HR Leaders Group

Wednesday 12 June 2024

Meeting summary

Chair – Dan Appleby, Head of HR, Loram UK
Partner – Rachel Mills, Partner, Nelsons
Rail Forum Host – Elaine Clark, CEO

The 4th HR Leaders Group took place on 12 June 2024 with 17 attendees on the day. The delegate list was issued with the joining instructions.

The event started with Dan Appleby providing a brief reminder about the purpose of the group and a summary of the variety of discussion topics covered over the last 12 months.

Natalie Desty, STEM Returners founder (guest) provided an introduction to STEM Returners. She explained their missions and ran through some of the key statistics outlining the difficulties and barriers that returners faced in securing roles back in their sector following a career break. STEM Returners have placed 500 people over the last 5 years with a 96% retention rate; and have some 150,000 individuals 'on their books'. Natalie said that recruiters need to think differently and ensure that returners aren't automatically filtered out at the preliminary stages of recruitment. Typical organisations would approach STEM Returners to run a campaign for them with a fee payable on placement. There were a number of questions including research undertaken on time for skills fade becoming an issue, impact of automated (AI driven) filtering systems and the mentoring provided to potential returners. The is an untapped pool of talent that could be useful to the industry.

Dan explained that due to the pre-election period rules on employees of armed lengths bodies speaking in public, Lydia Fairman of Network Rail was unable to present - she will join us for a future meeting, but linked the potential skills drop-off that Lydia would talk about to the untapped pool of talent that Natalie talked about.

Rachel Mills, Nelsons, provided a useful employment update. Rachel touched on several recent pieces of legislation including

- Carers' Leave Act 2023
- Employment Relations (Flexible Working) Act 2023
- The Protection from Redundancy (Pregnancy and Family Leave) Act 2023
- Neonatal Care (Leave and Pay) Act 2023 *(comes into force 2025)*

Rachel recommended that companies review their policies to ensure they are up to date and where practical ensure they were ahead of the game on upcoming changes.

Dan then introduced Donna Mitchell from Network Rail's media and communications team. Donna explained that she had developed a video (a link to this had been circulated with the meeting details) that she was keen to promote across the supply chain to be used as part of induction. This goes into quite a bit of detail about the issues surrounding and lessons learned from the fatal accident to Harrison Ballanytne a few years ago. She is keen to receive feedback on how the video could be used to encourage everyone

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working on the railway to recognise they have a role to play in protecting people who may not be fully aware of the hazards on the railway.

The group then split into breakout rooms to discuss the three key topics (STEM returners, employment law update and the Network Rail video).

Key feedback from the groups included

- On the employment law changes employers need to treat each case on its merits whilst maintaining a consistent approach to all employees,
- STEM returners could provide a useful additional 'route' for new recruits (contact details to be shared for those employers that want further information)
- On the NR video there was agreement we need to tap into the emotional issues associated with the particular case and need to 'rehumanise' some of the decision making. Dan added that he hadn't seen the short Harrison's Story video on which the longer video is based and he felt this shorter version would have more impact if used in an induction setting for some people.

In conclusion Dan thanked our speakers and attendees and reminded people that slides from the session would be made available in the members' area of the Rail Forum website, and that all previous summary notes and slides are also available there. The next meeting will be a face-to-face meeting at the Military is Good for Rail career event in Derby on 11 September.