

Inspiring a younger generation into STEM and the Aviation Industry

Our goal: Inspiring young people to explore careers in STEM and aviation, to support and encourage their future career choices.

How can you help? By sharing your story

Name & job role:	Kirsten Riensema Head of Strategic Relationships
What did you enjoy doing when you were younger?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - My dad used to set me mathematical puzzles and see how fast I could solve them – it was a special time together. - Reading detective stories.
What were your favourite subjects in school? Why?	Algebra, geometry and physics because they were logical, unlike languages.
What or who inspired you to study these?	My dad. He was interested in my maths homework and I felt encouraged to be good at it. The idea that math or physics was not for girls never entered my mind.
Did you do work experience? Where and did it help in choosing your career path?	During University I had an internship at Philadelphia International Airport. In my second week, all of the unionised employees went on strike and I ended up working 12 hours shifts as a janitor in the terminals for 3 weeks. I was working alongside all the managers and directors, and I guess they liked my attitude because they offered me a permanent job (not as a janitor but as an operations officer)!
What was your first job?	<p>In high school I worked in a nursing home.</p> <p>My first job after school was as an Operations Officer at Philadelphia International Airport (see question above). It involved assigning aircraft stands and managing the employee airside ID system which had just become law.</p>
How did you arrive where you are in your career?	While I was working for PHL international airport, I was approached by two airlines (Northwest and British Airways). For a while I worked part time for both of them, before becoming a full-time BA ticketing and flight planning agent and then the station duty manager at Atlanta. I married an Englishman and came to work at Heathrow as a dispatcher calculating aircraft mass and balance and managing all aspects of departures.

	<p>From there I joined the CAA as an aerodromes policy expert and have been with the CAA in various roles for 15 years now.</p> <p>The highlight of my career so far was being posted to Montreal at the International Civil Aviation Organisation helping to oversee the technical annexes for global civil aviation safety.</p>
What do you love about your current job?	I love collaborating with colleagues inside the CAA, the industry and internationally to improve aviation safety. On safety, everyone is willing to collaborate and share lessons learnt to help us all to improve.
What were the biggest challenges/barriers you had to overcome?	There have been times when it was a challenge to get people to take me seriously as a woman and I struggled to get heard over everyone else. Interestingly I was accepted more quickly when I worked in operational roles, perhaps because I was able to demonstrate my capabilities more quickly.
Who have you looked up to and why?	People who able to motivate and inspire and get things done while retaining a human touch.
What is your ambition?	To continue to work with a broad collection of people to improve aviation so people can connect with their loved ones in a safe and green manner.
What is the best advice you were given?	It is not advice per se, but I would say my work ethic. My parents encouraged me to do my best and apply myself, and that I could do what I put my mind to.
What advice would you give a younger you?	Don't be afraid of failure. If an opportunity presents itself, always think 'why not?' instead of 'why'. Take a chance and see where it leads you. If you apply yourself with enthusiasm and curiosity, you will end up in a better place.

Any additional comments:



Thank you for sharing your journey.