The Voices of Women: Leadership and gender in the further education sector
Research Publication Notices

Research Reports

Many of the documents in this series are prepublication/preprint articles, which may subsequently appear (part or whole) in peer reviewed journals and books. In most cases they are draft documents, the purpose of which is to foster discussion and debate, prior to publication elsewhere, whilst ideas are still fresh. Further information about the research programme and other papers in this series can also be found at the following websites:
http://www.lsis.org.uk or http://www.lums.lancs.ac.uk/leadership/cel/

Citation Notice

Citation should conform to normal academic standards. Please use the reference provided or, where a paper has entered into print elsewhere, use normal journal/book citation conventions.

Copyright

The Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS) owns the copyright for all publications it commissions. Permission should be sought before any materials are reproduced. Short sections of text, not to exceed two paragraphs, may be quoted without explicit permission, provided that full acknowledgement is given.

The Learning and Skills Improvement Service

The Learning and Skills Improvement Service aims to accelerate the drive for excellence in the learning and skills sector, building the sector’s own capacity to design, commission and deliver improvement and strategic change. LSIS is dedicated to developing excellent FE provision working in partnership with all parts of the sector to build and sustain self-improvement.

Disclaimer

This project has been commissioned by, but does not necessarily reflect the views of the Learning and Skills Improvement Service.

Contact Details

LSIS: Learning and Skills Improvement Service
Friars House
Manor House Drive
Coventry CV1 2TE
Switchboard: 024 7662 7900 Enquiries: 024 7662 7953 or enquiries@lsis.org.uk  www.lsis.org.uk
## Contents

1 Executive Summary ........................................... 2

2 Introduction ..................................................... 2

3 Research Framework and Theoretical approach .......... 4

4 Methodology .................................................... 7

5 Research Findings ............................................. 10
   5.1 Profile for Sample ......................................... 10
   5.2 Career Progression ....................................... 14
   5.3 Moving Forward ........................................... 26

6 Conclusions and Recommendations ..................... 38

References ....................................................... 43
1 Executive Summary

Why are women so under-represented at principal level? How are we to ensure that the further education sector is selecting the best people to be senior leaders from the widest pool of talent?

This research aimed to identify the career progression barriers for women and recommend good practice that would ensure women are better represented at the top. The report summarises the beliefs, experiences and suggestions of 171 women and men who participated in eight regional research events and 470 women, mainly middle and senior managers, who responded to an online survey.

The majority of participants did believe that there were barriers to career progression. While under half of all respondents reported encountering them, black and ethnic minority women were far more likely to have done so or to report a difficult career path. Barriers were primarily around the need for more flexibility in working arrangements to accommodate childcare, but also around a lack of support from their college and discriminatory attitudes or practices and other factors. It is also clear that there are major issues around levels of self-confidence amongst women compared to men, with far more concern about not being up to the job, or perceiving their skills, experience and knowledge to be a poor match with those needed for principal posts.

Women’s experience and descriptions of the culture in their organisation differed wildly, from an almost Dickensian picture of colleges with a lack of support for individuals or staff and leadership development, to examples of positive cultures where everyone is encouraged to take up development opportunities and plan their career.

Respondents were very clear about who they thought should take some responsibility for encouraging the appointment of more female senior leaders and principals, reporting that college governors, principals, senior management teams, government and public agencies all have a part to play. It is to these groups that the suggestions, based on women’s responses, are directed at the end of this report.

2 Introduction

2.1 Background

The sector needs to recruit its leaders from the full pool of talents. It cannot afford to continue under-recruiting both black and minority ethnic (BME) professionals and women if it is to succeed in addressing current and future challenges. Furthermore, given the profile of our learners and the important role that colleges have in promoting diversity, it is important that our leaders represent the communities that we serve.

The latest Women’s Leadership Network (WLN) research (WLN, 2010) shows that 36 per cent of college principals in England are women, whilst latest workforce statistics
from Lifelong Learning UK (LLUK, 2009) indicate that 64 per cent of the workforce are women.

Who is responsible for redressing the imbalance? The sector as a whole, including supporting agencies, membership organisations, government departments as well colleges and governing bodies must surely take responsibility or else there will be limited or no progress, particularly in a recession.

The WLN, a member-based organisation for the learning and skills sector, is particularly concerned with the under-representation of women in top jobs and seeks to encourage and support women as they progress through management. The WLN also works closely with the Network for Black Professionals (NBP) and collaborates with them on projects such as mentoring for women, both BME and white. The two organisations are also organising a joint diversity conference which will take place in May 2010.

Perceptions and anecdotal evidence in the sector from recruitment specialists, principals and governors indicate concerns that:

- Some governors have a particular image of a principal, which is often male and white, and have difficulty in imagining those that do not conform to this image being effective in the job
- Some governors believe that in a time of recession women may not be up to the tougher requirements of the job
- Many women lack confidence, not believing that they are capable of the top jobs
- Every year fewer suitable candidates apply for senior posts.

2.2 Aim of the research project

Why do women continue to be under-represented at principal level? What action can be taken and by whom?

In October 2009, the WLN and the Learning and Skills Network (LSN) embarked upon a research project on behalf of the Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS) as part of their Practitioner Research Project Scheme 2009-10. Protocol National has supported the project and will be producing a Good Practice Guide. The project has the support of the NBP and of female principals and senior managers across the country who organised and participated in the regional research events during December 2009 and January 2010.

The LSN, in consultation with the WLN and the NBP, also funded and carried out a complementary research project about the motivation of women and men in terms of career progression and their perceptions of essential leadership skills (LSN, 2010). The main findings relating to gender differences are reported briefly in the next section.
Building on the findings and recommendations in the CEL research report (CEL, 2007) referred to in the next section, the aim of the current research was to obtain an updated view from a substantial number of women in further education colleges about the enablers and barriers to career progression, in order to establish clear actions for good practice and to advise the sector on how all players and stakeholders can work towards redressing the gender imbalance.

For the purposes of the research, the further education sector includes staff in general further education colleges and specialist colleges, sixth form colleges, and adult community learning providers. The methodology for the project involved an online survey and regional forums, and the data collected via both strands of work has been analysed together to draw out key findings.

3 Research framework and theoretical approach

3.1 Research context

3.1.1 WLN annual desk research into percentage of female principals

In the last two years, the WLN has taken the initiative in researching the number of female and male principals in all colleges in England, as this information is not currently available. In February 2010, for the second year running, WLN research showed that only 36 per cent of college principals are women.

This should be of concern to the sector as Lifelong Learning UK (LLUK) workforce figures indicate that women constitute 64 per cent of the sector workforce and 60 per cent of its managers (LLUK, 2009). During the last year, seven out of the eight principal posts that disappeared through mergers had been held by a woman.

3.1.2 CEL research report: Gender-related factors in career progression

*Gender-related factors in career progression* (CEL, 2007) reported findings from a research project funded by the Centre for Excellence in Leadership (CEL) and the LSN, that was carried out by LSN for CEL and WLN. The purpose of the research was to: provide information about the numbers and profiles of managers in further education, explore the gender-related enablers and barriers to career progression and identify possible roles for CEL and WLN in addressing the issues.

Data collection was based on information received from 172 colleges. Individual online survey responses were received from 119 women and 90 men, and telephone interviews were conducted with 30 women and 14 men.

The findings and conclusions showed that:

- Women are over-represented in first line management roles but continue to be under-represented at senior management levels and on governing bodies;
• Minority ethnic groups are under-represented in all management levels, particularly at second tier level;
• There is still a significant “glass ceiling” effect;
• There are important contributory factors linked to the impact of career breaks and levels of domestic responsibilities on career progression for women.

The recommendations for CEL and WLN are shown below:
• Establishing national and regional networking opportunities for female managers;
• Setting up mentoring and shadowing schemes;
• Raising awareness about career breaks;
• Providing mandatory governor training on diversity competence;
• Undertaking more work into BME under-representation;
• Undertaking further research into the effects of career breaks;
• Recommendations for updating selection policies, awareness raising and staff development in light of report;
• Identifying best practice to counter discriminatory selection and promotion processes.

The WLN has carried out the first two points and the current research project attempts to further respond to the last three points and to elicit personal views and perceptions from a substantially larger number of women.

3.1.3 WLN/FE Focus questionnaire, June 2009

A brief survey about motivation and general culture in FE, devised by FE Focus and the WLN, was completed by participants at the annual WLN conference in June 2009.

This survey indicated that the most important motivation for the respondents, when considering a principalship, was the “chance to improve learning”, and that the least important was “a high salary”. By far the biggest concern about becoming a principal was “fear that you may not be up to the job or of failure”.

3.1.4 LSN online survey “The next generation of leaders”

An online survey on motivation and leadership skills was funded and carried out by the LSN during October and November 2009. It was designed in collaboration with
the WLN and supported by the NBP. The WLN welcomed the LSN investment in this survey as it was an opportunity to pursue further some of the issues raised in the brief conference questionnaire and the anecdotal evidence reported above.

The aim was to inform succession planning across the sector through developing a better understanding of what motivates people to apply for the top jobs in order to build capacity and diversity into the next generation of college leaders. The survey was sent to all college principals with a request to complete it and pass it on to second tier colleagues. It asked participants about their current role, their interest in becoming a principal, their motivation and their view of the qualities principals need.

The 112 respondents were all principals or second tier senior managers and comprised 50 women and 62 men. The main responses from participants regarding their motivation, their concerns about promotion and their own views of their skills showed some significant gender differences. When asked to consider either how they had felt before becoming principals, or, for second tier managers, how they now felt about a possible move to principalship, the following findings are of relevance:

- Second tier female managers were less likely (57 per cent) than their male counterparts (70 per cent) to show an interest in becoming a principal;
- Women were more likely than men to cite age as a reason for not being interested;
- More men than women had wanted to be a principal from an early age;
- Women were far more likely to have concerns about not being up to the job than men;
- Second tier female postholders were far more likely to say that they had serious or some gaps in skills match for principalship, while men were far more likely to state that they had an excellent skills match and none said they had serious gaps. No women said they were an excellent match;
- Second tier females were also far more likely to say that they had some or serious gaps when it came to experience, whilst men were more likely to say that their experience matched the needs of the job and none said they had serious gaps;
- Whilst second tier women were more confident in their knowledge match, again a very low proportion of second tier women thought they had an excellent match and a higher proportion of women thought they had serious or some gaps. No men thought they had serious gaps and a far higher proportion of men thought they had an excellent match;
- Women were more likely to choose the acquisition of experience and skills as being helpful for career progression than men;
Female principals were more likely than men to have been motivated by being encouraged to apply for the job and more likely to have been motivated by thinking that they could do as good a job, if not better, than the principals they had known.

Also of note: more women than men were commuting on a weekly basis to their job and more men than women had relocated.

Some of these findings are relevant to this research and conclusions and recommendations have taken them into account.

3.2 Theoretical approach

This research into enablers and barriers in women’s career progression aimed to reach large numbers of women through research and discussion meetings held in the nine Learning and Skills Council (LSC) regions of England and an online survey. By taking a regional approach, the partners ensured a geographical spread of responses.

At the inception of the project, female principals in each of the nine Learning and Skills Council regions agreed to be “principal champions”. They then undertook to host the regional research events and to invite participants in their regions during December 2009 and January 2010. The LSN produced a leaflet outlining the research project and its aims, which was circulated at the November Association of Colleges Conference and sent prospective participants.

An online survey covering all the main themes with carefully formulated questions was developed by the LSN through discussion with the partners.

4 Methodology

There were two main components of the data collection process:

- Eight regional events
- A national online survey

4.1 Regional events

Between 2 December 2009 and 31 January 2010, 171 participants (169 women and two men) employed in the further education sector attended eight research meetings in the following locations: East Midlands; West Midlands; North East; North West; London (incorporating Surrey from the South East region); South East (the coastal counties); Yorkshire and Humberside; and East of England. Nine were originally planned with an additional event in one region but two regional meetings were cancelled due to severe winter weather conditions.
Champions in each region hosted and led the events – these were either principals, or representatives from membership organisations supported and assisted by principals. Champions issued invitations, encouraging women, and also men interested in the discussion themes, to attend. A representative from the WLN project team attended all meetings.

Regional meetings started with a brief introduction by a WLN representative, followed by roundtable discussions in groups of between four and six participants around four questions relevant to the themes of the project.

The themed questions were developed through discussion between the partners and were designed to complement the online survey. Copies of the discussion questions are in the Appendices, available in a separate document from LSN or WLN.

After participating in the events, participants were also invited to complete an online survey and to circulate the survey to female colleagues in their institutions. A total of 213 participants were emailed the online survey directly. Further details about the survey process are outlined in the following section.

4.2 National online survey

Questionnaire design and distribution

The online survey was facilitated by LSN’s Statistical Analysis and Survey Unit. Snap Professional survey software was used to programme the online survey and generate a URL link which was dispatched to participants at the events. The survey was live from 3 December 2009 to 15 February 2010.

Participants were then asked to forward the survey to with between 5 and 10 female colleagues in their institution so a broad range of views could be captured.

While the survey was live, responses were closely monitored to ensure that a sufficient response rate was achieved. A week prior to the closing date of the survey, a final email reminder containing the original link to the survey was sent out in order to obtain an optimum number of responses.

The online survey, designed by LSN in consultation with partners, included a combination of tick box, multi-choice, ranking and text box questions. It was piloted with a small number of individuals to ensure the questions were reader-friendly and that they gathered appropriate data to support the project objectives. The questionnaire was structured into three main sections, namely:

- Section 1. About you
- Section 2. About your career progression
- Section 3. Moving forward

A copy of the online survey is in the Appendices, available in a separate document from LSN or WLN.
Data analysis

Data checks were carried out on the responses submitted for quality assurance purposes. Duplicate cases were removed and individual responses were checked to ensure that responses were sufficiently completed. The responses were collated and analysed using SPSS and Excel.

The majority of questions within the survey were single or multiple choice questions. However, there were also a number of open ended questions. The open ended questions were grouped into themes to identify key points. Themes have been outlined and summarised throughout the report and are supported with relevant quotes.

An overview of the results for all questions is summarised in this main report and further breakdowns of the data were carried out to examine results according to two key demographic factors:

- Job role; and
- Ethnicity.

Age was also a factor that was examined however minimal differences were noted in the results and therefore only those results observed as significant and noteworthy have been reported. During the analysis stage: statistical differences were observed in most cases between staff in different roles, and staff of different ethnicity groups. In order to generate meaningful results based on substantive sample numbers, the relevant variables were recoded into main categories.

The variables ‘Job role’ and ‘Ethnicity’ were recoded for the purpose of conducting further analysis, as shown in Tables 1 and 2 below:

Table 1. Recoding of variable ‘Job role’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Original categories</th>
<th>Recoded categories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second-tier manager</td>
<td>Second-tier manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle manager</td>
<td>Middle manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First-line manager</td>
<td>First-line manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher/Tutor/Trainer/Lecturer</td>
<td>General staff (teacher/tutor/support staff/other)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support staff</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The category ‘Principal’ was not presented in the breakdown analyses as there were insufficient response numbers (16) to draw out any reliable conclusions.
Table 2. Recoding of variable ‘Ethnicity’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Original categories</th>
<th>Recorded categories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black or black British</td>
<td>Black and minority ethnic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian or Asian British</td>
<td>(BME)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dual heritage</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Ethnic Group</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Due to the small proportion of respondents who were represented by the BME group, percentages presented for this category must be treated with caution as the overall number of BME respondents was considerably lower than respondents of the white ethnic group.

Before finalising the sample size, the data was cleaned to:

- Filter out duplicate responses;
- Remove responses which were not sufficiently complete;
- Remove responses completed by males (in order for the sample to be representative of females views only). A total of 18 responses were submitted by males.

After checking the data for quality assurance purposes, there were 470 valid responses. The survey data tables covering all respondents, respondents by job title and respondents by ethnicity group are in the Appendices document, available in a separate document from LSN or WLN.

5 Research findings

The following sections present the results of the analysis of the 470 responses to the survey, with reference to the outcomes of the regional roundtable discussions where appropriate. The results have been examined according to job role, ethnicity and age, and where statistical significances were identified these have been highlighted in the report. The findings begin with a section outlining the profile of the sample, followed by a section on career progression, with a final section on future planning and moving forward.

5.1 Profile of sample

The first section of the survey collected information on those who completed the online survey.
Role

The majority of the respondents were in management positions which included middle managers (40.5 per cent), second-tier managers (21.7 per cent) or first line managers (13.9 per cent). A small proportion of participants were principals (3.4 per cent). Ten per cent of respondents were in teaching roles and an additional 10.2 per cent were support staff. One respondent indicated ‘Other’, however they did not specify their role.

Over three-quarters of respondents were in management positions and this was in line with the objectives of the research.

Age

The majority of respondents were between the age of 40 and 54. This can be broken down further to shown that 18.4 per cent were aged 40-44, 19.7 per cent were aged 45-49 and 20.5 per cent were aged 50-54.

A significant relationship was found between age and job role. A higher proportion of second tier manager staff and middle manager staff were aged between 45-49 and 50-54, whereas a higher proportion of younger staff aged under 25 and 25-29 were general staff or first line managers.

Ethnic group

The majority of respondents were white (92.1 per cent) and 7.9 per cent were from a BME group. A further breakdown of the BME groups indicated that 3.6 per cent were black or black British, and 2.4 per cent were Asian or Asian British. One per cent of respondents were dual heritage and less than 0.5 per cent were Chinese. Less than 0.5 per cent of respondents declared themselves as ‘Other’ ethnic group, however they did not provide any further information on this.

The ethnic breakdown showed that 7.9 per cent of the sample were from a BME group. This is over-representation compared to national figures for senior managers (3.5%) and other managers (7.5%) in the sector workforce, but slight under-representation compared to the average national profile of the further education workforce (8.4%) (LLUK, 2009).

Disability

Individuals were asked to declare whether they have a disability or not. The majority of respondents (94.9 per cent) indicated that they do not have a disability.
Highest level of qualification

The majority of respondents indicated they held a NQF Level 6/7/8 qualification (81.4 per cent). A further 11.3 per cent indicated they held a NQF Level 4/5 qualification. 4.5 per cent of staff indicated they held a NQF Level 3 and an additional 2.8 per cent indicated their highest qualification was a NQF Level 2.

Organisation

The majority of respondents were working at a general Further Education College (78.2 per cent). A further 14.8 per cent indicated they were working at a sixth form college, with 3.9 per cent at an adult community learning provider and 3.2 per cent at a specialist college (e.g. Agriculture, Arts, etc.).

Region

The regions with the highest proportion of respondents included the South East (28.2 per cent), Greater London (17.5 per cent) and the North West (14.7 per cent). Regions with the lowest proportion of respondents were the West Midlands (4.3 per cent), North East (4.5 per cent) and South West (5.1 per cent). A further two respondents selected ‘Other’ (0.4 per cent), both of whom indicated they were operating on a national level.

Length of time in current role

The length of time that respondents have been in their role can be summarised as:

- 3 to 5 years (28.4 per cent);
- 1 to 2 years (26.1 per cent);
- 6 to 9 years (16.5 per cent);
- Over 9 years (11.3 per cent).

Length of time in current organisation

A higher proportion of respondents have been working in their current organisation for 6 to 9 years (23.1 per cent) and a further 20.0 per cent had been working in their current organisation for 3 to 5 years.

Mode of employment

The modes of employment amongst respondents can be summarised as:

- Full-time (88.8 per cent);
- Part-time (9.9 per cent);
• Sessional (1.3 per cent).

No respondents indicated that they were job sharing.

A significant relationship was found between mode of employment and job roles. It was more common for second tier managers and middle managers to be working full-time (96.1 per cent and 96.8 per cent respectively) in comparison with general staff and first line managers where there was a higher proportion working part-time (32.3 per cent and 12.3 per cent respectively). Only the general staff category included individuals working on a sessional basis (6.3 per cent).

**Contract type**

The majority of respondents were in permanent jobs, with:

- Permanent (96.4 per cent);
- Fixed term (2.4 per cent);
- Casual (0.6 per cent);
- Employed through an agency (0.6 per cent).

All second-tier managers were in permanent jobs, followed by a further 98.5 per cent of first line managers and 97.4 per cent of middle managers. A lower proportion of general staff were in permanent positions (85.4 per cent) and more likely to be in fixed term positions or casual positions (3.1 per cent).

**Career breaks**

The majority of respondents have either had no breaks in their career (44.4 per cent) or a career break which lasted less than 12 months (22.2 per cent). The figure below shows the breakdown of career breaks taken by the respondents.
Q1.13. Have you experienced any breaks in your career, e.g. for maternity leave or any other reason?

240 respondents provided further information as to why they had taken a career break, with the most prevalent reason being to take maternity leave or to look after children.

5.2 Career progression

Section 2 of the questionnaire asked respondents for their opinions on how women were represented in senior leadership roles and about the factors which would enable women to progress to senior management roles. Respondents were also asked to provide their personal views and experiences of their own career development.

Q2.1 How well are women represented in principal roles

Respondents were asked to indicate, on a scale from 1 to 10 (with 1 indicating “very poorly” and 10 indicating “very highly represented”), how well they believe women...
were currently represented in principal roles. Forty per cent selected between 1 and 4, suggesting they felt that women on average were not very well represented in principal roles. Furthermore, 22.2 per cent selected number 5, suggesting that just over a fifth of respondents were indifferent to whether women were well or poorly represented. At the other end of the spectrum, 3.8 per cent felt that women were very well represented.

**Q2.2 How important it is that women are well represented in senior leadership roles**

The responses to this question about the importance of women being represented in senior management roles can be summarised as follows:

- Very important (61.8 per cent)
- Important (35.3 per cent)
- Not very important (1.7 per cent)
- Never considered it (1.3 per cent)

**Job role**

Respondents across all types of job roles felt that it was important that women are represented in senior leadership roles. However, these opinions were slightly stronger amongst middle managers (65.8 per cent felt it was very important), second tier managers (60.8 per cent) and first line managers (60.0 per cent). Just over half of general staff (52.1 per cent) felt that it was very important that women are represented in senior leadership roles.

**Ethnicity**

When the results were investigated further across the ethnicity groups, a significantly higher proportion of BME respondents felt that this was very important (75.7 per cent) compared to those who were classified by the white ethnicity group (60.6 per cent).

**Q2.3 Barriers to progression to senior management roles for women in general and black and minority ethnic women**

Respondents were asked to indicate whether they felt there were barriers preventing women in general, and specifically BME women, from progressing to senior management roles. Eighty-nine per cent of respondents indicated that there were either many or some barriers preventing progression to senior roles for women in general, and a slightly higher proportion (89.5 per cent) indicated likewise for BME women. It is interesting to note that a higher proportion of all respondents felt that there were many barriers for BME women (25.3 per cent) than for women in general (14.1 per cent).
Q2.3. Do you think there were barriers to progression to senior leadership roles for...  

Ethnicity

When analysing the data across the ethnicity groups, a significant difference was noted between the responses of BME and white staff. More than half (57.7 per cent) of BME women felt that there were many barriers for BME women in progression compared to 22.9 per cent of white females in the sample. A lower proportion of BME women felt that there were no barriers (3.8 per cent) in comparison with this perception from white respondents (11.0 per cent).
Figure 3. Total proportion of respondents by perception of whether there were barriers to progression to senior management roles for women in general and black and minority ethnic women: by ethnicity

Q2.3. Do you think there were barriers to progression to senior leadership roles for...

Roundtable discussions

Most groups at the regional research events reported that there were some barriers. A minority of groups thought that there were many barriers or were unsure between “some” and “many”. One group suggested that there were more barriers the further one progressed.

Q2.4 Barriers to career progression that they had encountered

Respondents were asked to indicate whether they had encountered any barriers to career progression. A slightly higher proportion of respondents indicated they have not encountered barriers to career progression (55.6 per cent) in comparison with those who have (44.4 per cent).
**Job role**

When looking at this breakdown across the job roles, barriers to career progression amongst general staff were more common (50.0 per cent) compared to all other types of staff, for example: 32.3 per cent for first-line managers; 34.3 per cent for second tier managers; and 41.1 per cent for middle managers.

**Ethnicity**

There was a significant difference observed between BME and white staff. A considerably higher proportion of BME women have encountered barriers to career progression (74.3 per cent) in comparison to white women (41.9 per cent).

**Age group**

Older age groups were more likely to indicate that they had encountered barriers to their career progression. This includes the 60-64 age group (50.0 per cent) and 45-49 age group (48.9 per cent).

**The different types of barriers to career progression that they had encountered**

Following on from the above section, respondents who indicated that they had encountered barriers in their career progression were asked to identify what were the main barriers they had come across. This was a multi-choice question where respondents could select more than one option from a list. The following proportions were based on the total number of responses (n=590). As displayed in figure 4 below, the top five barriers encountered by women in descending order included: domestic or family commitments; lack of organisational structures for progression; lack of mentoring or career coaching; poor line management; and lack of confidence. There were 11 respondents that selected ‘Other’, of whom all provided further information. According to the responses provided, other barriers to career progression included childcare, discrimination (racism, ageism, sexism) and male attitudes.

**Ethnicity**

When looking at the overall breakdown by ethnicity for the individual types of career progression barriers, a significant relationship was found between ethnicity and domestic or family commitments. Within this particular category, there was a higher proportion of white respondents who selected domestic or family commitments (20.0 per cent) compared to those of the BME group (5.9 per cent). The top three barriers for each group are listed in Table 3 below.
Figure 4. Total proportion of respondents by type of barrier to career progression

![Bar chart showing the total proportion of respondents by type of barrier to career progression.]

Table 3. Top three barriers encountered by women by ethnicity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>White</th>
<th>BME</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Domestic or family commitments</td>
<td>Lack of organisational structures for promotion (20.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(20.0%)</td>
<td>Lack of mentoring/career coaching (16.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of organisational structures for promotion (14.9%)</td>
<td>Poor line management (12.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor line management (12.1%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Regional event findings: barriers in general

The regional group discussions about barriers to career progression concentrated on the barriers that exist generally, rather than the barriers that individuals had personally experienced. Some of the top five barriers reflect those illustrated in Figure 4 above, but there were some differences.

Family Commitments

As found in the survey, the most commonly identified barrier to progression was family commitments. All of the regional events listed this, as well as the effects of
career breaks. Groups commented that women are often likely to be the primary carer, both for children and for older relatives. Women often take career breaks of varying lengths to have children, and when they return to work they are behind their male peers. Additionally, one group commented that often it is the person on the lower wage that is more likely to take a career break or give up their job to be the primary carer, which is often the woman. This is perhaps self-perpetuating due to less career progression and perhaps because of gender pay inequalities.

Groups commented that there was a lack of flexible working opportunities within senior leadership roles. It was felt that part-time and job-share opportunities are uncommon in principal roles and there is a feeling that the culture surrounding management positions assumes that people should be available “24/7”.

Confidence

The second most common barrier cited by nearly all of the groups, and in every region, is women’s lack of confidence in themselves. Groups commented that women are more likely to need to know the content of something and have direct experience of something, whereas men might instead concentrate on having the competencies for a job and being able to transfer experience from another situation. One group commented that “women fear ‘being found out’, for example, not knowing about finance, employment law”. There is a feeling that men are more assertive, whilst “women tend to be apologetic” and “have a fear of failure”.

Several groups mentioned that men are encouraged to aspire to progress in their careers and see themselves as leaders, but women often are not. Two groups felt that ambitious women can be seen in a negative light, whereas ambitious men are viewed positively. As one participant reported, “Women’s behaviour may be labelled as ‘feisty’ – if a man behaved in the same way then no comment would be made”. Another group commented that, “Women look for validation of their ability to be a principal whereas men assume that they can do the job”.

A variety of observations were made around the behaviours female senior managers have developed in their positions, and how they can often be off-putting to other women. There is a feeling that women do not help other women, both in supporting each other to progress, and in providing a good role model for other women.

Relocation

The third main area that a majority of groups commented on is the need to relocate for senior management positions which can often be problematic due to family commitments. The need to relocate was not cited by groups in the East and West
Midlands, or in the North East, but it is not suggested that there is any regional significance in this.

Culture

The fourth theme identified from the group discussions is around culture generally. Groups observed that governor and senior management positions are predominantly held by men, and so the male culture can be a barrier in itself. One group felt that men and women are managed differently and behaviours towards male and female staff can be different. Several groups commented that women may find it difficult to be heard.

Some groups commented that women in senior management positions within further education do not necessarily progress to them from an education background. Another group commented that women within further education work in areas that are not necessarily associated with senior management roles, for example health and childcare.

Q2.5 Whether there are factors that encourage the following groups into senior leadership roles (women in general and BME women)

Respondents were asked to indicate whether there were any specific factors which encourage women in general and BME women into senior leadership roles. Overall, 83.3 per cent of respondents said that there were factors that encourage women in general and 79 per cent said that there were factors that encourage BME women.

Ethnicity

Overall, women of BME felt more positive about factors encouraging both women in general and women from BME background to progress to senior leadership roles than their white counterparts.—Overall 17.4 per cent of white women thought there were no factors which encouraged women in general compared to the 5.4 per cent of BME respondents who indicated this. In relation to factors available to encourage BME women to progress, again a higher proportion of white respondents felt there were no factors available (21.7 per cent) compared to 14.3 per cent of BME respondents.
Q2.5 (continuation) Factors or activities which would be most effective in enabling women in general and BME women to progress to senior leadership roles

Respondents were asked to select which individual factors would be most effective in enabling women to progress to senior leadership roles. Similarly, respondents were also asked to indicate which factors would be the most effective in enabling BME women to progress to senior leadership roles. This was a multi choice question where respondents were asked to select up to five options from the list provided. The table below displays the six most selected factors enabling women in general and BME women to progress to senior leadership roles. The trends across the ethnicity groups did not differ significantly from the overall results.

Table 4. Summary of factors / activities which would be most effective in enabling women to progress to senior leadership roles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Women in general</th>
<th>BME women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Flexible working arrangements (13.1 per cent)</td>
<td>Sound equalities practice in the recruiting organisation (12.5 per cent)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to professional development and training opportunities (10.8 per cent)</td>
<td>Access to professional development and training opportunities (11.4 per cent).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clear organisational structures for promotion (9.7 per cent)</td>
<td>Mentoring or coaching programmes (11.1 per cent)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good supervision and on the job support (9.3 per cent)</td>
<td>Flexible working arrangements (9.3 per cent)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sound equalities practice in the recruiting organisation (9.1 per cent)</td>
<td>Clear organisational structures for promotion (8.9 per cent)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentoring or coaching programmes (9.0 per cent)</td>
<td>Good supervision and on the job support (8.5 per cent)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Q2.5. Which of the following factors or activities would be the most effective in enabling women to progress to senior leadership roles?

Four respondents stated that there were other enabling factors or activities for women in general in progressing to senior leadership roles. These factors include the availability of childcare facilities and a structured partnership arrangement with others in similar roles.

Q2.6 Their career development path so far

The final question within this section asked respondents to indicate what their own career development path had been like so far. In descending order, respondents thought that:

- It has been mixed, with some minor obstacles/difficulties experienced (56.8 per cent);
- It has been relatively easy with no obstacles/difficulties experienced (33.8 per cent);
• It has been difficult, with several obstacles/difficulties experienced (9.4 per cent).

Respondents were asked to provide further information to support their response for this question. According to the responses provided, reasons as to why staff found their career path to be fairly easy were explained by situations such as: the ability to get a flexible contract to support childcare and access to support and professional development. Inflexible working arrangements, lack of support and encouragement and negative attitudes were the main reasons for female staff having a mixed or difficult career path. Also mentioned were discrimination, a counter-productive organisational culture and support managers unable to progress without a teaching qualification.

Table 5. Quotations from respondents about what their career path has been like so far

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quotation</th>
<th>Job role</th>
<th>Age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It has been relatively easy with no obstacles/difficulties experienced</td>
<td>Middle Manager</td>
<td>55-59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There was some difficulty in getting a variation in contract after my second child was born (1987) but it was agreed.</td>
<td>Middle Manager</td>
<td>35-39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have had a lot of support and guidance to enable me to develop and progress as a manager.</td>
<td>Middle Manager</td>
<td>40-44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It has been mixed, with some minor obstacles/difficulties experienced</td>
<td>First-line Manager</td>
<td>30-34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My barriers have mainly been around the inflexibility of my partner in regards to childcare and travelling opportunities.</td>
<td>First-line Manager</td>
<td>30-34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There have been very few female role models, until very recently, in the organisation I work in, this makes it difficult to aspire to being in a more senior role.</td>
<td>Middle Manager</td>
<td>35-39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It has been difficult, with several obstacles/difficulties experienced</td>
<td>General staff (teacher/tutor/support staff/other)</td>
<td>50-54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motherhood to three children, becoming a single parent, lack of access to childcare, lack of experience in the workplace due to not having access to childcare.</td>
<td>General staff (teacher/tutor/support staff/other)</td>
<td>50-54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Own lack of confidence when dealing with line managers.</td>
<td>Middle Manager</td>
<td>50-54</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Job roles

The highest proportion across all job roles indicated that their career development path so far had been mixed, with some minor obstacles/difficulties experienced. Looking at the other two categories in more detail, a higher proportion of general staff
(17.7 per cent) indicated it had been difficult, compared to the 6.9 per cent of second tier managers who were represented by this category.

In contrast to this, a higher proportion of second tier managers indicated that it has been relatively easy with no obstacles/difficulties experienced (39.2 per cent) in comparison to the 29.2 per cent of general staff:

**Figure 6. Total proportion of respondents by what their career development path has been like so far: by job role**

Q2.6. What has your own career development path been like so far?

**Ethnicity**

Having compared this question against the ethnicity group, a statistically significant relationship was found. As displayed in the chart below, a higher proportion of white respondents stated that it has been relatively easy (36.1 per cent) in comparison with those of the BME ethnicity group (5.4 per cent). Inversely, a higher proportion of BME respondents stated that it has been difficult (18.9 per cent) in comparison with those of the white ethnicity group (8.6 per cent).
Q2.6. What has your own career development path been like so far?

### 5.3 Moving forward

The purpose of Section 3 of the questionnaire was to gather data on women’s views on how the representation of women in senior leadership roles in the further education sector can be improved and whether there are gender differences in leadership.

**Q3.1 What is needed (to improve women’s representation in the future)**

Respondents were asked to indicate whether there is a need for any of the actions listed in the figure below. This was a multiple choice question where respondents were asked to select up to five options. The following percentages were based on the total number of responses (n= 1,488).
Q3.1. Do you think there is a need for any of the following?

Respondents who selected ‘Other’ were invited to provide further information. The 15 respondents who selected ‘Other’, all provided additional information which included having a more evenly distributed gender balance within senior management, having regular equal pay audits, job shadowing and mentoring, having flexible working hours, and childcare provision and facilities.

This quotation illustrates a particular concern regarding support staff and their career progression:

‘The issue here is, why is there a prejudice against support managers, whether they be male or female. The reason this is a woman’s issues is that most support staff were women - is this the reason why this type of job is not valued?’

(Middle Manager, aged 40-44)

Another expresses frustration over inequalities in social role expectations:
‘Support for women with children as this will impact on progression to leadership. Inequalities in social role expectations (parenting) will act as a ‘bottleneck’ to progression and I do not think this survey has really addressed this, or explicitly recognised it as an issue.’

(General staff, aged 40-44)

This respondent has particular concerns about the assumption that principals have to “live their jobs”:

‘We need to explode the myth that Principals have to live their jobs to be successful. Few women wish to / were in a position to ignore the needs of their families. Women will not apply for or be successful in gaining top posts until it is accepted that even Principals can and should have lives outside the college.’

(Second tier manager, aged 40-44)

Job roles

When comparing the following factors across all job roles, some differences were noted. The highest proportion of respondents across all job roles selected ‘organisational management support to enable women to participate in networks / events’. This accounted for 17.4 per cent of second tier managers, 16.7 per cent of middle managers, 22.8 per cent of first-line managers and 16.0 per cent of general staff. The table below displays the top five options across all types of job roles. The following table has been colour-coded to identify the trends.

Table 6. Ranked responses for whether there is a need for any of the following: by job role

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Second tier manager</th>
<th>Middle manager</th>
<th>First-line manager</th>
<th>General staff</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Organisational / management support to enable women to participate in networks / events (17.4%)</td>
<td>Organisational / management support to enable women to participate in networks / events (16.7%)</td>
<td>Organisational / management support to enable women to participate in networks / events (22.8%)</td>
<td>Organisational / management support to enable women to participate in networks / events (16.0%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. More female principals (15.1%)</td>
<td>More networks/forums for women leaders (16.0%)</td>
<td>Government initiatives specifically for women (13.8%)</td>
<td>Publication of women’s work and achievements (12.6%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3. Increase in the number of women governors (13.1%)  
   More female principals (13.8%)  
   More networks/forums for women leaders (12.7%)  
   Increase in the number of women governors (12.6%)

4. More networks/forums for women leaders (11.8%)  
   Government initiatives specifically for women (11.4%)  
   More female principals (9.5%)  
   Specific opportunities for female learners' voices to be heard (11.9%)

5. Celebrations of women's contributions (e.g. national/regional/local awards and recognition) (11.8%)  
   Increase in the number of women governors (10.3%)  
   Publication of women's work and achievements (9.5%)  
   Government initiatives specifically for women (10.9%)

Ethnicity

When the following data was analysed across the ethnicity groups, a statistically significant relationship appeared between ethnicity and the need for organisational / management support to enable women to participate in networks / events. A higher proportion of BME respondents thought organisational / management support to enable women to participate in networks / events was needed (21.8 per cent) compared to those of the white ethnicity group (17.0 per cent) and the overall percentage for this category (17.5 per cent). The top five categories within each ethnicity group were outlined in the table below.

Table 7. Ranked responses for whether there is a need for any of the following, by ethnicity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>White</th>
<th>BME</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Organisational / management support to enable women to participate in networks / events (17.0%)</td>
<td>Organisational / management support to enable women to participate in networks / events (21.8 per cent)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>More networks/forums for women leaders (13.1%)</td>
<td>More networks/forums for women leaders (14.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>More female principals (12.8%)</td>
<td>More female principals (14.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Increase in the number of women governors (11.9%)</td>
<td>Government initiatives specifically for women (11.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Celebrations of women’s contributions (e.g. national/regional/local awards and recognition) (10.5%)</td>
<td>Publication of women’s work and achievements (10.9%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Q3.2 Gender differences

Individuals were asked to indicate whether they thought there were gender differences in how leaders enact leadership, experience leadership and reflect on their leadership practice. Across all categories, just over half the respondents believe there to be a difference between genders. 55.4 per cent of respondents believe that there were gender differences in how leaders enact leadership, 53.2 per cent believe there were differences in how male and female leaders reflect on their leadership practice, and a further 52.6 per cent believe there were differences in how males and females experience leadership.

Respondents were asked to expand upon their responses for the above categories. Overall the responses suggest that women are more reflective and more emotionally involved in their leadership style compared to men and most but not all comments provided were biased towards women’s leadership styles. The following are examples of respondents’ comments:

Table 8. Example of responses: Do you think there were gender differences in how leaders…

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quotation</th>
<th>Job title</th>
<th>Age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Women will tend to use more consultative, enabling approaches where men were more likely to develop 'cult of the leader' ways of working. Both genders apply all approaches, of course. It's just the degree to which men or women were more likely to adopt one than the other.</td>
<td>Second-tier management (e.g. Vice Principal, Director)</td>
<td>50-54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women on the whole demonstrate more emotional intelligence and enact more distributive styles of leadership. Men expect more compliance and often get it!</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>40-44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male leaders tend to believe in themselves even when they were not very good whilst good women leaders have less self belief.</td>
<td>Middle Manager</td>
<td>45-49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females reflect well - and will do so together. Men tend to reflect on their own performance but not the impact of their actions</td>
<td>Second-tier management (e.g. Vice Principal, Director)</td>
<td>50-54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female leaders listen well and can use a wider range of strategies to engage staff. Male staff tend to have greater clarity and clear direction.</td>
<td>Second-tier management (e.g. Vice Principal, Director)</td>
<td>50-54</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Job role

When the results above were analysed across the job roles, second-tier, middle managers and first line managers think more about gender differences in comparison with general staff. Second tier managers were more likely to think there were gender differences in enacting leadership (64.7 per cent), experiencing leadership (59.8 per cent) and reflecting on leadership practice (59.8 per cent) than staff in other job roles. On the other hand, a higher proportion of general staff had never considered whether there were any gender differences in enacting leadership (34.4 per cent), experiencing leadership (36.5 per cent) and reflecting on leadership practice (37.5 per cent). These trends suggest that those in higher tier job roles were more inclined to reflect upon the gender differences across the different aspects of leadership and management.

Ethnicity

It is interesting to find that a higher proportion of BME respondents than white respondents thought that there were gender differences across all aspects of leadership and management. 64.9 per cent of BME respondents thought there were differences in the way genders enact leadership, in comparison with the 54.6 per cent of white respondents. In addition, 64.9 per cent of BME respondents thought there were differences in the way that males and females experience leadership compared to 51.5 per cent of white respondents. A further 65.7 per cent of BME respondents thought there were gender differences in the way that they reflect upon their leadership practise in comparison to the 52.2 per cent of white respondents.

Q3.3 Aspects of the respondents’ organisational culture that impact positively or negatively

Individuals were asked whether there were aspects of their organisational culture that may act positively or negatively on the progression of women into leadership roles. There was a fairly even divide between those who agreed and those who disagreed with this statement, where 55.5 per cent selected no and 44.5 per cent selected yes.

Q3.4 Further information provided on their organisational culture

Respondents who answered yes were asked to provide further information on the positive and negative impacts of their organisational culture on the progression of women into leadership roles. By far the most mentioned source of positive impact was the presence of women in senior management roles, followed by positive college culture and sound equalities practice, good support and professional development. Negative impacts included
long hours cultures with few flexible working opportunities, negative culture with reference to sexist attitudes and unsound equalities practice.

Comments included the following quotes:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positive impact</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In our culture, there is no pressure to be at work outside normal office hours, except by arrangement (e.g. governors’ meetings, etc.) Family commitments are recognised and valued. The key thing is getting the job done, not being seen to be at work until 7 pm.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior leaders encourage career progression, not just for women but men as well – equal opportunities are strongly embedded in my organisation’s work culture.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Negative impact</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Culture of working long hours - judged on presenteeism rather than outputs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There are still some male members of staff who have old fashioned views of women and either resent females in management positions or who make sexist comments in front of female staff. These people are in the minority.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q3.5 Whether certain groups should be doing more to increase the number of women principals

Participants were asked to indicate who should be doing more to increase the number of women principals. This was a multi choice question where respondents were asked to select no more than five options. The following percentages were based on the total number of responses (n=1,729). The four most selected groups were senior management teams, governors, government/public agencies and principals.
Q3.5. Do you think any of the following should be doing more to increase the number of women principals?

Of the respondents that selected ‘Other’ (0.6 per cent), suggestions included recruitment agencies, societal attitudes towards women and the comment that “everyone is responsible”.

Q3.6 Who would have the greatest impact on increasing the number of women principals

This was a multi choice question where respondents were asked to select no more than three options. The following percentages were based on the total number of responses (n=1,243). According to respondents, once again by far the most selected groups were governors, senior management teams, government/public agencies and principals.
Figure 101. Total proportion of respondents by factors which have the greatest impact in increasing the number of women principals

Q3.6. Which three from the list below do you think would have the greatest impact in increasing the number of women principals?

Q3.7 Strategies which might be employed to ensure greater leadership progression opportunities

Respondents were asked to outline what strategies could be used to ensure that greater leadership progression opportunities were ensured for:

- Women in general
- BME women
- Women of all ages
- Women with disabilities

These were open text questions where respondents were invited to provide their views and opinions. Overall, similar topics to other questions emerged: flexible working arrangements and better support on return from career breaks, mentoring and workshadowing, access to information and guidance and appropriate development opportunities, sound equalities practice, clear progression routes,
networking and other confidence building activities, more role models, government target-setting.

Table 9: Key themes and quotes identified in response to Q3.7 - What strategies could be used to ensure that greater leadership progression opportunities were ensured for women in general

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Quote</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mentoring, support and training</td>
<td>‘Better advice, guidance, support and training to empower women not only to perform well in their current and future roles as managers’</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>‘Conferences on self esteem, confidence building, how to survive difficult situations’</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexibility</td>
<td>‘Greater flexibility with regard to working hours and career breaks’</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>‘Promote flexible working practices and provide development training that is accessible in terms of funding, location and times’</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information and opportunities</td>
<td>‘Encouragement; opportunity to gain experience to build up a portfolio’</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>‘Information and opportunities clearly communicated with support provided by other women managers’</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role models</td>
<td>‘Clear role models with an effective mentor who is able to question self esteem and fear issues’</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>‘More women in powerful roles on governing bodies’</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equality</td>
<td>‘National monitoring of impact of equalities policies’</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Others included: recruitment strategies, networking facilities, celebrate gender differences, child care policies etc.

For BME women, respondents suggested in addition to the above the endorsement of BME women in senior position and BME support programmes and campaigns such as those provided by the Black Leadership Initiative (training arm of the NBP).

For women of all ages, suggestions included positive age discrimination, endorsement of female leaders of all ages, sound HR procedures.

Finally, for women with disabilities, respondents proposed favouring disabled people, eliminating negative attitudes and encouraging disabled people to apply.

**Q3.8 Examples of good practice in supporting progression opportunities for women, in your organisation or in another you were familiar with**

Respondents were asked to give examples of good practice in supporting progression opportunities for women. Unfortunately, this question did not receive any responses.

**Q3.9 Request for participants to assist in follow-up interviews**

Respondents were asked whether they would be willing to assist in follow-up interviews. 154 agreed to do so.

**Regional Event Findings**

The regional events asked delegates to discuss the activities, actions and changes that would be the most effective in enabling women to progress to senior leadership roles. The responses to this question can be compared with the answers to the online survey question about what strategies might be employed. Most answers tend to focus on areas of direct support and development for individual women, perhaps reflective of areas that delegates felt could realistically be put in place and help them operate within the current culture and system, rather than changing the existing culture.

*Mentoring and work shadowing*

Mentoring and work shadowing were the most popular suggestions mentioned as beneficial to women’s career progression. Groups commented that being able to get experience of what it is like to be in a senior management position would be useful, as would getting experience of participating in meetings at all levels.
Networking and role models

Networking opportunities and positive female role models were also seen as potentially useful. One group commented that it would be good to have an online women’s networking blog. Another group suggested that hearing about success stories and being able to visually see women successfully working in management positions would be encouraging.

Encouragement, advice and guidance

Groups commented that general encouragement and support would be helpful. Honest, constructive feedback from colleagues was suggested by several groups, as was a robust and supportive appraisal system. Several groups felt that advice and guidance in completing application forms and interview techniques would also help women. Additionally, one group felt that succession planning should be involved so that people can be targeted and ‘grown’ into senior positions.

Training, development and support

Training, development and culture change were mentioned by all groups, in a variety of contexts. Some groups felt that training needed to be targeted at everyone so that women can receive professional development training where relevant and senior managers can be trained in changing their culture and processes to become more appealing to, and take account of the needs of, women. One group felt it would be useful to research the potential variance in women applying for senior management positions and women achieving success in being offered senior management positions. Another group commented that a commitment from senior management is needed to ensure change is made.

It was suggested that women receive specific training on re-entering the workforce after a career break and single-sex development groups should be established. Additionally, career advice should be given to women, and integrated into the education system to ensure that women are encouraged and given the confidence to aspire to management positions from a younger age. One group commented that it is important to educate the next generation.

Other

Flexible working opportunities were mentioned as important to encouraging women into principal positions. One group suggested that technology could help as it allows people to work remotely more easily. Several groups also commented that affordable childcare would help women progress their careers.
Finally, one group commented that it would be useful to look at international strategies, to see what other countries are doing to encourage and enable women into senior management positions.

6 Conclusions and recommendations

6.1 Conclusions

Respondents were mainly drawn from women in middle and senior management in colleges across England. Of the respondents to the online survey, 190 (40.5 per cent) were middle managers and 102 (21.7 per cent) were second tier managers (for example vice principal, director, etc.). Therefore the findings can be said to reflect the group who are most likely to be considering applying for the top roles in the sector. BME respondents, who comprised 7.9 per cent of the sample, were well represented when compared to national averages for managers and senior managers, although actual numbers were small.

Most respondents thought that women were not well represented at principal level and most believe that it is important that they should be. Over half of all respondents thought that women carried out leadership roles, experienced leadership and reflected on their leadership practices differently from men, and overall the differences proposed by respondents were biased towards women’s leadership styles.

Barriers to progression

When asked whether barriers to progression to senior leadership roles exist in the sector, 88.7 percent thought that there were some or many and 44.4 percent reported having personally encountered barriers. BME respondents were far more likely than their white counterparts to have encountered barriers (74.5 per cent compared to 41.9 per cent).

When asked about their individual career path, over half reported that they had experienced mixed journeys, with some minor obstacles or difficulties. 9.4 per cent reported that they had had difficult experiences, with several obstacles or difficulties. BME respondents were significantly more likely to report a difficult career path (18.9 per cent) than white respondents (8.6 per cent).

Gender differences in motivation and levels of confidence

The findings from this research resonate with previous research carried out by the LSN (LSN, 2010) which found important gender differences. These need to be taken into account and acted upon if the representation of women is to improve:

- women in second tier management posts indicated less interest in becoming principals than men;
• some cited age as a reason for not being interested in progression (and given this current research it is likely that career breaks may have delayed their career progression);
• men were more likely to have planned on becoming a principal at an early stage, so may have benefited from more careful career planning;
• women were more likely to have been motivated by encouragement from others;
• women’s levels of confidence in the extent to which their skills, knowledge and experience matched the requirements of principalship were markedly lower than those of men working at the same level;
• women were more likely to be concerned about not being up to the job or failure.

These findings indicate that the sector needs to work harder in order to encourage and support women to apply for senior jobs.

**Good and less good practice in the sector**

Just under half of the respondents had experienced some impact on their career progression (either positive or negative) as a result of their organisations’ culture, and 115 provided examples of negative impact.

When asked to give examples of good practice that they had witnessed in supporting progression opportunities in their own or other organisations, no direct responses were received, either through the online survey or through the eight regional research events.

However, overall the responses did contain a number of examples of good practice that respondents had witnessed and experienced, that could be put into practice across the sector. However, the research also revealed several types of practice that should be avoided.

Indeed the striking contrast in the comments from respondents who felt supported by their organisations versus those who did not must be an issue for the sector.

**Summary**

A study of the responses regarding barriers and the negative impact of culture reveals that women face particular barriers. These include, although are not limited to, barriers related to: family commitments, a lack of confidence, negative attitudes in some organisations and a lack of development opportunities and support for career progression.

The following positive and enabling factors are referred to again and again in the responses:

• Flexible working arrangements to accommodate domestic or family commitments;
Support during and on return from career breaks;
Organisational structures and practices that encourage progression (through sound line management support, effective appraisal and access to professional development);
Clear progression routes and organisational structures for promotion;
Sound equalities practice (particularly important for BME women);
Mentoring, coaching or work-shadowing programmes (particularly important for BME women);
Networking, learning from role models and other confidence-building activities;
Endorsement and celebration of BME women in senior positions;
BME support programmes and campaigns such as provided by the Black Leadership Initiative.

When asked what the sector needed to improve the representation of women, the top four factors selected were:

- Support to enable women to participant in networks and events;
- More networks and forums for women leaders;
- More female principals;
- An increase in the number of women governors.

Other important initiatives that were needed include: government initiatives specifically for women, celebrations of women’s contributions and greater promotion of women’s work and achievements.

Respondents were very clear about who should do more to increase the number of women principals and who would have the greatest impact. By far the most cited groups were governors, senior management teams, government and public agencies and principals.

6.2 Recommendations

Four strong sectoral and organisational themes for action and change emerge from the comments of our respondents:

*Family friendly policies within an organisation*
*A college culture that positively encourages career planning and progression*
*A college culture that is free of discriminatory attitudes and embraces sound equalities practice including strategies to encourage more BME professionals into senior leadership roles*
*Local and national activities that build women’s self-confidence and encourage them to regard themselves as potential senior leaders*

College governors, principals, senior management teams, government and public agencies all understand the need to encourage talented and skilled managers to become senior leaders and principals in the sector.
The following recommendations are based on comments and suggestions from our respondents and for the most part will also benefit men aspiring to senior leadership roles.

6.2.1 A family-friendly culture in each organisation, with policies that support women and men with caring responsibilities

- Acknowledge and value the family commitments of both men and women;
- Develop a work-life balance policy and ensure that the college working hours, including meeting times, are family-friendly;
- Support job share, fractional part time options and arrangements for home working at all levels;
- Actively support those taking a career break, keeping them informed and inviting them to meetings as appropriate;
- Actively support those returning from a career break, offering updating opportunities such as work shadow, work experience and respecting age discrimination legislation.

6.2.1 A culture in all colleges that positively encourages career planning and progression for all

- Effective supervision, support and performance management;
- Appraisal that encourages professional development and career planning;
- Accessible professional and leadership development opportunities;
- Clear organisational structures for promotion and progression.

6.2.2 A culture in all organisations and across the sector that is free of discriminatory attitudes, takes into account the obstacles faced by certain groups of people and embraces sound equalities practice

- Effective equalities training for governors, principals and senior management teams including a sound understanding of the obstacles that women and BME professionals face;
- Sound equal opportunities practice including fair and open recruitment processes;
- Clear career progression routes in colleges and across sector;
- An increase in the number of women governors;
- National monitoring of the impact of equalities practice.

6.2.2 Strategies to increase the number of BME professionals in senior management, in addition to the above

- An increase in the number of BME college governors
- Higher national profile of BME senior leaders in the sector
- Effective equalities practices, with a common understanding of diversity, across the sector
• Mentoring and leadership skills development specifically for BME professionals
• Networking and support specifically for BME professionals
• Celebration and positive endorsement of BME senior leaders

6.2.2 Confidence-building activities to encourage women to regard themselves as potential senior leaders

• Opportunities for mentoring, work-shadowing and secondments
• Networking opportunities to learn from peers and from female senior leaders
• Celebration and positive endorsement of women leaders

Who is responsible? There is an essential role here for government departments, support agencies, membership organisations and unions, as well as individual colleges and their senior leaders and governing bodies.

6.3 Further work and research

An important part of the current project is the commitment of Protocol National to support the production of a good practice guide for the sector, based on the recommendations and suggestions coming from the respondents in this research.

Of the 470 responses received, 154 women indicated their willingness to be interviewed further about the issues and questions raised through the research. This could provide important additional material regarding good and less favourable practice in the sector and possible ways forward to increase the representation of women in senior leadership roles.

Finally, the sector needs reliable estimates of the numbers of managers at second tier (female, male and BME) so that targets can be set and progress reviewed.
7 References


*Gender-related factors in career progression*, Centre for Excellent in Leadership, 2007.

*The next generation of leaders: motivation and leadership in the further education sector*, Learning and Skills Network 2010 (in preparation).