

**Women in Transport in Wales**

**October 2022**

**Executive Summary**

Women in Transport has a growing profile across the UK, providing support and network for women working in the industry and aiming to increase gender equality in the sector. Recently, Transport for Wales and Welsh Government have proposed to bring a regional hub of Women in Transport to Wales to provide a central point of support and professional development for women already working in the sector or considering a career in transport in Wales.

To inform the work of the hub, research was carried out to map where women are working in the transport sector in Wales and to understand their experiences. Through both quantitative and qualitative analysis, this report identifies some of the key areas for action it’s recommended that the Women in Transport Hub Wales focus on.

The transport sector is crucial to many aspects of our lives and is essential to keeping our economy functioning. It’s a sector that offers a wide range of jobs and careers, is going through transformative change as we respond to the climate crisis and is likely to grow in Wales. However, it’s well documented that women remain under-represented in this sector, leaving them at risk of missing out on opportunities for well-paid roles, that offer good opportunities for progression.

**Where are women working?**

Recent figures show that *Transport and Storage Information, and Communication[[1]](#footnote-2)* sectors’ workers make up 6.9% of the whole workforce in Wales (9.6% in the UK). Hugely critical to Welsh and the UK economy, the sector, however, is subjected to a significant gender gap; women make up only 20% of the workforce of the Transport and Communications industry in Wales (26.2% in the UK).[[2]](#footnote-3) The gap widens as it goes down to subsectors: women only make up 6.7% of the workforce of *Transport and Mobile Machine Drivers/Operators* in Wales (6.6% in the UK).[[3]](#footnote-4)

Across the eight transport companies that provided their equality and diversity data for this research, women account for just 21% of the workforce. The majority of men working in the sector are aged 50-64, while the majority of women are aged 35-49, a pattern that was more pronounced among the bus companies that participated in the research.

While the sample size when disaggregated by gender and ethnicity was small, we can conclude that the transport sector is not ethnically diverse. Men from ethnic minority backgrounds make up 3.3% of the workforce in the sample group, and women from ethnic minority backgrounds make up 4.1% of the workforce in the sample group. Similarly, disabled people are also under-represented, with just 1.2% of the men working in transport identifying as disabled, and just 3% of the women doing so.

Women are notably under-represented in the occupational groups traditionally associated with men, particularly among engineer, vehicle maintenance and drivers, and while they are under-represented at all levels of seniority there appears to be a particular issue at more junior levels – 37% of executives and directors across our sample are women, compared to just 13% of intermediate roles and 18% of entry level roles.

The data aligns with existing figures and demonstrates the scale of the challenge that still remains to achieve greater diversity and gender-balance in the transport sector in Wales. Improving the representation of women in roles more traditionally associated with men is a clear priority, but there is also a need to address the large gender gap evident among more junior roles. Without action to build this pipeline, it will remain challenging to achieve gender balance in decision.

**What are women’s experiences?**

There is no single reason for this under-representation of women in the transport sector. Based on our discussions with those working in the sector we can identify a number of factors that may be contributing to the relatively lower numbers of women entering and progressing in the transport sector.

The reputation and perception of the sector continue to create barriers. Rooted in historical images of the sector, the idea of it being largely dirty, physical and difficult work persists. Linked to this, is the ongoing influence that gender stereotypes exert on people’s educational and career choices.

Working in a men-dominated sector also creates challenges. While overt discrimination is rare, there remain more subtle, complex factors that are perpetuating gendered structures and attitudes that in turn lead to inequality. Some women feel they are judged differently or have to prove themselves, especially in roles traditionally seen as ‘male’. Culture is identified as the issue here, as much as individual attitudes. It’s also important to note that given the interrelated nature of the transport sector, good practice in one or two companies is not enough, we need to see change across the sector as a whole.

To cope with this work environment and workplace culture, women adapt and change their own behaviour, or develop the resilience they need to deal with it. We need to see a shift away from individualised coping mechanisms to sector-wide, institutional and organisational change.

Structural gendered issues remain a problem. Recruitment can favour traditional education and training pathways and risk reinforcing stereotypes. Progression pathways can be unclear, and while it’s seen that opportunities are open to all, in reality women are often encountering barriers to taking up these opportunities. There may be a need to shift in perspective from merely providing equality of opportunity to focusing on equitable outcomes.

There can also be a lack of support around childcare, flexible working and part-time work, a lack of diversity among decision-makers and in some cases very physical barriers related to a lack of facilities for women and poorly fitting PPE.

All of these factors are impacting the recruitment and retention of women in the transport sector. They also help identify a number of action areas that we recommend focusing on.

**Action Areas**

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| **Improving the perception of the sector** Making the sector an attractive place for people from all backgrounds is key. Challenging traditional images of the sector, targeted campaigns towards under-represented groups and showcasing relatable role models can all be useful in shifting perceptions  | **Pathways into the sector** Clear, inclusive and accessible pathways into the sector are crucial. Looking at current pathways through an equalities lens, identifying where women are or are not engaging and taking action are all important steps.Reaching out to younger women is integral to the future diversity of the sector |
| **Pathways within the sector** Progression pathways need to be visible, accessible and inclusive. Progression shouldn’t be negatively affected by career breaks or part-time work and targeted schemes for women and others who are currently not progressing easily in the sector may be needed.  | **The organisation of work**Work in the transport sector cannot continue to be organised around an outdated male norm. Greater provision of part-time and flexible working are needed, along with greater support with childcare and around pregnancy and maternity.  |
| **Stamping out discrimination and banter and changing attitudes**Gender stereotypes still shape behaviour in places, with outdated attitudes and banter affecting women’s experiences. Work is needed to educate the existing workforce as part of building an inclusive culture. This has to happen across the sector a, particularly areas where women remain significantly under-represented. | **Diversity in Leadership** Stepping up efforts to diversify the leadership in the sector is important. It can help ensure that gendered issues are recognised and tackled. This may require targeted leadership development schemes, reviewing leadership recruitment practice and looking at ways of bringing in people from outside the sector who have transferable skills.  |

1. Annual Population Survey Apr 2021-Mar 2022. Transport and Communications (SIC 2007 H,J codes). Retrieved via Nomis. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Annual Population Survey (APS), Jan-Dec 2021 Transport and Communications (SIC 2007 H,J codes). Retrieved via NOMIS. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. Annual Population Survey (APS), Apr 2021-Mar 2022. Industry by gender: 82: Transport & mobile machine drivers/operatives (SOC2020). Retrieved via Nomis. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)