

CASE STUDY: Midland Metro Alliance - Connecting Futures in the West Midlands

The Midland Metro Alliance is committed to creating a trained, enthusiastic and committed workforce to meet its skilled and semi-skilled resource plans over the coming decade.

We saw great success in 2017 with a series of award-winning sector based work academies, which were created in partnership with local authorities, colleges, Jobcentre Plus and the Department for Work and Pensions, to help upskill local people in the region and give them their first opportunities to gain real skills and experience in the construction, civils and highways sectors.

The courses, which ran in spring 2017, saw more than fifty local people receive accredited qualifications (and a guaranteed interview with the Midland Metro Alliance) through the completion of a six-week course. More than 25 of those who completed the course were employed by the alliance and were monumental in ensuring the Bilston Road Tram Track Replacement project in Wolverhampton, which was the biggest light rail project in the UK in 2017, completed ahead of schedule in December.



Furthermore, JobCentre Plus also recognised this programme from the Midland Metro Alliance and its partners, as being a major contributing factor to the fall in unemployment in Wolverhampton during the year.

Following this great success, the organisation similarly recognised a lack of knowledge and misconceptions surrounding the sector at various job fairs and career events that the training team attended in the year and decided to lead an initiative with other employers in the West Midlands to address some of the issues by educating young people, parents, teachers and other organisations through delivery of career advice.

As with all of the alliance's careers workstreams, recognising a need to redress an aging workforce in the sector (the average age in construction and rail is 45 years old) the alliance engaged with local colleges to host a roadshow showcasing career opportunities within rail, civils and construction sectors to schools, colleges and unemployed young people aged 18-29 across the West Midlands.

The roadshows, which were entitled "Connecting Futures in the West Midlands" and held over six days in March 2018, were visited by more than 2,000 young people.

Over 40 employers collaborated with us on the project, including:

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| Alstom Group | Aspire | Avatar 3D | Barhale |
| Bodyguard Workwear | Buckingham Group Contracting Ltd | Bouygues UK | CADCOE |
| Chase Plant Hire | CITB | Colas Rail | Colas Ltd |
| Dawnus Construction | East West Rail | Egis | Gunn JCB |
| HS2 | Job Change | Jonathan Lee Recruitment | Keyline Rail |
| Laing Murphy | Morgan Sindall | National Careers Services | National College for High Speed Rail |
| Pell Frischmann | Pier UK | PLANit Global | Quattro Plant |
| Rail Safety Solutions | RSK Environmental Ltd | SOCOTEC UK | Speedy Services |
| Tony Gee | TXM Plant | Virgin Trains | Waterman Group |
| Weir Waste | West Midland Trains | West Midland Combined Authority | Women into Construction |

Connecting with young people

Young people, parents, teachers and youth workers were invited through direct marketing, partnering with educational institutions, local authorities and advertisements on social media and in local newspapers.

The sector is very diverse and as such, so were the opportunities at the event. Young people heard about routes to careers in design, engineering and construction, as you might expect, but also were able to learn about business administration, marketing, procurement, finance, human resources, information technology, engagement, leadership and many other areas of work. Young people could chat to people currently employed in such roles and find out what qualifications and routes were most advantageous.

Connecting with employers



The West Midlands is seeing the highest levels of investment in the transportation sector in decades with the extension of the West Midlands Metro and the forthcoming works for High Speed Rail (HS2). In addition, high profile motorway maintenance projects are having an impact on the availability of skilled and semi-skilled labour. It was clear that when our training and development team spoke

with industry colleagues, they instantly recognised the benefit that attending such a roadshow would bring their organisation.

Employers who attended the events recognised the opportunity to combat limited career advice that is often the case at school, college and university, specifically related to our sector. They also were able to share first-hand accounts of skills shortages that they were experiencing and why careers in civils, transport or construction are exciting and rewarding. The young people who attended the events were very diverse and employers also recognised the range of entry paths (graduate schemes or apprenticeships, for example) that they were able to promote.

The colleges that partnered with us also had positive things to say about the programme of events:

“I’ve had lots of positive comments from tutors who brought their students to the roadshow, in particular expressing how nice it was to see a group of employers concentrating on areas that their students were interested in, such as engineering and construction.”

Wendy Harrington, Woodlands Campus Manager – Solihull College

“Birmingham Metropolitan College was delighted to participate in the Connecting Futures in the West Midlands Roadshow brought to us by the Midland Metro Alliance. With employers exhibiting to showcase careers in the rail, civils and construction sectors it encouraged our students to explore different career paths. Our students actively engaged with employers present giving them a fantastic insight to the job roles available across the region, especially the apprenticeship opportunities, ranging from rail engineers to business administrators. We are hopeful that this is something that will develop and become a regular feature for young people and those currently unemployed or looking for a career change who are engaged with BMet and Midland Metro Alliance.”

Shaun Hall, Planning and Projects Manager – BMet

Future connections

The alliance’s work to ensure the region is skilled enough to staff the growing number of infrastructure projects in the region doesn’t stop here.

The Midland Metro Alliance was, in January 2018, given the go-ahead from the Institute for Apprenticeships to develop an employer-led apprenticeship standard for Tramway Construction Operative. Work has commenced to develop the standard and once the

scheme has been agreed, employers could start to train the first apprentices in early 2019. Input from employers across the industry is crucial to ensure that the new apprenticeship will cover all the knowledge, skills and behaviours required to undertake tramway construction and renewal activities in complex, ever-changing urban environments

In addition, the Midland Metro Alliance has recently been recognised in the awarding of the Talent Match Mark Award status at gold level. This accreditation celebrates the commitment that Midland Metro Alliance makes to offering work experience and employment opportunities to young people in the region.

The Talent Match Mark was launched by Talent Match and Youth Employment UK in 2017, with funding from the Big Lottery Fund. The Mark draws on the principles of youth friendly employment created in 2012 by Youth Employment UK and uses the learning from the 21 Talent Match regions.

The work to provide these learning opportunities which have been spearheaded by the organisation's training and development function has had a positive effect on all teams within the alliance and more staff members are sharing and capitalising on opportunities in the local community.

Recently two graduates, currently working on Midland Metro Alliance's Wolverhampton City Centre Metro Extension, headed back to school at the West Midlands University Technical College in Wolverhampton, to support students with a light rail construction module.

Ben Crowe and Dan Colley designed a construction skills module in order to teach students, aged 14-18 years, about construction of tramways in urban environments.



The college's lessons are a mix of classroom lectures and practical construction experience, so in order for the construction element of the course to be completed safely at West Midlands UTC's Springfield Campus, the Midland Metro Alliance also donated test track which was used in the planning stages of the Bilston Road track replacement project, completed last year.

The Year 10 and 12 students will continue their lessons with Midland Metro Alliance graduates throughout the rest of the 2017/18 summer term, with their project concluding with presentations on their mock-proposals for new light rail schemes in the region. The students have to justify the viability of routes with considerations on usage, cost, sustainability and safety of operation.

Conclusions

We'll leave it to the alliance's Training and Development Manager, Rose Rees, to sum up the importance of the work that the Midland Metro Alliance is undertaking collaboratively in the West Midlands:

"We believe that an important route to maintain a strong, knowledgeable and sustainable workforce is to invest in it."

The West Midlands is currently undergoing a transformation in terms of infrastructure and development. The work that the Midland Metro Alliance and partners are doing, including careers guidance, training opportunities and more formal schemes like apprenticeships and graduate opportunities are important ways to secure the future talent we need. We are delighted to be leading on these initiatives.”

Rose Rees, Training and Development Manager – Midland Metro Alliance

The Midland Metro Alliance will be working in the West Midlands over the next decade and is keen to leave more than just new tramways. We want to leave a legacy of knowledgeable light rail and construction experts who can export their skills for light rail and construction projects around the world.

Find out more about our work at www.metroalliance.co.uk.

