

# **Women's National Commission Partner Survey 2010**

## **Introduction**

From February 2010 to March 2010, the WNC conducted an informal survey to review the relationship the WNC has with its Partners. Other questionnaires were examined (including the GEO's Stakeholder Audit 2009) before developing a WNC model which was reviewed by the WNC Board of Commissioners at their February board meeting before sending it out for response.

The survey was broken down into six sections: General Information, Communications, Engagement and Marketing, Activities and Consultations, WNC Single Equality Scheme, Newsletter and Website and Future Improvements. The survey included a range of question topics and styles to elicit both quantitative and qualitative responses. Through not prescribing Partners with given options for much of the survey, it allowed respondents to define the themes of the answers themselves.

The questionnaire, which was conducted online through SurveyMonkey, was emailed out to all WNC Partners and was completed by 101 individuals or organisations (17% of our Partner base). The WNC sent out reminders and some WNC Commissioners also spoke to Partners on an individual basis, encouraging them to complete the survey. It was not compulsory to answer all 31 questions, allowing Partners to complete the sections they felt strongly about and those on which they could comment with confidence. This was made clear to respondents, and was done to ensure answers were as accurate, fair and honest as possible. Therefore, all statistics do not include those who omitted answering that particular question. However, the number of responses for each question show that most people answered most questions.

A broad overview of the results can be found in the executive summary. In addition, this section identifies the key areas and themes for improvement and those in which the WNC is currently performing well, in the opinion of Partners. Throughout the remainder of the document, the results of each individual question have been discussed more thoroughly.

Partners responded to the survey in a helpful and constructive manner, providing feedback, advice and support. The diverse responses also reflect the breadth of women in the UK and in our Partnerships.

Attached in Annex A is a breakdown of all WNC Partners divided by region and work area as of April 2010.

## **Executive Summary**

### **Section 1: Information**

- We received responses from organisations based in all regions and across the devolved nations. The largest response was from London.
- There was a reasonable spread across the five categories of International, National, Regional and Local Organisations and Individuals.
- The majority of Partners found out about the WNC through word of mouth, through other current Partners, events and other government affiliated bodies.

### **Section 2: Communications, Engagement and Marketing**

- On the four quantitative questions in this section, respondents were asked to rate their answer 'Excellent', 'Good', 'Acceptable', 'Poor', 'Don't Know'.
- Respondents were asked to compare the communication of the WNC to other government bodies, how the WNC communicated its schedule of events and activities, how the WNC communicated useful information, development and announcements and how the WNC had responded if the Partner had contacted them.
- In all questions the most popular response was 'Good' and the majority answered 'Good' or 'Excellent'.
- A third of respondents felt that communication was fine as it was. To improve communications, respondents wanted more frequent email bulletins and newsletters, more notice and contact over events and consultations, more proactive and inclusive engagement and more accessible communication.
- To improve its marketing, respondents felt the WNC should issue press releases and get itself media coverage, engage better with younger women, demonstrate its effectiveness and independence, improve its publications, attend relevant women's events and increase its outreach beyond London.
- The words that respondents most commonly used to describe the WNC objective included: 'represent/representative', 'voice(s)', 'promote', 'equality' and 'women'.
- Approximately half responded positively when asked about their overall image of the WNC. The remaining respondents highlighted issues around exclusivity and elitism and concerns around the WNC's independence.

### **Section 3: Activities and Consultations**

- The WNC rated better when compared with other non-departmental bodies, advisory bodies, government bodies and umbrella organisations with a large membership.
- When Partners were asked how they rated the WNC at involving them, listening to their views and considering them, 'Good' was the most common response and the majority felt the WNC were 'Good' or 'Excellent'.
- Two-thirds of respondents had been involved with a WNC consultation; primarily engaging on Violence Against Women, International, Women in Public Life and Equalities, through focus groups, conferences and online consultations.
- Respondents highlighted women in the economy, young women, women, ethnicity and religion, sexual objectification, women and disability, sexual violence, women and healthcare, older women as key policy areas on which WNC should be working.
- Respondents felt that for the WNC to engage its stakeholders more effectively there needed to be more regular, consistent contact with Partners, more innovative media communication, more effective use of the WNC's Partnerships, clarifying the remit, work and purpose of the WNC and communicating this effectively to Partners.

### **Section 4: WNC Single Equality Scheme**

- Partners felt that the main groups who could be engaged more effectively by the WNC were young women, BAME women and older women.
- The two main areas of work the WNC's Partners said they would like to see the WNC undertaking to ensure it represents all women were: work around women in the economy and maximising marketing and media potential, whilst improving our communications and engagement with Partners and potential Partners.

### **Section 5: Newsletter and Website**

- In general, Partners wanted to feel more engaged and included and be the focus of the WNC newsletters. They also wanted more debate, opinion pieces and improvements in the overall formatting of the newsletter.
- Respondents felt that the main ways to make the WNC website more useful and relevant was to have specialist areas, the use of visual imagery and interactive sections.

## **Section 6: Future Improvements**

- Two-thirds said the WNC would be their Partner of choice in liaising with government on gender matters due to its knowledge and understanding, position and connections and history of success and commitment.
- Respondents felt that the WNC could work better with their organisations by clarifying how Partners can engage, organising more joint events and work with Partners, increasing its outreach (especially beyond London) and improving its communications.
- The main ways that the WNC could increase and improve its role include developing its knowledge and contact with the devolved nations, working more collaboratively with Partners and increasing our gravitas on national and international issues.
- When asked what single request Partners had of the WNC, respondents asked for independence, clarity and transparency, better publicising and communication, an increase in outreach and resources, more support to its Partners and to improve its representation.

Overall themes from the survey responses

### **Main areas of success for the WNC:**

- For every question the most popular response was 'Good' and the majority rated the WNC 'Good' or 'Excellent' as opposed to 'Acceptable' or 'Poor'. This related to the following areas: the communication of WNC compared to other government bodies, how the WNC communicated its schedule of events and activities, how the WNC communicated useful information, development and announcements, how the WNC had responded if the Partner had contacted them and how the WNC involved its Partners, listening to their views and considering them.
- Overall, the WNC rated better than other non-departmental bodies, advisory bodies, government bodies and umbrella organisations with a large membership at involving stakeholders in their objectives.
- A number of Partners used the evaluation as an opportunity to thank and congratulate the WNC for their hard work in a complex and challenging position.
- The WNC was described as professional, approachable, knowledgeable, proactive, inclusive and experienced.
- Partners noted that the WNC has a large remit and has achieved a great deal with few resources.
- Those respondents who have contacted the WNC generally had a very positive experience.

- Two thirds of respondents confirmed they would liaise with government through the WNC on gender matters.
- Most Partners joined the WNC either through the recommendation of a current Partner or a partner body or after a positive experience of WNC at an event.
- Respondents noted that the WNC plays a vital role in representing women's voices to government.

## **Recommendations for areas of improvement for the WNC:**

### **Clarity**

- With regard to what it meant to be a Partner and what opportunities there are for Partners to engage and providing avenues for this engagement.
- The role and remit of the WNC (i.e. not a campaigning or lobbying body).
- How the WNC work agenda is decided and transparency in this.
- Reasserting its independent status and effectiveness.

### **Communication and outreach**

- Outgoing communication could be improved; the WNC needs to provide more accessible communication and more accessible contact routes with Partners.
- More regular and timely contact from the WNC was also identified as a high priority.
- Using more innovative media communication including making the newsletter and website more up-to-date, relevant and Partner-focused. This would engage both new Partners and current Partners.
- The WNC currently relies on word of mouth. It needs to develop a media presence both nationally and locally and market what it offers, what it does and how it does it more efficiently and effectively.
- The WNC needs to raise its profile by actively attending relevant women's events, including holding and attending events outside of London.
- Returning to the fundamentals of the WNC; its priority lying with listening to its Partners rather than delivering news on government policy.
- Its communications need to be tailored more towards the requirements of its Partners.

## Remit

- The WNC Partner base and work remit needed to expand and there are a number of key areas where Partners feel the WNC needs to do more work to ensure it is fully representing and reflecting women and their needs.
- Although WNC cannot lobby, it can advocate for the voices of women's organisations and the women's sector would like to feel more supported and sure of this role.
- Respondents also felt that the WNC could use its position to support networking and information sharing amongst Partners.
- More funding and resources are needed to develop the role of the WNC successfully.

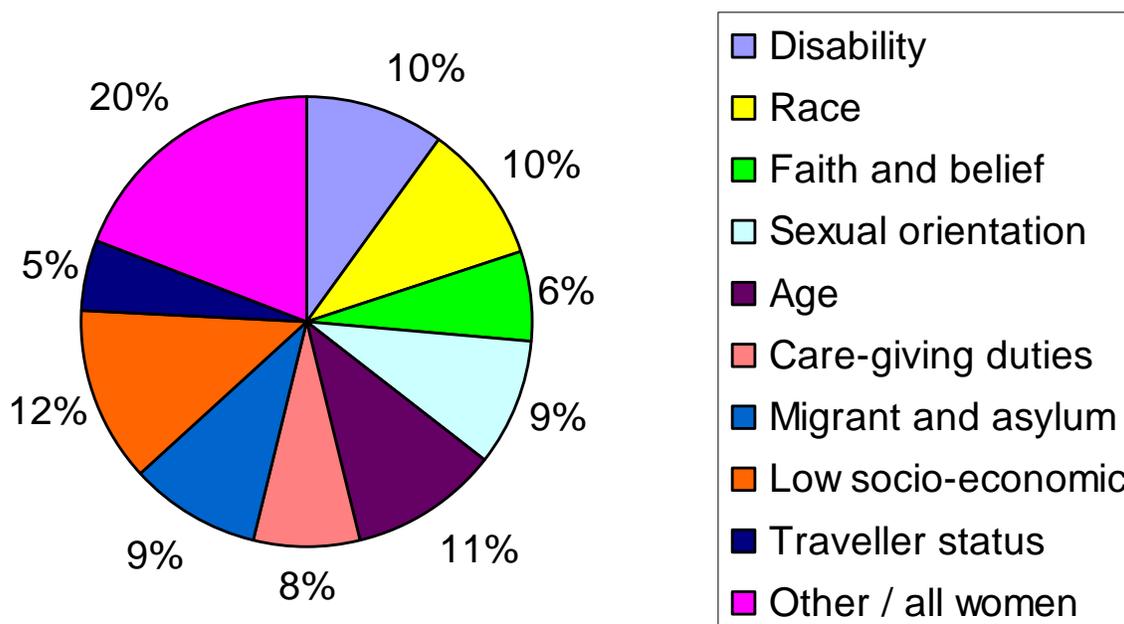
## Partners

- The WNC needs to make sure both its Partnership base and its Commissioners are more reflective and representative of all women in society. This is particularly important in relation to young women, regions outside London and the devolved nations.
- It needs to be proactive in making sure it has a more reflective and representative Partnership base and eroding its image of exclusivity and elitism.
- The WNC needs to collaborate more effectively with its Partners, making the most of their skills, knowledge and networks.

**Section 1: Organisation/ Individual information**

It was decided that the survey would be anonymous to encourage those who completed it to feel that they could respond honestly. There were a number of ways, however, of checking that the proportion of Partners who responded represented a fair range across the WNC Partnership base.

**1.1 Which 'group' or 'groups' of women do you represent/work with/provide services for?**

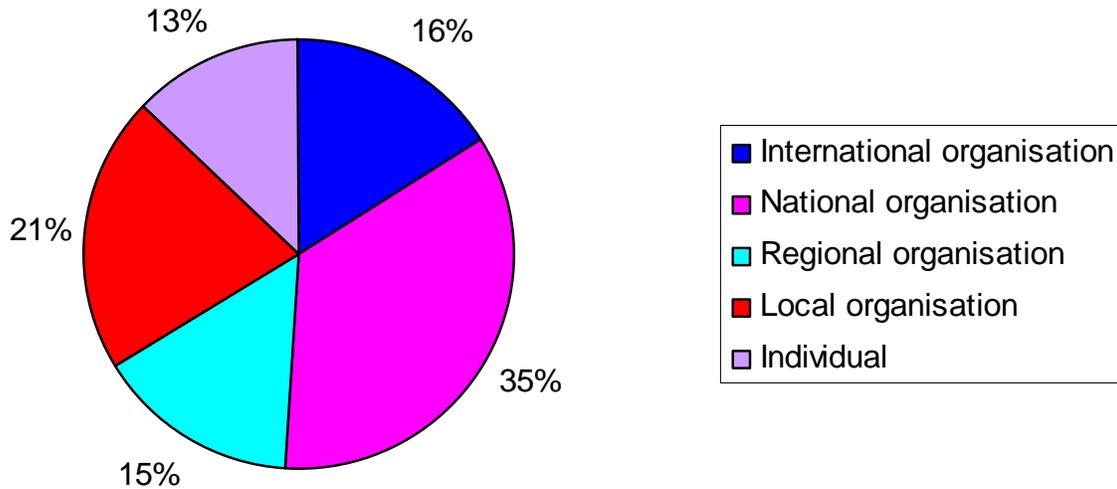


Respondents represented a broad and relatively proportionate spectrum of women from our Single Equality Scheme strands: disability, race, faith and belief, sexual orientation, age, care-giving duties, migrant and Asylum, low socio-economic and Traveller status, as seen in the pie chart above. However, differing proportions show where the WNC can work to expand its Partner base.

There was also the option, 'other', for respondents to specify a group or groups, of women they represented, not covered specifically by the above list. The main groups highlighted here were violence against women (including domestic violence, sexual violence and prostitution), entrepreneurs/business/professionals and graduates/education/academics. Other groups included widows, social housing, women seeking reproductive rights/abortion care/sexual health, ex-offenders, mental health, widows, peace and social justice, radio and the Women's Institute. Many organisations also specified that they felt they represented all strands through their work.

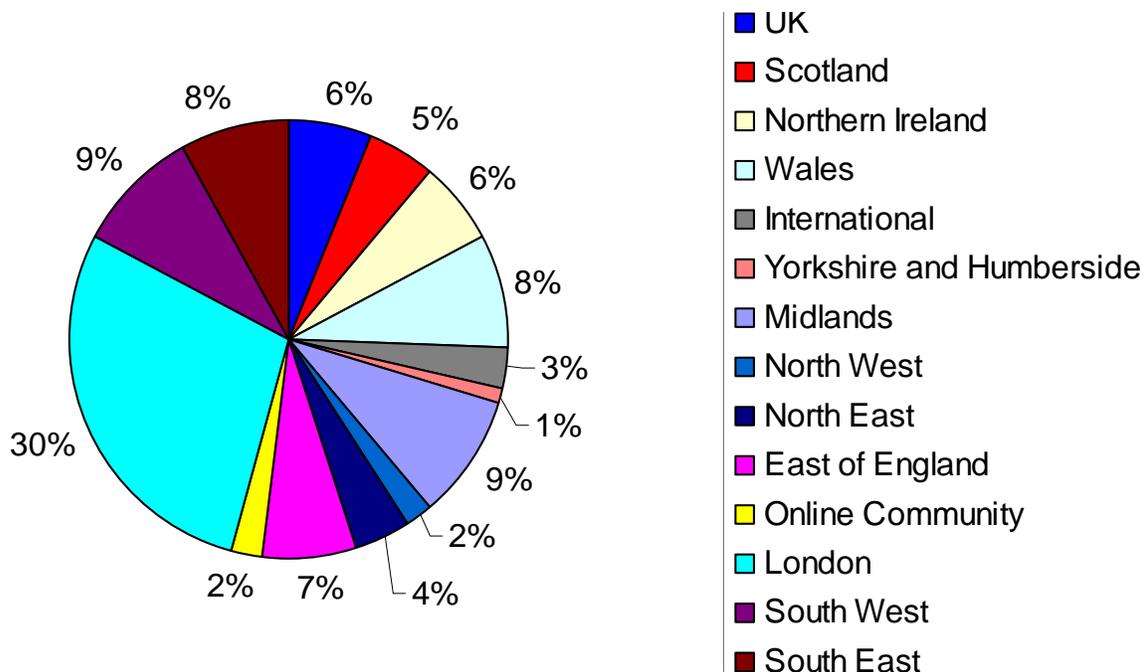
### 1.2 Are you...?

The majority of respondents represented national organisations; however there was a fair spread across the five categories of International, National, Regional, Local and Individuals.



### 1.3 Where are you based?

The WNC received responses from organisations based in all regions and across the devolved nations. The largest response was from London. This is a good stimulus to encourage the WNC to increase its partnership base across the regions and the devolved nations.



#### 1.4 How did you find out about the WNC?

What was clear is that the overwhelming majority of respondents found out about the WNC through word of mouth.

The responses came under three main categories:

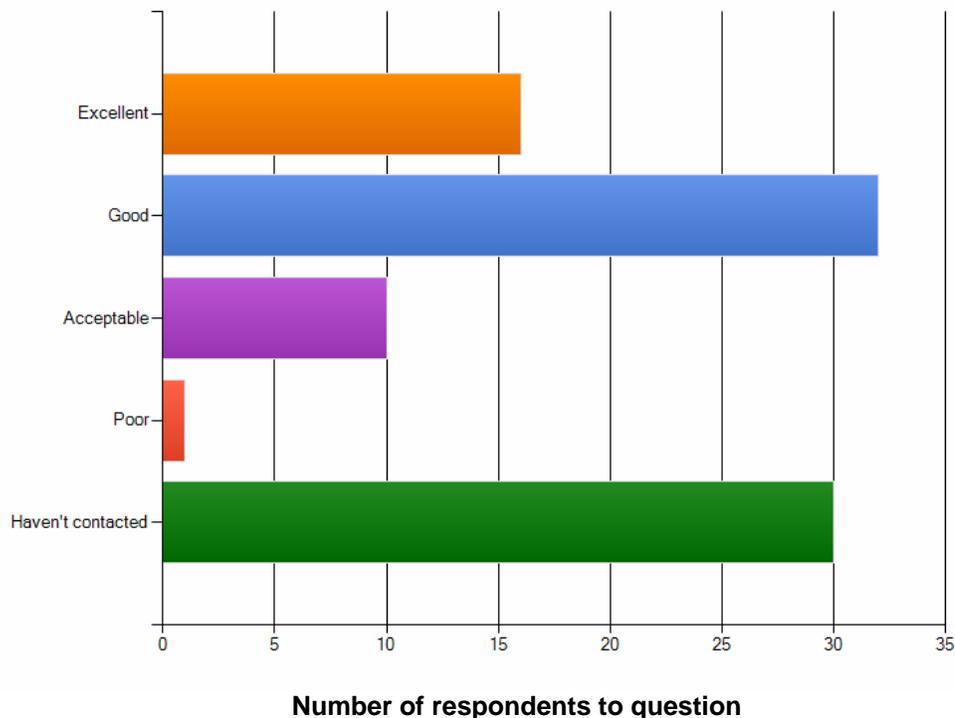
- **Current Partners:** through another WNC Partner organisation and their publications, newsletters and networks.
- **Events:** through an event held by, or in conjunction with, the WNC.
- **Longstanding members:** a fair number had been members for a substantial time and did not remember, or did not know, when their organisation first found out about the WNC and joined. Others had joined at the inception of the WNC.

Other answers included:

- Other government-affiliated bodies or individuals;
- Newsletters, website and publications of the WNC;
- Previously worked for the WNC as staff or as a Commissioner; and,
- Individuals moving from an existing Partner organisation to a new organisation and signing up their new organisation

**Section 2: WNC Communication, Engagement and Marketing**

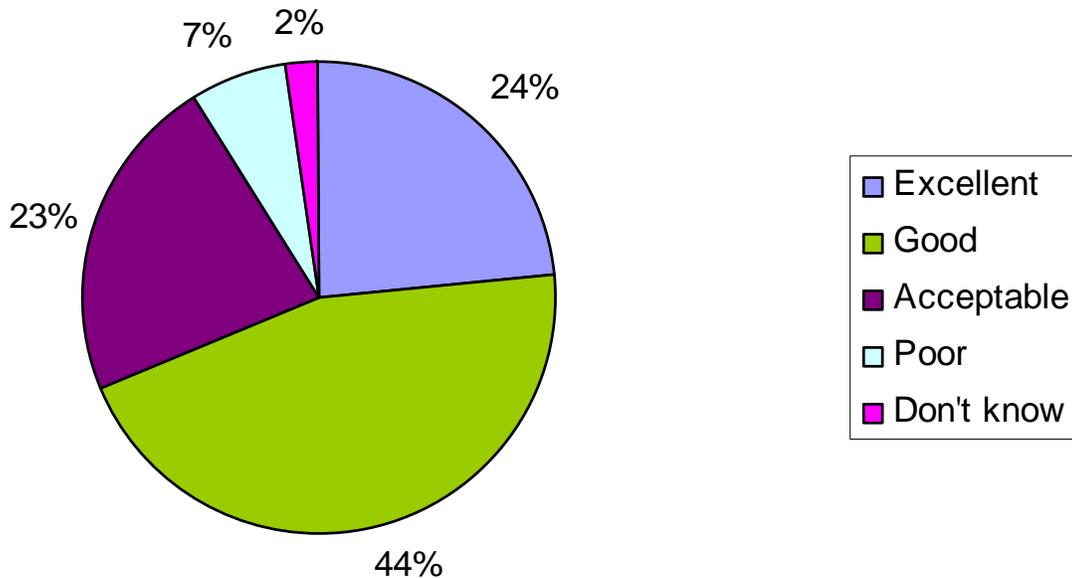
**2.1 If you have contacted the WNC needing information or expressing views, how would you rate their response?**



66% of respondents had contacted the WNC. Importantly, only 1% of those who had contacted the WNC reported that the response had been 'Poor', the majority stating that the response had been 'Good' and 81% reporting the response as 'Good' or 'Excellent' as opposed to 'Acceptable'.

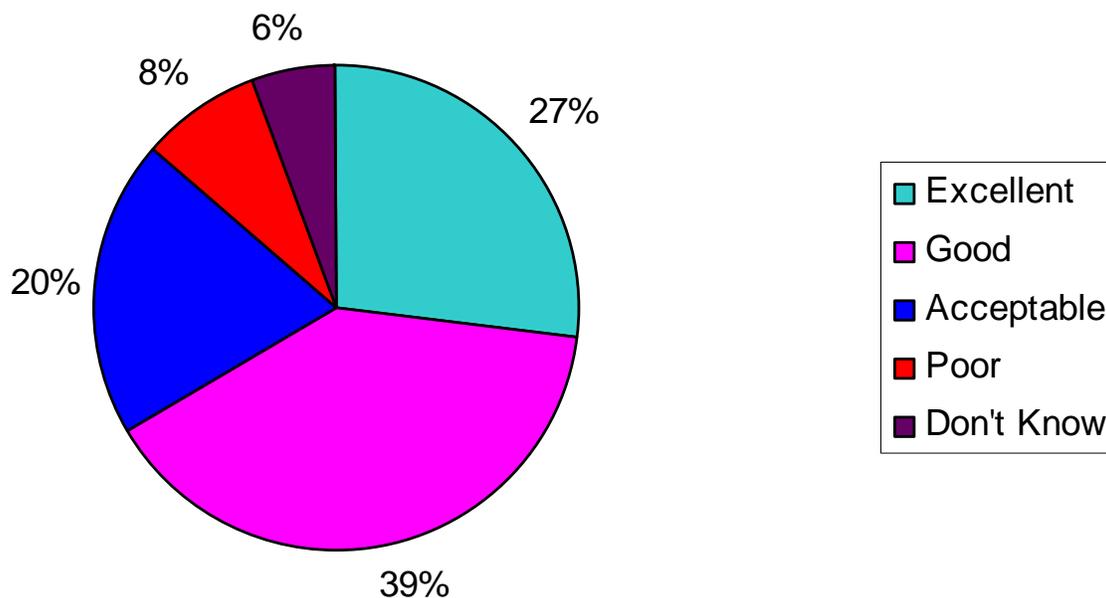
Approximately one-third had not contacted the WNC personally, perhaps suggesting that the WNC could do more to advertise its role as a channel to government and ensuring that contacting the WNC is as accessible as possible.

**2.2 How effective do you consider the WNC to be at sharing useful information with you and informing you about developments and announcements?**



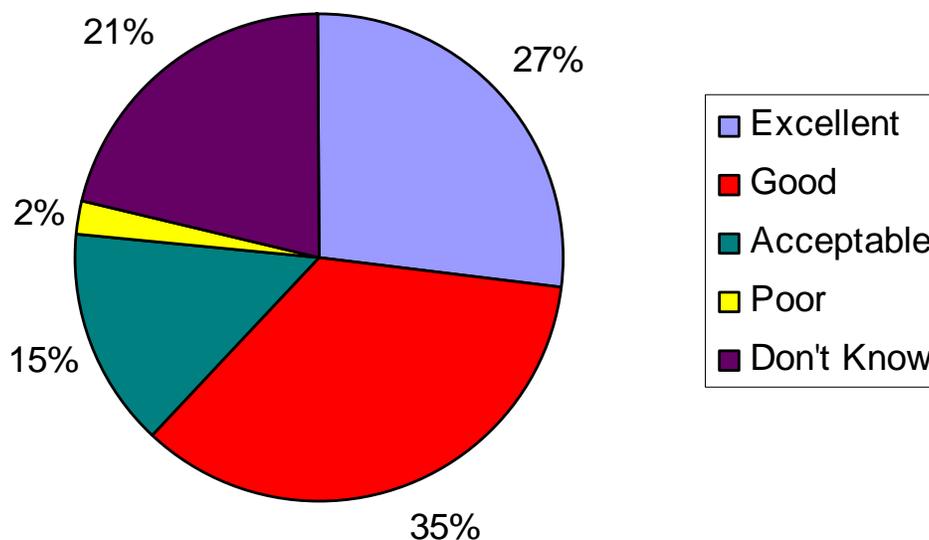
68% felt the WNC to be 'Excellent' or 'Good' at sharing useful information and 91% felt the WNC to be 'Excellent', 'Good' or 'Acceptable'. However, 7% felt that the WNC could go a fair way to improving information sharing, and this statistic must be taken into consideration. Further on, the survey respondents were given an opportunity to recommend various ways of improving communications.

**2.3 In your opinion, how successfully does the WNC communicate with its Partners on its schedule of events and activities?**



66% felt the WNC to be 'Excellent' or 'Good' at communicating its events to Partners and 86% felt the WNC to be 'Excellent', 'Good' or 'Acceptable'. Respondents were given an opportunity to recommend various ways of improving communications. Results were similar to the previous question, suggesting that the WNC are consistent in outgoing communication to Partners, regardless of its content.

#### 2.4 How does the WNC rate against other government bodies in the way it communicates with stakeholders?



This question was important to help gauge how the WNC were faring in the wider picture. Comparatively, the WNC fared better than most government bodies. 62% of those respondents who felt able to contrast the WNC's communications to those of other government bodies felt the WNC were, by comparison, 'Good' or 'Excellent'. 21% felt unable to draw a comparison.

#### 2.5 How can we improve our communication with/to you?

Despite giving respondents the opportunity to suggest improvements to communications, over a third took this opportunity to comment that in fact they were currently satisfied. For example, 'you are really very very good so no complaints', 'maintain present standard which is excellent at the moment', and 'the WNC's communication with partners has recently been extremely positive and inclusive.'

Of the two-thirds who suggested improvements these included:

### **More frequent email bulletins and newsletters**

The most prevalent response to this question was more and regular email bulletins and newsletters (suggestions of weekly, fortnightly or monthly contact): 'monthly newsletters with important information / regular bulletins about events'. Partners also wanted to have more influence over the content of these newsletters. This included a number suggesting email bulletins to be 'more targeted' or themed: 'regular e-newsletter that we can tailor to our areas of interest', using the newsletter to share information between Partners and 'perhaps send information linked to the specific area of professionalism of the member'. This may also include 'more items in local newsletters.' One respondent felt that 'communications have been less regular I think because of staff shortages and the time needed to review the WNC's priorities.'

### **More notice and contact over events and consultations**

Partners requested that 'if you are thinking about running events in the region it would be good to be able to liaise with you over whether these clash or overlap with other scheduled events' and felt that 'informing us of events sooner and checking that other events are not happening on the same day' would be important improvements to WNC communications. Respondents also wanted 'more notice for events that are to take place and for submissions of returns on consultations'. However, it was also acknowledged that 'time scales often too tight but that's often due to other factors outside of WNC control.' A number mentioned that they had dropped off mailing lists or were not receiving certain emails about events or email newsletters. This needs to be investigated and contact details need to be updated.

### **More proactive and inclusive engagement**

It was noted that active recruitment of Partner organisations to expand the WNC Partner base was needed; 'be more pro-active in finding out what is out there'. This may also mean 'more outreach events' to gauge women's voices around the country; 'more face to face meetings for all Partners, not just a few on a working group'. In addition, events that are 'more inclusive and facilitate new voices as speakers at your events, rather than the same old people we have heard before.'

### **Accessibility**

Barriers to accessibility included language, timeframes, 'information sharing' and communication avenues. For example, communication can feel like 'jargon and initials need more explanation', 'longer consultation time in order to give time to consult with our groups' and very importantly, the need to 'clarify what opportunities there are to engage and provide avenues for this engagement'.

Furthermore, access to follow-up information through 'regular post-consultation updates' was requested. Lastly, Partners were keen for the WNC to improve contact with Commissioners on a local level by facilitating 'better communication with our local Commissioner'.

## **2.6 How do you think WNC could market itself better and improve its presence/public persona?**

Respondents' answers to this question identified a number of clear themes:

### **Press releases, media coverage and profile**

A number of respondents mentioned the need for 'better media coverage and exposure', as the WNC is simply 'never in the media'. 'It needs to get onto the national media, as profile is high amongst those who know it, but few do.' This would involve being 'more actively involved in women's sector debates'; 'more headlining of its views on matters of public debates, such as the gender equality aspects of the Equality Bill'; 'more headlining of its reports on, for example, the Government's CEDAW performance'; 'get more press coverage' with more 'press releases' 'so that the WNC's name, comments on women's equality development (or backsliding!), are more frequently reported in the national press'; 'publicise its activities to a much wider audience by using for example, a commonly read daily such as the Mirror, Sun or Guardian.'

Press coverage needs to include that at a local and workplace level, 'more work needed here and in regional local press so WNC not seen as elitist or London-focused'; 'put articles and events in all local newspapers, LA (Local Authority) newspapers and PCT (Primary Care Trust) newsletters'; 'communicate what the WNC is and its purpose to the general public through schools, colleges/universities and workplaces. Use the internet to reach a broader audience.'

### **Engaging younger women**

There were a number of respondents who felt that the WNC 'still needs to reach out more....to the young – we Partners are all so old and need young women. We should do more in schools and colleges to profile WNC work'. They identified the need to make sure that younger women are involved and included by 'widening appeal to engage with younger women.' This may include 'promotional school work', 'input into schools PHSE sessions for young women' and 'provide mentoring and role models to younger women'; 'work with youth organisations like NCB (National Children's Bureau) and NYA (National Youth Alliance) to target young women'; a WNC presence in areas with 'colleges and universities' leading to 'a more communicated and more popular WNC'; 'encourage "passing the baton" on to ensure the continuity of achievements and activities of women's

equality remains relevant and engaging to today's generation. The message needs to alert younger women that equality is still a long way off.'

### **Showing its effectiveness and independence**

Showing its ability to influence and change policy and remain strongly independent from government was considered to be key: 'give evidence that the WNC has clout with government and is close enough to members to accurately represent their views'; 'deliver stronger results and your reputation will follow'; 'stressing the WNC's independence from the Government of the day might also improve its public persona'; 'move away from its perceived role as being a 'Government Spokesperson'...it has a direct channel of communication with the Government, but can it affect policy change'; 'be continuous with activities rather than intermittent; more proactive'; 'must maintain steady pressure on Government, not sporadic.'

### **Publications**

Suggestions for improvements included 'website and events newsletter', 'more newsletters/flyers/fact-sheets', 'regular newsletters' and 'targeted mail-shots - trying cascade technique'. Finally, 'giving out leaflets / flyers at women's events' which ties in with the theme below.

All-round respondents felt wider outreach was key; essentially the WNC is well known in the sector but unknown outside of it. Many respondents highlighted the need to do work in schools, colleges, universities and work places.

### **Attendance at relevant women's events**

This included a number of elements such as the 'need to raise the profile of the organisation through events and issues' and 'more seminars that tackle contemporary issues'; and to 'make more use of partner agency contacts' and their knowledge about local events, so the WNC can 'widen the range of organisations [it] knows about'. 'I think that it could use its Commission membership more widely as Ambassadors...we could certainly ensure that they are clearly on our dissemination lists for communications about our relevant work.'

### **Events outside London**

To avoid being perceived as London-centric, the WNC was encourage to hold 'more meetings and events outside London', including 'more regional and local events', 'holding events in rural and urban areas outside cities' as a whole and 'more inclusively across the devolved countries / nations.'

**Other important suggestions included:**

- 'Try and make sure people clearly understand the aims without the jargon'.
- 'Wider dissemination of information on relevant government consultations so partners can make their own input'.
- 'Not sure WNC has a 'public persona' as such, not sure Ms Bloggs at the supermarket, in the bank, at the school, in the city, etc is au fait with the work of the WNC and how that work might influence their concerns. It is definitely well established in the community of parties who already have a specific interest in issues affecting women – but how they communicate locally might be an issue.'
- 'By genuinely reaching out. It needs to have a better 'offer' to partners than engagement in consultations, which take up a lot of time and requirement to attend events which also take up a lot of time.....we held off applying for partnership because of the dread of regular communication and yet more 'things to do' when we are all volunteers and already feel overcommitted with so much to do for gender equality.'

**2.7 What do you consider the role of the WNC to be and are we clear in our objective?**

Over a third mentioned explicitly that they felt the WNC were clear in their objective. Others, through detailing the WNC's purpose correctly, confirmed or inferred that the WNC was clear in promoting its role.

Suggested objectives most commonly included the words 'represent/representative', 'voice(s)' and 'promote'. Other key words included 'issues', 'women', 'views', 'awareness', 'opinions', 'interests', 'equality'. Other words and phrases included 'communicate', 'champion', 'mouthpiece', 'influence', 'look after', 'support', 'engage', 'help others engage', 'bringing attention to', 'consult', 'explore', 'advise/advisory', 'empowerment', 'input', 'research', 'explore', 'umbrella', 'raising awareness', 'bridge', 'link', 'listening', 'expressing'.

Very few mentioned 'independence', however, and a couple of respondents mentioned campaigning and lobbying, which the WNC needs to be clear is not part of its role.

**Some particularly notable definitions included:**

- 'Ensuring issues which affect women in all walks of life are considered, debated, acted upon by those in a position to do so.....the other big part of WNC's role is ensuring that those less strident voices are heard and mixed in to the pot.'
- 'To tell the government what British women really need and want.'

- 'Broker between women's sector and government ensuring that women's voices are heard and their needs and experiences have an impact on all levels of policy legislation.'
- 'Question government actions that are disadvantageous to women, or have the potential to be so.'
- 'To represent women and women's organisations, providing a voice to government about policy implementation and about policy development.'

## Concerns around the role of the WNC

Some respondents highlighted issues around representing and listening to women rather than simply passing down information from government; for example, the WNC are 'clear on objectives (act as a mechanism for women's organisations to influence the government), but in practice seem to be a mouth piece for the government rather than for women's groups' and it needs to ensure that it is 'representing women to government (and not the other way round!).'

Moreover, the issues of how it decides its work remit and how reflective this is of women's concerns were raised; for example, the 'WNC should represent the voices of the women's sector to government. Whilst it is obvious that the WNC cannot report to government on every campaign etc that is taking place in the women's sector, it would be interesting to know more about how the WNC chooses the areas that it focuses on. It would be interesting to see the WNC define more clearly what it won't do e.g. support political campaigns etc.'

Partners sought clarification of how WNC works with and fits in with other government equality bodies and promoting this appropriately; for example, the WNC is an 'advisory body to government on women's behalf. I think the equality landscape is quite confusing for non-specialists, with the GEO and EHRC. If you can afford to put articles in women's magazines, go onto Women's Hour more, comment on the media more? I know all that's more difficult than it sounds. What about a high profile woman championing WNC's work? J K Rowling?; Tanni Gray Thompson? etc.' Similarly, the 'WNC's objectives are generally clear to those already engaged, which brings us back to communication and marketing – is Ms Bloggs engaged and does she have to be and how can she be?'

## 2.8 What is your overall image of the WNC?

There was a split in opinion here. However, over half that responded took this opportunity to congratulate the WNC. For example, it was described as professional, approachable, knowledgeable, proactive, inclusive and experienced. Comments included:

- 'Approachable and effective'
- 'Professional and proactive'

- 'Looking out for the welfare and equality of women no matter what background they come from'
- 'Very good and well organised'
- 'Proactive and inclusive with a clear agenda'
- 'A very professional body which promotes and cares for the voices of women'
- 'An important, articulate, committed and experienced organisation – very necessary'
- 'A very useful network – meeting at Partners' events is invaluable'
- 'A good source of information on women's issues and Government'
- 'It provides a good forum for advising Government on issues relevant to women. The meeting organised on the Equality Bill last year was one of the best meetings on the Bill that I have ever attended'
- 'Individual staff are helpful and nice'
- 'I attended a conference for the first time this year and I felt a great sense of partnership and support'

All other comments around image and performance were constructive and often focused on factors that they recognised as outside the control of the WNC. This included under-funding, under-resourcing, under-staffed and over-worked:

- 'Good, but overstretched and expected to do too much with too few resources'
- 'Could have more 'bite' – higher level of access to government and more resources for specialised work'
- 'A good idea but very under resourced'
- 'Over-worked, not enough staff, difficulties in being independent from government'
- 'A very relevant body in today's society that could do more if given some powers and funding by the UK Government to further women's issues such as educating the public on the relevance and use of 'CEDAW'

## **Exclusivity**

Other feedback around the WNC's image included themes around elitism and being out of touch in its jargon, clientele and understanding:

- 'Rather old age middle class, same faces, a bit elitist'
- 'Dominated by a small circle of white, female, older women whose experience and understanding of the women's sector is not in keeping with today's demographics. New communities and organisations such as ours are often there in a marginal capacity. This is particularly true of activity at the international level'
- 'Mostly white middle class'
- 'Not active enough in inclusion of all women's organisations'

- 'A bit of a closed shop and lacking in grassroots representation'
- 'Lack of understanding of front line issues, but try to do their best'
- 'Positive but sometimes rather removed from the experience of 'ordinary women''
- 'A little full of jargon, which is only understood by government organisations'

However, others felt we had gone some way in the right direction to shaking off this image: 'in recent years I think the public image of the WNC has improved greatly, they are much more viable in the women's sector and play a clear role in taking information from the women in the UK to government, as the WNC's membership increases it's authority increases, although I think it is still associated with some of the 'old guard' in the women's sector – although I understand it is trying to counter this image' and 'becoming more engaged.'

There were also concerns about the Anglo-centric and London-centric image of the WNC: 'communications with devolved nations and general understanding of the nature of devolution could be improved', similarly 'excellent at national issues – local issues tend to be ignored, unless they are specifically raised up to national level'.

## **WNC's independence**

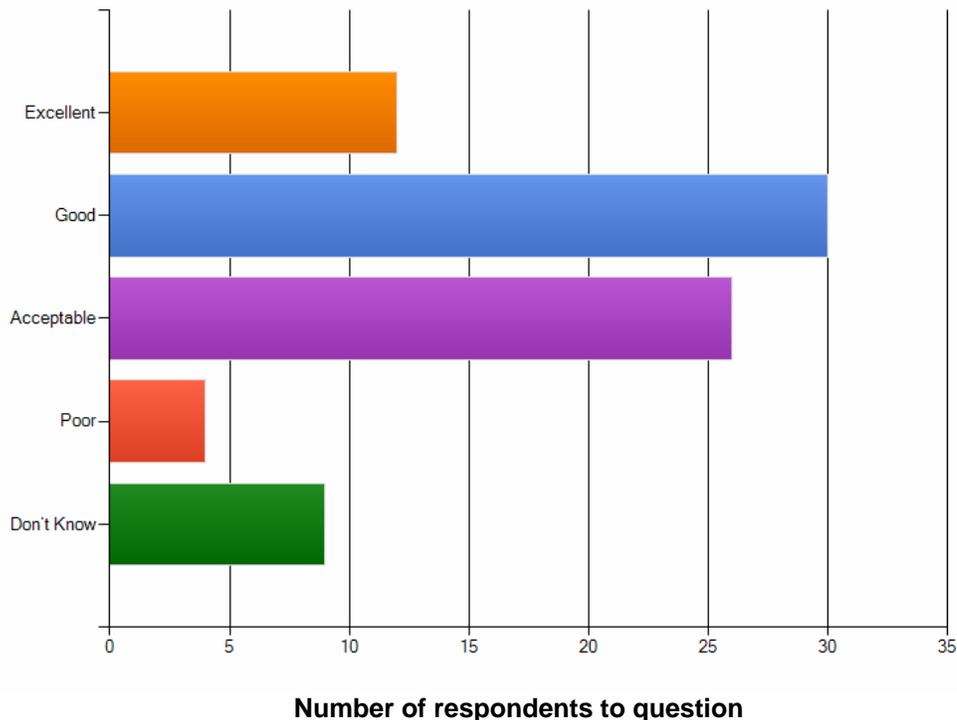
Much of the feedback focused on issues around the independence of the WNC and its relationship with the women's sector and government:

- 'Small, massively under-funded and ignored by government. A token gesture towards equality by the state, but with staff who really want to make a difference'
- 'A bureaucratic arm of government rather than an organisation that is reaching out to women and women's organisations'
- 'It is struggling to remain relevant to current debates and to cover an extremely wide brief of 'women's issues''
- 'Rather low profile and 'polite' to Government. Its views are nevertheless sound. Maybe 'worthy' would be the best one word'
- 'Worthy but ineffective. This is due to lack of political commitment from government and inadequate resourcing'
- 'While WNC is a very important body, its independence and ability to truly represent the sector's views may be somewhat limited due to its positioning within the UK Government'
- 'Performs a necessary task. Its independence is highly valued and is an asset to the women's sector'

This indicates that the WNC needs to reassert its independence as being fundamental to its value to both the women's sector and the government.

**Section 3: WNC Activities and Consultations**

**3.1 How do you rate the WNC at involving you, listening to your views and considering them when advising Ministers on Government's policy development?**



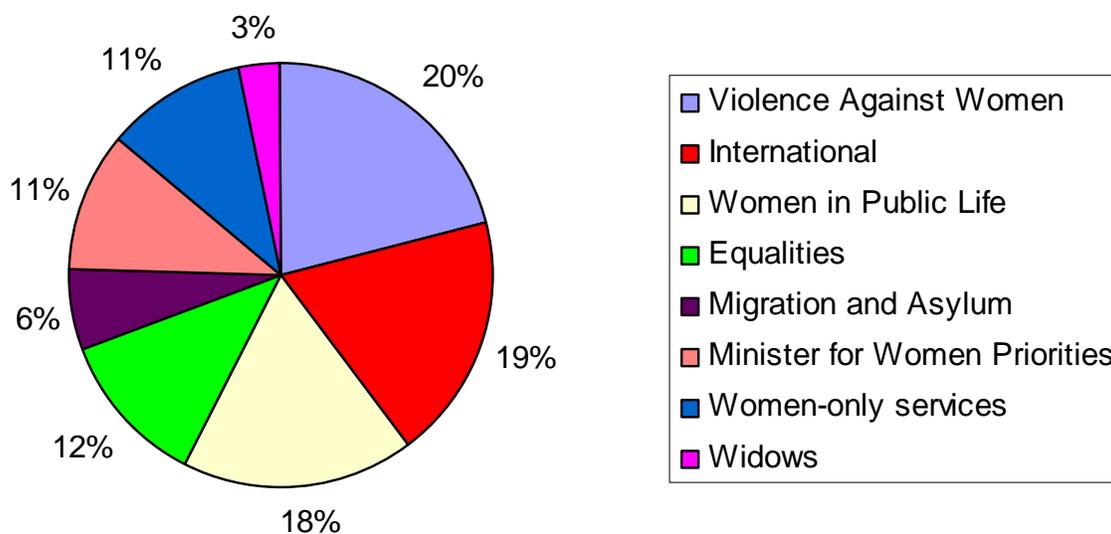
52% of Partners thought we were 'Excellent' or 'Good' at involving them. 84% felt we were 'Excellent', 'Good' or 'Acceptable'. For the 11% who answered 'Don't Know' and the 5% who felt this was 'Poor' it needs to be made clear through our communications that listening to the views of Partners is part of what the WNC does. The WNC also needs to ensure that it feeds back clearly (as some respondents have suggested elsewhere in the survey) on how we have listened and acted on the views of our Partners.

### 3.2 How do you rate the following at involving you in their objectives?

| How do you rate the following at involving you in their objectives? |           |            |            |            |            |                |                |
|---|-----------|------------|------------|------------|------------|----------------|----------------|
|   | Excellent | Good       | Acceptable | Poor       | Don't know | Rating Average | Response Count |
| Non-departmental government bodies                                  | 6.5% (5)  | 26.0% (20) | 29.9% (23) | 26.0% (20) | 11.7% (9)  | 2.90           | 77             |
| Advisory bodies   | 3.8% (3)  | 30.8% (24) | 30.8% (24) | 23.1% (18) | 11.5% (9)  | 2.92           | 78             |
| Government bodies   | 3.8% (3)  | 16.7% (13) | 35.9% (28) | 33.3% (26) | 10.3% (8)  | 2.71           | 78             |
| Umbrella organisations with a large membership                      | 6.3% (5)  | 34.2% (27) | 34.2% (27) | 16.5% (13) | 8.9% (7)   | 3.13           | 79             |

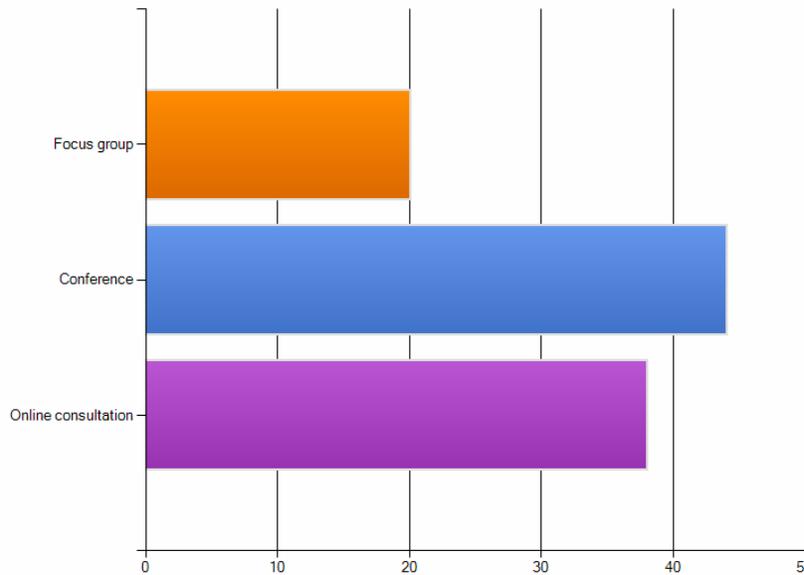
Bearing in mind the results from the previous question which rated the WNC as 15% 'Excellent' and 37% 'Good', overall the WNC was rated better than other non-departmental bodies, advisory bodies, government bodies and umbrella organisations with a large membership (see chart below).

### 3.3 What areas/ activities have you been involved in with the WNC?



The pie chart demonstrates that respondents reflect and represent a broad range of the WNC's policy strands and therefore feedback is coming from women who have worked with the WNC across all our policy areas. Respondents were able to tick more than one option for this section, and from numbers in each category it can be discerned that some of the women had been involved in two or more work areas. Understandably, the majority of respondents had engaged with the WNC over one of its four current, main policy strands (Violence Against Women, International, Equalities, Women in Public Life).

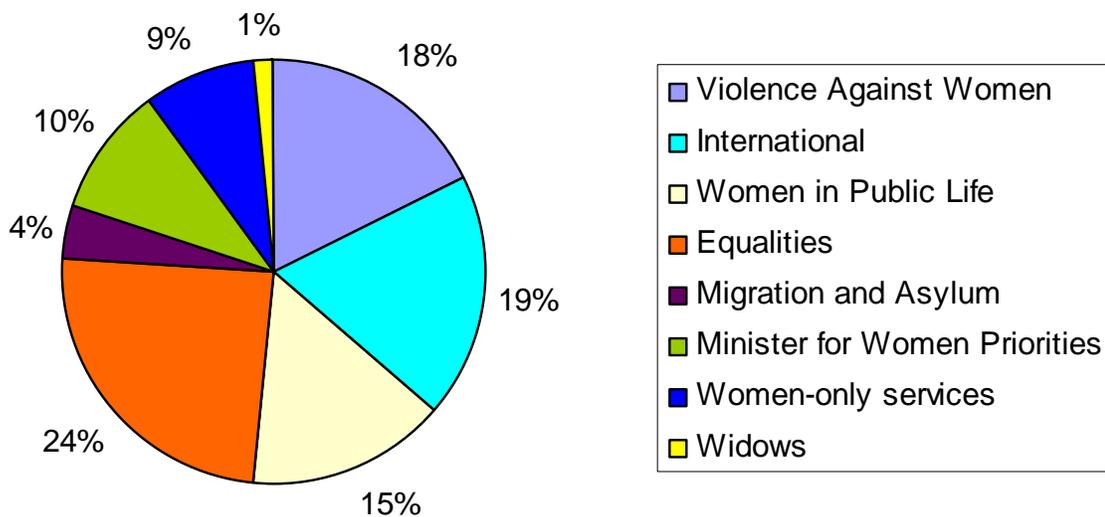
**3.4 Have you been involved in a WNC consultation via focus group, conference or online consultation?**



**Number of respondents to question**

The WNC utilises a number of different ways for responding to consultations. The traditional route of using conferences and focus groups has been supplemented by the more recent use of online consultations which are proving popular. This supports feedback elsewhere in the survey requesting more diverse consulting methods.

**3.5 If you have ever been involved in or filled out a response to a WNC consultation, what was or were the topic(s)?**



This pie chart shows that the WNC has engaged across the board and has consulted in all its work streams. As expected, the greatest engagement has been with the WNC's most prominent work streams this year.

### **3.6 Are there any other key policy areas we should be working on?**

In answer to this question a number of respondents were emphasising the need to focus on a particular area within an existing WNC policy remit, for example, 'women and the criminal justice system, in particular, victims of sexual violence'. One respondent commented that you 'could argue that the remit is already stretched in terms of WNC's limited resources.'

#### **Women in the Economy**

31% mentioned issues around women and their 'socio-economic disadvantage' across the four nations. Themes around pay gap, 'equal pay for all sectors', equal promotions, senior positions and 'statutory pay audits'.

Themes around care were also highlighted for example, 'fatherhood leave', 'men having better opportunities to do childcare' and 'developing shared childcare options as in Sweden'. This also included 'women's contribution to the economy (paid and unpaid)' and 'women with caring responsibilities for disabled or ill relatives and friends as this has a particular impact on women and, taken with the impact of looking after children – builds up inequality and compounds it over time'. 'Improving training for outsourced childcare' was also mentioned. Linked to this was 'women and climate change'.

It was felt that 'women, work and the economy will become increasingly important over the coming years' and that the WNC could help 'bring together women and organisations to fight for these.'

#### **Young Women (and education)**

'Young women' was another popular answer (10%), such as 'young women especially violence, opportunities and gangs'. Linked to this was 'women and higher education', 'mentoring in schools/colleges', and 'falling literacy and numeracy'.

#### **Women, Ethnicity and Religion**

Themes included 'women in Islam (which I know you have addressed forced marriages etc), but there are other areas – such as neo natal and post natal child mortality and educating the girl child' and 'issues of competing rights, particularly when religious freedom competes with human rights e.g. over women's place and rights'. Another issue mentioned was 'involving more women

from Black and Minority Ethnic Communities in your activities', similarly 'we are hoping that given the multicultural nature of Britain, the WNC would start supporting Women of Africa to raise the profile of African women in order to bring African women to the international policy decision table.' Linked to this was to 'use more languages' in WNC's work. Lastly in this remit 'religion, identity, and political representation'.

### **Sexual Objectification**

Another common theme was around the 'sexual objectification of women' including the 'degradation of girls and women in the media, including electronic media' and 'the mainstreaming of pornography and its impact on gender equality.'

### **Women and Disability**

Partners identified work around disabled women: 'as a disabled woman, I would welcome any policies around women who are disabled/ have a chronic illness.' Specifics included 'the dire situation that disabled women with disabled children are in with specific reference to the lack of care support to enable them as mothers' and 'having children taken away from them rather than adequate support being put in place to enable them.'

### **Sexual Violence**

Within this respondents highlighted 'women and the criminal justice system', 'SARCs [Sexual Assault Referral Centres] and their negative impact on the women's sexual violence sector' and 'pushing for the demand side of sex buying for criminalisation'.

### **Women and Healthcare**

Respondents identified women, infancy and health, healthcare including 'nutritional status for women and infant', 'family-centred health', and 'reproductive rights in Northern Ireland, given the current abortion law'.

### **Older Women**

Partners' suggestions included 'issues affecting older women', such as 'retirement issues' and 'women and pensions'.

The capacity of the women's sector was also mentioned: 'infrastructure support for taking forward the above work (existing WNC policy remits) that is led by women's groups who specialise in these areas'.

### **3.7 Could you suggest one idea on how we could engage our stakeholders better on policy?**

#### **Contact with Partners**

The overwhelming theme here was more, regular and consistent contact with Partners. Face-to-face outreach, especially in the regions and better use of media tools to keep in touch with Partners was requested. This included 'keeping in touch more frequently in smaller doses i.e. not an expensive conference once a year', 'regular dissemination and early notice for events and policy formulation and consultation', 'better publicity' and 'properly advertise in advance'.

#### **Innovative media communication**

Partners' suggestions included 'punchy info e-mail', 'group texts', 'email newsletters and links to resources and publications' and 'sending out e-mails asking for views on important issues affecting women featured in the news'. Overall, 'continuity is the important factor'.

#### **Effective Partnership**

Respondents suggested that the WNC should use its Partnerships more and more effectively, to ensure it is being fully representative and making the most of the expertises of its Partner base: 'working closer with many groups on a one to one basis would clarify the needs that women have and therefore enrich the representation of women when advising the Minister'; 'use organisations like ours in a partnership rather than just to get bums on seats'; 'link policy to specific areas of specialism of the members, such as education, People will be more interested in contributing to areas which they understand'; 'take steps to profile the commissioner in their local regions to encourage participation and input from a bigger range of organisations'.

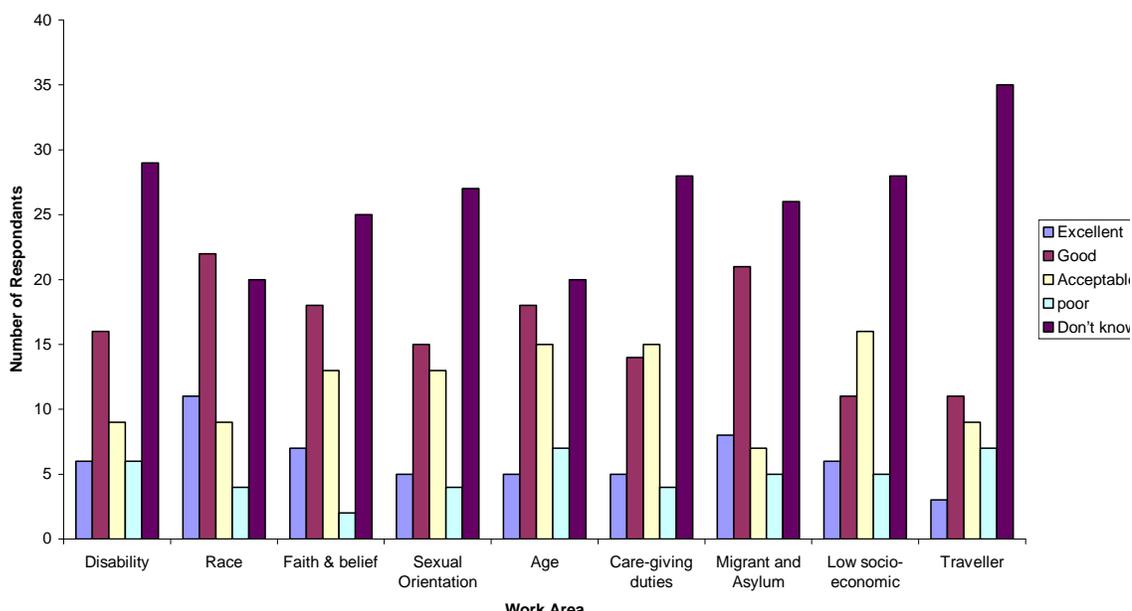
#### **Clarity**

In this section it was clear that not everyone knew the remit or purpose of the WNC. Many respondents noted issues around clarifying the work of the WNC and communicating this effectively to Partners. For example, 'I think it would help if the WNC were very clear about what exactly they hope their intended impact to be and who it is trying to represent. That would make it easier for stakeholders to understand what can be gained by engaging with the WNC'; 'agreeing a clear outcome that will be achieved through active engagement with the WNC'; 'provide glossaries and summaries to ensure prior understanding. Use surveys like this that enable easy feedback'; 'not sure what your current modus operandi is – do you target specific partners based on their specific interests or do you do blanket coverage on issues?'; 'I didn't even know all these areas existed, so for starters, it would be good to let stakeholders know this!'

**Section 4: Single Equality Scheme Consultation**

As part of the WNC's commitment to equality, we want to review how we work with a number of under-represented groups of women who, due to additional aspects of their identity, can experience further discrimination.

**4.1 The categories below reflect those groups highlighted in the WNC's Single Equality. How do you rate the WNC at engaging with?**



This shows the rating breakdown that the WNC were given for their engagement with each group. On average 40% selected 'Don't Know' suggesting that the WNC could communicate more effectively to all its Partners on how it works with different groups of women. Another possible explanation, building on feedback elsewhere in the survey, is that WNC Partners may not have time to evaluate how the WNC engages with other areas outside their own specific interest.

Interestingly, the results mostly reflect the thoughts of the Commission on areas in which it generally does best and its Partnership base. It also reflects the areas it needs to focus on in the forthcoming financial year to ensure that it meets its commitments under the WNC's far-reaching Single Equality Scheme.

#### 4.2 Which groups of women could we engage with better and why?

- **Young women** were the most mentioned group by far as 'lacking in the women's sector'. Reasons included: 'there are no representatives from this age group and their needs, views and concerns need to be heard. Recent research has proven that this group have so many views that differ to those over 40 years old who currently dominate the WNC' and 'they won't necessarily know about us but will know and care about our issues. Vital for our future work'. This is particularly significant because the make-up of the current WNC Partner base means this was not a self-nominating group.
- **BAME women** were also regularly mentioned as a target group for improved engagement. Reasons included: 'because they are under-represented in public life' and 'this group of women are greatly disadvantaged due to existing lack of trust.'
- **Older women** were another frequent response to this question. Reasons included: 'apart from activists, they are invisible and in most cases are poor and disenfranchised.'

#### **Other groups mentioned included:**

- Faith and belief groups
- Small grassroots organisations
- Entrepreneurs
- Scientists
- Widows
- Low socio-economic
- Refugees and Asylum seekers
- Single parents
- Roma/Gypsy/Travellers
- Care givers
- Sexual orientation
- Migrants and migrant workers
- Disabled
- Working-class

### **4.3 What other work would you like to see us doing to ensure we fully represent all women who live in the UK?**

Two main areas arose from answers to this question.

#### **Women and the Economy**

Themes highlighted within this section included:

- Micro and small businesses
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Impact of the recession and the structure of the labour market on women's economic well-being
- Women living in poverty/socio-economic inequality and the use of fiscal policy
- Gender pay gap
- Working with Trade Unions
- Women in low-income households

It is interesting that this category came up most strongly, as this is an area the WNC Commissioners are looking to work on specifically in the next financial year.

#### **Media, marketing, communications and engagement**

Once more this issue emerged; making it a consistently strong theme throughout the survey – utilising the Media and its Partners: 'the WNC needs to continue to increase the number of partners it has and have more capacity to be monitoring and engaging with them so it has a firm understanding of trends, movements etc'; 'use your partners' energies and talents to get around the country and preach the good news that WNC is there for women and ready to listen and respond. Be more media and PR savvy'; 'I think you've probably got all areas of life and living covered - comes down to marketing and communications again'.

#### **Specific suggestions in this area included:**

- Online discussions
- Schools and colleges to engage with young women
- Meetings at weekends
- Grass roots groups
- Road shows
- Network regionally
- Utilising WNC Partnerships more
- Continuous engagement and meetings with four nations
- Papers (including local)

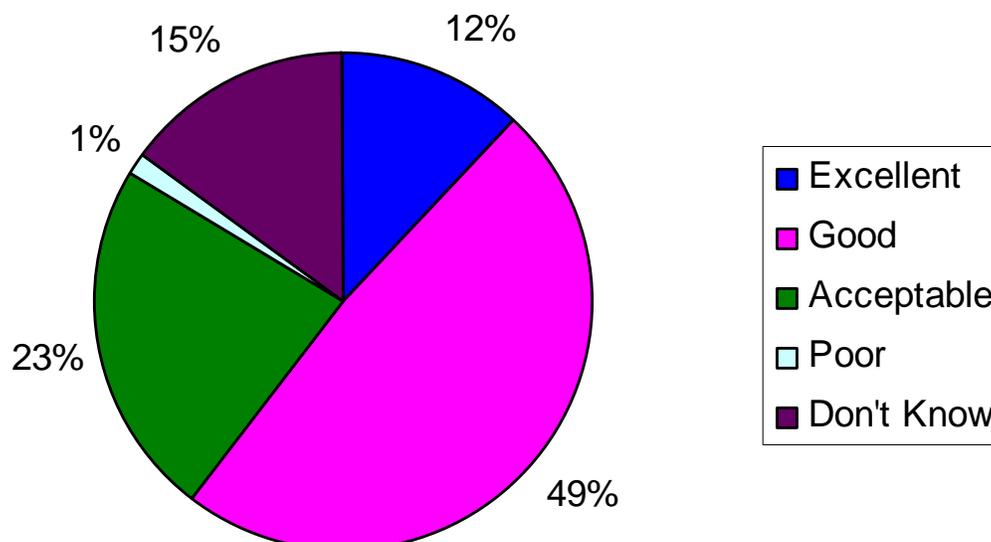
- Raising awareness in male dominated areas

**Other answers to this question included:**

- Women-only organisations and services and sustainability (including advice and support)
- More representative Commissioners
- Reproductive rights (particularly in Northern Ireland)
- Women in the criminal justice system
- Refugees and asylum seekers
- Multiculturalism
- Carers
- Disabled
- Female witnesses

**Section 5: Newsletter and Website**

**5.1 How do you rate the content and format of the WNC Partner newsletter?**



The majority of respondents felt the newsletter was either 'Good' or 'Excellent'. However, a large proportion felt it was only 'Acceptable' (the reasons for which are explained in the answer below) and a number of Partners answered 'Don't Know' to this question, which suggests that the WNC needs to make sure the newsletter is distinctive and useful.

**5.2 What could make it more useful and relevant? / What would you like to see more of in the Partner newsletter?**

The main themes that emerged in answer to this question were:

**Partner focused and themed**

Partners wanted to feel more engaged, included and more of the focus in the newsletter. They wanted to feel more in touch by knowing what was going on at the WNC and to feel supported: 'more on Partners' work and partners needs for collaboration and support....newsletters could help share resources and ideas'; 'funding advice and new funding availability'; 'more frequent and themed'. More detail on particular issues including specific in depth pieces, 'case studies and comments' on areas of specialism, for example women in small businesses, education and healthcare. Also 'news from the regions' and 'more information on what WNC has been doing since the last newsletter and new staff etc' is needed. One respondent commented that it is 'interesting to see what partner

organisations have done but it would be good to be more forward looking as to what is happening.' It was also mentioned that WNC should actively get their news mentioned in other women's sector newsletters.

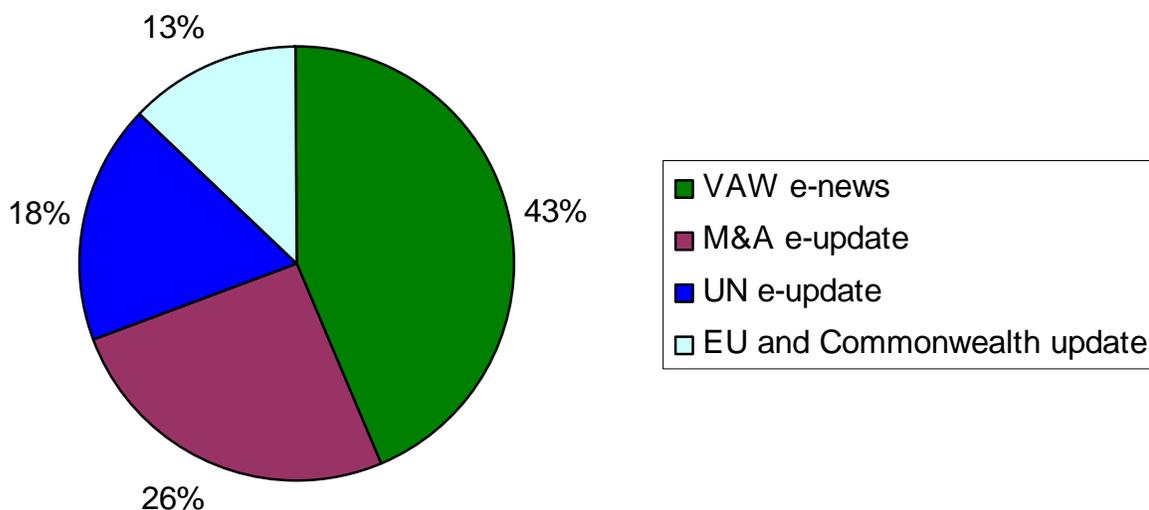
## Debate and opinion

Partners wanted to see 'more headline views on matters of public debate', including 'communications from Partners and readers – debate, political engagement' and 'more opinion pieces especially by your Chair and Commissioners – it would be good to know their views and what they represent'.

## Formatting

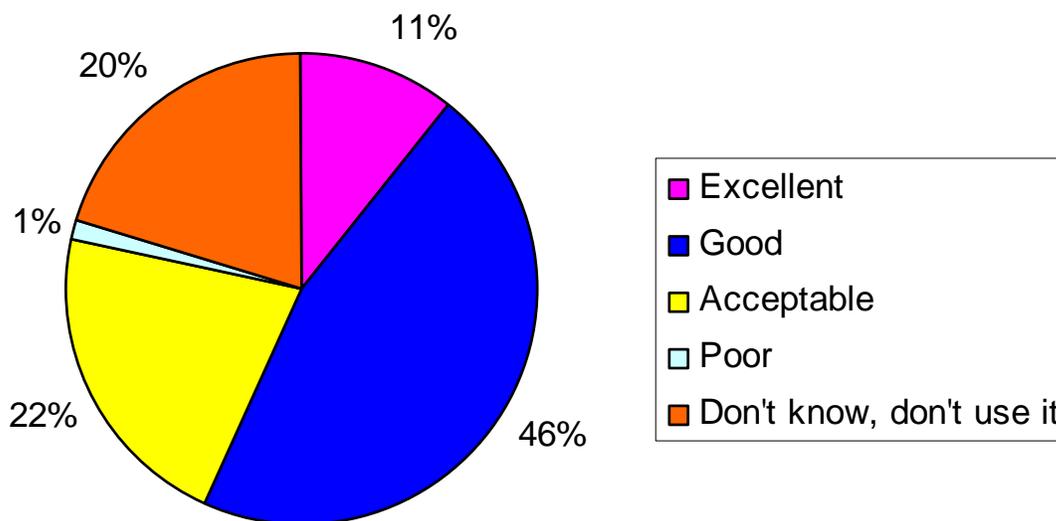
The formatting and colour of the website were considered to be un-engaging and 'too wordy', 'a bit dry', would benefit from being 'less dense', and 'if I read it online the columns make it hard to read'. Furthermore, it 'could be a lot more engaging in presentation and content' as it contains the 'same old initiatives and organisations'.

### 5.3 Do you receive any other WNC newsletters?



Of the 40% who received other newsletters, the majority subscribed to the VAW e-news. The WNC could look at wider advertising of these e-bulletins so that a broader audience can receive them (building on feedback elsewhere in the survey). One way would be to advertise these to Partners as part of the general newsletter.

**5.4 How do you rate the content and format of the WNC website?**



The majority of respondents felt the website was either 'Excellent' or 'Good'. This shows that for the current Partner base the WNC website is relevant and accessible in format and content. However, almost a quarter ('Don't Know') had not used the website. It is similarly important to note that whilst the website may meet the needs and expectations of many of current Partners, it could serve as an effective tool to attract a wider and more diverse Partnership base if developed accordingly.

**5.5 What could make it more useful and relevant? / What would you like to see more of on the website?**

**Tailored and accessible**

The need was identified for a website that builds on the specialisms of the WNC Partners and offers tailored information for the benefit of its Partners. The WNC needs to be more accessible and inviting in terms of the way it is presented and for it to offer Partners and those interested an interactive element in line with current new media trends. For example, 'in the first webpage you have a title CSW54 Updates – as if many women would know what that means – and also a prominent link to details of honours for women connected with the WNC. This comes across as inward-looking.'

**Interactivity**

'Interactive sections' on the website including 'proper regular surveys that would affect the work carried out' and 'online polls' such as the 'use of SurveyMonkey

to poll women's opinion, published on website, on emerging issues'. The website should also include 'more up to date features, like discussions for partners that can't make events' and 'blogs, twitters and managed threads.'

### **Specialist areas**

This could include: 'an area on the website for a younger audience', 'more facts and figures on up to date/current issues', 'more details of current work and active consultations', 'more detail on government policy' affecting women, 'specific areas linked to specialism of members' and 'information and advice on funding available to Community Organisations'. Other advice included 'links to Partner organisations' and conversely for the WNC website to be 'advertised by Partners'.

### **Visual imagery**

This would include 'photos and pictures' and 'graphics' to update the website.

## **Section 6: WNC Future improvements**

### **6.1 Would we be your partner of choice in liaising with government on gender matters? If so why? If not – why and who would be?**

Two-thirds said they would liaise through WNC, with reasons including:

- 'The good connections that WNC clearly has with government'
- 'Your history of successes'
- 'I know who you are, what you do, how committed you are'
- 'Well established and respected'
- 'Good communication skills and willingness to pursue issues'
- 'Absolutely! You have a better understanding when it comes to women's issues'
- 'You're in a strong position to make a good impact due to the good contacts you already have with the UK Government'
- 'As WNC is uniquely placed within government but retains independence'
- 'Of course – who else?'
- 'The organisation has expert knowledge on the wider gender equality agenda and is strategically positioned between women's organisations and the government'
- 'I see the WNC leading on this'
- 'The WNC represent everything women stand for'
- 'You have access to ministers, and a good networking system with people who make things happen'
- 'WNC is experienced and committed'

#### **Alternative answers included:**

- Going directly to the specific government department
- Specific sympathetic MP or peer
- Organisations such as the Equality and Human Rights Commission, Fawcett, Women's Resource Centre, Women's Budget Group, End Violence Against Women Coalition (EVAW)
- Would depend on what issue area and whether it was local or national issue, dependent on how issue was different in devolved nations
- Would think to use WNC more if it raised its profile

#### **Reasons for this included:**

- 'I would be inclined to go via an issue-based but high profile women's organisation such as EVAW'
- 'Not necessarily as you seem to favour women who are more concerned with pursuing a career'

- 'I'm not convinced our views are listened to and taken forward and would look to doing it independently'
- 'WNC are inefficient at communicating'
- 'You are not expert enough on UN matters'
- 'We have to do this on our own as the WNC don't understand the issues'

## **6.2 How could the WNC work better with you and your organisation?**

### **Partner engagement**

Clarify how Partners can engage effectively with the WNC and be clear on what we offer. 'Tell us how you work operationally and your preferred way of engagement so that we can negotiate on best working-fit', 'clarifying how and what could be taken forward through the WNC' and 'let us know what working groups exist, etc. I didn't know for example that you sent out those email bulletins on EU and UN matters'.

Furthermore, the WNC needs to ensure that all Partners are listened to fairly – this includes finding effective ways for small Partners to engage with limited 'free' time and funds: 'more equitable relationships and not doing delivery but enabling through organisations like ours'; 'please give smaller partners a chance to speak at your conferences on the platform i.e. those that have new and important campaigns and issues which need to grab attention for, and not just the same old faces'; 'work with subject specialists on issues'; 'the WNC works very well with a certain set of partners but does not always recognise the resources, knowledge and skills that are available in newer organisations. Though this is obviously a two-way relationship of engagement, sometimes it feels as if as a newer, smaller organisation we will have less of the WNC's ear than older more established organisations, even though they are considered 'out-of-touch'.

### **Joint events and working with Partners**

The WNC needs to link up with existing regional forums and focus more on enabling its Partners: 'more joint events – the one we had was excellent and led to a joint meeting with the Transport Minister'; 'I think it is as much on us to use the WNC'; 'engage me in projects to engage the hard-to-reach women in our communities'; 'try to set up or link with existing regional forums as a sounding board'; 'if it had some resources to share, we would be able to do more'; 'as our organisation has wide access to grassroots women in Scotland we would welcome being a lead NGO membership organisation in Scotland'; 'if the WNC didn't exist we would need to invent it BUT we also need to understand more fully how it differs, complements, works with other independent women's third sector groups'.

### **Increased outreach**

This would include more local, regional and devolved events and actively recruiting new and representative Partners (especially from under-represented communities): 'more direct invitations to participate in meetings and roundtables would be very welcome – more outreach'; 'regular regional meetings or an expense-paid invite to conferences and meetings'; 'difficult to say really – the problem is with chronic under-funding of the women's equality sector so that we have no funds, no paid workers and therefore can't attend meetings or conferences very easily. But if we don't, there is nobody to speak for us.'

### **Improve communications**

It was noted that Partner emails do not always receive a response and that more regular and consistent contact with regard to news and events is needed. The use of new media and plenty of notice for events was encouraged: 'better information flow with members to capture their views', 'more online consultations to government documents', 'longer response time' and 'keep the communication lines open, consult us often and allow me to have an input to your work'.

### **Positive comments**

There were also a number of respondents who felt 'happy with how things are': 'you do work very very well with my organisation', 'where I've worked with them I've found them excellent', 'our working relationship is growing and I look forward to opportunities for further input'.

## **6.3 What would you like to see more of from the WNC/ How would you like to see the role of WNC develop?**

### **Devolved Nations**

Respondents pointed to the need for developing our contact with the devolved nations by 'continuing with activities to include the devolved 'governments'' ensuring 'involvement of women from all regions' and 'more presence in other nations in the UK'. This would include improving our knowledge of 'issues around nature of working within devolved countries and relationship of WNC to those legislative governments/assemblies etc'.

### **National and International issues**

It was suggested by respondents that the WNC could increase its gravitas on national and international issues; for example, 'the WNC engage in valuable work to ensure the government takes account of their obligations on gender equality. We would like to see the WNC develop through member organisations to ensure

that UK NGO's have a strong voice nationally and internationally and central and devolved governments welcome the contribution collectively made by WNC member organisations'; 'more to tackle FCO on international work, the UK roles on security council, on ECOSOC, on appointment system be more forceful with FCO and ask for more transparency on gender matters especially re UN SCR 1325, ECOSOC and GEAR'; 'challenge to impact more on "Europe" both impacting on wider European legislative process and the implementation of European legislation in UK'.

### **More collaborative work with Partners**

The WNC needs to ensure it feeds back to Partners on how their voices have helped effect change: 'more timely information that shows organisations that WNC has made groups' voices heard and helped effect change'; 'more specialist meetings which involved member experts from organisations'; 'outreach towards groups'; 'I would like to see WNC work to bring together the views of the sector on key issues and present them to government – e.g. via a women's manifesto for first 2 years of next administration'.

### **Other suggestions for the WNC included:**

- Increasing its public image and press coverage for the high-quality work it does: 'I would like it to be better known for the excellent organisation it is' and 'not sure it's a question of what we'd like to see more of...think your remit is full to the brim but perhaps the question is 'can we see more of the WNC?'
- Facilitate more networking between its Partners and its Partners and government: 'I would like more opportunities to meet with government and in smaller groups' and for the WNC to take on a 'networking role'.
- Work with and focused work areas on, young women: 'provide more opportunities for younger women of school age and perhaps specific programmes working with young women in schools'.
- Increased independence from government: 'I would like the WNC to champion women's rights rather than the government's work', taking on 'more challenge, more independence'; 'Act as the Female Ombudsman'.
- More collaborative work and 'direct engagement with other government departments besides GEO'; 'I would like to see WNC work in partnership with EHRC'.
- The WNC should have 'greater resources and capacity' so that it can fulfil its brief: 'the WNC could do with more money and more staff so that it is able to fully engage with its members'. Similarly 'the WNC should have

more money so it could support regional and local third sector organisations to do joint work'. This would also include 'more funding, more permanent staff as there has been high staff turnover in the last five years meaning that there was little continuity'.

- Regular contact, briefings and summaries of important events, news, issues, achievements and more use of online facilities: 'briefings on key issues'; 'regular interaction'; 'more events'; 'more informal open meetings (maybe regional to ensure good spread) to discuss specific issues'; 'regional offices'; 'online consultations like this one'; 'key briefings'; 'partner meetings'.
- Representation: 'I would like WNC to be more inclusive and reflective of British society'.
- Aiding the sustainability of women's organisations: 'better support of women's sector – resources have dwindled since WNC began its work, yet evidence confirms the need for a better resourced sector. WNC has failed in lobbying for this'; 'help for women's organisations in these difficult times regarding bidding for resources'; 'lobby more for Government support and adequate funding to engage Partners in projects to further women's causes/issues in our society'.
- Minimising confusion around the role of the WNC so Partners do not ask for things like 'more campaigning/lobbying': 'there is still some work to be done about where the WNC does and does not get involved – clarity on that would be useful'.

## 6.4 If you had one message for, or request of, the WNC what would it be?

The following themes emerged from answers to this question:

### Independence

Most common were requests and observations around WNC's status as an independent organisation.

- Exercising this position more effectively: 'assert its independence from government and ensure criticism is directed when required', 'be more proactive' and 'stick your neck out a bit more and represent organisations to Government, rather than telling us what Government wants us to do'.
- Protecting the WNC's independence: 'your value lies in your access to government and your independence from it – guard both these things',

'remain independent and continue to amplify the voice of women' and 'don't let government marginalise the WNC'.

- Increase its independence: 'get more power within the system – WNC should be more than a consultative organisation'.
- Ensure that all staff respect and support this independence: 'make sure all staff support WNC's aims'; 'I would like to see it being led by a feminist vision. Just having women who have no background in women's rights doing the official work does not change anything'.

## Clarity and transparency

Openness and transparency was requested of the WNC: 'remain open-minded and willing to listen to your partners', 'be more transparent' and 'be more open and strategic in your appointment of Commissioners'; 'please can you clarify the role of the working groups and the outcomes that they can be expected to achieve?'

## Profile and communication

Publicise better the good work done by the WNC: 'keep up the good work, but do not hide your light under a bushel', 'be louder at getting the messages out there!', 'more headlining of voices' and 'raise your profile'. To do this the WNC needs to 'be more assertive in engaging media interest', 'improve liaison links with BBC, Channel 4, and the Asian network (not the BBC one - their independent network)' and 'appoint a media spokesperson'.

Furthermore, in doing this, the WNC needs to ensure that it relates and 'communicate[s]' the work that it does to *all* women: 'I would further enhance your effectiveness by relating the hard work to the reality on the ground for women', being 'more visible with 'normal' women' and 'promoting the Beijing Platform for Action to ensure its relevance is widely understood among women in the UK'.

## Outreach and resources

This mainly focused on continuing to become less London-centric (most crucially in outreach terms): 'remember we do not all live in or have easy access to London'; 'be less apparently inward-looking and London-focused. This does not mean organising regional events that are not communicated until too late to mobilise people though!'; 'be more accessible outside of London'; 'become more visible in the regions'; 'more outreach and a regional structure/presence'.

Also highlighted was the need to secure more resources: 'more money, more staff, more events. That is three, but they mean the same' and 'lobby for greater resources'.

## **Support**

Partners felt that the WNC needed to support them in delivering their services and defending them in the face of government action: 'support me and others to educate people on the relevance and use of the 'CEDAW' in our communities'; 'there are many women's groups doing valuable work with few resources. Government needs to be aware of this and recognise it'; 'help sustain the Women's Centre's in Northern Ireland'; 'BAME national groups are still not well resourced and WNC has never addressed this'; 'how can we continue our positive work with women? We are unable to operate fully due to huge funding cuts. If this continues we...will eventually close'.

## **Representation**

A range of issues were covered by respondents around representation including WNC Commissioners, young women, the devolved nations, newer organisations, carers, business women, and small organisations:

- 'Commissioners...need to be representative of all parties, ages and backgrounds'.
- 'Appoint a Commissioner to represent faith groups'.
- 'Connect up with the new generation of young feminists'; and put on 'specific programmes working with young women and schools'.
- 'Ensure that they represent all nations in the UK and keep up to date with policy and strategy from all four nations'.
- 'Take seriously the issue of reproductive rights for women in Northern Ireland'; 'keep mainstreaming carers into your work'.
- 'Increase contact and opportunities that are part of the new landscape and those that work on intersectionality'.
- 'Find a way of engaging better with small independent women's organisations'.
- 'Keep up the good work and raise the profile of women-led micro and SME businesses'.
- 'Make yourself more accessible to the disenchanted'.

## **Positive comments**

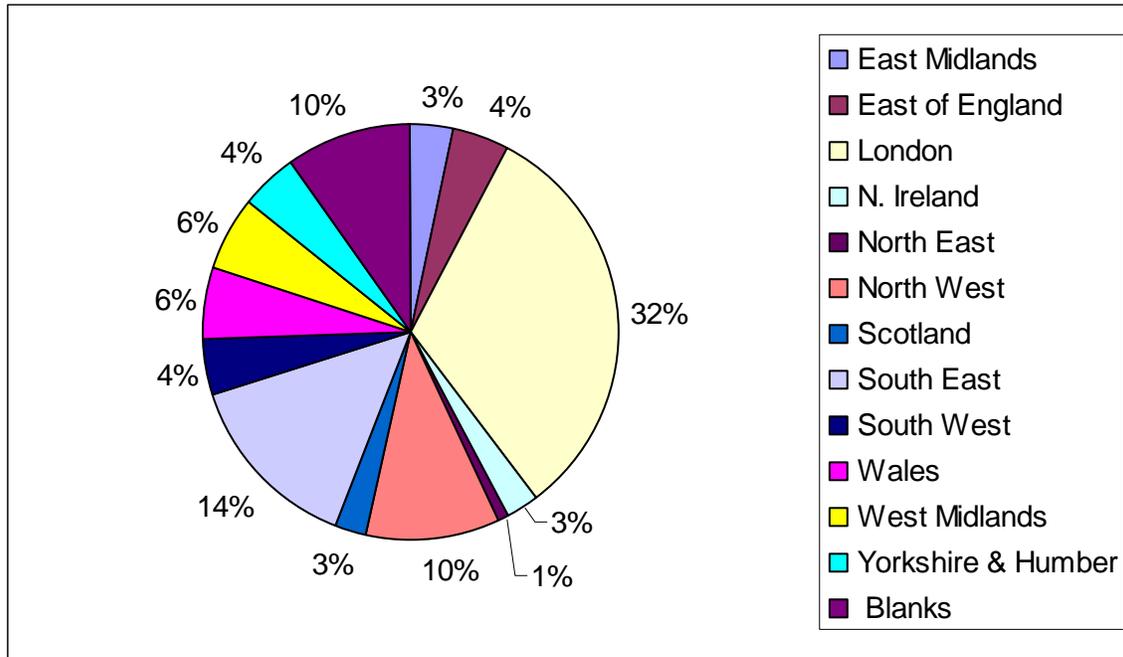
A number of women also wanted to send a message of gratitude to the WNC:

- 'Thank you all for all that you are doing to represent the voices of women at policy decision making table.'
- 'Keep doing the excellent work you are doing despite limited funds and staff.'
- 'WNC has a very tough remit, but I am glad you are there to represent women's views at the highest levels.'
- 'Keep up the good work!'
- 'We know you're working hard and representing women's voices to government and that it is a huge and tricky task. I hope you get the support and backing you need to keep going – we're going to need you!'

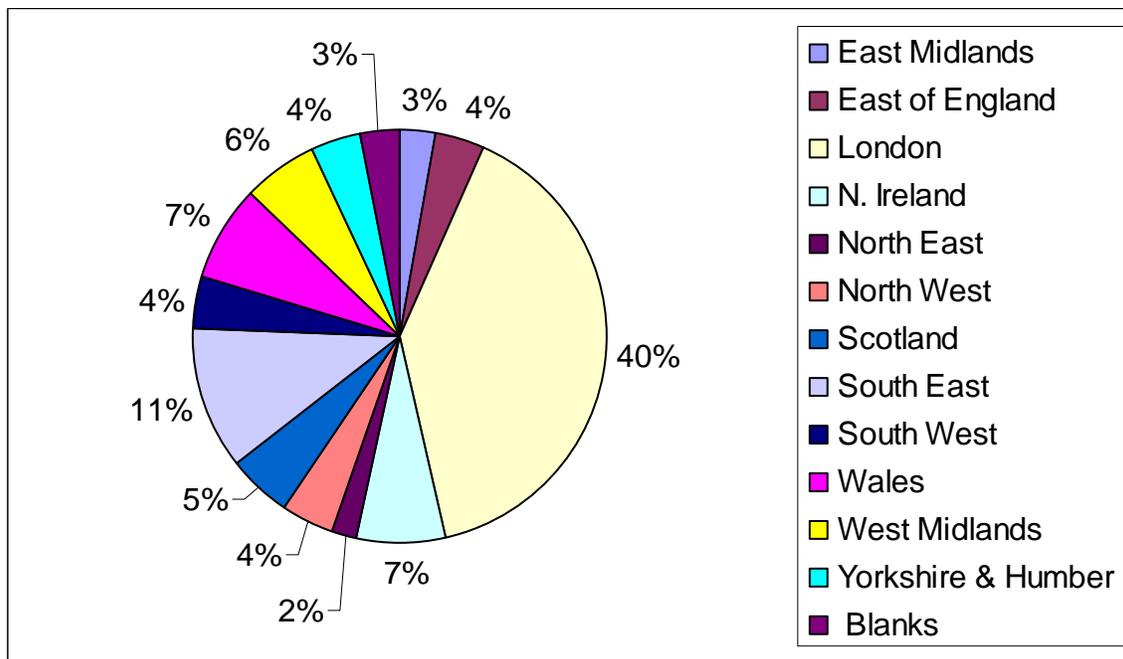
**Annex A**

**Overall WNC Partnership Distribution – April 2010**

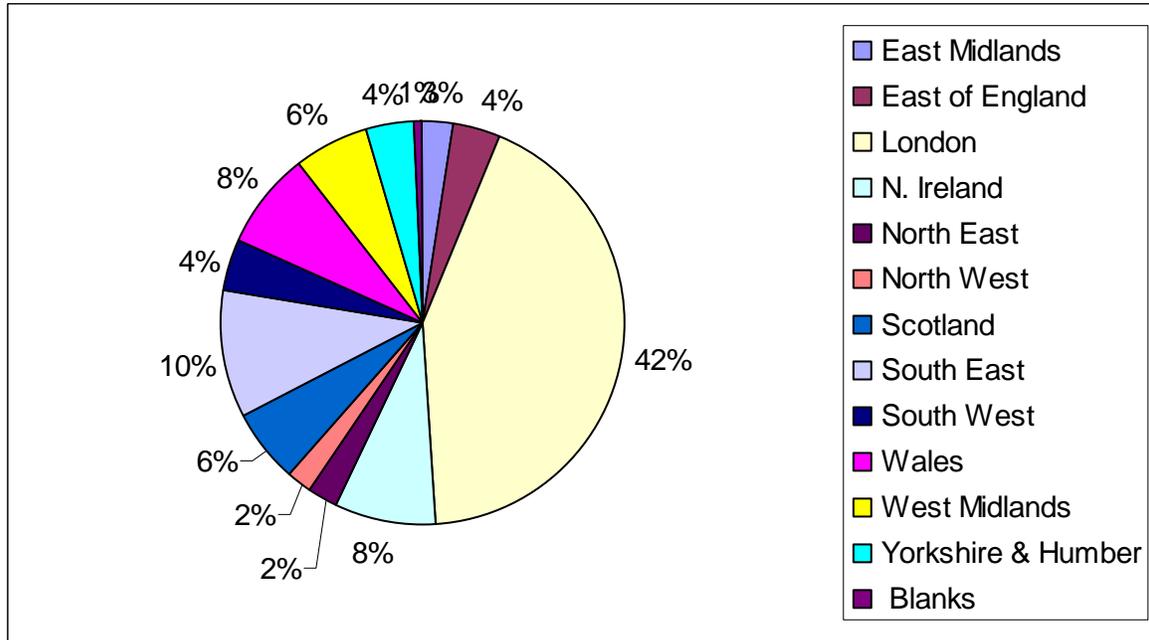
**Distribution by Region – Partner Individuals**



**Distribution by Region – Partner Organisations**

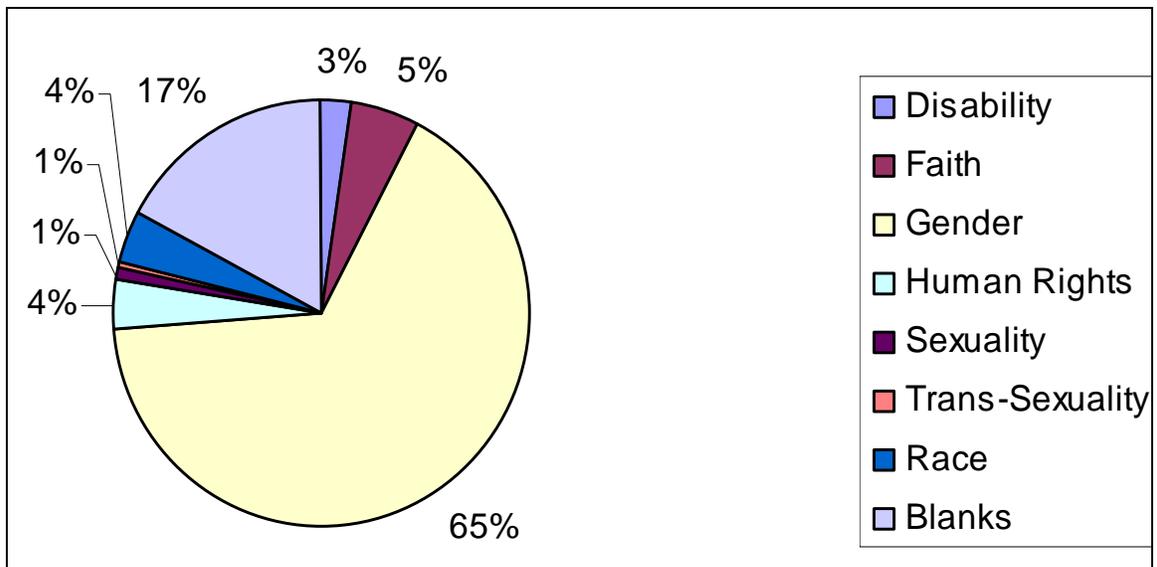


**Distribution by Region – Total Partner Individuals and Organisations**

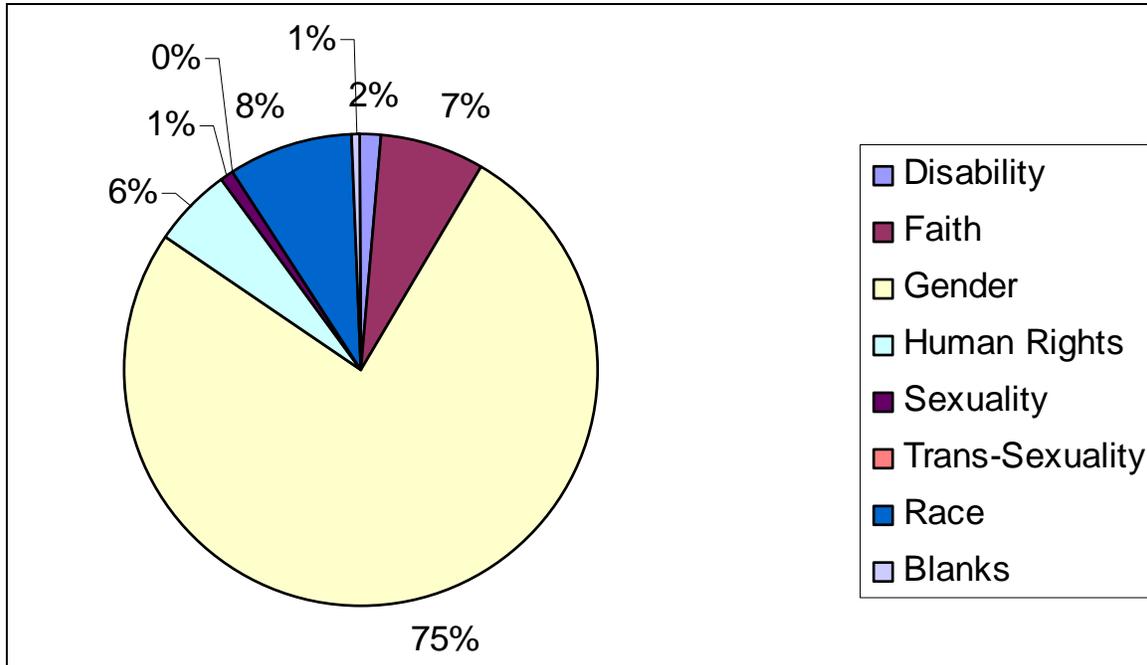


**Partnership Distribution by Interest – April 2010**

**Partners – Individuals**



**Partners – Organisations**



**Total Partners Individuals and Organisations**

