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Rail firms way off track on gender equality - Claire Perry

Rail Minister Claire Perry has condemned the “dismal performance” of Britain’s railways on gender equality after a study found just 16% of the workforce are female.

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Rail Minister Claire Perry has condemned the "dismal performance" of Britain's railways on gender equality after a study found just 16% of the workforce are female.

She said there was "no excuse" for the figure and warned that the railways risk "looking like the industry that time has left behind".

Campaign group Women in Rail found that just 14,024 of the 85,723 people employed across the rail sector are female.

It expressed concern that the majority were in customer-facing roles, with just 4% in engineering.

Ms Perry claimed this was doing damage to equal pay.

She noted that salaries for station assistants start at £12,500 a year while Network Rail is currently advertising for engineers who will earn just under £40,000 a year.

"When women are prevented from taking the jobs they could excel at just because they are women, they're not just having their choices restricted. They are missing out economically," Ms Perry said.

She went on: "We can't hope to have the high performing rail industry that the country needs without first addressing the ... great challenge facing the industry today: its dismal performance on gender equality."

Women in Rail founder Adeline Ginn claimed rail companies would be able to use the new figures to identify areas for change.

"It is extremely important that the rail industry confronts this gender imbalance as a first step towards changing it for the better," she said.

"These changes will need to happen within the rail industry, as well as outside, to encourage women to follow career paths that lead to rail - such as engineering - from a young age."