

# Survey shows increasing confidence in rail as an innovative sector

December 2, 2021



A new survey suggests that rail professionals are becoming more confident the industry is innovative.

The new report, from the Railway Industry Association (RIA), compares results from two surveys – one held in 2019, another in 2021.

This showed a 12 per cent increase between the two of those saying rail was an innovative industry: from 50 per cent to 62 per cent.

Summarising the report, the RIA said the industry still ranked lower than automotive, transport, finance and defence, but had seen the largest swing of those sectors, from 2019 to 2021, in those considering it 'extremely, very or quite innovative'.

Procurement, sponsorship & champions and product approval were named as the three 'priorities and processes' that have the biggest impact on innovation in rail. Availability of rail funding, testing and trialling facilities and innovation advice were listed as the three 'facilities and resources' that have the biggest impact on innovation in rail.

Meanwhile, 56% of respondents said that the Coronavirus pandemic had had a negative impact on their planned innovation projects in 2020/21.

Technical director at the Railway Industry Association (RIA), David Clarke, said: "Innovation is vitally important for the rail sector – helping ensure the industry continues to provide the best possible services for passengers and freight users, whilst delivering more cost-effectively, reducing carbon emissions and with less disruption to the public.

"As part of RIA's Unlocking Innovation programme, we surveyed professionals from across the rail sector, gauging how innovative they believe the industry is. The results give reason to be optimistic, showing a significant jump from 2019 to 2021 in the number of respondents saying the rail sector is innovative, from 50% to 62%. Yet, it also showed that more work needs to be done, particularly in areas like procurement and rail funding, to ensure rail suppliers have all the tools they need to bring new products and services into the market. Although moving in the right direction, rail professionals still see their industry as less innovative than some others. Whilst it is unclear how objective this assessment is, it suggests that there is more to be done in celebrating and promoting rail industry innovation.

"So, the sector is making progress, but we simply can't rest on our laurels. At RIA, our Unlocking Innovation Programme, supported by strategic partners Network Rail and UKRRIN, continues to bring innovators together and promote the good work of companies across the sector. As we approach 2022, we will continue to support the rail industry in its efforts to deliver state-of-the-art rail services across the UK and overseas."

Head of rail technology at Network Rail, David Rowe, said: "It is good news to see the industry's confidence growing in its ability to innovate. Through the Network Rail Research & Development Portfolio, we've been investing some £245 million for innovative products and solutions including using new, lightweight products and automation processes – with examples like the Prometheus drone and FLOW Bridge. And through the Accelerated Innovation Programme, we've been taking a new approach to procuring innovation, taking ideas from proof of concept to first deployment within 12 months. What's more, all of our work is aligned with the industry-wide Rail Technical Strategy and the key priorities within it.

"There has never been a better time to get involved – whether you're new to rail or a well established company already, the rail sector is the perfect place to develop new technologies, providing greater benefits to all who use our railways."

Chair of the UK Rail Research and Innovation Network (UKRRIN), Jo Binstead, said: "This survey is a welcome contribution to the debate of how we best promote innovation in the sector. Since its establishment in 2018, UKRRIN – the £92 million partnership between academia and industry – has led the way in supporting new products and services to get into the industry. Through the four Centres of Excellence, we are bringing the commercial knowhow of the private sector with the research capabilities of universities to supercharge innovation in rail.

"Through UKRRIN, we now have the facilities, capabilities and expertise that will not only make a significant contribution to delivering on the aims set out in the Williams-Shapps White Paper, but also to

export and adopt UK technology on a global scale.”

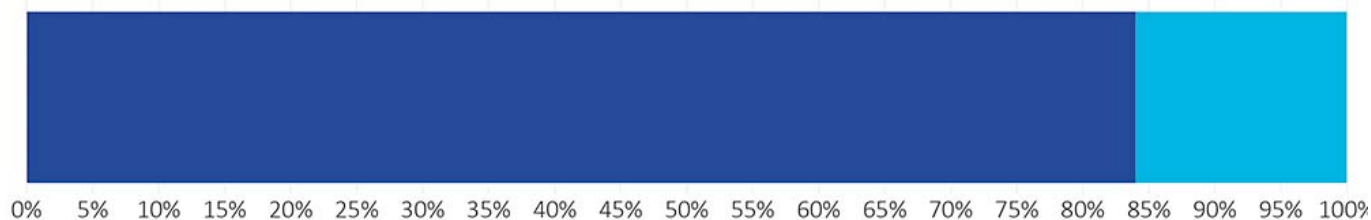
Some more findings from the survey:

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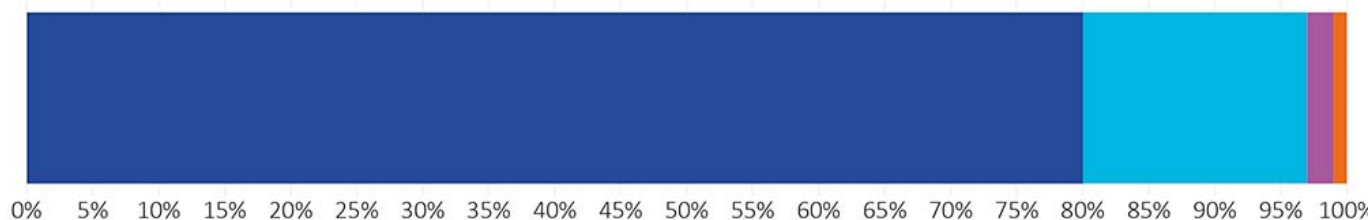
### Q1: How important, if at all, is it for the GB rail industry to be innovative?

■ Very important   ■ Quite important   ■ Neither important or unimportant   ■ Not that important   ■ Not important at all

November 2019



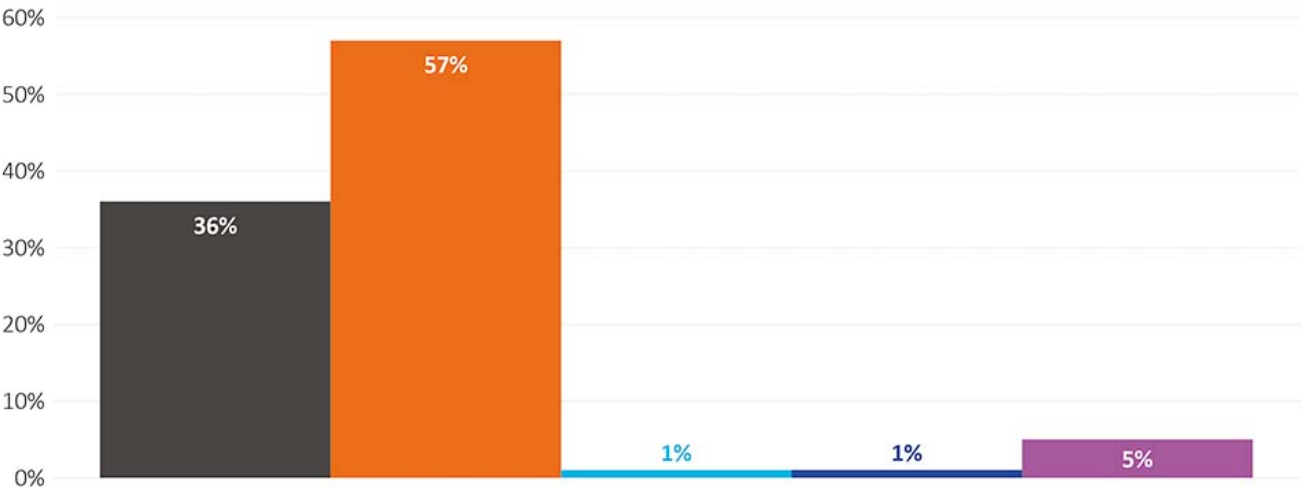
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**Q2: Where is the GB railway industry on its innovation journey right now?**

■ GB rail industry is just at the beginning of its innovation journey   ■ GB rail industry is somewhat making headway right now  
■ GB rail industry is a way ahead of other industry sectors   ■ GB rail industry is a clear leader in innovation   ■ Other

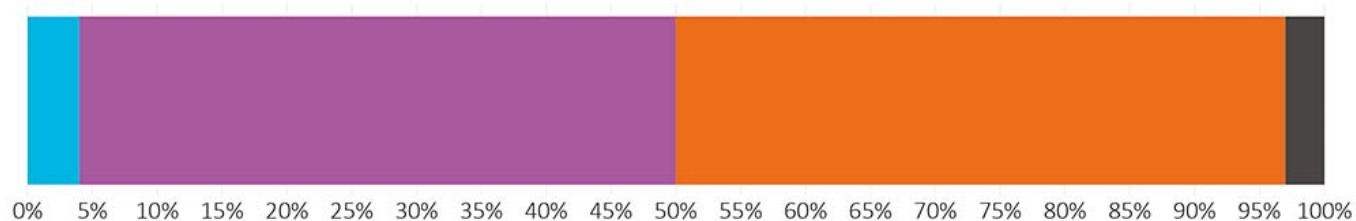
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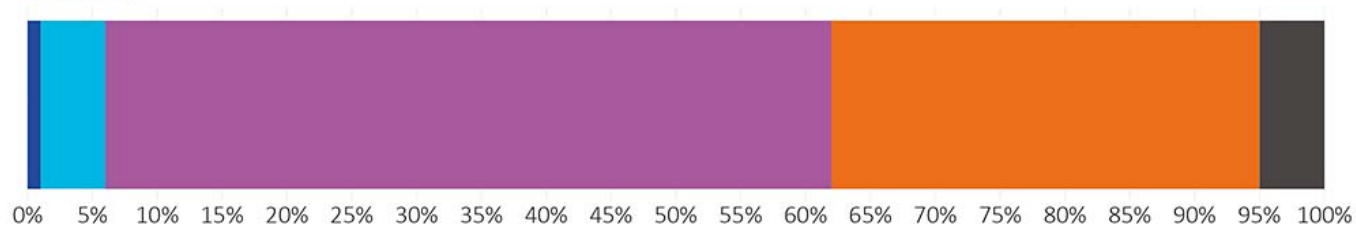
**Q3: How innovative, if at all, do you believe the GB railway industry is currently?**

■ Extremely innovative ■ Very innovative ■ Quite innovative ■ Hardly innovative ■ Not at all innovative

**November 2019**



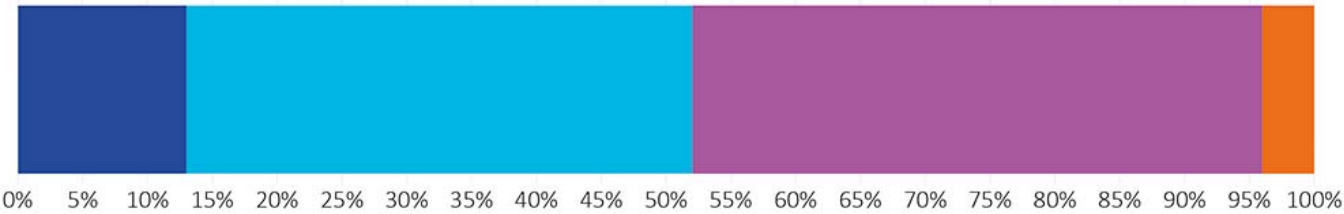
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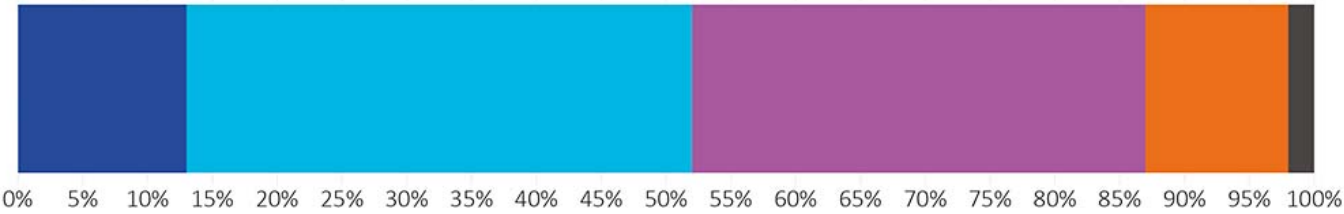
**Q4: How innovative, if at all, do you believe the defence industry is currently?**

Extremely innovative   Very innovative   Quite innovative   Hardly innovative   Not at all innovative

November 2019



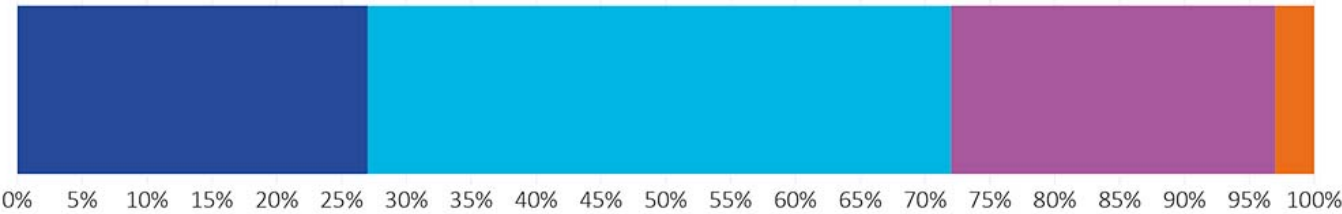
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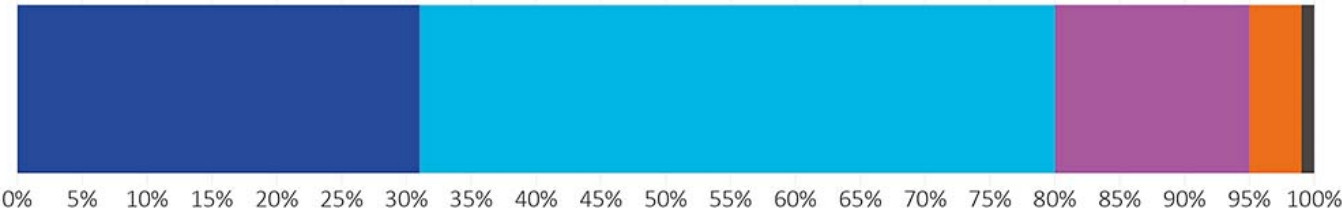
Q5: How innovative, if at all, do you believe the automotive industry is currently?

Extremely innovative   Very innovative   Quite innovative   Hardly innovative   Not at all innovative

November 2019



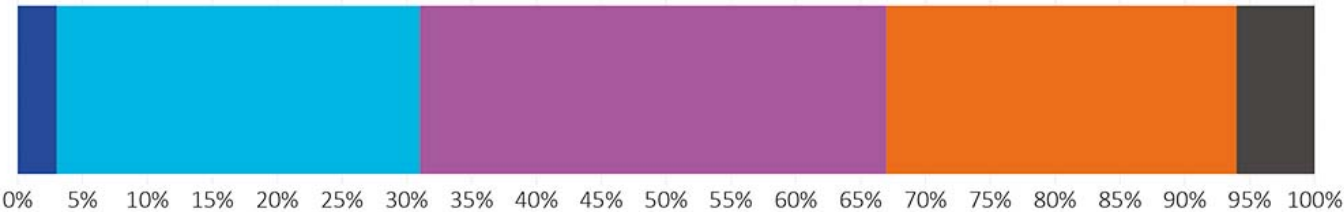
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**Q6: How innovative, if at all, do you believe the finance industry is currently?**

Extremely innovative   Very innovative   Quite innovative   Hardly innovative   Not at all innovative

November 2019



July 2021

