

The role of recognition in building a culture of respect, safety, and pride



everyone
home safe
every day

Dear all,

Last week I had the real pleasure of visiting our teams in Llandudno and Bangor. I came away not just impressed, but genuinely reflective. One of the most memorable moments was meeting two prisoners on day release from HMP Prescoed, who are currently training and gaining work experience with our off track teams at our Llandudno depot. They're both eager to join us permanently after their release, possibly as early as April next year. I found it humbling to hear how uncertain they feel about their future and how limited their opportunities have been. They spoke with real honesty about the challenges they and their peers face.



Rob Cairns,
Regional Managing Director

That conversation stayed with me - because in many ways, it mirrors something we see across our railway: a huge amount of unseen effort, and the worry that it might go unnoticed. On my visits, **what stood out wasn't just the complexity of what we do, or the pride our teams take in their work - it was being reminded just how much vital work happens behind the scenes.** Most of it is invisible, either because it's meant to be, or because our people are just that good at what they do.

I started out in front-line maintenance nearly 30 years ago. But I'm still surprised by how quickly my own sense of reality can slip when I've been away from site for even a few weeks. The office can create a false simplicity - tasks look easier on paper than they do in practice. You forget how much effort it takes to pull together a SSOW pack, or how challenging it can be to get a line block from an already-stretched signaller. That disconnect worries me - because if leaders lose touch with how the railway is really delivered, we risk leading it badly.

We often define safety by what doesn't happen - no accidents, no delays. But behind that smooth running is a huge amount of judgment, care, and effort. The better we get, the more invisible it becomes. I think about the signaller who clears a morning backlog - dozens of decisions, calmly made under pressure. By lunchtime, it's all back to normal, as if nothing had ever gone wrong. Or the roster clerk, dealing with a few new suspects from the previous night's Ultrasonic Track Testing download. Half the team's on training, and they're scrambling to find S&T and weld cover. They make calls, call in favours and adjust the plan.

And by Monday? The weekend passed without issue. No one even notices. And the clerk goes home - maybe without a single thank you. There's the HR partner, supporting colleagues through painful, deeply personal issues. No one sees the emotional labour. Or the section manager, chasing down a calibration kit after a missed collection caused by staff sickness - just to protect the weekend's work. Nothing goes wrong. That's the point.

These stories happen every day. And they matter.

But because these roles often succeed by stopping problems before they happen, their work becomes invisible. That invisibility creates a deeper issue too - because it's in these front-line roles that we see some of the greatest diversity across our organisation. If we don't recognise them properly, we're also missing the opportunity to champion the full spectrum of talent and backgrounds that make our railway stronger. It's not just about fairness - it's about making sure people have what they need to succeed. If we don't see them, they might miss out on the tools, support, or career progression they deserve. And that's especially true for people from underrepresented groups, who may already face additional barriers.

It bothers me deeply that so much effort can go unrecognised. Over time, that silence becomes damaging. People feel unseen - not because they stop caring, but because they stop feeling valued. We say safety is everyone's responsibility. **Recognition is too.**

Saying thank you means something. It says: I saw what you did. It mattered. You matter. We don't thank people for ticking a box. We do it because we've all felt what it's like to be overlooked. And because no one should carry that feeling alone - especially when they're giving their best for the sake of others.

So this week, please make a point of noticing the quiet work. Spot the colleague who prevented a problem, filled a gap, or supported someone through a hard time. **And let them know you saw it. That's how we build a culture of respect, safety, and pride.**

As always, I'd welcome your thoughts - feel free to [email me directly](#).

Stay safe, and stay kind.

Rob

This update is provided by the Wales and Western Communications team. For any queries, please contact walesandwesterncomms@networkrail.co.uk