

Women in rail

Sarah Reid



# Never Mind the Gap

**Sarah Reid**, Commercial Director at Network Rail and Chair of Women in Rail East Midlands explains the life changing initiative for women in transition and fantastic opportunity to attract women into rail

Last year in the East Midlands, I launched Never Mind the Gap, a Women in Rail pilot initiative designed to attract more women to the railway industry. Never Mind the Gap targets women who are not in employment, either as a result of a career break (i.e. moving on from caring), redundancy or otherwise and who may not previously have considered a career in our sector. Through this initiative, women are offered free training and two-week work placements in a rail company, gaining direct experience of what it is like to work in the railway.

When we launched in the East Midlands, we were looking for women with a positive attitude, enthusiastic about getting into work and keen to improve their employability, and we found them! A wide

range of women from diverse backgrounds applied to benefit from our initiative: from dental nursing, local catering, the armed forces and engineering, mostly with self-funded qualifications, all looking for a second chance in their career.

Eight women took part with work placements provided by Network Rail, Bombardier, Crosscountry trains and Mott McDonald and supported by Job Centre Plus, Derby City Council, Ganymede, ATA Recruitment and Shorterm Group. The programme started with a three day introduction during which we shared our knowledge and experience of the rail industry with the eight candidates, teaching them how to re-focus their CVs, brush up their interview skills and, thanks to graduate trainees from Bombardier and Network Rail, develop their IT skills. It was a pleasure to witness the women's confidence grow tenfold during these three days.

During their two weeks placements, the eight candidates spent time with Train Managers, Signallers, in maintenance teams, on quality inspections, doing CAD design, working with HR, customer service and much more. One woman stayed a few days longer to finish off projects, having not worked for 17 years!

This opportunity was life changing for many women. One emotionally commented that, within a few weeks, she went from struggling to pay her rent to working in a frontline role with Network Rail at the start of a very promising career. Most are now determined to work in the railway.

I am convinced that by allowing individuals to directly experience working in our sector, we will increase the number of female candidates applying for roles and consequently benefit from greater diverse thinking within our teams and



organisations.

We are launching a nationwide Never Mind the Gap campaign through our regional group network, having already secured the support of Andrew Haines, CEO of Network Rail and of the other companies involved in the pilot. It would be fantastic if the rest of the rail industry collaborated with us on this initiative. We are calling on train operators and manufacturers, design, construction, signalling and track organisations, recruitment and training experts, big and small companies, all rail businesses to join us and support Never Mind the Gap 2020!

*To find out more about Women in Rail's Never Mind the Gap initiative, please contact Sarah Reid at [Eastmidlands@womeninrail.org](mailto:Eastmidlands@womeninrail.org).*

