



# Addressing recruitment and retention

**Which comes first, the technical know-how, the wider skills, or the necessary experience? When it comes to having the right people in the right place, most would agree that the heavy lift logistics sector demands a unique blend of training and on-the-job reality. *Felicity Landon reports.***

**V**ariety, flexibility, thinking on your feet – undoubtedly working in the heavy lift and project cargo logistics sector offers that ‘every day is different’ quality for those involved. And that throws up parallel challenges in recruitment and training. Here is a world where one size most definitely does not fit all.

As Maria Vasilchenko, office manager at Moscow-based freight forwarder RTL, put it: “The heavy lift logistics industry is too specific. No one university can provide students with all the appropriate knowledge. The main reason is the uniqueness of this business. Only live practice and an experienced tutor can grow a real heavy lift logistics specialist.”

While there are many universities in Russia that specialise in transportation and logistics, most do not provide the knowledge for handling heavy lift cargoes.

### Urgent requirements

Recruitment became an urgent issue for RTL about two years ago – the company had won a series of major projects and needed experienced staff to work on them.

“When we were faced with a lack of appropriate candidates, we made the decision to hire people without experience but who could satisfy our internal requirements,” she explained. “We have been training these workers and will allocate them towards more complicated projects when they are sufficiently experienced. Also,

our doors are open for students who would like to try working in the logistics sphere. Unfortunately, we can take only a limited quantity of people because of the additional workload for the staff who train them.”

The heavy lift and transportation sector offers an incredible challenge to employees, owners and investors, with significant project, equipment, engineering and safety complexities, said Zack Parnell, president and ceo of Washington-based Industrial Training International (ITI).

“Unlike some industries that might get away with a sub-par workforce, companies performing well in the high-risk/high-reward sector of heavy lift and transport must have high-calibre personnel in nearly every position, including craft, equipment operations, equipment management, project management, equipment maintenance, dispatching, safety and so on.

“So, in short, this sector has always had a challenge in talent acquisition, given the very high standards in skill, knowledge and accountability needed to perform the work,” he said.

“When you contrast this truth with





today's economic conditions characterised by an ageing workforce, an under-skilled replacement workforce and increasing economic output requirements in much of the world [which increases employment], the talent acquisition challenge has become much more severe."

### Training centres

ITI has nine training centres in North America providing courses spanning cranes, rigging, lift planning, engineering and virtual reality (VR) simulation. While it focuses primarily on existing workforce development, it is also making moves to help its customers during the pre-hire phase of their employees.

The organisation recently formed a partnership with Tallo, a talent development network that has amassed 500,000 users between the ages of 14 and 22.

"Tallo makes recruiting a crane operator or other specific skillset much easier, as young people are populating their profiles with their qualifications and interests, specifically seeking a job after high school or trade school," explained Parnell.



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"Additionally, ITI has developed a robust experience logging application called OperatorPro. This is for equipment operators to track and share their shifts, work activities and equipment qualifications with current and prospective employers. We believe this will help make hiring decisions more efficient for employers. Lastly, we are developing more VR-learning solutions that reduce on-boarding, training and assessment time in material ways for employers."

Parnell believes it will not be long before the heavy lift and transport sector has its first chief learning officer. "Efficient and robust talent acquisition, development, compensation and retention strategies create substantial returns for many other sectors," he said.

"Well-managed companies in this sector – of which there are many – work hard at talent management and all will have to continue to do so, given the macroeconomic forces challenging the sector. As part of this strategy, a robust training programme must increase its ability to deliver employee task qualifications more efficiently over time, with more innovative training methodologies



like VR online learning and pre-examination to reduce redundant retraining.”

Meanwhile, the Lifting Equipment Engineers Association (LEEAA) is responding to well-documented recruitment challenges by developing a new ‘Lifting Equipment Technician’ apprenticeship and taking its careers message direct into schools.

Baz Trehwella, LEEAA’s learning and development projects specialist, said: “The industry has for a long time been suffering with the maturing of the workforce – with very little new blood coming in. We have a situation akin to new recruits being trained by an older generation, some of whom are perhaps from the days of old training that did not include the regulations that are now a given.

“This means a lot of training can be lacking all the information required by current legislation, notwithstanding factors such as new innovations, materials and so on. While the older generation close to retirement are passing on a good skillset and probably a good level of knowledge, it may not be 21st century – hence the idea behind the apprenticeship.”

### Boosting industry appeal

The lifting industry in its entirety comprises a whole range of industries that go well beyond sectors such as cargo logistics, offshore oil and gas, and renewables, he pointed out – theatre rigging, the medical world where patients and equipment must be lifted ... are just some examples. The apprenticeship is being designed to reflect this.

“There has never been an apprenticeship for a lifting equipment technician. This project will develop an occupational profile and identify the daily work of an employee, making sure it meets industry requirements and fits all the aspects.”

While the initial apprenticeship will only apply in England, LEEAA’s membership is a global one and there will be opportunities to adapt its contents internationally.

Meanwhile, LEEAA has launched a ‘Think Lifting’ initiative to attract young people into the industry. “We are starting to visit schools and colleges to promote the lifting industry in a way that sells it to the younger generation,” said Trehwella. “There are a whole host of paths within the industry – it does not necessarily have to be offshore or renewables. We need to give these young people more options.”

LEEAA will develop and refine its own careers advisory programme for schools and colleges, he said: “We have to convince young people that it is an interesting industry, that you can go anywhere you want



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with it, and that there is the opportunity to earn good money.”

Addressing the challenge of recruiting, retaining and training staff is integral to the Project Cargo Network (PCN), said Rachel Humphrey, the group’s ceo. “It is important to invest in the next generation as they will be the ones who will push our businesses through the next 50 years in a sector that is so important to the economy and international trade,” she said.

PCN’s annual gatherings provide the perfect opportunity to integrate young people into the network and secure future business between PCN overseas offices, said Humphrey. The ‘PCN Future: Under 30s Scheme’ allows members to register a second delegate who is under 30 for a hugely discounted fee. This subsidy helps younger staff become more visible and develop stronger relations with other staff of similar age.

“They can then bring their experience back to the office and share it with other young staff – having the responsibility of bringing their training back to share encourages them to be present and engaged during the meeting,” she said

PCN’s staff exchange programme is also helping young staff to gain global experience, she added. Realco Logistics (Taiwan) and Canaan Shipping (Canada) recently took part in the programme, with Curt Chen from Realco spending three months at Canaan Shipping.

Humphrey has spoken previously about

the risk of training obtained ‘on the job’ – something that happened more in the past when appropriate courses were not available.

“We believe theory, physics and principles should be learnt first and then applied on the job – not the other way around. Therefore, we invested heavily in both professional training from an industry expert and a bespoke eLearning platform

([pcntraining.com](http://pcntraining.com)) to provide members with a comprehensive online training programme.

“Besides the benefits of not having to travel to workshops and seminars, there are additional advantages to the eLearning platform such as being able to stop and start the training at the user’s convenience with no deadlines.”

Earlier this year, the Project Professionals Group (PPG) project cargo forwarding training course was restructured to a master class one-day format. This is to better meet the needs of those who have limited time to be away from their offices, said PPG general manager and course coordinator Kevin Stephens.

The two-day format has been delivered over the past ten years in conjunction with major breakbulk and heavy lift events and education programmes internationally.

More than 500 participants from around the world have attended the course, described by Stephens as the first of its kind specifically for the professional development of people involved with project cargo logistics management.

“Industry feedback has encouraged the reformatting of the training into a one-day master class workshop,” he said. “The new format is aimed clearly at project forwarders, 3PLs, clients and EPCs to provide an integrated understanding of what is involved in the successful multimodal transportation of complex supersize cargoes and the management of risks for all stakeholders.”

A one-day master class is being organised in Houston, Texas, this November.

### Shortage

The haulage industry has suffered from a shortage of drivers; recruitment and retention of younger, newly qualified HGV drivers is of utmost importance to hauliers. The situation was put into stark perspective in a recent skills shortage report published by the UK’s Freight Transport Association (FTA), said Nigel Thornton, compliance manager at Collett & Sons.

According to the FTA, new driver licence acquisitions dropped by 25 percent between 2008 and 2013, with the trend continuing downwards to date. “This is being brought about by a number of issues, such as the



## THLG supports Vyhmeister in DAV studies

If you walked around the halls of the Breakbulk Europe exhibition in 2018 you may have spotted The Heavy Lift Group's (THLG) Jürgen Osmer playing a barrel organ. As entertaining as it was, Osmer's foray into the music business actually signalled the launch of THLG's logistics scholarship scheme.

After gathering donations at the show and throughout the year, including at an auction hosted during its annual gala dinner, THLG matched the money raised. The money will be used to support a student in his or her studies at the German Foreign Trade and Transport Academy (DAV) in Bremen – a provider of specialised training for the logistics industry. More than 6,000 graduates have passed through the academy's doors during its near 60-year history.

The selection process, according to THLG's Jos Willems, actually turned out to be a simple process as one candidate stood out – Katharina Vyhmeister.

Vyhmeister started her career in an apprenticeship programme at Hellmann Worldwide Logistics before moving to container line CMA CGM, where she remained for nine years before returning to Hellmann. At that time, Vyhmeister decided to supplement her industry experience by enrolling on a DAV programme.

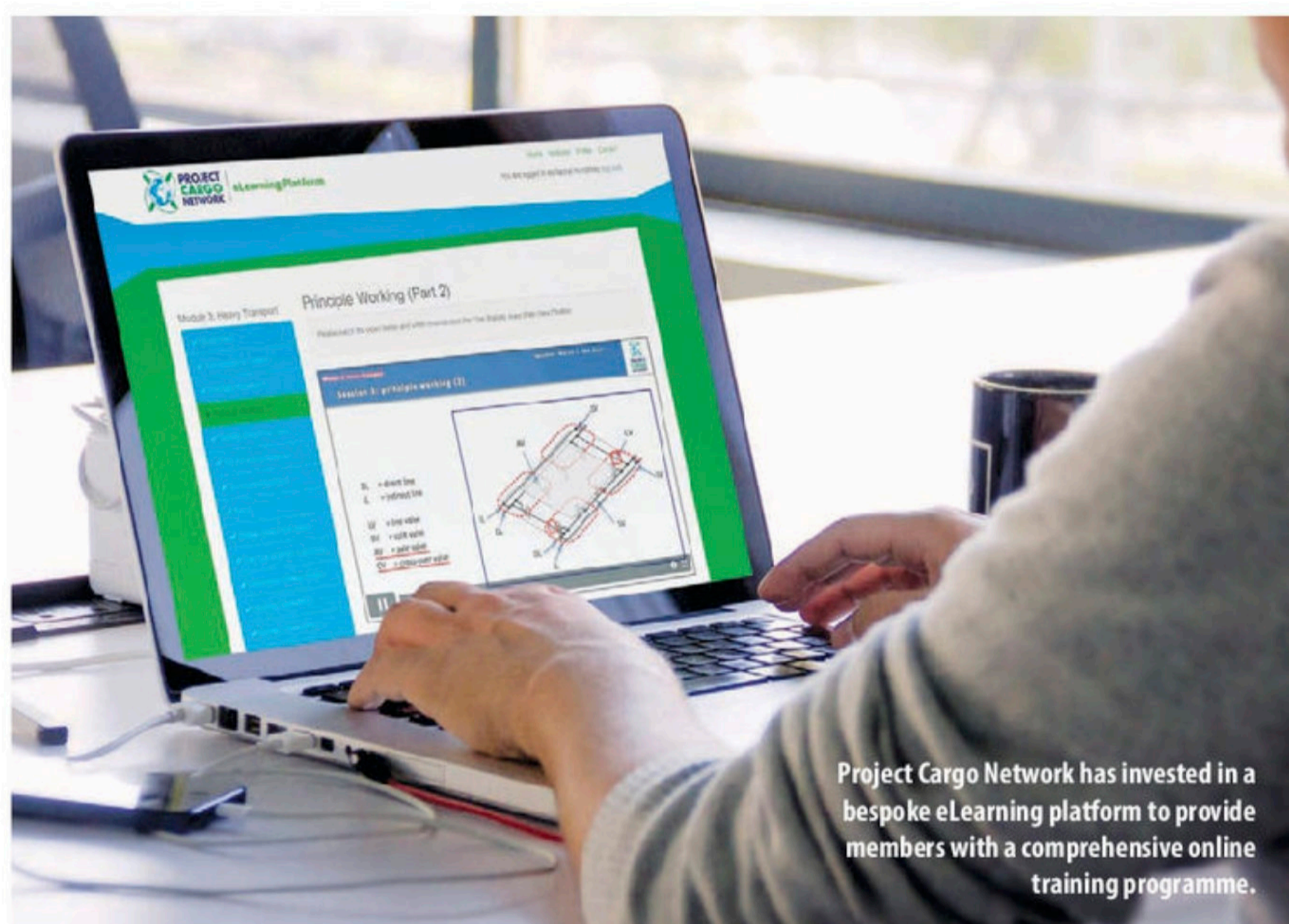
Unfortunately, after her first semester, Vyhmeister's ten-year-old son was diagnosed with bone cancer, which prevented her from completing the two-year course. Instead, she relocated to Berlin to stay by her son's side during his chemotherapy treatment. While DAV paused her studies, the financial burden of the past year meant Vyhmeister was unsure

whether restarting the course was a viable option.

"After hearing Katharina's story, the decision of who should receive the scholarship was unanimous," explained Willems. "With Katharina, we are sure that the funding will support somebody who has a great ability and needs a little help."

Willems added: "In our industry, education and training is very important and we were looking at how we at THLG can contribute. We hope this is an initiative that we can continue so that we can help more students in the logistics industry; we invite professionals from across the supply chain to join our cause."

If you would like to make a donation towards THLG's logistics scholarship scheme, please contact Jos Willems at: [admin@theheavyliftgroup.com](mailto:admin@theheavyliftgroup.com)



Project Cargo Network has invested in a bespoke eLearning platform to provide members with a comprehensive online training programme.

'Level 2 Escort Drivers' and 'Level 3 Escort Managers' qualifications that were developed by the HTA three years ago. "We are currently working on updating the current qualifications to incorporate the training programme into the City & Guilds Assured Scheme, for the HTA," said Thornton. "We have been tasked with updating the course to incorporate the new industry standards (which the HTA has taken the lead in developing) for self-escorting abnormal loads in the UK.

"Also featured as part of our transport operations, Training4Transport offers qualifications in managing abnormal loads, STGO (special types) driver awareness and driver's assistant training." Collett's training facility provides Driver CPC training for its employees and for others, and covers a number of courses.

### Collaboration

The company has been collaborating with organisations, such as the Hinkley Point nuclear power station abnormal load team, delivering training and raising awareness of the requirements to undertake abnormal loads in the commercial environment.

Collett has also been working with the London borough councils on the deployment, implementation and delivery of a new course for Transport for London, which is aimed at abnormal load officers.

"The course provides an overview of the requirements of abnormal loads through the eyes of the haulier and abnormal load officers, while providing a comprehensive understanding of the regulations affecting all parties in both the notification and approval of abnormal load movements," said Thornton.

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high cost of obtaining a licence – today it costs well over GBP3,000 (USD3,774) for a candidate to gain a C+E (Old class 1) licence – while the pool of HGV drivers actively seeking employment is shrinking – including the number of EU nationals that are currently available in the [UK] marketplace," said Thornton.

Although the average age of HGV drivers fell by almost a year between 2017 and 2018, the number of young drivers entering the industry is not outweighing the number of older drivers leaving, he said.

Collett is actively trying to develop its own drivers – notably through increased training aimed at lifting the profile of the position of an HGV driver to a professional status. "This is backed up by the government's initiative for drivers to undertake Driver Certificate of

Professional Competence (Driver CPC) training. We have been and still are developing young workers by funding the cost of obtaining HGV licences and developing them once they have their HGV licence, by getting ADR [dangerous goods] and lorry loader licences as well, to have a more professional driver."

Until recent years, training for drivers and operators in the heavy lift/abnormal load market was generally limited to that provided by individual companies and internal training programmes, said Thornton. "The trend is changing now, in that nationally recognised qualifications are coming to the marketplace, brought about by industry-leading trade associations such as the Heavy Transport Association (HTA)."

Collett & Sons is approved to deliver the