

Grace Palmer

Travel Sales Advisor

National Express Birmingham Coach Station

Grace Palmer, 60, has worked for National Express in Birmingham for almost 40 years.

Her career with the coach company, which celebrates 50 years on the road in 2022, has spanned a number of roles within the busy coach station, which services an average of two million travellers every year.

“I have seen a lot of change in my time with National Express. When I first started, customers would either book their tickets via travel agents or queue around the corner to buy them in person at the coach station.

“Everything was hand-written – a day at work would result in calloused fingers from the amount of tickets we used to write out. I was trained on the telephone exchange – a mass of wires and connections in a huge control room, performing the same job as a single desk phone and computer today.

“We would see regulars coming into the station to buy their tickets for their annual family holidays or to visit family. There has always been a real community spirit and a feeling that we were playing a part in people’s lives. I have always really loved that about the job.”

Blitz Spirit

During a severe snow storm in the 1980s, Grace recalls having several coach-loads of passengers stranded in Birmingham Coach Station. “None of the coaches could leave for about 14 hours on a Saturday night.

“The staff were stranded there too so we ended up moving people into the offices above the station to keep them warm. I helped make hot drinks for people, who bedded down and slept under their coats. I think a lot of people who were there will remember that night. ”

When Grace celebrated her 35th year with National Express, the firm recognised her long service by naming a coach after her. “It was a huge honour”, Grace said. “I don’t get to see her that often as she is on a route somewhere down south, but to see my name on one of the coaches was so much fun.”

Changes

As well as huge advances in technology, one of other notable changes that Grace has witnessed over her four decades with National Express, has been the uniforms. “We have worn a range of different colours and styles, from bright orange to police-style uniforms with cravats. The uniform we have now is comfortable and instantly recognisable for customers, which is great. ”

Grace concludes, “I’ve spent almost my whole life working for National Express. I had my two children while working here and have made some lifelong friends along the way too. I am proud to be part of the team – here’s to the next 50 years, National Express. Happy Birthday.”

**ENDS**

**To speak to the team or to or to arrange an interview, contact Amy Dickin -** **amy.dickin@nationalexpress.com** **/ 07917 083828 or Paula Mitchell -** **paula.mitchell@nationalexpress.com** **/ 07825 976593**

* Customer figures correct in line with a normal operating year, pre-pandemic