

TRAINEES INTO THE WORLD



THE EXPERIENCE WE OFFER AT THE ENGINE SHED AIMS TO HELP TRAINEES DEVELOP THE SKILLS AND CONFIDENCE THEY NEED TO GO INTO THE WIDER WORLD OF PAID EMPLOYMENT. WHILE THEY ARE WITH US THEY ARE LEARNING ALONGSIDE THEIR PEERS IN A SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT, BUT IT CAN BE A FASTER PAGED ENVIRONMENT OUTSIDE: WE GRADUALLY INTRODUCE THEM TO THIS WORLD AND HELP THEM MAKE THE TRANSITION INTO WORK.

The Role of the Training Officer

Kath plays an important role as link between the Engine Shed and the outside world.

“My job is Training Officer and I deal with the trainees from the start of their training with us. In fact it's even before that: I show potential trainees around, deal with their application, interview them with Marian and arrange a four week trial in one of the units.

Then they'll get a start date for their three year training. I'll meet them when they start, give them a locker key, an Engine Shed tee-shirt, take them through an induction process and introduce them to their supervisor.

We do regular reviews throughout their training; their supervisor is involved and we go through things like their attitude to work, appearance, which is important in working with food, getting into work on time etc.

At the six month stage people are generally able to go out on a work placement one day a week. It's me that would approach the employer to find out if they could offer one of our guys a placement, knowing what their skills are.

We ask for a half-day trial: I'll either stay with them at the workplace or go back later in the day to see how it feels for both parties and take it from there. We have a contract that says what particular skills we're trying to encourage the person to work on. I go back after four weeks to check up and I use the same check list that we use for internal reviews, so we're always feeding back.

We let that roll and if things are going well I'll check up at 3 months and 6 months and so on.

When a trainee has been with us for two and a half years I start thinking about jobs. The ideal scenario is if we can turn the work placement into a paid job. It would always be part-time position. Although we're very busy in the Engine Shed and we're a commercial business, it's a far faster pace outside. We're usually looking at 20 hours a week, five days a week.”

A Day in the Life of the Training Officer

“There isn’t really a typical day. I usually work 9 to 5 but not always. Last Wednesday for example, I met one of our trainees, **Robert**, at 8.00am at the bus stop to take him to a new work placement. Part of my job is to ensure the person gets to work on time and knows what bus to take from home. I help get them into the building as it can be quite difficult sometimes with security.

Yesterday, Robert’s shift at his placement started at 10.00am so I met him outside the building, signed us both in got changed and ready to start for 10.00. Because I’m not sure what his skills are yet I wanted to work alongside him for the morning. I wanted to try him out on cleaning: he did some really good work and really got into it. He had a shot at using the dishwasher again and he remembered the sequence from the week before and where most of the stuff had to be put away.

At the end of his shift Robert knew what bus to get home and said he would show me to my own bus stop to get back to the Engine Shed; no chance to skive for me then! Next week he’ll sign himself in at the placement and I’ll just meet him in there.

When I got back to the office yesterday I checked my e-mails. I used to be on the phone all the time but now more is done by e-mail. There’s still a lot of phoning and meetings in my job. We show round potential trainees and I speak at open days at schools and colleges. The supervisors at the Engine Shed say that they would hate my job – talking to all those people – but I really like that part. I find it exciting!

Because we had a large group of trainees coming in six months ago quite a few of them have reached the stage where they need to go out on their first placement. I have to think about each person when I’m planning a placement: where they live, how they will get there, what their skills are. Employers will ask me what the trainee can do so I need to give them a proper profile.

I’ve also got four trainees ready to come to the end of their training so I have to think of jobs for them. If the placement is definitely not going to turn into a paid job I’ll start phoning around other employers to ask if they have any vacancies. This is the biggest challenge, especially now. I look at the places that are still busy, but they have been so hard to find. There is no slack at the moment and everyone is hanging onto their jobs.

This can be frustrating as our trainees are good workers. When I started at the Engine Shed and got my first job for a trainee it was such a thrill. I still get a thrill picking up that phone and getting someone a job. You know they should get a job, you know they work hard. You try your hardest for them. I’m like a dog with a bone: I say to myself, ‘you will have this person, you just don’t know it yet!’”