



Go North East Washington depot manager, Sophie Moorby.

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The wheels on the bus industry are turning fast, writes Sophie Moorby.

At 23, Sophie Moorby from Ponteland is our youngest ever depot manager. She's responsible for 160 employees and 60 buses. She explains what it's like to work in a predominately male-dominated industry and why more women should get on board.

“There are clearly very talented women in the work place we just need to make sure that they know what a great industry this is to work in and that the old preconceptions, that women wouldn't be welcome, are not true.”

The bus industry is often labelled 'old school' in the negative sense. The implication is that the industry hasn't changed much over recent years. In reality, behind the scenes, it is one of the most innovative industries around.

The very nature of the business means that it has no choice but to move with the times. Every year throws up a new challenge to tackle and overcome – whether it's the ever increasing traffic levels on the road, the threat of the Buses bill or the pressures to be greener, the need for change is ever present. The industry is constantly evolving and improving simply to ensure that we keep pace with the required changes.

Whilst the industry is changing there are some aspects of being 'old school' that are positive. By this I mean the level of respect and camaraderie that comes from being part of the bus industry. Whilst not everyone agrees with everything that happens there is a general level of respect that is given, regardless of age or gender.

Although this may be deemed to be old school, it's this unexpected, but welcome, behaviour that allows someone like myself to come in to the industry and have the opportunity to contribute.

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As a young female manager I was nervous about how I would be received and I had preconceived ideas about the industry. Having completed my first year as a depot manager I can honestly say that, whilst I was apprehensive at first, I have really enjoyed my time at the depot.

I have been fortunate to work for a company that has put so much faith in me, allowing me the freedom and resources to implement my own ideas and initiatives. In addition I work with a driving team that has a wealth of knowledge and experience and an openness to teach me.

But is enough being done and what incentives would I like to see put in place? My answer to this is two-fold – putting incentives in place to encourage diversity in my opinion implies; 1. That this isn't the right place for

women to work in 2. that the bus industry doesn't have much to offer. Either way I would fiercely argue that neither of these are true.

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We need to encourage diversity of all natures. The industry as a whole needs to advertise the innovations and opportunities that it offers. The wealth of knowledge and experience that a young manager can learn from working in this industry is unrivalled.

Go North East recently hosted its 65th annual long service awards with the longest-serving driver being awarded for 45 years. There is no other industry that I know of that attracts and retains employees for their entire careers and as such the lessons that can be learnt from these people are second to none.

In conclusion, the bus industry needs to do more to encourage diversity by demonstrating the vast array of opportunities and experience that it has to offer.

Not only the wealth of knowledge, but the innovations that we are putting in place in terms of engineering, recruitment, training and service support provide such a vast range of opportunities as well as the flexible working hours make it an industry accessible to everyone.

But like I said, we are not doing enough to tell people about this. We need to break down these common preconceptions and demonstrate that this industry is unlike any other and can provide careers that last a lifetime.

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