

Chipping away at the glass ceiling

The WLN's annual research into the gender of college principals in England shows some improvement, but at 38% the percentage of female principals is still surprisingly low.

We would expect a higher percentage, given that the latest LLUK figures show that 64% of the workforce is female and 46% of second tier managers in colleges are women. However this year's figures do show some improvement.

The good news – our February 2011 research shows that:

- of the 351 college principals in the further education sector in England, 38% are women, an increase of 2% over 2010
- of the 53 colleges that appointed new principals this year, 45% were women

Less good news:

- only 29% of sixth form college principals are women, no improvement from 2010
- some regions continue to show very low percentages of female principals, in particular the North East at 24%

Women are successful leaders of large colleges

Whilst overall female principals only comprise 38%, the picture in larger colleges is quite different: of the principals leading the larger colleges (those with an income of £25m or over), 47% are women. Women are successful in moving from principalships in smaller colleges to lead larger colleges: of principals moving to another post during 2010-2011, 44% were women. And women are now well represented in the 157 Group of colleges at 63%, up from 46% last year.

Gender of principals by regions in England

There are still some significant differences in the percentages of women principals across the regions in England:

PERCENTAGE OF FEMALE COLLEGE CEO/PRINCIPALS		
Regions in England	February 2011	February 2010
East of England	42%	32%
East Midlands	26%	25%
Greater London	40%	34%
North East	24%	29%
North West	43%	45%
South East	39%	38%
South West	34%	33%
West Midlands	36%	34%
Yorkshire and Humberside	43%	37%

The North East has the lowest number of colleges at 21, and also shows the lowest percentage of female CEO/Principals at 24%. The East Midlands percentage is still low at 26%, again a region with a low number of colleges (23).

There were increases in the percentage of female principals in the East of England and in Greater London, and the North West still shows the highest percentage at 43%.

Is there a business case for more women principals?

There is plenty of evidence to show that women principals are successful and make good principals. Two examples: this can be seen in the high percentage of existing female principals being selected for a second principalship and also by the fact that half the colleges judged Outstanding by Ofsted are led by women.

So yes, there is a business case for diversifying leadership in colleges and a clear message to governing bodies: women across the country have an outstanding track record in running successful colleges, managing substantial budgets and achieving high grades in inspections.

What are we doing about the gender imbalance?

At the WLN we believe that we must encourage more women and more black and ethnic minority professionals to aim high and to apply for the top jobs. Our annual activities include:

- annual research into gender equality (see website for reports)
- a WLN checklist available to all colleges to assist self-assessment in the area of gender equality and leadership
- seminars for emerging leaders and termly newsletters for members
- a joint annual conference run with the Network for Black Professionals
- regional networks and an annual mentoring programme for women

For more information and to join us TODAY, go to www.wlnfe.org.uk.