**VIRGIN TRAINS AWARDED SOCIAL MOBILITY EMPLOYER STATUS**

* *Virgin Trains has become the first train operating company named an accredited Social Mobility Employer*
* *The Social Mobility Pledge commits employers and businesses to play their part ensuring everyone has the opportunity to reach their full potential*
* *Campaign was launched in Parliament last year*

Virgin Trains has become the first train operating company to be named an accredited Social Mobility Employer, as part of a nation-wide drive to improve social mobility in the UK.

The train operator has signed up to the Social Mobility Pledge, which encourages businesses to play a role in tackling social mobility by providing training and employment opportunities to local people from disadvantaged communities.

The Social Mobility Pledge commits employers and businesses to play their part in ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to reach their full potential – irrespective of background. In its 2017 ‘State of Social Mobility in Britain’ report, the Sutton Trust found that the UK ranks near the bottom for income mobility across OECD nations.

The campaign was launched in Parliament in March 2018 by former Secretary of State for Education, Justine Greening MP and now covers more than 1.8 million employees. It is a commitment from businesses large and small across Britain to become a Social Mobility Pledge accredited employer, by taking three simple steps:

1. Partnership - with schools or colleges to provide coaching through quality careers advice, enrichment experience and/ or mentoring to people from disadvantaged backgrounds or circumstances.

2. Access - providing structured work experience and/or apprenticeship opportunities to people from disadvantaged backgrounds or circumstances

3. Recruitment - adopting open employee recruitment practices which promote a level playing field for people from disadvantaged backgrounds or circumstances, such as name blind recruitment or contextual recruitment.

The pledge is backed by major employers such as BT, Aviva, Adidas, ITV, True Potential, KPMG and others.

Currently Virgin Trains run a number of initiatives including a programme aiming to get ex-offenders back in to work, partnering with schools where pupils have an introduction into the railway industry as well as providing work experience placement and apprenticeships.

Ms Greening said: “Business has a key role in improving social mobility in our country. That’s why I am asking businesses large and small to commit to a universal social mobility pledge.

“For me, social mobility is something that we have never had in this country. It is a structural deficit on opportunity that has persisted for decades and we need to recognise that.

“We need to get more opportunities for more young people, so that we have equality of opportunity. The Social Mobility Pledge is a step along the road to delivering just that.”

Natasha Grice, People Director of Virgin Trains, said: “We are absolutely delighted to sign the Social Mobility Pledge and to be officially recognised as a social mobility employer. We have many exceptionally talented people working with us from diverse and individual backgrounds. It’s the collection of those talents and experiences that makes us a successful business.”

**About the Social Mobility Pledge:**

For more details on the pledge visit [www.socialmobilitypledge.org](http://www.socialmobilitypledge.org)

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**About Virgin Trains**

Stagecoach and Virgin are working in partnership to operate the West Coast inter-city route under the Virgin Trains brand, revolutionising travel on one of the UK’s key rail arteries.

The network connects some of the nation’s most iconic destinations including Glasgow, Liverpool, Birmingham, Manchester and London.

Virgin Trains is committed to delivering a high speed, high frequency service, offering shorter journey times, more comfortable travel and excellent customer service. Customers consistently rate Virgin Trains ahead of other long-distance rail franchise operators in the National Rail Passenger Survey (NRPS) commissioned by industry watchdog, Transport Focus.

Virgin Trains has a proud record of challenging the status quo - from introducing tilting Pendolino trains, to a pioneering automated delay repay scheme, introducing the industry-leading onboard entertainment streaming service, BEAM, and becoming the first franchised rail operator to offer m-Tickets for all ticket types.

Virgin Trains operated the East Coast route between March 1, 2015 and June 24, 2018. In that time, we invested £75m to create a more personalised travel experience, including over £40m in the existing fleet. Customers have benefitted from 48 additional services between Edinburgh and London every week, and an extra 22 Saturday services between Leeds and London – a total of 1.74 million additional seats since May 2015.

Working together, the partnership railway of the public and private sectors has published a long-term plan, called *In Partnership for Britain’s Prosperity,* to change and improve Britain’s railway. The plan will secure almost £85bn of additional economic benefits to the country whilst enabling further investment and improvement, and contains four commitments which will see rail companies: strengthen our economic contribution to the country; improve customers’ satisfaction; boost the communities we serve; and, create more and better jobs in rail. For more information go to [Britain Runs on Rail](http://www.britainrunsonrail.co.uk/?gclid=CjwKCAiAr_TQBRB5EiwAC_QCq9OA-y_Al1Voo4ZvYjMvSBs86kuvjZLD8MfFvnOUU9UeVZ1T5CObLRoCasIQAvD_BwE).

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