



# Annual Report

Prepared by :

**NSAR**

[www.nsar.co.uk](http://www.nsar.co.uk)

2023



# CONTENTS

- 01. A word from our Chair
- 03. 2023 Highlights
- 04. Our Purpose
- 05. Membership
- 07. Quality Assurance
- 12. Apprenticeships and Training
- 15. Workforce Planning
- 19. Competency Management
- 20. International
- 21. Routes into Rail
- 25. Marketing and Communications
- 27. NSAR Board

# A WORD FROM OUR CHAIR

**Dyan Perry OBE**

**I am pleased to present to you the NSAR Annual Report for 2023. This year has been a big one for NSAR. It remains steadfast in its commitment to helping address skills shortages within the rail industry and has grown its resources to strengthen this commitment.**

At the end of 2022, Andrew Haines and I facilitated a meeting on the further efforts required to increase apprenticeship numbers in rail. In response to this and under the guidance of the Board, NSAR has introduced two services to bolster collaborative efforts – Skills Match and flexi-job apprenticeship agency status. With both services, NSAR aims to play a more active role in supporting employers to take on apprentices, specifically small businesses in the supply chain. On behalf of the Board, I congratulate NSAR for taking these exciting new steps and look forward to seeing how this work progresses in 2024.

The importance of quality data cannot be overstated, especially when it comes to formulating strategies and setting industry direction. This year, NSAR's Workforce Analytics team once again conducted a comprehensive survey of the UK rail workforce to update the Skills Intelligence Model (SIM). The SIM is an invaluable resource for the rail sector, pinpointing current and anticipated skills shortages and helping the industry make strategic workforce plans to ensure a steady supply of skilled employees. Leveraging the SIM and their expertise, the Workforce Analytics team undertook projects for organisations across the rail industry, including government. In addition, NSAR used its strategic workforce planning expertise in the wider transport and infrastructure sectors in the UK and internationally.



Safety is always a top priority. NSAR continued to deliver its excellent quality assurance service to ensure training providers are delivering high-quality programmes that the industry can trust. The Quality Assurance team supported providers to deliver that high quality by sharing their knowledge through information sessions and masterclasses.

In 2023, NSAR also introduced new membership offerings designed to enhance members' access to services and to better understand and support their individual goals. This initiative reflects NSAR's dedication to providing more targeted support to the rail industry. The response to the

new memberships has been positive, highlighting the growing recognition of the invaluable work NSAR is engaged in. Part of this growing support can be attributed to marketing and engagement efforts, which, in 2023, have consistently provided valuable updates and thought leadership.

NSAR continues to champion Routes into Rail for the benefit of the whole industry. Some great work has been done this year to promote the industry to people of all ages and skill levels and get them excited about rail careers. Thank you to NSAR for leading such an important initiative.

Thank you to all our members, clients and partners in the industry for their continued support for NSAR in 2023. It is what keeps us moving forward and striving to be an ever more valuable resource for the industry. We look forward to working with you all in 2024.

**Dyan Perry OBE**  
**NSAR Chair**



# 2023 Highlights

Despite being a small organisation, NSAR makes a big impact in the rail industry and wider sectors due to our expertise in workforce planning and development, ensuring the quality of training programmes, delivering apprenticeship support and providing membership services.

Here are a few achievement highlights from 2023:

- Launched a new service – Skills Match – and were successful in our application to become a flexi-job apprenticeship agency, increasing NSAR support for the rail industry in its efforts to address skills shortages and increase social value through apprenticeships.
- Provided quality analytical support to the Department for Transport and the Great British Railways Transition Team to assess future skills needs in the industry and where challenges exist.
- Updated our Skills Intelligence Model using data from our comprehensive annual survey of the rail industry workforce to include information on 95% of the 2023 industry workforce.
- Used our data analysis and workforce planning expertise to collaborate on 40 reports and data reviews, informing the industry about skills shortages, social value and the importance of workforce planning.
- Continued to assure the quality of rail training – as evidenced by 86 assurance visits, 94 additional visits (such as advisory visits, practical site approvals and trainer observations) and 11 new investigations.
- Offered 18 training provider update sessions and 1 programme to develop and upskill training providers, further contributing to increase the quality of training in rail and keep the industry safe.
- Once again received full marks in a BSI audit of our Quality Assurance delivery, processes and documentation.
- Expanded our membership offerings to better support members' goals and industry priorities.
- Exported our workforce planning and training expertise to Indonesia, Malaysia, Australia, Georgia and the Philippines.
- Welcomed new clients and rolled out enhancements to our competency management system, Skills ID.
- Continued to lead the Routes into Rail initiative on behalf of the rail industry by promoting rail careers and opportunities to various audiences, including 450,000+ students.
- Received more than 1,400 average monthly visits to our website, which was continually enhanced to ensure fit-for-purpose and a great user experience.



# Our Purpose

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**NSAR's vision is for a modern, efficient and productive railway, that delivers a world-class service for its passengers.**

**Our mission is to support all parts of the rail industry to acquire, maintain and develop the workforce needed to deliver this world-class service.**

To deliver this mission, we support clients to navigate the skills landscape efficiently (saving significant time and cost) and effectively (delivering the right talent, at the right time, in the right place) to create a safe and skilled workforce.



# Membership

**NSAR has a membership of 348 organisations.**



In 2023, NSAR introduced a new membership offering. Annual Subscription Memberships in three tiers – Bronze, Silver and Gold – give member organisations access to discounted services and an active community of like-minded people sharing specialist knowledge in all aspects of rail. The discounts can save members up to £2,000 a year on NSAR services, or 17%.

The new membership structure better enables member organisations to set and achieve workforce goals. In addition to discounted NSAR services, it includes greater target-based account management aimed at gaining an understanding of members' needs and goals and supporting their achievement. This furthers NSAR's capabilities to meet the rail industry's current priorities and assist future growth

Continuous engagement with NSAR members has remained a focus in 2023. As well as raising awareness of how our services can support businesses to meet skills challenges and build an excellent workforce, our engagement keeps members up to date with the skills and education landscape.

Membership engagement activities have included:

- Monthly newsletters, including insights from the NSAR Chief Executive on each month's must-know topics and news.
- Consistent social media activity to keep members informed of NSAR activities, useful services and important industry news.
- Regular thought-leadership articles to share practical skills and workforce knowledge.
- Spotlight emails on not-to-be-missed thought leadership, news and NSAR services updates.
- The annual NSAR Skills Symposium bringing together rail industry professionals to share skills and workforce insights and connect with fellow rail industry experts.

In addition, we have introduced two new services, Skills Match and flexi-job apprenticeship agency services, to better meet our members' needs and provide additional apprenticeship support. More information on these new services can be found on page 12.





## Case study:

### Freightliner joins NSAR as Silver subscription member

*“We have been an NSAR member for two years now and are delighted to become a Silver subscription member. The workforce analysis NSAR undertook for us provided great insights into our workforce demographics and roles, allowing us to gain a better understanding of potential risks. We are excited to take advantage of all NSAR’s services with our continued membership.”*

**Anika Shenfield, Learning and Development Manager at Freightliner**

Freightliner commissioned NSAR to conduct a workforce analysis study in early 2023, providing insights on employee demographics and roles that posed potential retirement risks.

Following on from the success of the workforce analysis study, Freightliner decided to become an NSAR subscription member to take advantage of the discount on consultancy days that membership provides. As part of the NSAR Silver membership, 7 consultancy days are included – equal to an 11% discount on each consultancy day if bought individually – which can be used across NSAR’s full suite of services.

NSAR has supported Freightliner with regional schools engagement and the development of outreach resources.

# Quality Assurance

**The NSAR Quality Assurance (QA) team assesses the quality of delivery, compliance and premises for regulatory training across the UK, measuring against industry standards, rules and requirements.**

In 2023, the QA team has continued to provide excellent services to providers throughout the UK, supporting the industry to select training providers with confidence and ensuring the safety of rail workers and railways.

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## Assurance visits continued, with processes reviewed and improved

The Quality Assurance team underwent a review at the end of 2022. As a result, the team was split into three areas to harness specific skills to support the delivery of the service:

- Compliance to RTAS & Standards
- Delivery Assurance
- Investigations, Reporting & QA projects

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## Compliance

2023 has seen the Compliance team fully staffed. They have introduced an online method for giving anonymous feedback on assurance visits, so they can hear more from providers and use the feedback to improve the service. The Quality Assurance Managers have generally seen high-quality delivery across the industry this year.

## Delivery

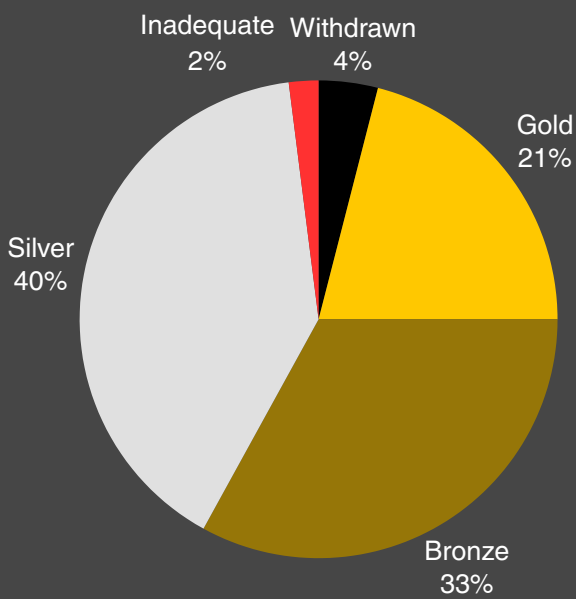
An online First Time Observation (FTO) booking system was established by the Delivery team, to support forward planning and allow the team to turn around FTO assurance quickly and more efficiently.

The Delivery team also consulted with RTAS training providers on the Quality Assurance Framework v4. They wanted to find out what providers thought about the areas covered by the Quality Assurance Framework, how it is implemented and how the service could be improved. There were three well-attended online events and two face-to-face events in Newcastle and Manchester. A summary of the feedback will be produced and circulated to training providers in December 2023. The team will be analysing the feedback and discussing responses with Network Rail in early 2024.

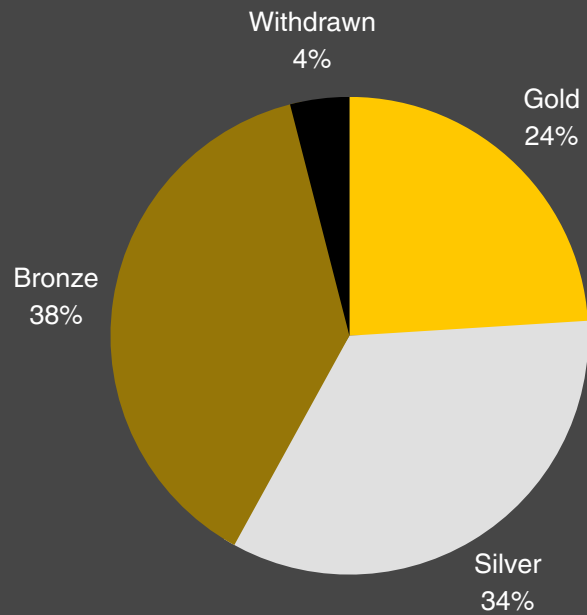
## Grades

Throughout the year, the second round of visits to the tri-grade system has continued. Providers are working hard to maintain standards previously achieved. Findings from visits inform future requirements of RTAS V3.0 and assurance visit models in Compliance and Delivery. There have been two grading appeals in 2023, which are reaching conclusions.

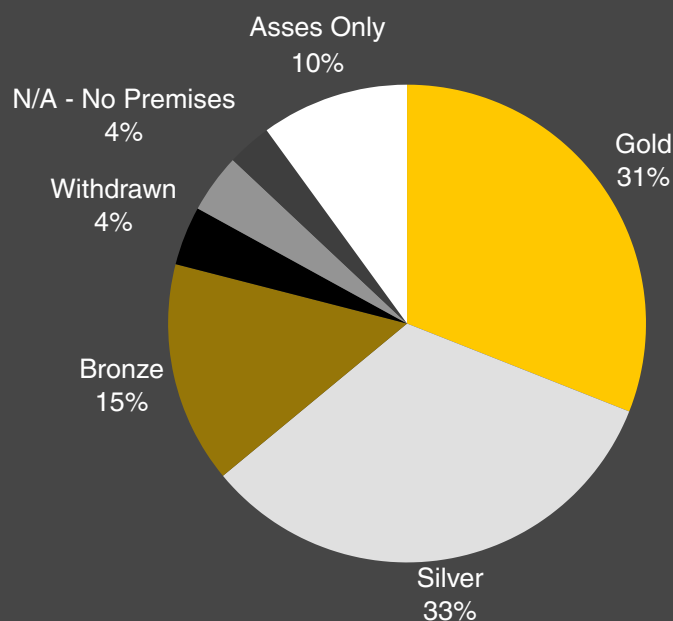
### Compliance

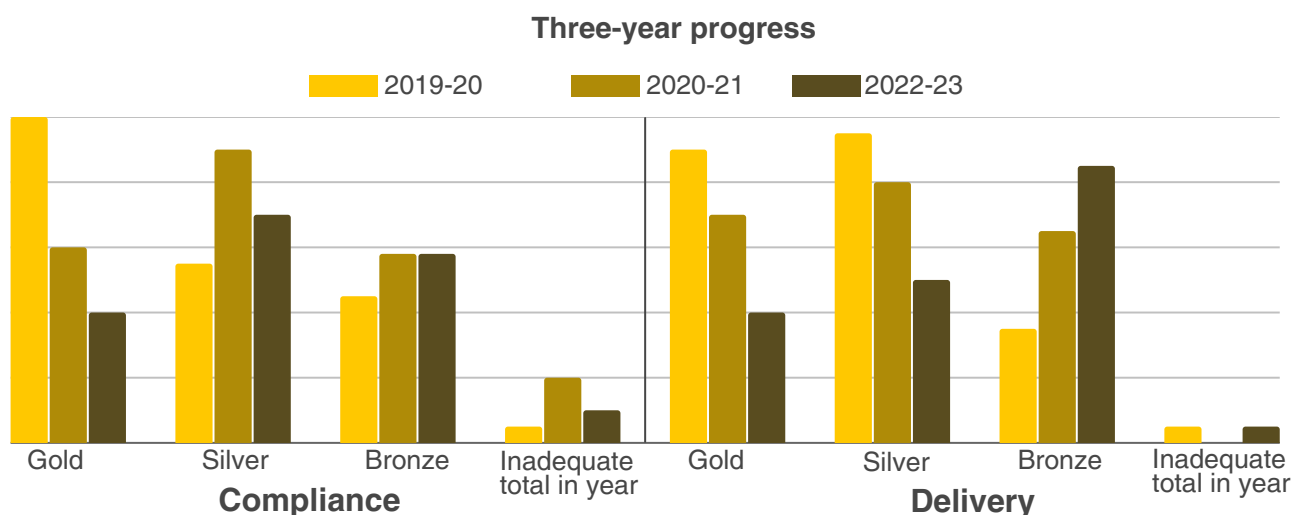


### Delivery



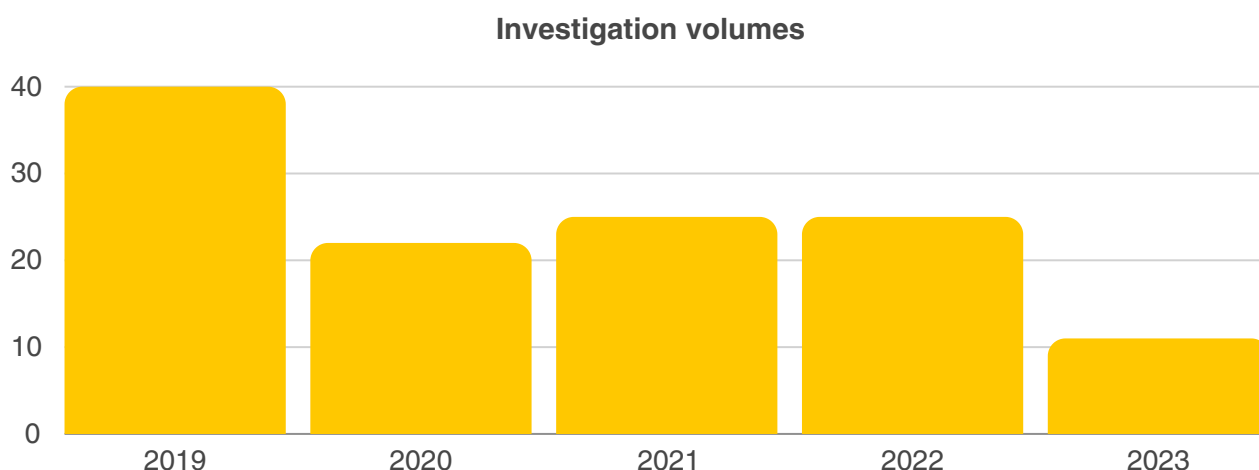
### Premises



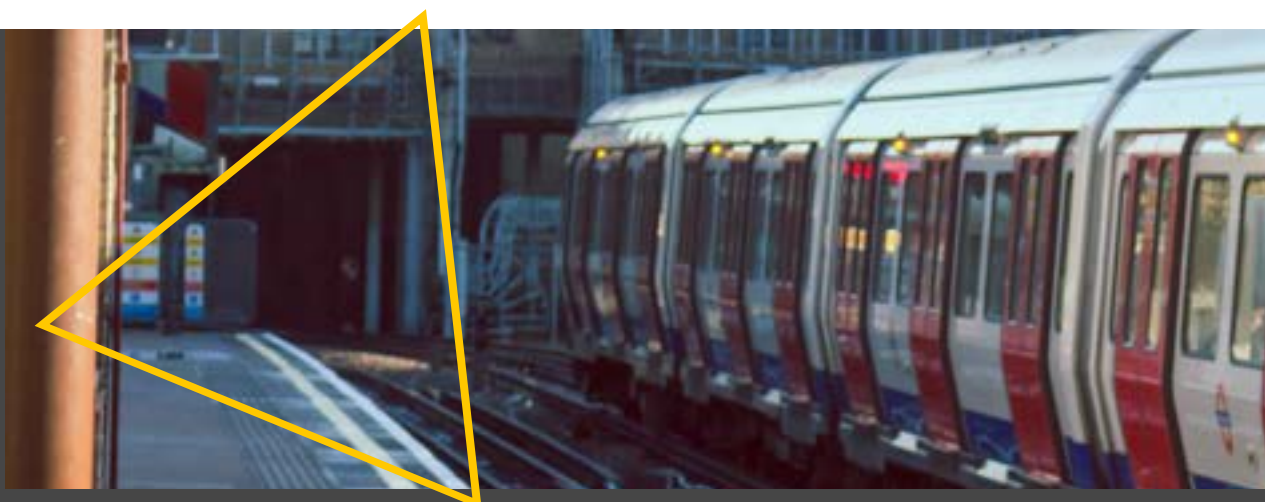


## Investigations

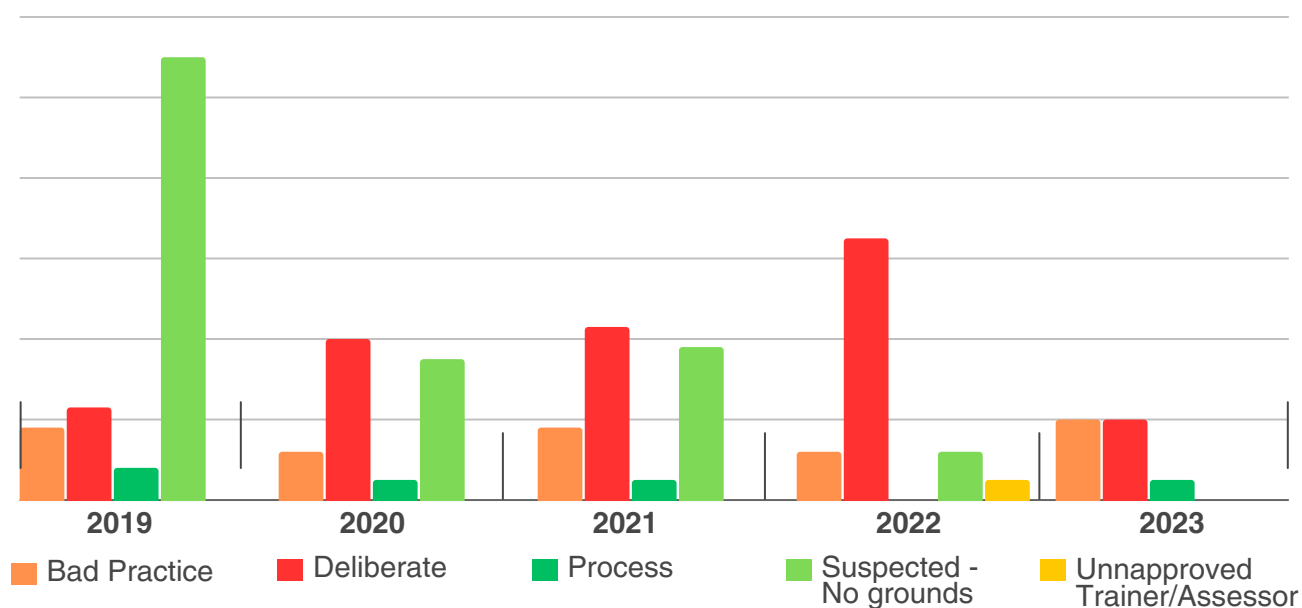
Investigations continue to be a persistent feature of RTAS Assurance activities; however, overall volumes of investigations have fallen in 2023. This is testimony to the hard work and collaboration between training providers and their QA Managers.



Whilst volumes have reduced, the trend of root causes of incidents has continued to be deliberate and intended breaches of the rules and standards that underpin the compliance of training and assessment.



### Nature of Investigations Over Time



As deliberate and bad practice causes continue to prevail, it is a logical outcome that the rate of temporary suspensions pending the conclusion of investigation has also increased proportionate to the overall volume of new cases.

50% of investigations that closed in 2023 with an RTAS outcome determined have been appealed. Due to the standard of investigative processes and evidence gathering, appeals have been rejected by Network Rail as appellants have been unable to provide any new information not already presented during the investigation or mitigating circumstances.

The investigation process applied has been tested by a Network Rail review in 2023 and has been determined as robust, fair and proportionate.





## Trainer Mentoring Programme

The QA team once again ran sessions of their Trainer Mentoring Programme. The programme provides a faster and higher-quality progression path to training and assessment, to reduce the skills gap and the overall age demographic of current rail trainers and assessors. The intention is to provide more well-rounded trainers – who filter their knowledge through to novice trainers, raising the quality of the future training and assessment front line.

The team recently delivered a session at the invitation of and in partnership with Bridgeway Consulting. Discussions will be held with Network Rail in the new year to establish the future availability of the programme.

## Collaboration continues to be a vital aspect of quality assurance services

Training provider assessments and investigations are complex processes and multiple parties are involved. The need for working together to achieve the required outcomes is evident.

Collaboration has resulted in some key successes in 2023:

- A Network Rail strategy progressing digital opportunities in training and end-of-training assessment.
- Increasing engagement with Network Rail Training Portfolio Managers in future RTAS training and competence, current and future development and communications.
- Increased training and competence change workshops for Assured Providers with Network Rail leads.
- Increasing the scope of RTAS Assurance in 2024, specifically in Welding and Signal Works Testing.
- A review and update of the trainer application process, with Skills Backbone upgrades underway to implement this.
- Reducing the volume of data corrections outside 21 days of delivery.
- The launch of online booking and payment for first-time trainer observations.
- Intelligence communications that now include NSAR, the Department for Education, the Education and Skills Funding Agency and the Construction Industry Training Board.

## NSAR Quality Assurance services once again received full marks in BSI audit

Our Quality Assurance process was again audited by BSI in 2023. The surveillance audit reviewed delivery, processes and documentation to ensure that our assurance regime continued to deliver to ISO 19011:2018 the International Standard for Guidelines for Auditing Management Systems.

This was the second monitoring visit completed by BSI since gaining the standard. NSAR is pleased to announce that the outcome of this year's audit was again marks of 100% across all four sections of the audit, with no non-conformities and no areas for improvement identified, demonstrating the continued efforts of the Quality Assurance team.



# Apprenticeships and Training

NSAR has an in-depth understanding of the apprenticeship landscape. Our Apprenticeship Services support organisations with apprenticeship programme development, assessment planning, levy optimisation and finding training providers. We also work with government, suppliers and employers to develop and reform apprenticeship standards.

Apprenticeships can ease wage inflation pressure and bring fresh, diverse talent into the industry. Rail has low apprenticeship recruitment and utilisation compared to other industries. We have done some great work to get us to where we are now – approximately 2,500 apprentices per year – but that is only about half of what is needed. NSAR's ambition is for the industry to act collectively and collaboratively to address skills and productivity gaps by doubling current levels of apprenticeships to reach at least 5,000 per year.

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## **NSAR Skills Match and flexi-job apprenticeship agency services support organisations to take on more apprentices**

In May 2023, NSAR launched a new service called Skills Match. With Skills Match, NSAR plays a more active role in supporting employers to address skills gaps in their workforce by increasing the utilisation of apprenticeships. It aims to remove barriers to apprentice recruitment by helping employers identify their apprenticeship needs, creating cohorts of individuals and matching them with the right training and education providers.

We have promoted Skills Match to over 300 employers to raise awareness and highlight the benefits of the service to their business. As part of the Skills Match delivery, NSAR has also identified 64 apprenticeship standards that are commonly used across rail and has created fact sheets for each standard. This will help employers navigate the standards on offer and choose which is best for their business.

In October, NSAR announced that we were joining the Department for Education register of flexi-job apprenticeship agencies to help employers offer more apprenticeships. As a flexi-job apprenticeship agency, NSAR will recruit and employ apprentices and place them with host organisations to receive on-the-job training.

This new service will de-risk apprentice employment for smaller employers who can take on apprentices knowing that NSAR can place them elsewhere if contracted work is insufficient to cover the entire length of the apprenticeship. It also mitigates risk for employers who are concerned about having the breadth of work necessary to cover the knowledge, skills and behaviours contained in the apprenticeship standards. NSAR will be able to ensure the apprentice is employed for long enough to complete their apprenticeship and are exposed to a range of experiences and opportunities.

# Contributing to apprenticeship standard reviews

NSAR has been supporting reviews of Rail Engineering and Train Driver apprenticeship standards.

## Rail Engineering apprenticeship standards from Level 2 to Level 7

- We have worked with employers and higher education institutions to create a new draft of the Rail and Rail Systems Engineer at Level 6.
- A working group is starting in December to look at restructuring and rewriting Level 2.
- A refresh process for the Level 3 and Level 4 technician standards is also in the pipeline. IfATE has asked the rail employers to accommodate the High-Speed Rail and Infrastructure Technician Level 4 standard because this apprenticeship is being withdrawn.

We will be exploring how best to kickstart the Rail Engineering apprenticeship standards work, possibly with an employer symposium scheduled for early in the new year.

## Train Driver Apprenticeship Standard

NSAR has also been working with IfATE and employers to review the Train Driver apprenticeship standard. This standard alone brings in over £19M to the sector every year. Two major challenges have held up the development and publication of the new train driver apprenticeship standard – NSAR has been able to work with IfATE and employers to resolve both.

The first challenge concerned the removal of the Level 2 ICT functional skills (train driver is one of the few apprenticeship standards that mandate the completion of an ICT Level 2 qualification) in response to changing Government policy and the subsequent removal of any funding for it. This meant any new apprenticeship starts would be unable to complete the apprenticeship. NSAR worked with IfATE and employers to remove the mandatory ICT qualification and incorporate the necessary ICT skills within the new apprenticeship standard, in effect for any apprentices registered from 1 August 2023. Existing train driver apprentices registered before this date were given the option to complete the ICT qualification, but not achieving it would not hinder their apprenticeship progress.

The second challenge was related to finalising the assessment plan for the new train driver apprenticeship standard, particularly concerning changes in IfATE policy and external regulatory requirements. NSAR was able to work with the Trailblazer Group and IfATE to identify how to resolve the challenge by using post-qualification monitoring as a potential solution. Once this proposal is accepted by IfATE, the new standard and assessment plan will be completed, allowing for the availability of a new train driver apprenticeship in the near future.

## Refreshing the National Occupational Standards for Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland

NSAR has started a consultation process to refresh Permanent Way, Signalling, Overhead Lines, Traction & Rolling Stock and Telecommunications National Occupational Standards (NOS) for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. This consultation started in October and runs through to the end of March 2024. There are 150 NOS involved in the review. This is important work given the pivotal role NOS play in many areas – from occupational descriptions and job roles to vocational education and training programmes.

## External Quality Assurance services were transferred to OFQUAL

The External Quality Assurance (EQA) team transferred the last of their EQA responsibilities to the Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation (OFQUAL) on 31 December 2022. NSAR was the third-largest provider of EQA for apprenticeships, after OFQUAL and the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IfATE), and the largest employer-led EQA organisation.

In total, NSAR provided external quality assurance of end-point assessment marketplaces that saw apprentices take these assessments across five sectors, in over 50 apprenticeship standards. The team also identified and actioned 901 quality improvement opportunities across 63 end-point assessment organisations.



# Workforce Planning

The NSAR Workforce Analytics team provides insights for organisations and projects of all sizes throughout the rail, transport and infrastructure sectors in the UK and internationally.

## NSAR's workforce analytics expertise has contributed to multiple projects

Our expertise in data and analytics has contributed to multiple workforce reports in 2023 across different sectors. Our Skills Intelligence Model (SIM) is a centralised platform that provides an overview of a workforce's skills attributes at the organisational and sector level and predicts what workforce is needed for the future. Workforce shortages are analysed and plans developed to address these.

### Workforce analysis for the West Coast Partnership Development

An initial phase of analysis has been undertaken for the West Coast Partnership Development (WCPD), uncovering insights into Avanti West Coast's current workforce and how it benchmarks against the sector and competitors. It also reviewed the Unified Target Operating Model and its applicability to the operation of WCPD. The team has started the second phase of work to develop a skills plan and talent strategy for a future integrated services workforce. This will consist of structured interviews and discussions with key industry leaders to ensure the correct outcomes are met.

### Capability and maturity model mapping for the Department for Transport

The Department for Transport (DfT) has commissioned multiple projects from the Workforce Analytics team in 2023. The team has been working with DfT on mapping 80 rail sector-wide capabilities and looking at different maturity models for delivering planned upgrades and projects. This has involved attending and participating in industry workshops and understanding the wider impact on the sector. The results of these workshops, as well as examples of good practice from elsewhere, will be used to assess the skills and steps needed to improve the maturity of the sector capabilities.

Another piece of work has been started for the Transport, Employment and Skills Taskforce (a DfT cross-transport group) to assess future skills needs across the different transport modes and understand where challenges exist. In addition, the work will seek to identify where there is sector overlap in skills requirements.

## Network Rail Southern Region signalling workforce dashboard

An interactive dashboard has been created for the Network Rail Southern region that shows information and visualisations about the current Wessex Route signalling workforce, what the workforce will look like over the next 12 months and current vacancies. Network Rail Southern can enter their own data into the dashboard without input from NSAR, making it easy to keep updated.

## Workforce analysis for Port Skills and Safety and the Maritime Skills Commission

The Workforce Analytics team gathered and analysed data for Port Skills and Safety and the Maritime Skills Commission on the current UK ports workforce, with gaps identified. An interesting headline to share is the female workforce data across different sectors:

Metric	Rail	Offshore Wind	Heat Networks	Maritime Ports
Female Proportion	16%	19%	19%	12%
% Aged 50+	33%	17%	25%	39%
% Aged under 30	10%	9%	20%	16%

### Other key work this year includes:

- Preparing training materials on strategic workforce planning for senior leaders at Network Rail Northwestern Central Route, explaining strategic workforce planning, why it is important and how it can be effectively implemented.
- A report for Rail Partners on the current traction and rolling stock workforce and what future technology changes might mean for the workforce.
- Supporting the offshore wind sector annual workforce survey collection.
- Identifying risks across Arriva's workforce and how they can make effective use of apprenticeship levy funds and determine future training requirements.
- Equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) analysis for Transport UK Group.
- Workforce analysis for the Heat Network Industry Council on the heat network industry, focused on diversity and inclusion.
- Demographic analysis for Southeastern, specifically focusing on ethnicity.

### Membership activities:

- Working with Freightliner to map their current workforce and upcoming needs – an update on previous analysis – and to develop strategies to deal with workforce challenges.
- Workforce analysis updates for Porterbrook and insights on employee demographics.

# Case Study:

## Demographics analysis for Rail partners

NSAR investigated the current demographics of Rail Partner organisations and whether the Traction and Rolling Stock sector's skills and training were fit for purpose for new technologies.

Rail Partners is a trade body for passenger and rail freight train companies, providing advocacy, policy solutions and operator services to their members. They wanted to understand training needs in the Traction and Rolling Stock sector, taking into account current and anticipated demographic, technological and economic changes. The analysis was intended to build on, and update, work undertaken by NSAR in 2014.

We were required to estimate data on new and retractioned rolling stock to determine a baseline and compare it to three possible scenarios of technological changes. NSAR used our Skills Intelligence Model (SIM) to collect quantitative data about the sector's current workforce and consulted with nearly 30 industry leaders. Combining this quantitative and qualitative evidence, we determined the current workforce demographics and the workforce needs of the Traction and Rolling Stock sector today and over the next 30 years.

The research identified a number of issues that need to be addressed. The current workforce is ageing, with 80% set to retire by 2050. The number of under-25s joining the sector has been steadily decreasing. Although the rollout of new hydrogen technologies will start in only a few regions due to infrastructure and supply, there is a lack of skills generally to accommodate the new fleet.

NSAR made recommendations for the sector to ensure it has the workforce and training it needs to prepare for the future.

## Supporting international organisations with skills intelligence

In 2023, NSAR continued to provide skills analysis and advice to organisations outside the UK.

Michelle Russell, NSAR Head of Workforce Analytics, visited Georgia in June to start work with Georgian Railway and the Asian Development Bank on workforce skills analysis as Georgia goes through an infrastructure modernisation programme. A report was submitted in September that provided workforce insights for Georgia Railway.

Last year, NSAR undertook analysis and collaborated on a report for the Australian Rail Association (ARA), so the ARA could understand the extent of the skills gap within the Australian rail sector as the Government makes significant investments in Australia's rail infrastructure. The ARA is planning to renew the analysis in the next year.



# Rail Workforce Survey

The NSAR Rail Workforce Survey is a comprehensive annual survey of the rail industry workforce. Each year, railway organisations across the industry contribute by submitting their workforce data on demographics, job roles and work locations. The survey helps NSAR build the most complete and accurate representation of the UK rail workforce, which helps the industry and government understand where current and future gaps are and develop strategic workforce plans to ensure a pipeline of skilled employees is available.

This year, NSAR has shared a report on the findings of the survey, to enable organisations to benchmark themselves to the industry and better plan for the future.

The headline findings are that skills shortages continue to be a major issue for the rail industry. The rail workforce continues to age year-on-year and is facing a critical loss of experience and knowledge – the number of people leaving through retirement and other forms of attrition could be as high as 75,000 (or 30% of today's workforce) by 2030. While proportions are improving, rail remains a male-dominated industry with lower numbers of people from ethnic minority backgrounds than national averages.

Addressing skills shortages and improving diversity provides large economic and social value opportunities. The report models these figures and provides recommendations to support the industry in achieving its goals.

Navigating the skills shortage: Annual Rail Workforce Survey 2023 is available for download at [www.nsar.co.uk/projects/rail-workforce-survey/](http://www.nsar.co.uk/projects/rail-workforce-survey/)

## 50+ yrs

A third of the rail workforce is aged 50 years or over

## 45 yrs

The average age of rail employees is 45 years (compared to 43 years in 2018)

## 75,000

people leaving through retirement and other forms of attrition

## 16% of rail employees are women



compared to 13% in 2018

## Diversity

12% of rail employees are from ethnic minority backgrounds\*



\*national average 18%

## £181 million

Addressing skills shortages in rail provides the opportunity to generate up to £181 million for the UK economy between now and 2028.

# Competency Management

NSAR offers a full range of competency management services that help organisations ensure and improve competence across their workforce. Our Competency Management System (CMS) called Skills ID supports organisations to access and track their overall and individual staff skill set, training requirements, progress and authority to work. We can combine Skills ID with workforce analysis, to investigate where competencies can be strengthened or added to increase competitiveness and future-proof workforces.

2023 has been a busy year. Morgan Sindall has gone live with Skills ID. Implementation has involved pulling data from various databases and configuring records from eight separate business divisions into a single universal format. Acceptance of the new system is high and feedback is positive.

East Midlands Railway (EMR) was also added as a new client. Work is progressing swiftly to implement Skills ID across their Fleet function. EMR is keen to work with NSAR on further developments to their Skills ID platform, such as a native app that Skills ID will launch by the end of 2023 to allow clients to do observational assessments.

As well as planned enhancements and upgrades for existing clients, we take into 2024 a healthy pipeline of potential new customers.



# International

**2023 has been a busy year for NSAR with international work as we continued to build and strengthen our relationships with key partners and clients.**

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## Indonesia

Engagement with our partners in Indonesia has continued. Following the signing of an MOU earlier this year between NSAR, Chulia Group and Muhammadiyah University to collaborate on the development of rail skills programmes, we have developed a mutual service agreement and presented it to potential clients.

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## Malaysia

NSAR has been helping the Malaysian government set up a Rail Centre of Excellence to enable a planned rail infrastructure programme. NSAR Chief Executive Neil Robertson travelled to Malaysia to continue exploring NSAR's role in giving advice on skills building and providing quality assurance services for rail operations training. A priced proposal has been submitted to the Malaysian Rail Development Corporation for the provision of assessment and quality assurance services.

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## Australia

Building on our relationship with the Australasian Railway Association (ARA), Neil Robertson was invited to speak at the 'Future Rail Skills Forum' hosted by the Australian National Transport Commission and the ARA in Melbourne. The focus of the forum was identifying how to attract diverse and younger workers to meet this demand and how to develop the digital skills needed now and into the future. He spoke about what the UK rail industry has learnt in its own efforts to meet workforce demand and our successes based on NSAR data.

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## Georgia

NSAR continued to build its relationship with the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and was awarded a commission to undertake a skills audit and workforce analysis on the Georgian Railway, as part of ADB's investment commitment to support the modernisation and development of the railway.

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## Philippines

NSAR's Head of Membership and Development Mark Holmes travelled to the Philippines in October to speak at conferences for the Philippines Railway Institute and the Asian Development Bank Bank on the challenges and how to attract new talent to rail. We have built good working relationships with each organisation and the events also present great opportunities to network with attendees across the ASEAN region.

# Routes into Rail

NSAR is the driving force behind Routes into Rail – a rail industry initiative that aims to inspire a new generation of talent to pursue careers in rail.



# routesintorail

Routes into Rail promotes career paths and opportunities across the industry. It provides information to young people on entry-level jobs, apprenticeships and graduate positions and to mature workers with transferable skills to enable them to move into the industry. It reaches a wide audience through a comprehensive website, social media channels, targeted partnerships and key events, spreading the word that there is a career in rail for everyone.

Routes into Rail has made a step change over the last 12 months – growing into a well-established campaign targeting hundreds of thousands with engaging information and activities.

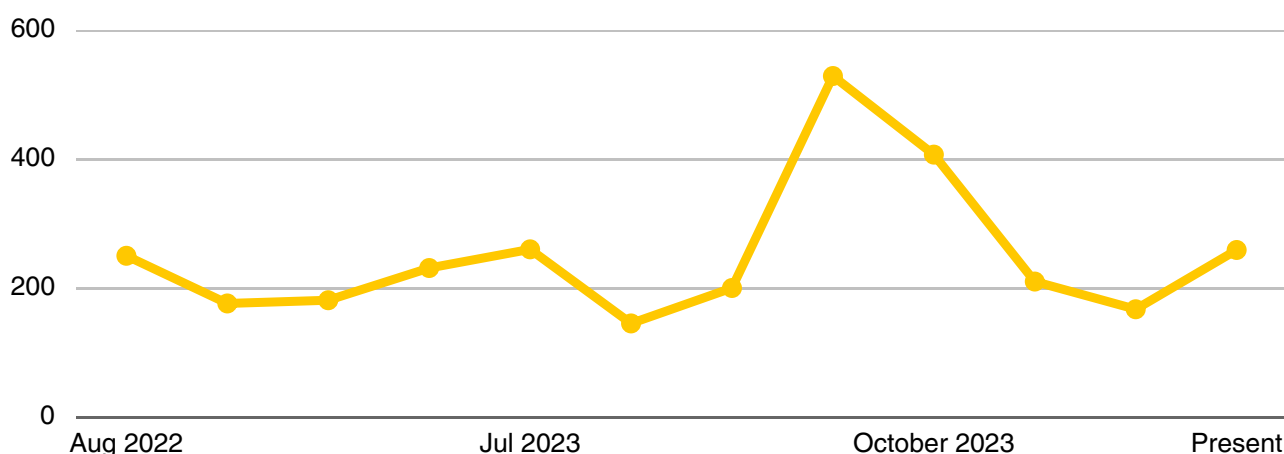


## The Routes into Rail website was refreshed to improve user experience and engagement

The Routes into Rail website is the hub for advice and information on entry pathways into the sector for young people and those returning to work or changing careers. It also provides information for parents, teachers and career advisors.

In March, a refreshed website went live. Changes – including a new look, more relevant content and improved navigation – ensure the website acts as a fantastic resource for people investigating rail careers. The updated website is based on feedback from employers across the industry and research on what information and resources young people need when considering a future career. The website update includes new articles and a fun careers quiz to help quiz-takers find out which rail career could work for them.

**Routes into Rail website – average monthly users**



## A set of videos were created to promote and demystify rail careers

The Routes into Rail team worked with video production company Cognitive to produce a series of short animated videos with information about the rail industry and rail careers. These videos are aimed at students, graduates, teachers, parents and people interested in apprenticeships.

The videos are placed throughout the Routes into Rail website to reinforce information about rail careers and are used across social media and Routes into Rail campaigns. They are also useful for teachers and careers advisors to share with students who want to learn about rail, apprenticeship and graduate opportunities.





## Virtual work experience programme helps students learn about rail careers

Springpod creates and provides a platform for interactive, experiential learning programmes that help young people learn about the world of work and university before they apply. Routes into Rail facilitated a group of employers in rail to help create a 10-hour virtual work experience programme that helps students learn more about the different careers available in rail and gain a deeper insight into working in the industry. Many of the roles highlighted in the programme are the most in-demand roles needed in rail now and in the future.

## Working with partners to amplify the Routes into Rail message and reach new audiences

Routes into Rail seeks out partnerships to extend its reach and get information on rail careers out to a wide range of people.



In January 2023, Routes into Rail began a partnership with UCAS to reach engaged students considering university and apprenticeship options. The UCAS platform is the most visited and trusted portal for students in the UK.

The partnership includes:

- An employer profile on the UCAS website.
- Social media and email campaigns to the UCAS audience via their channels.
- Physical and virtual presence at UCAS events attended by thousands of students.

Reach is approximately 1.5 million students. Display ads on the UCAS website generated almost 450,000 impressions and ads run as part of a social media campaign by UCAS for Routes into Rail generated more than 310,000 impressions.



## Rail Business Group

The RBD Rail Recruiter is embedded on the Routes into Rail website to allow young people and career switches to shortlist roles, manage applications and apply for the latest rail industry jobs.

We also have a mutually beneficial relationship with Rail Business Daily and Rail Director magazine, for us to promote relevant content for the Routes into Rail audiences and get coverage on Routes into Rail activities on their platforms.

Reach is approximately 73,000 rail industry professionals.



## Signing the Armed Forces Covenant

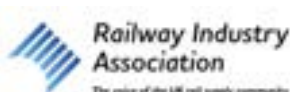
NSAR signed the Armed Forces Covenant on behalf of Routes into Rail to pledge support to the Armed Forces community and ensure that service leavers, Reservists, volunteers, spouses and partners receive equal employment opportunities and appropriate support. Through Routes into Rail, NSAR will continue to promote the rail industry to the Armed Forces community as a great place to work with lots of transferable skills opportunities, progression and benefits.



## Funding

Routes into Rail is completely reliant on industry funding to deliver campaigns and activities. We are now on a funding drive for 2024. A new funding pack has been developed with various annual funding options available for businesses of all sizes. We hope to renew all existing funders and get new funders on board across the industry.

2023 funders included Network Rail, HS2, VolkerRail, Amey, the Railway Industry Association (RIA), Porterbrook, Freightliner and the Department for Business and Trade



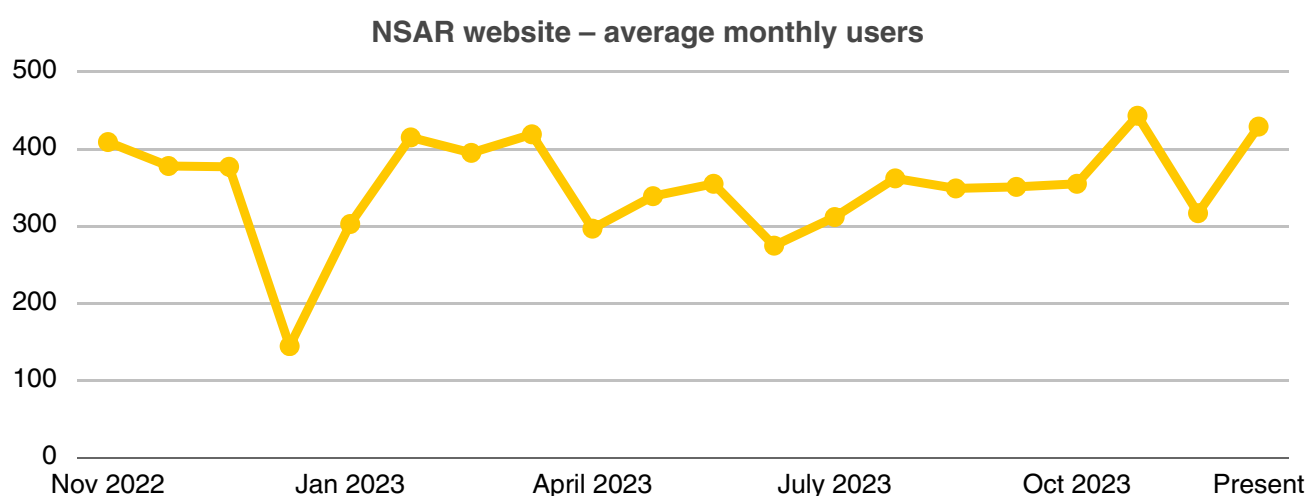
# Marketing and Communications

In 2022, NSAR expanded our marketing resources to grow the NSAR brand, establish industry authority, increase membership and raise awareness of our services and projects.

In 2023, the Marketing team has been focused on delivering on these priorities by providing specialist support through a range of activities.

## Website development and lead generation

Following the launch of the new NSAR website in September 2022, the Marketing team has continued to develop the website and ensure it is fit for purpose. This has included rewriting and redesigning several pages, as well as introducing pop-ups to generate leads and encourage newsletter subscriptions. Key campaigns, articles and thought leadership pieces have also been promoted across the site, including case studies and testimonials to better demonstrate and explain how we deliver our services.



## Social media

We continue to engage with clients, members and industry via our LinkedIn and Twitter accounts, growing this community and increasing our engagement and activities. These channels have been key for promoting news and content, as well as engaging with and getting feedback from NSAR members and the rail community.

# 3,347

 **LinkedIn followers**  
(+14% in 2023)

## Member communications and email

Consistent member communications have been a focus in 2023 to build industry confidence in NSAR and promote our services and achievements. Monthly newsletters have gone out to the database consisting of insights, updates and news. These have been supported by continuous 'Spotlight' emails on NSAR services and relevant thought leadership articles, as well as event invitations and other industry news. Our subscription lists have been growing and we are seeing great engagement with comparatively high open and click-through rates, proving the value of these email communications to audiences.

- 948 email subscribers  
(+34% in 2023)
- 36% average open rate  
(+10% in 2023, 15-25% considered good open rate)
- 15.6% average click rate  
(+8% in 2023, 2-5% considered good open rate)

## Content and PR

Engaging and insightful content has been regularly created for publication on the website and promotion across social media and in industry publications – including thought leadership articles, insights from the NSAR Chief Executive Neil Robertson, case studies, blog posts on relevant topics and press releases – to increase awareness of and trust in NSAR and our products and services. In addition, the team has overseen PR coverage for Skills Match, our recent successful application to become a flexi-job apprenticeship agency, Routes into Rail and the Rail Workforce Survey across industry publications.

# 948

Email subscribers  
(+34% in 2023)

# 36%

Average open rate  
(+10% in 2023)

# 15%

Average click rate  
(+8% in 2023)

# NSAR Board

## 2023



**Dyan Perry OBE**  
Chair



**Neil Robertson**  
NSAR Chief Executive



**Rachel Thomas**  
Chair of Finance,  
Remuneration & Compliance



**Stuart Calvert**



**Darren Caplan**



**George Clark**



**Kirsty Derry**



**Martin Giles**



**Mary Grant**



**Neil Hayward**



**Andrew Joy**



**Tim Shoveller**





[www.nsar.co.uk](http://www.nsar.co.uk)