Written evidence submitted by National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers (RMT) (FES0260)

Education Committee

Further Education and Skills

RMT Union is Britain's largest specialist transport union and has more than 80,000 members from almost every sector of the transport industry. RMT is by some distance the largest rail union and represents all grades of rail workers. RMT is responding to the inquiry's questions on skills and apprentices but we very much welcome and thank the Education Select Committee for the opportunity to submit this response to this inquiry.

Introduction

Becoming an apprentice in the transport sector in 2025 should be a coveted route into a skilled and secure job for life where the skills, knowledge and experience of transport workers on the tools is passed down through generations of work experience to the next generation of workers who would then go on to keep our public transport, industry and economy moving. Unfortunately we know that for many young people keen to enter the transport workforce, whether it is the National Railway, London Underground or Maritime, this is simply not the case and their experiences of training and education does not get close to matching their needs and expectations, this has led to increasing numbers of apprentices dropping out and leaving the industry before they have really begun, never to return.

On the railway, apprenticeships have not always existed but there has always been training on the job in a number of different forms. Starting in the 1950s up to the 1980s there were indentured apprenticeships for engineering, electricians and fitters for 4 years with a one-year residential training programme in Swindon, with other residential training happening in the north and Scotland.

However since the railways were privatised three decades ago, like so much on our railway, many apprenticeships have become fragmented with many outsourced to the lowest bidder with on the job training and education being split between different providers often with unacceptably poor levels of quality and shocking facilities.

Young people have been betrayed by successive Governments and today with insecure jobs, housing and higher education tuition fees costing upwards of £60,000 it is vital that this Government invests in apprenticeships to give young people an alternative and successful pathway into the railway industry.

In the maritime sector, seafarer training is deeply imbalanced, with the previous Government's policy of stimulating Ratings training through the apprenticeship system having largely failed whilst relying on the last Labour Government's Tonnage Tax and Support for Maritime Training (SMarT) policies for subsidising seafarer training, almost exclusively for Officer Cadets.

Seafarer training standards are set by the IMO Seafarers Training, Certification and Watchkeeping (STCW) Convention 1978. UK compliance and enforcement with international seafarer training standards is the responsibility of the Maritime and Coastguard Agency. This includes the basic safety training that all seafarers, whether they are the Captain or a female Rating working in the bar of a passenger ferry need to complete in order to work at sea.

RMT also support improvements to apprenticeships in the ports, offshore energy and inland waterways sectors. These could also serve to stimulate employment and annual intakes at FE Colleges in working class communities.

Summary

In the detailed submission below, we provide answers to the questions on Skills and Apprenticeships put by the Committee, but here we summarise our evidence in brief, together with our recommendations.

- Apprenticeships in the rail industry are vital to fill the skills gaps created by an ageing workforce. According to the National Skills Academy for Rail (NSAR) nearly 50,000 rail industry employees are expected to retire by 2030. This has the potential to be devastating for our railway industry but there is a solution and opportunity to avoid this skills gap cliff edge moment. Currently the new Government is drafting legislation to create the new Great British Railways which will bring track and train together to end the disastrous fragmentation of our railway and create a unified network. The Government must use the opportunity of new legislation to establish Great British Railways and ensure that it includes a new centralised and fully funded apprentice training scheme which will provide exposure and a pathway for uniformed, overalled and back office apprenticeships going forward.

- The fragmentation of the transport sector due to privatisation and outsourcing has led to the outsourcing of apprentices training and education often to the lowest bidder with many education facilities and teaching being completely inadequate and substandard. We want a return to dedicated in-house facilities for apprentice training and quality education for apprentices to the highest standards.

- RMT agrees with the TUC recommendation[1] for Skills England to spearhead a new national skills strategy, developed with trade unions, employers and other key stakeholders embedded within the Labour Government's industrial strategy. The inclusion of End Point Assessments in the duration of apprenticeships is a welcome early reform by Skills England.

- Apprenticeships face many challenges. These include the scandal of low pay for apprentices in the private sector which must end. Apprentices need standardised pay above the national living wage and National Collective Bargaining for private engineering companies. RMT also wants to see an end to bogus apprenticeships where young people are paid below National Minimum Wage.

- Many apprenticeships are offered on fixed terms contracts meaning there is zero guarantee for that apprentice to be offered any employment once the apprenticeship is finished. This has led to an increase in companies offering bogus apprenticeships where young workers are essentially used as a cheap unit of labour without full employment rights expected in other contractual work. RMT wants a job guarantee for all apprentices if the qualification is passed and permanent contracts and workers' rights from day one.

[1] https://committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/130892/pdf/

- The fragmentation of rail privatisation has led to the outsourcing of apprentices training and education often to the lowest bidder with many education facilities and teaching being completely inadequate and substandard. We want a return to dedicated in-house facilities for apprentice training and quality education for apprentices to the highest standards.

  RMT surveyed members on apprenticeships in London Underground (LU) and Network Rail (NR) and found that

  - 69 percent of NR respondents disagreed that their work was well planned.
  - 53 percent of LU respondents disagreed that their current college had adequate welfare facilities.
  - 43 percent of LU respondents disagreed that the quality of their education was good
  - 41 percent of NR respondents disagreed that issues that they raise are dealt with, whilst just 26 percent agreed.

- Nearly 50 per cent of UK seafarers are aged over 40 years and this rises to over 60 per cent amongst Deck Ratings. A better balance is needed in the maritime sector between subsidised training *and employment* for seafarer Ratings and the existing subsidy for Officer Cadet training through the Tonnage Tax and the Support for Maritime Training schemes.

- In line with the Maritime Skills Commission's 2023 recommendations, seafarer apprenticeships need to be re-designed and promoted with an emphasis on Ratings grades in deck, engine, electro-technical, catering and hospitality roles, amongst other reforms.

- The Maritime Just Transition Taskforce has estimated that around 850,000 seafarers in the current global workforce of 1.9 million will need adaptation training by 2035 to operate new vessels powered by low or zero emission fuels. UK Ratings and Officers cannot be left behind by an unjust transition.

- The offshore oil and gas sector is taking on apprentices and the Offshore Skills Passport launched by the UK and Scottish Government in January needs to take this cohort into account.

How to resolve the skills shortage and narrow the gap between the skills that employers want and the skills that employees have.

Great British Railways can become a direct provider of and guarantor of the standards of a new generation of high quality of apprenticeships. According to the National Skills Academy for Rail (NSAR) nearly 50,000[2] rail industry employees are expected to retire by 2030. However, the issue facing the rail industry is that when these workers are replaced, it is often with an older person. The proportion of under 25-year-olds in the rail industry has halved since 2016, from 10 percent to five percent of the workforce whilst the top 10 skills gaps require recruiting 153,000[3] additional people between 2023 and 2030.

NSAR notes that upwards of 5,000 new railway apprentices are needed each year to avoid the ageing and retirement cliff edge in the rail industry. In the privatised railway, too many apprenticeships are low paid, fixed-term contracts that function as cheap labour for employers. [4]

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[2] NSAR _ Addressing Skills Shortages in the Rail Industry Through Investment in People and Skills https://www.nsar.co.uk/2022/09/addressing-skills-shortages-in-the-rail-industry-through-investment-in-people-and-skills/
[3] NSAR How to Increase Apprenticeship Numbers in the Industry https://www.nsar.co.uk/2023/02/how-to-increase-apprenticeship-numbers-in-the-industry/

GBR can create a new centralised fully funded apprentice training scheme which will provide an industry-wide training scheme aimed at young workers and offer a career path from school leaver to retirement in the rail industry and a pathway for uniformed, overalled and back-office apprenticeships. It can also specify, accredit and monitor apprenticeships within the supply chain, in consultation with unions.

The level of collaboration between the further education sector, local Government and employers in responding to the skills shortage.

The fragmentation of the transport sector due to privatisation and outsourcing has led to the outsourcing of apprentices training and education to the further education sector often to the lowest bidder with many education facilities and teaching being completely inadequate and substandard. Our recent survey of RMT Union apprentice members working at London Underground found that too often the facilities at further education and training suppliers does not meet adequate standards.

"The college facilities are poor and it gives a feel that the contract to deliver the course was sold to the lowest bidder."

"Facilities at college are embarrassing. Nowhere to sit at lunch time, disgusting toilets, no provisions for hot drinks/food unless you buy it from the college. Have asked for microwave etc and been told no."

53 per cent of London Underground respondents to our survey disagreed that their current college had adequate welfare facilities for example. It is vital that all apprentices have decent training and college facilities.

The role of Skills England in meeting the Government's industrial strategy and boosting economic growth.

Skills England must be fully established to spearhead a new national skills strategy, developed with trade unions, employers and other key stakeholders embedded within the Labour Government's industrial strategy.

RMT, as an affiliate of the Trades Union Congress agrees with their proposals that Skills England be fully established as a statutory, independent body. This structure would solidify social partnership and tripartite collaboration. Equipped with this framework, Skills England can effectively:

- Influence Government and the wider skills system: By providing well-considered recommendations, Skills England can guide policy decisions for long-term benefits.

- Shape strategic direction: Through its expertise, Skills England can help define a clear path for developing a world-class skills system.

- Track progress and monitor improvement: By measuring change over time, Skills England can ensure continuous improvement and hold the Government accountable for long-term investment in skills development. This comprehensive approach would encourage a shift away from short-term solutions, fostering a sustainable and effective skills system that serves both workers and the economy.

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[4] https://www.nsar.co.uk/2024/02/how-to-increase-apprenticeship-numbers-in-the-industry/

- Rebuild foundational industries such as shipping where a low-pay model deters or displaces apprenticeships for local seafarers.

Current challenges for apprenticeships, including employer engagement, funding issues, and apprentice pay.

RMT believes there are currently many challenges for apprenticeships and we are particularly concerned that non-unionised apprentices are at risk of being super exploited as cheap units of labour on the transport network which RMT's young members have repeatedly warned[5].

Low Pay

The level of the Apprentice rate National Minimum Wage (NMW) is a huge challenge and disincentive for young people and is often cited as a cause of high drop-out rates for apprentices in their first year of their apprenticeship. Currently the NMW for apprentices is just £6.40 per hour if they are under 19 or in their first year of their apprenticeship.

This apprentice NMW increases by £1.15 (17.9 per cent) on 1 April 2025 but this means it is still only £7.55 per hour or £13,741 per annum based on a 35 hour week. With the cost of living crisis still having profound impacts, this rate of pay is significantly lower than the minimum standard rate of pay which people need to meet an acceptable standard of living. A 20024 report by the Centre for Research in Social Policy (CRSP) at Loughborough University found that a single person needs to earn £28,000 a year to reach a minimum acceptable standard of living in 2024. The current apprenticeship NMW rate makes it almost impossible for anyone to live independently piling huge amounts of pressure on apprentices. RMT is calling on the Government to legislate for apprentices to receive standardised pay above the national living wage.

Skills gaps

The NSAR highlights how supply and demand factors – such as government investment in rail projects, apprenticeship numbers dropping during COVID-19 and an ageing workforce – have made the current skills gaps even worse. Rail now needs upwards 5,000[6] apprentices per year, or 2 per cent of the workforce which is effectively doubling of current average annual cohort levels.

Apprenticeships in the privatised rail industry are fragmented and patchy with privatisation impacting the standard, quality of education and terms and conditions in much of the privatised rail sector. At the time of writing there were no apprenticeships open at Alstom or Hitachi Rail and only one at Siemens Mobility, the big two privatised rail manufacturers and maintenance companies in the UK, the starting salaries are also noticeably lower than comparable roles in public sector employers Network Rail and London Underground. This is due to the private sector generally having poor collective bargaining agreements and a lack of union representation which lead to worse pay and terms and conditions for employees.

Company	Apprentice Starting Salary
Siemens Mobility	£17,000

[5] P.16 RMT News https://www.rmt.org.uk/news/publications/rmt-news-july-august-2022/285021-rmt-news-july-august-22-web-version.pdf

[6] NSAR How to increase apprenticeship numbers in the industry https://www.nsar.co.uk/2024/02/how-to-increase-apprenticeship-numbers-in-the-industry/

Alstom	£18,000
Network Rail	£19,838
London Underground	£27,944

Poorer pay and terms and conditions for apprentices in the private sector can also be attributed to the 'boom and bust' of rail manufacturing in the UK and recent lack of orders for new rolling stock that led to Alstom recently considering closing down their historic 180 year old rail manufacturing plant in Derby, before Government intervention averted this disaster.

Outside of engineering, many Train Operating Companies (TOCs) also employ staff on so-called 'customer service apprenticeships' such as for on-board caterers and customer service positions on stations. These 'apprenticeships' allow employers to pay staff worse salaries whilst still not having full workers' rights. The majority of Train Operating Companies also outsource their technical fleet maintenance roles to the big private railway engineering companies who increasingly have design, build and maintenance contracts.

In the public sector a recent survey of apprentice members on Network Rail and London Underground apprenticeships illustrated the variance in experience of employment at both companies. Those at Network Rail whose training is provided in-house, had fewer issues although both cohorts believed their training was badly planned and often lacking in quality. What's clear from these surveys is that both Network Rail and Transport for London can and must make significant improvements to their apprenticeship programme to provide a much more positive experience for their apprentices.

Members at London Underground also noted how facilities at colleges such as bathrooms, catering and classroom areas were inadequate with 73 per cent of respondents not believing their welfare facilities were adequate. This was not felt by Network Rail respondents who were generally (60 per cent) happy with facilities at their training centres. This illustrates that outsourcing of training and facilities by London Underground directly affects members' experience and training. However, members at both had issues with the nature of their apprenticeships and 78 per cent of LU and 74 per cent of NWR stated that they did not feel their issues were delt with when raised. This raises concerns for the union particularly considering the younger demographic of apprentices and the insecure nature of their employment.

In other sectors, the Maritime Apprenticeship Trailblazer Group set up in 2014 under the Coalition Government is not a successful model. Funding levels and wider problems such as the prohibition on using the Government's Support for Maritime Training (SMArT) scheme to train maritime apprentices are serious barriers to a coherent maritime apprenticeship offer to young people in our coastal communities and to FE colleges in the same areas.

In the last ten years, some exceptions amongst employers in the ferry sector and the Royal Fleet Auxiliary but the Trailblazer process only delivered one standard that has resulted in any take up by apprentices and employers – the Deck Able Seafarer Apprenticeship.

However, even with some regular uptake amongst Deck apprentices, the bare numbers for Rating Apprenticeships are astonishingly low. The latest Seafarer Statistics from the Department for Transport (which includes the RFA and CalMac apprenticeship figures) show that there were only 360 Deck Able Seafarer Apprenticeship starts over the last six years.

One example of the shipping industry's failure to act in the national interest is the Maritime Caterer Apprenticeship. This took three years to develop in the Maritime Trailblazer Apprenticeship Group but the final standard only provided £6,000 funding to employers. This funding band for a 2-year Level 2 course (including six months sea time, but not the End Point Assessment) was far too low and only a handful of apprentices started this in the six years it was available. FE Colleges could not afford to run the course due to the low numbers and the Maritime Caterer apprenticeship was withdrawn by IfATE in June last year.

In comparison, the Able Seafarer (Deck) apprenticeship which has been the most popular apprenticeship attracted £10,000 funding per student. This was also Level 2 and shorter than Maritime Caterer at 18 months (not including EPA).

The *Maritime mechanical and electrical mechanic* apprenticeship has also been unsuccessful. Originally, the RMT protested that the title alone would deter apprentice and employer take up but were overruled at the Maritime Trailblazer Working Group. This apprenticeship has failed despite maximum funding of £12,000 for a Level 2 apprenticeship that lasts 18 months (not including EPA). Again, FE colleges also lost out from this failure.

There is also a continuing lack of uncertainty over the availability of the Apprenticeship Levy in the shipping industry, partly because of the complications around calculating annual National Insurance liabilities and the common use of practices such as offshoring the pay roll for UK seafarers (to reduce the National Insurance Bill) and recruitment of foreign seafarers through offshore agencies to work in the UK shipping industry. This requires urgent clarification so that employers have certainty over investment in UK Ratings and Cadets.

The widespread use of P&O Ferries style employment practices is a major disincentive to employers to train UK seafarer apprentices, because the weakness of employment laws and of the requirements on the UK Ship Register mean that a majority of shipowners, with some notable exceptions, effectively outsource their seafarer labour needs to offshore crewing agencies to cut labour costs.
P&O Ferries, Irish Ferries, CLdn, Seatruck and many other ferry operators use this employment model which makes a small number of shipping executives very wealthy whilst seafarers are paid a pittance for long and fatiguing contracts with fewer rights.

The previous Government established the Maritime Skills Commission in 2020. RMT persuaded the Commissioners to investigate barriers to training Ratings and this resulted in the publication of the MSC report[7] on removing barriers to training Ratings in the UK.

The MSC made a series of recommendations, many of which would be extremely beneficial to seafarer training policies and to apprentices and FE colleges in working class communities up and down the country, including:

- Review the Support for Maritime Training (SMarT) and Tonnage Tax schemes to increase the supply of newly qualified UK Ratings, including use of SMarT funding to meet apprentices' travel and accommodation costs.
- Overhaul of the Maritime Skills Qualification units for technical Ratings' apprenticeships.
- As the industry body for maritime apprenticeships, the Maritime Skills Alliance to improve Ratings apprenticeships, training data collection and presentation and collaborate with UK Hospitality to develop successful Maritime Catering and On Board Service apprenticeships.
- Specific mandatory training obligation on shipowners in the Tonnage Tax scheme to train UK Ratings.

[7] Barriers To Progressing UK Ratings Review Maritime Skills Commission, August 2023

- Supply of UK Ratings to be accounted for in the planning of future workforce demand in the Offshore Wind sector.
- Better promotion of Ratings careers by the Merchant Navy Training Board.
- MCA to centralise and digitise records of Ratings' qualifications.

These and other recommendations from the MSC are still awaiting implementation. DfT will be reviewing the SMarT scheme and the seafarer projections later this year. In our submission to the Chancellor's Spending Review, RMT called for strong reform of the Tonnage Tax scheme that provides a mandatory link to training and employment for UK resident Ratings. We look forward to the outcome to the Spending Review.

Essentially, successive Governments have subsidised Officer Cadet training since the late 1990s through the SMarT and Tonnage Tax schemes, whilst Ratings apprenticeships are limited to two public sector employers (CalMac Ferries and the Royal Fleet Auxiliary) and a handful of private ferry companies. Annex A clearly shows the disparity between Officer Cadet and trainee Rating numbers on Tonnage Tax qualifying vessels.

Originally, the SMarT scheme provided 30 per cent of employers training costs. The previous Government adjusted this to 50 per cent in 2022. This is welcome from a general seafarer perspective but has to been seen in context. The Maritime and Coastguard Agency has distributed over £35m since 2022-23[8] in SMarT funding to employers and almost all of that has been on Cadet training. The routes for Ratings training are rarely used, even route 5 Rating to Officer conversion training which has been overtaken by the Slater Fund, an industry funded scheme that meets 100 per cent of costs but does nothing to backfill Ratings positions.

As a result, employers like P&O Ferries and the maritime supply chain for the offshore wind industry simply choose to employ agency crew recruited offshore to meet their labour needs. This is cheaper in every sense and is dangerously destabilising the UK's maritime skills base, as the annual UK Seafarer Statistics continue to illustrate.

RMT remain committed to working with the Government on delivering the MSC recommendations and other improvements to maritime apprenticeships policy.

We note the Maritime Minister Mike Kane MP's recent statement on the development of apprenticeships in the UK Small Vessel Sector and are encouraged by the precedent that this sets in terms of Government ambition for Ratings apprenticeships in working class costal communities:

"This Government is serious about breaking down barriers to opportunity and encouraging more people into their dream careers.

"I'm proud to see this support for apprenticeships in the maritime sector, which will help develop and nurture the next generation of skilled, hardworking UK seafarers."[9]

The role of devolution in addressing regional skills needs and apprenticeships.

Responsibility for funding apprenticeships across the UK is a devolved matter and with over 22 per cent of the workforce in Scotland aged 55 or older, key sectors such as construction, health care, and transport face significant risks from the retirement cliff edge[10].

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[8] Pg 113, 2.2 Purchase of Goods and Services MCA Annual Report and Accounts 2023-24, published 20 January 2025.
[9] https://lisw.com/new-zero-to-hero-apprenticeship-launched-to-provide-new-opportunities-for-a-career-at-sea/
[10] https://fraserofallander.org/publications/skills-for-today-and-tomorrow/

Although Scotland's main train operator ScotRail is now under Scottish Government control[11], Scottish rail apprenticeships have suffered from similar fragmentation and underinvestment following 35 years of rail privatisation and outsourcing. Engineering and Maintenance of ScotRail fleet is done in-house and at the time of writing there were a number of apprentice opportunities being advertised.[12]

In Wales 'Careers Wales'[13] administers apprenticeships for the Welsh Government. In Wales, the overall number of vacancies increased from 40,800 in 2019 to 58,900 in 2022. Overall, 35 per cent of all vacancies were skill-shortage vacancies (defined as vacancies hard to fill due to applicants lacking the skills, experience or qualifications employers require), a higher proportion than in 2019 (24 per cent) and 2017 (27 per cent).[14]

As a devolved issue, it is worth mentioning the progressive policies of the largest publicly owned ferry company in the UK, CalMac Ferries which operates the Scottish Government's £1bn Clyde and Hebrides Ferry Services (CHFS) contract for lifeline ferry service in the west of Scotland. Through our work with City of Glasgow College and the RMT's Learning Organiser for CalMac Ferries, the current contract which expires at the end of September has delivered 180 Ratings apprenticeships, backfilling positions and offering young people in island communities the prospect of a rewarding career at sea.

To further illustrate the quality of the apprenticeships and jobs for CalMac crew, an apprentice starting salary is £22,641 increasing to £33,900 after completion of phase three at the six-month mark of courses which vary between 20 months and 24 months depending on the department. This is well above the apprentice NMW rate and acknowledges that for specialist industries like rail and maritime, the apprentice NMW is not a viable incentive.

In Wales, there is more alignment with England but no FE College has run maritime apprenticeships and there is no specialist maritime college in Wales. This is a worrying gap in provision, especially given the importance of ports in Wales to the smooth running of logistics links to Ireland.

This is exacerbated by the fact that all crew on Irish Ferries vessels, one of the main providers of ro-ro ferry services in the Irish Sea, are employed through a crewing agency based in Cyprus and does not recognise trade unions. The Irish Ferries fleet not only pays some crew below the UK and Irish NMWs but also does not train any seafarers.

The quality and availability of work placements within vocational courses.

The quality and availability of work placements is a significant factor in the alarming drop-out rates of apprentices before they have completed their course and training. A recent report by the Education Think tank EDSK[15] highlighted how the Government's own figures show that almost half of all apprentices (47 per cent) are now dropping out of their course, and 70 per cent of those report problems with the quality of their training – equivalent to 115,000 apprentices every year.

[11] https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-glasgow-west-60319922

[12] https://apply.scotrail.co.uk/vacancies/#results

[13] https://careerswales.gov.wales/apprenticeships

[14] https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/statistics-and-research/2024-02/employer-skills-survey-2022-wales-report.pdf

[15] No train, no gain - An investigation into the quality of apprenticeships in England https://www.fenews.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/EDSK-No-Train-No-Gain-1.pdf

The EDSK report details some of the reasons for the dropouts which include tens of thousands of apprentices are not receiving their minimum entitlements to training during their programme. All apprentices must get one-day-a-week 'off the job' away from their normal work duties so that they can receive vital teaching and training, yet more than half of apprentices get less than the minimum one-day-a-week and 30 per cent receive no training from their provider throughout the entire working week. One in five apprentices are not even told by their employer or training provider that this minimum entitlement exists.

A new apprentice training scheme fit for the future

Recently our young members in the union have developed an Apprentices Charter[16] which we will be using to campaign for vast improvements for apprenticeships in the rail and wider transport sector. RMT Union has a wealth of knowledge and insights into how a new apprenticeship scheme can work and we would be very happy to provide further evidence to the Education Committee, utilising our lived experiences in the development of a UK apprentice training scheme fit for the future. The Apprentices charter sets out five key demands for the new Government:

1. **New Apprentice Training scheme under Great British Railways (GBR)**

The Government must use the opportunity of the new rail reform legislation to establish Great British Railways and ensure that GBR includes a new centralised fully funded apprentice training scheme which will provide an industry-wide training scheme aimed at young workers and offer a career path from school leaver to retirement in the rail industry and a pathway for uniformed, overalled and back office apprenticeships.

2. **More skilled apprenticeships in our industries**

Currently there are nowhere near enough new apprentices being taken on in the rail industry. The National Skills Academy for Rail highlights how upwards of 5,000 new railway apprentices are needed each year to avoid the ageing and retirement cliff edge in the rail industry. We want the Department for Transport to set an ambitious and fully funded apprenticeship Strategy with growth targets for the industry with specific regard to skills gaps.

3. **Better Pay - Terms and Conditions in Private Sector Apprenticeships**

The scandal of low pay for apprentices in the private sector must end. Apprentices need standardised pay above the national living wage and National Collective Bargaining for private engineering companies. We also want to see an end to bogus apprenticeships where young people are employed as an apprentice and paid below National Minimum Wage to fill an established job vacancy.

4. **An end to Fixed Term contracts**

Many apprenticeships are offered on fixed terms contracts meaning there is zero guarantee for that apprentice to be offered any employment once the apprenticeship is finished. This has led to an increase in companies offering bogus apprenticeships where young workers are essentially used as a cheap unit of labour without full employment rights expected in other contractual work. We want a job guarantee for all apprentices if the qualification is passed and permanent contracts and workers' rights from day one.

[16] The RMT Apprentice Charter 2025 https://www.rmt.org.uk/news/publications/apprentices-charter/1apprentices-charter.pdf

5. **In sourcing of apprentices training and education**

The fragmentation of rail privatisation has led to the outsourcing of apprentices training and education often to the lowest bidder with many education facilities and teaching being completely inadequate and substandard. We want a return to dedicated in-house facilities for apprentice training and quality education for apprentices to the highest standards.

GBR: A powerful lever for raising numbers and standards of apprenticeships

The creation of Great British Railways is a historic opportunity to tackle some of the deep-seated problems that have led to the long-term decline in the provision of private sector apprenticeships. With a rapidly ageing workforce and tens of thousands of transport workers set to retire within the next decade, the Government needs a fully funded strategy to invest in the future generations that will keep our country moving for decades to come. In the railway sector the Government must use the opportunity of new legislation to establish Great British Railways and ensure that it includes a new centralised and fully funded apprentice training scheme which will provide exposure and a pathway for uniformed, overalled and back-office apprenticeships going forward.

A new scheme should incorporate the best elements of Network Rail's apprenticeship scheme, as well as covering operational and clerical roles at passenger and freight train operators, so that young workers experience the whole range of opportunities in the rail industry.

Successive Governments' policies have attempted to raise the number of apprenticeships in the economy. through initiatives like Train2Gain and the Apprenticeship Levy. These led to an increase in absolute numbers from the historic lows of the 1980s and 90s to the early 2000s but it is now widely recognised that much of this was either 'deadweight' spending which rebadged existing training programmes as apprenticeships or the creation of apprenticeships of a lower quality. Beneath the headline numbers, employer spending on apprenticeships and training has been historically low in Britain since the 1980s, when training was de-regulated and the labour market recomposed. Employer spending on training and apprenticeships has also fallen steadily since 2011.[17] This reflects a deeper problem of the low priority given among British businesses to research and development, where Britain laps behind peer group economies.

Great British Railways will be well placed to intervene in the labour market to raise the quality of apprenticeships, not only through becoming a direct provider of apprenticeships in rail but through its contracts in its wider supply chain. Rail supports an estimated 600,000 jobs in the wider economy and major employers contract with Network Rail and the train operating companies in the renewal and enhancement of rail infrastructure and rolling stock. Great British Railways can specify, accredit and monitor agreed numbers and types of apprenticeships within the supply chain, in consultation with unions, making contracts dependent on meeting these standards.

Maritime Apprenticeships

The previous Government's 'Trailblazer' policy on maritime apprenticeships has failed. Even where there was some take up, the Deck (Able Seafarer) Apprenticeship for example, the standard needs reviewing.

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[17] https://education-economy-society.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/apprenticeships.pdf; https://ifs.org.uk/publications/investment-training-and-skills

There is a recognition amongst some employers that they must seriously engage with training providers and the RMT over the design of a new set of Deck, Engine, Electro-Technical, Catering and Hospitality apprenticeships for all sectors of the shipping industry.

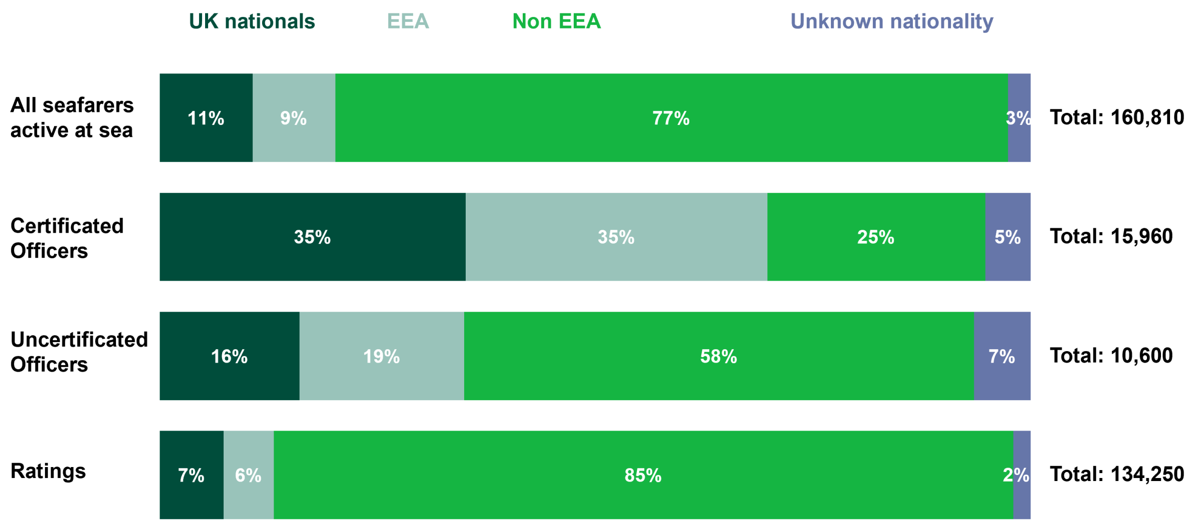
RMT is also drafting a new Maritime Apprenticeships Charter which we will share with the Committee when it is published. Established policy of the union is for maritime apprenticeships in England and Wales to be accompanied by an appropriate level of funding, at least six months sea time for operational roles and support for the cost of travel, accommodation and living expenses.

The small number of specialist maritime colleges around the country make travel, accommodation and subsistence support particularly important elements in the package to attract and train the next generation of Ratings through maritime apprenticeships.

Ther is some good practice between employers, training providers and the RMT in Stena Line and Fleetwood Nautical College but we need greater clarity over the Government's ambition for Ratings apprenticeships in the maritime sector.

We also welcome the new Government's emphasis on identifying skills gaps as part of its industrial strategy. The role of the Migration Advisory Committee will also help identify those sectors of the UK economy that are blatantly relying on cheaper imported labour to maximise profit from essential industries. This is clearly the case in the UK Shipping industry, as the Seafarer Statistics for 2024 have again officially confirmed.

Seafarers employed in the UK Shipping Industry by role and nationality[18]



The 85 per cent figure for non-EEA Ratings working in the UK shipping industry

[18] Source: DfT Seafarers in the UK Shipping Industry 2024 Table SFR0303

clearly illustrates the harsh reality of the seafarer labour market. RMT strongly welcome the Government's measures in the Employment Rights Bill to improve pay and working conditions in the ferry and wider shipping industry. The powers in the Bill[19] to raise standards of seafarers' pay and working conditions should be flexible enough to allow the Government to mandate apprenticeship targets for operators in the ferries and wider shipping sector.

This is a major step toward a UK shipping industry that values Rating apprenticeships, employment and domestic maritime skills over profiteering from exploited foreign seafarers paid £5 per hour to work 17 weeks at sea without a break, as is still the case on P&O Ferries fleet in the North Sea.

Annex 1

Tonnage Tax Analysis

Value of relief to qualifying shipowners 2000-01 to 2024-25

UK Seafarer Training Rates

Financial year	Reduction in tax liabilities (£m)[20]	Number of Cadets trained[21]	Number of Ratings trained
2000-01	60	No figures	No figures
2001-02	65	No figures	No figures
2002-03	70	No figures	No figures
2003-04	80	621	No figures
2004-05	90	571	No figures
2005-06	90	562	No figures
2006-07	100	658	No figures
2007-08	170	854	No figures
2008-09	225	925	No figures
2009-10	95	702	No figures
2010-11[2]	100	850	No figures
2011-12	115	903	No figures
2012-13	100	776	No figures
2013-14	100	790	No figures
2014-15	95	819	No figures
2015-16[22]	100	752	6
2016-17	115	737	13
2017-18	140	684	31

[19] Clause 47, Schedule 4 (Report Stage version of the Bill)
[20] Based on HM Treasury Estimated Cost of non-Structural Reliefs (Corporation Tax)
[21] Figures from Written Answer 122639 10 Feb 2022 and industry estimates.
[22] Introduction of the Tonnage Tax (Training Requirement) (Amendment) Regulations 2015

2018-19	155	605	11
2019-20	185	621	23
2020-21	90	460	5
2021-22	105	555	14
2022-23	110	595	12
2023-24	175	567	No figures
2024-25	185	No final figure	No figures
Total	**£2.915 billion**	**14,607**	**115**

April 2025