

**Women in Public Life Events Report
2009-2010**

A programme of events across the English Regions sponsored by the
Government Equalities Office.

Women's National Commission (WNC)

The Women's National Commission is the UK umbrella body that represents the views of several million women and over six hundred and thirty Partners.

Established in 1969 as the official independent advisory body giving the view of women to government, it is now the only official national body in the country providing the views of women and the women's sector to government. The WNC is fully funded by the Government Equalities Office (GEO), but is independent in its views.

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AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The Government Equalities Office commissioned a programme of work during 2009-2010 to support the Government's aim to increase the numbers of women entering public life. The WNC organised eighteen breakfast events across the nine English regions throughout the year to raise the awareness of the impact women can make in public life, providing advice and practical tools to help women counter some of the obstacles faced in getting through the application process. An event in Brighton was cancelled and will be rescheduled in 2010 – 2011. A full list of the locations of the events across the 9 English regions can be found in Annex A.

The events were developed to assist in meeting government targets for women's civic participation. Despite women making up to 51% of the population, women are currently under represented in the majority of the UK's elected bodies making up only 33.3% of public appointments. To reverse this trend activities have taken place within the Government Equalities Office and the Women's National Commission to improve the diversity of public appointments, but in particular, increases in appointments of women and people with disabilities.

STRUCTURE OF THE DAY

The events were structured to enable women to gain a shared understanding of what it means to be involved in public life, to provide pathways for engagement for those who were interested in taking the next step and asking the participants to identify what they saw to be the main obstacles to appointments, if any; to inform government thinking.

The women who participated in our events came from diverse backgrounds, a range of ages and different careers. Some women had already tried to gain a public appointment but had been unsuccessful; some wanted to learn more about what the commitments might be and the experience that might be needed. There was also a body of women who were attracted to the WNC's promotion but who had little idea of what participation actually involved.



Delegates at the Greenwich event

The WNC developed the events in line with the GEO brief of a small, informal audience of around 12-15 women but designed them to be adaptable to the

needs of each audience. Following a breakfast, the events were chaired by a range of WNC Commissioners (a full list can be found in Annex B) together with inspirational guest speakers who themselves had an active role in public life, senior officials from GEO and at some events, GEO Ambassadors.

Women at the events emphasised the need to record and take action on their views and this report attempts to ensure the views of participants are fully taken into account and disseminated across government.

MOVING FORWARD

We therefore intend to inform the Government of our findings and ensure that all the participants are kept fully informed of all on-going work in this area. As a result of Commissioner engagement in this programme a number of localised networks and relationships have developed to provide support and mobilise action in community activities.

In response to the results of the programme, WNC Commissioners have signalled that increasing the numbers of women in decision making remains a strategic priority and, following the mandate from the All Partners' Conference in 2009, have developed a programme of work to build on the progress made in the last financial year, to be taken forward in the 2010-2011 WNC Business Plan.

This includes increasing the diversity of appointments through targeting partners from specific equality strands, including women with disabilities, women from a wide-range of socio-economic groups, young women, women from the LBT community and identifying women from BAME communities who are particularly under-represented.

Activities will include following up action with last year's participants to build on their skills gaps, develop the programme to a new diverse audience from a wide range of equality strands, mentoring and network support, targeting business women through the corporate world and working strategically to influence good practice and ensure appointment panels, key recruiting bodies and applicants themselves have a good understanding of each others' needs.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The WNC targeted a wide range of women through our partnerships and the overwhelming message has been that women are keen to shape and influence the direction of their communities and get involved but women told us that there are barriers to their widespread participation.

Key emerging issues:

- Caring responsibilities combined with the bulk of household chores and the increasing number of women working in some capacity means that there is virtually no remaining time to take on a further role;
- Diverse groups such as women with disabilities, BAME women, young women and those from the LBT community are not visible;
- Many women suffer from a lack of confidence;
- There is a lack of awareness about what is on offer and what it actually involves;
- There is a lack of mentoring and network support;
- There is a lack of clarity about remuneration;
- Perceived discrimination exists and deters women from applying;
- Concerns about the perceived 'political' nature of the process;
- Lack of confidence in completing application forms;
- Fear of boardrooms;
- Lack of interview, presentation and interview skills;
- Lack of experience in CV writing; and,
- Need to modernise the ways boards operate and embrace new technology such as video-conferencing and rotation of board locations.

CHAPTER 1: CHALLENGES

We asked women to identify the challenges to entering public life.

1. TIME AND FAMILY RESPONSIBILITY

Most women identified time as a major challenge to civic participation. Women often had a number of roles in both their personal and work lives, including multiple roles within the family and juggling a career. We found that women were often the primary carers for children and elderly relatives and often have simultaneous caring responsibilities. Women highlighted that it was extremely difficult for them to find the time to fulfil all of these roles and take up a public appointment, even if they were enthusiastic about making a difference.

Work commitments have an impact on the free time available and some women felt that additional duties such as dropping their children to and from school were particularly time intensive. Women also raised concerns about attending evening meetings and as a consequence, the availability and cost of childcare. Working women questioned our speakers on how much time was needed for a public appointment and whether employers would allow their employees time off work to attend board meetings. A number of participants also highlighted that some professions were not conducive to a public appointment role; it is difficult, sometimes impossible, to accommodate the time (this includes the teaching profession and some particularly inflexible jobs in the private sector).

Traditional attitudes towards family life still exist today; family responsibility was a key issue for the women who attended the events. The women identified a link between domestic chores and the challenges to entering public life; women had a greater responsibility in the home. Therefore they were more likely to consider local jobs to suit family commitments.

Time is a factor for women, regardless of their age whether it's looking after children or grandchildren; women found that there was no ideal time to enter into public life. Women were committed to different roles and many felt that they had a lack of flexibility and support. The work/life balance is a struggle for these women and a public appointment would only add to the pressure on time.

2. CONFIDENCE

Some of the women identified confidence as another challenge to participation in public life. A large number of women felt that they lacked the confidence to apply for a public appointment. This appeared to stem from a lack of self belief in their ability and the perception that public life was a 'man's world'. One participant felt that historically, men had always taken up these

roles in the community because there was traditionally a wife at home to look after the domestic responsibilities and raise the family, enabling the man to work, undertake civic duties and also socialise. All of these activities were too much for one individual, particularly as more women were finding themselves as single mothers taking on a large number of competing roles.

Some women believed that the skills, experience and qualification they had were not 'good enough' for public office. For example, from their experience, participants suggested that women tended to apply for under qualified jobs compared to the skills and experience they have. Comparatively men were more likely to apply for jobs which needed greater experience and qualifications. It was felt that women often undervalued their competencies compared with men and are particularly and acutely concerned about their ability to do the job.

This lack of confidence resulted in a lack of self-esteem, and held some women back from applying for public appointments. Women do not see themselves in this type of role and may 'self de-select' without taking the first few steps!

Women often failed to value the assets and unique perspective of the world they can bring to a public board. Due to this lack of confidence women had low expectations of their success in applying for a public appointment. In addition women are fearful of being heard over men's voices once they are in the boardroom. Men are seen as the dominant figure and this scenario appears to persist.

Confidence building is key to the progress of women's participation in public life and women suggested that perhaps more could be done to advertise and promote the reality of a board situation.

3. LACK OF AWARENESS

The events have shown that women are interested in applying for public appointments however there is a considerable lack of knowledge and information on what public appointments actually are, what is involved, what qualifications are needed, their eligibility for the role, the level of board experience required and where to find vacancies. Public appointments were seen as a somewhat elitist role and the fact that job vacancies are still advertised in broadsheet newspapers appeared to reinforce this view for many. Many women had only come across the idea when the information was cascaded through the WNC partner network and had been interested to find out more.

In addition, the lack of information on public boards contributed to the participants' lack of awareness of what sort of organisations constitute public bodies. Therefore many women did not realise where they could apply or what would interest them. The attendees also expressed a lack of understanding of the various roles on a public board. Researching the public

board is also a barrier; participants were unaware of how boards operate. The attendees' lack of awareness proved to be a significant barrier.

Understanding the different mechanisms on a public board and the level of responsibility required is key to women achieving greater understanding of public appointments. Information on public appointments should be made more widely available.

4. LACK OF DIVERSE ROLE MODELS

The women agreed that the lack of role models ('women like me') made public appointments an unattractive career path. They did not see themselves in this type of role or felt that they would not readily fit into that type of environment.

Many women lamented the lack of women with disabilities and younger women who it was felt faced real issues of credibility. The under representation of a diverse range of women in existing public appointments is in itself a barrier.

The perception is that existing networking opportunities were geared towards men, therefore women cannot benefit from this. The participants questioned whether women and particularly marginalised women had the same networks as men and whether the introductions of special measures were needed to redress this deficiency. Most of the participants told us it was refreshing that the WNC events all included an 'inspirational' women speaker who "had made it" in a man's world and that had given them confidence.

The lack of visibility of under-represented groups is a barrier and makes women feel that a public appointment 'isn't a place for me' and that 'only those who already hold a public appointment in some way are much more likely to hold more public appointments'. There was general agreement that more efforts needed to be made in the areas of increasing under-represented equality groups and promoting their visibility in order to send powerful messages that everyone had a part to play and had a voice.

5. LACK OF REMUNERATION

The lack of, or low level of, remuneration for some public appointment posts was cited as a barrier for women entering public life, in particular, during the current economic climate. Some women could not afford to take a public appointment that was unpaid nor could they risk time away from paid employment. The cost of participation for some individuals was high, for example, women with caring responsibilities would most likely incur childcare costs. Moreover the cost for people travelling long distances appeared to act as a barrier in particular, if meetings were held in London. There was general dissatisfaction that so many appointments were London based and one woman asked whether more imaginative arrangements could be put in place,

such as video-conferencing facilities or a change of region. Some women felt that it was unclear which public appointment roles attached pay and / or expenses, and there appeared to be inconsistency with remuneration as different boards had different procedures in place.

Self-employed women also expressed their concern with the lack of remuneration available; these women are committed to their businesses and have limited time available (as many women told us, 'time costs money').

Time taken away from work may result in loss of earnings due to the resistance of some employers to allow paid time-off for public duties; the participants were concerned with the cost or the time taken away from the office. They were worried about the financial risk to their families and the impact this may have on their work and family life. The participants expressed their concern with the possibility of financial constraints with a public appointment role. The participants were unsure of how expenses were managed and whether childcare costs were ever taken into consideration. The financial issue meant that only people from certain socio-economic backgrounds would be likely to be able to accommodate these arrangements and that a review of how public appointments operate in the 21st Century needed to be undertaken.

It was also suggested that financial barriers to participation is a consequence of the lack of information and transparency from the Public Appointments Commission.

6. NETWORK SUPPORT

The perception of many women was that public appointments are an 'old boy's network'. This is alive and well, men have their own social groups, for example, golf clubs and bars, which can be influential. A participant suggested that 'it's not what you know but who you know'.

Many women have no network support to call upon which can help to advise and guide them through the application process. At present only a limited number of mentoring schemes enable women to gain experience and access to public appointments. The women expressed their difficulty in finding out about vacancies and were unaware of the public appointments website which advertises vacancies. This reinforced the feeling that public appointments were not for 'people like me' and this assumption was widespread. Furthermore, some women viewed public appointments as an elitist and middle class undertaking. The perception was that appointments were based on cronyism rather than merit. People in public appointments get there through someone they know, instead of going through the correct procedures.

The women concluded that network support is vital for women achieving equality in public appointments. This lack of support was seen as a barrier for women entering public life. The participants explored the 'old boy's network' and how this appeared to benefit men and their involvement in public

appointments. The women believed that people in public appointments all know each other, therefore it is difficult to get your 'foot in the door'.

Public appointments were seen as largely political (at the higher levels) and the existing appointees appeared to be largely men therefore many women felt marginalised and excluded from their inner circle and marginalised by the public appointments structure. In particular, women from Plymouth suggested that there were few women's groups in their local area; therefore the structure needed to support women and their participation in public life is limited. Networking services could provide women with support, guidance and greater opportunities. This is key to women's' participation in public life.

7. DISCRIMINATION

It was noted that many women felt that discrimination against women was a key barrier for women entering public life. Some of the women perceived public appointments as 'hostile territory'. The mechanisms within the public appointments sector were believed to be largely influenced by men. Therefore, the participants concluded that women were more likely to experience discrimination in the boardroom simply because they are female. The women agreed that the 'structure' of the public appointments system discriminated against women and their existing commitments. In addition, the women also highlighted race, ethnicity and religious discrimination already faced by Black, Asian and White women (non-British) in society and how this can be replicated in the boardroom.

The fear of racism was a barrier for many women entering public life. Public appointees are often white, middle-class men and here again the women believed that public appointments were 'old boys, middle-class and middle England'. Some women with experience of applying to boards had found that the Public Appointment panels (selectors) tended to be all white males and the participants suggested that the selectors had a pre-disposition to recruit the same type of people (women were again sidelined).

Furthermore, many women opposed the 'token women' label; the participants wanted a public appointments process based on merit rather than their gender. This also refers to Black, Asian and Ethnic minority women who viewed tokenism negatively and rejected the notion that a public appointment was based on ethnicity.

8. PERCEPTION OF PUBLIC APPOINTMENTS

Broad issues were raised about the perception by the women of the public appointments process. The negative perceptions of public appointments referred to who is generally appointed and the perceived political nature of the process. This negative perception of public appointments could deter under-represented groups from applying, thus reinforcing the 'old boy's network' factor again.

A number of the participants perceived public appointments as too political 'only the great and good' within political circles were successful in securing a post. Again, the women suggested that appointments reflected vested interests and people are appointed on the basis of 'who you know'. Some of the women believed that public bodies would not take their views seriously and would not encourage their involvement but felt that public boards should engage more with under represented groups. There was very little evidence of disabled women as successful applicants, despite the fact that the life experiences of disabled women would bring a much needed perspective to the work of any board.

Moreover the participants held perceptions of themselves; they felt that their qualifications were not sufficient for a public appointment despite knowing they could do the job. The women also referred to stereotypes that exist in society. Women felt they were regarded as weak, not rational, emotional, bossy, stroppy and difficult. There is also an assumption that women were not high achievers and that public appointments are not seen as being part of a woman's role. The success of women and their participation in public life, according to the participants, is based on the perception that women have to work twice as hard to get a public appointment and feel valued in their role.

CHAPTER 2: OVERCOMING BARREIRS

The participants identified a number of key barriers for women entering public life:

- the application process; and
- board meeting experience.

Other areas also became evident as the programme of events progressed:

- lack of awareness of what the term 'public life' actually meant and what it would involve;
- lack of promotion and advertising about vacancies;
- the need for mentoring and support networks for women as these do not traditionally exist in everyday life;
- practical interview experience; and
- advice on CV writing.

The WNC events were structured to address the two initial barriers highlighted above. Following the findings from the 2010-2011 programme, the WNC Business Plan for 2010-2011 has been developed to address the other emerging issues through a programme of WNC commissioner-led activity.

1. APPLICATION FORM PROCESS

Preliminary research from partners highlighted the application form as one of the main barriers for women entering public life. The application form presents a particular image of the public appointments structure which is predominantly male, white and middle class. The women believed that application forms are difficult and that you needed a vast amount of experience to produce a sound application form. The application forms tended to be complicated and not provided in a range of formats. The level of jargon and acronyms used is off-putting and daunting. The language used in the application form can be inaccessible and too formal. This suggests that the language used in the application form is aimed at professionals rather than ordinary women.

The public appointments process was not sufficiently explained for many women. Therefore it is difficult to know the experience, skills and the levels of skills required. The participants were not aware of the different roles on a public board and were confused with the application form process. Some women experienced a lack of confidence and self criticism when completing application forms. A number of the participants questioned whether they were 'good enough' or if they could 'match the criteria' set. This is a significant barrier for women applying. The application form appeared to specify skills and criteria which were beyond the experience of 'ordinary women' and under represented groups.

A number of the participants suggested that transferable skills were not recognised by the public appointments sifters. For example, the women questioned whether the skills and experience used to run a home could be

used as an example of budgeting or juggling different priorities. Furthermore the public appointments application form did not take into consideration the gaps most women take in their careers to look after their families. The women felt that long gaps in a career would deter sifters from selecting a perfectly able applicant.

The participants identified three main criteria which were problematic. Firstly, the 'influencing others' criterion which women agreed was difficult to explain and provide examples for. Secondly, 'personal skills'; the women found it difficult to 'sell their skills'. Thirdly, 'finance skills'; the women indicated that if you did not have a finance background you could not answer this question sufficiently. The women concluded that the application forms are geared towards professional women, who could provide examples of their skills in a formal setting. In addition most of the participants were first time candidates and their lack of experience deterred them from applying for a public appointment. This led women to suggest that they had an insufficient skills base; therefore applying for a public appointment was out of the question.

Many of the women who had completed an application form found it daunting and the lack of feedback for an unsuccessful applicant disengaged them. The participants would like feedback, guidance and support with completing application forms.

Participants in Bristol suggested that the public appointment selection criteria are biased towards men; the application form does not take into consideration women's participation in the informal economy. The participants also claimed that the application form process is too bureaucratic. A number of the participants indicated that grassroots experience is not recognised in the application process, despite many women gaining their experience from these organisations. The criteria set by public boards was overwhelming; for example, public boards required work experience, community experience and board level experience. This in particular affects younger women who are seen as lacking experience and perceived as a possible risk.

Participants in Newcastle suggested that postal codes were possibly a barrier for some women, particularly for those who lived in known deprived areas. In addition, the extra cost of travel which may be incurred for some women to attend board meetings, may put-off sifters if budgets were an issue for the board. The organisational structure of the public appointments process may be class biased and take an old fashioned approach with only considering certain candidates (wealthy and educated).



WNC Commissioner Jan Floyd-Douglass leads a discussion on barriers to participation with Delegates at the Victoria event

2. BOARD MEETING EXPERIENCE

The participants also identified the lack of board meeting experience as one of the barriers for women entering public life. The participants raised questions about their fears and challenges of the board meeting. The boardroom can be a daunting place



WNC Commissioner Mary-Ann Stephenson with delegates at a mock board at the Birmingham event

for some. The lack of formal boardroom experience prevented many women from applying for a public appointment. The women suggested that board members are expected to have a high level of expertise in their area in order to challenge or raise questions to the board. Some participants had not experienced being in a formal board meeting and were nervous about contributing to formal meetings.

One of the main concerns the women raised were the external issues which arise at board meetings. This includes the formation of cliques, male dominated culture and logistics. The women suggested that the male dominated culture of public boards discouraged their application to enter into public life. This environment is often alien to women and they fear exclusion from an 'inner circle'.

The women in Nottingham were apprehensive about certain board members dominating the meeting and how best to react to this when you have limited boardroom experience. According to some of the women, board meetings were tactical and in Manchester the participants suggested that in order to get heard in a board meeting you had to power play i.e. 'sit next to the chair',

'have eye contact' and 'weigh up the relationships on the board and note who is listening to who and who has the influence.'

During the mock board meeting exercises ran by the WNC, the participants exchanged ideas on how best to cope with the board meeting scenario. Many participants had a lack of confidence about attending board meetings, the formal nature of board meetings and their lack of experience contributed towards this. Many had no understanding of the different roles on a board and welcomed the informative discussions from WNC commissioners about the different roles and responsibilities.

In addition, the time and location of board meetings fail to take into consideration the dual burden that many women carry. Many women struggle to balance family life and sitting on a board often seemed to involve late nights or unsociable hours, travel and childcare.

Interestingly, many women commented that they found the whole board scenario distinctly uncomfortable as a way of 'doing business'. Many said that they found the panel style approach of the Magistracy more appealing and were instinctively drawn to smaller informal groupings.

CHAPTER 3: RECOMMENDATIONS

Through our events the women identified several recommendations that would increase the participation of women in public life. The following highlight the main findings of the events.

TIME AND FAMILY RESPONSIBILITY

1. Thinking about when meetings are held may help women juggle their competing priorities.
2. More flexibility and time to enable women to attend board meetings. The Appointments Commission could clarify the rules for employers with regards to how much time away from work is acceptable for a public appointment role. This is a key issue for women who have to juggle different priorities.
3. The roles between men and women need to change, men need greater responsibility within the home this includes looking after children and helping with domestic chores. This can be achieved through domestic change. Educating boys from a young age to counter the existing stereotypes that exist in society through encouraging their participation in domestic chores and caring responsibilities.

WOMEN'S LACK OF CONFIDENCE

4. Provide women with training schemes on confidence, self-esteem and self-belief. This will enable women to reach their fullest potential and contribute towards their confidence in applying for a public appointment.
5. Provide women with mentors.
6. Encourage the use of and facilitate if necessary, networks.

LACK OF AWARENESS

7. The Government should adopt more proactive measures to increase the awareness of public appointments and the opportunities that are available.
8. The Appointments Commission could further increase the awareness of public appointments to the general public. This could be achieved

through harder-hitting advertising campaigns calling all women to apply for a public appointment.

9. Targeting young women through advertising in magazines and billboards could encourage their participation in public life. Email newsletters can also provide up to date information on current vacancies as well as the use of new social media.
10. Advertise public appointments more widely with a more targeted approach whilst adopting the 'plain English' campaign to simplify the message and appeal to a cross-section of the community.
11. Public boards should also increase their visibility; the participants would like more information on the work they do. Furthermore, the public boards should offer prospective female candidates one day training events and open days. This taster session will allow women to experience board level activities and encourage their participation.
12. The Government and the Appointments Commission could fund more regional events encouraging women to enter into public life. These events are a useful tool in raising the awareness of public appointments. Further events should target specific women and focus on the different public sectors such as health, education and the police. This will engage women who are interested in specific areas.
13. Educate young women about public appointments, the work of public bodies, the nature of appointments, the potential and the opportunities that are available. This will increase the awareness of public appointments to a new generation, thus increasing the number of applications in the future. Education in schools can be used as a tool to convey the work of public boards.
14. The Appointments Commission website can be overwhelming for some; a user friendly website will encourage women to search for vacancies. In addition, the public appointments website could pull together relevant information that can assist applicants with their search and subsequent completion of their application form.
15. Greater press and media coverage on the work of public boards and the government targets to increase the number of women in public appointments. This will raise the awareness of public appointments, reinforce the need for women to apply and welcome applications from women from diverse backgrounds.
16. It should be incumbent on all public boards to self-promote in a diverse-friendly way, and bodies should make links with grassroots organisations and Trade Unions to encourage women in these organisations who have the skills and experiences required for a

public appointment but who were not aware of the opportunities to apply for a public appointment.

LACK OF OPPORTUNITIES

17. The Government and the Appointments Commission could invest in mentoring schemes. Mentoring schemes would provide women with support, advice and guidance. This is key to providing women with the opportunities needed to apply for a public appointment; mentees can learn from the experiences of others and seek avenues of opportunities. Mentorship can include both face-to-face interaction and online communication. Targeting particular groups of women will encourage a diverse range of women to apply for public appointments.
18. A more widely available Common Purpose scheme will increase diversity and the pool of talented women ready to take up a public appointment.
19. Public boards should support women through government training schemes and organise grassroots events aimed at specific groups such as disability and ethnic minority groups.
20. The women identified the Government Equalities Office Ambassador programme as a really positive example of how best to encourage women to get involved. The ambassadors inspire women with their personal experiences and the work they do. It was noted that opportunities can arise through these links.
21. Training and developing skills are a useful method for increasing the opportunities for women. This includes focusing on identifying and developing a set of core skills, techniques to enhance the chance of success in the application process, understanding about the work of public appointments, developing finance skills and public speaking training. Training of this nature should increase the number of successful applications.
22. Shadowing opportunities for board meetings to allow potential applicants to observe the work of board members and develop their understanding of the processes involved. This should equip the participants with the experience needed for a public appointment role.
23. Diverse role models inspire and encourage women to apply for a public appointment and using the experiences of women who successfully hold a public appointment can raise the awareness of the contribution women can make in public life.
24. An overwhelming number of women suggested that quotas are a useful tool in increasing women's under representation in public life,

thus increasing their success. A 50% quota for women on all public boards could ensure that women are represented and society better served.

LACK OF REMUNERATION

25. Financial barriers to participation in public life should be addressed in terms of remuneration and the payment of expenses.
26. The Appointments Commission and public boards should clarify the rules and guidelines with regards to what can be claimed. A universal approach is the best option.
27. A reasonable rate of remuneration should be paid to assist public appointees. This includes travel costs and hidden costs such as paper, ink and printing costs. If the rules are explicit women will no longer fear financial implications for holding a public appointment.

NETWORK SUPPORT

28. Network support is vital in encouraging women to enter into public life. Support Networks offer support, guidance and provide the main source of information. Increased network support can be achieved through improving networking skills and opportunities by holding further public appointment events.
29. The participants suggested that follow up women in public life events will encourage participants to apply for public appointments.
30. Public bodies should offer network support, run mentoring schemes and shadowing opportunities, in addition to finding innovative ways to overcome the barriers that women face.

TACKLING DISCRIMINATION

31. Positive discrimination could be considered as a way that the Government and the Appointments Commission could increase the number of women in public life. This could include quotas and women only committees and boards.
32. The Appointments Commission could reserve specific places on boards for women, in particular in areas where women are under represented.
33. More needed to be done at Panel level to ensure a change in the attitudes, culture and ethos of public boards and board members to adopt a more diverse-aware environment. Changing the attitudes of

board members and their behaviour towards women could reduce discrimination.

34. A culture change for all public boards to promote diversity was needed. The ethos, values and culture of the public board should reflect a more diverse make up of society at large. There was a real lack of BAME women and disabled women on boards.
35. The Appointments Commission could promote diversity awareness training that is compulsory for all board members. This should also include training for public appointments selectors as this will increase their understanding of gender equality.
36. Pressure could be put on public boards to make sure they have a fully diverse board taking into account all equality strands.
37. Public boards should focus on developing a gender equality practice framework that includes the development of knowledge of equalities issues through training staff and board members. The recruitment of staff should also include their accordance with good equalities practice.
38. Greater equality awareness should be addressed by the Chairperson of the public board. Gender equality should be included as part of the induction process for appointees and as a competency during the application process. This would ensure that all board members are equality- aware.

PERCEPTION OF PUBLIC APPOINTMENTS

39. Advertise more widely the benefits of holding a public appointment including the difference a public role can make to the lives of others.
40. Case studies of women can be used to identify individuals who have successfully participated in public life. Their experiences can be used to inspire other women and improve the image of the board.
41. Publish examples where the Appointments Commission is working towards changing the perception of public boards. This can include seminars and conferences aimed at encouraging women to apply for a public appointment.
42. Increase the visibility of women who currently hold a public appointment; this could increase women's participation in public life.
43. Public boards should engage more with women by forming close contacts with local communities.

APPLICATION FORM PROCESS

44. The Appointments Commission should be more equality aware. A review of the selection process is required. Public boards need to scratch beneath the surface to increase their diversity. The women suggested that the application form process needs to change rather than the women.
45. The application form process needs to be clearer; more widely available information about the skills and experiences needed for a public appointment role. It should contain explicit information about the value of 'life skills'.
46. Public boards should make the application form accessible to all and easy to read. Avoid the use of jargon and use simple language. This format will appeal to the majority of women.
47. The Appointments Commission and public boards should ensure that the essential criteria required for a public appointment role includes different skills and experiences from all walks of life. Some women argued that the criterion for a public appointment fails to focus on character, integrity and how well you work with others.
48. Skills training for women on public speaking, jargon and the formal language of the organisation prior to a public appointment would be very beneficial.
49. Feedback on all applications submitted to public boards; this would allow applicants to improve their application form.
50. The selectors of public appointment roles should be challenged on the decisions they make. Selectors should be held to account.

BOARD MEETING EXPERIENCE

51. Induction for prospective applicants and newly appointed board members. This induction should include handy tips on the mechanism of board meetings.
52. Public boards should hold one day workshops on how board meetings are conducted. This will give a flavour of how a board meeting is conducted for less experienced women.
53. Hold board meetings in local areas to attract women from the community. This would also ease the pressure on women with caring responsibilities. Board meetings should also be rotated - each meeting should be held at a different location.

54. Confidence training for board meeting situations would help women to increase their confidence during meetings.
55. Public boards should adopt new technology such as video-links for women who cannot attend board meetings.
56. Demystify public boards by producing DVD's that illustrate how a board meeting is held. In addition to providing guidance on the operations of public boards, advice on public speaking and how to ask questions at board meetings.

Annex A – WOMEN IN PUBLIC LIFE EVENTS

Oxford - 7th October

Newcastle - 20th October

Greenwich - 9th December

London - 10th December

Cambridge - 26th January

Norwich - 27th January

Birmingham - 2nd February

Coventry - 3rd February

York - 23rd February

Leeds - 24th February

Sheffield - 25th February

Plymouth - 1st March

Bristol - 2nd March

Nottingham - 16th March

Leicester - 17th March

Manchester - 23rd March

Liverpool – 24th March

Annex B – WNC COMMISSIONERS WHO FACILITATED THE EVENTS

Mary-Ann Stephenson

Juliet Lyon

Bea Campbell

Haleh Afshar

Helen Jackson

Adele Baumgardt

Olivia Bailey

Ann Henderson

Jan Floyd-Douglass

ATTENDANCE / PARTICIPATION

The attendance and participation for the Women in Public Life events was diverse; to achieve this high level of diversity, the events were largely publicised to ensure equal representation from women across today's society. This is important in order to engage with all women.

Firstly, the events were publicised to our diverse partner base via an email invitation and personal phone calls. The Women's National Commission have over 630 Partners. Secondly, we approached external local women's groups to ensure that women in the local community attended the events. We made links with these local organisations via email and personal phone calls. We also sent attractive flyers (posters) to our partner base and distributed posters at partners' events and local groups to promote the events to a wider audience.

Flyers were also sent to the following organisations:

- Libraries
- Town Halls
- Health Centres
- Leisure Centres
- Post Offices
- Supermarkets
- Universities
- Community Centres
- SureStart Centres
- Citizens Advice Bureau

The WNC adopted new forms of technology to increase the diversity of the audience. The events were publicised on Twitter and on Facebook. The events were also publicised on our website.

Furthermore the WNC worked with external groups such as Operation Black Vote, Go East, the Women's Institute, local councils and Equality South West to engage with women from diverse backgrounds.

Over 200 women (total 212) attended the Women in Public life events.

GUEST SPEAKERS

The following list the guest speakers who took part in our events and shared their experience and advice with the participants:

Joanna Foster - Oxford
Carol Blythe - Newcastle
Dr Lily Segerman-Peck - Greenwich and Norwich
Mei Sim Lei - Central London
Maureen Donnelly - Cambridge
Julia Lowndes - Birmingham
Balbir. K. Kandola - Birmingham
Zaidah Ahmed - York
Jane Carter - Leeds and Liverpool
Shirley Harrison - Sheffield
Rhiannon Holder - Bristol
Ushrat Sultana - Nottingham
Parvin Ali - Leicester
Naseem Malik - Manchester

GOVERNMENT EQUALITIES OFFICE AMBASSADOR PARTICIPATION

A number of Government Equalities Office Ambassadors attended the Women in Public Life events and also shared their valuable experiences of public life. The following ambassadors attended the events:

Julie Summerell - Norwich
Clare Dodgson - Leeds and Manchester
Emily Lam - Sheffield and Liverpool
Christina Bacon - Bristol
Michelle Grimwood - Leicester
Dee Narga - Leicester
Kathy Cowell - Manchester
Marilyn Mornington - Liverpool

FORMAT OF THE DAY

The events were tailored to raise the awareness of the impact women can make in public life by providing advice and practical tools to counter some of the obstacles women face in getting through the application process. The events were led by a WNC Commissioner and featured a guest speaker who previously or currently holds a public appointment. The guest speaker used the opportunity to share their respective journeys and experiences of public life, illustrate how they overcame the barriers that many women face and offered useful and insightful advice to participants.



Guest speaker Mei Sim Lei talking about her experiences at the Victoria event

Each event followed the same format and consisted of three interactive exercises based on where it has been identified that women face particular obstacles.

- The first exercise encouraged women to identify the challenges for women entering public life and what can be done to overcome these challenges. As an aide, the participants were provided with two documents explaining the qualities needed for public life and the challenges for women entering public life.
- The second exercise provided advice and handy tips on how to fill in an application form. The participants were provided with a participant's toolkit which aimed to assist the women with completing their application form. The toolkit included application form examples, a good practice guide and an application form top tips guide.
- The third exercise was a mock board meeting aimed at building women's confidence for participation in meetings. Each participant had an optional role to play and an agenda. The selection of materials presented to the participants aimed to enable women to take the first steps into public life.

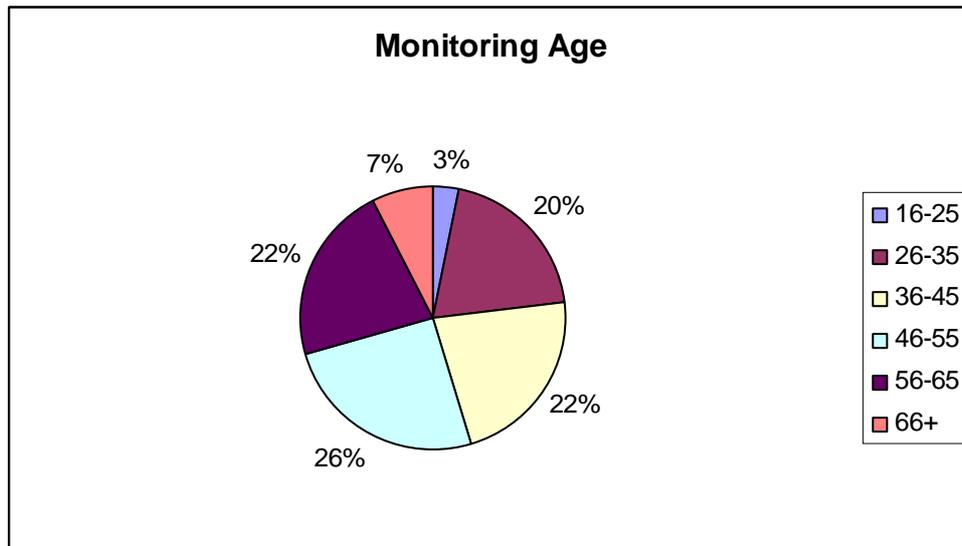
The WNC used this format for the events because we aimed to ensure that women received the tools and useful tips required to take the first few steps in applying for a public appointment. We found, and further research has indicated, that women need guidance during the application form stage of the public appointments process. In addition board meetings are considered by women to be unfamiliar territory. Therefore, our Women in Public Life events ensured that we included these two aspects in our programme.

Furthermore, we found that it is important to ask women to share their thoughts and ideas on what they believed the barriers and challenges are to entering public life and the different ways we can overcome these barriers to ensure women's equal representation in public life.

MONITORING ANALYSIS

The diagram below illustrates the monitoring information gathered at the events (please note: not all the participants filled in a monitoring form).

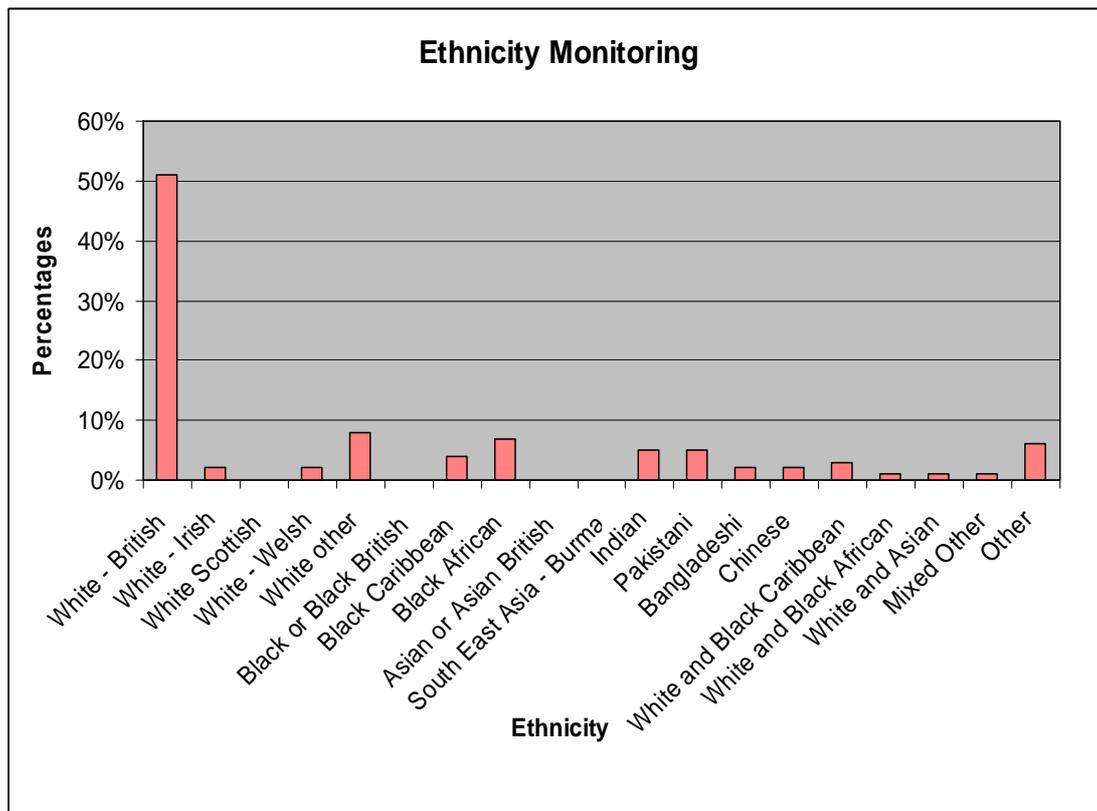
AGE



The diagram above shows the age breakdown of the participants who attended the events:

- In total 26% of the participants were aged between 46 – 55.
- 22% of the participants were aged between 36 – 45.
- 20% of the participants were aged between 26 – 35.
- 22% of the participants were aged between 56 – 65.
- 7% of the participants were 66+.
- 3% of the participants were aged between 16 – 25.

ETHNICITY



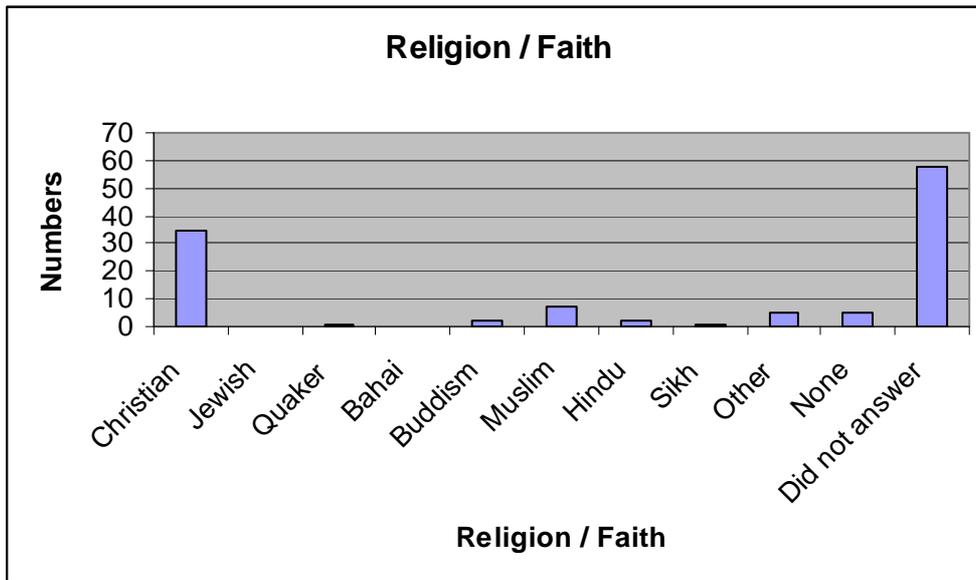
This diagram shows that approximately half of the participants who attended the events were White British:

- In total 51% of the participants were White British, 8% White other, 2% of the participants were White Irish, 2% of the participants were Welsh.
- 25% of the participants were Black, Asian and Ethnic Minority (BAME).
- 6% of the participants had Mixed Ethnicity.

In addition, certain events had a large number of participants from Black, Asian and Ethnic Minority backgrounds. For example, in Greenwich and Central London a high proportion of the participants were from Black, Asian and Ethnic Minority background:

- At the Greenwich event 40% of the participants were Black African and Black Caribbean represented 40% of the participants. In total 80% of the participants were BAME.
- In Central London 21% of the participants were Black African.
- In Leicester 33% of the participants were Indian.
- In Coventry half of the participants were Indian (50%).
- 40% of the participants in Sheffield and in York 25% were Pakistani.
- In Manchester 25% of the participants were Chinese.

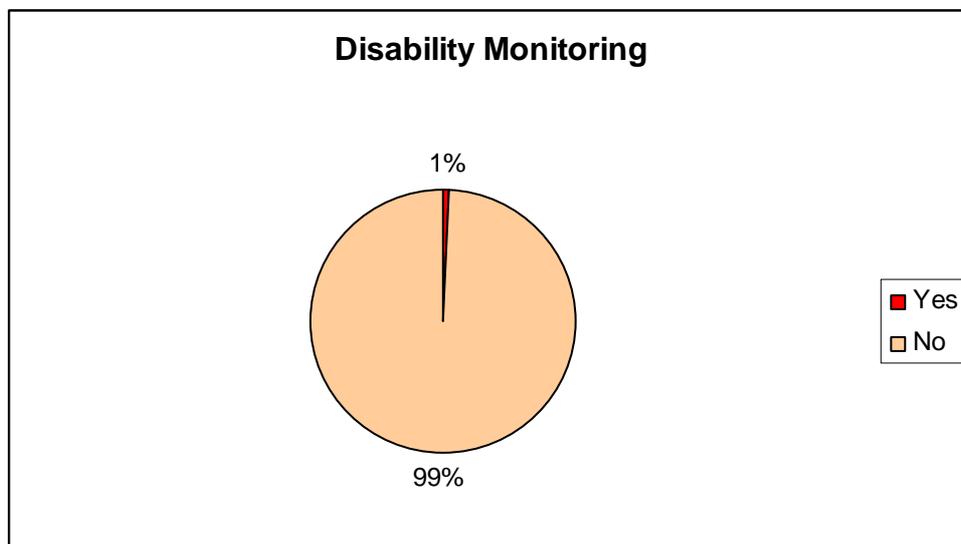
RELIGION / FAITH



- In total 50% of the participants did not answer the question.
- 30% of the participants were Christian.
- 6% Muslim.
- 4% Other
- 4% None.
- 2% Hindu
- 2% Buddhist
- 1% Sikh
- 1% Quaker.

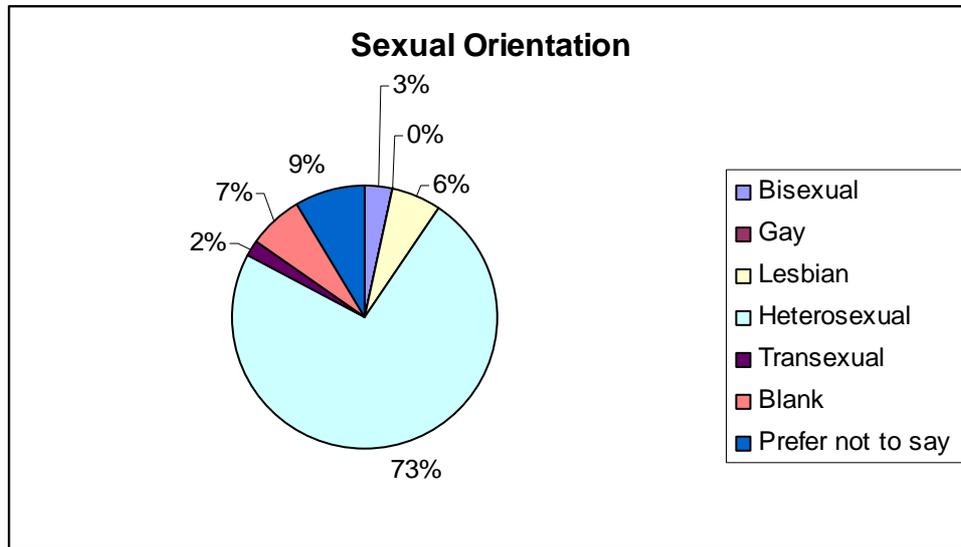
DISABILITY

This diagram shows the findings from the disability monitoring form, 99% of the participants had no disability and 1% of the participants had a disability.



SEXUALITY

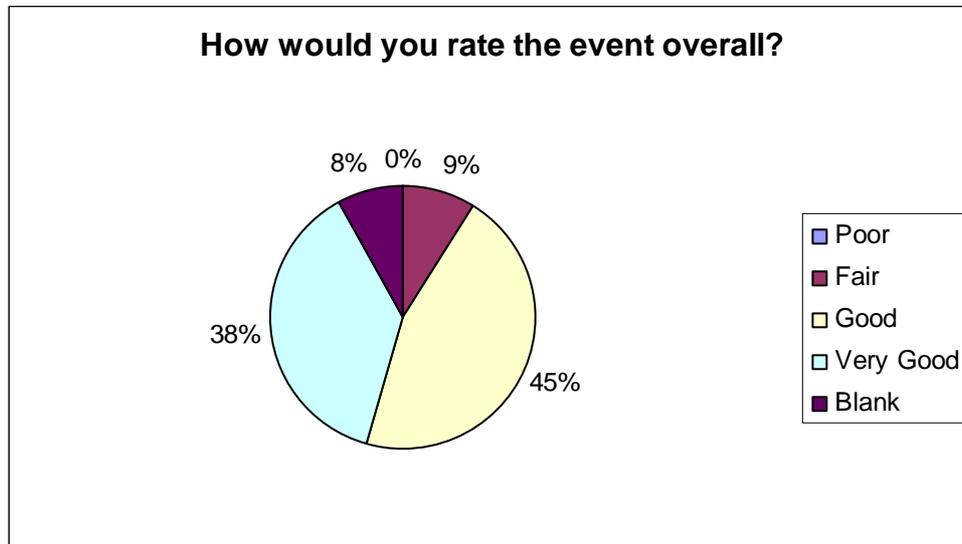
The following diagram illustrates the sexuality of the participants:



- 73% of the participants were heterosexual.
- 9% preferred not to declare their sexual orientation.
- 7% of the participants did not answer.
- 11% of the participants were LGBT (Lesbian 6%, Gay 0%, Bisexual 3%, Transsexual 2%).

EVALUATION ANALYSIS

For these series of events, monitoring and evaluation was conducted using Survey Monkey. Participants were emailed after each event and were asked to follow a link to the survey page specific to the event they attended.



In total 112 participants filled in this section of the questionnaire.

From the results gathered:

- 45% of the participants rated the events good
- 38% very good
- 9% fair
- 0% poor
- 8% of the participants did not answer the question.

EVALUATION QUESTIONNAIRE

Below is a selection of extracts taken from the participant's responses:

QUESTION	RESPONSE
<p>How did you find the running of the day (e.g. time and agenda, presentations, discussion groups, venue, catering etc?)</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Everything was well organised and delivered. Everyone was very welcoming and approachable. Food was lovely – Birmingham. 2. I found it very enjoyable – the right mix of discussions and presentations – Norwich. 3. Very good and interesting – Nottingham. 4. The day was very interesting, well organised, with relevant presentations in a nice venue with good catering – York. 5. It was all very good – Leeds 6. Good. It was a very useful event – Cambridge 7. The chair created a very relaxed atmosphere but kept the discussions focused and on the agenda. Participants contributed freely and discussions were open and helpful. The venue was central and excellent - Manchester 8. Very good, well focused and tightly planned so interest was maintained throughout. Good clear presentations and guidance – Oxford 9. Very well organised – Central London

Which session of the day did you find the most useful and why?

1. The talk about how to find out about boards and get involved in them – **York**
2. The whole event was interesting, we need to have more events like this that can give us a collective voice – **Coventry**
3. The talk from the commissioner about her own experiences was enlightening and her suggestions for each of us attending. It was also interesting to hear about other women's background and ambitions – **Plymouth**
4. Discussions of the barriers to women's involvement in public life – **Sheffield**
5. The open discussion was very useful; as it made me realise that other women had the same problems as me – I was not alone. I also found the practice session on completing an application very useful – **Norwich**
6. All the group sessions were excellent and I enjoyed them as they gave women an opportunity to share experiences and ideas – **Nottingham**
7. Listening to the main speaker – **Cambridge**
8. Quite a few were very useful, the barriers clinic, the guest speaker and the application form master class were all useful – **Manchester**
9. The mock board meeting role play, interesting dynamics, board procedure and presentation – **Greenwich**

<p>Which session of the day did you find least useful and why?</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I think all sessions were relevant I enjoyed it, all the morning flew by – Manchester 2. None – Bristol 3. The break was too short, a bit longer would have allowed more networking – Birmingham 4. Each session had it's part to play and none bored me – Plymouth 5. I cannot say that anything was least useful, as I was new to the topic everything seemed very relevant – York 6. None – Cambridge 7. Jan was an excellent leader and provided useful and practical examples – Central London 8. I would have liked more time on the application forms – Newcastle 9. The whole day was useful – Greenwich
<p>Do you feel the event met its intended objectives of: raising awareness of the impact women can make in public life and providing advice and practical tools to help you through the application process?</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Yes, I felt encouraged – York 2. Yes, it met the objectives – Cambridge 3. Yes, very much so lots of useful information – Birmingham 4. Yes, opened up aspects I had not thought about – Liverpool 5. Absolutely – Coventry 6. Very much so. It also provided

	<p>networking opportunities to connect outside of the meeting to help and advise those with less experience. I also made the decision to become a member [of the WNC] as a result of attending – Manchester</p> <p>7. Yes. I'd be interested to know the follow up from this i.e. what else can be done to raise awareness – Nottingham</p> <p>8. Yes, very informative – Norwich</p> <p>9. The event needs to be followed up i.e. by a contact/mentor – Oxford</p>
<p>Did the event meet your own expectations?</p>	<p>1. I was not sure what to expect. However, I learnt a lot from listening to other delegates and was able to offer some of my own experiences. I would recommend this event to other women – Manchester</p> <p>2. More than – Nottingham</p> <p>3. Yes – Coventry</p> <p>4. I was expecting something more formal so the smaller group and great interaction was really good – Leicester</p> <p>5. It was better – Leeds</p> <p>6. More than met my expectations – Liverpool</p> <p>7. I went with an open mind, I found it pleasantly more informal than I had expected – Plymouth</p> <p>8. Yes, good follow up reading</p>

	<p>material – York</p> <p>9. Yes and No, no in that it exceeded it. I didn't think it would be this interactive or useful – Central London</p>
<p>Please provide any general comments on the overall quality and usefulness of this event?</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The presenters were very good, especially promoting sharing experiences and letting the attendees contribute, hearing their say and what they found necessary – York 2. It made me think about joining a committee myself! – Cambridge 3. I thought it was very useful and quality was good given the limited time to deliver the information – Liverpool 4. Well organised and well thought out. Enjoyable – Birmingham 5. These events can become a platform where we can express our interests and issues that effect our day to day lives – Coventry 6. Very informative and an excellent opportunity to network – Nottingham 7. Very useful for younger women with advice on actual job applications – Norwich 8. Thank you – I hope the workshop materials could be disseminated/replicated more widely throughout the country and get a campaign going – Greenwich 9. Highlighted the fact that so

	<p>much work still needs to be done to empower women to participate in public life – Newcastle</p>
<p>Please provide further comments that would help us organise future successful events?</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I feel that there would be a bigger up take if it could be held outside normal working hours because I know some women would have liked to attend but because they are teachers were unable to get time off. However I have passed the information on to them – Liverpool 2. Different food to sandwiches – Nottingham 3. Ideal timing – Leicester 4. More contact with local agencies contacts to promote event – Norwich 5. It would be interesting to know what positions need to be filled or how the assets of each attendee could be useful for specific roles – Bristol 6. Possible start at 10am so that parents can take children to school and have enough time to reach the venue – Birmingham 7. It would be useful to look how the commission could practically support women overcome some of the barriers that women face – Sheffield 8. Perhaps a later start some of us had trouble getting through the city centre in the rush hour – Cambridge 9. Well done, keep it up. This is

	a good idea – Oxford
<p>How did you find out about this event?</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Email – York 2. I was emailed by the British Federation of Women Graduates (BFWG) – Plymouth 3. The Government Equalities Office sent me an email via the Ambassador network – Norwich 4. I think it was the Women’s National Commission website. I hadn’t particularly considered a public appointment seriously beforehand but I have sent off for application forms now – Leeds 5. The Women’s National Commission, Women In Public Life website – Nottingham 6. Through the Women’s National Commission – Coventry 7. Through one of your ambassadors, Michelle Greenwood and it was great to have her attending the event too – Leicester 8. Operation Black Vote (OBV) – Greenwich 9. Direct email – Central London

LESSONS LEARNT: THE WNC PERSPECTIVE

Overall the Women in Public Life events were a huge success. The format of the event worked extremely well and the practical sessions engaged the women and encouraged their participation. The events had a mixture of interactive information sharing and practical exercises. The participants worked together in small and large groups to reflect on the main challenges to entering public life and how to overcome these challenges. The mock board meeting also encouraged the women to work together and gain board level experience. The application form master-class gave sound advice to the participants on how to complete a successful application form. The Appointments Commission approved the application form toolkit. In addition, the guest speakers encouraged and inspired the women to apply for public appointments.

A more flexible time frame to suit different women would have been ideal; however, due to budget constraints this was not possible. The WNC could only afford half day room hire and catering.

Furthermore we recommend that future Women in Public Life events should be based on specific areas of interest for example Health, Engineering, Crime and Justice, The Police, Sports and the Arts. This targeted approach encourages women who are interested in different sectors to apply to the relevant public board. This will also provide sufficient information to women who are interested in these specific areas.