

## Is the glass ceiling even lower in tough times?

The WLN's annual research into the gender of college principals in England shows a worrying trend: the percentage of newly appointed female principals has dropped in the last year. Is this the effect of the recession? Does it perhaps reflect some college governors' doubts about women's ability to be tough when times are tough?

The overall percentage of college principals who are women has remained constant for the second year at 38%. The college workforce comprises 64% women, so women should be at least aspiring for parity when it comes to the top college jobs. However, it's encouraging to see that the percentage of female principals of sixth form colleges has increased from 29% to 33%.

For the first time last year the LLUK workforce report showed the gender breakdown of second tier managers: 46% (in the colleges returning data) are women. A challenge for the WLN is to encourage more women at this level to aspire to the role of chief executive and more women in middle management to see themselves as senior managers.

In summary, the good news coming out of our February 2012 research:

- the percentage of female principals of sixth form colleges has risen from 29% in 2011 to 33%
- for the second year running, 47% of the larger colleges are run by women
- the North West has an impressive 46% of female principals (up from 43% last year) and the South East has seen an increase from 39% to 44%

And the less good news:

- of the 47 new principals appointed in the last 12 months, only 13 (28%) were women, a marked decrease from 24 (45%) in 2011
- the East Midlands percentage of female principals has sunk from 26% to 23%, and in the South West the percentage went down from 34% to 25%
- seven out of the nine English regions still have below 40% of female principals

## Gender of principals by region in England

The North West continues to lead the regions, this time with 46% of the colleges led by women. The South East comes second with 44%, while the East Midlands, the North East and the South West (down to 25% this year) show low numbers of women at the top. Our figures are valid for 1<sup>st</sup> February 2012 and are based on the current number of colleges: 222 general further education colleges, 94 sixth form colleges and 29 specialist colleges.

	Percentage of colleges with a female principal		
	1 <sup>st</sup> Feb 2010	1 <sup>st</sup> Feb 2011	1 <sup>st</sup> Feb 2012
East of England	32%	42%	38%
East Midlands	25%	26%	23%
Greater London	34%	40%	39%
North East	29%	24%	25%
North West	45%	43%	46%
South East	38%	39%	44%
South West	33%	34%	25%
West Midlands	34%	36%	36%
Yorkshire and Humberside	37%	43%	39%

## Women continue to be successful leaders of large colleges

The overall percentage of 38% for female principals is disappointing, but for the second year running 47% of principals of the larger colleges in England (those with allocations of over £25m) are women. And for the second year running the percentage of female principals within the 157 Group is 63%.

There continues to be a clear business case for more female leaders 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 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
- termly newsletters and e-bulletins to colleges
- an annual conference for leaders and aspiring leaders at all levels
- regional networks and an annual mentoring programme for women

For more information and to join us TODAY, go to [www.wlnfe.org.uk](http://www.wlnfe.org.uk).