

Climbing the greasy pole to the glass ceiling

For the second year running, the Women's Leadership Network has carried out research into the gender of college principals in England. And for the second year running, the WLN has found that only 36% are women.

This finding is all the more disappointing when we consider that, according to LLUK workforce statistics, around 64% of the workforce are women, and approximately 60% of college managers are women.

Research carried out in January and February 2010 by the Women's Leadership Network shows that:

- of the 353 college principals in the further education sector, only 36% are women
- 306 colleges kept their principal during the year, and 47 colleges appointed a new principal
- of the new appointments, 17 out of 47 were women, only slightly above the 36% average
- in the eight college mergers this year, seven of the eight posts that disappeared were held by women
- without the mergers, there would have been 3 more women and 3 fewer men leading colleges, an increase of females of around 1%.

We are encouraged by the fact that women continue to perform well at the largest end of the FE sector: 13 out of the 28 colleges in the 157 group are run by women. And when colleges are rated by the size of their LSC allocation for 2008/09, as shown in the graph below, women principals are not bunched into the smaller colleges.

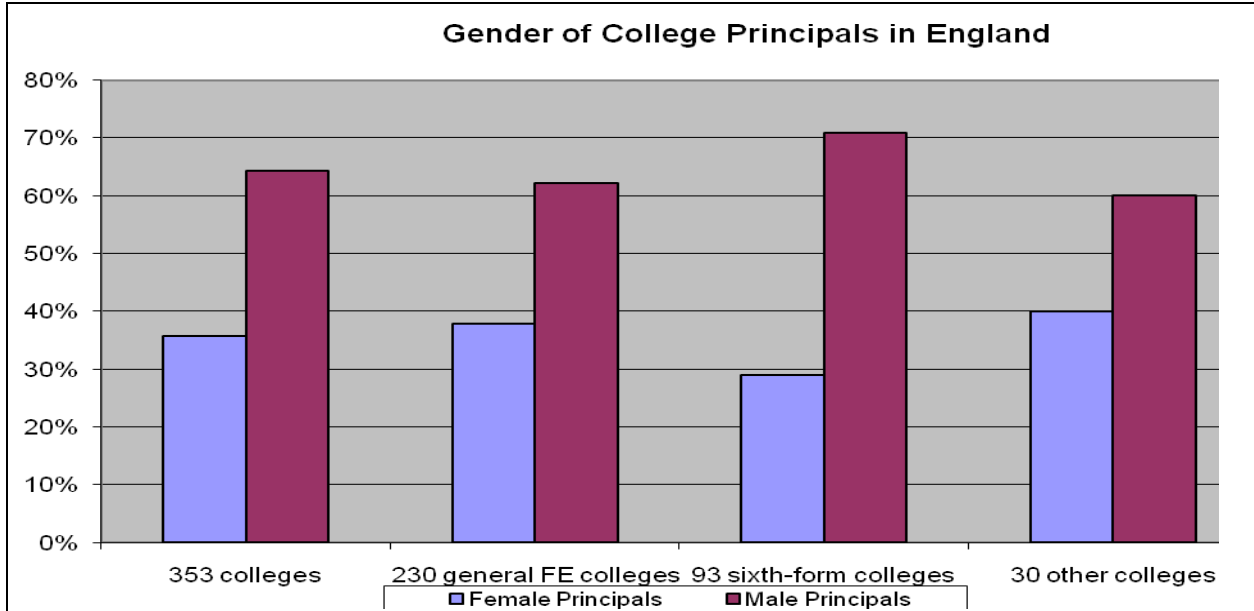
Once again, as our statistics in this paper show, there are some significant differences, both within college types and between the various regions in England.

For the first time, this year the WLN is joining with the Network for Black Professionals for our annual conference. The event, entitled "Impact through Diversity: making 2010 the breakthrough year", is aimed at encouraging and inspiring women and BME professionals to aim high. Lord Ouseley will be giving the keynote speech, joined by a host of inspirational male and female speakers from the sector. Date and place: 26th May, Holiday Inn Bloomsbury, London; for details and bookings see www.impactthroughdiversity.co.uk.

Read on to find out about the gender of principals by college category, by region and by LSC income and to learn more about the WLN.

Gender of principals by college category

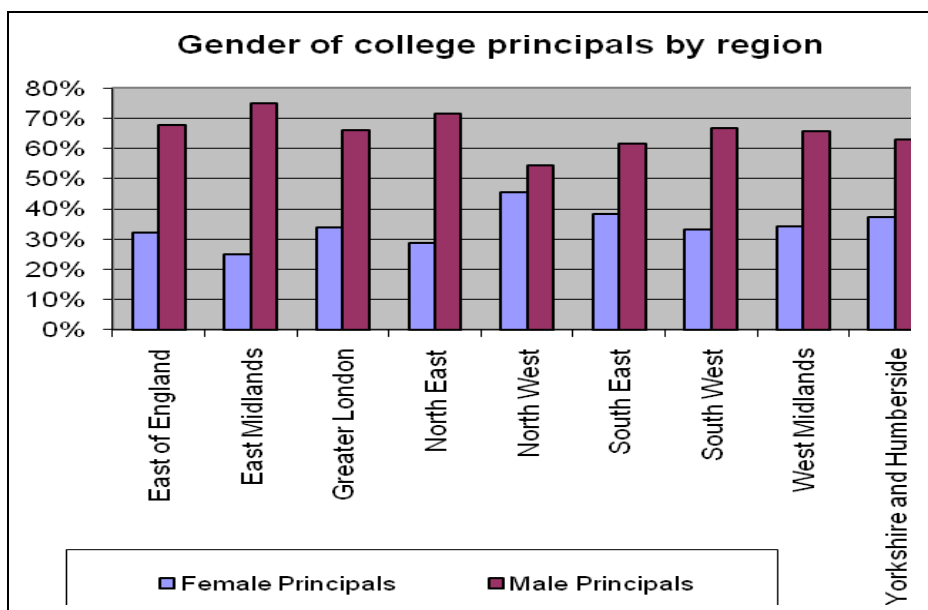
The table below shows the gender of principals in England by three college types: general colleges of further education, sixth form colleges and other colleges (specialist providers and specialist designated colleges).



While GFE colleges have seen a slight reduction in the percentage of women principals as a result of mergers, in the sixth form colleges there has been some improvement, with a rise from 26% in 2009 to 29%, still far from the sector average of 36%.

Gender of principals by regions in England

The next table shows that there are still some significant differences in the percentages of women principals across the regions in England, although overall the percentages have tended to even out since last year.

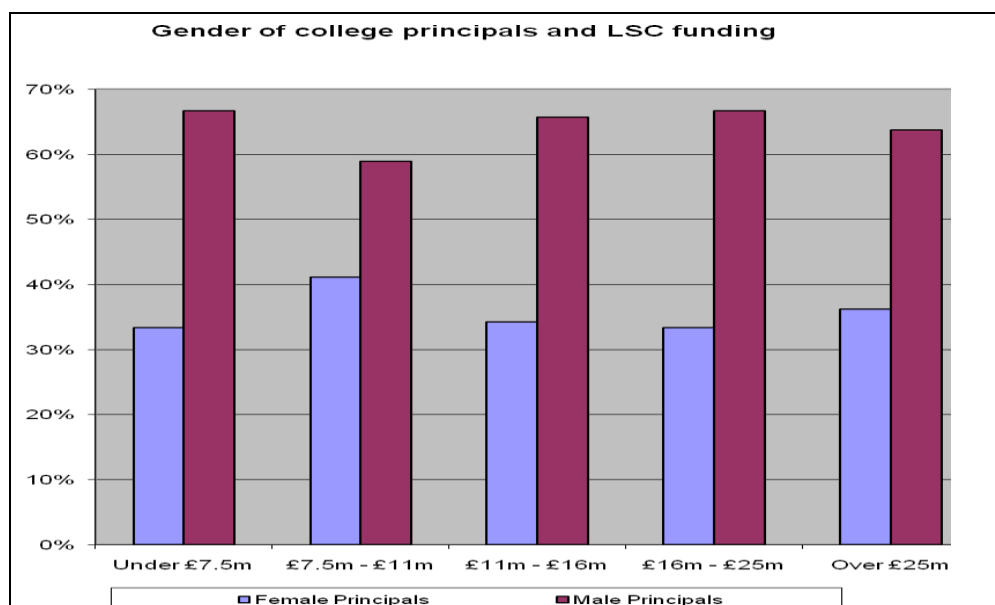


Once again, the North West, with 55 colleges, shows the highest percentage of women principals at 45%. And once again the 24 colleges in the East Midlands show the lowest percentage of women principals at 25%, although it is encouraging to see that this has moved up from 21% last year.

Both Yorkshire and Humberside (35 colleges) and Greater London (53 colleges) have seen a drop in the percentage of women principals, whilst the North East and the East of England show a slight rise.

Gender of principals by volume of LSC income

The following table shows the gender of college principals and the amount of income their colleges are contracted to receive from the Learning and Skills Council in 2008/9:



This year, we can once again see from this table that although fewer women are appointed to the post of principal, once appointed they are as likely as men to be leading the colleges with the highest income: 25 women out of a total of 69 principals lead colleges with £25m or over LSC income.

Women are under-represented among the colleges receiving the least amount of LSC income, but in this category there are more sixth-form colleges than general FE colleges, and as already mentioned women comprise only 29% of sixth form college principals.

Is there a business case for more women principals?

Women make good principals! There is plenty of evidence to show that women principals are successful. For example, 46% of the colleges in the 157 group have female principals, and women are as likely as men to be leading general FE colleges judged Outstanding by Ofsted.

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?

We have run a simple model which shows that if each year 47 colleges appoint new principals with an equal gender split and other things stay the same (hardly likely in the current climate), then it will take ten years for the proportion of female principals to reach 47%. A question for the whole sector: can we afford to wait this long before it starts fishing from the full pool of talents?

In addition to planning our 26th May conference, "Impact Through Diversity: making 2010 the breakthrough year", the WLN has this year been concentrating on supporting women by:

- funding and carrying out research: working with the Learning and Skills Network, this year the WLN won LSIS funding for a nation-wide research project to establish what are the barriers and facilitators for women in their career progression. Participants from all regions in England have contributed, with 490 online surveys completed and 170 women and men participating in discussions across the country. Findings will be available in April.
- responding to what women say they need by establishing a pilot mentoring scheme for aspiring women, working with the Black Leadership Initiative
- supporting and encouraging regional networks to encourage women to aim high - there are now seven well established networks
- working with AoC and LSIS to deliver workshops for governors on "recruiting the best principal"
- increasing our membership from 20 to a record 55 to date - membership subscriptions are essential if we are to continue our work
- producing our termly newsletter, "Leader", for members and other interested parties in which we report on our activities.

We know that ours is a long-term campaign and we shall continue to reach out to women at all levels in colleges, not just people who are already second-tier managers, who aspire to the highest positions in the FE sector.

Women's Leadership Network for the further education and skills sector
February 2010

Notes on the WLN research

1. This desk research by WLN is based on principals in post on 1st February 2010
2. The definition of "college" used is the organisation governed by a college corporation or governing body, in other words one college per corporation
3. The definition of "principal" used is the chief executive officer answering to a corporation
4. The definition of "region" used follows the 9 Learning and Skills Council regions in England
5. The numerical data collected by college type and by region is available on request from Thalia Marriott, WLN Director, at thaliamarriott@wlnfe.org.uk
6. For more information about the WLN, go to www.wlnfe.org.uk