

DATE	23 rd April 2015
MONTHLY USERS	7,894

Rail Professional

Women in Rail

At a critical point

Adeline Ginn, founder of Women in Rail looks back at all that the group has achieved so far, and outlines its big plans for the future

Women in Rail was created in 2012 to provide networking opportunities and ongoing support for all women in the rail industry, to promote rail as an attractive career choice, to develop strategies for engaging young people to consider a career in the sector, and to influence key stakeholders and undertakings to support and encourage initiatives aimed at improving gender balance and diversity in the rail industry.

Here we are in 2015. We have achieved a tremendous amount in two years, thanks to our members (now more than 1,400) and the many people and organisations who worked with us to push the diversity agenda and showcase our industry as a modern and dynamic sector. The rail industry is filled with many unrelenting, passionate and determined women and men and the group would not have achieved so much if it wasn't a team and joined-up effort. Yet we are now at a critical point: we are brainstorming on how best to move forward, build on our successes and evolve our vision for the benefit of not only women in rail but the industry as a whole.

So what have we achieved?

Establishing a robust networking platform

An important part of the work of Women in Rail has been to bring women in the rail industry together and provide them with a forum to connect on both a personal and a professional level. This began with the launch of Women in Rail on the networking site, LinkedIn, in 2012 and the official launch of the group in 2013. In the last 12 months alone, membership has grown by 50 per cent. We have held a number of workshops and events up and down the country, addressing some of the key issues which women have told us prevent them from pushing themselves forward in their career and also enabling them to create or expand their network. The feedback received has been fantastic and going forward we intend to strengthen these initiatives and develop new ones to continue helping our members grow stronger and foster key relationships.

Providing a strong support network

Another core objective of Women in Rail has been to provide



a structure to help the women who currently work in the rail industry achieve their full potential. In 2014, we launched a mentoring programme which provides a unique opportunity for women and young graduates to receive support and guidance from senior industry professionals. Today, we have more than 35 mentors, male and female, each supporting a woman or young girl in the industry. We have also partnered with the government's 'Your Life' campaign and pledged to expand the programme by having up to 100 pairs by June 2015. It is a tall order but, having witnessed how much benefit such an initiative is providing to women and young graduates in the sector, we are determined to give the programme as much exposure as possible to reach this target. In addition to helping our members grow in strength, the mentoring programme demonstrates how committed the industry is to supporting its women and contributes to making it an attractive sector to the young generations, which itself is crucial to improving gender balance and the overall economic success of the industry.

Campaigning for the rail industry

Shortly after launching Women in Rail and talking to our members, especially young graduates, we realised that one of the key issues the rail industry faces is an image problem, more precisely with the younger generations. Therefore, Women in Rail quickly devised initiatives to position rail as an attractive career choice and raise awareness of the excitement and benefits a career in the sector can offer. We reached out to the general public through various articles and interviews (including on Radio 4's *Women's Hour*); we created an Interview section on our website showcasing role models and the roles women perform in our industry; we supported like-minded initiatives and last year officially partnered with Young Rail Professionals in its Ambassadors Programme to showcase the various career opportunities the industry has on offer for women and young graduates. We visited 10 universities in 2014 and plan to have visited 40 by the end of 2015.

We also gave several presentations to primary school children, taking about rail and engineering, to inspire them to take an interest in the sciences.

In the last few months, we have also reached out to executive women within the rail sector and created a focus group to

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brainstorm on ways to get undertakings and stakeholders in the industry to support and encourage diversity initiatives. Together, we are working on the business plan and in 2015 will campaign and push for high level engagement with our vision.

But we have even bigger plans for the future.

Where are we going?

The latest report from Lord Mervyn Davies, the government's champion of gender equality in the boardroom, has seen the percentage of women on boards grow from 14 per cent to 23.5 per cent in just three years. That shows exactly what can be achieved. However, while being a board member is an obvious aspiration for ambitious women, the rail industry is not yet seen by many as an attractive route. For most women and young girls, rail is not the first dynamic, creative and rapidly growing industry that springs to mind when choosing a career. This is a great shame because it should be.

For this reason, Women in Rail will continue to campaign and focus its efforts on changing these perceptions from the roots up: we want to see young girls passionate about science, we want to see teens leaving school inspired to study engineering and we want to see women thriving in their career on the railway. And we want rail to be a first career of choice for the young generations and praised as an industry that is dynamic and forward looking, supporting and fostering the career of its

workforce and, in particular, its women.

We will also continue to consolidate our existing initiatives to support women within the rail sector through events, workshops, our mentoring programme and the focus group.

But we also want to push the business case with key undertakings and stakeholders. Back in 2012, when Women in Rail was created, we carried out an industry survey to determine the male/female ratio. The results came at 17.8 per cent of the workforce in the rail sector being female. We want to find out more not only about the ratio but also the role women perform in the sector (and those they don't so easily do). In the next few weeks, we will spearhead an in-depth survey of the rail industry in England and will use this data to evidence the need to continue to push forward the Women in Rail agenda and gain widespread support among key influencers in the UK to fix the issues faced by the sector in terms of image and gender balance, which we will launch in June.

If you want to help us with any initiatives, please do contact Women in Rail. We are always looking for volunteers to work with and showcase rail as a modern, dynamic and exciting industry.

Adeline Ginn is founder of Women in Rail and general counsel at Angel Trains

Visit: www.womeninrail.org

LinkedIn: [Women in Rail](https://www.linkedin.com/company/women-in-rail)

