



**Women in
Leadership**

**Council for Higher
Education in Art and
Design**

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Introduction

Professor Catherine Dormor, Trustee

It is notable when surveying leadership across HEIs in the UK, while there have been improvements on the gender balance at board and senior executive level we still see women appointed to only 29% of all Vice-Chancellorships, 37% of all executive teams and 31% of headships in the top tier of the academic structure and only 25% of professorships.[1] When we fail to see ourselves at the top tables, it is hard to imagine how we might get there. We know that the women in HE that we work with are highly talented, have immense leadership and management expertise and the intellectual capacity to take on the highest leadership roles in our institutions, but they are often frustrated and blocked from achieving these aspirations.

This is a loss to the individual ambition, but also to the sector, who stands to benefit enormously from a broader range of skills and perspectives. In the Art and Design sector, where counter-linear approaches and creative thinking are framed as vital skills within a contemporary and future-facing workforce, such leadership is even more badly needed. This is the thinking that initiated CHEAD's 'Women in Leadership' workshop.

We wanted to ask the questions about what women leaders are wanting to achieve; what are the blockages and hurdles they are facing; how can we help one another; and where are our allies? These questions were initially intuitive and we were keen to use this time to listen and understand from the women attending and the women presenting about their particular perspectives, experiences and ambitions.

Our keynote speaker, Professor Kerstin Mey, opened the workshop with the provocation of mobility, relating to us her progression to the first woman President at Limerick University. This provocation is not simply about physical mobility, but also mobile thinking. She is a great proponent of breaking down disciplinary, hierarchical and social barriers, looking for ways in which teams can build and innovate different knowledge systems. This thinking fed into the discussions around Research, Mentorship, Collaborative Partnerships/Place-Making and EDI in Technical Support. All of the groups report specific areas where different models of working and supporting that work are needed to create a more equitable framework and to ensure the full range of skills and knowledge are being deployed. All groups were seeking peer-to-peer opportunities, mentoring and upward support to realise their ambitions and potential.

Gender is a key, but not the only, determinant in shaping inclusive and equitable organisational cultures. If HEIs and art and design specifically are to provide cultural, political and economic leadership, this needs to come from an internal leadership that is itself open to change and different models. It is crucial that the enabling factors that aid personal, professional and leadership development of women in HE are recognised, understood and, where necessary, redesigned.

This means recognising how caring responsibilities are built into the planning and design of professional development opportunities, progression and promotion criteria. This means supporting flexible working models and childcare facilities. This means careful management of workload distribution and far greater attention to closing gender pay gaps. In the summaries of the discussions below, the teams unpack how these impact on the professional development of women into leadership roles and they point to ways that these hurdles might be overcome.

Finally, in the summary, there are some calls to action, some ways in which change can begin and we can look to an Art and Design HE sector in which women expand its reach and impact.

[1] [Projects \(women-count.org\)](https://www.women-count.org/) 2018

Research

Professor Deborah Sugg Ryan and Dr Catherine Baker

This group discussion focused on themes specific to research, including Citizenship and Leadership, Bidding, Research Outputs and Promotion. With respect to Citizenship and Leadership it was generally agreed that women often commit to activities in academia at the neglect of their own research. The phrase 'housework of academia' led to questioning about how to step away from these and start to focus on the full range of citizenship and leadership skills that can lead to successful promotion. This led to a discussion about women's lived experience and home and work-life responsibilities. It was perceived that there is often a balance needing to be made between family responsibilities and the emotional labour of running a home and doing similar 'domestic' tasks in the workplace. The group discussed how contribution to subject area activities is a way to build experience. For example, being involved in editorial boards, subject associations terms of office and of course CHEAD. These offer research networking opportunities for getting to know other researchers and potential collaborators. One participant also suggested Jiscmail (<https://www.jiscmail.ac.uk>) as another way of connecting out to the broader research network in higher education. Jiscmail promotes opportunities and calls for papers and forums for people to subscribe to.

On the topic of Bidding, participants shared a range of bidding experiences and suggestions of available funds aligned to professional/research development.

This included British Academy mid-career fellowships, the advertisements of small pots of money and subsidies through the platform Research Professional, AHRC and HRC grants (where HRC provides a lottery system) and suggestions about getting involved as a Co-investigator on Research Council funded bids. One participant explained that landing an external bid changed people's opinions of her. Another participant suggested that Principal Investigator projects that focus on managing people in industry (through Knowledge and Cultural Exchange projects) or use Arts Council England funding can also provide autonomy and experience as a researcher in the field of the creative and cultural industries.

The group's discussion of research outputs focused on the pressure of the Research Excellent Framework (REF) to achieve 3 and 4-star outputs. It was emphasised that it is important to reflect on how to spend your energies and time when it comes to output generation. One participant reminded the group about understanding the focus of multicomponent output generation in UoA32 and UoA33 where practice research is prevalent. Furthermore, Units of Assessment 32/33 are not tied up with journal metrics, but focused on the quality of the research. It was suggested that as a researcher you should look at all the ways you can submit to the REF in your institution to make informed decisions about research inquiry and projects.

It was also agreed that promotion isn't always about output and that there are important markers of esteem that should be taken into consideration, such as becoming a Chief Editor of a journal. Markers of esteem are about building a research profile and developing a distinct identity that the institution can buy into.

When it comes to generating impact it was suggested that written testimonials are a good way to go forward and to also consider reach and significance. Suggestions for gathering evidence included the number of people in talks, using exit questionnaires and keeping track of the changes that may have occurred in a research project with non-academic audiences. For example, reach can be tiny, but the significance can be huge. Another participant suggested that University press offices are your friends. They can provide support for evidencing impactful public engagement, alongside public social media dissemination.

Time was understood to be valuable and necessary for doing research (research through practice in particular). It was advised that women researchers have to learn to be strategic and make sure that the time invested in research reaps the best possible benefits. For example, ensuring that the publication of research is in well-respected journals and public platforms.

Finally, with regard to promotion and marketing it was noted that some universities have formal mentoring structures that allow researchers to meet with mentors three times annually. With these mentoring schemes there are a lot of enormously generous people in these groups.



It was advised that it is really important to get to know your academic community and the women within it. It was also mentioned that women often get support from women they know within the sector. Some people don't have a formal external mentor but have people they go to regularly. A participant suggested that former colleagues can also offer informal support and serve as critical friends.

The group agreed that there needs to be more capacity to work with colleagues, especially women. This impacts career progression through a lack of capacity and mentoring circles. Senior lecturers and above often find a lack of support available at their level. Sometimes universities might need to buy that mentor support.

Removing Barriers by Mentoring

Professor Catherine Dormor and Sandra Booth

Mentors are commonly defined as 'a special and trusting person who, knowing more through experience, commits their time, attention and energy to assist a less knowing peer.' Adapted from *The Mentor's Guide* by Zachary (2000). We clearly need a more feminist mentoring approach that is collaborative and mutually enhancing. A relationship where the mentee's voice and experience are valued and encouraged. One which celebrates the diversity of everyone's creative career and life journey. One in which mentors and mentees examine how their relationships are influenced by their distinct and intersecting social identities and personal values.

The group discussed their own individual experiences of mentoring and being mentored. It was noted that often women undertake mentoring roles with their families and friends and as an integral part of their roles as educators at work, and particularly with students and work colleagues. It was recognised that 'whilst we are busy mentoring everyone else' we often didn't find the time to seek out our own mentors or to sustain our own aspirations and potential.

Mentoring can be very powerful and empowering for women who are aspiring to, and already in leadership and management roles. The benefits are realised by both mentors and mentees and should be part of any leadership development programme. Some of the benefits include building confidence and capacity, reinforcing self-agency, championing individuals, building networks and communities of support, profile raising, opportunity spotting, and advocacy.



Mentoring draws upon key concepts from coaching including active listening, person-centered development, challenging negative and hindering thoughts such as 'imposter syndrome', providing constructive feedback, reflection, and reinforcement. Women in leadership roles within the art and design higher education sector are active role models for aspiring leaders and can provide an important connection to unlocking and unblocking barriers many women face in academia by creating space for dialogue, careful nurturing, and progression.

CHEAD members expressed their need to feel '*psychologically safe*' at work and to develop a community of practice within a mutually supportive network of mentors and mentees. A mentoring scheme, facilitated by CHEAD, would go beyond this and would 'fold in' our strengths as women alongside pedagogies and practices drawn from art and design disciplines to create a safe space for collaboration, peer learning and developmental conversations to take place.

Whilst a mentoring scheme would clearly benefit all those taking part, the overall outcome would hopefully create the conditions which could underpin a step change in organisational leadership cultures - forging the way for a more inclusive, diverse, representative, collaborative, connected, compassionate, authentic, progressive and kinder environment in which women could thrive.

Collaborative Partnerships, Civic and Place Making

Dr Rowan Bailey and Dr Rhiannon Jones

The focus of this group discussion session sought to bring together thoughts and experiences of forming partnerships, working collaboratively and often in a specific place or region. A series of prompts focused on leadership roles in knowledge and cultural exchange contexts led to several observations drawn from lived experience, particularly on the ethos and energies of leadership working in civic and place-based ways.

Firstly, the group vocalised that in academia women face multiple challenges and assume various roles. We need to hear more stories about the intertwining successes and obstacles in leadership experience. It was acknowledged that the values and ethos of collaboration and risk taking are *'crucial to achieving growth and success. We need to reset the system for the next generation'*.

Secondly, it was agreed that collaboration in university settings involves forging connections between leadership roles and that to really understand what leadership looks like we need to start by sharing the stories of our own lived experience so as to help people find their place in a group or in the world of leadership. As one participant remarked: *'storytelling and sharing lived experiences are vital for encouraging stakeholder collaboration'*. The group also reflected on the close relationship between storytelling and place-based making and how this can *'create a sense of belonging'*.

For example, *'In order to have productive conversations and make real progress, it's important to start with personal stories and actions'*. It was emphasised that a deeper understanding of each other's experience is necessary for meaningful transformation.

Thirdly, the group observed that gender is a binary concept and the themes of vulnerability and personal storytelling can help to render visible the specific nuances of experience, particularly experiences of the forces and plays of power in institutional settings. Storytelling tools are sometimes used in some women's leadership programmes and this can create a transparent and safe space for others. One participant suggested that embedding storytelling into training was a positive way forward for anyone engaging in leadership, regardless of gender: *'Everyone has expertise that can be tapped into by sharing stories; storytelling is a useful tool in reducing hierarchies, especially when working within the public domain'*.

Fourthly, the group discussed different types of leadership styles, which included collaboration, mindfulness, kindness, adaptability, co-production and co-creation. It was agreed that effective leadership often requires creating spaces where people feel comfortable and that the structure of institutions may make it hard to implement these styles as they often involve being embedded in a place outside of the institution.

This intellectual and emotional labour can often be missed because it is not inside the university setting. This led to a more focused analysis of the kinds of soft skills in leadership styles and the values we ascribe to them. For example, one participant explained how soft skills like kindness in relationship building *'takes time and effort to build and maintain'* and that working collaborations *'are fragile and require nurturing'*. Soft skills in social civic place-based programmes, particularly those that are co-created with partners and communities necessitates constant adaptation and decision-making. It was agreed that changes in university environments are not always made quickly or responsibly.

The labour of love required to successfully deliver community and co-created programmes of work with creative and cultural industry partners is frequently unrecognised at universities and the time and resources required for this work are not widely understood. As one participant explained: *'senior management must value kindness as a strength'*.

Finally, the group raised the significance of 'nurturing relationships' and the importance of positioning yourself as a leader in different contexts and environments to develop deep, embedded and sustaining relationships with individuals and organisations. It was unanimously agreed that although this takes time and effort it allows you to work with external parties more frequently and sometimes at a higher level. It can also afford you the opportunity to work with greater depth in a targeted way, in order to address a key issue and this then creates the opportunity for change.

The group thought that more successful projects led by women leaders should be shared in order to better advocate for and promote good practices in place-based making. This could be through the creation of a shared resource for examples of best practice, to widen our advocacy of our work, and to increase the frequency and opportunity to learning from, and with, each other.



A Technical Lens

Dr Kate Dixon, Anita Coppock and Kelly-Marie Roberts

In this session the main themes discussed were visibility, career pathways, removing barriers, developing networking and communication skills and influence, particularly with senior managers and leaders.

The many benefits, expertise, and opportunities that technical staff bring to the leadership arena were highlighted including capabilities to lead on technology enhancements, student experience, pastoral care, hybrid digital pedagogy, outreach and access, functional space and studio culture, interdisciplinary innovation and research infrastructure.

A key barrier to leadership progression is the lack of visibility and recognition which often leads to assumptions about technical roles, typically made by non-technical focussed decision makers, being interpreted and reflected poorly in policy, job descriptions, recruitment and progression processes, management training, work patterns and promotion opportunities. Leadership pathways are tricky to navigate, and one attendee spoke of how we 'should see your career as not a ladder but a jungle gym'.

Priorities to address included recognition for technical staff, encouraging technical professionals to apply for the Aurora scheme, normalising women's' need around part-time working, job sharing, flexible working, access to mentoring schemes and development of more creative career pathways to enable and encourage women to apply to interesting and diverse technical roles and to progress further within institutions.

Key takeaways, which will influence the development of the CHEAD women in leadership programme, include building confidence, making a network within and beyond the institution, connecting with inspirational women and role models, and acknowledgement and amplification of where best practice, technical commitment and plans which outline pledges to improve EDI through a technical lens exist and are having an impact.

Conclusions and Institutional Policy 'Asks' and provocations

Women in Leadership, and advocacy for potential female leaders, requires careful consideration by Institutional leaders. When more women are empowered to lead, everyone benefits, collaboration and decision-making improves, and transformational leadership becomes a reality. There is a strong business case for a heterogeneous leadership profile that reflects a diversity of backgrounds, leadership identities and talents.

CHEAD Women in Leadership group call upon institutional leaders to –

Know the value of your female leaders and nurture the potential of all women in the organisation by building your talent pipeline.

Devote management time to understanding and embracing the unique contribution art and design thinking, practice and pedagogy will bring to Institutional missions, values, and purposes.

Commit to supporting mentoring schemes that embrace and amplify female centered approaches and develop positive role models.

Create an environment and culture where women can thrive.

Interview qualified women for every open leadership role.

Create innovative, diverse, and inclusive pathways to leadership.

Give more visibility and support to technical staff.

Strengthen policies and practices that address barriers at work for women. Don't assume what these are – actively ask and encourage women to come forward and have their voices heard. Listen.

Ask ourselves – Ask others

'What are we doing to promote women as leaders and critical thinkers, and what more can we do?'

'How inclusive and representative are our senior leadership teams, our recruitment and retention policies and our everyday practices and processes?'

'When was the last time our leaders immersed themselves in studio culture and pedagogy?' Invite them in.

'What are leaders doing to amplify the voices of technical staff, researchers and those involved in cultural, civic and place-making roles?'

What are we currently doing within the H.E sector in order to occupy the space for regenerative leadership?

What regenerative futures and storytelling practices are taking place at the moment?

How are we engaging with a regenerative and inclusive model of leadership at an institutional level?

Undertake one deliberate and targeted action now - Change your policy

'How diverse is our professoriate?' 'How do we ensure that academic women and men have equal access to research funds, sabbaticals, and opportunities to publish, all factors which are so critical to building an academic career?'

According to AdvanceHE, being a professor is usually a prerequisite to becoming a Vice-Chancellor, a Pro Vice-Chancellor or a Dean but women are less than 25% of all professors. Priority attention must be given to the roadblocks to becoming a professor, and selection criteria must be reviewed for implicit bias. Does the institution focus on a narrow set of achievements, conservatism and therefore isn't fully considering contributions from teaching, enterprise, partnership working and technical departmental support?

Next Steps

The next Women in Leadership event will be held on 21st May 2024. These conversations continue.

Join us for the 2024 Women in Leadership event, building on the success of the 2023 sell out event. Reflecting on the learnings from the rich conversations from the 2023 event, we will be including a discussion on eco-stewardship, the language of leadership and will focus on inclusivity and non-binary/trans/+ gender identities in leadership.

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