

# The need for qualifications

John Glover FCILT MIRO MPWI, looks at the training gap that led to the creation of the Institution of Railway Operators and highlights courses on offer

To suggest that there needs to be a professional structure and qualifications for people with knowledge and experience of operating the railway doesn't sound like a particularly controversial idea. Yet, in the rush to embrace a privatised business-led system a decade ago, the importance of the job of running the railway was largely forgotten.

This led to the setting up of the Institution of Railway Operators, which is going from strength to strength.

Not the least of its successes has been the introduction of distance-learning diploma and degree courses in conjunction with Glasgow Caledonian University. These courses have a number of distinct aims:

- To provide knowledge and help in understanding how working railways operate;
- To provide a flexible and practical learning approach to studying;
- To provide a good foundation of knowledge and learning upon which to enhance the career paths of participants;
- To provide a recognised academic qualification, both within the rail industry and externally; and
- To provide a route via the diploma course for entry into the IRO at associate level, and then taking the degree course to attain full membership.

In the first intake of October 2005, 15 students enrolled for the diploma and 16 for the degree course.

## PREVIOUS SCHEMES

British Rail held a series of evening classes on operating subjects. There was also an intensive programme for those selected for the Operating Management training scheme. It is the gaps created by the demise of these and other schemes that the IRO intends to fill with its new courses.

What happens out on the track is within the control of management, and that control has to be rigorous. This is not only to ensure safety of operation, but also to make the best possible use of the capacity that the infrastructure provides. This is in considerable contrast to roads, where the degree of control is far less.

Railways also require some understanding of the associated technical issues. The steel wheel on steel rail has many positive characteristics, but a train travelling at speed needs a considerable distance and time for it to be brought to a stand. Hence the importance of signalling, which aims to provide a safe distance between succeeding trains at all times, and ensure that the interval between one train and that following is as short as safety will allow. This leads into the issue of the regulation of trains and the compilation of timetables, which need to be economic in terms of use of assets, but also able to offer a high degree of reliability and performance.

## NEED TO EVOLVE

There is much more, but what stands out is that a huge compendium of rules, formal and informal, has evolved on how the railway should be run. In operational terms, there is a reason for virtually everything that one sees.

However, technology evolves. Thus, direct and secure communication between a train driver and a signalling centre, other than by lineside telephone, has only become possible in recent years. But this has to be matched with a methodology that understands the risks as well as the benefits that can result.

The course study notes make a point of stressing the benefits of going out and observing the railway at first hand. Years ago, when I was a BR trainee, we were given regional passes. 'What I want you to do', said the training officer, 'is to travel all over the system, at any time, as long as you use your eyes to note what you see.' He went on to say that, if this included taking a late evening train home in the company of a lady on a Saturday night, the same still applied. 'Any trouble from the guard, questioning whether the journey was being made on duty,' he said, 'refer him to me.' He emphasised his point by saying that he didn't care 'whether it was our own wives or somebody else's!'

Disregarding the last remark, he had a point. Observation is a fine tool. What he might have added was the need to attempt to understand what one saw, and the reasons for it happening that way. That was not to suggest that this was necessarily the right way to do it; improvements are always possible. But the enquiring mind should question the observations, pursuing them with others.

## SWEEPER UP

As an example, and keeping the late night theme, why is it that the last trains on long-distance routes so often call at all stations? The last Manchester Piccadilly-to-London Euston train calls at Lichfield, Tamworth, Nuneaton and Rugby. This is the 'sweeper-up', the aim of which is to ensure that passengers are not left stranded anywhere, due perhaps to earlier problems like broken connections. It also means shorter journeys can be made. Good reason, bad reason? Let the reader decide, but such things don't happen just by chance.

In succeeding issues, it is hoped to give some insight into the modules which make up the courses which are now offered.

*The author is a board member of the Institution of Railway Operators*

## NEWS FOR IRO MEMBERS

Have you experience of operating the railway? Would you like professional recognition, development and work-based academic qualifications? The Institution of Railway Operators provides a professional structure and qualifications for people with knowledge and experience of operating the railway, at all levels. An information pack about the Institution and its education programme is available. Contact Claire Wickes at the address at the top of the page.

## MEMBERS' NEWS

The following employers operate a Corporate Membership scheme, by paying a one-off annual

fee that 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. Please note that, as the IRO's subscriptions are tax-deductible, a receipt will be issued for all payments, whether by cheque, standing order or internet payment.

Network Rail, Eurostar UK Ltd, First ScotRail, First Great Western, First Great Western Link, Railnews, Iarnród Éireann (Irish Rail), EWS Railway, Northern Ireland Railways, Central Trains, Virgin West Coast, Virgin Cross-Country, Thameslink, Southern,

Corus Rail Consultancy, London Underground Ltd, Docklands Light Railway, Transport for London, Stagecoach Rail, South West Trains, Sheffield Supertram, Arriva Trains Wales, South Eastern Trains, Island Line, London Lines, Silverlink Trains, c2c Rail, WAGN Rail, Wessex Trains, Midland Mainline, First Transpennine Express, One and Gatwick Express.

If your company would like to explore the benefits of corporate membership of the Institution, please contact us. We welcome applications from all industry companies, suppliers and associations – please contact Chris Daughton on 01444 248931 or admin@railwayoperators.org

Most of you will be aware that the IRO has entered into a partnership arrangement with Glasgow Caledonian University (GCU) to run diploma and degree courses in Railway Operations Management.

A new cohort of students started in February and, although it required quite a lot of travel by some people, GCU hosted the launch event on its campus in Glasgow.

We couldn't come to Scotland without involving the Scottish Area, so we extended the launch event for new students into a study weekend for existing and new students.

Whilst new students were introduced to the course material by Vince Mills and Sabina Siebert of GCU, Tom Birch and Colin Charman took existing students through some key issues from the Railway Operating Principles module. It is essential that students fully understand this module as it underpins the whole programme.

Everyone then came together for the remainder of the programme. This started with a visit to a computer laboratory, where students were given hands-on experience of GCU systems and Blackboard – the GCU on-line communications system – in particular.

After lunch and on Sunday Jim

# To Glasgow and back

**Tony Cousins, education manager for the Institution of Railway Operators, reflects on the successful launch of the Institution's degree and diploma courses**

Summers (acting Scottish Area Chairman) took students through a series of visits and talks, all of which were designed to assist in putting flesh on the modules which our students have to study. The overall theme was capacity and performance.

Included in the activities was a talk by Geoff Cook of Network Rail about capacity enhancements. This showed how increasing congestion affecting Edinburgh Waverley would be tackled by a phased expansion, which had now begun.

Geoff also showed how re-opening the Stirling-to-Kincardine line for freight would have major benefits elsewhere for the passenger network.

The students then visited the Control Office for Scotland. In Scotland, the Toc and Network Rail controllers have always worked in the same room. The main concern that day was handling the crowds for the Scotland-France rugby match – both

the train service and the rugby result went satisfactorily.

The group then travelled by First ScotRail to Paisley, noting that while electric trains in Strathclyde are operated by the driver, a revenue protection/customer service person is rostered for each train. The commitment of Strathclyde Passenger Transport to customer service and security is shown by its support for the Strathclyde Customer Services Centre. This is situated at Paisley but deploys CCTV cameras throughout the area.

Nearby is the Paisley Signalling Centre, charged with merging successfully an intensive suburban service with a heavy programme of coal trains from Ayrshire. Those who were unfamiliar with signalling were helped by the signallers to come to terms with an NX panel and automatic route setting.

Underlining the importance of the

event, Chris Leah, chairman of the Institution, travelled from East Anglia to the formal dinner that evening. Before the meal, we learned about road freight on rail from John Holwell, one of our members who now worked for the major logistics firm W.H. Malcolm, a road haulage firm that had pursued a strategy of using rail. John's message was twofold: strive for simplicity, and never stop challenging things.

On Sunday morning, Billy Black, overnight services manager, First ScotRail, analysed the many components of a train service, in particular the complexities of the Caledonian Sleepers, from laundering the linen for 864 beds every night, to the differing types of brakes, and the cycling of sets for maintenance. The impact of engineering possessions on the sleeper service was far-reaching, and the damage should not be overlooked by the planners. Billy deserved special thanks, not only for turning out early on a Sunday morning, but for providing sleeper passes for a number of students to travel to and from Glasgow overnight. Existing students had been asked to undertake a customer service audit on their journey to Glasgow, whichever mode they used (none had tried the coach services) and were able to provide their findings during this session.

Next it was down into the unique Glasgow Subway system, the third underground railway to be built after London and Budapest. This 6.5-mile circular system, with a gauge of four feet and with gradients as sharp as six per cent, carries about 14 million passengers a year. It is, of course, subject to HMRI and has a living safety case like any other railway.

GCU, Jim and his colleagues pulled out all the stops to make this a most enjoyable and informative weekend. Networking, an important part of study life, also took place.

I would like to wish all those students participating in these, our first, courses good luck towards a successful conclusion.

## DIARY OF EVENTS

### ANNUAL LUNCH

Our 2006 annual lunch will take place on Friday 28 April in Manchester. Full details and a booking form are being sent out to all members. Any companies wishing for a corporate table of 10 are welcome to contact us: please email a provisional booking to: [admin@railwayoperators.org](mailto:admin@railwayoperators.org) or call us on 01444 248931.

### SCOTTISH AND IRISH AREA

**Monday 20 March:** The work of the Rail Accident Investigation Branch. This will again be in Glasgow at 1715hrs, although the venue is still to be confirmed.

**Monday 24 April:** We are hoping to arrange something with an emphasis on Ireland. For information on all Scottish events and matters, please contact [Scottish@railwayoperators.org](mailto:Scottish@railwayoperators.org) or phone Jim Summers, Acting Chairman on 01324 625284.

### MIDLANDS AREA

Provisional dates: **Monday 20 March;** **Monday 24 April** (please note change of day); **Monday 15 May.** To contact the Midlands Area on any subject, please call Julia Stanyard on 0121 345 5030 or email: [Midlands@railwayoperators.org](mailto:Midlands@railwayoperators.org)

### SOUTH EAST AREA

**Monday 20 March:** 'Station Operations' Operations Master Class. **Monday 15 May:** Speaker (TBA). **Monday 10 July:** 'Basic Signalling' Operations Master Class. **Monday 18 September:** Speaker (TBA). **Monday 20 November:** 'Track for Operators' Operations Master Class. All South East Area meetings take place at the Union Jack Club, Sandell Street, Waterloo. Doors open at 18:00hrs and the talks commence at 18:30hrs. To contact the South East area on any subject please email: [Southeast@railwayoperators.org](mailto:Southeast@railwayoperators.org)

### NORTH EAST AREA

North East Area meetings normally take place at 1730hrs for 1800hrs, at York. For further news contact us by email at: [Northeast@railwayoperators.org](mailto:Northeast@railwayoperators.org)

### NORTH WEST AREA

**Wednesday 22 March:** Talk on ERTMS by Paul Le Vesconte. **Wednesday 24 May:** Visit to the new Transpennine Express Depot at Ardwick. Note this event is still provisional and we will keep you informed. To contact the North West area on any matter, please contact Clive Evans on 01270-629009 or email us at: [Northwest@railwayoperators.org](mailto:Northwest@railwayoperators.org)

### SOUTH WEST AREA

For information on all other South West events and matters, contact Lawrie Hall on 01453 822150 or email [Southwest@railwayoperators.org](mailto:Southwest@railwayoperators.org)