

Women into school headship

The obstacles to progress for women leaders were pored over by more than 100 contributors to talk2learn's debate on women into school headship. Co-hosted by Eve Warren and Meg Maunder, the discussion was part of the Tomorrow's leaders today succession planning campaign.

Key issues were:

- the demands of family life
- problems with resuming work after a career break
- the persistent perception that headteachers should be male

Improved job sharing and shadowing, a sharper focus on work-life balance and the re-defining of staff roles and responsibilities could help persuade more women to become headteachers, many contributors suggested.

Tammie Prince a deputy headteacher in West Yorkshire said most of the headteachers she knew were women but very few of them had children.

"Is pressure being put on women with children NOT to further their careers because it would leave them less time with their children?" Why is this not the same for fathers of young children?"

Melanie Cox Globe, a deputy headteacher for five years and mother of a two-year-old, said she fought hard to achieve work-life balance.

"I have a headteacher who is truly marvellous and I couldn't ask for better support and understanding. I am considering aiming for headship. But I worry about the impact of a career shift on my family life."

There was a sober tale from Sarah Mulryne educational consultant in the West Midlands who left her headship after having her third child.

"Family demands on me now mean that I cannot envisage a situation in the near (or middle) future when I



will be able to take on a full-time headship. There has been lots of talk on the subject of job share headship, but I have yet to see any in my area."

It also remains difficult for women to resume their careers after having a family, partly because they may want or need to work fewer hours, said Angela Searle a Director of Student development in Hertfordshire. "Their careers

are stunted – teaching and learning responsibilities (TLRs) are not given to part-time workers. *We still work to a very masculine ideal within schools and it restricts men and women alike.*"

Appointing panels should realise that time taken either in a career break or a more coasting phase was as valuable as a steady upward progression, said Eve Warren co-founder of WiSH - Women into School Headship.

"However, we know it often undermines our own confidence, making it harder to get back in there and sell ourselves, or believe that we are capable."

Maureen Andrews a headteacher in South Yorkshire suggested a few things that might help to redress the balance.

"More opportunities to experience the role with a safety net – secondment, job shadowing, acting up and so on. And as current headteachers, we need to talk up the job more."

But Jo Williams headteacher from North Lancashire thought there was a deep-seated, social problem to tackle: the prevailing perception of headship as a masculine role.

"I know that, on occasion, *I project myself in a more masculine way than is necessary because I feel that the people I am talking to expect a man.* When answering the door at school, I have been asked on more than one occasion could I show them 'to the headmaster, thanks love!'"

A range of resources and tools to help you with diversifying your workforce can be found at www.ncsl.org.uk/tomorrowsleaderstoday.

If you are not yet a member of talk2learn and would like to join, more information is available at www.ncsl.org.uk/onlinecommunities.