

White Rose Women in Leadership Initiative: Absent talent in UK HEIs?



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Executive Summary

Introduction to the project

- This research explores existing challenges to achieving more equal representation of men and women in senior (professorial) roles in Higher Education.
- Women are seriously under-represented at leadership levels in academia making up 20% of the professoriate and 17% of vice chancellors in the UK (ECU, 2013, UCU, 2013). This finding can be seen within the context of 5400 ‘missing women’ from all senior appointments across UK society (Commission, 2011).
- Both women and men benefit from fair representation of women at the top and healthy diversity within senior teams strengthens the effectiveness of leadership decision making and performance especially within the context of the current economic climate where building leadership capacity is centre-stage (Davies, 2014).

Methodology

The methodology comprised two parts:

- Seminars conducted at each of the three White Rose University institutions – Universities of Leeds, Sheffield and York.
- One to one interviews with 14 female professors across the White Rose Universities

Overview of Research Findings

Presented below are the seven overarching themes that emerged from the data.

Theme	Description
The work-life-family balance conundrum	Addressed issues relating to work-life balance focusing on the tension between work and family; institutional culture of work life balance and experiences of flexible working arrangements
The career path-negotiating the trajectory	Addressed individual career trajectories with a focus on professional and personal impacts
Promotion: ascending the grading structure and entering the domain of senior leadership	Addressed issues relating to two facets of promotion: progression through the grades/spine points and professorial zones and acquisition of senior management and leadership roles within the institution.
Cultural barriers: ‘Fixing’ the Knowledge	Focused on cultural barriers impacting on female representation in senior leadership. These were 1) alienating leadership cultures; 2) masculinities cultures;
Organisational barriers: ‘Fixing’ the institution	Addressed examples of positive institutional culture and positive working practices



Theme	Description
Individual barriers and enablers: 'Fixing' the women	Addressed positive and negative impacts on career development that were perceived to be related to/focused on the individual: 1) success – individual qualities that have led to professional success; 2) 'blame' – individual qualities that are perceived to hold women back and that are perceived to be specific to women; 3) support – supportive interventions focused on the individual
How to make a difference: opportunities for change	Focused on 1) the potential of leadership to impact on future generations and 2) critical mass arguments

Conclusions

- The research highlighted two major barriers to women academic's career development – institutional barriers and societal barriers;
- There is an acknowledged lack of transparency in institutional procedures and practices which poses a significant threat to gender equality; with women professors reporting that they do not to 'know the rules' of the game of senior leadership
- The perpetuation of gendered leadership cultures, hegemonic masculinity discourses and masculine leadership models are a significant cause of fewer women to be found ('the missing women') in higher education leadership.
- The gender pay gap is a highly divisive and opaque practice, and needs to be addressed.

Recommendations

- Further funding to be sought from HEFCE and ESRC to expand and build upon the foundations of this small scale research project and to support implementation of interventions that address gender inequalities
- Future work should be both practice-based and research-based; areas for focus should include how to improve gender equality within HEIs; and how to address and influence the loss of talent which the sector is currently experiencing
 - Practice-based work should focus upon unpacking the mystery of the missing women by designing and delivering interventions and formally monitoring and evaluating their impact over a longitudinal period
 - Research-based work should seek to conduct more intensive empirical study and address the gaps in the literature, especially learning from good practice in other sectors and ensuring that both women and men are engaged.
- To develop, produce and disseminate good practice guidelines for various communities across our institutions based upon the findings of the research
- To extend the research developed within the White Rose institutions nationwide to explore the context and experiences more widely across the sector



Introduction to the Study

This research aims to explore existing challenges to achieving more equal representation of women and men in senior (professorial) roles in higher education. The pilot study reported here generated data through seminars and one to one interviews with female professors across the White Rose universities with a view to seeking larger scale HEFCE catalyst funding in Autumn 2014 to address issues around the implementation of recommendations. It is also the intention of the steering group to prepare a funding bid for larger scale ESRC funding. The LUCILE¹ funded research is based on development work already started via the White Rose University Consortium to explore the scope for a 'Women in Leadership' initiative. A Steering Group was appointed for this work and has guided the research as this small scale funded study generated data for further discussion.

Rationale for the research

Women are seriously under-represented at leadership levels in academia making up less than 21% of the professoriate and 17% of Vice Chancellors (UCU, 2013). This finding should be viewed within the context of 5400 'missing women' from senior appointments across UK society (Commission, 2011). Women are predicted to be the majority of all academics by 2020 although the same projections show that women will not be fairly represented at professorial level until 2070 at the earliest (Leathwood and Read, 2009).

The under-representation of women in higher education leadership is important to research on at least three grounds: there is a strong *moral* argument that suggests that it is unjust to perpetuate a situation in which women continue to be invisible in senior academic roles; there are significant *equity* arguments that pinpoint a need for parity of treatment between men and women within our higher education institutions; and there are well-researched *economic and business* arguments that provide a compelling case for change. In summary, both women and men benefit from fair representation of women at the top and a healthy diversity of senior teams strengthens the effectiveness of leadership decision-making which is increasingly pertinent in the current social and economic climate where building leadership capacity and diversity is centre-stage (Davies, 2014).

¹ Leeds University Centre for Interdisciplinary Leadership Studies



The context for change

There has been mounting interest in taking action to redress the under-representation of women in senior academic roles. Universities are beginning to articulate the need to retain and progress women into leadership positions and improve the gender and diversity balance at the highest senior management levels (Jarboe, 2013, Manfredi et al., 2014). A number of drivers for change have now become apparent, and include:

- Athena Swan charter: Recognises commitment to advancing women's careers in science, technology, engineering, maths and medicine employment in higher education and research. This initiative is a catalyst for change – encouraging higher education institutions, research institutes and others to transform their cultures and make a real impact on the lives of staff and students and to address the continuing under-representation of minority ethnic staff in higher education and the under-representation of women at senior levels and in STEM subjects. There are currently 115 member institutions of Athena SWAN.
- Research Councils' positioning with respect to Athena Swan (as articulated in the RCUK expectations for equality and diversity statement), and the requirement for Silver status to be considered for research funding for NIHR Biomedical Research Centres (BRC), Biomedical Research Units (BRU) and Patient Safety Translational Research Centres.
- The setting of targets in both the public and private sectors – the Lisbon Agreement had a goal of 25% women professors throughout Europe by 2010 but there was still a significant shortfall in 2012 (the latest three yearly review figures) and the Davies Review set a target for FTSE 100 companies to achieve 25% female representation on their Boards by 2015 (it was 20.7% by April 2014 and fewer than 50 women now need to be appointed to meet the target set).
- Potential European-wide legislation on quotas by Commissioner Viviane Reding to increase the numbers of women at board level
- Compliance of institutions with the public sector equality duty of the new Equalities Act (2010) encompassing work streams relating to individual protected characteristics of Age, Disability, Gender Reassignment, Marriage and Civil Partnership, Pregnancy and Maternity, Race, Religion or Belief or Non-Belief, Sex, Sexual Orientation.



Aims and objectives of the research

This research sought to address the under-representation of women in senior management in higher education institutions (HEIs) with a focus on White Rose Universities.



The objectives of the study were to:

1. Generate data from senior university staff across the White Rose consortium institutions
2. Produce a position paper for incorporation into HEFCE catalyst bid and ESRC funding bid
3. Make recommendations for practice and research within the White Rose Universities as well as potentially more widely within the UK University sector



The Literature

What is the problem and why it matters

There are more women in UK higher education than ever (McTavish, 2009, Yakaboski, 2011) prompting the ‘feminisation’ panic that large numbers of women, both middle management staff and students, are now disadvantaging men. There is no evidence to support this, in fact on the contrary, the rise of neoliberalism (Morley, 2011, Williams, 2013, Saunderson, 2002) appears to be sustaining traditional gender power relations (Bagilhole and White, 2011). Almost six in ten undergraduates are women as are virtually fifty per cent of early career academics (UCU, 2013). Nevertheless this trend does not extend to more senior roles where recent data identifies that only 20% of professors and 17% of vice chancellors are women (ECU, 2013, UCU, 2013). These ‘missing women’ at the top of higher education can be seen within the context of 5,400 reportedly missing women at the top across all sectors in the UK (Commission, 2011, Coalition, 2013, Now, 2012). Nationally within the UK there is a growing urgency to the conversation about gender equality in leadership whereby the professions (for example: accountancy; broadcasting and the media; the church; education; finance; law, medicine; the police; and politics) have become much more attuned to the business case for equality, diversity and inclusion (Desvaux et al., 2010, Walby, 2011, Phillips, 2012, CIPD, 2005, Deloitte, 2011, Foundation, 2006, Department for Business, 2013). Moreover the corporate sector has avoided the imposition of quotas for the representation of women at board level by seeking to ensure that government targets are met by 2015 (Davies, 2014). These targets are being driven by a combination of business, social justice, and equity and parity concerns (Doherty and Manfredi, 2010, Davidson and Burke, 2011, Prosser, 2006) which invariably lead to positive action measures (O’Cinneide, 2012) being introduced to address inequality sooner than the seventy years (at least) across all sectors it will take without intervention (Commission, 2013, Leathwood and Read, 2009). Recent research highlights that universities, which should be leading the way in relation to being beacons of good practice, now lag behind every sector except for the judiciary in relation to diversity and equality (Manfredi et al., 2014).

Equality and diversity is a cornerstone of higher education philosophy and enlightenment and as such it matters that the sector embraces gender equality and is seen to be addressing the missing women conundrum (Jarboe, 2013). Not least because not only does higher education contribute £3.4 billion to the economy it also receives significant contributions from public funding bodies who in turn must demonstrate they satisfy equalities legislation (HEFCE, 2013). Moreover, the lack of women at the top of higher education has wider and more serious resonance for women’s participation in public life (Warwick, 2004). It is significant that HEFCE, HESA, ECU, UCEA and CUC are now working together to profile their ambition for gender equality in an attempt to influence higher education to act, and to act now (HEFCE, 2012).

Higher education gendered leadership cultures

Writings within the gendered organization field have emerged because feminist/gender scholars have committed to rewriting/revising organization theory and research such that women’s experiences and voices, and the lives of ‘men as men’, are represented, rather than silenced

(Calas and Smircich, 1992, Ford et al., 2008, Martin and Collinson, 2002). When practices are referred to as *gendered* it means that these practices symbolize values, characteristics and qualities more associated with one sex than the other at a particular place and point in time. It is clear that gender, or as Acker has articulated, ‘patterned, socially produced, distinctions between female and male, feminine and masculine’ (P:250) is a core concept for discerning what is happening with people in their lives at work, and for understanding how people encounter encouragement, scepticism, support and suffering in organizations (Acker, 1992).

Some of the first investigations into the gendered arenas of management and organization were conducted by Acker and Van Houten (Acker and Van Houten, 1974) and Kanter (Kanter, 1977). These and other writers’ research have triggered the exposure of previously concealed gendered relationships at work. Nevertheless, this is a relatively recent phenomenon. Organization theory has traditionally and right up to the 1970s neglected gender aspects. Employees have been viewed either from a supposedly gender neutral (male) perspective, or from the point of view that considers only the male part of the organizations as interesting. As Legge noted, even recent texts that purport to discuss the people related issues in organizations fail to take account of issues such as gender, women, men, femininity and masculinity (Legge, 1995). Despite the development of extensive scholarship on gender and organizations, many accounts continue to ignore the relationship between organizational arrangements and gender. Feminist organizational analyses and the study of men and masculinities, on the other hand, have problematized the depiction of gender in organizations, and a range of theoretical perspectives have been adopted in the pursuit of exposing such neglect. These studies have included consideration of essentialist and constructed accounts of gender; boundaries between families and work organizations; between processes of production and reproduction; the domination of gender power and gender class and race and the powers and paradox of sexuality.

Within such studies, there is recognition that organisational cultures are gendered and gendering (Aaltio et al., 2002, Alvesson and Billing, 2009, Mackenzie Davey, 2008) and there is a growing acknowledgement that higher education promulgates gendered leadership cultures (Acker, 2006, Benschop and Brouns, 2003, Fitzgerald, 2011, Haake, 2009, Hearn, 2001). The emerging work on gender mainstreaming acknowledges that there is no easy ‘organisational fix’ for this (Tiessen, 2007, Mushaben, 2005). Individual, institutional and societal issues combine to produce leadership cultures which are defined by masculine models of leadership whereby the ‘ideal employee’ (the disembodied worker) thrives (Ford, 2006, Catalyst, 2011, Ford and Collinson, 2011). This ‘leadership gendering’ tends to disadvantage women (and men) who do not easily ‘fit in’ with hegemonic masculinity leadership discourses (Butler and Dawson, 2006, Connell, 2005, Paechter, 2003b, Paechter, 2003a) .

Masculine models of leadership

Equalities policies abound across higher education as public testament to the extent of the sector’s compliance with equalities legislation (Leeds, 2013). Nevertheless masculine models and approaches to leadership thrive and this could account for the missing women at the top

(Brooks and Mackinnon, 2001, Burkinshaw, 2013) despite the increasing visibility of women (possibly as a result of new managerialism which has promoted many women to middle management roles) (Deem, 2007, Doherty and Manfredi, 2010). Seemingly gender-neutral human resource procedures and practices, such as promotion and progression (Van den Brink, 2011, Bird, 2011, Ibarra et al., 2010), reinforce a masculinities hegemony, undermine diversity and perpetuate bias against female leaders (Elsesser and Lever, 2011, Eagly and Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001, Jacobs and Schain, 2009). The specific ways in which higher education recognizes and rewards contribution has the effect of penalizing those academics who work collaboratively, dedicate themselves to pastoral work, and emphasise their collegial responsibilities, leading to an emerging recognition of 'the gendering of excellence' (Sprague, 2013, Rustad and Ryste, 2010, Ryan-Flood and Gill, 2010, Schucan Bird, 2013). In other words, institutions tend to construct power hierarchically as a limited quantity rather than energy that expands when shared which is how more women are likely to construct it. Academic promotion criteria still define success as largely an independent act that must attain national recognition via publication. Often there is a devaluation of the scholarship of application, teaching and integration compared with 'discovery' scholarship. This academic orientation is gendered. When attributing their success women tend to emphasize the support they have received from their partner/family and the role of a good reference whilst men tend to emphasize their own efforts through their publications, their work on high profile projects, the size of their grant income (Forum, 2010). To help address this 'gendering of excellence' attention is now turning to 'fixing the knowledge' in an effort to recalibrate society's bias and recognise alternative forms of scholarship instead of valorising the lone academic worker who dedicates himself to research pursuits (Schiebinger and Schraudner, 2011, Van den Brink, 2012).

Nonetheless, higher education thrives on 'grace and favour' appointments, more often than not culminating from men's relationship with other men (O'Connor, 2011). This homosociability promulgates 'boys club' culture and penalises those who do not, cannot, or choose not to fit in (Morley, 2013a, Morley, 2013b, Grove, 2012). Research surfacing the lived experiences of women in academia illustrates the emotional labour of navigating and negotiating gendered leadership cultures (Cotterill et al., 2007, Saunders et al., 2009, Priola, 2007, Acker, 2012, Chesterman and Ross-Smith, 2005, Hoskins, 2012), misrecognition of women's contribution (Morley, 2005) and the paradox of visibility for women leaders (Stead, 2013).

Women and resistance

This effort of 'fitting in' positions ambitious women in a double bind whereby masculine models of leadership are out of reach (Catalyst, 2007, Francis, 2010). Satisfying the greedy institutions of work and attending to domestic and family concerns places a significant burden on women academics, although conversely women without children are often penalized too by expectations they will cover for other women with (Acker and Armenti, 2004, Bascom-Slack, 2011, Cummins, 2005, Hewlett, 2005). Performing femininities excludes women from 'the boys club' yet performing as 'one of the boys' is frowned upon also (Acker, 2010, Eveline, 2005). So invariably leadership roles become 'undoable' jobs for women (Chesterman et al., 2005) although inevitably discourses emerged about 'fixing the women' instead, as though women

are homogeneous (Bilge, 2010). There has been a pervading sense that if only women became more resilient, more confident, more ambitious and 'more like a man' the problem would be solved (Schein et al., 2006). More recently, far from blaming women themselves for 'missing' from these undoable jobs it is recognised that their under-representation comes from a combination of gendered leadership cultures and women's resistance to these (Clarke and Knights, 2014, Morley, 2013a, Dean et al., 2009). One way to address this is by tackling tokenism and achieving a critical mass of women across leadership (Erkut et al., 2008, Kramer et al., 2006, Klenke, 2011, Osmond, 2009, Zehner and Basch, 2009) thereby challenging entrenched leadership cultures and offering alternative leadership models and 'protean organisations' (Cabrera, 2009, Eagly and Carli, 2007). Otherwise side effects of the double bind, such as women's 'queen bee' tendency not to support other women coming through (Chesler, 2001) (Mavin, 2008, Mavin and Williams, 2012, Parks-Stamm et al., 2008) and promoting women to precarious positions (Ryan and Haslam, 2005) will prevail. In the meantime women still need support through development programmes (Clarke, 2011, Ely et al., 2011, Lyness and Thompson, 2000, Middlehurst, 2012), mentoring (Pololi and Knight, 2005), role-modelling (Sealy and Singh, 2010), networking (Singh et al., 2006) and other positive action measures (Forum, 2010).

Gaps in the literature

In summary, the gendering of academia and its impact upon diversity in leadership is well researched. Nevertheless there are specific areas worthy of further research exploration. For example: there is a dearth of literature about the positive difference it makes for higher education when alternative models of leadership are practiced (regardless of the motivation); similarly, there is a gap in the literature about how senior leaders are embracing equality, diversity and inclusion agendas by challenging the status quo and surfacing discriminatory practices and bias; and also, the focus of the literature could expand to explore what men can do to further gender equality and why this is invariably interpreted as a woman's problem thereby marginalising this critical issue. To clarify, the research gaps open for future projects are:

- What difference does it make to the leadership of higher education institutions when alternative models of leadership are practiced in ways that benefit diversity and inclusion?
- How well are senior university leaders challenging masculine models of leadership in order to address discriminatory practices and bias?
- How can many more men be best engaged with the pursuit of gender equality without either marginalising women or demoralising men?



Methodology

The methodology comprised two parts:

- ❖ Seminars conducted at each of the White Rose institutions
- ❖ One to one interviews with 14 female professors across the White Rose institutions

Seminars

Each seminar addressed issues relating to the aims of the research and session outlines are detailed below:

- University of Leeds: *Different perspectives on the issues, challenges and barriers to achieving more equal representation of women in the professoriate, and ideas for overcoming them*
- University of Sheffield: i) *In what ways is Sheffield an enabling/limiting employer for women; ii) Designing 'The Paragon University of the White Rose'*
- University of York: *'Your Decisions in Focus – Raising Awareness of Unconscious Bias'*

The approach used for conducting the seminars differed between institutions: full details of the methodology used for each of the seminars are listed in Appendix 1.

Interviews

Fourteen one to one interviews were conducted with female professors at the Universities of Leeds (6), Sheffield² (4) and York (4). Six interviews were conducted at Leeds owing to ease of access for the researchers (Dr Paula Burkinshaw and Dr Jane Cahill) conducting the interviews.

A semi-structured interview format was used for the interviews. The content of the interview schedule (listed in Appendix 2) was agreed between the grant applicants and the White Rose University Consortium project manager Ms. Claire Pickerden.

Data Analysis

A thematic analysis was used for all data collected from the seminars (including outputs from seminar exercises such as timelines and post- it notes) and one to one interviews. The data were analysed by both researchers on the project (PB and JC) with each researcher analysing the data which they had collected. Each researcher independently performed a thematic analysis on the data to generate a list of major themes which in turn were subdivided into subthemes/issues. Subsequently both researchers agreed a common list of seven overarching themes detailed in the following sections.

² One of the interviewees from Sheffield was a reader.

Overview of Research Findings

Table 1 presents the seven overarching themes providing a brief description of what each one means.

Theme	Description
The work-life-family balance conundrum	Addresses issues relating to work-life balance focusing on tension between work and family; institutional culture of work life balance and experience of flexible working arrangements
The career path-negotiating the trajectory	Addresses individual career trajectories with a focus on professional and personal impacts
Promotion: ascending the grading structure and entering the domain of senior leadership	Addresses issues relating to two facets of promotion: progression through the grades/spine points and professorial zones and acquisition of senior management and leadership roles within the institution.
Cultural barriers: 'Fixing' the Knowledge	Focuses on cultural barriers impacting on female representation in senior leadership. These are 1) alienating leadership cultures; 2) masculinities cultures.
Organisational barriers: 'Fixing' the institution	Addresses examples of positive institutional culture and positive working practices
Individual barriers and enablers: 'Fixing' the women	Addresses positive and negative impacts on career development that are perceived to be related to/focused on the individual: 1) success – individual qualities that have led to professional success; 2) 'blame' – individual qualities that are perceived to hold women back and that are perceived to be specific to women; 3) support – supportive interventions focused on the individual
How to make a difference: opportunities for change	Focuses on 1) the potential of leadership to impact on future generations and 2) critical mass arguments



THEME 1: The Work-Life-Family balance conundrum

In the interviews with professors we asked whether women in general and the interviewee in particular experienced tension between their work and family.

A large number of issues focused on the tensions brought about by attempting to both develop and sustain a senior career and look after children. What clearly emerged from the women's responses was a 'career or children' dilemma: that the decision to have a family or decisions around the size of the family had involved some complex compromises for women aspiring to the very top:

"When you look around the SMG table they've either got no children or just one child"
(LSD16147)

Another respondent described a decision making process that took place with regard to who would take on the major child-rearing role. In this case it was the father who took on this role thereby enabling the mother to develop her career. This was in the context of a complex, nuanced decision which was mutually supportive, also taking into account that within a couple career aspiration is not uniformly felt to the same degree:

"So we had a decision to make which was could we have two children and two careers and decided we couldn't...so he has always put the family first and because of that I've had a completely free reign to do whatever I want" (LSD16346)

However other respondents reported such decisions as a dilemma which entailed an imperative for one or other of the couple to deny their career aspirations. In this context there was a suggestion for the issue to be couched in terms of 'family' responsibilities rather than 'maternal' responsibilities. This would have a number of benefits encouraging men to see the imbalance as their responsibility too but also to move on from the imperative for either partner to abandon their careers for childrearing:

"Because to remedy it you have to say to the whole of society, long hours cultures are not clever and the assumption that one parent or the other will abandon their aspirations in order for the non-parenting one to work ridiculous hours" (LSD16334)

However as indicated by the quote above, there was a realisation that those social and cultural biases which designate childcare as the mother's responsibility would prove a significant challenge. A side effect of these biases has been the disadvantaging of academic women who do not have children, leading to a 'flip side' discriminatory practice:

"I've seen reverse kind of prejudice of favouritism being paid towards women who have families and bias against those who don't" (LSD16383)

"That's the issue for me, it's quite a big issue really, is that if you don't have children you have to teach at funny times, do all the things outside hours, go to all the events that are put on and dinners and what not, because you're the one without children" (LSD16386)

A number of 'concrete' impacts of maternity on career trajectory were specified. The first of these related to the effects of maternity leave on the CV and hence promotion prospects:

"I think probably one of the main things about that is that it's really hard to compare CVs when people have had time out. So if you have time out because of maternity leave or leaves, you shouldn't – I really don't think you should expect to move at the same rate." (LSD 16282)

“But I think for people like that they either have to accept that it’s going to take them a lot longer to get to the positions their male colleagues are in...so I think it’s easy for them to get left behind and it’s hard to get back on” (LSD 16284)

Second the practice of part-time working, a decision resulting from childcare responsibilities, was constructed as having personal hindering impacts to do with identity as an academic:

“Feeling like a weaker researcher” (LSD 16333)

And also professional hindering impacts to do with promotion prospects:

So working part-time means that you are seriously disadvantaged, even though the promotions criteria allow you to apply for promotion that realistically it doesn’t really. (LSD 16333)

Linked into these hindering factors was recognition of the gap between rhetoric and reality of flexible working:

“But I think as you progress higher up the university it’s assumed that you don’t have those commitments. That somehow there’s a team of staff behind you sorting it all out” (LSD 16386)

With the gap being characterised by an associated lack of compassion:

“And I don’t think the university is sympathetic enough, not just to women but to people who are dealing with quite difficult situations in their personal life”. (LSD 16376)

Interestingly the dark side of flexibility as a working practice within academia was described, whereby work-life-family activities could bleed into each other perpetuating an institutional long hours culture which would have a detrimental effect on the mental health of the workforce:

“What I would actually like to say is there are twenty-four hours in every day, sleep for eight of them, and actually work for eight of them, actually work. And then there’s eight left over to do all the rest of the stuff.” And if you stick to that, you will probably be much more productive because you won’t be getting into diminishing return, so you won’t be angsty about what’s going on at home when you’re meant to be working, nor when you’re at home and you’re meant to be focussing on your home life will at the back of your mind be your to-do list. Just actually to get a separation in there and let’s kill the long hours.” (LSD 16334)

So consideration of the work-life-family balance conundrum has generated the following key tensions:

- 1) Dilemma of ‘career or children’ figures prominently: while some respondents speak of sacrifice/denial of career aspirations others speak of a more complex and nuanced decision around child rearing made by the couple with regard to who will take on the role of primary carer.
- 2) managing family and work responsibilities is a hugely complex operation which involves juggling roles, identities against a backdrop of cultural biases;
- 3) flexible and part-time working while promoted as a hall mark of good gender equality practice (the ‘rhetoric’) were very much seen as having a deleterious effect on promotion and progression to more senior roles (the ‘reality’).

THEME 2: Career Path: Negotiating the Trajectory

The interview schedule contained a question relating to the professors' career journey to date, starting with early career stages through to their current role and questions relating to facilitators and barriers in their respective institutions which yielded information for this theme. Questions on barriers and facilitators to career success were also raised within the seminars held at each of the White Rose Universities.

Within this theme a range of trajectories was identified with varying degrees of personal agency expressed. A number of respondents spoke of their career happening 'by accident'

"Much, much better career advice now. My career happened by accident." (LSD16349)

"Because I would characterise my career as completely Alice through the looking glass. I thought about what I didn't want to do and then I've ended up doing it." (LSD16334)

As a variant on careers happening by accident some respondents spoke of 'seizing the moment' in response to serendipity; so a degree of agency expressed which was nevertheless facilitated by 'lucky accidents' or the 'tap on the shoulder'.

"Of course there is an advantage to the tap on the shoulder which is what's benefitted me. Which is not thinking that you are up for the job, that you're good enough to do the job, but someone else recognising it." (LSD16274)

"And just fortuitously I had actually – because I was working in [subject discipline] I met a guy called [] and he encouraged me to apply for an MRC post-doctoral fellowship, which I actually was successful in getting to my astonishment." (LSD16376)

In contrast to lack of agency there were some respondents who understood their career to be a result of considered planning and goal setting; a landscape which was shaped by a high degree of agency:

"And none of these things were really accidental. I had a plan, and I wanted a university level role and I was very invested in post graduate issues around recruitment, retention, experience, education, the rest of it and so on." (LSD16281)

"And I always wanted to do a PhD for some strange reason. I always wanted to go to university to do science" (LSD16376)

A number of respondents described a process of negotiation that underlined their planning that was in response to events. A common event was children, bringing with it the impact of maternal responsibilities:

"I know all the data, women take longer, they stay in their role for longer, and I think probably one of the main things about that is that it's really hard to compare CVs when people have had time out. So if you have time out because of maternity leave or leaves, you shouldn't – I really don't think you should expect to move at the same rate." (LSD16282)

"I didn't regret it because I did feel that my son was a bit young, he was a different sort of child to my daughter and so I'd kind of wanted to stay a bit more with him before he went into full-time childcare, so that bit of it was fine." [LSD16333]

Aside from the negotiation aspect (arranging part time hours maybe) maternal responsibility was expressed by some as a process of negotiation operating on a deeper intra-psychic level – brining about a re-evaluation of 'challenges':

“But I was just kind of thinking that my challenge is getting in without having sick down my shoulder, you know.” (LSD16333)

As respondents spoke of planning out the trajectory what emerged as a thread was a series of snags/glitches – what constituted barriers to planning for success. These ranged from logistical and operational barriers such as issues to do with temporary contracts and delays in funding to barriers that were expressed as being more cultural and intractable in nature. Lack of transparency was frequently described in relation to the highest levels of senior management:

“The roles above head of department, there is no route...there is no transparency...almost like a secret society which you might be let into, I’ve no idea how to get into it.” (LSD16147)

This opacity characterising appointments to the most senior of roles was described as being supported by a range of processes that were secretive in nature with lack of consistency in application:

“So if you are one woman competing against whatever then it doesn’t matter what everything else counts because its decided to be a voting issue then she will not be accepted. Then in another role the head decides it’s not a voting issue it’s a nomination issue and then they nominate who they want.” (LSD16386)

As mentioned earlier the tap on the shoulder (lack of transparency) has been described as both a facilitator (some respondents benefitted from it) but as an unjust one that not only acts as a barrier to equality but can actually have the effect of being detrimental to women on a personal and professional level:

“And when he wanted me to be Deputy Vice Chancellor, he just called me in and said, “Will you do the DVC job?” So there was no sort of – I was just picked.” (LSD16334)

“I think more transparency would help. Because I think the extent to which we’re sort of handpicked can allow people to say, “She only got it because she’s a woman.” And can allow that kind of anxiety to creep in.” (LSD16334)

What emerged from this theme was a complex and varied landscape that while expressing commonalities was also highly individualistic, reflecting the diversity of respondents’ stories. Key characteristics which defined individual trajectories were:

- 1) the degree of personal agency/goal setting in bringing about success;
- 2) capricious presence of luck/fortune;
- 3) indelible impact of maternity leading to not only need for negotiation of working arrangements but also negotiation of internal values and definitions;
- 4) an array of snags and glitches threatening the route to success ranging from those that are simply operational to those that are deeper and more intractable – lack of transparency forming a particularly insidious example.

THEME 3: Promotion

During the interviews we elicited respondents' views on career advancement in higher education, their own career advancement and on challenges facing women in higher education. Data relating to this theme were also derived from the seminars across the three institutions.

The theme of 'promotion' is conceptualized as promotion through the grading structure and promotion to senior roles – both of these types of promotion have considerable impact on the shape and gradient of respondents' career trajectories.

Ascending the grading structure

Very much at the forefront of respondents' narratives of their promotion experiences was the concept of 'being ready' (or not). A verdict on respondents' readiness was reported as coming from others – senior colleagues/line managers:

“Even at the time I went for it [personal chair] my head of department said I don't think you are ready yet. He didn't give me much evidence for that. Then the second time he said I still don't know if you are ready.” (LSD16349)

This verdict was sometimes resisted with the practice of 'job hopping' being reported

“but at that point [] was still working more on a time served rather than sort of merits kind of basis in terms of promotion, so I didn't feel that I needed – I should wait, I felt that I was ready and []thought that I was ready.” (LSD16281)

Although the practice of moving university in order to secure a promotion was not always available as some women found themselves 'geographically tied':

“And I do think that is something that hampers women's careers for sure, just this lack of mobility. Because it's not that easy to up sticks all the time and move your children around. And I think in any career the more flexible you are, the more you move around, then sometimes the quicker you can accelerate up, climb the scales.” (LSD16376).

The verdict of 'not being ready' has also been reported as coming from women themselves, and this tendency to avoid chancing it has been reported as being gendered.

“Whereas I think a lot of male colleagues would just put in for their Chair at a time when I think many women would think they're not ready for it. So they would just think, okay, I'm going to have a go.” (LSD16376)

This view was endorsed by data from the one of the seminars which highlighted that a promotion process which is by self-application only can disadvantage those who are risk averse, with research evidence showing that those people tend to be female. It is not only promotion behaviours (willingness to put oneself forward for promotion) that are gendered. Gendering of promotions applies to criteria and a number of processes within the promotions system, and the role of unconscious bias in supporting such practices of gendering was widely acknowledged. With regard to promotions criteria, it was identified across institutions that these are male centric; that is the criteria endorse domains of activity and behaviour typically or traditionally exhibited by men:

“I think the metrics are very – for assessing excellence, are very male orientated. I think it's a very adversarial environment. How many papers have you got, how many grants have you got, how big is your grant?” (LSD16376)

Worryingly there was some evidence that not only was the measurement male centric in terms of criteria but that the assessment process itself was inherently biased:

“we value the things I’ve just mentioned, so things like, how much money have you brought in, how many high quality publications, how many prestigious awards have you got? They’re the things we can measure and we can measure them quite easily, metrics. We know that women don’t get cited as much as men. So even if they had exactly the same publication list, their citations will be different and therefore the H index, the measuring is quite different” (LSD16283)

Although there were some positive suggestions that would militate against overt assessment bias such as anonymisation of promotions applications, the practice of measurement dominated by quantitative methodologies was viewed as contributing to an institutional culture in which male activities and behaviour are endorsed; that is only activity which can be measured easily (often by quantitative metrics) has worth:

“And I think the things that are valued are the things that are easily measured. And it’s easy to measure grant income, its less easy to measure your contribution to making your research team work well, your contribution to running projects well” (LSD16284)

This issue of promotions criteria being predominantly male centric and being driven by a number of unconscious biases was picked up across the three institutions and in one of the seminars there was a recommendation for a *rethinking of excellence program*, which would involve expanding definitions of reward and recognition and hence a change to promotions criteria and language. It was recognised that in order for any type of change to be effected in these areas transparency was required at institutional level.

Lack of transparency (opacity) was identified as figuring in both promotions processes and criteria, proving a significant barrier to equality. With regard to promotions processes, a number of respondents acknowledged that in many respects the system was equitable. For example panels were noted as being conducted with integrity:

“I’m very impressed with the way that runs and the way in which the panel take their duties very seriously, there’s a very clear process.” (LSD16264).

However there were two domains in which transparency were under threat. First it was noted that even in institutions where processes were sound, up to associate professor level, the professorial domain was characterised with opacity, with professorial zones/bands being identified as particularly problematic in both York and Leeds:

“That process [professorial bands] I think is very poorly managed because it’s not transparent. And I don’t even know who’s on the panel, which I find very odd.” (LSD16274)

Two issues around transparency were around availability of data and how to progress between zones as well as the process whereby professors were allocated to zones.

Second it was noted that while it was possible to characterize overt processes as fair, equitable and transparent the more covert processes provided a challenge. That is, the more covert aspects of promotion such as how applications are assessed, a process that is underwritten by the dominant discourses of promotion:

“I suppose that if there’s an element of gender to it then I would say it’s probably in the way in which promotions, and I’m not just talking about academia here, now they favour a certain attitude to work, they favour a certain tone and a certain confidence that you find more regularly amongst male colleagues.” (LSD16333)

At one of the seminars there was some discussion around how the discourse of promotion is self-promotional – ‘I did’ rather than ‘we did’ and the degree to which the reluctance to self-promote is gendered, and what is a ‘cultural mismatch’ between the act of self-promoting and what female academics are socialised into.

Ascending the grading structure then was often subject to a range of dominant external and cultural influences such as 1) senior colleague's/manager's verdict of individual's 'readiness'; 2) gendering of promotions criteria and characteristics pointing to institutional male centrism; 3) institutional opacity. Mitigations of threats to progression included individual resistance such as job hopping/seeking a second opinion but also institutional resistance figured by calls for a 'rethinking of excellence' programme.

Entering the domain of senior leadership

This issue relates to the acquisition of senior roles, often focusing on the domain post professor. Some respondents described the appointment to very senior roles such as PVC roles as being characterized by lack of transparency:

"I didn't apply for it. I was appointed by the vice chancellor. Personal appointment"
(LSD16349)

With this lack of transparency there was an element of unpredictability, a sense of a world that was outside the individual's control in which appointment to senior roles was in the 'lap of the gods'.

In addition one respondent identified a cultural bias that was 'anti' transparency for very senior roles illustrating an interesting tension associated with equity and appointment to very senior leadership roles

"But there's a kind of view in the Russell Group and the 1994 universities that there's something a bit smelly about advertising for your senior management group. You know, do you not have the right people in house that you can pick?" (LSD16334).

Interestingly some respondents acknowledged that this lack of transparency with regard to appointments to roles had actually done them favours while at the same time was evidently not supporting equality and inclusion principles:

"And gradually I was given more responsibility, asked to take on particular roles in the department, which got me more involved in the running of the department.... I didn't apply to do them. Now I don't think that's necessarily – I would – okay, there are things that have changed." (LSD16274)

This highlights an important tension: when does talent spotting – identifying and recognising talent become a tap on the shoulder, a non-transparent practice of patronage leading to exclusion of some groups. While some respondents had clearly benefitted from the 'tap on the shoulder' there were other reports of the practice of patronage leading to invisibility of women (*"But it means you're completely invisible"* LSD16388). Aside from the practice of patronage/sponsorship there are other practices within institutions such as population of committees by ex-officio roles and the practice of self-nomination which is itself gendered that can perpetuate masculine cultures of leadership (*And it seems to me that men are more likely to self-nominate for positions or recognition,* LSD16147). This position was summed up by a participant from one of the seminars as follows:

"So by populating senate...populating any other committee in an ex officio way when you know that that group of people are male - uniquely wouldn't it be better just to write a constitution for two white men because that's what you are going to get" [LSD16388]

In summary, the process of acquiring senior leadership appointments was perceived to be based more on patronage than open competition and the world of senior leadership roles was characterized by a valorisation of masculine norms and behaviours such that many women felt marginalized, silenced and excluded from these roles.

THEME 4: Cultural barriers: 'Fixing the Knowledge'

This theme focuses on work cultures within higher education institutions that provide some insight into the under representation of women in senior leadership positions. What emerged from the data was a theme of alienation, what we describe as 'alienating leadership cultures' engendered by perceptions of senior leadership in higher education.

First, respondents reported a perception (within themselves but also expressed by their colleagues) of senior leadership positions as 'undoable jobs'; this perception was strongly influenced by the impact of caring responsibilities and was ultimately judged by some as a price that was too high to pay:

"Some jobs (laughs) just appear undoable. And they may be undoable more for women than men because of the greater – the typical, average, greater investment in women in the home and family than men." [LSD16282]

"And I have spoken to senior women and they really have embraced the workaholic ideals...and they're very successful so you look at them and think, well could I be like that? And as I said before the price is very high. And for me the price is too high." (LSD16346)

One respondent also reported a perception, expressed by female colleagues, of leadership being too dry, boring and concerned with politics, and the implication was that this perception was gendered:

"But I would say that in general women don't like the idea of what they would see as the politics of management and they don't like the idea of just being involved in those sorts of meetings and exclusively working on a strategic level" (LSD16333).

A significant source of alienation from senior leadership roles was the perceived masculine cultures and practices that strongly influenced women's perception of what leadership roles had to offer. This finding emerged from data across all three institutions. For example one participant from the York seminar described the perception of senior leadership as a 'macho political backroom':

"I've heard over the space of my career from people it is kind of tacitly assuming that the kind of qualities that it takes to be more successful in a senior role are more prevalent amongst men. So we're talking about authority and gravitising, managerialism." [LSD16335]

Such perceptions self-perpetuate a model of leadership that is masculine and encounters resistance from potential female senior leaders. Across institutions there was a degree of resistance to the masculine VC model of leadership:

"But if there is no visibility of women...there's probably not enough female VCs for other people to think, I could probably do that and enjoy it" [LSD16111-4]

Strongly associated with the masculine model of leadership was the long hours culture – although a key deterrent for those with caring responsibilities sometimes embraced by women aspiring to the top:

"We do have people in our department who are encouraging you to work at weekends, encouraging you to send emails at two o'clock in the morning. And I think the atmosphere is a little bit competitive..." (LSD16346)

The masculine model of leadership and the degree to which it has been perpetuated should be understood within the context of 'masculinities cultures'. A range of both overt and covert practices was described and within this report we highlight a few that were reported as having particularly detrimental impacts on women.

First, with respect to the more covert elements, there is a perception of institutional bias, a deeply embedded cultural attitude that endorses male behaviours and choices. What was described across the institutions was the influence of the masculine hierarchy supported by the masculine contribution being valued more and invested with authority. Endorsement also

applies to choices: one respondent outlined how endorsement of male choices (for example relating to working away from home) have a direct impact on women in that when they make what is perceived to be a 'male choice' they are not supported:

"And again, you do have to make choices. And men have made those choices and society has validated and endorsed those choices, which does make it harder for women"
[LSD16281]

Second, with respect to overt practices, respondents extensively reported a range of sexist behaviours exhibited within their institutions. Such behaviours could be openly confrontational such as aggressive behaviour in seminars ("*research seminars were much more like a bear pit than I was used to and kind of quite – it's the Oxford way, you know*" [LSD16333] and application of unreasonable amounts of scrutiny that would not be applied to men:

"They're being asked to justify themselves all the time, for the slightest normal request they're being asked to justify when a male colleague wouldn't...they have their self-confidence undermined on at least a weekly basis"[LSD16388]

There were also a range of behaviours that while not openly hostile were perceived as detrimental in their banality and hence acceptance into the cultural norm:

"I guess one other little thing which I've said is much less visible. And I think that if somebody said – in the context of somebody being Muslim or disabled or even possibly even gay these days, they'd jump on it and, you know, racist, inappropriate to say it. I don't think that rule applies to sexism. I do think you get – not serious sexism but your banal everyday stuff," [LSD16424]

Another example of a behaviour that while not overtly hostile towards women has been insidious in its effects is the practice of homo-sociability: that is male networks which exclude women on a social and professional basis, appointments coming through male networks being one concerning example. The net result is a wide-spread perpetuation of masculinities cultures:

"So the culture is dominated by one particular group. And that group tends to be male...I'm suggesting that there's a tendency for women to be more conscious of helping others and working for the collective good" [LSD16283]

Encouragingly there were some suggestions on ways to combat the alienation women were experiencing within their institutions. These focussed on demonstrating that a variety of leadership styles are acceptable, in order to prevent perpetuation of masculine models of leadership. This would be achieved by reconfiguring models of leadership so as to endorse qualities such as collaboration, enabling others, keeping morale of workforce in face of adversity.

"So what we don't want is to fix the issue by putting in a Margaret Thatcher who will simply be a clone of the others but in a slightly different suit. So it's embracing different styles of leadership."[LSD16385]

In summary there were a number of interlinking discourses exploring women's sense of alienation from models of senior leadership. These included

- 1) perception of senior leadership roles as 'undoable';
- 2) senior leadership roles as being boring/dry/unappealing;
- 3) conflation of senior leadership roles with hegemonic masculinities whereby cultures were reinforced by overt and covert cultural practices within institutions. Deliberate reconfiguration of models of senior leadership was offered as one potential solution to this described alienation.

THEME 5: Organisational barriers: ‘Fixing the Institution’

This theme relates to specific features of the institutions that were viewed as impacting on women’s career development and their representation in senior leadership roles. We distinguish between ‘positive culture’ (covert elements) which relates to the social and cultural environment of the institution and ‘positive practice’ relating to procedures and policies (overt elements).

Positive Culture

Across the interviews and seminars a number of respondents spoke warmly and favourably of their institutions highlighting elements of positive working cultures. Supportive working cultures including positive relationships with colleagues were viewed as being particularly sustaining - both to the individual and the institution, in that a positive culture recruits good staff who buy into that culture. Other examples of positive working environments included cultures of leadership and collegiality leading ultimately to cultures of equity of opportunity:

“So a lot of it is about a culture of leadership, a culture of collegiality and cooperation to make sure that people can do the jobs that they’re good at as well as sometimes doing the jobs that they don’t want to do, so that the role can spread round.” [LSD16281]

Another positive aspect, seen as critical for women’s career development was the extent to which an institution was prepared to invest, and also to take strategic risks:

“So institutionally, it was really people being prepared to take a punt on something a bit different.” [LSD16333]

Across all institutions, respondents were candid in highlighting areas that needed attention: the role of implicit assumptions and unconscious bias in perpetuating inequitable work cultures was extensively acknowledged and debated– with concern expressed that institutions needed to recognize the scope and scale of the problem:

“A culture that recognises that – there’s all these kind of assumptions about gender behaviours and things, women are more nurturing so you put them in the student facing, teaching oriented roles and men are more cerebral so they get the research roles and all of that,” [LSD16281]

Recognition was highlighted as the crux of the problem – one respondent spoke of the need for absence of diversity to be recognised at all levels – not just gender – but more worryingly spoke of the institutions that do not recognise lack of representation of women in senior leadership at the level of the data, and therefore as a problem to be addressed. This lack of recognition at a basic level has the potential to lead to the most intractable issues in work cultures

“But it fascinates me sometimes how it’s not recognised....It’s not recognised. And then the next stage is it’s not recognised as a problem. So the fact that I’m sitting there in a room full of guys with one other woman at the senior level and that nobody questions that”. [LSD16389]

So while institutional culture was held to be positive in a number of respects such as supportive and collegiate working relationships, the role of unconscious bias in deeply embedded inequitable institutional practices was recognised as a significant challenge.

Positive Practice

Interview and seminar data yielded wide ranging and innovative suggestions for improving institutional practice for putting in place procedures that enable full engagement. We highlight three key areas emerging from the research.

Core hours

Across all three institutions *'core hours'* policies were discussed extensively. There was widespread support for implementing core hours to prevent certain groups of people being excluded from essential activity and therefore denied the opportunity to contribute to their full potential. For example profile enhancing networking events are often held outside core hours and the practice of holding strategic breakfast meetings was recognised as leading to inequity of opportunity. Accordingly the value of using core hours to cover strategic activity and constraining those parts of the job that most impose on colleagues to within the working day was endorsed by a number of respondents. Indeed it was noted that judicious use of core hours could actually dispose of unessential meetings (one respondent identified this figure as 50 %!). However the complexity of implementing core hours was also noted and a call was suggested for flexibility of approach. There was also some resistance/doubt to the wholesale application of core hours, hinting at a deeply embedded cultural attitude perpetuated within academia from the highest levels:

"REF doesn't say, "Did you do that work between nine to five?" It says, "Did you do that work?" So you cannot change that." [LSD16274].

Core hours is an interesting practice example as it is a policy that has some far reaching impacts on working cultures within institutions and so offers great scope for effecting cultural change. Within one university faculty core hours has been taken one step further to encompass 'out of hours practices' with a policy restricting sending of work emails to the hours of 8am to 6pm in an effort to dismantle the long hours culture, a culture that has disenfranchised some members of the University. For example out of hours emailing can exclude groups of colleagues from significant activity if business has been transacted via email during the evening. Restricting emailing times can also help to set realistic expectations – especially with regard to students – and also to staff with junior staff often feeling pressured to replicate the work behaviour of their line managers.

Addressing the pay disparity

A key area identified for action was around pay disparity between men and women. The importance of conducting full and transparent pay audits was recommended across all three institutions, taking into account the impact and interplay of promotion processes on pay:

"But I'm not sure they keep track of things like how long do men and women stay at lecturer level before they're considered for SL? And how long are men and women held at SL before they're promoted to professor? So there's something about what is the kind of information that we're gathering and how can we use that appropriately." (LSD16349)

The action of auditing and making data transparent itself was viewed as having the potential to have significant impact on the culture of the organization, in that it promotes transparency.

Using Equality initiatives as a catalyst for change

Athena Swan is only one example of an equality scheme there are others such as Project Juno, Investors in People, and Stonewall diversity champions. What emerged from discussions and interviews was the importance of embedding such processes across the institutions rather than employing them as a form of crisis management (band aid):

"I hope one of the big long lasting benefits of all the departments in engineering and science and medicine going through Athena Swan is not whether we get gold, silver or bronze, but those conversations have taken place widely and you've begun to change the culture. And that's what we need" [LSD16283]

As highlighted above, a number of positive themes were presented by the research participants across all three Universities and these will be developed further within the recommendations to this project.

THEME 6: Individual barriers and enablers: 'Fixing the Woman'

This theme is concerned with attributes and issues relating to the individual which facilitate or impede career success. Interview questions asked women to describe what factors had contributed to their success and what had hindered them, and to differing degrees respondents attributed their success or difficulties to 'individual' or 'institutional' factors. Also taking into account data from the seminars, competing discourses emerged that framed either the individual (including interventions to support the individual) or the organization as the driving factor in achieving equal representation of the genders in senior leadership. This theme is led by the 'individual' hence the heading 'fixing the woman'. Within this theme we consider 'success' (driven by the individual), 'blame' (where individual factors are held responsible for lack of success) and 'support' (interventions targeted at the individual).

Secrets of my success

A common individual quality respondents attributed to their success during the interviews can be summed up as tenacity – driven by 'bloody hard work' and the desire to succeed:

"Bloody hard work. (Laughs) And there's a lot of that actually. I work really hard and I work a lot of hours." [LSD16282]

Also a salient element, in conjunction with tenacity, was the importance of goal setting informed by strategic planning:

"I think it probably goes back to the fact that I'm a goal setter and I make plans. So for instance, I wanted to have my personal Chair by the time I was forty, so that entailed doing what was necessary to do that." [LSD16281]

Interestingly one respondent conceptualised the ability to strategize as being enhanced by a strongly developed sense of identity:

"It's about maintaining your sense of identity throughout all of that. Your sense of identity as a person and a researcher. So what makes you distinctive?" [LSD 16389]

In contrast to strategizing/goal setting some respondents maintained that a strong affective element, concerned with emotional commitment, a passion to make a difference was instrumental to their success:

"And I think a lot of people who are in research are very passionate about what they research for a reason, because they feel that that field needs to be progressed." [LSD16376]

Blame

This is a somewhat contentious heading – but is used here to convey a distinctive discourse that emerged from the data which focused on factors that held women back which while both individual personality traits and behaviours were also gendered – to do with 'being a woman'. So in terms of how specific personality traits and behaviours were conceptualised as holding women back we have a suite of factors that are largely focused on lack of assertiveness informed by a lack of confidence. For example respondents described women as bad at putting themselves forward; needing to learn the confidence to speak up; not being good at promoting themselves (one respondent advised taking an 'immodesty pill!) and vulnerable to knock backs so hampering their promotions prospects. With respect to promotions, a common trait of women (not shared by men), that proved a significant impediment to success was the need to 'tick all the boxes' driven by hyper self-criticality, a behaviour that has been documented in research evidence:

"You know, because I think my instinct would be to wait until I was way beyond the criteria before applying" [LSD16333]

The theme of self-criticality was a common one with a number of correlates including fear of failure and lack of confidence, which has recently become badged as ‘imposter syndrome’, where women fear that their perceived shortcomings will be found out at some point and they continue to experience considerable self-doubt.

“I think women in particular have very much the kind of imposter syndrome and very much they don’t think they’re good enough” (LSD16346)

An interesting theme around personal responsibility was raised – which ties into the debate as to whether interventions need to be targeted at the institution or the individual. There was variation in the degree to which respondents located the problem of lack of female representation in senior leadership in the institution or in the individual. The following quote effectively sums up the tension in this debate:

“It’s a difficult one to answer because I think I’m not entirely sure that I feel that institutions create obstacles. Certainly not in any kind of active way.... And I do think that sometimes women not so much create their own obstacles but assume that there are obstacles, and perhaps could push through them a little bit more.” [LSD 16281]

This theme of personal responsibility is a critical one and has a number of implications for how the problem of absent talent in leadership is framed and therefore how interventions are formulated. This tension was evident in respondents’ descriptions of ‘unhelpful/self-limiting behaviours that females in HE engage in such as reluctance to compete against male colleagues for internal roles, and a tendency to gravitate towards ‘departmental housework’

“Women tend to do quite a lot of looking after jobs. They do more than their share of looking after and they may be spending a less proportion on their own academic work that benefits their person career” [LSD16110]

Support

A range of individual-led interventions were identified derived from questions soliciting female professors’ opinions and also through the institutional seminars. We highlight a selection. First ‘mentoring’ was discussed extensively – the value of it and the best approach to adopt. Across institutions there was widespread support for a formal mentoring scheme citing such benefits as facilitating visibility and helping women to make strategic decisions, and mitigating promotion barriers by overriding the ‘female’ tendency to ‘wait till they’re ready’:

“I was an impact mentee with no, not no ambition but I didn’t feel promotion was even in the near future and I got sat down and told, “Well, you need to do this, you need to go for this. Because when all the men round you start getting promoted and you don’t, you’re going to wonder why you’re so far behind.” (LSD16111-4)

In the discussions regarding mentoring it was also raised that male colleagues can be good mentors too and certainly in the interview data there were many instances of male sponsors/champions spotting and nurturing talent – planting the seed as one respondent described it:

“When I first became head of department – so this was 2008 I think – the Vice-Chancellor said to me, “You could be a PVC.” And I just went, “Yeah, fine.” And walked away. He didn’t have to say that, and maybe he says it to everybody, I don’t know. But just to plant that seed in somebody’s mind. And that’s what we can do for everyone. We encourage everybody, whether they’re male or female, saying you can do this, don’t be afraid.” [LSD16424]

As a complementary strand the value of informal mentoring and networking was recognized, particularly the importance of national networking to raise one’s research and professional

profile and to mitigate isolation and invisibility. An important positive practice was encouragement of women to develop such networks:

“And a good piece of advice was...don’t get yourself cut off...and gained me a big network of national and international colleagues” [LSD16349]

Second, a number of interview respondents expressed a strong sense of moral responsibility to nurture and enable other women as they had been nurtured and supported – ‘looking out for other women’:

“And so I think women just have to look out for other women and just keep that in mind. Because even with the best intention or a person of any gender who knows what the score is, it took me a lot more effort to do that than I suspect” [LSD 16282]

Aside from the pastoral element of ‘woman to woman support’ there was an element of role modelling, setting aspirations:

“I think that the single most important factor in my success was having a very strong female role model...so I know she put a good word in with him about me - so I was very grateful he gave me that opportunity.” [LSD16346]

Finally, although leadership and development courses sometimes had a mixed reception with regard to their effectiveness the wider indirect benefits were supported such as providing an important place for reflection, sending out positive messages about value of investment and building up contacts:

“you send a message to everybody that you’re investing in yourself in terms of development and that nobody is a finished product. You send a message to yourself that it’s important and useful to think about how you approach things and that you can learn something from the way other people have done it or theories about how we lead. Having the time away to allow yourself to put on a different hat and say, “Oh no, I didn’t like the way we did that.” [LSD16385]

While the individual was the unifying thread in this theme, there were some startling contrasts in terms of discourses produced:

- First there was the discourse of ‘success’ focussing on the personal often stable traits of the individual that had led to their senior position
- Second there was the controversially headed but distinctive discourse of ‘blame’ that highlighted the characteristics (often posited as being unique to being female) that proved significant hindrances to success ranging from lack of assertiveness to hyper self-criticality. This attributional style that locates barriers within the individual has in turn produced the discourse of ‘support’ which focusses on remedial interventions.



THEME 7: How to make a difference: opportunities for change

This theme broadly addressed the mechanisms of effecting cultural change across HE institutions. First there emerged from the data a sense of how senior women's actions, behaviours and leadership styles could make a difference to their colleagues and their institution. Sometimes this was valued more than the practice of climbing the ranks

"And I enjoy trying to make a difference to something. If I feel as though I'm doing something useful to something I care about then that's what I will do." [LSD16274]

'Making a difference' was associated with a deep sense of responsibility – making an impact on policy and practice so as to effect cultural change:

"But the answer is because I was prepared to really take a radical look. And really able to bring my colleagues along behind me so that we changed it."[LSD 16334]

Effecting cultural change was viewed as a way of 'looking out for' the next generation:

"Those women see it as their responsibility to help the next generation of women along. I feel quite strongly that now I'm kind of in the middle of the age group that go to those conference that I need to do that too, you know, to try and mentor people." [LSD16333]

This was viewed as particularly important for growing future generations and feeding the pipeline – with a sense that if women did not acknowledge this responsibility then some women would be left behind constituting a personal cost but also a cost to the institution which would not be making the most of their capacity.

Analysis of both interview and seminar data revealed a range of 'critical mass' arguments – with the concept of critical mass being instrumental in effecting culture shifts. For example, encouraging a better gender mix on decision making bodies could improve decision-making processes and help to mitigate against women being 'simply the other'

"We do need more women representation in terms of numbers at certain levels I think to help overcome that tension. Because that leads to a greater understanding of what the issues are. I think one of the problems is that if you're in a minority any tensions you might be facing are not considered." (LSD 16389)

Critical mass is so important because it means the difference between 'fringe activity' of the 'minority group' and concerted action by a group that can embed cultural change through embedding policies and practices within the institution so they become the norm:

"And I think – and this comes back to my point about being the other, I think that somehow we have to embed these policies and attitudes into the institution" [LSD16389]

There was a sense from a number of respondents that a 'critical mass', however defined, could prove critical in making a 'change in practice' the 'norm'. This was viewed as key to ensuring uptake and compliance within the organization with an additional positive of reducing backlash against women for making what are currently viewed as 'masculine' choices:

"But the more women who do choose to do this kind of thing, the more socially normalised it will become and the less of those value judgements will be exercised." [LSD16281]

"You know, it's supporting them to say prevail upon your partners to take an equal amount of responsibility, you can do it. You know, if we all do it" [LSD16334]

This theme highlighted the persuasiveness of critical mass arguments in terms of effecting culture shifts. Some arguments focused on importance of increased female representation on decision making bodies while others focused more on the importance of change in practice becoming the norm once that critical threshold had been reached. Within this theme, although not to do with critical mass per se, there was also a sense of a deep social and moral responsibility; growing the next generation by establishing equitable and nurturing practices.

Conclusions

The research highlighted two major barriers to women academic's career development – institutional barriers and societal barriers. Given the relatively small scale of this exploratory study we recommend that further research is undertaken to determine if these barriers are more widespread within the White Rose University Consortium. If so, this provides scope to work on interventions which are designed and shaped accordingly.

- Societal barriers are more covert and hard to address but include the gendering of excellence whereby merit is defined and rewarded against hegemonic masculinities criteria. Interventions to address this type of barrier require more stepping back and unravelling and often more work around implementation in order for them to be effective. The rising popularity of (un)conscious bias awareness-raising activity within higher education is recognition that societal barriers play a significant role in the missing women conundrum.
- Equally significant are institutional barriers such as promotion procedures and other discriminatory working practices and it is critical these are addressed too. All three White Rose Universities are having conversations around introducing measures to alleviate potential discrimination by redefining promotion criteria and setting core hours for example. Institutional barriers are more effectively addressed with targeted and focused interventions supported by facilitated training during implementation processes.
- There is an acknowledged lack of transparency in institutional procedures and practices which poses a significant threat to gender equality. Not only during formal promotions procedures and pay disparities but also as a driver for the 'grace and favour' ex-officio type appointments. Overall the research has surfaced the daily lack of transparency experienced by women professors who do not to 'know the rules' of the game of senior leadership let alone 'how to play' the game. This lack of transparency contradicts equalities legislation and policies and it is disturbing to find that it still surfaces across the three Universities.
- The perpetuation of gendered leadership cultures, hegemonic masculinities discourses and masculine leadership models are a significant contributor to 'the missing women' in higher education leadership. These have had engendered varied responses in women. Some women have reported being discriminated against because they do not 'fit in' with these cultures and models while others have resisted the cultures and steered their ambition accordingly. As one of our participants says, the university 'is a boys club' and 'run by men for men'.
- Although Athena Swan type interventions such as 'mentoring', 'women's leadership development' and 'champions' are valuable and welcome they can become little more than 'band-aids' or window dressing without effectiveness if they are not catalysts for deeper change in institutional practices.
- The gender pay gap is perceived as a most divisive practice which concerns everyone within the Institutions and needs to be addressed.



Recommendations

1. This White Rose research project into the missing women in higher education leadership should continue apace with applications for further funding from HEFCE and ESRC to build upon the foundations of this work. There seems to be momentum gathering that the time is right to exploit a raising awareness of such issues associated with women's under-representation at senior levels.
2. Future work should be both practice-based and research-based and should ask questions around: how do we make our Universities better in terms of gender diversity and inclusion; and how do we seriously address and influence the loss of talent which the sector is experiencing now?
3. *Practice-based work* should focus upon unpacking the mystery of the missing women by designing and delivering interventions over a period of time (say two years) and formally monitoring and evaluating their impact. These interventions could include:
 - Further awareness-raising seminars across institutions on themes around the two major findings from this study which are: *lack of transparency*; and *importance of challenging masculine models of leadership*.
 - Formal networking activities across all three institutions for the purposes of career development and promotion.
 - A study of senior decision-making forums across institutions with a view to placing an observer from the research team in forum meetings and taking note of any discriminatory practices and feeding back these observations to panel members. These observations can then be used as good practice guidelines for all decision-making forum chairs across institutions.
 - An exercise about top-tier engagement whereby the senior management team of each institution is 'adopted' by one of our researchers and shadows one of their team to identify opportunities for gender mainstreaming in that institution. This to become a potential joined-up project with another university which is seeking ESRC funding for their higher education gender mainstreaming research.
 - 'Unpicking' and challenging the policies and practices that engender 'undoable jobs' in academia
 - Exploring the dangers and benefits of patronage and sponsorship with regard to career progression in HE
 - Reviewing the practice of ex-officio appointments
4. Research-based work should focus upon addressing the gaps in the literature especially learning from good practice in other sectors and exploring ways in which to better engage men in such debates.
 - What is it that other sectors are doing around gender equality that really makes a difference to organisations that higher education can emulate?
 - How can men best be engaged with the pursuit of gender equality without either marginalising women or demoralising men?



This research needs to be practical, not only desk research, and will involve the enhanced use of existing corporate networks any of our three institutions already belong to. It will also involve ethnographic studies of the career development of women and men across institutions so for example, volunteer female and male academics keeping a journal about the gendering of academia on a week by week basis. An important aspect of this ongoing research is the practical outputs it will produce.

5. Develop, produce and disseminate good practice guidelines for various communities across our institutions based upon the findings of the research so far. For example: guidelines for mentors; promotion panel chairs and members; professional development reviewers; and heads of school/department.
6. Set up a White Rose 'everyday sexism' portal where anecdotes of lived experiences of women can be posted and profiled and encourage institutions to adopt a 'no tolerance' position on discourse which often currently goes unchallenged thereby becoming entrenched.
7. Continue to assess the impact of Athena Swan on the career progression of senior women in the White Rose Universities
8. Extend the research developed within the White Rose institutions nationwide to explore the context and experiences more widely across the sector.



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Appendix 1: Methodology of the White Rose seminars

University of Leeds

Penny Hatton provided overall facilitation for the seminar and in conjunction with the research team developed the following methodology:

A World Café approach was taken, with each participant selecting two of the four topics to discuss with a small group of other participants. Each table hosted a topic and a facilitator. After a brief introduction to the process, each participant spent 25' at a table of their choice. After 25' everyone moved to a 2nd table (topic) of their choice. The conversation of the 2nd group to visit that table built on the conversation of the previous group. Places at each table were limited so that all four topics could be discussed. By 1.10, each table facilitator had a record of the contributions of both visiting groups and summarised the findings for plenary feedback. Participants followed the following protocol:

Task: For each topic please discuss

- a. What good practice already exists in this area, either at Leeds or that you are aware of elsewhere, that might be built on?
- b. What would help to improve poor practice that needs to be overcome?
- c. What needs to happen to get from where we are now to where we want to be?

University of Sheffield

Facilitation: One person sits on each table to gather data and, if required, to support and encourage the participants during the exercises.

Warm up exercise: In your next life would you come back as a woman or a man? Why?

Timeline exercise: Main facilitator explains task and provides example. Table facilitators are on hand to explain the key, give examples, etc. Participants asked to hand timelines in to researchers – if they are comfortable with this

1st Group discussion. In what ways is Sheffield University an enabling employer for women? i.e. what does it do to support women's career progress and ensure that talented women have equal access to senior leadership posts?

2nd Group discussion. In which ways is Sheffield University a limiting employer for women? i.e. what features of UoS slow down or block women's career progress or limit their access to senior leadership posts?

3rd group discussion. Visioning Exercise – blue skies thinking; Designing 'The Paragon University of the White Rose'; Groups discuss what the UK's 'ideal' university would look like and feel like. They can to design it on a blank sheet of paper. Assume ample funding, high quality of staff of both sexes available, plenty of students keen to register. How the university is structured, what are its key features?

Plenary discussion. Real world recommendations for The University of Sheffield to help it be a fairer employer that fully embraces equality of opportunity – especially at senior levels.

University of York

'Your Decisions in Focus – Raising Awareness of Unconscious Bias'

Joining Instructions for Participants

On behalf of the Athena Swan Steering Group and the White Rose Women in Leadership Steering Group, we are delighted that you are able to join us for the above event.

Gender equality is a key issue at York and a number of initiatives are currently underway to support work already achieved. The Athena Swan Steering Group play a very active role in this area and raising the awareness of unconscious bias was recognised as a key area of activity.

As you may be aware the institution has maintained our Bronze Award for Athena Swan and a number of Departments have gained Awards under this scheme. Brain Fulton and Paul Walton have created the attached document that provides an overview of this and we would ask you all to read prior to attending this workshop.

For a number of months now, as members of the White Rose Consortium, we have been exploring the potential benefits of establishing a Women in Leadership network across the three institutions. As a result of our initial discussions it was recognised that it would be useful to conduct some research into this area and Professor Jackie Ford, Director of Leeds University Centre for Interdisciplinary Leadership Studies has secured some funding for this purpose. This research aims to generate data from senior university staff across the White Rose consortium institutions concerning the gender imbalance at the top of higher education. We decided to take this opportunity to blend this research with our desire to explore the impact of unconscious bias on our individual and collective decision making. As a result this workshop will form part of the research. During the workshop there will be a breakout session to use focus groups to capture ideas on the issues that are arising and these will be recorded to provide input to the research project. For this reason a consent form is required from all those attending. Further details of the wider research project are attached to this e-mail along with the consent form which we ask you to return completed on the day.

We look forward to exploring the area of unconscious bias with you and collectively identifying ways in which we can reduce the negative affect this may have on our decisions.

Topics for the breakout groups:

- Where are these biases likely to manifest themselves in the workplace?
- What could we do more / less of to reduce these biases?
- What are the perceived barriers specifically for female progression at York?
- What more could we be doing to address gender imbalance in top roles within HE?

Appendix 2: Interview schedule

White Rose study interview schedule

'Women in Leadership: Absent talent in UK HEIs'

Introduce myself and my role in the research study. Preamble to include the aim of the research:

'this research aims to explore existing challenges to and advances in achieving more equal representation of men and women in senior (professorial) roles in higher education'.

And also the data generation from seminars and interviews across the three White Rose universities. Say something about the plans for disseminating the findings of the research and about confidentiality and anonymity.

Confirm that they have received a copy of the information sheet, talk about consent and make sure the consent form is signed by both of us.

Welcome and thank you very much for your time.

1. Please tell me something about your current role and responsibilities?
2. Please tell me something about your career journey to date, starting with early career stages through to your current role?
3. Tell me about your views on the key challenges facing women in HE and in particular the key challenges you have faced during your career.

Follow ups:

3.1 What are the factors that influence your progress to a senior position in HE?

3.2 What aspects of HEIs create obstacles for women to hold leadership roles? [E.g. recruitment, selection pols, lack of mentors, role models, career development, promotion pols, SDR scheme etc.

3.3 What do you think are the most persistent barriers to women gaining senior positions within HE?

3.4 In your experiences in HE, have any of these barriers had an impact on your work opportunities. If so, can you tell me more?

3.5 Do you think women in general and you in particular experience tension between their work and family?

3.6 Please tell me about any flexible working or care leave arrangements that you have experienced. What arrangements might there be to help you overcome any problems you have experienced?



4. Can you please tell me about your success stories of achieving your current professorial post? What factors have contributed to this success?

Follow-ups:

4.1 Probe as to whether there are any factors, such as social, cultural, economic, personal, political factors that contribute positively to women's (and your specific) advancement in HE.

4.2 Probe any organisational aspects that have helped to advance your career.

4.3 Probe any developmental opportunities available within the University.

4.4 Probe any significant person/people who have influenced your career.

4.5 What do you think was the most helpful of any of the factors you mentioned in your career advancement?

5. What are your views on the gender balance of more senior roles in HE?

6. Based on your experiences as a senior academic and given the nature of your work, the barriers you have faced and advances you have made, what do you suggest to help you and other women to achieve senior positions in HE?

Follow-ups:

6.1 What can women do on an individual level to influence women's advancement/representation at senior levels in HE?

6.2 What organisational policies do you think will influence women's career advancement to top positions in HE?

7. If you could change anything about your life choices or employment experience, what would it be?

8. Where do you see yourself in 5 years from now? 10 years from now?

9. Is there anything else that you would like to add not already mentioned in our discussions?

