

First-ever train driving apprenticeship for Wales

Wales
TUC
Cymru

Established by ASLEF's The Learning Partnership Programme, a Wales Union Learning Funded initiative.

ASLEF, working in social partnership with Welsh Government, Transport for Wales, the Wales TUC, National Skills Academy for Rail and Qualifications Wales tackled the enormous task of developing a brand new train driving Apprenticeship together.

The process took several years and we overcame many barriers and challenges along the way but the new qualification was approved and ready for enrolments by October 2021.

How to find out more

If you are interested in applying to be a new Transport for Wales train driver apprentice, best thing to do is keep an eye out on the websites of rail operators in your area.

Transport for Wales jobs are listed [here](#).

For information on the project contact Emma Penman: emmalpenman@aslef.org.uk

Who are we?



Established in 1880, the Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Fireman (ASLEF) is the UK's largest train driver's union representing over 21,000 members in train operating companies and freight companies as well as London Underground and light rail systems. The union represents just over 700 drivers in Wales.



The Learning Partnership Programme is the ASLEF Wales Union Learning Fund (WULF) project, which has been working within the Train Operating Companies since 2010 to create a stronger, more skilled and resilient workforce for the rail industry in Wales.

Our aim

Our goal and main focus was the introduction and development of the first ever Train Driver Apprenticeship for Wales.

The background

The campaign started several years ago. ASLEF, supported by WTUC, started by lobbying the train operating company.



“We felt it was important for Train Drivers to have recognition for the high level of training undertaken to obtain their “key” and gain recognised qualifications to reflect the skills set.”

Emma Penman, ASLEF Project Worker



TfW cohort of train driver apprentices on enrolment day with Training Team & ASLEF Project Worker

The start

In April 2019, a working group was set up specifically to develop a Train Driving Qualification/Apprenticeship for Wales. The group comprised of Head of Learning and Development at Transport for Wales; a TUC Learning Officer; members of ASLEF Company Council; ASLEF's Education Project Worker; Welsh Government officials, and the National Skills Academy for Rail.

The group agreed on the need for a formal qualification, so our next steps were to seek an awarding body to develop the framework and bid for funding.

The Challenges

Transport for Wales worked with awarding bodies to try to get the qualification off the ground but this was when we met our main challenge: The award bodies said that the number of people who would take on the apprenticeship each year was too low to warrant its development. This was obviously frustrating for the working group.

Welsh Government Support

Thanks to a long history of partnership working with the Welsh Government, ASLEF was able to call on our existing relationship

with Ken Skates, Minister for Economy, Transport and North Wales, to explain the problem. The Minister was keen to support the qualification and, on 5th March 2020, wrote to instruct that the working group should liaise with Qualifications Wales to oversee the design of the new qualification and commission an awarding body.

The Partnership Process

In September 2020 Ian Thompson, ASLEF Company Council Secretary, and Emma Penman attended the first stakeholders meeting with Transport for Wales (TfW) and the partner organisations who had come on board to develop the qualification: Coleg Y Cymoedd (the apprenticeship provider partner) and EAL (specialist-skills awarding body).

We agreed that the qualification would be developed from the current TfW train driver training structure. This was mapped across by EAL to create a qualification. It was set at a level 3 and developed under the Welsh Apprenticeship Framework to include Essential Skills level 2 (literacy, numeracy and ICT). EAL developed a standalone qualification – the Level 3 Diploma in Train Driving.

In January 2021, when the main body of the qualification was laid out, ASLEF took part in

an official engagement exercise which brought in Welsh Government and Skills Academy Wales to the stakeholder group to officially endorse the work.

On 8th February 2021, EAL Level 3 Diploma in Train Driving – C00/4312/6, gained approval from Qualifications Wales with an operational start date of 1st March 2021.

Following a four-week public consultation exercise (sharing the qualification with organisations such as ASLEF, Learning Providers and Train Operating Companies) the Welsh Government gave approval to progress to acquiring apprenticeship status.

Apprenticeship status

A lot of work then went on behind the scenes, by our stakeholder partners, to bring the initiative to fruition. In August 2021 the first ever Train Driving Apprenticeship for Wales was established and by October Transport for Wales were ready to sign up the first train driver apprentices in Wales.

Next Steps

TfW hopes to recruit around 100 apprentices every year for the next five years. This exciting initiative is a great achievement and came about through the true spirit of collaboration.

ASLEF will remain involved in the apprenticeship programme at Transport for Wales through our social partnership. The union will continue to support new apprentices and work with Transport for Wales to diversify recruitment programmes and support additional training needs.

ASLEF now has a negotiating and consultative role in the apprenticeship programme and Transport for Wales has adopted a stronger social partnership approach.



TfW Head of Human Resources & ALSEF District Organiser signing The Apprenticeship Charter



Mick Whelan ASLEF General Secretary

“We are thrilled that the first ever accredited qualification in train driving, in Wales, is, finally, in place. It proves that persistence pays off because this is something that we have been pushing for, for years. And I note that it is only under the Welsh Government – a Labour Government – that it has happened. It’s a great step forward for training, for train drivers, for the railway, and for Wales.”

Adam Bagwell, TFW Operations Training Manager, said:

“This has been a long time coming and the hard work by our training team in partnership with ASLEF, the national trade union for train drivers, Coleg y Cymoedd, our apprenticeship provider partner, and the Rail Delivery Group, has now come to fruition.

“The train driver’s role is a professional, highly-skilled, job and our drivers deserve recognition for their hard work through training in the form of this qualification. It shows we are committed to provide the best possible training to our drivers in Wales and the Borders.”

Matthew Tucker, Assistant Principal at Coleg y Cymoedd, said:

“There has been huge infrastructure investment and development in transportation across Wales, and creating this apprenticeship generates new opportunities and ensures education and skills development forms a critical part.”

Lee Waters, Deputy Minister with responsibility for Transport, said:

“The creation of Transport for Wales was not just about improving public transport but to bring other benefits to our communities as we do so. Bringing on apprentices into well-paid jobs is a great example of how we are doing both.”

