



ASLEF Response to the All Party Parliamentary Group for Freight Transport Inquiry

1. The Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen (ASLEF) is the UK's largest train driver's union representing approximately 18,000 members in train operating companies and freight companies as well as London Underground and light rail systems.
2. ASLEF are glad to have an opportunity to respond to the Group's inquiry into the barriers young people face when trying to begin a career in the logistics sector. As the train driver's union we can obviously only comment on the recruitment of rail freight drivers.
3. There remain many barriers that stand in the way of young people becoming rail freight drivers. Historically, the freight sector has poached "ready-made" train drivers from each other or the passenger operators. This has meant they rarely recruit drivers from outside the industry or within their own staff in other grades. This would therefore deter those who wish to become trains drivers from joining the logistics industry and make them more likely to pursue a driving career for Train Operating Companies.
4. It should however be stated that this has begun to change. Freight companies used to be able to offer extremely competitive salaries and the opportunity to increase your take home pay by working overtime. However with less attractive terms and conditions and less opportunity to make more money through working rest days, the sector is becoming less attractive. This is in a large part due to the lack of job security in the rail freight industry. Our freight members are far more exposed to the

economic climate. If there is stagnation and contracts dry up, they are often moved from depot to depot or face losing their jobs. If a passenger company goes bankrupt, the state takes over the service and it stays operational. The same cannot be said of a freight company.

5. Because of problems with retention, FOCs are increasingly hiring from within. Although ASLEF are obviously concerned that our members do not want to remain at these companies and it cannot be a good sign that so many leave, it has meant that they are finally investing in training and bringing more people into the driving grade.
6. Freightliner Heavy Haul and Freightliner Intermodal are both running “Graduate Schemes” to train drivers. Initially this scheme only recruits from within the company but could be used externally. These schemes have a 5 year tie in clause, which suggests a lack of faith that they could keep staff based upon pay and working conditions alone. This points to the retention problems they face.
7. Currently mainline drivers have to be 21 years old. ASLEF believes that this should be reduced. It was often the case the companies would begin training people below this age so as soon as they reached 21 they could drive. Unfortunately, this is now very rare.
8. Another barrier to young people joining the industry is increasing casualisation. Amongst some of the smaller operators, we are starting to see drivers employed on zero hours contracts. This has many safety implications, but in terms of the group’s inquiry, it will also reduce the amount of new driving jobs. Often older or retired drivers are put on these contracts and called up on a job by job basis. This of course reduces the amount of full time drivers that are trained and recruited.

9. There are additional concerns regarding recruitment of women. ASLEF commissioned a report called "On Track with Diversity." The report examined barriers to underrepresent groups in the industry becoming train drivers. Women were invited to suggest what improvements the union could make to push the equalities agenda in the rail industry. The most common responses were to push employers on certain issues particularly affecting women. These included family-friendly working conditions, one woman saying ASLEF should "push for the company to make flexible working hours/rosters for parents of babies/young children". Another call made by several women was for improved facilities, particularly toilet facilities. One respondent spoke of the need to "ensure that women have separate clean toilets and facilities to use instead of having to share men's toilets" and another of the "need to have better facilities in place for women as we have none!! On freight site like being stuck in the 1920s."
10. These issues remain and the industry must resolve them if it is to recruit more women to become freight train drivers and make the industry reflective of wider society.
11. The very nature of the freight industry means that paths are free at unsociable hours. Passenger services get priority during normal working hours for understandable reasons. This means that our freight members often have to work undesirable working patterns. Additionally, it is freight members that carry out maintenance work. Again, this takes place during off peak times. Usually this is overnight or at weekends. This will be an obstacle for young workers who want to maximise time they can spend with family.
12. ASLEF is also concerned by the pressure that is put on members to work overtime. Often the FOCs will tell drivers that if they do not work extra hours, contracts will be lost and jobs could be put in jeopardy. Forced overtime will of course reduce the amount of full time driver posts that a company has.

13. ASLEF therefore believes that Freight Operating Companies must deal with the poor terms and conditions, salaries and working conditions in order to keep current drivers, let alone attract new people to the industry. Casualisation of labour must stop and the industry must be more flexible to attract women who are dramatically underrepresented in the workforce.

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