

Rail Industry Executive Survey Report



Executive summary

The number of females in senior positions in the UK rail industry is shockingly low, currently just 1% in C-suite roles.

As a result, the sector is missing out on a wealth of senior talent and the business benefits to be gained when companies improve inclusion and gender balance across their entire workforce.

To gain a clearer picture of the challenges preventing women joining, remaining and, crucially, climbing the career ladder within the industry we launched the SWiFT (Women in Rail): Rail Industry Executive Survey.

The survey results cast a spotlight on the barriers to gender balance at C-suite level. But, at the same time, many of the comments and opinions received also help to map a way forward - with positive suggestions to create a much more gender inclusive culture within UK rail.

SWiFT and Women in Rail (WR) are grateful to everyone who took the time to take part in the survey, with the results informing and guiding our activities going forward.

Looking forward, into 2022/23, we also asked respondents how they would prefer SWiFT events to take place and the majority (76%) wanted these to be a blend of face-to-face and virtual, preferably on weekday evenings (59%). We will be factoring this into our events programme planning.

Shamit Gaiger, SWiFT leadership team member and WR trustee



Background and objectives

SWiFT is an integral part of WR with the aim of supporting career progression and to drive an improvement in gender diversity at senior level.

By providing space and support for our executive members of all genders through a peer-to-peer network (Teal Network) and fostering the development of high potential women in our industry as a pipeline to more senior roles (Blue Network), SWiFT's objective is to help shift the dial in respect to the number of women in executive roles in the UK rail sector.

SWiFT launched the Rail Industry Executive Survey in 2021 to obtain the views of senior rail executives on what they perceive are the barriers to improving gender balance at senior level in the railway and, more generally, how to support the progression of women to leadership roles in the sector.

Engaging with more than 140 senior leaders within UK rail, the survey responses will be used to determine future SWiFT and WR initiatives and events.

Survey method

Senior rail executives were invited to take part in the SWiFT (Women in Rail): Rail Industry Executive Survey via direct email. We are thankful to the Rail Industry Association that helped us reach their senior members.

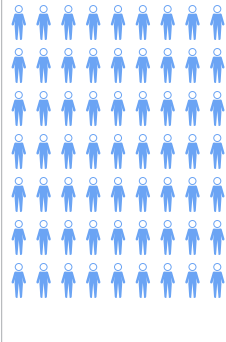
A total of 141 respondents completed or partially completed the questionnaire. Percentage figures quoted in the report have been rounded up or down to the nearest whole number.

Survey Respondents by Gender:

Female - 75



Male - 63



Undisclosed - 2



Non-binary - 1



Survey Respondents by Role:

Board Member
23%

C-Suite
13%

Manager
10%

Other - 2%

Senior Leadership Team
52%

Survey Results

The survey revealed that 60% of respondents were either 'very dissatisfied' or 'dissatisfied' with the industry's current gender balance. Just one participant was 'very satisfied' with the status quo.

A majority (69%) would also welcome a voluntary gender balance target for senior positions, with 16% declining to answer whether they were in favour or against.

Meanwhile, 34% of respondents think an acceptable target for females in C-suite roles by 2030 should be 30%. While 14% believe it should be 50% by that date.

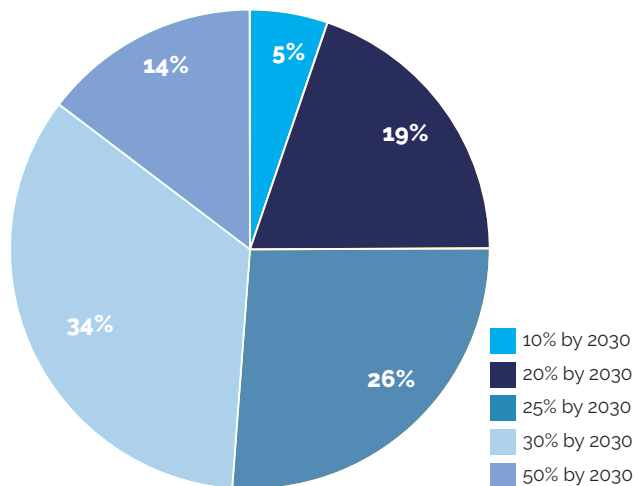
Asked what key skills they are seeking at C-suite level (with the opportunity to select up to 5 from 17 options), strategic thinking came out top (76%), followed by empowering leadership style (62%), emotional intelligence (55%), communication skills (50%) and authenticity (49%). The least relevant skills were deemed to be being a technical expert in a specific field (6%) and financial skills (7%).

Creating a high performing team (85%) was judged to be the greatest benefit of a gender-balanced leadership team. An engaged leadership came second with 71%, innovation 43% and financial performance was considered to be the least important with 14%. (Respondents were invited to select all that applied.)

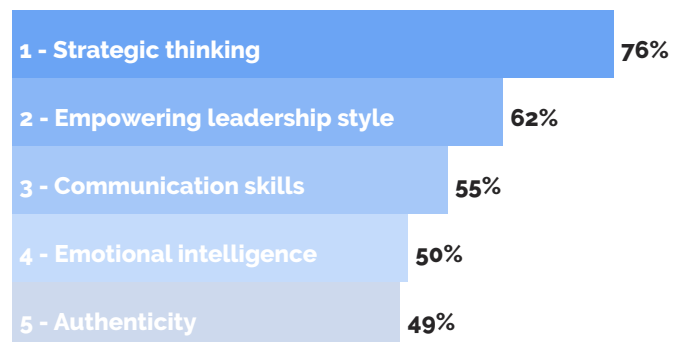
Asked to select the two greatest challenges in reaching gender balance in senior positions, an insufficient talent pipeline recorded 64%, followed by there being insufficient role models with 46%. The culture of paying lip service to gender balance within the industry was 38% and the poor image of the industry 36%.

Respondents were also asked to rank a number of initiatives from which senior industry leaders and members of SWiFT would most benefit - whether face-to-face or virtual.

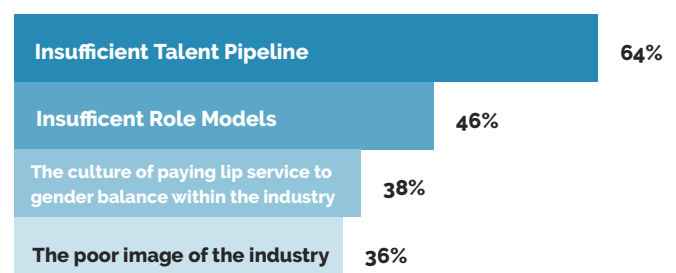
Acceptable target for females in C-suite roles by 2030



5 most relevant key skills in C-suite roles:



Greatest challenges in reaching gender balance in senior positions:



Mentoring or coaching proved most popular, with 79% considering this would be 'most beneficial' or 'beneficial'.

75% considered small groups or seminars for personal growth would be 'most beneficial' or 'beneficial'.

65% thought small group interviews and interactions with successful business leaders from outside the sector would be 'most beneficial' or 'beneficial'.

Invited to choose the top five topics/areas of activities they would like to see Women in Rail and SWiFT explore, the benefits of leadership team diverse thinking came out top (63%) followed by authentic leadership (55%), tackling the diversity challenge (53%), how to influence/drive change from a position of no direct authority (52%) and high performing teams (50%).

The survey invited comments on what needs to be done to increase gender balance at C-suite, with 103 responses highlighting a wide range of issues.

Just some of the comments, suggestions and opinions are below:

IMPROVING WORK/LIFE BALANCE

- Providing better support for women balancing careers with motherhood
- Ensure flexibility in the workplace is part of the culture e.g. "in my organisation Board Meetings are always scheduled for half term holidays, it's just very old fashioned and restrictive"
- Innovative and inspiring flexible working allowances made for high potential women
- The all-hours culture limits many people
- Moving away from all networking events being in the evening, to accommodate those with family and caring commitments

CHANGING PERCEPTIONS & EARLY ENGAGEMENT

- Revamp sector image as not just being male
- We need to address perception of male industry to enable pipelines
- The perception of a lot of women is that they don't believe they can have a family and be a senior manager. They feel that being a mother will put off employers
- Early engagement with females to promote career options
- Break down some of the traditional gender imbalance within the sector and encourage more engineering roles to be suitable for women

RECRUITMENT

- More open minded view to recruit executive leaders that do not necessarily have ingrained whole career railway experience, but do have relevant leadership experience
- An aggressive change programme to make current male leaders accept that diversity of thought from outside the rail industry is to be embraced, not dismissed
- Use an independent team to help the non-diverse recruiting teams recognise effective leadership skills that are different from their own which they may be blind to
- Recruitment beyond the sector to bring in women from other industries who can provide different insights (we place too high a priority on industry-specific knowledge in many areas), and gender balanced panels for senior appointments
- Changing the recruitment factors that currently favour the appearance of confidence, and can work against women.





RETENTION & CAREER DEVELOPMENT

- Supporting women better to return to work after [having] children
- Open up the networks to people outside of the current inner circles. It can be hard to breakthrough the 'graduate' or informal networks that exist and can exclude people who joined through non-traditional routes or who are BAME
- Training women to understand their skills and how they can be used
- Sponsoring female colleagues to ensure they are developing the skills needed to take on a C-suite role
- Accelerated development of younger talent and promotion from within

TALENT PIPELINE

- There needs to be improvements in the pipeline, with coaching to encourage risk taking and breaking down personal barriers to applying for senior positions.
- We need to attract more female graduates, apprentices and trainees, to create a pipeline
- Actively attract, support, promote and retain female talent to build real capability to support gender balance in the talent pipeline and champion that talent in the business
- Support for women to gain experience and opportunity when they are in the junior part of their career would mean more coming through for executive opportunities

GENDER-BALANCED C-SUITE

- The [gender] targets need to be made mandatory, driven by the Department for Transport as they agree franchise contracts. We know the business case stacks up so we need to be bold and set challenging targets to drive change
- There needs to be more recognition of the importance of gender balance in C-suite roles from those recruiting, client organisations and the government. To achieve this more education is required at all levels
- Identification, development and coaching for candidates with the potential and aspiration to operate at C-suite level
- Commitment to interview women for those [C-Suite] roles and gender diverse interview panels

CELEBRATE SUCCESS

- Publicising great stories of successful women in many different roles will help to change the image of rail and attract more talent into the business
- Better promotion and visibility of senior women and insights into how to navigate the path to C-suite
- More recognition of the contribution that women make to the industry

Join SWiFT today

Senior Women in (or **Formerly in**) UK rail or **Transport** and their male allies.

SWiFT's objective is to shift the dial in respect to the number of women in executive roles in the UK rail sector and, in line with the Women in Rail core values, to further promote equality, diversity and inclusion in our industry, with a focus on executive grades and roles.

SWiFT has two membership options available:

Blue membership provides senior high potential women in our industry a platform to help progress their career and transition to C-Suite roles establishing rail's future senior talent pipeline - aimed at women looking to rise within the industry to include amongst others:

- "Board Ready" development workshops
- Leadership Talks from male and female executives in other industries
- Access to resources and senior and live board job vacancies
- Peer-to-peer networking events

Cost: £150.00 per annum

Teal membership provides space and support for its executive members, women senior leaders and their male allies, through a peer-to-peer network (C-Suite) to include amongst others:

- Exclusive A-list speaker dinners with QA
- Leadership Talks exploring the issues facing C-suite executives
- Access to resources and NED/Trustee and executive vacancies
- Peer-to-peer networking events

Cost: £250.00 per annum

For more information on the SWiFT initiative, and how you can become a member, please email: swift@womeninrail.org.

