

Channeling success: become a railway engineer for Eurostar



There's nothing quite like hopping on a train at London St Pancras and emerging, just over two hours later, in Paris' Gare du Nord. Since its maiden journey in 1994, Eurostar has become synonymous both with romantic weekend getaways and efficient business travel. With plans to extend the direct route to Amsterdam, the rail giant is seeking out fresh talent to help implement a new wave of investment and compete with budget airlines.

That's where PROCAT comes in. The college offers comprehensive railway engineering apprenticeships with the company, teaching key skills relating to rail traction, rolling stock, signalling and telecommunications – all the foundations for a lengthy career at Eurostar.

An apprenticeship is a golden opportunity for anyone looking to build a long-term career, and that's certainly true for Eurostar's hand-picked apprentices. As well as the more technical training, apprentices are taught key personal skills such as responsibility, behaviour, attendance and ownership that they wouldn't get at university or if they just applied for a local job. Students still have to apply for a position at Eurostar once they've finished the course, but the qualification means they're already on the right track – and have the attributes the company is looking for.

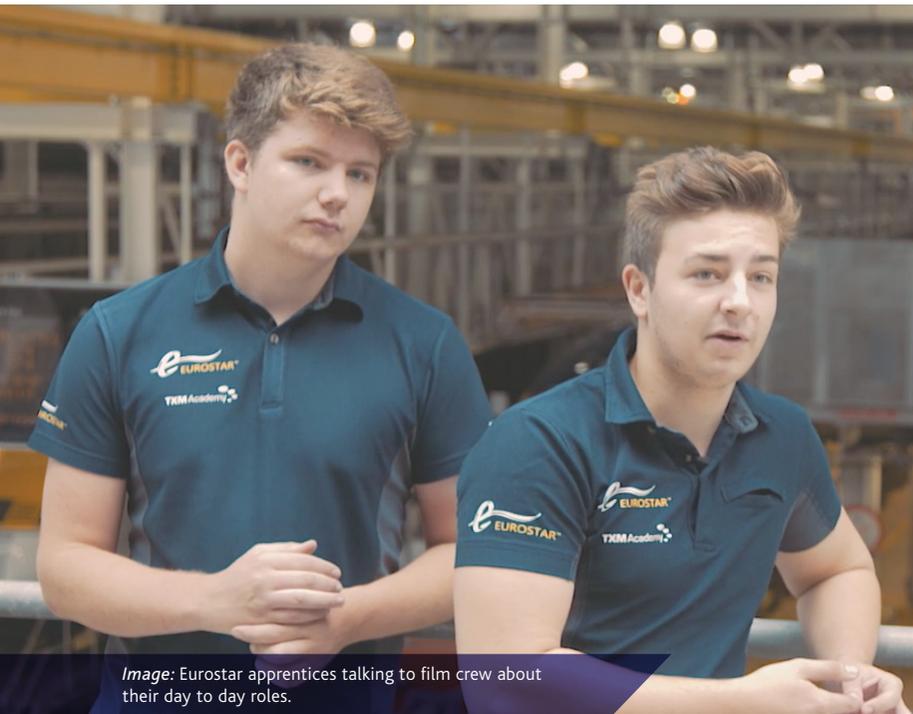


Image: Eurostar apprentices talking to film crew about their day to day roles.

Oliver Marsh, a 17-year-old who is in the first year of a four-year rail technician apprenticeship with Eurostar, had always been interested in engineering and believes that helped him bag a place on the scheme. "I did double engineering at school, I've already done a B-Tech course [at Procat]... it helped towards getting the job." This previous experience means Oliver is refreshingly sure about his future goals and career for someone his age: "Get a full-time job as a rail technician at Eurostar, at the Temple Mills depot."

However, studying engineering at school isn't a prerequisite for the course. To apply, you need five GCSEs at A* to C, including English, Maths and Science. Apart from that, the key qualities are passion and, obviously, an interest in rail – meaning a wide range of people from different backgrounds can apply.

Oliver explained that the apprenticeship at Eurostar is well suited to youngsters who feel that the academic, university route isn't for them. "I always liked engineering, and I thought [an] apprenticeship was a much better way to get into a trade that I wanted to do," he said. "I didn't go to university – I learned hands-on skills... plus I'm getting paid."

The salary is certainly an attractive factor, which can later be supplemented with raises and bonuses for good attendance. Oliver said the fact he's earning money marks him out from his friends. "They don't really like it, they just study normal courses at college at the moment."

However, what makes the Eurostar apprenticeship at PROCAT special, according to a Eurostar trainer, is the atmosphere and equipment. "It's got a positive ethos: people who work here are keen and enthusiastic. You look around you, you see quality," he said. "There are dozens of tools available, workbenches everywhere – it's all neat and tidy... There's quality kit and facilities, and also quality people."