

Women in Teaching: Equal Opportunities

Key Points

- Although at the time of the research some 68% of all teachers in Northern Ireland were female, only 57% of Vice Principals and 40% of Principals were female.
- Where women are Principals, it is more likely to be in a nursery or primary schools, all-girls secondary school or a school with fewer than 100 pupils.
- Key reasons for women not applying for promotion include concerns about the validity of the selection process, not wanting to give up teaching, lack of confidence in their own abilities and the possibility of a hostile reaction from others.
- Women who do apply for senior posts are proportionately more likely than men to be successful.

Figure 1 : SEX OF PRINCIPAL (%) BY TYPE OF SCHOOL

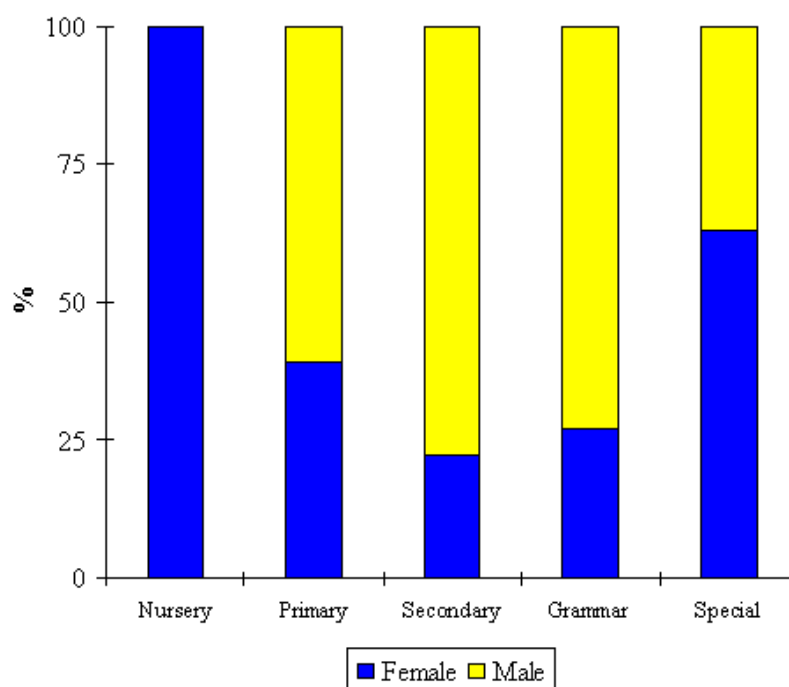


Figure 1

Sex of Principal (%) By type of School

Introduction

Previous Research

1.1 Data have previously been collected on the numbers of men and women in senior education posts but there had been no definitive study into the reasons for the under-representation of women in these posts, and why in many cases women do not apply for senior positions.

Policy Appraisal and Fair Treatment

1.2 The Government's guidelines on Policy Appraisal and Fair Treatment (PAFT) stress the importance of considering the implications initiatives have in the context of equal opportunities.

Terms of Reference

1.3 The overall objective of the study was to identify the barriers - actual or perceived - to women's progression to higher posts, including posts attracting responsibility points, so that the employing authorities can devise appropriate action plans for change.

This included analysing the relative importance of the reasons why women are under-represented at senior levels and suggesting a strategy for change. Amongst the issues investigated were:

- age and length of experience;
- initial and post-entry qualifications;
- career consequences of career breaks;
- personal factors (family commitments);
- stereotyping;
- training for management (career plans); and
- suitability of job specifications for senior posts, promotion procedures, selection panels, etc.

Main Findings

Selection Process

2.1 The employing/advisory authorities (the 5 Education and Library Boards) the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS), the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education (NICIE) and the voluntary grammar school sector have all taken steps in recent years to improve the efficiency and objectivity of promotion and selection procedures.

2.2 Key issues around the validity of the selection process include the role of the Principal in appointments, the availability, take-up and effectiveness of sophisticated equal opportunities training for Governors and the perceptions of women who find the current process daunting and inappropriate for assessing skill levels.

The Role of the Principal

2.3 The Principal's role has changed since the advent of Local Management of Schools (LMS) and now involves a greater degree of financial management, staff motivation and marketing of the school;

2.4 Principals state that a large proportion of their time is spent on routine administration and that much of this is carried out at home.

2.5 Over 60% of teachers believe that the Principal's role is 'very stressful' yet few are able to define the competences required to carry out the role successfully.

Working Time and Patterns

2.6 Around 92% of teachers work longer than their contractual hours, with the average working week equating to 43 hours. The more senior the post, the greater the number of additional hours worked.

2.7 Women are more likely than men to carry out their additional work at home rather than at school.

Work and Domestic Responsibilities

2.8 Over a third of women spend over 21 hours a week on domestic responsibilities (compared to around 12% of men) and this can lead to difficulties in balancing work and home.

2.9 Almost half of women believe that taking a career break jeopardises promotion prospects, there is a widely held view that job-sharing is not appropriate in the education sector, and many teachers believe that young women are a high risk for promotion because of the possibility of their taking maternity leave.

Women's Attitudes to Promotion

2.10 Women and men have very different views on the career priorities of the opposite sex. Women dramatically over-estimate the importance to men of status, pay and terms and conditions, while men significantly over-estimate how important a 'convenient' job is for women.

2.11 Men are much more likely than women to 'throw their hat into the ring' and apply for promotion as a gesture of ambition, whereas women want to be absolutely certain they can do the job before they apply.

2.12 Advice on getting promoted includes obtaining a combination of Pastoral/curriculum/co-ordinating experience, studying towards further qualifications and raising one's profile within the school. Almost two-thirds of women (but only 15% of men) believe that women have to out-perform men to get promoted.

2.13 There are significant differences of opinion between teachers and Governors about what a teacher has to do to get promoted.

2.14 Key reasons for women not applying for promotion include concerns about the validity of the selection process, not wanting to give up teaching, lack of confidence in their own abilities and the possibility of a hostile reaction from others.

Training and Career Development in Schools

2.15 There is limited training available for those who are not yet in a managerial position but who would like to be.

2.16 Around one third of teachers would not seek advice on career development from their Principal and women are less likely than men to feel that their Principal has encouraged them in their career.

2.17 Both teachers and Governors believe strongly that being seen to take up training opportunities gives teachers a greater chance of getting promoted.

Networking

2.18 Women under-estimate the amount of networking they do and are less likely than men to use their networking contacts for career development purposes.

2.19 Informal networks for women (such as the 'old boy network', where men can share experiences of school, sport and so on, and use their contacts to achieve career advancement) are not considered (by women or men) to exist.

2.20 Governors rate 'talking to teachers' as an important source of information about the education sector, but very few teachers state that their contact with Governors is any more

frequent than once or twice a year. In reality, teachers and Governors have very little formal or social contact with each other.

The Role of School Governors

2.21 The profile of respondents to the Governor's Survey was primarily male, in full-time employment and with an average of nine years' service as a Governor. Male Governors outnumbered females by 3 to 1 in the primary, secondary and grammar sectors.

2.22 Well over one third of Governors do not believe that the current selection process enables them to assess candidates' abilities properly.

2.23 There are considerable differences of opinion between teachers and Governors about what qualities each other values in schools.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 The main conclusions and recommendations are as follows:-

- There is a key role for DENI and the employing authorities in terms of promoting and monitoring equal opportunities as a top priority.
- The role of Principal is widely recognised as being extremely stressful. Attempts should be made to make the position more attractive to potential applicants by reviewing the job content. This would include an emphasis on development and action planning, together with retaining an element of teaching. The role of Principal should then be demystified by defining more clearly the competences needed to do the job. The delegation of a proportion of the Principal's administrative workload would be a means of developing the School Secretary role to one of Education Administrator.
- There should be a review of the make-up of panels and periods of tenure for Governors (maximum two terms of continuous office) in order that there is a greater combination of experience and skills levels on each Board. More frequent rotation should encourage women to join and a shorter expectation of tenure should encourage more people to apply in general.
- Sophisticated equal opportunities training ought to be provided for all Governors. This should cover not only legislative requirements, but also encourage the identification and adaptation of 'best practice' in order to allow for the complexity of issues involved.
- A review of the selection process is needed in order to ascertain and improve its actual and perceived validity for teachers and Governors. The key area for improvement here is not the performance of those who get as far as interview stage, but concentrates rather on those (particularly women) who are deterred by it from applying for senior posts.
- On account of the infrequent contact between teachers and Governors and the subsequent misconceptions about values and priorities which arise, the level of contact between the 2 parties ought to be increased (this is already happening in some schools).
- There is a need to manage teachers' career development in a more focused way from earlier on in the individual's career. Options for improvement include greater encouragement from the Principal for women, opportunities to assume positions of responsibility on a short-term basis, partnerships with industry and other sectors within education, and greater utilisation of career development loans.
- All training for teachers should incorporate an equal opportunities element and there would be an advantage in reviewing current equal opportunities components of in-service training.
- The implications of flexible methods of working (career breaks, job-sharing, part-time) in the education sector need further investigation. Whilst they enable women to continue in or return to teaching, they carry a negative weight with regard to

promotion. For these options to be viable, there needs to be a commitment from DENI, the employers and Principals towards making them work and creating an environment where taking a career break, for example, does not jeopardise chances of promotion.

- A formal networking forum, Women in Education Management, should be created. This would require limited initial outlay and would enable women to discuss personal and career development issues in a mutually supportive environment. This would enable a unified approach to be made to the employing authorities in respect of proposed innovations or changes to existing procedures.
- Further research is required into the extent to which stress is an issue in the education sector, and what steps (including an appropriate performance management system, counselling support and stress management training) can be taken to minimise its effects.

METHODOLOGY

4. Quantitative and qualitative methods were combined to obtain the data included in the report. The research methodologies were:-

a. a confidential survey questionnaire distributed to a statistically representative sample of 3,500 teachers at all levels (male and female) which invited their views on relevant issues such as promotion, training and management of schools;

b. eleven focus group discussions (7 female and 4 male) comprising Principals, Vice Principals and Assistant Teachers;

c. twelve Work Diaries, completed by Principals and Vice-Principals (male and female) over a period of 4 weeks, including a daily account of work and non-work activities, and a qualitative section on perceptions of daily incidents;

d. ten in-depth Case Study interviews with women Principals with varying levels of experience and in different sectors to explore their work and non-work histories and their perceptions of the gender imbalance at senior level;

e. a confidential survey questionnaire distributed to 585 School Governors who had been involved in at least one appointment at Principal or Vice-Principal level during the last 3 years;

f. a Story Completion exercise distributed to a random sub-sample of the School Governors taking part in the above survey in which they were asked to complete imaginary scenarios in which Equal Opportunities were a key factor;

g. consultations with a wide range of individuals in the education sector, including representatives from the employing authorities and the recognised teaching unions.

THE PROJECT

5. The project was undertaken for DENI by Deloitte & Touche Management Advisory Services in conjunction with Professor Teresa Rees, School for Policy Studies, University of Bristol. The cost was £67,556.

FULL REPORT

6. The full report entitled 'Women in Teaching: Equal Opportunities', DENI Research Report Series No. 16, is available from DENI, cost £5.

[footnote : Each educational institution and library is entitled to one free copy.]

This paper is a summary of the research report and as such any views it contains are not necessarily those of DENI.

Previous Research Briefings

- DENI funded research 1993/94 RB 1/1993
- DENI funded research 1994/95 RB 1/1995
- Persistent school absenteeism in Northern Ireland in 1992 RB 2/1995
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Statistics and Research Branch
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Rathgael House
Balloo Road
BANGOR
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Telephone (01247) 279679
Fax (01247) 279100
E-mail stats.mail@deni.gov.uk

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