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Changing the landscape of rail

Women In Rail founder ADELINE GINN reports on initiatives to attract more women into the rail industry

From a young age, girls and boys are faced with a perception of how they should behave. Girls are traditionally encouraged to play with dolls, and boys with cars.

P&G brand Always recently launched an award-winning campaign (#likeagirl) that features young women and girls talking about how they feel they are limited by society. They discuss issues such as feeling like they shouldn't be strong or a hero, and that they should aspire to do a traditional job that is not too challenging. 72% of all girls feel that they are limited by society - those girls are our sisters, daughters, granddaughters and nieces.

This perception is a big factor behind the lack of women in the rail industry. The last time the industry was surveyed, just 17.8% of the workforce was found to be female. This is no surprise, when you consider the popularity of the likes of Thomas the Tank Engine, model railway tracks and toy trains for young boys - the gender of the industry seems influenced from a young age.

Girls have also been found to be less likely to take STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering

and Mathematics) subjects at school, or go on to study STEM subjects that tend to lead to the rail industry (such as engineering or construction).

But this is changing. Since 2010, the number of girls studying Maths A-level is up by 8%, and those doing Physics is up by 15%. And there is a welcome push by the Government to encourage more girls into STEM subjects.

Yet perceptions that we face at a young age are not the only reason there are fewer women than men in rail... the industry itself has a perception problem. The variety of roles the sector has on offer is not immediately obvious, and as a result rail is not a destination career for most women.

However, the latest report from Lord Mervyn Davies, the Government's champion of gender equality in the boardroom, reveals that the percentage of women on boards has grown from 14% to 23.5% in just three years. That

shows exactly what can be achieved.

The perception of the rail industry needs to be tackled from the roots up. Young girls need to be passionate about science, teens should be leaving school inspired to study engineering, and women should be thriving in their career on the railway. Rail should 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.

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 to support and encourage initiatives aimed at improving gender balance and diversity in the rail industry.

Thanks to our members (now more than 1,400) and the many people and organisations who have worked with us to push the diversity agenda and showcase our industry as a modern and dynamic sector, we have achieved a lot.

An important part of the work of Women in Rail has been to bring women in the rail industry together, and to provide them with a forum to connect on both a personal and a professional level.

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Slavina Nikolova, Class 379 Electrostar and Class 360 Desiro Engineer, Abello Greater Anglia. WOMEN IN RAIL.



Linda Wain, Depot Manager, East Midlands Trains. WOMEN IN RAIL.

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Feature People



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Women in Rail ran a special networking and cocktail-making masterclass on June 23. Experienced confidence and communications skills coach Sean Brickell hosted a networking session to coach women in practical networking skills, and the evening drinks-making session allowed attendees to put their new skills to the test in a fun environment. **WOMEN IN RAIL**

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 past 12 months alone, membership has grown by 50%.

We have held a number of workshops and events up and down the country, addressing some of the key issues that 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. We intend to strengthen these initiatives and develop new ones, to continue helping our members grow stronger and foster key relationships.

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 that 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.

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 increase the number of pairs by the end of 2015.

In addition to helping our members grow in strength, the mentoring programme both demonstrates the industry's commitment to supporting its women and contributes to making it an attractive sector to the young generations. This is crucial to improving gender balance and the overall economic success of the industry.

Shortly after launching Women in Rail, and after 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 young generations.

Therefore, Women in Rail (quickly) devised initiatives to position rail as an attractive career choice for the young generations, raising awareness of the excitement and benefits that 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 their Ambassadors Programme to showcase the various career opportunities that the industry has on offer for women and young graduates.

■ We visited ten universities in 2014, and plan to have visited 40 by the end of 2015.

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

In the past few months, we have also reached out to executive women within the rail sector, and created a focus group to identify new ways to get stakeholders in the industry to support and encourage diversity initiatives. Together, we are working on the business plan, and in 2016 we will campaign and push for high-level engagement with our vision.

And we have even bigger plans for the future. So if you want to help us with any initiatives, please contact Women in Rail (womeninrail@angeltrains.co.uk). We are always looking for volunteers to work with us and help us in our mission to support women in rail and showcase rail as a modern, dynamic and exciting industry.

■ For case studies of successful women in the rail industry, see www.womeninrail.org ■

About the author

Adeline Ginn, Women In Rail

Adeline Ginn has worked at Angel Trains since 1999. She has held the position of general counsel since 2009, before which she was a legal advisor at the company. She launched Women in Rail in 2013 as a means of providing networking opportunities and support for all women in the rail industry, and to highlight the role women play in shaping the future of rail.

