



THE PROFESSIONAL BODY FOR RAILWAY OPERATIONS



ANNUAL REPORT

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our vision.

To champion the professional development of those working in railway organisations, enabling the whole railway system to succeed.



Membership

Committed to offering professional affiliation and recognition, as well as access to an exceptional network of rail experts, professional development opportunities, and topical events and webinars to each of our 11,500+ members.

Apprenticeships

The Chartered Institution of Railway Operators (CIRO) offers unique rail operations course contextualisation across levels 3, 4, and 5 of the apprenticeship standards, incorporating the knowledge, skills, and behaviours required and defined for today's industry.

Awarding Organisation

Raising professional standards through collaborative partnerships with industry stakeholders in the creation of Chartered qualifications and industry-specific endorsed programmes of learning.

Academic

Offering specialist higher-education courses designed to broaden understanding of railway operations, develop reflective skills, and provide students with a valuable industry-recognised qualification.

End-Point Assessment

A crucial provision for the industry, CIRO has been trusted by leading Train Operating Companies (TOCs) and Freight Operating Companies (FOCs) to provide high-quality, effective, and efficient delivery of the final stage of their training programmes since 2019.

Rail Academy

The online training hub for rail operations staff, offering up-to-the-minute rail industry course content and fully customisable interactive programmes.

CHAIR'S STATEMENT

As Chair of the Chartered Institution of Railway Operators (CIRO), I am immensely proud of the strides we made during the 2022-23 period in supporting our members and the broader industry. This year presented both challenges and opportunities, and our collective efforts truly showcased our commitment to excellence and professional development within the railway industry.

We celebrated our first-ever Ofsted inspection for our apprenticeship delivery, receiving a commendable 'good' rating. This milestone reflected the substantial efforts of the apprenticeship team, the learners, and stakeholders. Additionally, the recognition of our End-Point Assessment service by Ofqual emphasised our dedication to rigor and maintaining high standards for the industry.

The launch of our new online members portal reflected our commitment to improving our members' experience, continually adding value, and increasing accessibility. Furthermore, the successful introduction of endorsed learning programs through our Awarding Organisation, in partnership with Network Rail, was a testament to our innovative approach to professional development.

As we navigated a challenging and evolving landscape in light of the Great British Railway announcement, the industry's recovery from the effects of the pandemic, and increased industrial action, CIRO remained committed to fostering a culture of trust, leadership, and collaboration.

This period coincided with our first full year as a Chartered Institution, and we leveraged this status to develop future-facing solutions for the industry, drive forward a more efficient and sustainable network, and support our stated goal to be a 'force for good' within rail.



Ellie Burrows
CIRO Chair

ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE YEAR

In January 2023, CIRO achieved two major milestones following years of preparatory work by our teams in Apprenticeships and End-Point Assessments (EPA).

Our Apprenticeship division received its first-ever Ofsted inspection for its own apprenticeships, obtaining a 'Good' overall rating. The report stated, "Apprentices gain substantial knowledge, skills, and behaviours because of their apprenticeship. They are proud of their work and talk with confidence about what they have learned and how it is improving their effectiveness in the workplace through the application of managerial techniques gained because of the programme."

During the same month, CIRO's End-Point Assessment service gained Ofqual recognition, which allowed CIRO to join the End-Point Assessment Organisation (EPAO) register and continue to offer EPA services. A nationwide reform of apprenticeship External Quality Assessment (EQA) set out by the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IfATE) required that all EPA providers become Ofqual recognised to continue offering the service.

In August 2023, our Membership team was proud to unveil an all-new online members portal designed to drastically improve the membership experience. The portal allows members to view membership information, upgrade, network quickly and easily through a new platform called CIRO Collaborate and access all their membership resources and benefits from one central location.

In July 2023, CIRO Awarding Organisation officially launched its first endorsed learning programmes, in partnership with Network Rail. Following years of intensive development, three new capacity planning programmes were launched for use in Network Rail's internal training. The announcement signalled the launch of the Awarding Organisation, which has since begun work on various similar collaborative projects.

Membership

CIRO's membership reached a record 11,734 during this period, with 191 membership upgrades, including nineteen new Fellows.

A total of forty-one membership events were held throughout the year with the help of the CIRO Area Councils across the UK, who hosted in-person and online events for our members. The annual Rail Ops Conference, held in June 2023, received the highest number of registrations to date, with over 950 rail professionals having signed up to attend.

We also welcomed three new corporate members during the period, in the form of Arup, Nexus, and Resonate, and were delighted to be able to welcome new members from these companies.

Apprenticeships

In the recent period, our apprenticeships team achieved a 'good' rating from Ofsted after our first-ever inspection. We were also rated 'Excellent' by employers and 'Good' by learners via the Government Digital Apprenticeship Service. Our team has since worked to build on this, acknowledging recommendations and feedback, developing new processes and procedures, as well as investing in new IT systems, to further underpin our approach.

Our functional skills offer has expanded for learners who need to complete Functional Skills alongside their apprenticeship. Learners now have a choice of face-to-face delivery in the classroom or online learning. There has been good uptake of face-to-face delivery since this was introduced.

Our monthly learner catch-up days continue to be popular. The days offer learners dedicated space and time to work on their apprenticeship. Tutors and coaches are available during the day to provide guidance and support should it be needed. Learners can attend in person or on-line. In the last year, more than 80 learners have accessed support at these events.

During the period, eleven new cohorts began their apprenticeship journey with CIRO, and our Apprenticeship team also successfully tendered for the Level 4 Operations Management Graduate Scheme with Network Rail, for the fifth consecutive time.

Awarding Organisation

During the year, the CIRO Awarding Organisation was officially launched with the announcement of three new endorsed learning programmes, developed in partnership with Network Rail:

- CIRO AO, Level 2 (Certificate) in System Operator Timetable Development
- CIRO AO, Level 3 (Certificate) in System Operator Strategic Timetable Development
- CIRO AO, Level 4 (Diploma) in System Operator Strategic Timetable Development and Production

The first certificates (Level 2 and 3) were awarded to Network Rail Operational Planners and Specialists during Autumn 2023. Due to the success of the programme, Network Rail and CIRO are currently looking at further opportunities for collaborative training product development.

Academic

During the period, the Academic team worked to improve the recruitment process across all levels, supplementing the recruitment drive with a series of online open evenings. Former graduates of all three academic programmes were invited to give first-hand insight to prospective students and to answer any queries they may have had. These events were well attended, with positive feedback, and resulted in our highest student intake since 2020 with over one hundred successful applicants.

We also welcomed three new Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) into the CIRO tutor community. All three SMEs are graduates of the Academic programme and have now successfully delivered their first modules as tutors.

End-Point Assessment

During the period, a total of 394 End-Point Assessments were completed, with a pass rate of 94% (372 pass/22 fail). This brought the all-time total for CIRO EPAs to 1,542.

It was also confirmed during this time that the current dispensation in the Train Driver standard has been extended until 31st December 2024. As such, the EPAO began preparations for the revision with product development, assessment writers, and expert specialists. This is with the hope that (depending on the changes to the assessment plan) adequate time is provided for transition from the old version to the new version, and any delays in the EPA gateway and delivery are avoided as much as possible.

Rail Academy

Rail Academy saw an increase in users of 56% over the previous period (growing from 520 to 811 users) with a mix of passenger, freight, and infrastructure providers actively using the platform. We also experienced growth in international users against the previous year.

The period saw the successful return of face-to-face delivery for our Introduction to Rail short course, with four dates held throughout the period, each with good uptake and attendance. These four dates were in addition to those delivered in-house by clients and hosted at CIRO's Stafford offices.

The first delivery of a new 5-day short course in Railway Operations Management took place in Melbourne in May 2022. This was delivered in partnership with Monash University, allowing CIRO to bring the course to the Australian rail industry for the first time.

CHALLENGES FOR THE FUTURE

In 2023, the CIRO Fellow group actively engaged in a research initiative to assess the current state of railway operations and the wider industry. The findings of this research were categorised into six key themes and are summarised below:

CULTURE

The CIRO Fellows' perspectives reveal a tapestry of interconnected issues within the "Culture" theme. These include strained industrial relations, a mindset that inhibits decision-making and ambition, the disempowerment of middle managers, and the overwhelming challenges faced by TOCs.

LEADERSHIP

The observations made by the CIRO Fellows underscore a series of interrelated causes contributing to challenges within the "Leadership" theme. These include leaders' tendency to play it safe, their general lack of change management skills, being trapped within organisational systems, resistance to personal change, and the presence of individuals not suited for leadership roles. An example of this was that leaders are time poor, but the Fellows had observed that there were leaders with tendencies to use their position to build their career rather than focus on resolving longer-lasting issues for the industry.

INVESTMENT IN RAIL

The feedback provided by CIRO Fellows emphasises a range of related factors contributing to challenges in the "Investment in Rail" theme. These include the inconsistency of funding direction, poor project management on major initiatives, overspending issues, and the broader financial challenges stemming from market changes.

GOVERNMENT ATTITUDE TO RAIL

The Fellows also identified a series of interrelated issues within the "Government attitude to rail" theme. These include conflicting messages that limit the industry's freedom to act, a lack of transparency and openness from the Department for Transport, and a general mistrust stemming from past overspending and ongoing industrial action. The government questions the industry's ability to deliver on its promises, meet targets, and manage resources effectively. The absence of trust and credibility was felt to impede support for funding, hinder collaboration on policy and regulatory matters, and slow down the implementation of crucial initiatives.

TREADING WATER

The observations shared by CIRO Fellows uncovered a series of interconnected factors contributing to the challenges within the "Treading Water" theme. These include the absence of a comprehensive and clear industry strategy, a lack of guiding vision, insufficient strategic oversight, the persistence of silo thinking, and the impact of political briefing on industry fragmentation.

DAMAGED PUBLIC PERCEPTION

The Fellows' insights highlight issues in the "Damaged Public Perception" theme. These include the industry's reputation and public trust issues, as well as issues facing the industry's ability to attract and retain diverse skill sets into the workforce.

2023

YEAR IN NUMBERS

1542

CIRO Train Driver
End-Point Assessments
completed in total.

100%

pass rate across all
three apprenticeship
standards we deliver.

100+

students enrolled
on CIRO Academic
programmes; the
highest intake since
2020.

94%

pass rate across 394
completed End-Point
Assessments during
the period.

92%

of former apprentices
say that they have
used their learning to
implement a change
in their workplace.

41

membership events held,
including the Rail Ops
Conference and Learning
& Development online
open evenings.

11,734

CIRO members at the
end of September 2023,
with 151 membership
upgrades, including
nineteen new Fellows.

£259k

income £3,164,615
Overheads £2,904,689
Surplus £259,926*

*Moneys to be reinvested in members services.

CIRO'S ROLE

Finally, following their engagement in the research initiative, the Fellows' group was asked how, in their opinion, CIRO could best support the industry in the face of the challenges identified? The responses to this question have been summarised below:

Rebuilding trust within the rail industry is vital, given the strained relationships between leaders, managers, and staff, and the lack of trust from government entities. Open communication and responsible fiscal management are essential to restoring this trust. CIRO, with its Chartered status, can serve as a unifying force, bringing together diverse viewpoints and fostering collaboration.

By viewing current changes as opportunities, CIRO can play a more active role in building trust and encouraging cooperation between the industry and the government. This collaborative effort can lead to a more efficient and sustainable rail network, addressing inconsistencies in the Department for Transport's management and supporting the profession through periods of change.

Leadership development is crucial for navigating change and driving innovation within the rail industry. CIRO has created materials and events for leadership programmes but needs to enhance collaboration with other organisations.

Despite its success in contextualising leadership and management, CIRO's offerings are often overshadowed by more general programmes. Expanding access to its specialised content through new qualifications can amplify its impact.

Empowering employees by decentralising decision-making can improve performance and innovation. CIRO can also reinvigorate pride in the industry by addressing issues highlighted by research, such as a lack of passion and overly cautious leadership.

LOOKING FORWARD

As I step into the role of Chair of CIRO, I want to express my deep gratitude to Ellie Burrows, who has so skilfully led our Institution through challenging times while also developing our offering to the industry, marking an era of resilience and expansion.

The rail industry faces a transformative period ahead, with the new UK Labour government keen to press ahead with major restructuring through the Great British Rail reform, and in Ireland the All-Island Strategic Rail Review representing a cross-border strategic pathway up to 2050. These promise to reshape the rail sector, and with it, the challenges and opportunities for our industry will inevitably evolve. We welcome the commitment expressed by the new UK government to improve and reform the rail sector, which is essential to the nation's infrastructure and economy. As CIRO's new Chair, I am acutely aware of the pivotal role CIRO can play in supporting this transformation.

CIRO's mission—to champion the professional development of those working in railway organisations—positions us uniquely to contribute to this reshaping. Our achievements, as outlined by Ellie earlier in this report, during the 2022-23 period underline our commitment to raising professional standards and advancing industry competencies.

The coming years will demand innovative solutions to tackle emerging challenges and foster a skilled workforce ready for the new landscape of rail operations. CIRO has a vital role to play in our industry's future, both in terms of influence and reach. CIRO is a vibrant, progressive organisation which continues to be a 'force for good' and champion the professional development of the railway operators of today and tomorrow, ensuring our members are equipped with the skills and competencies needed to drive these advancements. By staying at the forefront of industry needs and technological advancements, we aim to support a seamless transition to the reformed rail sector.

Together, we will play our part in leading these changes with resilience and vision, ensuring that CIRO remains a cornerstone in the development of a skilled, future-ready rail workforce. I look forward to leading this journey and to the collaborative efforts that lie ahead.



Jim Meade

Chief Executive
Iarnród Éireann

For further information or to contribute your thoughts to our business plan, please contact CEO Annette Shipley at annette@railwayoperators.co.uk



**Chartered Institution
of Railway Operators**