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Women in rail Adeline Ginn



Flexible working – or the lack thereof

Adeline Ginn looks at the importance of flexible working and encouraging it as part of removing barriers to working in rail

The UK has recently been described in the *International Business Times* as having an 'archaic' attitude towards flexible working. There is some truth in this statement although a little harsh in my view. As a country we are not as open to the idea of flexible work hours as other countries. France, for instance, has offered flexible working arrangements since 2000. Today, flexible working is not a 'nice to have', it is a necessity, and we need to accept that the landscape of the family and work dynamic has changed.

A recent study by Timewise found that currently 14.1 million people in Britain want flexibility in their working hours, with seven in ten parents wanting flexible working. Our modern day society, with the realities of the school run, is in need of a more fluid

routine. Often described as a generation expected to 'do it all', couples are expected to work full-time, have a clean house, a perfect family and ironed shirts and generally juggle all aspects of their life seamlessly. A report

discussed in *The New York Times* found that 65 per cent of parents find it difficult to balance job and family without the support of flexible working. The answer is clear enough – our population is under more

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stress than any before them and society needs to make a change.

According to the report released by The Women and Equalities Select Committee last week, it would be to the UK's advantage. The report looked at the UK's gender pay gap and how our society can best rectify the problem. One area they highlighted was to what extent the UK economy would benefit from an increase in productivity if flexible working was integrated into our businesses.

A recent survey of 8,000 global employees and employers conducted by Vodafone found that 61 per cent said flexible working increased their company's profits.

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Women in Rail conducted a report at the end of last year that highlighted the need for more women to pursue a career in rail. A more forward thinking attitude to flexible working across the board would certainly lead to more women contemplating rail as

a legitimate career option. It found that currently only 16.4 per cent of the total workforce in the rail industry is female and among that group the majority (83 per cent) are in junior roles such as customer service. Clare Burles, people director at Virgin Trains East Coast, discussed this in detail. She thinks the reason for this natural attraction to customer service is due to the availability of flexible hours among these roles. There are structural challenges for women seeking a career in our industry, and to create a balanced workforce we need to ensure careers are flexible across the board.

We should be actively encouraging our women to reach for those more senior roles and make the industry as a whole more gender equal and inclusive. By utilising all skills available, businesses will not only financially benefit, but their work environment will become a hub of productivity.

We need to work to remove internal barriers and make the industry more attractive to women. Ask yourself, could your job be flexible? And speak to your manager. The amount of talent potential business could tap in to, both male and female, is huge if flexible working is on offer. Adeline Ginn is general counsel at Angel Trains and founder of Women in Rail
Visit: www.womeninrail.org