



Knowledge Exchange Seminar Series (KESS)

...is a forum that encourages debate on a wide range of research findings, with the overall aim of promoting evidence-based policy and law-making within Northern Ireland



Gender Equality in the Northern Ireland Public Sector - a View from the Top

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Research Project

Stage 1: Collection and Analysis of Secondary Data for 143 Public Sector Organisations (2,308 executive positions) to provide baseline data

Stage 2: Survey of Male and Female Current/Aspiring Executives in the public sector (3,186 responses) to identify enablers, barriers, gender culture and best practice towards achieving gender equality

Stage 3: In-depth Interviews (107) with Current and Aspiring Executives to investigate a number of gender equality themes at the executive level of the public sector

Civil/Senior Civil Service

Local Government

Non-Departmental Public Bodies (NDPBs)

Health and Social Care in N.I. (HSCNI)

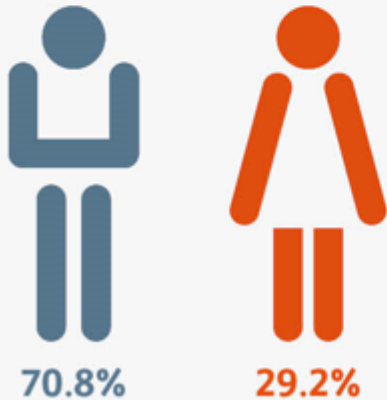
Further & Higher Education



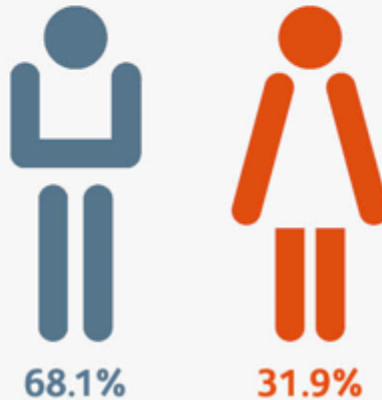
Summary of Findings: Stage 1

Overall Gender Composition of the N.I. Public Sector at Executive Level

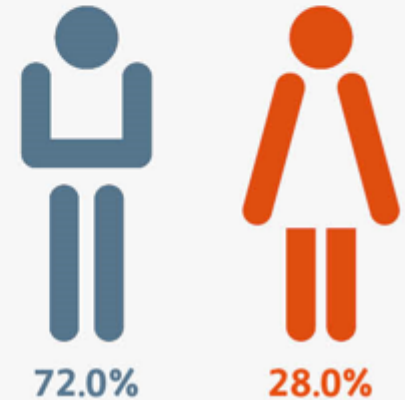
All Executive Level Positions
2,308



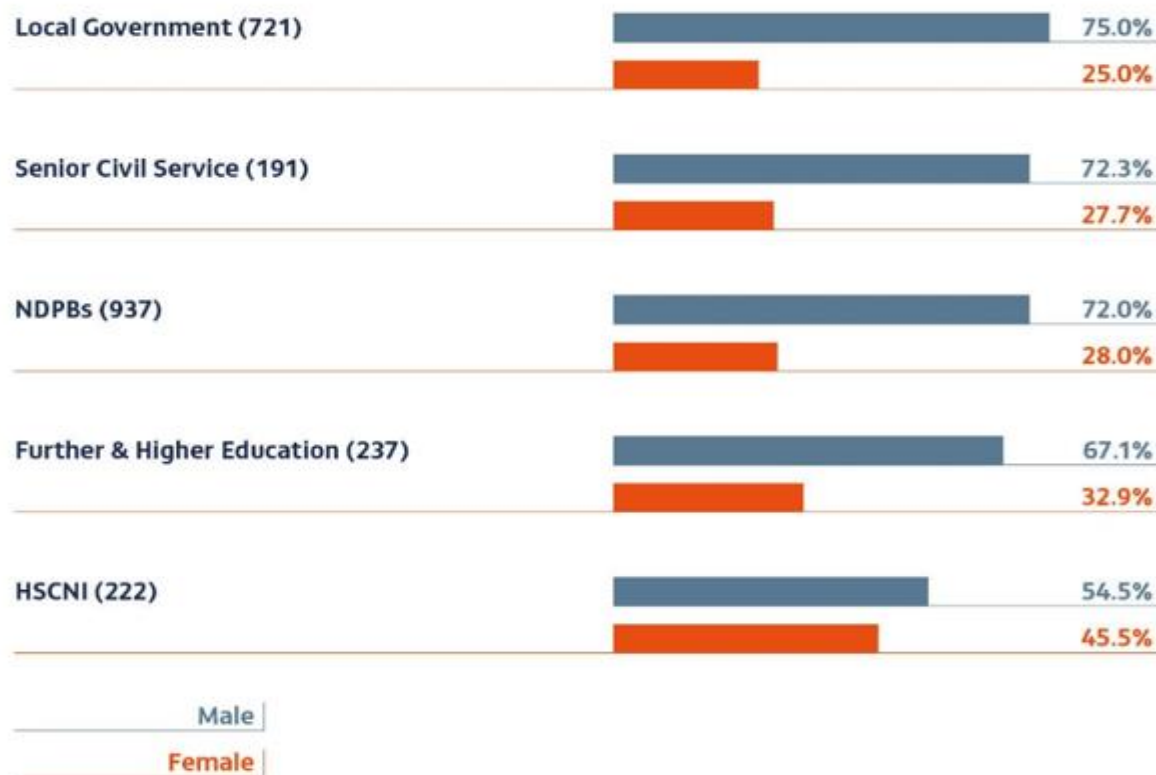
Executive Directors
722



Non-Executives
1,586



Overall Gender Composition of the N.I. Public Sector at Executive Level by Organisational Type



Gender Composition of the N.I. Public Sector at Executive Level

Occupational Segregation



Gender Composition of the N.I. Public Sector at Executive Level

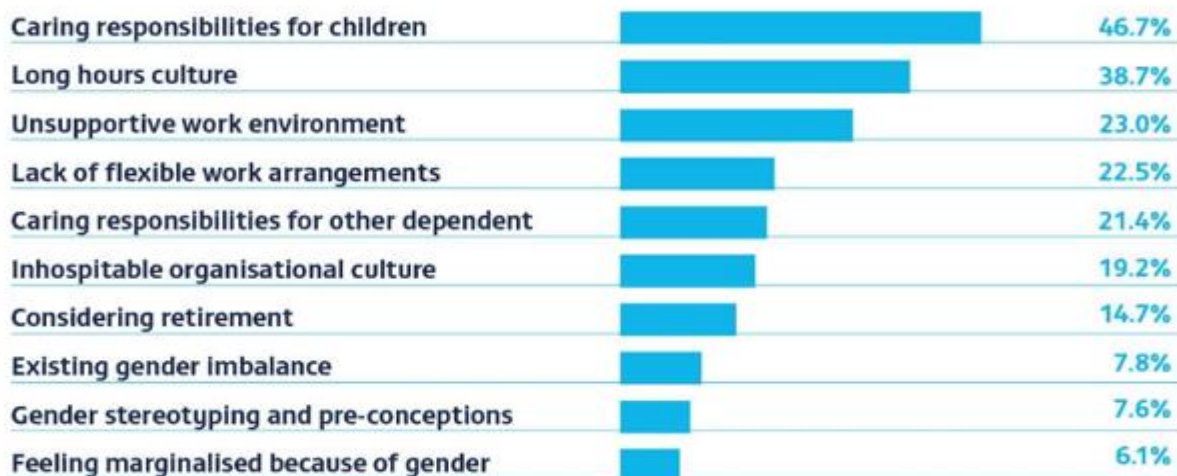
Influence of Gender of Chief Executive & Chairperson



Summary of Findings: Stage 2

Reasons for Opting Out of Career Progression

Male & Female Responses Combined



Enablers of Career Progression – Male & Female Attitudes Combined



Barriers to Career Progression – Females Only

Caring responsibilities
for dependent children

Colleagues' negative reactions to
using flexible work arrangements

Lack of recognition for
work/life balance

Lack of awareness of
organisational politics

Lack of opportunity to work
on challenging assignments

Long hours
culture

Exclusion from
informal
networks of
communication

Other Stage Two Findings

My organisation has not allocated sufficient financial resources towards promoting gender equality at executive level

Within my organisation an informal culture of 'jobs for the boys' still prevails

Women bring a unique perspective to decision making

women managers have their ideas challenged more often than male managers

Women have to perform much better than males to succeed

Women managers have their work judged more critically than male managers

My organisation does not communicate effectively when implementing policies which promote equality at executive level

Differing views regarding gender culture and female stereotyping

Holding senior executives/managers accountable for the advancement of aspiring female executives is important

Cronyism is still rife within my organisation

My organisation has not allocated sufficient time resources towards promoting gender equality at executive level

Compared to male managers, female managers are often uncomfortable in taking credit for their success

My organisation does not have a balanced gender management board

Gender composition
of senior
management boards

Promoting
gender equality
at senior levels

Stage three interview themes

Benefits of gender
balanced boards

Opportunities for
advancement,
recruitment
and progression

Work life
balance

Gender
Culture

Flexible work
arrangements

Theme One – Perceptions of the Gender Composition of Senior Management Boards

'Yes, it is an issue... it is clear and the facts speak for themselves, that there is an under representation of females in the Senior Civil Service...I would say the male dominated culture probably applies fairly well across departments' (Current Executive, Female, Senior Civil Service).

'Well I personally don't [think gender equality is an issue]...we have quite good policies in this regard. Although I do have some issues I think in my mind about how much harder it is for women to break through that ceiling because of other reasons you know. I think there's probably a need for more support for talent within the organisation...' (Current Executive, Male, Local Government).

'If you are working on a proportionate basis, because we have four times as many women working in this organisation as men you would think you would have four times as many women than men in management positions, but we don't' (Current Executive, Female, Health).

'There are certainly issues around gender representativeness [within our organisation] and I think part of that at a senior level has got to do with historical gender inequalities based partly on prejudice' (Current Executive, Male, NDPB).



Theme Two – Gender Culture

I think that we are well disposed towards gender equality, we are fair in our decision taking, but we're probably not as engaged with the issue as we should be both from the point of view of the future of the organisation and the future of society as a whole. I think we have an obligation not only to reflect society but to be a role model for the rest of the public sector' (Current Executive, Male, Senior Civil Service).

'It is a male bastion and will continue to be. The whole culture of I suppose this alpha male ... so the whole system then potentially needs to change at the top, there needs to be change in that culture' (Current Executive, Female, Senior Civil Service).

Theme Three – Flexible Work Arrangements

Difficult to manage
staff availing of
flexible Work
arrangements

Negative
perceptions

Lack of active
job redesign

Expectations of full-time
work for senior positions

Flexible work arrangements

Gap
between
rhetoric and
reality

Feelings of guilt

Lack of commitment

Difficult to progress
while availing of flexible
work arrangements

Theme Four – Work Life Balance

Demands of
politicians

Barrier for
females

Long hours culture

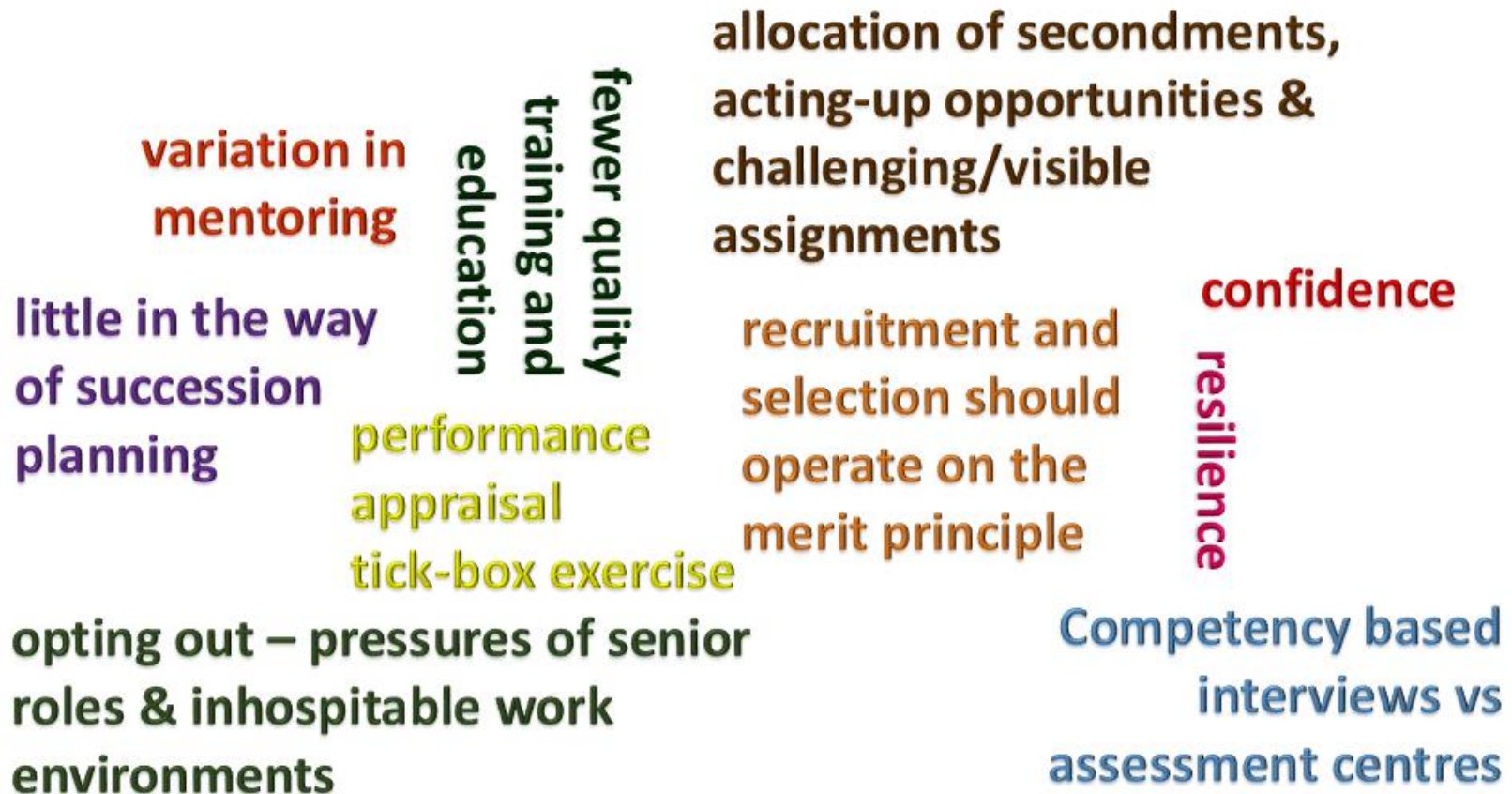
Poor work-life balance

Poor role
models

Work life
balance
deteriorates
with career
progression

Demanding nature
of senior roles

Theme Five – Opportunities for Advancement, Recruitment and Progression



Theme Six – Benefits of Gender Balanced Boards

‘Not having that representativeness in a group I think means that you're starved of their viewpoints and their expertise and their challenge function and their alternative thinking and their alternative experiences ...’ (Current Executive, Male, NDPB).

‘It sends out a very strong message that a department is trying to be representative of the people we serve and trying to be more representative of the external audience, 50% women, 50% men.....Men and women approach things in different ways – i.e. men are more direct, women consider all of the issues more – neither is good on its own so a balance is needed’ (Aspiring Executive, Female, Civil Service).

Theme Seven – Promoting Gender Equality

'Absolutely not [i.e. in favour of quotas] ... there are enough good women in the Civil Service to make it without the quotas, I really do feel that and I also think that if there are quotas there will be a feeling that women have got there because of it' (Current Executive, Female, Civil Service)

'Targets are okay if you have the means to effect change, but there's no point setting targets unless you have levers to pull to hit those targets, otherwise you're fooling everybody and being a little bit dishonest' (Current Executive, Male, Senior Civil Service)

'If you don't get the chief or a high up person behind it [i.e. the gender champion], it won't happen' (Current Executive, Male, Local Government)

Recommendations

Strategic recommendations

- 1.Ensure the achievement of equal participation of women and men (i.e. a minimum of 40% from either gender) on executive management boards by January 2023**
- 2.Organisations should identify a Gender Champion, employed at the most senior level of management, to take responsibility for setting and achieving gender equality targets and the promotion of a gender inclusive culture**
- 3.Establish an Academy for developing professional executives/managers across the public sector**
- 4.Establish a Public Sector Forum for Gender Equality as a conduit for the sharing of experiences, problems, potential solutions and best practice**
- 5.Establish an overarching Public Sector Women's Network for current and aspiring executives across the public sector**



Policy recommendations

6. **Develop a gender inclusive culture at senior management levels which promotes the acceptance and use of flexible work arrangements**
7. **Develop a culture which promotes an appropriate work life balance**

Process recommendations

8. **Ensure career development opportunities are allocated in a fair, transparent and competitive manner**
9. **Deliver mentoring opportunities in an open, fair and consistent manner;**
10. **Link performance management more clearly to career development**

Data analysis recommendations

11. **Data should be collected and published at a disaggregated level with respect to the gender composition of executive management boards**
12. **Data should be collected at an individual organisational or sectorial basis at regular intervals regarding barriers to achieving gender equality at senior management levels**

Best practice cases & recent developments





Northern Ireland
Assembly



Queen's University
Belfast



The Open
University



Ulster
University

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