

SUBMISSION FROM FIRSTGROUP PLC

Background:

FirstGroup welcomes initiatives that encourage women to seek employment in the transportation industry. FirstGroup has an Equal Opportunities Policy; the purpose of which is to ensure that all employees are treated equally and with fairness and consistency at all times.

FirstGroup's Rail and Bus operations ideally would reflect the communities they serve. However, historically the transportation industry as a whole has had difficulty attracting females into its workforce.

Response to inquiry request – Women and work:

Responses to the specific difficulties raised regarding women and employment take into account the various work environments from across our UK businesses (Rail and Bus operations).

Workforce issues

Many of our businesses have taken steps to adjust shift patterns where possible, but it has proved difficult to make substantial changes due to the nature of public transport timetables – peak periods of demand do not coincide with working mothers' availability. We do have a number of staff members on flexible working arrangements including part time, job share and compressed working hours.

Occupational segregation

Studies have shown that the transportation industry as a whole has difficulty attracting women into their workforce. A study conducted of the industry in the UK by People 1st found that 78% of the sector's workforce is male and that core occupations are characterised by large gender imbalances. Some roles are still mistakenly associated with a particular gender and the nature of some job roles does mean that they are more attractive to men. Support by the educational sector to encourage a shift in the mindset of females may help in addressing this issue.

Internally our analysis shows a slight increase in the number of applications received from female candidates over the past four years. However, the percentage still remains low. The success rate (employment offers) is consistent with the percentage of applications received, which leads us to believe that the main issue to improve our gender diversity is to attract more interest from female applicants.

We have also investigated our gender makeup within our leadership teams and find that our ratio of women compared to men is only slightly better than the ratio of our workforce in general. We plan to review our succession planning process to ensure it has been fairly applied and all decisions are

made without any gender inequities. Our succession planning process will help identify key future women leaders and provide mentors for female employees at lower levels within the organisation.

In response to Lord Davies' report on Women on Boards, we have stated publically on our website the following:

"We are also supportive of Lord Davies' aim to raise the proportion of women on UK boards and will work towards an aspiration of 20% of board positions filled by women by 2015, subject to the availability of candidates with the right skills and experience."

In the coming year we plan to investigate further the barriers behind the low numbers of women in the transportation industry. In addition, we plan to target more recruiting efforts at local female-oriented community groups in an effort to attract more women applicants.

The remaining issues/difficulties outlined in your request for information do not apply directly to our business. We hope the above provides useful information for the Equal Opportunities Committee.

Kim Kutcher
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FirstGroup plc
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