

Why more women should consider a job in the railways

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It is no secret that the rail industry has a gender imbalance. In the second part of our interview with Heather Waugh, the only female freight train driver in Scotland, she explains why more people should consider it as a career.

Despite the rail industry receiving the highest levels of investment since the Victorian era, recruitment is

still a challenge facing the sector.

There is a high priority in increasing and promoting diversity and inclusion through recruitment, to attract a new generation to the rail industry.

An estimated one in six of the UK rail workforce are women – of which an even smaller percentage work in roles such as drivers.

Heather Waugh was a train driver for ScotRail for 12 years and has spent the last year as a freight driver. In the second of two features, for Rail Business Daily she explains why she thinks she's the only female freight driver in Scotland.

She said: "There are two reasons. The first is simply that freight companies have less of a requirement to hire trainee drivers in Scotland. They can take on qualified drivers directly from other train operating companies but as there aren't many qualified female drivers to start with, the odds are reduced significantly.

"But the biggest reason is simply perception. Like me, most female drivers assume freight is physically demanding, long hours, insecure, and that freight companies, and drivers, would not be keen on recruiting women. My experience is the total opposite of that but until perceptions change, women drivers will continue to assume freight isn't an option.

"I think the biggest boundary is your own self-doubt. The perception that you won't be accepted. Or that you won't be able to do it. And that is why it is so important for women in this industry to be willing to share our experiences. To show that we aren't just capable, but that we love it.

"I guess the other great debate is toilet facilities. This isn't female specific though so is something all train companies should strive to improve upon, freight included. Personally, I haven't found this a barrier at all. My diagrams provide ample opportunities for personal needs breaks. I realise that there are certain jobs within freight that make this more of a challenge but there are always options."

Hard work is underway to attract more females to an industry which is transforming in the UK with opportunities and also fears of a skills shortage.

Heather believes visibility and perception are two of the key areas that need to improve.

She said: "I can think of few jobs that will give you more pride when being asked what you do for a living. It is always a conversation starter, and always gives me great satisfaction.

"Train driving requires many skills and attributes and will provide you with many challenges and rewards.

"For me, freight is the most rewarding of all. Being given the responsibility for 10,000BHP and a 2,000 tonne train is incredible. To drive these trains across the country is such a privilege and there is no reason to feel intimidated as a woman.

“I was very anxious about moving to freight. Would I be accepted? Would it be too physically demanding? The reality is I felt part of the team right away. Everyone cares about the profession and are there to help whenever you need advice, or reassurance.

“Not because you are a woman, but because you are a team and look out for each other. And the aspects of the job that I feared would require strength just requires technique and practise.

“Finally, there is something very special about the ‘railway family’, no matter what part of the railway you work in. You will have friends, and support, the length and breadth of the country.”

To read the first part of the interview click [here](#).