

Educational outreach activities



PROMOTING GOOD PRACTICE IN COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT WITH RAIL | DEVELOPED BY



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Educational outreach was cited as a key area for engaging with communities, with rail becoming much more responsive in this area.

Participants identified a myriad of benefits to effective education initiatives, including addressing the skills shortage in the industry, attracting new and diverse talent, improving social mobility, and engaging communities to raise awareness of the importance of rail and the opportunities, including future career options, it offers.

Desired and suggested elements of best practice included:

Establish dedicated roles for education engagement

- Create specific outreach roles rather than relying on HR departments.
- Ensure these roles have a strategic remit beyond local schools/colleges to cover a wider geographic area (e.g. a certain mile radius around operational hubs).

Partner with strategic education networks

- Collaborate with organisations like the Careers and Enterprise Company to access schools seeking engagement.
- Use tools like bulletins and Enterprise Adviser roles to identify and respond to outreach opportunities efficiently.
- Use industry collaborations/resources promoted by RSSB and other rail partners to develop impactful educational outreach programmes, e.g. Skills Builder, Routes into Rail.

Engage with specialist and inclusive schools

- Work with specialist institutions to support specific, e.g. engineering-focused, and diverse learners, including those with communication barriers.
- Offer tailored programmes and act as a 'critical friend' to help shape curriculum and career pathways.

Adopt and benchmark against employer standards

- Use frameworks like the Careers and Enterprise employer standards to self-assess and improve outreach efforts.
- Aim to progress through levels (aspiring → achieving → exceeding) using case studies and benchmarking tools.



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Track and report engagement activities

- Maintain records of all school and community engagement.
- Report back to local hubs to ensure visibility and accountability.

Participate in STEM-focused programmes

- Research and join initiatives like Get up to Speed with STEM and North Star Science School.
- Run interactive workshops (e.g. 'Who Wants to be an Engineer') to make STEM subjects engaging and relevant.

Develop internal ambassador schemes

- Train staff as Education Ambassadors to support outreach events and ensure consistent, high-quality work experience offerings.
- Encourage voluntary participation to build advocacy for education activities internally.

Target marginalised areas with vocational programmes

- Implement initiatives like 'Back on Track' in secondary schools to offer alternative learning experiences.
- Use tools like virtual reality simulators to engage students who may not thrive in traditional academic settings.

Promote rail as a diverse career sector

- Highlight the full spectrum of rail careers, not just infrastructure or train operations.
- Include roles in digital technology, sustainability, and data to challenge outdated perceptions.

Facilitate collaborative events

- Organise or participate in events like Remake Learning Rail, which bring together multiple stakeholders to showcase rail careers.
- Use festivals and museum events to reach broader audiences and promote sector diversity.

Focus on social value and community connections

- Use outreach to build goodwill and demonstrate rail's role in social mobility and economic development.
- Coordinate with local community rail networks to amplify impact.

Provide clear career pathways

- Offer transparent information on entry routes (e.g. apprenticeships, technical qualifications, graduate schemes).
- Ensure young people understand long-term development opportunities within the sector.



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“Some people say – ‘It’s so hard to get into schools’ – no, it’s not! You just need to find the right partners to access those opportunities.”

“Schools and colleges need employers to fulfil their promise of careers activity, so it’s a win-win. Organisations in rail just need to overcome that fear of the unknown.”

“Rail is becoming a very responsive sector in this area, and education is a great example of the social value stories that rail should be telling.”

“Like other rail companies, we have concerns over a skills shortage in rail and an ageing workforce. We decided to make education a priority and increase our visibility within schools and communities.”

“Education engagement should not be about competition; it is about promoting social mobility and opportunities for individuals and communities.”

Why are educational outreach activities important to the rail industry?

Educational outreach is vital to the rail industry because it strengthens talent pipelines, builds community trust, and helps modernise perceptions of the sector. By establishing dedicated roles for education engagement, rail organisations can take a strategic approach to connecting with schools and colleges across wider geographic areas, ensuring consistent and meaningful visibility among young people. Partnerships with national rail education schemes, such as those supported by RSSB, e.g. Routes into Rail, further enable the industry to identify outreach opportunities efficiently and engage schools actively seeking employer involvement.

Importantly, outreach supports diversity and inclusion by collaborating with specialist and inclusive schools, offering tailored programmes, and helping shape curriculum pathways for learners with a wide range of needs. Through STEM focused initiatives and interactive workshops, the rail sector can make engineering and technology careers feel accessible, exciting, and relevant to students who may not have previously considered them.

Such activities also deliver social value. Targeted programmes in marginalised areas improve social mobility, while collaboration with community rail networks, including the dedicated Community Rail Education Network, strengthens local relationships. By promoting clear career pathways, from apprenticeships to graduate schemes, outreach ensures young people understand the breadth of modern rail careers, helping secure the industry’s future workforce and fostering long term economic impact.

Further resources: To access a host of educational resources from across the rail industry, see the following links:

- [Routes into Rail](#)
- [Skills Builder](#)
- [Switched On rail safety](#)
- [Network Rail STEM activities](#)
- [Community Rail Education Network](#)



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Case Study:

VolkerRail's impactful educational outreach

VolkerRail has significantly advanced educational engagement in the rail sector. With a strong STEM focus, VolkerRail's outreach spans primary schools to colleges, offering curriculum support, careers fairs, mock interviews and site visits. Their Education Ambassadors – around 30 trained staff – have reached over 7,000 students and parents across 46 institutions, dedicating more than 680 hours in 2023 alone.

Strategic partnerships, such as with the Careers and Enterprise Company, have expanded VolkerRail's reach across South Yorkshire, enabling tailored engagement through bulletins and the Enterprise Adviser programme. This includes support for specialist schools like Doncaster UTC and Communication Specialist College, promoting inclusive career development.

As a founding partner of the 'Routes into Rail' programme, VolkerRail's proactive approach has transformed its visibility, with schools now initiating contact directly. Their involvement in initiatives like the North Star Science School and the Remake Learning Rail festival – a collaborative industry event attended by over 300 people in 2025 – showcases the breadth of rail careers and counters outdated perceptions of the industry.

By refining their outreach through employer standards and cross-sector collaboration, VolkerRail has become a model for impactful, inclusive, and strategic educational engagement, helping bridge the industry's skills gap and inspire the next generation.

