

England 1 Germany 5

No, that's not a soccer score, it's the number of conference attendees sent from Germany (5) and England (1) to the conferences so far. Hopefully the number from England will increase this autumn when the 17th conference of the Netzwerk Feuerwehrfrauen (Network of female firefighters) takes place in Solingen from 2nd – 4th November. The German conference is small, compared to the English one but we do have some really good workshops to choose from and we also know how to network and party...

We expect about 90 attendees from all over Germany and this time we'll have some guests from South Africa. Maybe we should also offer a chocolate fountain to increase the number of participants! When Silke and I arrived at Luton airport, we acclimatized ourselves with the English 'summer' and put on several layers of extra clothes. At least the rain was warm!

Petra Barneveld picked us up and we drove together to the Fire Service College. Upon arrival we immediately bumped into some old friends and I think after the "knock out" we also had some new ones.



The opening ceremony and the party were a lot of fun and we found waking up in the morning one of our hardest tasks! The workshops we choose were excellent and we got lots of ideas for our own network. The Saturday night party was also great fun, despite not being a big Robbie Williams fan and the chocolate fountain and Tequila were fabulous. We danced for most of the evening and were once again subdued with the 'last order' thing you guys have in your bars. I don't think we'll ever get used to that. We were lucky to have chosen our Sunday morning workshop - Rope Rescue. It felt good to be outside in the fresh air, even if it was a bit damp. After many good-byes we had to head back to Luton. I'm sure we made lots of new friends and hopefully some of you will find your way to Germany to experience even worse weather at our conference! Hopefully some of us will come back to England next year and renew our friendships.

Thank you for such a great weekend.

Susanne Klatt and Silke Klanke
Netzwerk Feuerwehrfrauen,
Germany



Networking Women

RTC Advanced Workshop

For the first time I offered, and was subsequently able to be involved as an Instructor on an operational workshop - RTC Advanced - organised by London. Although I had been involved as a delegate at previous conferences, this year I saw it from a completely different angle. All the delegates (which included one of our male colleagues) were keen to get stuck in and get as much out of the workshop as possible. Confidence levels were brimming, everyone worked together in teams and you would never have guessed they didn't work together every day! I saw some of the delegates change from being fairly unconfident at first, gradually coming forward to ask questions and try the procedures themselves, to positively brimming with confidence by the end of the day. They were also able to give the team of Instructors some really positive feedback about what information and techniques they would like to see included in future workshops.

Although I am now confident in my abilities as a firefighter and instructor, I remember from years gone by that one of things I really hated was the feeling of being compared to my male colleagues, and of then feeling the need to have to excel at things so that people did not view women Firefighters negatively. I felt that if I made any mistakes it would reflect badly on the small number of other women Firefighters around me. Perhaps I created these feelings in my own head, but I dreaded some practical sessions in case I couldn't do something! I've met plenty of women over the years from other Fire & Rescue Services who I know have felt the same, so to see so many women, skilled, confident and ready to give it their all was a real buzz for me.

Having the chance to be an Instructor during that weekend was for me a real energizer - I think it would be a very positive and empowering thing if we could have more women instructing other women, and I hope next year a few more of us will put ourselves forward. Ladies - we make absolutely wonderful Instructors, give it a go!!

Jan Morris
Avon FRS

