

LONDON & CONTINENTAL RAILWAYS

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GETTING UP TO SPEED



On November 14th St Pancras International, Eurostar's new central London home and Europe's first 'destination station', opened for business. The station is the centrepiece of High Speed 1 (HS1), formerly known as the Channel Tunnel Rail Link, which was built and is now operated by London & Continental Railways (LCR). HS1 is the UK's largest ever construction project and the first major British railway project for over 100 years.

Harvey Nash consultant Neil Watkins has been associated with HS1 since 2004. He initially recruited for five senior positions for its parent LCR, and since joining Harvey Nash at the end of 2006 has helped recruit a Director of Business Planning and a Director of Assets and Engineering. An assignment to recruit a Retail Operations Manager is drawing to a close, and Watkins is handling two further assignments for the organisation.

“We have a sustained and developing relationship with Neil,” says George Vale, Head of Human Resources for HS1. “He doesn't finish one assignment and then disappear. At any time we might need to call him to recruit someone else, and he is always there.”

As Vale says, the high profile of the project, the kudos it lends to someone's CV and the fact that the company pays competitive salaries, means that recruiting the right people is not in itself difficult. “But where it does get tricky is getting the right people at the right time – both for us, and in the sense of getting them at the right point in their career. They need to demonstrate the kind of experience that will allow them to enrich the role, but we also want people who can broaden their career and rise up

the organisation. So the recruitment task is about more than just filling the job.”

Most posts are advertised internally as well as externally, but Watkins manages the selection process for internal applicants too. The Director of Assets and Engineering was an internal appointment, for example. “Recruiting an existing member of staff who has been through the same rigorous selection process as external applicants sends a very good message to our workforce about equal opportunities,” says Vale.

He says he trust Watkins to field the right candidates. “Neil knows us and understands us, he keeps us informed of his progress on a weekly basis, he is open, honest and reliable. Occasionally there are problems, but he always finds solutions. He is very sensitive to our culture and the way we operate, and that is a function of a long-term relationship.”

- High Speed 1, formerly the Channel Tunnel Rail Link, needed a raft of new skills to make the transition from construction project to functioning business
- It called on the services of Harvey Nash consultant Neil Watkins, who, over the past three years, has helped the organisation fill some of the most senior roles
- The new appointments will allow HS1's parent London & Continental Railways to achieve the expected returns from the new international rail link