

DATE	5 th November 2014
USERS	7, 894

Rail Professional

Opinion

Plugging the skills gap Women in Rail

Efforts to promote rail to university students have traditionally met with varying levels of success. **Jodi Savage** looks at the new Joint University Presentation Programme (JUPP), which involves young people in rail leading by example

A recent study by NSARE has revealed that 20 per cent of the UK rail industry's traction and rolling stock engineers are aged 55 and older, and that 10,000 of these engineers are expected to retire in the next five years. The study also revealed that 18,000 new recruits are required in the next five years in order to deliver planned rail projects.

With females representing only 4.4 per cent of the engineering workforce in the UK rail industry I see women as a relatively untapped resource, a resource which could help us plug our skills gap.

A long-term solution to address the skills gap, and increase the number of women in our industry, is to encourage more young people (boys and girls) to study STEM based subjects (science, technology, engineering and mathematics), to demonstrate that a career in engineering is full of potential and that the rail industry is as exciting and dynamic as other engineering sectors.

A more medium-term way of addressing this issue is to encourage those young people who have already made the decision to pursue a career in engineering to consider the rail industry as an attractive career choice. As an industry we need to position rail as being as exciting and dynamic as other engineering industries such as aerospace and automation.

Currently women represent 14 per cent of engineering graduates [data shared by WISE]. This figure is still very low, but if we can encourage more of these women into our industry so that we are able to mirror this percentage then we will increase our overall engineering population while also achieving a, slightly, more diverse workforce.

Because it is a privatised, fragmented industry, selling 'Rail' isn't easy. Many businesses, institutions and groups have made efforts over the years to promote the industry to university students with varying levels of success.

Going out to universities

Earlier this year, Women in Rail was proud to join forces with the Young Rail Professionals and other leading industry groups including the IMechE, IET, FWI and NSARE to promote the industry to university students. Our project is called the Joint University Presentation Programme (JUPP) and our objective is to visit 40 universities during the 2014/2015 academic year. Our first presentation took place in Huddersfield last month, and we have three more arranged for this month in Aston, Nottingham and Birmingham. The purpose of this programme is to promote the industry as a whole with all its disciplines. The common message is one of general industry promotion, inspiring and enthusing university students to consider a career in the rail industry.

The JUPP will draw on the young people within the rail industry to go and give these engagement presentations. Training will be made available to all presenters, giving them an excellent opportunity to further develop their skills. This also provides a brilliant opportunity to help build chartered competencies and to share the passion for the vibrant, dynamic industry that we all work in. We therefore welcome any new recruits within the industry who would be keen to take part in these presentations.

Women in Rail plays a vital role in the JUPP planning by ensuring that the presenters it puts forward to attend the universities represent a diverse workforce and it is our aim to have each university event presented by a male and female volunteer. It is essential that we have female role models whom the female students can relate to and look up to and who can inspire the next generation. It is our mission to target those 14 per cent of women engineers and convince them that rail is a career for everyone with great potential and longevity.

We have also worked hard to ensure that our template presentation shows a



Jodi Savage

"It is essential that we have female role models whom the female students can relate to and look up to and who can inspire the next generation. It is our mission to target those 14 per cent of women engineers and convince them that rail is a career for everyone with great potential and longevity"