



Women into leadership

Identifying talented leaders and managing and supporting careers

Background

Rochdale local authority wanted to find out how to support women's career progression after a maternity break. They wanted to identify the barriers to leadership succession for women and help address the issues.

They targeted women who had returned from a career break or had taken roles to fit with family commitments and identified a group for a workshop. Identification was through a letter to all headteachers within the authority asking them to nominate women who "have faced the challenge of taking a career break and are pursuing promotion to positions of schools leadership".

This work formed part of the authority's strategy of identifying, empowering and talent-spotting leadership potential in overlooked groups.

The workshop

Ten women were involved in the workshop including:

- a headteacher
- teachers (secondary and primary sector)
- deputy headteachers
- an assistant headteacher (non-teaching)
- a personnel officer

(A member of the focus group is also part of the Local Authority Advisory Group.)

The group learned about leadership opportunities in the area and it was agreed they would also act as a focus group to support the development of courses and coaching opportunities that the local authority is developing with the Rochdale Education and Learning (REAL) Trust. The authority tracked the group to analyse their career progression.

Participants were asked the following questions. Two Local Solutions fieldworkers supporting Rochdale during the pilot activity and the school improvement officer with responsibility for leadership succession facilitated the focus group (prompts for the facilitator are in brackets).

- What are the barriers women face in leadership succession? (Governors; perceptions; locality; childcare; length of time in one school; lack of interview experience).

- What has helped you to develop as a leader?
- What can the local authority do to support you in leadership succession? (Assertiveness training; developing self-belief/self-esteem; changing role of governors).
- How can we plan for the future to ensure more women step up into leadership roles? (Different models of headship; job shares).

Outcomes and impact

Three participants from this group have gone on to secure headship posts.

Key learning points

The focus group identified the following professional development, which they would like the authority to support.

Personal/professional development:

- opportunities to catch up on curriculum/professional issues
- time management
- confidence building
- writing applications and CVs
- interviewing
- public speaking
- assertiveness
- image/self-awareness
- shadow/secondment opportunities to gain a more informed view of the leadership role

Development work with governors

- To develop/challenge views on women returnees in terms of women's commitment to their career and families.
- Age of applicants for leadership posts (women returnees can often have a higher age profile).
- Career choices - ie women returnees often stay in one job for a longer period than would be expected because of family commitments.

Development work with human resource department regarding:

- job share opportunities
- flexible working hours
- phased return after maternity
- induction after maternity leave

Having a named person for 'women in leadership'.

As part of the local authority leadership succession strategy

- The local authority and the REAL Trust will work together to provide these professional development opportunities.

The local authority will recall the focus group to monitor and evaluate the professional development opportunities provided.

What went well:

- engagement of participants

- focus on the positive ways forward
- ways forward identified
- use of leadership succession materials including *Career Moves*
- Rochdale's Leadership Succession Report
- [Stepping up in Rochdale poster](#)

Further information

For further information about this case study, please contact carol.mclachlan@rochdale.gov.uk.