

# Tata Steel takes on more than 100 apprentices

Tata Steel has welcomed a new wave of more than 130 apprentices across its UK operations.

Some 116 of the 137 have joined the Indian-owned steelmaker's apprenticeship scheme in Wales – the vast majority (73) at its primary steelmaking plant in Port Talbot. The other apprentices in Wales have been assigned to Tata's downstream operations Troste in Llanelli, Llanwern in Newport, Shotton and Caerphilly.

The apprenticeships, which also include Tata's operations in England, cover a range of disciplines from electrical and mechanical engineering to technical, supply chain and functions.

Tata's chief HR officer, Chris Jacques, said "We're incredibly proud of our apprenticeship scheme, not only for the independent recognition it regularly receives, but also because it is a breeding ground for our future leaders.

"Apprenticeships are a fantastic route into our business, and we have found that the combination of academic study and hands-on experience supported by our own expert mentors, prepares these future leaders brilliantly for their careers ahead.

"The fact that 74% of our apprentices are still working with us five years after completing their course (compared to a national average of 50%) also shows we have career pathways that are working really well."

He added: "It was one of the Tata Group's founding fathers, JRD Tata, who said: 'The future belongs to the young' and it's key that we encourage, develop and challenge employees early

in their careers by trusting them with responsibility. Our apprenticeship programmes provide an excellent foundation for this.”

Tata employs 8,000 in the UK with around 4,000 at Port Talbot.

Last month chairman of Tata Group, Natarajan Chandrasekaran, said action to close UK operations would be taken in 12 months if a £1.5bn financial support package from the Westminster was not forthcoming. It is looking for backing as part of a planned £3bn strategy to reduce its carbon emissions.

One option is transform Port Talbot to an arc furnace operation making steel from recycled steel.

Another option, which would also require significant investment, is to maintain the two blast furnaces at Port Talbot, but employ carbon capture and storage technology—using the carbon to provide power. While technology is advancing in carbon capture and storage, electric arc furnaces have a proven track record.

The two blast furnaces at Port Talbot have had investment to extend their production lives. Blast furnace 4 in 2012 had its life extended by 20 years to 2032. Blast furnace 5 will expire in 2026, following investment in 2018.

From a planning perspective, Tata would need to move quickly if it is to start a phased or complete arc furnace transformation, with arc furnace capacity ready to take over from blast furnace 4 in 2026.

The other option, is that Tata from 2026 just operates one blast furnace (4). Both furnaces have capacity to provide 5 million tonnes of steel, but are currently operating at around 3.6 million equally split. Blast furnace 4 has capacity to produce 2.6 million tonnes.

Tata has been in discussions with the UK Government over a

funding support for the last two years, originally under the Treasury's so called project birch initiative – set up to back firms deemed of being of national and strategic importance to the UK Government.

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