

Logistics is going to need more than a million more employees

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Logistics firms and their education advisors are now targeting children as young as 14 in an attempt to create more interest in the profession, as fears intensify of a gaping staff shortfall in the future.

Ian Nichol, head of logistics at Career Ready, told delegates at Multimodal this morning that the industry is expected to need an additional 1.2m employees by 2022.

“We have a ready-made training programme, but we need the industry to channel its knowledge and enthusiasm, because at the moment very few actually understand what the logistics industry is.

“Too many people think it’s about driving trucks and working in sheds, and there are a lot of parents who don’t want their kids to go into that profession.”

Andy Kaye, chief executive of executive recruitment consultant BiS Henderson, added: “We have an ageing population and we don’t have the skills to take this industry into the future.

“Around 25-33% of employees are nearing retirement age, while at the same time the logistics industry is one of the fastest-growing sectors of the economy. The way we manage our lives now, with e-commerce, means that logistics and supply chains support the growth of the wider economy.

“But how do we get people to understand that? This sector has done very, very little to attract new talent into the industry.”

In response, Mr Kaye launched the NOVUS programme, an industry-led grouping that has organised a series of logistics degree courses in cooperation with Huddersfield University.

Bethany Fovargue, operations director at NOVUS, is a former primary school teacher who said that, while many previous efforts had concentrated on potential graduates and school-leavers, the critical age group for employers to attract potential recruits was now in the 14-year-old range.

But, she added, the industry suffered from a wide-ranging problem that people outside it simply didn't understand its function.

"We know that young people want to study business – what we need to do now is to take their concept of what business is and turn it into supply chain management. And we want to do that at a younger age than previously so that children develop a burning desire to become logisticians."

Mr Kaye explained that the NOVUS initiative now boasts two logistics degree courses and is funded by some 25 companies that pay £5,000 a year membership, which goes towards funding students' tuition fees.

Each of those companies – manufacturers and retailers as well as logistics service providers – also provide mentors and work experience options. Every student that graduates is guaranteed employment. Since 2013, some 200 graduates have passed through the programme.

Over the past year or so, the UK government's Trailblazer apprenticeship scheme was expected to address some of these issues, but Jim French, PD Ports' portcentric logistics director, told delegates less than 10% of the funds paid in by the freight industry had been drawn out to fund new apprentices.

"In the 12 months since the levy was introduced, the logistics sector contributed £83m, but has drawn out just £4.8m.

"The problem is that the industry is so fragmented that a lot of smaller companies aren't paying the levy at all, while many of those that are, are not drawing any of the money out."

(By Alex Lennane, The LoadStar)