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Diversity is a key theme for society and for the world at large — the acceptance and welcoming of others, regardless of gender, ethnic origin, nationality, religion, beliefs or disability. Intolerance fuels divisions and differences, with consequences that can adversely impact communities and individuals, sometimes disastrously.

Closer to home, the UK's Royal Academy of Engineering created a 'Diversity Concordat' a few years ago, and the IRSE, with many other professional engineering institutions, is a signatory to it. It is a voluntary agreement between the institutions, and has implications for our mission, strategy and activities which are of significance for the IRSE around the world, not just in the UK. At our April Council meeting we revised our Strategy and Action Plan for 2015-2020 to include actions that aim to promote inclusion and actively seek to make people of diverse backgrounds feel welcome as members of the Institution. You can find the updated Strategy and Plan under the **About** tab of the IRSE website.

One important element (but not the only one) is the need to focus more than ever on attracting women into the engineering profession. Only 7% of the IRSE's membership are women, a figure which is appallingly low. We should take little comfort from the fact that, in most parts of the world, this is the same proportion as are working in the field of railway engineering generally. We have for some years been lamenting the shortage of skilled people to work in our industry — and yet there is this largely untapped resource of women that could form a significant part of the solution. Evidently we are not doing enough to make our industry and our profession attractive to them.

There is one hopeful sign, although we should not take too much comfort from it. In the last 2-3 years the proportion of women applying to join the IRSE has actually risen, and is now around 15%. So it appears that there are more women entering our industry, if this measure is anything to go by. But it still means that for every five male applicants, we have just one female. We as an industry need to work together to actively breakdown the stereotypes, and promote ourselves by showcasing the fulfilling opportunities that this industry offers. Only by doing this can we attract and retain the resources and skills required to deliver a railway of the future that meets the needs of its users.

**Francis How, Chief Executive**



Front Cover: Prof Roger Dixon of Loughborough University with the Repoint switch machine demonstrator. Read more about this radical new approach to a long-standing railway challenge in the article on page 11.

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