

Women in rail

Claire Burrows



Women in Rail's message of supporting women and attracting female talent instantly resonated with me

Claire Burrows, legal director at law firm, Shakespeare Martineau, and Chair of Women in Rail West Midlands talks about her role as a Regional Leader for Women In Rail, helping to grow the organisation outside of London and its importance for promoting diversity and career opportunities within the sector

Aside from my role in Women in Rail, I am a legal director at Shakespeare Martineau, specialising in commercial disputes. I advise clients both in and out of the industry in relation to managing risk and litigation, hopefully avoiding or mitigating the latter!

My involvement with Women in Rail began in 2016, when I was introduced to the group's founder, Adeline Ginn, who was looking to expand out to the regions. The group's message of offering a support network to women in the industry and helping to attract and retain female talent instantly resonated with me and I began working with Adeline to grow a regional presence.

Our first event was hosted by Shakespeare Martineau and aside from showcasing an amazing panel of inspiring women speakers, was the birth of the first regional group for Women in Rail, here in the West Midlands. From there, under the guidance of a number of hugely motivated committee members, our group grew and I was asked to formally lead the region in February 2018.

The group is highly relevant for many of my clients and it is great to be able to support both them and the wider industry to promote diversity and career opportunities in the sector. I am particularly keen on getting our young talent engaged with the sector and developing and progressing themselves within the industry.

Since inception, the membership of the West Midlands group has expanded to almost 400 members. Our steering committee has a wide and varied skillset and many committee members do not

come from typical rail or engineering backgrounds, showing just how wide the industry is and the variety of roles that are within it. As well as my legal experience,



we have committee members working in recruitment, education and marketing (to name a few) and of course engineering as you might expect too.

In the last few years we've had plenty of moments to be proud of. These include working closely with groups such as Bodyguard Workwear looking at how to make female PPE better-fitting and safer, to our yearly presence at Rail Live, where I've twice had the pleasure of welcoming the Secretary of State for Transport to our stand and telling him all about Women in Rail, what we do and why we do it.

We're currently going through challenging times but the resilience and close bond of the group is shining through. It's often hard to get together face-to-face as a committee amongst the demands of daily work and life, but the current COVID-19 pandemic has shown us what is possible with modern technology. We have already enjoyed Zoom drinks with other regional leaders and we have lots of exciting opportunities coming up for our members, including virtual quizzes, webinars and Q&A sessions.

While we are embracing these new approaches due to the current climate, they are also highlighting the possibilities for us all to continue to feel much closer and more connected once this is all over.

Claire Burrows is a legal director at law firm, Shakespeare Martineau, and Chair of Women in Rail West Midlands

To find out more about the work of Women in Rail West Midlands, please e-mail WRWM@womeninrail.org