



# Position Specification

**Rail Safety and Standards Board**  
Chief Operating Officer

September 2025



## Foreword from the CEO

I write with a mix of gratitude and excitement as we begin our search for a new Chief Operating Officer. Our current COO, Johnny Schute, OBE, will be retiring in April 2026, marking the end of a remarkable 45-year career in public service that included distinguished service in the British Army and the UK rail industry. Johnny joined the RSSB in 2018 and has been instrumental in fulfilling our technical mission, overseeing vital areas such as railway standards, safety strategy, rail research, and sector strategy. We are immensely grateful for his dedication and leadership, and we wish him all the best in his well-deserved retirement.



As we look to the future, we have a unique opportunity to welcome a new leader to our team. The railway industry is evolving, and the new Chief Operating Officer will play a pivotal role in delivering on our ambitious five-year strategy. This is a high-impact role that requires a strategic and collaborative leader who can help guide RSSB through a period of sector-wide reform and transformation. We are seeking a dynamic individual to help us achieve our goal of having every rail employee rely on an RSSB tool or service daily by 2030. I look forward to working closely with our new COO as we continue to help our members keep Britain moving with safer, smarter rail.

**Mark Phillips**

**Chief Executive Officer, RSSB**

## The Organisation

The Rail Safety and Standards Board (RSSB) is a membership organisation that is owned by and serves Britain's railway industry. It is a non-profit company limited by guarantee and governed by a Board. Its way of working is set out in the Constitution Agreement and its Articles of Association, which include the memorandum of association. RSSB was established in 2003, in the aftermath of the Ladbroke Grove rail crash. Since then, it has been supporting Britain's rail sector.

We help to make an evolving railway safer, more efficient and more sustainable. Our work includes managing a national research programme, developing standards, analysing risk and data, and supporting health, wellbeing, sustainability, innovation and operational performance across the industry.

RSSB's purpose is **'To help our members keep Britain moving with safer, smarter rail'**. RSSB's goal is **'By 2030, every rail employee will rely on an RSSB tool or service daily, delivering essential value to the industry'**.

RSSB works collaboratively with an evolving industry to ensure that it is operated safely, and cost-effectively to the benefit of passengers and freight. RSSB's work focuses on six strategic business areas. These are [safer](#), [healthier](#), [harmonised](#), [efficient](#), [future](#) and [sustainable rail](#). RSSB develops standards, monitors safety and health performance, and provides sustainability guidance, underpinned by research and data.

The tools and solutions are developed for RSSB's members. Designed to address the most pressing industry challenges; [cost reduction](#), [safe and satisfied passengers](#), [improving system reliability and resilience](#), [adopting new technology](#), improving [freight safety and growth](#), and increasing rail's [sustainability and its benefit to society](#).

RSSB is proudly impartial, and home to some of rail's leading experts. Guided evidence by facts and data-driven analysis, RSSB helps to bridge knowledge gaps, optimise technology use, and disseminate and systemise industry best practice.

RSSB's services are used by rail operators, infrastructure managers, government, regulators, and the supply chain. We also share our expertise through our international Affiliation programme and collaboration with other industries.

Through its strategy RSSB aims to benefit members by:

- ensuring financial sustainability through cost efficiencies and centralised technical services
- delivering outstanding service and engagement
- reducing direct cost to members by expanding commercial activities
- improving RSSB's organisational health to attract and retain skilled staff
- leveraging digital transformation to enhance efficiency, customer understanding, and provide optimal solutions.

## The Five-Year Strategy

The new Chief Operating Officer will play a pivotal role in delivering on the RSSB's ambitious five-year strategy, which is designed to meet the evolving needs of the railway. RSSB has five strategic objectives:

- **Customer Experience** – Every rail employee using an RSSB tool or service daily by 2030.
- **Growth** – Generating growth in commercial contribution to reinvest in member services.
- **Organisational Health** – Aligning employee and customer experience for stronger relationships.
- **Digital Transformation** – Leveraging technology to continuously improve delivery.
- **Financial Sustainability** – Ensuring value for all members now and in the future.

For further information, please visit: [Rail Health and Safety Strategy](#)

## The Role

As Chief Operating Officer, you will lead the Chief Operating Group (COG), you will oversee a wide-ranging portfolio, including standards, safety and health, sustainability, sector strategy, research, a business management and resourcing function and supplier assurance. COG comprises seven direct reports, all directors in their own right. There are 380 staff in total across the organisation, with over 200 reporting up through the Chief Operating Officer.

You will play a key role on the Executive Committee, supporting the Chief Executive and Board in guiding RSSB through a period of reform and transformation across the sector. You will provide strategic leadership and wise counsel on the major challenges facing the organisation and industry, acting as a counsellor and confidante to the Chief Executive in particular, while shaping and delivering operational excellence.

This is a high-impact leadership role, requiring strong judgement, collaborative leadership, and the ability to energise teams and engage the wider sector. The role requires engagement with senior industry stakeholders, including ministerial teams (e.g., DfT, DG Rail, Secretary of State), occasional interactions with No. 10, and broader government and regulatory bodies.

## Candidate Profile

### Key Responsibilities

- Act as a trusted adviser to the Chief Executive and Executive Committee, helping shape organisational strategy and policy.
- Lead the Chief Operating Group to deliver high-quality, high-value services to members.
- Create a culture of excellence in delivery, accountability, and continuous improvement.
- Optimise organisational design, resourcing, and operational efficiency.
- Champion transformation and innovation, including new income generation and service development.
- Build a strong and inclusive leadership culture.
- Establish productive relationships with industry stakeholders and members.
- Represent RSSB credibly in senior industry, public, and media forums.
- Lead business planning, budgeting and performance monitoring.
- Promote collaboration across the business and with external partners.
- Oversee assurance and quality of products and services; strategic risk management is a core part of the role, with constant assessment of safety risk.
- Lead digital transformation and adoption of new technologies, including AI and digitalisation of products and tools for members.
- Be comfortable with rapid technological change and improvement of efficiencies.
- Coach and mentor direct reports, supporting their development.

### Key Challenges

- Evaluate and enhance the value proposition of RSSB's services and programmes.
- Navigate post-rail reform uncertainties and influence emerging sector structures.
- Strengthen member engagement and service alignment.
- Build organisational resilience and delivery capability.
- Lead transformation in assurance, digital transformation, and rail reform.
- Maintain relevance and impact of RSSB's outputs.
- Manage a diverse and multidisciplinary team, adapting to changing sector and stakeholder needs.

## Candidate profile

We are seeking an experienced and forward-thinking leader who brings:

### Leadership and Experience

- Significant senior leadership experience in a complex organisation.
- A strong track record of transformation, delivery and building high-performing teams.
- Ability to provide clear, strategic support and challenge to executive and board colleagues.

### Strategic and Operational Capability

- Proven ability to drive change, operational improvement, and organisational resilience.
- Strong decision-making capability in complex and regulated environments.
- A focus on delivery excellence, governance, and accountability.

### Stakeholder Engagement

- Politically astute and skilled at building productive, trusted relationships.
- A clear and confident communicator, representing the organisation credibly with industry partners, regulators, government, and the media.

### Leadership Style and Values

- Inclusive, emotionally intelligent, and collaborative approach.
- Committed to diversity, empowerment, and engaging people at all levels.
- Values-driven, adaptable, and pragmatic in seizing opportunities and tackling challenges.

### Desirable Attributes

- Knowledge of transport, infrastructure, or safety-critical sectors.
- Postgraduate qualification in business or leadership.
- Curiosity, adaptability, and the ability to anticipate and respond to future industry trends.

## RSSB Values

RSSB's work is guided by the following core values:

- **Trust:** Emphasising accuracy, impartiality, fairness, and honesty in all interactions, fostering an environment of mutual trust.
- **Innovative:** Encouraging out-of-the-box thinking, exploring alternative approaches, pushing boundaries, and embracing change to shape the future of rail.
- **Customer-focused:** Working collaboratively with colleagues, members, and stakeholders to achieve shared goals, developing and maintaining relationships to provide excellent experiences internally and externally.
- **Knowledgeable:** Valuing knowledge as it leads to informed, evidence-based, and useful actions for the industry, and stressing the importance of sharing this knowledge.

## Commitment to Diversity

RSSB is committed to diversity and welcomes applicants from all backgrounds. The organisation's strength lies in its diverse workforce, and it aims to create an inclusive environment where all individuals feel respected and are able to reach their full potential.

## Terms of Appointment

- **Appointment:** The is a full-time permanent appointment.
- **Remuneration:** A competitive salary and benefits package is available for the role.



# Position Specification

Ref: Chief Operating Officer  
Rail Safety and Standards Board

## How to Apply

The recruitment process is being undertaken by Russell Reynolds Associates on behalf of RSSB. The closing date for applications is **23:59 on Sunday 5<sup>th</sup> October 2025**. [Please click here to apply](#). You will be asked to register your details, answer any application questions and upload your CV and Statement of Suitability.

### Your submission should include:

- A **CV** setting out your career history, with key responsibilities and achievements. Please ensure you have provided reasons for any gaps within the last two years.
- A **Statement of Suitability** (no longer than two pages) explaining how you consider your personal skills, qualities and experience provide evidence of your suitability for the role.
- A completed **Diversity Monitoring Form** [available here](#). Please note the information you provide will help support monitoring RSSB's recruitment processes to ensure they are fair to all and allow us to attract diverse and talented candidates. The diversity data in this section is collated anonymously and will not be disclosed to anyone involved in assessing your application.

### Timeline

An indicative timeline is shared below, please note this may be subject to change:

Milestone	Date
Closing date for applications	5 <sup>th</sup> October
<i>Presentation of prospective candidates to agree longlist</i>	<i>w/c 13<sup>th</sup> October</i>
RRA conducts in-depth interviews with longlisted candidates	20 <sup>th</sup> October – 7 <sup>th</sup> November
<i>Presentation of prospective candidates to agree shortlist</i>	<i>w/c 10<sup>th</sup> November</i>
First panel interview	w/c 17 <sup>th</sup> November
Informal conversations with relevant stakeholders	
Final panel interviews	w/c 24 <sup>th</sup> November

*Please note that due diligence will be carried out on shortlisted candidates. Candidates should expect this to include searches of previous public statements and social media, blogs or any other publicly available information.*

Should you wish to speak with someone before submitting an application, or if you have difficulty in accessing the online platform, please contact [responses@russellreynolds.com](mailto:responses@russellreynolds.com) in the first instance, quoting reference number **2508-050L**.

