

WOMEN IN RAIL

ADELINE GINN, General Counsel of Angel Trains and founder of Women in Rail, explains the role of the organisation

A few years back I was chatting with female friends in the rail industry when we hit on a widespread feeling that women in our sector often felt isolated. Whilst there was a tremendous amount of female talent in our industry, few women had the confidence to push themselves forward in their career and therefore failed to realise their full potential.

It was to remedy this that I set about establishing Women in Rail with a group of like-minded colleagues. The idea was to give women the support they need to help them progress within the industry and ensure that the railways make the most of this valuable resource.

We launched in 2013 and are now well-established, with over 2,500 members (including some men), support from the Department for Transport and a network of partnerships within the industry. We have grown to encompass five regional groups: the West Midlands, East Midlands, the North West, Yorkshire and, next year, hopefully, Scotland. We run these groups in collaboration with the Young Rail Professionals' regional groups.

BUSINESS CASE

As Karen Boswell made plain in her presidential address to the Railway Study Association last year (p73, January 2016 issue), research shows that companies with strong representation of women on the board tend to do better on a range of measures, from higher sales to a bigger return on equity. Female directors are often a proxy for a more proactive attitude towards women throughout a company – what this shows is that there is a strong business case for pushing women forward.

Last year, Women in Rail undertook a survey in which we sampled 39 businesses in the rail industry. We found that women are woefully under-represented: 16.4% of the employees in the rail industry are women, as against 47% in the national workforce.

The proportions varied across different sectors: over half the workforce are women in the Department for Transport, but the figure is just 12% for manufacturing companies and around 20% for rail operators. But across the board we found that women tend to be employed lower down the pay scale, with two out of three in non-managerial roles. There are some talented women at mid-manager level, but few in senior positions.

Plainly, one issue to be addressed is recruitment: we need to get more young women interested in a career in the rail industry. There are some negative perceptions about rail in schools and colleges, with many young people – and females in particular – making it plain that they do not see the rail industry as exciting or dynamic. What we found is that most women in the industry joined because they knew family members or friends on the railways already: the others fell into it by accident, rather than a positive choice.



A rewarding career: Northern employee Anne Ridley on Appleby station. Paul Bigland

Surveys of girls from the age of seven onwards show negative perceptions of engineering industries, with young ones viewing them as 'dirty and messy' and older ones as 'physically tiring and dangerous'. There is much work to be done to change such perceptions.

ACTIVITIES

If we are to retain and develop talent and attract more women into the industry, we need to offer a strong support network.

Women in Rail offers a range of events, from networking and drinks opportunities to workshops aimed at developing self-confidence. We consider issues such as flexible working (and its benefits) and networking skills.

One of our most important activities is the WR mentoring programme. This was set up to help women receive advice and guidance from a more senior rail industry professional in their personal development, growth and confidence, such mentor being from a different company. In conjunction with YRP, the programme has since been extended to cover young male professionals as well.

We have also partnered with YRP on its Ambassador Programme, taking the message into schools, universities and colleges. We emphasise that there is a range of opportunities for young women in the rail industry and focus on how working in rail can save lives and make a difference.

We have also engaged in an extensive PR programme, with for example an appearance on Radio 4's *Women's Hour*. In the summer, we announced the winners in our search for the 20 Most Inspirational Women in Rail; there were nearly 200 nominations for the list. The survey is the first of its kind, celebrating women in the UK railway sector who have positively influenced others over the course of their railway career and are an inspiration to peers, colleagues and those interested in joining the rail industry.

I urge everyone to play a part in our initiatives to support, retain and attract talent: be a strong advocate, be a mentor or mentee, volunteer to help. By improving the gender balance we will spark the dynamism needed to push the industry forward. womeninrail@angeltrains.co.uk
www.womeninrail.org

RISA

Railway Study Association

Developing railway professionals

Details of Association Membership can be found on page 14. Hear the speakers, ask the questions and then read all about it in *Modern Railways*

HIGH SCORE

Women in Rail's 20 Most Inspirational Women in the rail industry are:

- Alero Abbey – Area Manager Green Park at London Underground
- Amelia Woodley – Thameslink Environmental Manager at Network Rail
- Charley Whitelock – Community Relations Apprentice at Costain – ATC Joint Venture Project
- Claire Douglas – Driver at Direct Rail Services
- Clare Waller – Head of Timetable Development at Arriva
- Debbie Bewley – Sustainability and Assurance Manager at Carillion Rail
- Dyan Crowther – Chief Operating Officer at GTR (now Chief Executive at HS1)
- Helen Kellaway – Lead Systems Engineer at Siemens
- Hollie Woodard – Project Manager at VolkerRail
- Jane Simpson – Chief Engineer at Network Rail
- Lucy Gardner – Senior Engineer at Arup
- Maggie Simpson – Executive Director at Rail Freight Group
- Margaret Kay – Managing Director at Stagecoach Supertram
- Mary Roberts – Managing Director at Cat 1 Training
- Nita Rabadia – Head of Specification and Assurance at HS2 Ltd
- Sally Clarke – Upgrades Delivery Manager (Crossrail & 3rd Party) at Transport for London
- Sara Clark – Commercial Guard at South West Trains
- Susan Cooklin – Route Services Director at Network Rail
- Suzanne Patterson – West Anglia HR Business Partner at London Overground Rail Operations Ltd
- Wendy Spinks – Commercial Director at HS1 Ltd