

Such a lot to learn!

by Claire Wickes, administration officer, The Institution of Railway Operators

The Institution will be four years old next spring and, like all youngsters of that age, it has had to learn to walk before it could run.

Like other three-year-olds, it has always had a lot of energy and enthusiasm, learning from mistakes, looking forward to the future when it's 'bigger and cleverer', trying to emulate and learn from its elders and betters, finding out what it is good at, learning to accept criticism, and find its niche in the world. I could keep this analogy going for ages, but you'll have got my drift. My own little girl came into the world just five days after the Institution was 'born', and as they are therefore the same age, she is a constant reminder to me of how far we have both come in those few years, and yet how much more we have to grow and learn.

Operating qualifications

In order to keep ourselves competitive in the job market, everyone wants to keep their skills up to date and keep a look out for new technology, jargon and possible new directions for their careers. In a diverse and fragmented rail industry, the Institution provides an education programme which, whilst independent of railway companies across the British Isles and beyond, has a cross-industry relevance and is already proving its worth.

The day will come when more operating job advertisements will state 'membership of the Institution of Railway Operators is an advantage' or even 'a requirement' for applicants to the post. Until we reach this stage, the Institution is already providing the means for individuals who are in the railway operating world – or who want to be – to acquire the knowledge and qualifications that will keep them in demand and suitably remunerated.

...and why I am not an Operator

I am certainly no operator myself, but I don't mean it to sound like an apology. Although a second

generation railwayman (and it so happens my husband is too) my railway service, before having my daughter and then joining the Institution, was all on the commercial side in customer services, retail accounts/audit and then 11 years in marketing. All very valuable roles in the industry but, I'd be the first to admit, not 'hands-on, shift-working, getting the trains to run safely and on time' jobs at the sharp end.

My role here is to look after the administration and finances of the Institution, supporting the chief executive and board in the valuable work they do to develop the Institution, its education programme and its service to the industry. I enjoy the work hugely, because to keep in touch with the industry I love, and grew up in, and married into as well, is so satisfying. The trials and tribulations of a desk job are as nothing compared to the day-to-day 24/7 responsibilities of keeping the railways running for our customers, yet we all need each other to grow, to learn, and to run this industry as a team.

We are all in the transport and communications business, even if I only transmit information and demands for money!

What have we learned and achieved this year?

- The enrolment of our 1000th member, Chris Hewitt of First North Western, is a real landmark in our short history, and the impetus it has brought us has been enormous. We are already up to member number 1050, just a month after number 1000 enrolled, so there is no time to rest on our laurels.

- We now have dozens of corporate member companies, and are thrilled that a few more are already in the pipeline. These companies are demonstrating a commitment to work-based learning and operating excellence that fully vindicates the Institution's existence – and the Strategic Rail Authority's generosity as the financial backer of our Education Programme's development.

- We are, and have been, expanding the Institution's board of directors to bring in yet more expertise and representation from Light Rail, Infrastructure Maintenance, Heritage Railways, Urban transport Systems and a wide cross-section of TOC franchise holders and the highest echelons of Network Rail.

- Our six areas have been holding events and visits to keep abreast of new developments and technologies around the country. Delegates on our study weekend in Newcastle – for students on our associate courses – were able to study Nexus (Tyne & Wear Metro) operations at first hand and found the get-together more than helpful to their studies as they compared jobs and experiences in the U.K. and Ireland.

- We had our first annual members' lunch in London in March, to which I was kindly invited (a real honour for a non-operator!) and we had an enjoyable time, a good meal, inspiring speeches from the two Richards (Bowker, chairman of the Strategic Rail Authority and Morris, chairman of the Institution), and managed to raise a goodly sum for the Railway Children charity.

- And finally, we have three associate courses running concurrently and our first-ever member course started just a couple of weeks ago. The education programme is our *raison d'être* and we are excited and encouraged by the level of interest being shown by operations managers and training managers throughout the industry. It is encouraging to see the mix of backgrounds and, yes, age-groups on the courses. It is never too late – or too early – to learn something new.

The engineering disciplines in the rail industry have long been served by their own respective Institutions. To paraphrase one of our board members, 'we fully appreciate that every railway needs experts in many disciplines to make them tick; we are here solely to recognise and develop railway operators'. If you want to learn – or prove you have already learned – the skills and rules of railway operating, well you know where we are. I look forward to hearing from you.

PROFESSIONAL QUALIFICATIONS FOR RAILWAY OPERATORS

- Have you got experience of operating the railway?
- Do you want professional recognition, development and qualifications?
- The Institution of Railway Operators has been established to provide a professional structure and qualifications for people with knowledge and experience of operating the railway, at all levels.
- A new information pack is now available for anyone interested in finding out more about the Institution and its education programme. Please email, write, phone or fax to Claire Wickes at the above address if you would like a pack for yourself or colleagues.

MEMBERS' NEWS

Great News on Subscriptions

Great news for those who pay their subscriptions out of their own pocket – IRO subscriptions can be included in your tax returns as a professional subscription, now that the IRO has achieved Inland Revenue 'Status 3 listing.'

Our subscriptions have remained the same for the fourth year running, and our Corporate Membership scheme (see below) enables many members to enjoy all the benefits of membership without paying any subscription personally.

If you wish to retain IRO membership in full retirement (i.e. no longer in any paid employment, consultancies or directorships, whether full- or part-time), you are able to claim a 50 per cent discount of your annual subscription, by so stating on your renewal form.

If you wish to pay by standing order, or set up a regular annual payment order through your internet- or telephone-banking system, please let us know and we will send you all you need.

The following employers operate a corporate membership scheme, by paying a one-off annual fee which covers all their

employees' affiliate or associate membership subscriptions. (Those with full membership will continue to pay their subscription personally, irrespective of whether they can subsequently claim it back from their employer through expenses). We are delighted to welcome Wales and Borders as the newest Corporate Member. Other corporate members are: Network Rail London Underground Ltd, Wales and Borders, Freightliner, Virgin Trains, First North Western, First Great Eastern, First Great Western, Go-Ahead Group, Transport for London, Docklands Light Railway, Thames Trains, South Central, Thameslink, Stagecoach Rail, London Lines, GB Railways, Sheffield Supertram, WAGN, Anglia Railways, Island Line, Silverlink Trains, Hull Trains, South West Trains, c2c, GB Railfreight, EWS Railway, Northern Ireland Railways, Connex, Iarnród Éireann, Corus Rail Consultancy, ScotRail, Central Trains.

DIARY OF EVENTS

NORTH WEST AREA

Wednesday 21 January 2004: details to be advised.

Wednesday 24 March 2004: North West Annual General Meeting with talk by Tom Birch on the Institution's Education Programme.

For details please contact: Clive Evans on 01270-629009 or email us at:

Northwest@railwayoperators.org

MIDLANDS AREA

The Midlands Area will not be holding an event in December 2003.

Monday 26 January 2004: Presentation by AEA Technology (Derby) - Provisional.

For information on all Midlands Area events, please contact Julia Stanyard on 0121 345 3099 or email us at Midlands@railwayoperators.org

SOUTH EAST AREA

Monday 26 January 2004: Tom Winsor, The Rail Regulator

Wednesday 18 February 2004: Kim Howells MP, Minister for Transport (This talk will be sponsored by Porterbrook)

Tuesday 30 March 2004: Tim O'Toole, Managing Director, London Underground

Monday 24 May 2004 - Ray Price, Operations Director, Arriva Trains

Monday 19 July 2004 - TBA

Monday 20 September 2004 - TBA

Monday 22 November 2004 - TBA

All meetings take place at the Union Jack Club, Sandell Street, Waterloo. Doors open at 6pm and the talks commence at 6.30pm. For details - or to contact the South East area on any subject - please email to: Southeast@railwayoperators.org

NORTH EAST AREA

North East Area meetings normally take place at 5.30pm for 6pm, at York, and full details will be published in advance each month in this column. For further news on the IRO in the north east contact us by email at:

Northeast@railwayoperators.org

SCOTTISH AREA

2 December 2003 - David Scotney on 'SESTRAN one.ticket - seamless travel or unrealistic dream?'

13 January 2004 - Chris Ballance MSP, Green transport spokesman, on 'Blunting the impact of transport on the environment'

We are guests of the ILT at these ILT meetings on Tuesdays at 1730 in Edinburgh City Chambers. For purposes of catering, please advise your attendance to the IoRo Scottish Organiser five days in advance.

For information on all Scottish events and matters, please contact

Scottish@railwayoperators.org or phone Douglas Kerr on 0141 335 5430

SOUTH WEST AREA

On 29 October we had a talk in Exeter from Paul Balmer, a railway consultant, on his experiences investigating railway accidents, and recent developments and best practice in those investigations.

On 11 November, we had a talk in Bristol from Martin Elwood, head of Network Rail's Logistics Unit, on the work of his team.

At 4pm on Tuesday 2

IRO welcomes 1,000th member

The Institution of Railway Operators has named First North Western employee Chris Hewitt as its 1000th member.

To mark the milestone in the Institution's history, Chris, a driver team manager based at Manchester Victoria station, was awarded a special tie and commemorative certificate.

The Institution aims to raise the profile of railway operating as a profession. It specialises in providing education programmes to aid career progression within the industry.

Tony Cousins, the Institution's Education Manager, who presented Chris with his certificate said: 'The Institution has come a long way since it was set up three years ago but we are still actively encouraging people to join us. We are delighted that Chris is our 1000th member and wish him a long and satisfying career in railway operations.'

Chris originally started as a carriage cleaner with First North Western 10 years ago, and worked his way up through the ranks of driver and instructor before becoming a driver team manager in June this year. He has become an Associate of the Institution.

He said: 'I was really pleased to be able to get free membership of the IRO through First North Western's corporate membership scheme. Being the 1000th member was a bonus! I'm hoping to take advantage of the training opportunities that the Institution provides in the very near future.'

First North Western offers all its employees the opportunity to join the Institution free of charge as either an associate or affiliate, dependent on level of experience.



December, at Network Rail's Offices at Temple Point, Redcliffe Way, Bristol we are holding an 'open-to-all members' committee meeting, to finalise the programme for 2004. We have decided to hold an event on the second Tuesday of each month. Some will be talks, to be given in Swindon, Bristol, Cardiff and Exeter, to enable as many members as possible to attend.

There will also be a programme of visits, to include Westinghouse at Chippenham, Mendip Rail at Merehead, near Frome, Sudbrook, which controls the pumping and emergency operations for the Severn Tunnel, and bus logistics in Plymouth. We intend to have

a social event at one of the heritage railways in the west of England, between Christmas and new year, as we did in 2002. Details will be sent to area members in early December.

Derek Holmes, Network Rail's director of operations, has recently become our board mentor, and we look forward to working with him to develop the area's activities and effectiveness.

For information on all South West area events, please contact Lawrie Hall on mobile 07771 827797 (internal 07 79307), or Tim Maddocks on 01392 476237 (internal 076 6237) or email us at southwest@railwayoperators.org