



Edge Hill
University

Breaking The Glass Ceiling – Can Devolution Deliver? Executive Summary

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Sponsored by Edge Hill University's
Institute for Social Responsibility

Recommendations of the report.

Clearly political parties will need to take their own decisions about selection and election campaigning and it is political groups which have the authority to take their own decisions about internal arrangements. This means parties and groups may accept our recommendations but apply them in different ways. We hope however that this report provides an impetus to look afresh at what could be done.

Recommendations to political parties

Political parties should collect and publish data on gender of applicants for selection, shortlists and final candidate (anonymised) for elections at Municipal, Mayoral and PCC level. They should commit to an annual internal review of trends and progress.

Political parties should ensure that visual representations of the party when campaigning or when involved in other communication activities never consists of a group of one gender.

Recommendations to local councils within the LCR

The six local authorities are already working on a Liverpool City Region Equality Framework for Local Government which will include commitments on understanding and working with the community, on leadership and organisation and on promoting a diverse and engaged workforce. The framework, which is currently in draft (Feb 2020) is part of a programme of "progressive measures" to advance the equality and diversity agenda across the City Region. This means it provides a timely vehicle to take forward actions to achieve equality and empowerment for women in local government.

Using performance monitoring and scrutiny as a driver for change, as suggested by the framework, **Councils should** include in their scrutiny the examination of the findings of the Fawcett Society and those of other relevant reports on promoting women's equal participation in local government. This should take account of issues such as the timing of meetings and parental leave policies for members which are identified through evidence as potential barriers to women's participation in public life.

As part of ongoing progress on workforce diversity and on demonstrating movement towards greater equality of previously underrepresented groups, **Councils should** include a focus on the involvement of women as elected members and in leadership roles as elected members in their work.

As part of using the draft framework's focus on analysing and using data and information, **Councils should** include exit interviews with former elected members as part of that data collection and analysis.

Recommendations to LCR area elected Politicians at national level

Section 106 of the Equalities Act 2010 has yet to be implemented. It would mean parties collecting data about selection in a systematic way. It would enable parties to better reflect on progress on gender balance. LCR area **MPs should** consider what legislative or persuasive efforts they can make to get Section 106 of the Equalities Act implemented or to extend its force to local government through another piece of legislation. This might be through a Private Members Bill or other Parliamentary device.

Recommendations to the Combined Authority and Metro Mayor

Routes into politics and public life can come through initial volunteer activities, such as joining the boards organisations, acting as a school governor or becoming a magistrate. There is no one central point which publishes all the opportunities across the LCR.

The Combined Authority, through FASJAB, should work with local authorities and other anchor institutions in the city region to ensure opportunities to serve on public bodies are widely publicised and that a diversity of applicants is encouraged.

The Combined Authority, through FASJAB, should conduct an annual review of gender balance in local politics, reviewing data and reflecting on progress. This should form part of a report to the CA on an annual basis.

The Combined Authority, through FASJAB, should hold an annual event to showcase positive action on equality and diversity in the City Region.

“ Loud, shouty white men with outdated views and misogynistic attitudes are the biggest barrier. I have worked in many different professions and never come across such outdated views and poor behaviour.”

Further information

For the full on-line version of the report please go to edgehill.ac.uk/isr/publications

Queries about the research, or about plans for further work, should contact Paula Keaveney at keavenep@edgehill.ac.uk

Breaking The Glass Ceiling – Can Devolution Deliver?

The establishment of Combined Authorities has created new political space. With this comes questions about how people are represented and who represents them, about who leads and how the organisation is led, about how the organisation is seen and how it projects itself.

2017 saw the election of Metro Mayors of three conurbations – The West Midlands, Greater Manchester and the Liverpool City Region. The Liverpool City Region Combined Authority brings together six local authorities – Halton, Knowsley, Liverpool, St Helens, Sefton and Wirral. Each is represented on the authority as is the Local Enterprise Partnership.

While devolution to Combined Authorities does mean some power moving nearer to the people, the structures highlighted power imbalances. The domination of positions by men became starkly apparent, leading to initiatives to find ways of addressing gender gaps. In the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority (LCRCA) a Fairness and Social Justice Advisory Board (FASJAB) was set up. At the same time *Power to the People? Tackling the gender imbalance in Combined Authorities and Local Government* by leading think tank the Institute of Public Policy Research (IPPR) identified a “pattern of thirds” which “runs through candidate selection and election and then thins out dramatically at the top of local government...”

A partnership was formed between the LCRCA, the Fairness and Social Justice Advisory Board, Edge Hill University, the TUC:NW, IPPR North and Blackburne House to focus on the issue of women in politics and political leadership.

As part of the work a report, *Breaking the Glass Ceiling – Can Devolution Deliver?* was produced. Sponsored by Edge Hill University’s Institute of Social Responsibility and based on interviews with women in politics and an exploration of the situation at local, regional, national and international level, the report highlights problems and recommends solutions.

The full report, including a foreword by Cllr Carla Thomas, references to key documents and full survey findings, is available at edgehill.ac.uk/isr/publications

This summary outlines some key findings and the recommendations made.

There is no shortage of national material analysing statistics and making recommendations about women in politics. This includes publications by the Fawcett Society, the British Council and the Inter-Parliamentary Union. And there has been progress, with participation increasing and some high-profile female leaders.

Yet women interviewed for this report, and those who filled in an anonymous survey, continue to highlight issues which can deter, limit and prematurely end involvement of women.

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... here I am...
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Candidate selection

Parties in the LCR area have a range of approaches to candidate selection and recruitment. The Labour party makes use of All Women Shortlists in some contests. The Green Party in Liverpool will re-advertise a vacancy if no women apply. Many parties put time into talent-spotting individuals from outside the membership who may make good councillors. This can be particularly useful in identifying women who lead community initiatives but who may not have considered elected politics.

Not all candidates are equal however. A party can have a high proportion of female candidates without achieving equality. Much depends on whether women are selected in wards in which they stand a chance of victory. Experienced politicians will be aware that some wards are considered “safe” for a party, others are marginal and therefore closely fought, others are unwinnable. While the unexpected can happen, it clearly matters more to a party who is selected in a winnable seat.

An analysis of new selections in safe or marginal seats across the boroughs showed that not every party was selected women in the areas most likely to lead to election.

Party barriers

The culture of political parties and of what was seen as normal in politics was highlighted by many respondents as a problem.

According to one respondent

“I often think, would I have become a councillor if I had gone to full council before my first meeting. I genuinely don’t know...given how intimidating it was and how the masculine toxicity of that time... it was awful...”

“I even went back to speak to women about why they had left... and much of it was about the aggression and the cliques and the negativity....”

Politics can create an environment which would be unacceptable in any other work-related situation. It is not surprising that some talented people, both women and men, decide to take their drive and initiative elsewhere. This is a loss for those individuals, but also for the parties and political organisations which miss out on talent.

Institutional barriers

Practices and systems at institutional level (Standing orders in a Council for example) can unwittingly create problems. Survey participants and interviewees highlighted issues such as meeting timings, child-care allowances, parental leave policies and the difficulty for those with caring responsibilities when faced with last minute demands on time. Research on a wider scale identified the use of approaches such as leadership job sharing as a possible solution.

Leadership and office terms

Women interviewed for the report highlighted a gap in term limits between male and female elected members. While the information published by local councils is in some cases inaccurate or incomplete, a survey of term lengths demonstrates that women are likely to have shorter periods on their councils than men. This in turn has an impact on leadership positions as individuals generally have to gain some experience before promotion. Scholars have identified a “glass cliff” phenomenon, in which women in leadership roles are more likely to experience shorter periods at the top.

What is done and can be done

Many of the problems are not new. And the research identified examples of good practice across the six boroughs. Women who took part in interviews and the anonymous survey were asked which initiatives should be taken to help increase the number of women active in local politics and to support them. There was a demand for more mentoring, more information for potential candidates, more “talent-spotting” and more publications highlighting successful women. There was support for 50:50 policies for committee chair allocation and for job shares in leadership roles.

All Women Shortlists already exists as a policy in the Labour Party. There was however some support for a wider application of the principle.