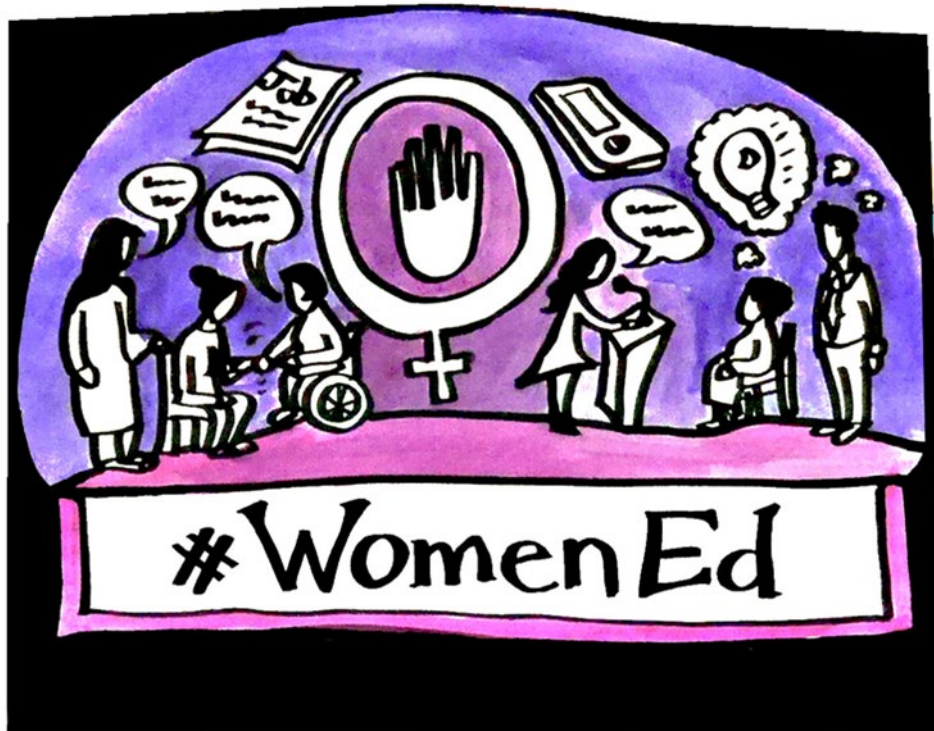




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## #WomenEd: A movement for women leaders in education

Kay Fuller and Jill Berry  
June 2019

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## The researchers

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## Abstract

In the global context of a renewed interest in gender inequalities, social media provides opportunities for dialogue that crosses the boundaries of physical spaces: geographical and organisational. Hashtag campaigns have demonstrated that any user of social media can join the discussion. The focus here is on a social media based network for women working and leading in education using the hashtag #WomenEd that has extended to face-to-face activities. We report the findings of a mixed methods research project that explored the network in its first two years. In particular, we aimed to discover why the network was needed and how social media was used to develop it. We argue that gender inequalities persist in educational settings as they relate to structural and organisational barriers. These are enacted as discriminatory behaviours. Social media provides the means to raise consciousness, communicate and, therefore, connect with those who share similar experiences and/or are of like mind in seeking to build educational organisations that value everyone. A notable finding is the clear focus on how and why leadership is done rather than on just balancing the representation of women in senior leadership.

## 1. Introduction

### Statement of the Problem

A global resurgence of interest in gender inequalities, the ubiquity of misogyny, and often ambivalent attitudes towards sexual violence have prompted women to speak up about their experiences in diverse workplaces such as entertainment, the media and politics. The spread of the #MeToo (from 2017) and #TimesUp (from 2018) campaigns are high profile responses.

Despite legislation such as the UK Equality Act (2010), designed to protect those with specific characteristics against discrimination in employment and public life, the professions are not free of sex discrimination, sexual harassment and sexual assault. Over half of women have experienced sexual harassment in the UK workplace (TUC 2016). Such behaviours are one aspect of multilevel barriers to women's career advancement.

Mindful of the gender inequalities in the workplace and wider society, #WomenEd began in 2015 as a social media based network designed to connect women in educational leadership. Early online discussions revealed the extent of their experience and awareness of inequitable behaviours in educational settings (Fuller and Berry in preparation). The network quickly extended to face-to-face activities as national Unconferences (where speakers were also delegates) and regional events. This paper reports research designed to explore the development of this international social media based network in its first two years.

### Significance of the Problem

Women's underrepresentation in politics and senior appointments in business and educational leadership is a long-standing theme globally (Paxton and Hughes 2017; Kalaitzi et al 2017; Sobehart 2009); as is their overrepresentation in the lowest paid jobs in cleaning, catering, cashiering, caring and clerical work (5 Cs) (Duffy 2007; Perrons 2009). The UK gender pay gap data for 2017-18 reveals disparity in educational organisations (GOV.UK, 2018). Such issues and disparities require a collective response that might be facilitated by social media, where individual women respond to hashtags in huge numbers.

#WomenEd began, as a Twitter hashtag, following online discussion about gender inequalities in teaching and school leadership. The ensuing Twitter conversation, between seven co-founders and the second author of this paper, resulted in an international social media network for serving and aspiring women leaders in education. There are twelve

regional networks throughout the UK, and international networks in Australia and New Zealand, Canada and the United States, the Czech Republic, Italy, and the Netherlands, with over 25K followers worldwide (June 2019). Since the research was completed networks have been established in the United Arab Emirates, Germany and jointly for Belgium and Luxembourg. All the regional networks are linked: formally in their use of the #WomenEd hashtag, Twitter handle and branding; and informally through individual relationships.

## Purpose

### Research aims and questions

Coinciding with this resurgence of interest we aimed to investigate:

- the impetus for developing a network for women educational leaders; and
- the role of social media in the growth of a new movement for women educational leaders in the UK and beyond during its first two years.

There is currently no published research about women educational leaders' use of social media to network professionally.

The main research questions are:

1. Why was a network for educational leaders needed?
2. How did social media facilitate network growth?

## Limitations

There are limitations to this research. In taking a critical and interpretivist approach we make no claims about positivistic constructs such as reliability, validity, sample representativeness or generalisability. This research does not seek an objective truth. Rather it presents the perceptions of participants and we hope to achieve authenticity and trustworthiness in our presentation and analyses of the findings. Readers are invited to consider the findings in the light of their own experiences.

The use of the UK Equality Act (2010) as a referent for an international study is a limitation. This must have seemed an arbitrary date for identifying discriminatory practices to participants working in international contexts. Nevertheless, in interviews they referred to country specific legislation where relevant.

Responses to the online survey were dominated by those working in the south of England. However, interviews were carried out with participants working in most UK regions and in international settings: North America, other European countries and Australia.

## Definitions

We use a number of job or role titles that need further explanation:

- co-founder refers to those who founded #WomenEd;
- regional leaders are those who lead activity in the various regions identified in Figure 1 below.

Formal job titles referred to in the report include:

- system leader (usually of a multi-site/organisation and includes executive headteacher and principal);
- headteacher (or principal is a site-based leader);
- senior leader (includes site-based deputy and assistant headteachers, vice and assistant principals);



- middle leader (subject leader or coordinator, head of department, phase or year group leader or coordinator);
- APM & Support (administrative, professional, managerial and support roles including in leadership);
- education consultant (provides services to education).

### Ethical Considerations

This research conforms to The University of Nottingham *Code of Research Conduct and Research Ethics (version 6)*. Ethical approval was given by the School of Education Research Ethics Committee. Contact can be made with the School of Education Research Ethics Office at [educationresearchethics@nottingham.ac.uk](mailto:educationresearchethics@nottingham.ac.uk).

This research also complies with the British Educational Research Association Revised Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research (BERA 2011, 2018).

The data were gathered during the academic years 2016-18. All data are stored on password protected and encrypted computers for a period of seven years after any publication in line with the University of Nottingham *Code of Research Conduct and Research Ethics (version 6)*. Personal data, where necessary, is stored in line with the General Data Protection Regulation. Privacy notices were distributed to participants whose personal data was collected after May 2018. Every effort has been made to distribute privacy notices to those who took part in the earlier data collection.

Pseudonyms are used to protect the identities of people. Following an Oral History research tradition, participants were given the opportunity to be named, for example, in relation to illustrative quotations. Some people agreed to be named when we posted survey findings as blogs. The default position in this report is to anonymise data. The researchers do not include individual, school, group or organisation names in any writing unless expressly permitted. Broad geographical regions are named.

## 2. Women and gender in educational leadership, management and administration

This section provides a brief overview of some international literature from the field of women and gender in educational leadership, management and administration (ELMA). In particular, it focuses on women's underrepresentation in educational leadership; barriers to women's advancement including discrimination; enablers to women's advancement; women's leadership approaches; and activist professionalism.

### Underrepresentation of women in educational leadership

The first stage of research in the field of women and gender in ELMA was concerned with women's absence (Shakeshaft 1987). The first author has argued that the documentation of women's presence in the field remains relevant in English secondary schools despite some improvement in the last fifteen years (Fuller 2017). Internationally, it persists, particularly in secondary and higher education (Moorosi 2018). A second stage of research is concerned with searching for women who have been or remain leaders, managers and administrators (Shakeshaft 1987). Accounts of women in ELMA have been collected to provide historical (Shakeshaft 1987; Watts 1998) and international perspectives (Sobehart 2009; Reilly and Bauer 2015; Miller 2017; McNae and Reilly 2018).

## Barriers to women's advancement

Barriers to women's advancement has long been the subject of research. Thirty years ago, Shakeshaft (1987) outlined barriers as societal, organisational and individual attitudes as well as overt and covert sex discrimination in the recruitment, selection, staff development and promotion processes in the United States. A multilevel approach to thinking about barriers to women in secondary schools was confirmed in England and Wales (Coleman 2002), and internationally (Cubillo and Brown 2003). Stereotypes that position men as leaders and women as teachers, supporters and nurturers in education have long existed. The investigation of why women are underrepresented has been framed as a third stage of research (Shakeshaft 1987). Again this focus for study remains relevant, particularly in international contexts (Lekule 2018).

## Discrimination

The UK Equality Act (HM Government 2010) is designed to protect people with specific characteristics from discrimination in the workplace and wider society. The nine protected characteristics identified are:

- age
- gender reassignment
- being married or in a civil partnership
- being pregnant or on maternity leave
- disability
- race including colour, nationality, ethnic or national origin
- religion or belief
- sex
- sexual orientation (Gov.UK [Discrimination: your rights](#)).

A person's single status and parenthood are not protected characteristics per se.

Recent reports of discrimination against educational leaders have included the use of homophobic language regarding their sexual orientation, their lack of shared religion in a faith school, the intersections of inexperience, youth, sex and single status (Cliffe et al in press). Participants also revealed their own discriminatory attitudes with respect to age and intellect i.e. questioning a desire for additional responsibilities later in life and not being competent. Examples of witnessed discrimination and recognition of structural discrimination included racism, sexism, ageism and discrimination against mothers and women of childbearing years. A few white women were aware of institutional racism in the composition of all-white senior leadership teams (see Showunmi et al 2016); and men were aware of discrimination against women and the dominance of men in senior leadership teams (Cliffe et al in press).

Discrimination may have been underreported with women not identifying some behaviours as discriminatory (Coleman 2002).

## Enablers to women's advancement

Research into women leaders and their leadership practice constitutes a fourth stage of research into 'women studied on their own terms' (Shakeshaft 1987 p. 13). Women's accounts of their career pathways have suggested how they overcame obstacles (Ozga 1993; Hall 1996).

Strategies suggested for the enablement of women into ELMA include:

- consciousness raising and recruitment into ELMA preparation programmes,

- financial assistance to complete internships and/or
- courses and workshops,
- the recruitment of women to university positions in the field of ELMA,
- curriculum materials,
- strengthening support systems with respect to family and home responsibilities,
- networking,
- developing 'political clout',
- legal remedies and affirmative action,
- consciousness raising for recruiters and selection panels, and
- creating jobs (Shakeshaft 1987, p. 211-214).

## Networking

Despite the perceived value of women-only networks in providing instrumental and expressive benefits (Ibarra 1993 cited in Coleman 2010), prior to the advent of social media, networks for women leaders in education in England had been in decline (Coleman 2010). Professional networks provide opportunities for role modelling, mentoring and sponsorship (Shakeshaft 1987; McCarthy 2004; Coleman 2011). Depending on network membership, there might be opportunities for career coaching (Coleman 2011) increasingly used as a form of career development (see e.g. Simkins et al 2006).

McCarthy (2004 p. 11) has found women's professional networks effective in tackling gender inequalities because of their flexibility, participatory and self-organising nature, responsiveness to contemporary gender politics and ability to 'effect a far-reaching and incremental impact on gendered power relations'.

Coleman (2011 p. 69) distinguishes between expressive, instrumental and informal networks. Expressive networks 'emerged naturally' among like-minded people; instrumental networks existed to promote contacts and were associated with men's traditional networking behaviours; informal networks might be groups of friends offering 'emotional support' usually in a social context.

In an under researched aspect of the field, Porritt and Featherstone (2019) provide valuable accounts of #WomenEd members' engagement with the network. Individual contributors provide personal perspectives on diverse topics ranging from the values that underpin the network and how they might influence someone's leadership practice and career choices to considering the role models who influenced each of them.

## Women's leadership in education

The fifth and sixth stages of research are concerned with women as a challenge to and the transformation of theory (Shakeshaft 1987). Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) identify five ways women lead as:

1. *Relational leadership* in which relationships are emphasised in horizontal arrangements rather than hierarchical structures that demarcate power relations over one another.
2. *Leadership for social justice* refers to a desire to change the status quo. Motivation might be about serving the interests of those who have been and continue to be least well served by current social and education policies and practices.
3. *Spiritual leadership* is about a sense of who we are in the world and of getting to know the worlds of others. It is also about using the language of passion and hope. It does not matter whether or not people are of faith or no faith.

4. *Leadership for learning* in which learning and teaching is central whether it be related to the education of children, young people and adult learners or the development of staff as teachers, non-teaching staff and leaders.
5. *Balanced leadership* is about achieving a balance between home lives and work lives. These need not necessarily be separate as families, friendships and community memberships inform leadership.

Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) acknowledge not all women lead in the same ways and that these ways are not exclusive to women.

The construction of leadership as male or masculine is thus disputed and a feminist reconstruction of leadership in education proposed (Blackmore 1989; Hall 1999). Alternative constructions of leadership have been applied to understand women and men's leadership in education (Fuller 2013), leadership for social justice (see e.g. Bogotch and Shields 2014) and critical leadership perspectives (see e.g. Courtney et al 2017). This scholarly work resists prevailing and persistent stereotypes of leadership.

### Activist professionalism

Women leaders' concern for learning and social justice suggest there might be a focus on activism within the profession. Activist professionalism is borne out of active trust, generative politics and a set of inclusive principles and practices. Active trust requires visible social relations built on a shared set of values. Alongside respect and reciprocity, active trust is fundamental to activist teacher professionalism (Sachs 2000, 2003). Joint endeavours, collaborative development and professional dialogue generate insights and improvements in practice. Generative politics enables people 'to take collective charge of their own destiny' (Sachs 2003, p. 144). It questions whose issues are made public, who provides leadership and how inclusiveness is promoted as these and other questions 'emerge in response to real needs as they develop at the grassroots level' (ibid. p. 145). A set of principles and practices comprise:

- Inclusiveness rather than exclusiveness;
- Collective and collaborative action;
- Effective communication of aims and expectations;
- Recognition of the expertise of all parties involved;
- Creating an environment of trust and mutual respect;
- Ethical practice;
- Being responsive and responsible;
- Acting with passion;
- Experiencing pleasure and fun (Sachs 2003 p. 148).

Networks and partnerships with shared interests develop into learning communities informed by systematic inquiry and practitioner research. Such networks and communities might be facilitated by social media (Carpenter and Krutka 2014; Rosell-Aguilar 2018). Indeed, offline and online activities working in tandem might be beneficial (Zimmerman 2017).

This research into why #WomenEd was needed and the role of social media in its development was designed with these issues in mind:

1. women's underrepresentation in educational leadership;
2. barriers to women's advancement including discrimination;
3. enablers to women's advancement including networking;

4. women's leadership approaches; and
5. activist professionalism.

### 3. Design of the Study

This investigation focuses on a social media based network: *#WomenEd - A movement for women leaders in education*. As an investigation of a women's network this research places at its centre women's experiences as serving and aspiring educational leaders and their exercise of educational leadership in formal and informal roles at various levels. The focus on gender and women locates the research as feminist research that uses both qualitative and quantitative data generating methods (Sprague 2016). Our epistemological stance is that we believe 'an individual's standpoint influences her knowledge of the world and her standpoint is shaped by the economic and political situation in which she is situated' (Grogan and Cleaver Simmons 2012, p. 32). Each account and survey response reveals an individual's perspective about 1) Why a network for educational leaders was needed; and 2) How social media facilitated network growth; as well as their perspective on gender issues in educational leadership. So too, our researchers' standpoint as insider researchers, and as feminists, influences our interpretation of the data generated. We locate this research as critical in design and interpretation. We are concerned with the 'question of power at the intersections of gender with race, class, and sexuality' (Grogan and Cleaver Simmons 2012, p. 32) and other characteristics in educational leadership and the teaching profession.

#### Insider researchers

Both researchers have been involved in #WomenEd from the early stages. Jill is an educational consultant and coach; a former headteacher who has worked in independent and state co-educational and single sex schools. She has also worked in an all-through setting and extensively with primary educators and leaders. She speaks at #WomenEd events, provides coaching, mentoring and job application advice to #WomenEd members and is a prolific tweeter. Kay is associate professor of educational leadership at the University of Nottingham and researches in gender and social justice in educational leadership. She is a former English teacher and deputy headteacher who worked in five mixed comprehensive schools in three local authorities. Tweeting was relatively new to her. Both have attended and contributed at numerous #WomenEd events. Kay is a regional leader for #WomenEd East Midlands.

The advantages and disadvantages of such research and the risks of informant bias, reciprocity in interviews and research ethics dilemmas associated with insider research must be acknowledged (Mercer 2007). Interviewees and survey participants were aware of the researchers' involvement in #WomenEd, but it is fair to say that their responses and accounts were highly individual and could not have been predicted or prompted by the researchers.

We benefited from shared knowledge and understandings of women's experiences, whether they were described by women or men in secondary school settings. The first author also shares knowledges and understandings of working in higher education; the second author of working in the independent sector and as an education consultant. However, as two white straight women without children and of similar ages, we do not share the experiences described by women of Black and Global Majority (BGM) heritages, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered or women who identify as non-binary, or mothers and younger women. We do not share the experiences of men working in education as straight or gay men, as men of BGM heritages, or fathers.

## Description of Research Design and Procedures Used

### A sequential multi-stage research design

The research comprised four stages as follows:

**Stage 1 - Semi-structured telephone interviews with 18 founders, national and regional leaders.** Findings from these interviews informed the survey design (see Appendix 1). These were conversations with a purpose (Ribbins 2007). The accounts were co-constructed by the participant and researcher(s) (Møller 2009). Interviewees made clear their desire to ascertain the network's impact not just by using statistical data but by valuing women's individual stories (see further research below).

**Stage 2 - An online survey coincided with the movement's second birthday in April 2017** (see Appendix 2). It was piloted in international contexts. Valuable feedback about technical matters, language use and optional questions informed the design of the final questionnaire.

**Stage 3 - An analysis of two years' worth of blogs mentioning #WomenEd** (to be reported separately (see Fuller and Berry in preparation)).

**Stage 4 - Follow up interviews.** These interviews included one with a regional leader who volunteered after the survey (the data from this interview has been included with the findings from the first 18 interviews); those with seven men who responded to the survey (see Appendix 1); and with 19 women who had experienced and/or witnessed discrimination (see Appendix 3). Three of these women provided written responses to the interview questions.

Thus data were generated in these four stages.

### The sample

#### The semi-structured telephone interviews

Semi-structured interviews were carried out with 19 co-founders, national and regional leaders. This included all the co-founders, of whom five were national leaders, 11 regional leaders (including the first author as insider researcher), and the second author as insider researcher.

They represent education professionals working in the primary (3), secondary (9), all-through (1), higher education (3), phases of education and in education consultancy (3). Their roles comprised executive headteacher/principals (2), headteacher/principals (4), deputy headteacher/vice-principal (1), assistant principals (2), middle leaders (2), teachers (2), academics (3) and consultants (3). Their careers have been wholly or partly in education. All three academics had worked in schools at a senior leadership level.

Ages ranged between the thirties and fifties. One was recovering from cancer (officially disabled). They were single, co-habiting and married women. They had no children, or school-aged and/or grown up children. They self-identified as White - British, Irish, and Eastern European; and Black - Caribbean, of unknown Black heritage and as Black and Minority Ethnic heritage. One said,

‘... when it comes to race, I don't know who my dad is. So I can't say I'm Jamaican or I'm African. I don't have a culture other than a British one which, you know, that's not what people are asking when they want to fill in those forms. When it comes to being a woman, I'm just a woman' (regional leader F).



Ten identified as of working-class origins including six identifying as first-generation university educated; four as middle class. Three identified as Christian. One identified as heterosexual; another referred to a same sex relationship.

### The online survey

The online survey was distributed widely via Twitter and email. It was designed to ensure only those who had heard of #WomenEd would complete it. There were demographic sections that asked about participants' work in education and their characteristics. There were 356 useable responses. The following section is adapted from the blog [The #WomenEd survey 1: Who answered?](#) (Fuller and Berry 2017a).

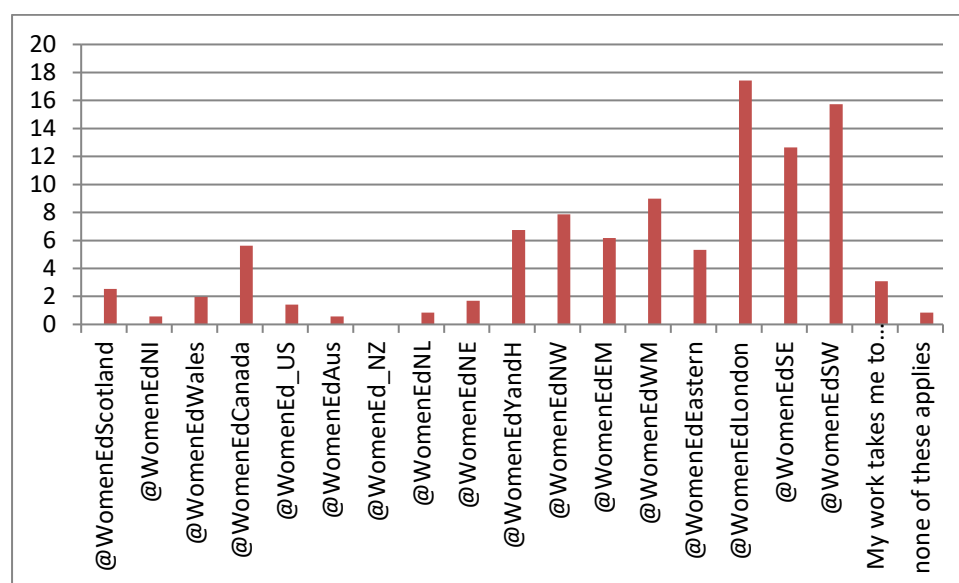
394 people answered. 38 had never heard of #WomenEd.

These data provide a glimpse of those people. They cannot be claimed as representative of the movement or of the thousands of followers on Twitter.

### Where were they?

Most responses came from England - London (17%), the south-west (16%) and south-east (13%) regions; almost half from the south of England. There were single responses from each of Central Europe, Prague and Malaysia.

**Figure 1- Participants by region**



@WomenEd\_Italy started in the middle of April 2017 – during the survey.

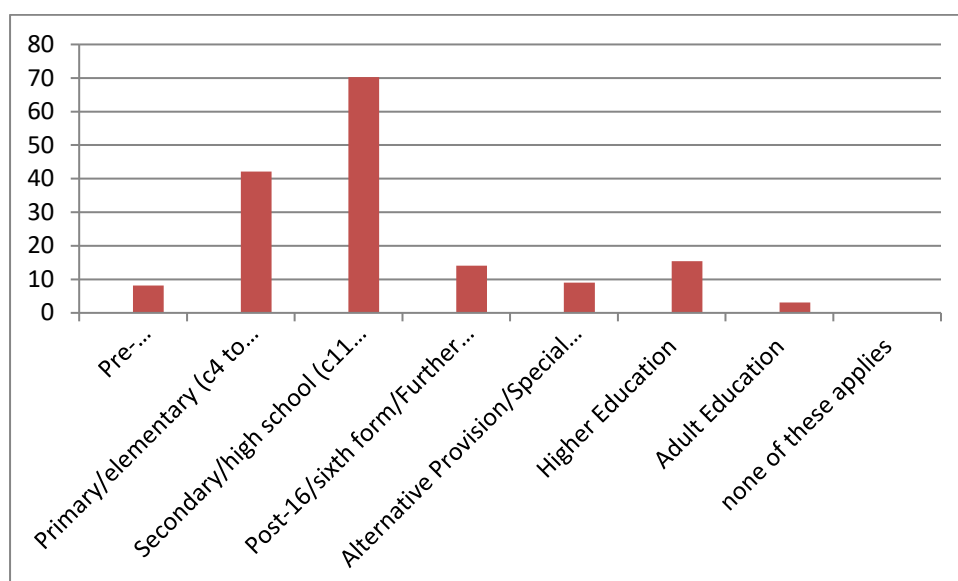
### What were their interests in education?

87% worked in a school, college or university. 32% identified multiple interests in education. For example, 14 people said they were students *and* work in an educational institution. 10% volunteered in education. 9% provided services to educational professionals. 7% were family members of students (does not coincide with the % who have school age children). 6% were family or friends of those working in education.

### Phase and sector

70% were involved in secondary education; 42% in primary; 15% in higher education; and 14% in post-16 education.

**Figure 2- Participants by phase and sector**



49% were involved with a state funded organisation; 15% with an independent (fee-paying) organisation.

37% were involved with an academy/free school or multi-academy trust; 15% with local authority maintained schools.

26% were involved with comprehensive education (for all abilities); 3% with selective education.

15% said they were linked with teaching schools and/or their alliances.

One person noted her links with every phase as well as all types of school. She worked for a union.

Several respondents noted connections to commercial companies providing a range of services and supplies (4), educational charities or charitable trusts (3), specialist education or supply teaching (3), the local authority, or a research institution.

## **Work**

Those who worked in education were teaching staff (28%), in middle leadership (teaching roles) (19%), in senior leadership (teaching roles) (25%) or headteachers/principals (14%).

11% were governors, board trustees, directors or similar; 10% were consultants.

### *How did they identify?*

The following section is adapted from the blog [The #WomenEd survey 2: Who answered?](#) (Fuller and Berry 2017b).

Participants identified in relation to the nine protected characteristics described in the UK Equality Act (HM Government 2010). These questions can be intrusive but many persisted and identified their characteristics. Understandably some chose not to give some of this information.



People's experiences are different. Some experience additive or intersectional discrimination. We wanted to get a glimpse of that.

### **Biological sex**

95% identified as female; 4% as male; 0.3% as intersex.

### **Gender**

94% identified as women; 5% as men; 0.6% as non-binary.

### **Age**

20s – 5%; 30s - 29%; 40s - 40%; 50s - 20%; 60s - 5%; 70s - 0.3%.

### **(Dis)ability**

94% identified as able-bodied. 2.5% identified a physical impairment; 1.1% a mental impairment; 0.6% identified as having both.

1.7% described a range of conditions including dyslexia, Myalgic Encephalomyelitis/Chronic Fatigue Syndrome, epilepsy and neurodiversity.

### **Marriage and civil partnership**

81% were cohabiting, married or in a civil partnership; 14% were not.

4% were separated, divorced or had legally dissolved a same-sex civil partnership.

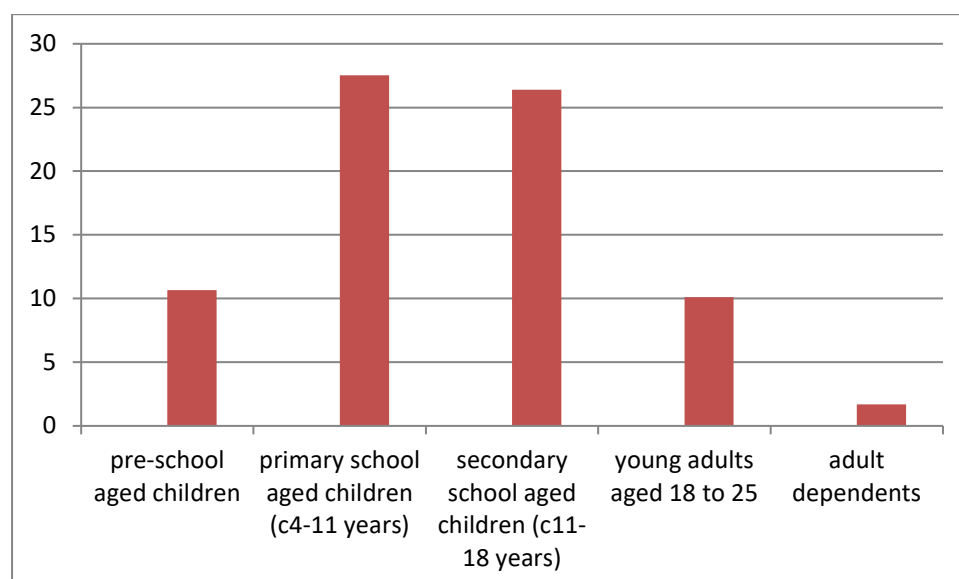
0.3% were a surviving partner from a co-habiting living arrangement, marriage or same-sex civil partnership.

### **Pregnancy, maternity, paternity and care**

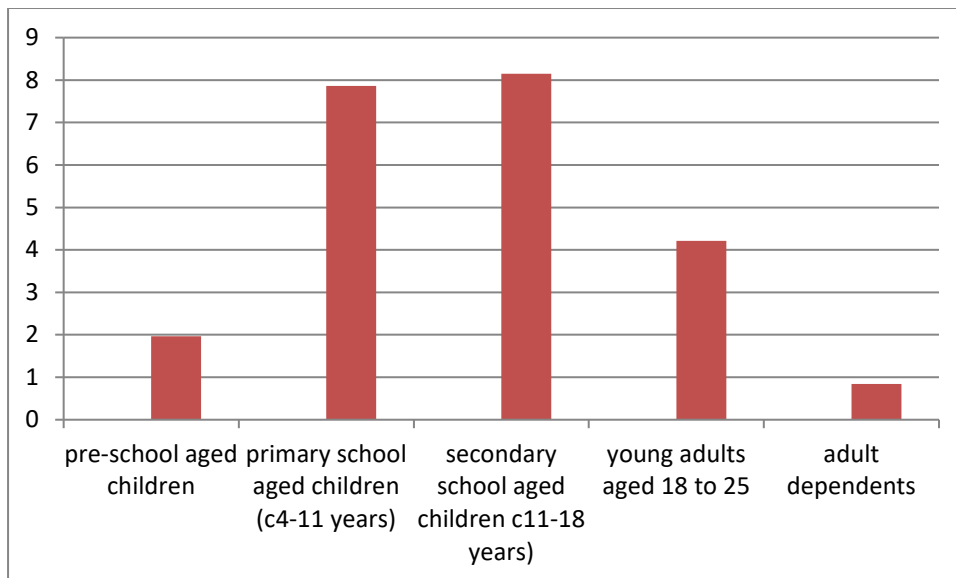
68% had children (of any age). 31% did not.

1.1% of people or their partners were pregnant; 0.3% said they or their partner was taking maternity/paternity leave; 0.6% were in the process of fostering or adopting.

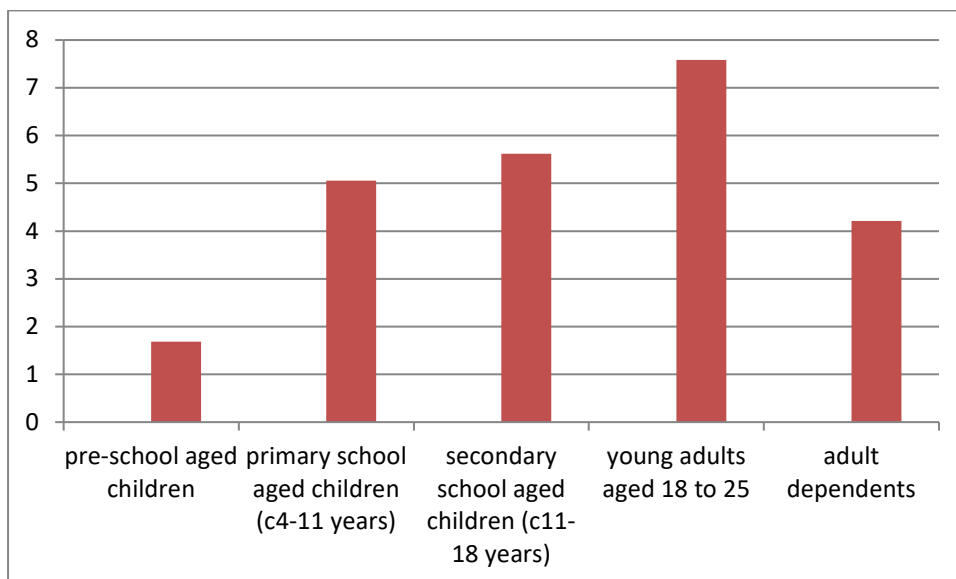
**Figure 3 – Participants with full responsibility for the care of children and adults (i.e. lived with them full-time)**



**Figure 4 – Participants with major responsibility for the care of children and adults (i.e. lived with them at least half the week)**



**Figure 5 – Participants with responsibility for the care of children and adults (i.e. lived with them occasionally at weekends, holidays and in emergencies)**



## Race

85% identified with the dominant racial identity; 7% with a minoritised racial identity; 5% with multiple racial identities.

0.8% identified with an indigenous identity (e.g. First American, Indigenous Australian, Māori). However, all also identified with English #WomenEd regions. This might suggest they were white British rather than from indigenous and minoritised groups in countries settled by Europeans.

2.8% identified differently as white English (1), white British recognising that is not dominant globally (1), white British & European (1), white non-British (1), internationally British (1), and Irish (1). They demonstrate the ways people wanted to qualify their identities.

## **Religion**

45% had no religion.

47% identified with Christianity.

2% identified with Islam; 1.4% with Hinduism; 0.8% identified with Buddhism; 0.8% with Sikhism; and 0.3% with Judaism.

2.8% said they did not identify with any of the major religions described. They identified with Daoism, Pagan/Wicca, Orthodoxy, Pluralism, Unitarian Universalism, Spiritual, and Personal.

## **Sexual orientation**

90% identified as heterosexual; 4% as lesbian; 1% as gay; 3% as bisexual; 1% as questioning; 1% as asexual.

## **The blogs**

The sampling of blog posts will be reported elsewhere (see Fuller and Berry in preparation).

## **The follow up interviews**

Semi-structured interviews about discrimination were carried out with 19 women (19 by telephone and three in writing). They were working in five countries (UK, North America, mainland Europe, and Australia).

They represented education professionals working in the primary (1), secondary (9), all-through (6) (including adult education for one and alternative provision/special education for another), post-16/further education (1) and higher education (1) phases of education and in alternative provision/special education (1). Eleven worked in state funded education (including in voluntary aided schools), five worked in independent education, two in higher education. One was a leader for the local authority.

Their roles comprised administrative, professional and management or support (2), system leader (1), headteacher/principal (2), senior leaders (5), middle leaders (5) and education consultants (4). Their careers have been wholly or partly in education.

Their ages ranged between the thirties and sixties. They all considered themselves to be able-bodied. They were single, co-habiting, married and separated or divorced women. They had no children, or school-aged and/or grown up children, one was in the process of adopting a child. They self-identified with a minoritised racial identity (1), with multiple racial identities (3) and with the dominant racial identity (15). One identified as internationally British. Eleven identified their religion or belief as Christian, six with no religion, one as Unitarian and one as Sikh. Eighteen identified as heterosexual, one as lesbian.

Semi-structured telephone interviews were also carried out with seven men working in two countries.

They represented education professionals working in the primary (2), secondary (2), all-through (3), phases of education. Their roles comprised middle leader (1), deputy headteacher (1), headteacher/principals (2), system leader (2), and consultant (1) (with a

long career in higher education leadership). Their careers have been wholly or partly in education.

Their ages ranged between the thirties and sixties. They all considered themselves able bodied. They were single, co-habiting or married men. They had no children, or school-aged and/or grown up children. They self-identified with the dominant racial identity (6) and with a minoritised identity (1). One identified as a first-generation immigrant. One identified his religion or belief as Christian, one as Hindu and five had no religion. Five identified as heterosexual, two as gay.

## Methods and Instruments of Data Generation

### The semi-structured telephone interviews (Stages 1 and 4)

Telephone interviews lasting approximately 30 to 60 minutes were carried out (see Appendices 1 and 3 for the interview schedules). Permission to audio record the interviews was given. Interviews were transcribed. Participants were given the opportunity to decide whether they wished to be named. Participants were given three opportunities to:

- 1) check the transcript, to make alterations, comments or deletions as they require;
- 2) discuss the interpretation of data by email, telephone or in person;
- 3) give or refuse permission for the use of specific quotations (where participants' names were used).

On each occasion they had the opportunity to withdraw from the research if they wished. Participants were reassured that the relationships between them and the researchers would not be affected in any way if they decided to withdraw. Data were analysed thematically using both deductive and inductive approaches. A priori categories were determined by the interview questions themselves whereas other themes emerged as patterns were identified across transcripts.

Recordings and transcripts remain confidential to the project and are stored in locked cupboards and/or electronic format on the University's password protected and encrypted computer system. All information regarding the participants is stored at the University of Nottingham in accordance with the EU General Data Protection Regulations.

### The survey

Bristol Online Surveys (now JISC Online Surveys) were used to design, store and analyse the data (see Appendix 2 for the online survey). The survey was distributed via social media and by email with the aim of gaining as many responses as possible. Participation was purely voluntary. However, completion of the survey and the submission of responses was construed as giving full and informed consent to the use of the data in the project. It was not possible to withdraw from the project after responses were submitted. It was not possible to remove data from the full set at a later date. Participants were not asked to identify themselves or their schools unless they chose to do so. If a participant was invited to take part in a follow-up interview or by providing a written account of their experience of #WomenEd they were able to choose whether to be named or not and the protocols described above applied. The default position was to anonymise the data. In line with our research position as described above, data have been analysed using descriptive statistics.

### An analysis of two years' worth of blogs

This material was available in the public domain as blogs posted to @staffrm during the first two years and tagged with #WomenEd. The blog site @Staffrm was shut down early in 2018. All blogs were copied and pasted to Word documents. Many blogs have been uploaded to [#WomenEd Blog](#) and #WomenEd members continue to post blogs. Material

from the first two years will be analysed and reported separately (see Fuller and Berry in preparation).

### Follow up interviews

Two further sets of semi-structured telephone interviews were carried out following analysis of the online survey data. These consisted of 1) interviews with men; and 2) interviews with women who described personal and/or witnessed experiences of discrimination. The interview schedule at Appendix 1 was used with the men. Please see Appendix 3 for the schedule for the interviews about discrimination.

## 4. Analysis of Data

### Why did women think a network for educational leaders was needed?

This section reports the findings from interviews with 19 women and seven men. Women's and men's responses are reported separately (see men's perspectives below). Interview participants responded to questions about what attracted them to the network, how they became involved, why they thought it was important.

### What attracted women to #WomenEd?

Almost all the women said they were attracted to #WomenEd because they already had awareness of women's issues and gender inequalities through:

- their activism in the women's movement whilst at university,
- reading about research,
- studying women and headship,
- teaching about gender,
- personal experiences of gender inequalities, and/or
- witnessed experiences of gender inequalities in the workplace and/or wider society.

Thirteen had been involved in teaching, training or leading development programmes, and networking around gender such as:

- educating about gender and language use,
- leading programmes for women's and girls' leadership in schools,
- committing to supporting women in their workplaces,
- networking with women in education (e.g. BELMAS – Gender and Leadership Research Interest Group, the Leading Women's Alliance).

Three said part of the attraction was linked to their awareness of race issues and racial inequalities. The steering group was diverse and there was encouragement to speak up about racial and ethnic inequalities as well as gender issues.

Almost all were attracted by the ideas, values and/or passion expressed by those engaging in the dialogue associated with #WomenEd. There was resonance with women's prior interest and awareness but there was also:

- expression of anger at workforce data shared online (by Future Leaders),
- recognition of enthusiasm,
- opportunity to connect with like-minded people,
- opportunity for self-reflection and self-recognition in other people's experiences,
- opportunity to raise women's profiles, and

- desire for action.

The values of inclusiveness, collaboration, openness and transparency were seen as resistance to stereotypes of women competing or quarrelling in the workplace. These values were framed as 8 Cs: Clarity, Communication, Connection, Confidence, Collaboration, Community, Challenge, and Change (see further discussion below).

Twelve women were attracted by the sharing of experiences (they spoke and listened) and the provision of support and advice (they sought and provided it).

Eight women said face-to-face meetings (e.g. #TeachMeets, a residential and the first Unconference) were attractions. The high quality of continuing professional development (CPD) at the first Unconference was largely attributed to the sharing of expertise and experience. These women had both contributed and benefited. There had been vibrancy in the talk amongst women at the first Unconference. There had also been tearfulness with some women relieved to talk and be supported by the other women in the room.

### How did women become involved?

Initial connections were made via social media where women posted, read, responded to and tweeted about blogs on the @Staffrm blog site (see below for further discussion about the role of social media). There was a mixture of offers and invitations to support the network. Some could not remember exactly how they became involved except that it was via social media (@Staffrm, Twitter, Yammer). Three women had been introduced to the network by someone else.

### Why do you think #WomenEd is important?

The majority of the women thought making connections with like-minded people was important, as was the nature of those connections. The women valued a safe, non-threatening space in which to address gender equality issues in the education workplace. That was found on-line (via blogs and comments, in tweets and by direct messaging) and in face-to-face meetings. They found support and challenge, as well as practical advice about making job applications. These connections reduced the sense of isolation expressed as geographical and in terms of life experience i.e. the experience of balancing care responsibilities with a career. Existing connections had been undermined by education reforms. The relationships being built were described as deepening friendships.

About half the women described the importance of using their voices, activism and empowerment. One thought it was important to counter the male dominance of EduTwitter. Others saw speaking up as confidence boosting and empowering. #WomenEd encouraged people to take risks, to try out ideas in a safe space. Sharing stories of success and failure was valued.

Six women thought raising consciousness was important through the dissemination of accurate data and discussion of gender issues. One extended that discussion to the education of girls. Others referred to the education of girls elsewhere in interview.

Some thought the importance lay in speaking to the shared experiences of women (such as the gendered power imbalance in senior leadership or being told what to wear), and inclusivity (the importance of recognising diversity of backgrounds, lack of formal hierarchy, inclusion of men in the discussion).

### What is its core purpose?

Over half the women said the core purpose of #WomenEd was to provide support to change circumstances for individuals or more broadly by challenging the status quo politically. Two

thought a collective voice was important for the representation of women in the profession; another wanted to challenge restrictive models of leadership practice. For most, it was about emotional and practical support for individuals in breaking down barriers as they experienced them; providing a balance between motivation and advice; providing, sometimes long-distance, mentoring and coaching; about networking that builds confidence.

For just under half it was about establishing equality 1) in the representation of women at education policy making level; and/or 2) for women in senior leadership in all walks of life; and/or 3) achieving recognition for achievements; and/or 4) redressing the balance to build a diverse workforce with respect to race and ethnicity as well as gender.

For just under half it was about how that was done in a non-hierarchical grassroots movement that values stories about women's successes and establishes a united and collective voice.

For a third of women it was about CPD through the dissemination of information, providing training and development, and mentoring and coaching in a way that might 'reinvigorate' women and help them to 'realign' their careers, 'we've got a lot of people who don't feel like they really belong in the system anymore or because they're losing their selves or losing their way in the system' (co-founder B).

Four people saw its purpose as putting values into educational leadership. Two people saw it as a positive action in line with the Equality Duty, for example. Two saw it as an attempt to reduce isolation.

### How does it aim to achieve that?

Almost all these women saw the combination of online and face-to-face activity as the way to achieve the core purpose. Relationships were developed in both spaces with women differently comfortable with social media. One saw social media as a space for introduction but the development of relationships needed longer conversations in person, or by telephone or Skype. These networking relationships countered the 'old boys' networks' (co-founder F). Relationships were authentic but not automatic. Sharing common interests did not guarantee people would get along. Nevertheless, women felt welcome at events and in online conversations.

Almost all the women talked about the regional networks as a valuable mechanism of the network. They provided the opportunity for building a community network where longer conversations were possible and local knowledge could be shared. They were a way to grow the network with autonomy to organise in ways women saw fit. They were developing at different rates in different ways. The regions were a way to avoid London or city-centrism, to counter geographical isolation, and to reach beyond social media. Different regional projects were being connected.

For a quarter of the women, the nature of the network afforded freedoms in being non-hierarchical, outside women's workplace organisations, and in terms of resisting traditional career routes. There was permission for women to follow their leadership ambitions at their own pace or not to seek further leadership responsibilities beyond where they were if they so choose.

For a quarter of the women enabling, supporting and amplifying of voices was a method by which the network achieved its purpose. Women had found a voice online and at events. This involved promoting, supporting and critically engaging with other voices. Some valued the risk and vulnerability expressed as well as the celebration of talent. Story-telling was a way to share successes and failures.



## How did social media facilitate network growth?

Various social media platforms were used by #WomenEd followers including the @staffrm blog site until 2018 (some material was transferred to [#WomenEd Blog](#)) Twitter, Facebook, Yammer, the #WomenEd app and [the #WomenEd website](#).

Most commented on the role of social media as a key vehicle for making connections and therefore growing the network; in enabling online dialogue via blogs and Twitter; and operating alongside face-to-face events in developing the network.

Online connections were important as introductions between individuals and groups or the consolidation of existing connections. They quickly crossed geographical boundaries regionally and internationally as well as organisational, educational phase and sector boundaries to reduce isolation. Social media provided a catalyst at a particular moment in time (associated with the demise of local educational authorities and growth of multi-academy trusts by some) that expedited growth; some thought it would have happened anyway, but more slowly. It was strategically important and key to the evolution of the network.

Both expressive and instrumental functions of the network were facilitated by online dialogue as blogs and comments and via Twitter feeds. People spoke up, emboldened by personal and organisational anonymity, to share experiences and express opinions about what they read online. There was a space to challenge, clarify thinking and to support. Dominant male voices were countered in social media spaces. The opportunity to take control of CPD existed online, with a shift of thinking about not having it 'done to them' (regional leader F) but rather taking agency to think for oneself about education, leadership and career development.

Social media worked alongside face-to-face events and relationships. For some, these were more important and could not be replaced by social media. #LeadMeets, #TeachMeets, Unconferences and regional events were publicised, organised and evaluated via social media. The need for phone calls and other means of communication was recognised.

A number of dangers were associated with social media use including:

- the exclusion of non-users of social media;
- the creation of 'echo chambers' (regional leader D) and 'bubbles' (regional leaders E, H and education consultant A) of likeminded Twitter users;
- the endorsement of Twitter feeds without thinking about the consequences;
- uncritical use of language;
- use of reductionist mantras;
- over-confidence inspired by using a keyboard instead of face-to-face communication; and
- a male backlash.

Several participants thought #WomenEd needed to reach beyond social media into the mainstream of educational settings. Similarly, some saw the danger of talking to the same limited group of likeminded people. One participant was concerned there was insufficient critique of language use or messages, such as the popular #10%braver hashtag.

The closed Yammer group i.e. invited members only, developed by Microsoft for #WomenEd, operated as an extranet rather than intranet. It enabled the network to re-group, re-articulate and respond to semi-abusive tweets and attacks:



'I think in the beginning there was a lot of people trying to shut down the voices, but actually that has empowered us further. And it was really interesting watching people being quite exposed on Twitter, under attack, retracting into Yammer, having conversations, coaching, composing their responses, supporting one another, helping to articulate it better or stronger, then going back out in a composed way. It wasn't like a strategy we chose to do. We were kind of like guardian angels for others on the social media platforms. We didn't want more women to be pushed off Twitter and actually I think the haters, if we use that expression, they now can see we're a bit of a force to be reckoned with. In the beginning we were three/four hundred tweeters. We're now nearly nine thousand voices' (co-founder B).

## #WomenEd's achievements

### What has been particularly successful?

Particular successes were linked to some of the network's core beliefs or values articulated as 8 Cs (see below):

- Communication (9)
- Connection (8)
- Confidence (4)
- Community (3)
- Change (1)

Almost all participants referred to at least one #WomenEd value.

Communication related to the expressive function of the network in enabling a range of voices that countered 'tough rough male' voices (regional leader E). It enabled risk taking in speaking up, asking questions, and being challenged, and accepting other points of view. Online dialogue and debate were 'energetic' (regional leader I). Mantras might seem simplistic but they were successful when they conveyed something like being #10%braver to speak in public for example (though this was also problematized). For some, it was less about being more confident than about being more active. There was a clear desire to focus on people telling stories. Badging the network with a recognisable logo (that incorporates a microphone inside the gender symbol for female (Venus)) added to hashtag recognition.

Connections made online or in person with likeminded people facilitated learning and deepening relationships. These included connections with men who might use the #HeforShe hashtag that encourages men and boys to engage in the struggle for gender equality.

Confidence came from the raised profile of working for gender equality, taking action locally, and engaging in outward facing activities that prevented institutionalisation.

A sense of community provided 'space and giving of agency. Enabling, empowering of women' (co-founder C). It was marked by openness, honesty, 'collective celebration' (co-founder A), bonding and like-mindedness.

The desire for change was linked to increased equity in the system at multiple levels (political, organisational) though it was acknowledged much remained to be done.

Over half the participants identified face-to-face events as successful, where there was felt a mixture of emotion and empowerment supported by high quality speakers and workshops.

Half the participants identified instrumental functions evidenced by women giving and receiving practical advice, coaching and other types of CPD on diverse issues such as job application, interview technique, headship aspiration, working with external advisors and bid writing.

For others the positivity was successful in creating a non-victim perspective 'not hopeless, not helpless' (regional leader A); it was solution-oriented and energetic, not complaining.

There was political recognition (Department for Education (DfE) 2016) and professional recognition (The Chartered College of Teaching).

#WomenEd had inspired the network #BAMEEd for Black, Asian and minority ethnic educators (open to all ethnicities) and linked with #TheMaternityProject.

### What difference has #WomenEd made to your professional career?

The difference #WomenEd had made to professional careers lay in actions for others, work opportunities for oneself, emotions and learning.

Actions taken for the benefit of others that were attributed to engaging with #WomenEd included:

- contributing by acting as a role model,
- feeling the pressure to 'walk the walk' (regional leader C),
- modelling values connected with promoting diversity and flexibility in the workplace,
- signposting opportunities to other women,
- supporting colleagues in seeking equitable pay,
- spontaneously changing a prepared presentation 'to talk about stuff which I hide' relating to race (regional leader F),
- developing regional activity,
- using the gender lens to look at life,
- engaging in scholarly activism,
- speaking at a Ted talk.

Work opportunities for oneself included:

- breaking away from someone else's career trajectory,
- resigning, seeking coaching, applying for headship,
- receiving support following unsuccessful job application that led to headship aspiration,
- changing job due to 'companionship' countering 'nagging doubts' (co-founder A),
- increasing aspiration to 'make a difference' through headship (co-founder H),
- becoming a trustee of a national teaching organisation,
- building local professional relationships,
- being more outward facing,
- being invited to speak at events in a broader range of settings,
- seeking advice,
- disseminating research.

Changed emotions meant people were:

- less fearful,
- overcoming fears and phobias (about public speaking),

- more 'buoyant' and more confident owing to the 'community and collective belief' (co-founder A),
- more open about their emotions,
- more confident to admit they were aspirational,
- sustained confidence,
- joyful to enhance their enjoyable work about diversity and impact.

People had learned from younger headteachers and people beyond their institution. The learning included practical matters about how to lead a workshop that had been transferred to a professional association conference and was used to support a colleague presenting for the first time. Two described learning about themselves. One had reflected on her values and through coaching was able to 'dig deeper' to 'discover [her]self' and her values (regional leader J). Another described the effect as transformative,

'There was a moment when I suddenly thought, "Oh my gosh. I've literally been transformed and I wasn't even looking and now I've got to learn how to live this new life". But actually, being a fledgling in #WomenEd is one of the best places to be a fledgling [laughing] because you've got so many people who are on the same road or further on the same road and hear you and are there to support you [...] It's the best staff room I've ever been in' (regional leader F).

Her mind-set had changed. There was a greater level of honesty, sense of responsibility to others and accountability to herself.

## The nature of engagement

This section reports whether and how women self-identified as feminists and/or activists.

### Feminism and activism

Sixteen women identified as feminists; three identified with aspects of feminism. Six were wholly positive about self-identifying as activists, two newly identified themselves as such and seven problematized the label to clearly delineate the boundaries of their activity.

There was little awareness of activist professionalism as such (Sachs 2003). However, #WomenEd had been recognised by bodies such as the Department for Education, teaching and headteacher unions and the Chartered College of Teaching. Activism extended as far as challenging the Department for Education who recognised #WomenEd in their white paper (DfE 2016),

'I'm taking on the DfE. [I tell family members] "I've upset the DfE". You don't go out there intentionally taking on the Ministers and taking on education, but yeah we definitely are seeking change. I prefer the label change agent. I think we've all got agency and we all want to [e]ffect change, but we can own that we're activists (co-founder B).

## The future

### What remains to be done?

Comments about what remains to be done were focused on sustainability, inclusivity and focus.

Sustainability was linked to developing activity in the regional networks for several participants. But there were difficulties in maintaining consistency and quality in a grassroots network accompanied by lack of accountability. The organic nature of the network and

persistence of gender inequality meant the network needed to be moved forward by a new generation.

The desire for greater inclusivity was linked to those who did not engage with social media, people of minority ethnic heritages, the next generation of women and girls, and men.

A focus was needed away from a deficit model of women needing to change themselves, towards diverse leadership that could be 'people-friendly, family-friendly, work-life balance friendly, let alone women-friendly' (regional leader D); breaking down stereotypes including about men teaching in primary schools and women as nurturers; minoritised groups; and measuring impact. It was recognised that inequality remained.

A few participants focused on women's equal (or proportionate) representation in higher levels of leadership as executive headteachers, for example, and creating more diverse senior leadership teams. One sought a move from discussion to action in securing better workplace terms and conditions and part-time contracts.

### Further research

Almost half the women sought research to demonstrate impact. Two were clear this should be gathered via story-telling rather than statistical data. One said,

'we've said from the beginning we're not about numbers, we're not about statistics. It is about people and it is about stories [...] It's about the shared experience. It's about the narrative. It's about people really thinking about who they are and what they do and why they do it and sharing that, and that's where people feel those relationships where things resonate because we're actually talking to each other about human-beings rather than just people in a building doing their jobs' (co-founder B).

Another added,

'I do think that for women, hearing success stories sometimes has more of an impact on them than the data, than the sort of hard numbers, that the men like to sort of throw around and try and pick flaws in' (co-founder E).

Twelve women specified focuses including critical analyses in relation to four main topics:

### *The #WomenEd network*

- who are the followers? How broadly does it reach? Including beyond social media,
- sustainability and coverage,
- regional engagement in #WomenEd,
- quality of presentations,
- future focus,
- resistance of women's professional networks – why do people think it is not relevant to them?

### *Women and their careers*

- Black women and their careers,
- flexible working practices and co-headship,
- young women and levels of confidence,
- identification of women with motherhood,
- women's rejection of women's leadership.

### The system

- gendered structures in the Department for Education,
- construction of what constitutes good headteachers,
- perceptions of education and teaching as a profession,
- why schools and Multi-Academy Trusts are not providing the equivalent CPD.

### Social media

- trolling on Twitter,
- #HeForShe engagement.

It was not within the scope of this project to incorporate all these interests. We hope we have addressed some of the issues.

### Further comments about #WomenEd?

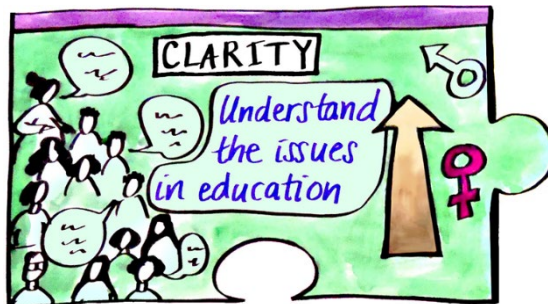
Women further commented on the development of their self-knowledge and learning, their emotions, the nature of the network, the sustainability of the network, diversity of experience and the network's focus.

### #WomenEd - Stage 2 online survey

The following section reports the findings from 356 survey responses in relation to the 8Cs of #WomenEd values: clarity, communication, connection, confidence, collaboration, community, challenge and change.

### Clarity

This section was adapted from the blog [The #WomenEd survey 5: The 8Cs – Clarity](#) (Fuller and Berry 2017f).



'It's that absolute **clarity** about who we are and what we stand for, and when [another co-founder] and I got the language down, drafted the values and made them memorable as the eight Cs that work in a sequence, we hit gold. They go along that process of needing to **clarify** what the issues are because you need to have the **confidence** to say and **communicate** it. You need to be **connected** with the **community**. You need to **collaborate**. And then through a common purpose and shared vision we create momentum which can affect **challenge** and **change**. I think it's that process that we all go on as individuals, but as a **community**, we go on it together as well' (co-founder B).

'the regional leaders in our very first orientation suggested we added the 8th C of **confidence**. So very much a **community** effort' (co-founder G).

Cubillo and Brown (2003: 281) identify barriers at:

- (1) the "macro" socio-political level;
- (2) the "meso" organisational level; and

(3) the “micro” level which concerns the individual herself.’  
Participants agreed #WomenEd provides information about:

- structural and societal barriers (72.2%),
- systemic barriers in education (82.3%),
- organisational barriers (62.9%)
- individual barriers (78.4%).

#WomenEd provides practical support and leadership models:

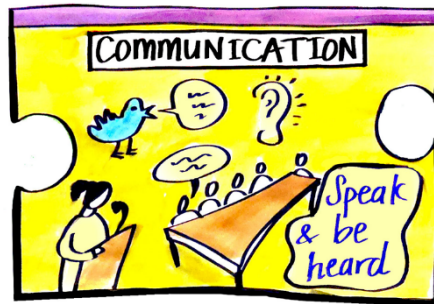
**Table 1 – Participants’ perception of what #WomenEd provides**

|   |       |
|---|-------|
| opportunities for mentoring/coaching/networking beyond my organisation                                    | 74.7% |
| a vision for education that values equity alongside excellence in education                               | 74.4% |
| stories and images of leadership that show leadership does not have to be white, male and heterosexual    | 74.4% |
| ideas about how women and men can support and encourage women to lead in education                        | 67.4% |
| a model of leadership that values flexibility (e.g. job shares, flexible working practices)               | 63.5% |
| a model of leadership that uses power to empower rather than to control                                   | 59.0% |
| ideas about how women can address the challenges for their own benefit and for the benefit of other women | 59.0% |
| information about how to balance the competing demands of work and life                                   | 58.7% |
| information about critically aware leadership (i.e. recognises unequal power relations)                   | 45.5% |
| none of these applies   | 1.1%  |
| other ideas about how to do leadership  | 1.1%  |

‘I see things differently now - I am more aware’ (survey response - middle leader).

### Communication

This section was adapted from the blog [The #WomenEd survey 6: The 8 Cs – Communication](#) (Fuller and Berry 2017g).



#WomenEd started as a Twitter conversation responding to blogs by one of the co-founders (see Wilson 2019).

[\*Mrs Mummy\*](#) recounts balancing ‘two hefty roles and their responsibilities’ as secondary school senior leader and mother.

[\*What glass ceiling?\*](#) recounts the impact of the 'Empowering Women in Leadership' conference on 18<sup>th</sup> March 2015. She ‘left the event with a bounce in [her] trademark red-heeled step, ready to combat #everydayleadershipsexism and hold out the ladder for other capable women to empower them into educational leadership...’

97.2% of survey participants engaged with #WomenEd on Twitter. Some engaged via Yammer (21.1%), LinkedIn (19.4%) and Facebook (11.8%); others via the #WomenEd website and app, @Staffrm, Wordpress and by email.

This is what they were doing:

**Table 2 – Participants’ use of social media**

|   |       |
|---|-------|
| I read tweets and posts                                       | 96.9% |
| I re-tweet and share posts to amplify voices                  | 80.1% |
| I respond to tweets and posts (including liking)              | 76.1% |
| I read blogs  | 56.7% |
| I write tweets and posts                                      | 46.3% |
| I offer encouragement   | 32.6% |
| I participate in online discussions (i.e. #digimeets, #chats) | 29.5% |
| I publicise blogs to amplify voices                           | 26.1% |
| I put people in touch with one another                        | 24.7% |
| I write blogs   | 23.9% |
| I offer advice about career advancement                       | 17.7% |
| I answer blogs  | 16.0% |
| none of these   | 1.4%  |
| [I engage] in other ways                                      | 0.8%  |

57.6% had attended an event such as a:



- regional event in my area - 23.9%
- TeachMeet or LeadMeet - 19.4%
- International Women's Day event - 13.8%
- Unconference I (London) - 13.2%
- Unconference II (Reading) – 12.4%
- national/regional planning meeting – 7.6%
- regional event outside my area – 7.0%
- events organised by others badged by #WomenEd (includes #BAMEed) – 4.8%

Other events included #ULead2017 in Banff (n=4), a first birthday party and following live events online via hashtag.

41.6% would like to attend an event.

41.6% had contributed to such events by:

- contributing to discussions – 29.2%
- planning and leading a workshop – 16.6%
- organising an event – 9.3%
- giving a keynote talk – 7.6%
- doing something else – 5.6%

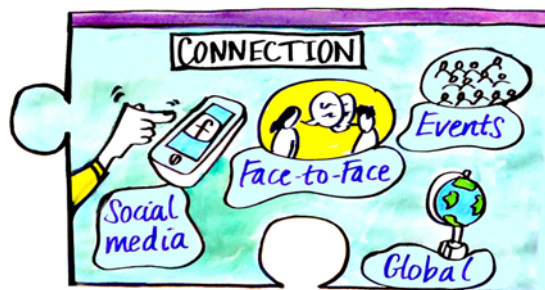
75.6% communicated what they knew about #WomenEd by:

- talking informally to colleagues – 69.7%
- persuading someone to follow #WomenEd – 41.3%
- publicising events – 30.3%
- persuading someone to attend an event – 29.5%
- talking formally to colleagues in meetings – 20.2%
- including information in presentations – 14.6%
- writing for online and print media – 6.2%
- in other ways - 1.1%

Two people referred to making links between other networks and groups.

### Connection

This section was adapted from the blog [The #WomenEd survey 7: The 8Cs – Connection](#) (Fuller and Berry 2017h).



Interviewees identified how and why **Connection** is important.

'The interactions that happened over the space of those few days after the initial blog and response were really quite special and led to some connections with women that I've never even spoken to online before, let alone met in real life,



that we all had a sense of urgency and a keenness to create that space and that opportunity to connect people and hopefully achieve something positive' (co-founder A).

Social media connections were direct and fast. Connecting like-minded people within a diverse community (see [The #WomenEd survey 10: The 8Cs - Community](#)) became a core purpose. Connection provided a challenge (see [The #WomenEd survey 11: The 8Cs - Challenge](#)) to think and approach leadership differently.

Isolation could be reduced - be it systemic, organisational, geographical or caused by balancing work with motherhood.

Inter-generational connections were made, and with DfE funded regional networks and men.

Being connected developed confidence (see [The #WomenEd survey 8: The 8Cs - Confidence](#)) to lead in the regions though sometimes making connections was a slower process.

69.7% of participants had connected with like-minded people through #WomenEd.

They had connected locally – (44.7%), nationally – (50.8%) and internationally – (14.6%).

Some connected across phases and sectors – (31.7%).

They connected with those they thought were influential in education – (34.6%) and with providers of career advice and/or coaching – (18.5%).

11.0% connected with like-minded people in other networks for women. 11.0% connected with like-minded people in other professional networks.

25.6% used direct messaging.

A regional leader described the damage disconnected leaders do,

'the disconnected leader who can't share their failures with anyone because they might think, 'Oh no. I'm failing', and they often run very high-powered successful environments, maybe sometimes short-term because there's a disconnect between them and the rest of the staff. People don't feel valued. People don't feel listened to, and you know, you might get things done but is that the why? To just get it done or is the why to actually engage? And that's what I think you could unpick around that idea of, 'I don't need it', or, 'It's not relevant'. 'If not for you, what about the people you interact and connect with on a daily basis?' What would they say?' (regional leader F).

## Confidence

This section was adapted from the blog [The #WomenEd survey 8: Confidence](#) (Fuller and Berry 2017i).



One participant said,

'I would challenge the premise of this interpretation of confidence - I take the view that structural patriarchy results in a lack of confidence, as a symptom, rather than a cause. To address and remove the structural and systemic barriers will result in increased individual confidence. Any lack of confidence should not be seen as a failing of the individual or indeed the responsibility of the individual to address/overcome' (survey response - female system leader and consultant).

In other words, internal barriers such as lack of confidence are a response to structural, systemic and organisational inequalities and individual experiences of sex discrimination, sexual harassment, sexual assault and/or sexual violence.

Citing women's lack of confidence as a reason for underrepresentation suggests women need to be fixed! What women bring to leadership needs recognition (see Schmuck 1986).

Nor is confidence static.

- 50% said their confidence fluctuated depending on context and circumstances,
- Reflecting on stories of vulnerability and success made 41.9% realise they should be more confident,
- 35.7% recognised their confidence was still growing,
- 25% acknowledged they were already confident but that they had increased in confidence,
- 13.2% said they were already confident and remained so,
- 11.5% were not yet confident enough to assert themselves professionally,
- 9.6% were not yet confident enough to apply for promotion.

The #10%braver and the #IWD2017 #BeBoldForChange mantras have been adopted widely. However,

'The 10% braver hashtag is great for encouragement (at a launch) ... however, it has its drawbacks for an on-going strategy. A lot of the [regional] group started to have a long and deep discussion about what is 10% braver? What does it mean? How do you know when you are 10% braver? It can mean different things to different people. Context, circumstance, personal narratives and individual identity matter. When does it stop? You can give 10% and then what's the next 10%? It always seems as if you are in a state of dissatisfaction. There's so much more to growth and personal development than a soundbite hashtag. 10% braver doesn't necessarily celebrate the uniqueness of people and their journeys. It's all about try/work harder!' (regional leader A).

## Collaboration

This section was adapted from the blog [The #WomenEd survey 9: The 8Cs – Collaboration](#) (Fuller and Berry 2017j).



Jill Blackmore's (1989) feminist critique and reconstruction of educational leadership identifies

- Power as multidimensional and multidirectional
- Leadership practised in different contexts by different people
- Leadership to empower rather than to control others (see [Feminist leadership: What is it? Who does it?](#))

Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) identify the importance of relational leadership.

- *Relational leadership* – emphasising horizontal relationships rather than hierarchical structures that demarcate power relations over one another (see <https://whatmattersnottingham.org/2016/11/08/what-matters-for-women-and-gender-in-school-leadership/> ).

16 of 19 interviewees identified as feminists. Others said,

'I don't think women are oppressed simply due to their sex but I do think that women are oppressed due to what they are taught their gender means. So I do find that I agree with aspects of feminism but I still wouldn't class myself as a feminist' (regional leader C).

A 'Social Justice Advocate' embraced elements of feminism with a wider interest and considers the interconnectivity of different & diverse communities' (regional leader A).

We asked about gaining inspiration from #WomenEd to work collaboratively. 62.1% already had a collaborative approach in their work. 43.0% valued and acknowledged what other people say.

Changes to practice were:

**Table 3` – Participants' perception of their changed practice**

|  |       |
|--|-------|
| I listen more carefully to colleagues                | 32.9% |
| I am more likely to ensure everyone's voice is heard | 31.7% |
| I contribute ideas more often in meetings            | 23.6% |
| none of these applies to me                          | 8.7%  |
| in other ways  | 1.4%  |

Other ways they changed their practice included 'connected & facilitated collaborations' (survey response - headteacher/principal).

However, the premise of the question was challenged,

'Whilst I agree that a re-thinking and re-purposing of working structures would sit well as part of addressing structural patriarchy, this would be part of a move to create more dynamic, agile and responsive networks that are far more fit-for-purpose in the ways in which we ALL now live and work. I struggle with the research findings that women favour more collaborative/ non-hierarchical ways of working. The interesting question is not 'they might favour collaborative working' but 'WHY women might favour collaborative working' (i.e. Challenging an inference that collaborative working is a genetic pre-disposition' (survey response - system leader and consultant).

## Community

This section was adapted from the blog [The #WomenEd survey 10: The 8Cs Community](#) (Fuller and Berry 2017k).



Community developed from making Connections (see [The #WomenEd survey 7: The 8Cs - Connection](#)).

Responses to the statements of positive effect about the #WomenEd community show it:

|  |       |
|--|-------|
| makes me feel welcome                        | 63.8% |
| facilitates collaboration                    | 48.6% |
| nurtures new relationships                   | 43.0% |
| makes space for me to reflect on my practice | 40.7% |
| makes me feel less isolated                  | 38.8% |
| helps me to celebrate my achievements        | 31.5% |
| refreshes existing relationships             | 19.4% |
| generates work (paid or unpaid)              | 10.1% |
| has other effects                            | 3.1%  |

Comments about other effects included:

'I'm sure it does do all those things but personally it just is a great reminder of how we must support each other, men and women, and remain confident as women' (survey response - middle leader).

'Creates opportunities/ opens doors' (survey response - headteacher/principal).

'It's making me think' (survey response - leader in local authority services).

'Makes me think about promotion' (survey response - middle leader).

'Encouraged by others finding their way. Not sure how to engage with it as an independent consultant' (survey response - independent specialist teacher).

'Inspires me to [be] more involved i.e. become a coach' (survey response - headteacher/principal).

14% said none of these applied. Comments were added such as:

'I do find it cliquy and [it] doesn't fit with my ideology of meritocracy > gender but I understand for many it works brilliantly and therefore am happy to support' (survey response - headteacher/principal).

'Can sometimes feel cliquy and exclusive' (survey response - headteacher/principal).

'I would say early days - an important movement and one I feel needed so much but not sure how it can help me right now' (survey response – senior leader).

'I think #WomenEd has made great gains in a very short period of time. My concern is that its ambition, and therefore its impact, is restricted by its focus on women changing THEIR behaviours rather than seeking to change the behaviours promoted and enabled by existing structures, mindsets and those who benefit from these structures' (survey response – system leader).

## Challenge

This section was adapted from the blog [The #WomenEd survey 11: The 8Cs – Challenge](#) (Fuller and Berry 2017).



The #10%braver mantra challenges people to be more confident (see [The #WomenEd survey 8: The 8Cs - Confidence](#)), to challenge and possibly change themselves rather than the workplace, system or society. To ascertain #WomenEd's impact we asked what people had risen to the challenge to do. They said through #WomenEd they had risen to the challenge to:

|  |       |
|--|-------|
| reflect more deeply on gender and other inequalities in society      | 55.6% |
| be braver in my practice   | 51.1% |
| question systemic inequalities in education (for staff and learners) | 45.5% |

|  |       |
|--|-------|
| call out sexist and discriminatory practices | 30.6% |
| offer to coach or mentor someone             | 28.9% |
| speak about gender inequalities in public    | 27.5% |
| do leadership differently                    | 24.7% |
| ask for coaching or mentoring                | 23.6% |
| none of these applies                        | 13.5% |
| in other ways                                | 1.4%  |

Through #WomenEd many participants were reflecting on structural inequalities and questioning systemic inequalities for staff and learners. Some were calling out sexist and discriminatory practices and speaking about gender inequalities in public. They were not just focused on personal confidence and practice though that was clearly important too.

Five people suggested other ways or offered further comments.

'Using my voice in the wider education community through twitter and a blog'  
(survey response – female senior leader).

'Yes - focusing the challenge on structural and systemic elements' (survey response – system leader).

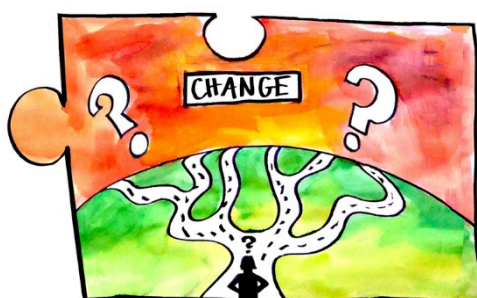
'Inform[s] my practice as a mentor, coach & role model to young women'  
(survey response – middle leader).

'Ma[de] me proud to continue to think and reflect deeply on gender issues'  
(survey response – headteacher/principal).

'I applied for a job that was a considerable promotion. Although I didn't get it I was shortlisted and presented myself well' (survey response – senior leader).

## Change

This section was adapted from the blog [The #WomenEd survey 12: The 8Cs – Change](#) (Fuller and Berry 2017m).



Interviewees wanted to see #WomenEd's impact. The #WomenEd survey blogs 1-12 show how #WomenEd affected participants' practice.

Half said #WomenEd changed what they do (50.8%).

They:

|  |       |
|--|-------|
| changed their practice to educate for equality, diversity and social justice | 23.0% |
| changed their practice to be more inclusive                                  | 19.4% |
| reviewed organisational structures to identify gender imbalances             | 12.6% |

|  |       |
|--|-------|
| changed their job  | 11.0% |
| revised organisational structures to ensure there is diversity in leadership       | 8.1%  |
| challenged politicians and civil servants to invest in leadership diversity        | 6.5%  |
| did something else   | 3.9%  |
| reviewed the gender pay gap in their organisation                                  | 2.5%  |
| agreed organisational objectives in line with the Public Sector Equality Duty (UK) | 1.4%  |

#### Something else included:

I have agreed to support #WomenEd by presenting at the forthcoming [regional] event which requires me to be 10% braver! (survey response – male consultant providing services to education).

Asked for a female mentor (survey response – researcher).

In the process of evaluating my career ambitions and am now exploring different pathways to leadership (survey response – teacher).

Begun applying for promotion (survey response – senior leader (APM)).

Applying for jobs (survey response – middle leader).

Made me consider an alternative career (survey response – middle leader).

Made me realise I should do more (survey response – leader in local authority services).

Thought of myself and others differently (survey response – middle leader (APM)).

Inspire and empower other female leaders to be involved in promoting inclusive, self-reflective practice (survey response – headteacher/principal).

Actually commit to attending and being active within the group - (survey response teacher and consultant providing services to education).

Founded The MaternityTeacher PaternityTeacher Project (survey response - middle leader).

Started to blog to create greater transparency in my thinking and learning (survey response – headteacher/principal).

Inspired me to write a book based on my own educational experience and study the many reforms that has changed the landscape of education in the last 50 years (survey response – support staff (lunchtime supervisor) in local authority maintained primary school).

## Discrimination

The following section reports the findings from the survey about discrimination. It is followed by a section that reports the findings from 19 follow-up interviews with women about discrimination.



## Women's experiences of discrimination

Participants constructed experiences of discrimination in relation to the protected characteristics. This section was adapted from the blog [The #WomenEd survey 3: Experiences of discrimination](#) (Fuller and Berry 2017d).

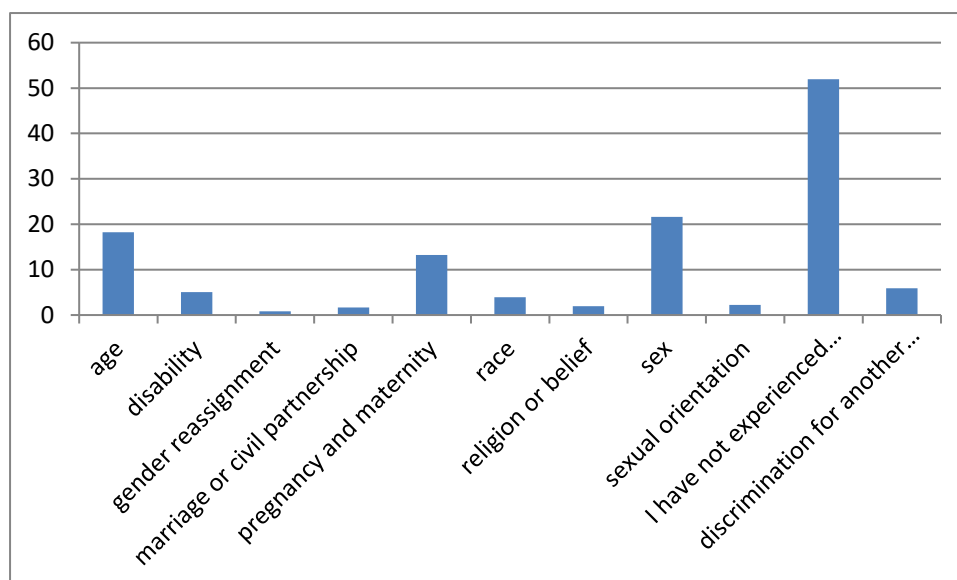


The UK Equality Act (HM Government 2010) legislates to protect 9 characteristics from discrimination. It brought together the Race Relations Acts (1965, 1976), Equal Pay Act (1970), Sex Discrimination Act (1975), Disability Discrimination Act (1995), and Employment Equalities Regulations (Sexual Orientation 2003; Religion or Belief 2003; Age 2006).

52% of participants had *not* personally experienced discriminatory behaviour in the workplace.

171 people (48%) had experienced discrimination. It is worth remembering that discrimination often goes unrecognised and is underreported (Coleman 2002).

**Figure 6 – Participants' experiences of discrimination since 2010 related to protected characteristics identified in the UK Equality Act (2010)**



Discrimination related to:

- sex – 22%
- age - 18%
- pregnancy and maternity - 13%
- another reason - 6%
- disability - 5%



- race - 4%
- sexual orientation - 2%
- religion or belief - 2%
- marriage or civil partnership - 2%
- gender reassignment - 1%.

Among females, sex discrimination was reported in combinations as follows:

- age and sex – (n=22)
- pregnancy and maternity, sex – (n=4)
- age, marriage or civil partnership, sex – (n=3)
- age, pregnancy and maternity, sex – (n=3)
- disability, sex – (n=3)
- age, disability, sex – (n=2)
- religion or belief, sex – (n=2)
- sex, sexual orientation – (n=2)
- age, pregnancy and maternity, sex, discrimination for another reason – (n=1)
- age, sex, discrimination for another reason – (n=1)
- disability, pregnancy and maternity, sex – (n=1)
- disability, race, sex – (n=1)
- pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, discrimination for another reason – (n=1)
- sex, discrimination for another reason – (n=1)

Other combinations, where sex discrimination was not identified, included pregnancy and maternity, gender reassignment and sexuality:

- age and pregnancy and maternity – (n=3)
- pregnancy and maternity and race – (n=2)
- pregnancy and maternity and religion or belief - (n=1)
- age, disability, marriage or civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity - (n=1)
- age, disability, pregnancy and maternity - (n=1)
- age, disability, pregnancy and maternity, race, sexual orientation – (n=1)
- age, marriage or civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, discrimination for another reason – (n=1)
- age, gender reassignment – (n=1)
- age, marriage or civil partnership, sexual orientation, discrimination for another reason – (n=1)
- age and sexual orientation – (n=1)
- gender reassignment and race – (n=1)
- pregnancy and maternity and discrimination for another reason – (n=1)

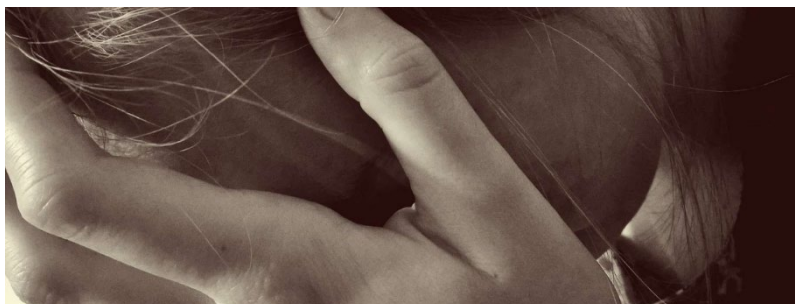
Combinations also included:

- age and disability – (n=1)
- age, disability and race – (n=1)
- age, race and religion or belief – (n=1)
- race and religion or belief – (n=1)

This complexity of experience(s) is better researched using qualitative methods. We followed up responses where possible in Stage 4 of the project where age referred to being either too young and too old.

### Awareness of discrimination in the workplace

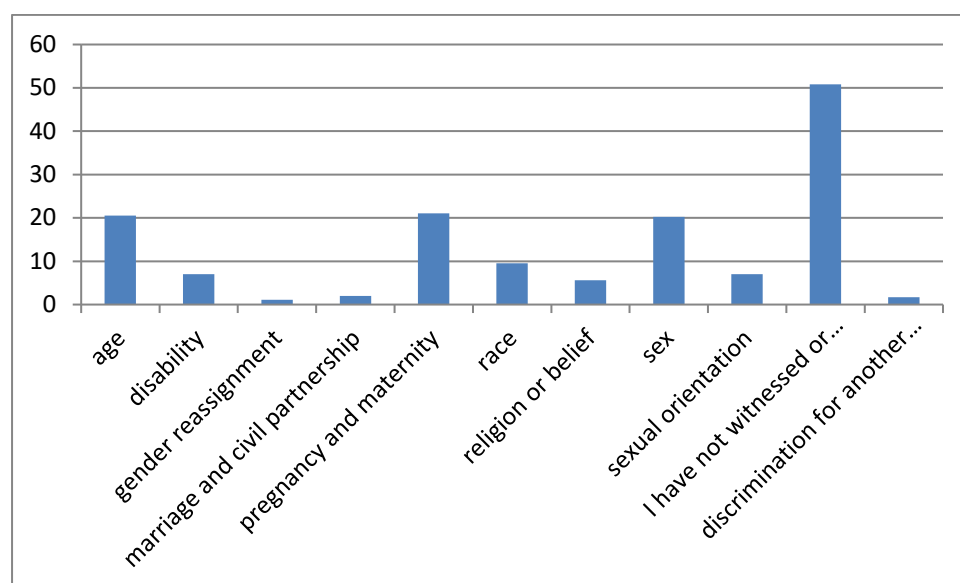
This section was adapted from the blog [The #WomenEd survey 4: Awareness of discrimination](#) (Fuller and Berry 2017e).



51% % had *not* witnessed or become aware of discriminatory behaviour in the workplace.

175 people (49%) had witnessed or become aware of discrimination.

**Figure 7 – Participants' awareness of discrimination since 2010 related to protected characteristics identified in the UK Equality Act (2010)**



Those who witnessed or became aware of discrimination said it related to:

- pregnancy and maternity – 21%
- age – 21%
- sex – 20%
- race – 10%
- disability – 7%
- sexual orientation – 7%
- religion or belief – 6%

- marriage and civil partnership – 2%
- discrimination for another reason – 2%
- gender reassignment – 1%

Responses show awareness of discriminatory behaviour for a combination of reasons.

Below are open text responses with respect to pregnancy and maternity, age and sex:

‘Ageism and disablism is rife in many of the educational institutions I work in. Neither appear to be taken as seriously as they should be. Single mothers (whether they be staff or students) should also have reasonable adjustments made for them where needed, given the additional challenges many face/ links with poverty and disadvantage’ (survey response - student and provider of educational services).

‘A senior leader being prevented from being included on marketing material because she was heavily pregnant’ (survey response – consultant).

‘Staff not selected for training due to pregnancy’ (survey response – middle leader).

‘Biases for white men (survey response - headteacher/principal).

‘Women's voices not being heard, men being promoted above women, men's opinions taken seriously and women's ignored’ (survey response – student and teacher).

‘No proper policy to deal with maternity/career progression’ (survey response – senior leader).

One person who identified as intersex had experienced discrimination relating to disability.

## Accounts of discrimination

### *Definitions of discrimination*

Nineteen women defined discrimination in follow-up telephone interviews. There was consensus in the definitions about action taken in the different treatment of people because of one or more characteristic. Actions included selecting one person over another, making decisions or judgments about ability or suitability, excluding people, putting up barriers, preventing achievement, restricting access to resources or opportunities to perform equally well, making jokes, and being dealt with in a derogatory way. Distinctions were made between direct discrimination in relation to employment and more subtle and indirect discrimination, ‘discrimination with a little ‘d’’ (education consultant E) based on assumptions, stereotypes and prejudices. That was widespread. The outcome of discrimination, intentional or not, resulted in injustice. One woman explored the nuances in constructing discrimination ‘we need to listen to how each of us defines it because it might be that one person might think it’s something that’s a bit of a joke and someone else might think it’s discriminatory’ (education consultant E). With maturity her understanding had changed as she ‘learnt more about other people’s histories and perspectives’ (education consultant E).

No one described positive discrimination or affirmative action.

Women had experienced discrimination personally or were aware of discrimination taking place in their workplaces.

### *Accounts of discrimination in the workplace*

All 19 participants recounted examples of experienced discrimination in the workplace since 2010. Eighteen described their awareness of discrimination towards others in their workplaces. We aim to do justice to their accounts by quoting their words in full where possible and include further detail in Appendix 4.

**Table 4 - Accounts of discrimination from 19 women**

| Protected characteristics      | Number of women | Number of examples of experienced discrimination | Number of examples of awareness of discrimination |
|--------------------------------|-----------------|--|---|
| Sex                            | 13              | 36   | 15  |
| pregnancy and maternity        | 8               | 10   | 12  |
| race and ethnicity             | 6               | 5  | 6   |
| Age                            | 6               | 3  | 5   |
| sexual orientation             | 4               | 8  | 3   |
| marriage and civil partnership | 1               | 2  | 0   |
| religion                       | 1               | 0  | 2   |
| disability                     | 0               | 0  | 4   |
| gender reassignment            | 0               | 0  | 2   |
| other                          | 4               | 3  | 3   |

These accounts related to the lived realities of organisational and societal culture revealed through the structures, relationships and behaviours of individuals towards one another in the workplace. For one, the voluntary sector i.e. a sporting body was included. These can be categorised as:

- appointment and promotion processes
- terms and conditions
- assessment of ability
- structures and relationships
- behaviour in meetings
- informal 'banter' and
- learners and parents.

### *Appointment and promotion processes*

Women faced all male interview panels, tokenism in short listing, and direct questioning about why a woman would be suitable for this job. Racial discrimination took the form of questions such as

"Are you going to be okay in a school like this given your [ethnic] background?"  
[The white male interviewer] added "Well, you might find it difficult at times, but I do think someone like you from your background would be good in a school like this" (senior leader A).

She refused the post. Others experienced age discrimination regarding over 50 year olds.

Women witnessed discussions about women interviewees' appearance, discrimination against working mothers, and against women of child-bearing years for internal promotion. These matters were openly discussed by the interview panel and in senior leadership team meetings. One woman recounted a second unadvertised job was created for a previously unsuccessful white woman candidate. Another recounted an unadvertised job had been

created for a male deputy headteacher. Younger women i.e. under 30 were not appointed to union jobs and principal/headships, because it was assumed they lacked life and work experience. By contrast, in another school a senior male colleague had been reprimanded for appointing only young attractive women.

There were insufficient numbers of visibly and invisibly disabled people in the teaching workforce.

### Terms and conditions

A job description changed, following interview, to incorporate additional responsibilities. A risk assessment was refused when one woman became pregnant, as were some of her Keeping in Touch (KIT) days during maternity leave. One woman was expected to complete tasks during maternity leave and was penalised through the performance management process when unable to do so because staff neglected to send material. Another woman, working part-time hours, was expected to attend parents' evenings when they coincided with her day off.

Women witnessed unequal treatment in the award of a maternity leave package in an international school, negative attitudes to job sharing (by a childless woman), unequal treatment of part-time staff by the timetabler, and by school leaders awarding part-time contracts following maternity leave. Women could lose their leadership roles on returning to work part-time. Pay was 'dock[ed]' (headteacher A) for responding to emergency childcare requests and excessive lesson planning increased workloads.

The difference between women and men negotiating salary at interview was noted. All the male candidates for a head of mathematics post negotiated pay, the woman did not. According to this woman, male heads of mathematics were earning more than women heads of English in three local schools.

A self-employed single mother was dependent on organisations paying invoices on time.

### Assessment of ability

A woman's competency was questioned after giving birth. Another was accused of racism as she worked with teachers to improve practice. If a risk assessment had been undertaken presumably it had not recognised Black and minority ethnic staff were being disproportionately targeted for remedial action.

Women were seen in stereotypical terms as 'too soft' or 'too hard' (senior leader in APM and support B). One woman recounted her support of five part-time women teachers in a single school whose competency had been questioned. One woman thought older women were not taken seriously in higher education.

### Structures and relationships

Women and other marginalised groups were absent or underrepresented in formal organisational structures showing hierarchical relationships. They were underrepresented in school senior leadership teams, executive headships, multi-academy trust and the Headmasters' and Headmistresses' Conference (independent schools) leadership in the UK, in district superintendency in North America, and globally in the international school sector.

Women were excluded from white male networks that met for breakfast or on the golf course. In one case, male senior leaders were involved in extra-marital relationships with junior women staff that became problematic for the women when they ended.

A self-employed single mother found it increasingly difficult to network informally to secure further work. In some educational settings there had been little sympathy, including *from*

women, when someone had a miscarriage or when another woman was ill during pregnancy. People assumed mothers were in supportive relationships.

Organisational structures and systems did not treat working mothers fairly. The culture in some schools meant women feared telling school leaders and colleagues they were pregnant. That news entailed colleagues taking on additional responsibilities and work they did not necessarily want. Structural change in some multi-academy trusts i.e. expansion to incorporate more schools, meant acts of racism were not properly monitored or prioritised. Same sex couples were unlikely to run boarding houses in independent schools and gay-straight alliances ran into difficulties in some faith schools. One union official had supported a transgendered man after he was dismissed from his post in a faith school.

### Behaviour in meetings

In meetings, some women thought they were invisible and/or inaudible or else their comments and ideas were appropriated by men. There were examples of name calling such as 'junior SLT', 'princess' and 'witch'. Each of these examples took place in the space of formal meetings. One woman described another woman's use of femininity,

'I've seen women go into governors' meetings so this is quite senior, going to governors' meetings saying things like, "Well I'll manage to get it through if I bat my eyelids enough", that you know, "They'll listen to me"' (education consultant B).

Flirtatious behaviour would ensure (probably male) governors' agreement. She and another woman had been asked to make the tea.

Boardroom 'banter' for one woman consisted of,

'Comments about being too emotional. Comments about being weak. Comments like general comments like boardroom banter. Just inappropriate implicit and explicit comments. More implicit than anything. Suggestive comments about my love-life. I want to mention some prejudice about not being a mother and not having children as well. Assumptions or presumptions made about when you're a single female. So yeah at the time I was perhaps a little naïve to it or a little bit innocent to it and didn't appreciate that it was actually like [...] soft prejudice, but on reflection I probably put up with more than I probably should have put up with' (system leader A).

For another, it was about gendered conversations that assumed shared understandings and general comments about women.

### Informal 'banter'

Informal banter continued in conversations about the appropriateness of dress, sexual innuendo and questions about women's private lives. Jokes were made about taking maternity leave as if it was a holiday. 'Banter' became abusive for one woman when her face was superimposed on a picture of pig and posted on a notice board by her line manager. At the time, a medical condition left her overweight and she was pregnant. Another woman, in an independent school, experienced women's lack of support for women and decided not to tell anyone when she went for promotion,

"I just can't deal with the whole back-stabbing, the females against females. I don't want to go down that whole gossipy politics route" (middle leader A).

In one school, women were told they might find it easier if there was a hair salon on site. There was also banter about accent (northern English) and assumptions made and perpetuated by staff about Asians and who in the community might deal in drugs.

Such comments might be seen as micro-behaviours. The use of language, labelling and pressure to conform to particular forms of dress resulted in one woman's fear of being 'outed' as a lesbian in school and, in effect, her silencing. It took a huge amount of energy for her to speak up in meetings, to challenge colleagues' assumptions and discriminatory behaviours.

### Learners and parents

Discriminatory behaviours from pupils and parents demonstrated prejudice against a woman teaching a STEM subject in an independent school, her being called 'Hitler' and 'bitch' by children, her insistence on meeting coursework deadlines was interpreted as 'being a good nag' (middle leader A). She resisted her line manager's attempts to support her in class as that would perpetuate the prejudice against a woman teaching STEM subjects. Eventually, parents and pupils recognised her ability and the value of her subject discipline for boys' future careers.

In another independent school, girls were told to cover their shoulders in case the boys were unable to control themselves. These 'off-the-cuff' comments were seen as 'laughable... out-dated' (middle leader C) and evidence of the overall culture of the school. This woman was criticised for being 'harsh' with deadlines for coursework.

In an international school, students were aware of the underrepresentation of women in senior posts and of staff from ethnic minority heritages generally. The staff did not reflect the student population's diversity.

In a state school, one woman observed a,

'lack of cultural sensitivity about how and why teachers and leaders interact with non-white students, and in that school where it was a very male-heavy, big male loud heavy kind of like teacher mode, I just constantly saw big black boys being shouted at in the corridor by bigger white men. Like really shouting in their faces and doing that piece about, "Look at me when I'm talking to you. Look at me when I'm talking to you", but in black culture you drop your eyes to show respect to authority and just a lack of cultural awareness about some of those subtle things that are ingrained in you as a child in some cultures and then they'd get into more trouble because they weren't looking, at the person who was shouting at them, in the eye. I saw a lot of that because it was a predominantly... It was a BAME-heavy [Black Asian Minority Ethnicity populated] school. It was a boy-heavy school and it was quite a tough school and he'd brought in a certain type of teacher and leader to help turn the school around, but I found that very uncomfortable' (system leader A).

Her response was to diffuse and mediate wherever necessary. She also observed Black children thought a Black teacher required higher standards of them than they did of white children.

Children and young people with disabilities and their families had often faced discrimination from birth. The transition between child and adulthood was a particularly difficult time for disabled youngsters and their families. Cross sector partnerships between education and health professionals did not always work effectively for the benefit of the young person.



### Organisational culture

A woman with considerable experience in both state and independent schools referred to the 'cultural inertia' at her current independent school resulted in no meaningful engagement with diversity and the 'wider world' (middle leader C). Traditional practices reinforced a sense of male privilege in the school. For example, notices relating to boys were consistently read out first. Staff hoped the appointment of a woman headteacher might 'Breathe fresh life into it to help shake up a very male-dominated top team' (middle leader C).

Others in the state sector described family unfriendly cultures that concerned men as well as women. Though, in one participant's experience, family friendliness meant, as a single and childless woman, she was expected to do more to compensate.

One participant had worked hard to change the culture in her organisation from boasting about the number of consecutive days worked and how much holiday time was due to celebrating what colleagues were doing on their days off.

One thought passivity among teachers was commonplace as a result of workplace bullying. As a former secondary school headteacher she had ensured equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) principles informed her practice. She monitored who was employed and/or promoted. Another thought EDI training was badly needed for school leaders.

Much more could be done to employ disabled people and recognise their needs, interests and concerns.

One woman observed the need to be geographically mobile to progress in higher education.

### Challenging discrimination

In response to these discriminatory behaviours not all women took action. Some regretted doing nothing; others understood the repercussions of speaking back. Those who took action either challenged the person directly or reported the incident, sought union support and advice, changed their or others' practice, or moved on.

One had started a campaign at her institution to overturn practice saying staff could not bring their children into work. The policy was fair but the interpretation of it differed at various levels of its implementation i.e. by administrative staff, security staff and senior leaders. There had been no spaces for students to breast feed their babies at her university.

### Speaking up and speaking back

Fourteen women talked about speaking up about or speaking back to discriminatory behaviour. One thought, 'in my younger days, I should have negotiated, I should have argued back, I should have pushed back against things that were clearly discrimination'. Another said,

'we, me included, probably take far too much as we fear being labelled difficult or too PC [politically correct]. I think this does not just affect women but all of us who see discrimination and know that it is wrong – we are fearful of challenging' (headteacher A).

She had been exposed to 'the crudest joke I had ever heard', despite an apparent effort to be less crude because 'there were "ladies" present', at a male dominated sporting awards dinner where she was making a presentation (headteacher A).

Twelve further examples of women challenging discrimination are included in Appendix 4.

### Union involvement and collective action

Two women involved the union when they faced discrimination. Four others referred to possible union involvement. One thought she should have involved the union when she was infuriated that a male deputy headteacher was appointed without a rigorous selection process. Another could have, but recognised things could be very difficult in an Australian rural school community if she did. She thought an urban context might be different. One found it uncomfortable approaching a teachers' union as a member of the senior leadership team. In an international school one woman had no access to a union.

One woman's union work meant she supported teachers in pay negotiation and when they experienced 'pushback' in public education regarding LGBT rights.

Another woman started a campaign in her workplace. This focused on the implementation of health and safety policy that prevented working mothers bringing their children into the workplace,

'I did try and do a sort of a campaign about it when I started but didn't get far. Some people were great, others were really just not that interested' (education consultant E).

### Part-time working

The headteacher who asked a woman to attend parents' evenings on her day off was in breach of her contractual obligations. Following union advice, the woman emailed the headteacher to explain why she would not attend on her day off,

'I sent her an email, a lengthy email, to explain everything that I had jotted down after I'd come out of the [earlier] meeting, explained what she had said to me, explained why I couldn't do it. I didn't use the word 'discrimination' in that but I did say that, "If you require any more information, I'm happy to meet with you with my union", and it's the very first time actually in my career that I'd consulted a Union. So it was quite a big deal for me. It's not an easy process to have to go through and it's only when you start climbing the ranks in schools you realise that actually taking on a headteacher can be career suicide in some respects' (senior leader A).

### Name calling

One woman was called a 'witch' when she disagreed with the school principal (senior leader C). She consulted the multi-academy trust's grievance policy, took the complaint to the CEO who attributed it to 'light-heartedness and banter' (senior leader C) but agreed to support her in formal proceedings. Instead, the woman chose a mediated meeting with the headteacher so she could tell him how the 'bantered language' (senior leader C) made her feel. The meeting was minuted by the headteacher's PA and the minutes shared with all parties including the CEO. The union advised her about what to say.

### Changing practice

In response to their experiences of discriminatory behaviours, five women worked to change their own and/or others' practice. Two changed the way they spoke: one literally muted her northern English accent; the other developed contrasting ways of speaking up,

'I have adjusted my behaviour in that respect and I've done a lot of research with discrimination [...] it's just the whole fact that women in a meeting, you know, they aren't heard. They have to speak up and I am quite aggressive. I don't know, that's maybe... But I'm not afraid to speak up and I do and I realise I have to. But on the other hand, I have also adapted a very deferential style with some of my male colleagues where instead of

saying, “Here’s my idea”, it’s like, “Well what do you think about doing this? I’ve been thinking about this. What’s your opinion?”, and I’ve had to do that a lot and I think I was quite successful in doing what I needed to do and what I wanted to do because I used that approach, which basically turned around to make them think it’s their idea [...] And I still resent having to do that.’ (senior leader in APM and support B) Three worked to change the culture in their organisation by encouraging others to speak up, proposing and implementing change to organisational culture, and proactively challenging an ingrained culture in her sector globally.

One believed by networking with others ‘people like myself through #WomenEd and through our networks definitely have a role in bringing a different voice to the table’. This voice was,

‘Questioning processes. Questioning traditions in that way without it being aggressive. Doing it through what is quality leadership. What do we need to be modelling for our students coming through and our colleagues? from that perspective’ (headteacher B).

Whilst she saw her inclusion on interview panels as tokenistic, she could see it was part of a deliberate shift to improve diversity in the organisation with job advertisements depicting diversity and in line with country level legal requirements they,

‘actively look for diversity within our applicants. So we’re looking for people who can bring something in addition to the qualifications and the background that we obviously expect from the teaching point of view’ (headteacher B).

Another was educating young people to think about gendered name calling in relation to sexual activity.

One woman who witnessed negative attitudes to flexible working practices insisted a role was undertaken on a job share basis. She tried to educate colleagues by providing a positive model when colleagues said they were pregnant.

### Moving on

Seven women framed their responses to discrimination in relation to work opportunities. One regretted not applying for principalships because women had been invisible in that post. One rejected a job offer. Five said they resigned, ‘the only thing to do would be to move on and move out’ (education consultant B). This woman’s move had resulted in ‘more positive feedback in that two years than I’d had in the previous six’ (education consultant B). Of these women, one was returning to the state sector having decided it was more ‘dynamic’ (middle leader C) than independent schooling.

A third of these women described discrimination occurring in their current workplaces or work situations. Two thirds had moved to work in, or create more equitable organisations or were self-employed.

### Men’s perspectives on #WomenEd

5% of the online survey participants identified as men. 11 had *not* experienced discrimination. Five had experienced discrimination relating to age (n=2) (40s and 60s); sexual orientation (gay) (n=2); combination of age (50s) and sex (n=1).

12 males were aware of discrimination regarding:

- pregnancy and maternity - (n=2)
- age, pregnancy and maternity and sex - (n=1)

- age, disability, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation - (n=1)
- age and pregnancy and maternity - (n=1)
- pregnancy and maternity and sex - (n=1)
- age and sex - (n=1)
- race and sex - (n=1)
- disability and pregnancy and maternity - (n=1)
- age, disability, sex and sexual orientation - (n=1)
- sex and sexual orientation - (n=1)
- age - (n=1)

Almost all of these men specifically recognised gender inequalities. They referred to:

‘Not being given options for flexible working after birth of a child’ (survey response – male senior leader (teaching)).

‘Marginalizing of pregnant colleague’ (survey response- male senior leader (APM)).

‘Comments made about women in leadership by men’ (survey response – male APM/support staff).

### Why did men think a network for educational leaders was needed?

Interview participants responded to the same questions as women about what attracted them to the network, how they became involved, why they thought it was important.

### What attracted men to #WomenEd?

Most of these seven men already had awareness of women’s issues and gender inequalities because of their:

- identification as a feminist,
- having experienced positive gender discrimination as a male principal in an elementary school setting (North America),
- understanding that women do not get the recognition they should through promotion to the superintendency (North America),
- awareness of the disparity of opportunities for women’s leadership development and pay,
- previous work educating girls such as working in a girls’ school,
- wife’s experience of discrimination as a headteacher taking maternity leave and as a working mother.

They were also attracted to the values led approach that resonated with their:

- sense of service to the community in trying to educate for a better society,
- commitment to equality of opportunity,
- value of collaboration in the workplace,
- support of #WomenEd values and ideals.

Two referred to their abhorrence of the negative comments on Twitter as a reason to become engaged positively. One had already engaged with other women’s campaigns (see Feminism and Activism below).

### How did men become involved?

These men became involved either because they met members of the steering group in person (4) or engaged on Twitter (2). One had been invited to a regional launch due to his research interest; he was the only man present and happy to become a #HeForShe advocate.

### Why do you think #WomenEd is important?

Most of these men focused on balancing the representation of the sexes (and in some cases the ethnicity) in senior leadership in education. Their focus was on inclusivity in the profession and in the network.

Four men thought the network was important in terms of voices, activism and empowerment. One thought strong women role models were important for children. One man described the subtle nature of patriarchy working through the system despite the dominance of women in the teaching profession and increasing numbers of women principals in his region. Women's career success did not automatically dismantle the patriarchy. He went on to argue that men needed to examine the practices that might perpetuate gender inequalities for women and children. Along with two others he saw the importance of the network in terms of raising consciousness.

One man related his experience as a BME leader to his understanding of marginalisation. Another thought developing a network was about a human desire to make connections.

### What is its core purpose?

Like half the women, all of the men thought the core purpose of #WomenEd was to provide mutual support to change circumstances for individuals or more broadly by challenging the status quo. This was connected to providing opportunities for CPD through peer to peer mentoring, coaching and guiding, championing and sharing stories of women's achievements and removing barriers of sexism to empower women further. Challenging the status quo was about not letting the patriarchy limit women's achievements and went further for one man who described the complexity of intersecting oppressive structures in terms of what Schüssler Fiorenza (1992, p. 114) calls the 'kyriarchy' of an 'interlocking, multiplicative, and overarching system' of oppression.

### How does it aim to achieve that?

Most of the men thought #WomenEd would achieve its purpose through communication. This was about sharing celebratory stories of success that demonstrated how women had overcome barriers, and about dialogue that raised consciousness by sharing knowledge, posing questions and challenging men to look within their own practice. Three men thought this could be done through a combination of social media and face-to-face events. One thought it could be achieved by way of peer-to-peer mentoring.

### How did social media facilitate network growth?

Most participants said the role of social media was in connecting likeminded people who might be close geographically or across huge distances within the same country or internationally. Connections were made across the institutional boundaries of multi-academy trusts and teaching school alliances as well as phases and sectors of education. Making connections reduced isolation for some of these men as well as women.

Three said social media enabled dialogue and with likeminded people but for one man it also enabled thought provoking exchanges about the issues. Posts needed to be systematic and frequent.

Three said it also had a publicity function in 'shin[ing] a light' (system leader B) to make events and information accessible.

Two men thought some of the comments and attitudes to #WomenEd in social media had been 'ridiculous' (system leader C). It could be supportive or disruptive.

One man thought social media had a huge role and went on to talk about EduTwitter more generally. One described how much better connected he was than he would be if he relied on his institution for connections.

## #WomenEd's achievements

### What has been particularly successful?

Most men associated #WomenEd's successes with at least one aspect of the network's values:

- Connection (4)
- Communication (4)
- Confidence (1)
- Challenge (1)

They commented on the success of growing a followership on Twitter, the benefits for women connecting with strong role models and the value of the connection in showing how things might be done differently.

The communication was successful in conveying a positive message, sustaining dialogue, setting a target for followers at the launch of a regional network and in curating a valuable #digimeet.

One man said there was a visible difference in his perception of women staff members' confidence since they had engaged with #WomenEd.

Another focused on the challenge to his construction of norms in educational leadership. He had checked the gender pay gap in the school to find the disproportionate number of women working in the lowest paid jobs as midday assistants and cleaners. However, women were also well-represented in the highest paid jobs in his school. #WomenEd's success had been in making 'people like me think'.

### What difference has #WomenEd made to your professional career?

For most of the men, the difference #WomenEd had made to professional careers lay in actions for others rather than work opportunities for oneself, emotions and learning. However, there was some evidence of men looking at their leadership in education differently as a result.

Actions taken for the benefit of others attributed to engaging with #WomenEd included:

- Reflecting on leadership practice as a result of reading blogs and posts,
- Auditing the organisation from a staff equalities perspective not just from the learners' perspective,
- Exploring possibilities for providing flexible working arrangements for those who needed them,
- Developing stronger conversations with women in the organisation (both younger and older)
- Signposting people to information,
- Developing a local network,

- Being empowered by hearing first-hand accounts to champion women,
- Challenging other men's attitudes (particularly online).

For two men, the network had raised their consciousness about challenges facing women. For another, it 'tweaked' his consciousness (education consultant F) and a fourth was already attuned to the issues.

There had been opportunities for one man to expand his personal learning network by 'seed[ing]' relationships across the country that was important in his current role, and in empowering him to take charge of his destiny (system leader B). He described the difference as significant.

Another had received personal support from members of #WomenEd for making job applications and interview technique. They had a 'massive influence on my career' (middle leader F).

## The nature of engagement

### Feminism and activism

Three men self-identified as feminists, three were aligned to feminism but were cautious about using the term and one did not identify as a feminist though he shared a commitment to promoting equality, diversity and inclusion in his work. Similarly, three men identified unhesitatingly as activist, three made clear the boundaries of their activism and one was mindful that his media profile gave him a responsibility to speak up about a variety of matters relating to education.

### The future

#### What remains to be done?

These men made comments about the focus, sustainability and women's equal (or proportionate) representation in leadership.

The focus should be on:

- three career points as leadership, career entry, and developing family commitments (maternity),
- working on women's biases and support as well as men's,
- a constant social media message, and
- Replacing the patriarchy with a focus on social mobility, parity and liberation.

In terms of sustainability they spoke about the necessity of the network rather than the means of sustaining it. Three men said the work would never be complete. One added that the remit was about changing society not just schools but that you might change society by changing schools.

Three spoke about achieving full parity of representation in senior levels of leadership in education and/or politics.

#### What do you hope it will achieve in the future? For you? For others?

Men's hopes for #WomenEd in the future were focused on continued learning for themselves and others, and changed approaches to leadership.

It was hoped their learning would continue (3) so they could consider the view of a high proportion of professionals and experience the discomfort of being the only man in the room to understand the experiences of many women. One man wanted everyone to learn to work for gender parity; another hoped women would pair up to provide peer mentoring.



Hoped for changes to leadership related to greater parity between the sexes not just in statistical terms but in terms of opportunities (3). One man had introduced blind short listing of job applications as a result of engaging with #WomenEd and learning how bias works. Two thought teaching and school leadership needed to be more family friendly.

One man hoped women would be encouraged to take on leadership roles.

### Further research

Men suggested specific focuses for research such as gendered career paths, personal barriers to advancement, the gendered messages conveyed to children, and the reach of the network via social media.

Three wanted evidence of impact in terms of stories or case studies as well as something 'tangible' or 'hard data' (headteacher C). There was a desire to 'distil' what #WomenEd did and to find an 'elixir' (system leader B).

### Further comments about #WomenEd?

Three men further commented on how the network made them feel i.e. 'honoured to be welcomed' (system leader B). #WomenEd was 'one of the most positive things on EduTwitter' (senior leader F).

## 5. Summary and Conclusions

In the context of a global resurgence of interest in gender inequalities, the ubiquity of misogyny, and ambivalent attitudes towards sexual violence, women have spoken up in social media spaces about their experiences in diverse workplaces including the teaching profession. Discriminatory behaviours in the workplace are one aspect of multilevel barriers to women's career continuance and advancement.

Since 2015, #WomenEd has been a social media based network connecting women in educational leadership. This paper reported an exploration of the international network's development in its first two years. The main focuses were on 1) why such a network was needed and 2) how social media facilitated its development.

### Why #WomenEd is needed

This sequential multi stage project that undertook 45 telephone interviews and an online survey completed by 356 participants found the #WomenEd network was needed because gender inequalities persist in education systems and wider societies worldwide. The international response provides evidence of the geographical scale of its need.

Network members were already aware of gender inequalities because they experienced or witnessed them. Some had studied or taught women's and gender issues and feminist theory relating to educational leadership and fields such as sociolinguistics and English literature. Many women already engaged in work around gender in education.

The network's major attraction was the ideas, values and passion it conveyed. For women, this sat alongside the reciprocal opportunities to share and listen to women's experiences and to seek and provide support and advice for completion of their daily work as well as career advancement. Thus it supplied both expressive and instrumental benefits (Ibarra 1993 cited in Coleman 2010). Indeed, the expressive became instrumental: stories of success and failure informed and inspired women.

There was a consciousness raising element to what #WomenEd were doing. Approximately three quarters of survey participants confirmed the network provided information about multilevel barriers to women's career advancement. However, solutions were discussed

positively. Women were not victims. They were inspired and energised by #WomenEd. The values of clarity, communication, connection, community, confidence, collaboration, challenge and change reiterated a positive message. In interview responses, women used the language of inspiration; in the survey they told us what they were inspired to do by engaging with #WomenEd.

Making connections with likeminded people, using voices and engaging in activism to break down barriers, however they might be experienced, for the empowerment of women and a range of marginalised groups were important features. So the core purpose was providing support to change circumstances at multiple levels for individuals, and to challenge the status quo in organisations, education systems and society. This could be achieved by engaging in a combination of social media and face-to-face activities through regional networks. Professional development opportunities were provided at events through a range of workshops or as distance coaching and mentoring. Thus, communication and connection were particular successes.

Within its first two years #WomenEd had already made a difference with respect to actions undertaken by members for the benefit of others and in creating work-related opportunities for women.

In the section below we present key findings in relation to the issues identified earlier and re-ordered here to reflect how participants saw their importance:

1. women's leadership approaches (including their activist professionalism);
2. enablers to women's advancement;
3. barriers to women's advancement including discrimination; and
4. women's underrepresentation in educational leadership.

### Women's leadership approaches

This research makes clear that #WomenEd focuses on how leadership is done as much as, or more than, on who leads in education. Almost three quarters of survey participants said #WomenEd provided a vision for education that values equity alongside excellence and stories and images of leadership that show leadership does not have to be white, male and heterosexual.

The network, and the leadership it advocates, is values oriented. Despite some reluctance to be seen as activists by some of its members, the #WomenEd values and responses of research participants demonstrate it adheres to the principles and practices of activist professionalism outlined by Sachs (2003). It is an inclusive network that believes in collaboration. It is successful in its clear communication of the issues and its values. It recognises and draws on the expertise of members, not least by using #Teachmeets, #Leadmeets and #Digimeets and Unconferences, at which speakers and workshop leaders are also delegates. It has created a safe space in which women can express themselves and continue to learn. The #WomenEd community responds to members' interests, needs and concerns at events and on social media to enable an ongoing dialogue with whoever chooses to join. There is passion in the engagement and members find the network and its activities pleasurable and fun.

Because of its sense of social injustices with respect to gender, race and sexuality (see #BAMEed and #LGBTed) it includes women's and marginalised group issues in how it frames leadership in education for social justice (Grogan and Shakeshaft 2011). It encourages challenge and change at multiple levels including of, and for, self, organisations, systems (including by challenging the Department for Education) and dominant discourses

of leadership. Almost a quarter of survey participants had changed their practice to educate for equality, diversity and social justice in the first two years of #WomenEd.

Its inclusion of people from all phases (pre-school to higher, adult and community) and sectors (state funded and fee-paying) in education, all genders, ages, stages of career and volunteers, races, ethnicities and nationalities, sexual orientations, relationship and parenthood statuses, abilities and faiths, and its increasing international reach ensures #WomenEd recognises leadership is practised in different contexts by different people; it is multidimensional and multidirectional (Blackmore 1989). Nicholls (2019) argues leadership is a transferable skill. That may be so, if as Browne (2019) suggests, leaders are attuned to the context in which they lead, that they listen to colleagues, students, parents and the wider communities they serve. There was a strong sense of leadership for the empowerment of self, colleagues, students and communities (Blackmore 1989).

The men in this research had certainly learned something new from listening to #WomenEd voices, or else they were reminded of structural inequalities in education and society (Hildrew 2019). The focus on continued professional development, leadership of and for learning (Grogan and Shakeshaft 2011) meant members taught, supported and challenged one another to think deeply about what, where and why they do what they do.

This was done with a sense of passion and hope (Grogan and Shakeshaft 2011). There was expression of emotions of frustration, exasperation and fury but the energy was harnessed to speak up, speak back, change things or move on (see discussion of discrimination below).

Members valued the lack of hierarchy that social media enabled. Connections could be made with likeminded, experienced and high-profile leaders in education as easily and quickly as with anyone else. At events, there was no sense of who was a newly qualified teacher, executive headteacher or academic. They were sitting next to one another, learning and sharing stories. Horizontal relationships were being created (Grogan and Shakeshaft 2011).

Finally, the network began with a focus on balancing home and work lives (Grogan and Shakeshaft 2011). Talking openly about family, care and community responsibilities ensures these relationships inform leadership in education.

### Enablers to women's advancement

Interviewees were already aware of gender inequalities and it may be that survey participants were too. But over half said #WomenEd had challenged them to reflect more deeply on gender and other inequalities in society. Just under half had questioned systemic inequalities in education (for staff and learners).

The instrumental component of #WomenEd was marked by its reciprocity. Members provided and sought expertise, advice and support. Experiential and practical knowledge was valued alongside research-based knowledge produced by academics. Almost three quarters of survey participants said #WomenEd provided opportunities for mentoring, coaching and/or networking beyond their organisation. Over 60% said it provided ideas about how women and men can support and encourage women to lead in education, and a model of leadership that values flexibility (e.g. job shares, flexible working practices).

Effectively #WomenEd created opportunities for the kind of strategies that might enable women's access to more senior leadership posts in education (Shakeshaft 1987). Ambition Institute was working with #WomenEd and the Leading Women's Alliance to provide for a women-only cohort taking the National Professional Qualification for Headship.

### Barriers to women's advancement including discrimination

Discriminatory practices persist in education. Accounts of how these women constructed and handled them reveal overt and covert discrimination, and illegal practices against equalities legislation in particular countries. It should be noted, for example, that in an international school, registered in the UK, local country legislation designed to promote equality, diversity and inclusion was flouted. In the main, these examples reveal everyday 'deep-seated and profound discrimination' (Coleman 2002 p. 12). Women saw individual acts of discrimination as symptomatic of organisational and societal cultures. In some cases, women were clearly working in the wrong organisation. The fit was wrong (Berry 2019). It was right to move on.

Empowerment is never consistent or complete. Participants understood there are always injustices to address. This research reveals some women remain fearful of speaking up about discriminatory behaviour, with respect to sexual orientation in particular. Others were fully aware that speaking up about their grievances resulted in further stigmatisation in their organisations.

### Women's underrepresentation in educational leadership

Concern about women's underrepresentation in senior educational leadership as a reason for #WomenEd's existence and success was less prevalent than might be expected. Under half the women interviewed identified its core purpose as establishing equality. For some, that was qualified as recognition of achievements not necessarily about the achievement of formal leadership posts. There was an interest in accessing and providing continuing professional development opportunities including coaching, mentoring and networking beyond their organisations (three quarters of survey participants said #WomenEd provided that) but it was not necessarily solely for the purpose of gaining promotion. Women were encouraged to progress in their careers as it suited them, or not. Aspiration related to job and career satisfaction rather than the achievement of formal senior leadership posts.

Women's concerns about underrepresentation came through more strongly from the women interviewed about discrimination. It was symptomatic of discriminatory practices occurring in male-dominated organisations and seen as self-perpetuating.

By contrast, most of the men identified balancing the representation of the sexes in senior leadership as a reason why #WomenEd was important. This might suggest some men have a narrow sense of the network's value and how women see their careers. This was a very small sample so this finding should be viewed with caution. It raises questions for further research.

### The role of social media

Social media provided the birthplace for #WomenEd. Various platforms have been used with Twitter and the microblogging site @staffrm used most prolifically. It has enabled connections that crossed boundaries: organisational, phase, sector, regional and national. It provided access to professional development and reduced isolation (Carpenter and Krutka 2014). It was a means of raising consciousness and was used to facilitate and publicise events. Members blogged and engaged in dialogue (Carpenter and Krutka 2014). Social media engagement worked in tandem with face-to-face events. Relationships deepened in the physical space so that online and offline activity became inseparable (Zimmerman 2017).

Whilst social media provided a useful tool of communication, its use was also problematic. Women recounted examples of online abuse. The solution was to switch platforms. Yammer provided a safer space to re-group and rehearse the articulation of their arguments.

A challenge for #WomenEd and its sustainability is about how to engage non-social media users in its activities. See Fuller and Berry (in preparation) for further discussion.

#### d. Conclusions

We conclude this research report by addressing our original questions: Why was a network for educational leaders needed? How did social media facilitate network growth?

##### Why the network?

- the network connected with, and therefore resonated with, women's prior experience of gender inequality in education.
- those who engaged with the network generally shared the vision and values it espoused and were committed to raising awareness and promoting equity, linked to a desire for positive change.
- #WomenEd was seen as an opportunity for all involved both to contribute to, and to benefit from, collaboration with others and mutual support.

##### Why social media?

- A powerful combination of online and face-to-face communication has built a safe community where positive relationships can be developed and strengthened, and the regional and international networks are an important part of this.
- Social media provides a channel and a mechanism for amplifying the voices and sharing stories and support (both practical and emotional) more widely - now within an international landscape.
- Building a personal and professional online learning community has enabled #WomenEd contributors to take control and to direct their own development, supplemented and reinforced by face-to-face contact, with men and women supporters.

It has also filled the need for networking that had broken down with the reduction in the work and influence of local authorities and the trend for teachers to work longer days making it difficult to attend after school meetings. It has done away with geographical boundaries.

However, we do need to recognise the importance of #WomenEd reaching beyond social media if it is to fulfil its potential as a force for positive change in gender equity, given the relatively small proportion of educators who engage with Twitter and blogs.

It is hoped that the continuing drive to build further links within the UK and beyond in order to amplify the message and reach more women, and girls (whose future we are investing in) and educate men and boys so that the professional capacity women have is fully utilised for the sake of education everywhere.

#### e. Recommendations for Further Investigation

Twenty-six interviewees were asked what needed to be researched. Their ideas informed the design of the further research stages. However, some avenues remain open for further investigation.

For example, further research is needed into particular aspects of continued inequalities for those who work in and with schools. There were few accounts of the intersections between gender and disability. Men's voices about gender and other inequalities need to be heard

strongly too. Research into the continuing connections between local, regional, national and international groups is needed.

Another important avenue for research is the very clear focus on new ways of leading in education underpinned by values such as those articulated by #WomenEd as 8Cs: clarity, communication, connection, confidence, collaboration, community, challenge and change. The level of social media interest, combined with face-to-face activities, provides much evidence of a desire to lead differently with a focus on equality, diversity and inclusion.

Finally, we hope this research is useful to educators, leaders and researchers interested in professional networks that focus on issues relating to equality, diversity and inclusion. We hope it will encourage activist professionals to use research to improve practice in a wide range of educational settings for the benefit of staff and students alike.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1

#### INTERVIEW SCHEDULE – Stage 1 semi-structured telephone interviews

#WomenEd: A movement for women leaders and aspiring leaders in education

1. Can you begin by introducing yourself?
2. Tell us what attracted you to the idea of #WomenEd. How did you become involved?
3. Why do you think #WomenEd is important?
4. What do you see as its core purpose?
5. How does it aim to achieve that?
6. What role does social media play?
7. What has been particularly successful?
8. What remains to be done?
9. What difference has #WomenEd made to your professional career?
10. What do you hope it will achieve in the future? For you? For others?
  
11. Do you see yourself as a feminist? If so, say more about your relationship with feminism. If not, say why not.
12. Do you see yourself as an activist? If so, say more about your relationship with professional and social activism. If not, say why not.
  
13. What aspects of #WomenEd should be researched further?
14. Do you have anything else you would like to say about #WomenEd?

NB: This schedule was used for the Stage 4 follow up interviews with men

## Appendix 2

### ONLINE SURVEY – Stage 2



On line survey.pdf

## Appendix 3

### INTERVIEW SCHEDULE – Stage 4 semi-structured telephone interviews about discrimination

#WomenEd: A movement for women leaders and aspiring leaders in education

1. Please briefly introduce yourself including your involvement in education.
2. How do you define discrimination?
3. Since 2010, what discrimination have you experienced in the workplace (education)?
4. How did you handle it?
5. Since 2010, what sort of discrimination have you witnessed or become aware of in the workplace (education)?
6. Were you able to take any action?
7. Is there anything else you would like to say about this?

The interviewer used the survey data to prompt the participant's recollection of experiences of discrimination

## Appendix 4

### Examples of women speaking up and speaking back to challenge discrimination.

#### 1. Speaking back to racial discrimination and questioning additional work

The woman whose ethnic identity was questioned at interview spoke back to the interviewer and refused the job offer,

'So I kind of gave him a bit of a mouthful and then said I wouldn't... you know. He'd said that he was very impressed and that he would offer me the job and I said I wouldn't work at the school at all, absolutely not. But it's those sorts of nuances, those kinds of references that makes you think that. There are opportunities that perhaps you aren't given because of your background or possibly because you are a certain way. In that situation it was because of my ethnicity, you know, he wasn't talking about the schools that I'd come from. He was specifically talking about, given the catchment of the children there' (senior leader A).

She also questioned the expectation of additional work to her job description after an internal promotion,

'So when I was promoted to the extended leadership team, I also had another post with that too, and it was leading careers and parts of the SMSC [spiritual, moral, social and cultural development] agenda and at that time when I took

that role on, it wasn't something that I was able to sustain doing. So I said, "Look. The job description says this. I didn't expect this bit to be on the job description. Is this right? This is not what I expected. This is not what I was told when [I] was promoted." They said, "No. Absolutely. This is part of your role." So I arranged a meeting with the headteacher to discuss it. She wasn't able to meet me and so what I did is, perhaps I should have spoken to her, but I did send her an email to say, "Thank you for the opportunity, however I can't pursue this role because I've been told that this extra bit of the role is still added on and I can't do both. Can we discuss this?" She then replied and said, "That's absolutely fine", but the tone of the email was very much, "You should be grateful for what you were given. This is part of the role and we will be looking at your timetable to put you down as a form tutor", a form tutor which I haven't been probably for about seven years. None of the middle managers were form tutors' (senior leader A).

Adding the form tutor role was punitive and when someone else was appointed to the role she had relinquished, the additional work was left off.

On two further occasions she questioned the internal promotion processes. The line manager, an assistant headteacher, was unaware of the process too. The conclusion was that a headteacher could 'still push things through if they wish to' particularly when someone's 'face fits',

'I think her face did fit in that position. She was white. She was well-spoken. She came from a Teach First background. I think those things mattered to the headteacher an awful lot' (senior leader A).

However, once she had challenged matters,

'you're seen as a little bit of a, "Well why are you asking? Who are you to ask?" Luckily for me I'm in a position, I'm in a senior leadership team position, I was able to ask that' (senior leader A).

In general, she thought speaking up was 'to [her] detriment' (senior leader A) but hoped opening up dialogue in the #WomenEd and #BameEd networks would raise consciousness to enable critical conversations to take place in the workplace.

## 2. Illegal interview questions

One woman was asked about her age as 'the elephant in the room' (middle leader E) at interview. Afterwards she pointed out the illegality of the question to the school principal who,

'was aware of that but didn't know what to do when it was asked. I told him he is responsible for what takes place in interview as he is the Principal, and he should have intervened' (middle leader E).

## 3. Keep rocking that boat

Another woman discovered her references for a new job were negative so repeatedly asked to see them, she 'had to keep rocking that boat' (senior leader C).

She also questioned discriminatory comments about a working mother candidate for a part time job,

'The job was advertised to be part-time and the conversation went along the lines of that they may not be as reliable as other people. [...] I was able to raise my

concern that actually as a mum myself and the second earner, that didn't feel that that was okay, but I was told that I was unusual [...] In that I broke the stereotype but this person on interview did not' (senior leader C).

The other woman on the interview panel said nothing. This was not an unusual occurrence,

'at leadership meetings there would have been other discussions as to who should be internally promoted and again women of a certain age were discussed as it would be a risky appointment because they would be going on maternity leave at some stage' (senior leader C).

The headteacher believed women Newly Qualified Teachers would get married and their careers would become secondary to their spouse's.

#### 4. Interview feedback

Having been unsuccessful in a number of applications for posts in her institution, one woman approached Human Resources for advice,

'The last time that it happen[ed] (in December 2017), I went to HR in the university that I work for to explain the situation. They listened and we agreed that next time there is a vacancy in the department that I am hoping to work, I will apply and if I do not get an interview but meet the criteria, I will speak to them again to see why this might be. I previously asked to see the shortlisting list and why I was not selected as I have experience of short listing for such posts, and should have been shortlisted' (middle leader D).

She thought older women, over 50s, were being pushed out of mainstream careers and into self-employed consultancy work. The media reported about women,

'they have never had it so good. They also say that they are starting their own businesses and retraining to deliver niche support to others or sell unusual goods. This is not just a positive trend. It has become a necessity as women are being pushed out of mainstream careers that they have undertaken for 20 to 30 years. This again is also happening to men and it is sad to see such talents and experiences go to waste' (middle leader D).

#### 5. Reporting discrimination to male colleagues

A STEM teacher gave three examples of reporting sexist behaviours. She repeatedly reminded her Head of Department his support for her in class undermined her authority with boys. She reported a male teacher's sexualised response to a request to show his lanyard. The deputy headteacher thought it funny but,

'he obviously saw my face, came back the next day and said, "I didn't realise... I didn't even hear what you said. So I didn't understand what you meant." So I have brought up things in the past and they don't get it, but I don't think they do it maliciously. They just don't relate to it and don't understand it. I went back to that member of staff I said about the lanyard, and I did it very quietly, and I explained. I said, "It's hard enough being a woman SLT without jokes, sexual innuendo jokes", and he apologised and said, "I didn't really mean it", and all that kind of side to it, but still the fact that you have to then go follow up' (middle leader A).

## 6. Reporting student responses

One woman working in an independent school was clear about students' perpetuation of gender inequality,

'I think when a student got worried about me being overly harsh with setting deadlines and homework and being firm with students, I did take that to my Head of Department and said, "I think if I weren't a woman, I wouldn't be having this conversation with you about this", and I found it unfair and I saw that there was a real double-standard there and that some of the male teachers could have this booming presence and be quite scary, but then as soon as a woman tries to effect some sort of firm and high expectations, the students then complain' (middle leader C).

She encouraged girls to object to being told to cover their shoulders for fear boys might lose control.

## 7. Picking battles about 'banter'

Boardroom banter about one woman's love life meant she 'had to kind of pick [her] battles as well, otherwise it was [her] isolating [her]self more and more about being the only person challenging some things that really weren't good enough' (system leader A).

There were,

'inappropriate throw-away comments from men about women, about what they wear, what they look like. Like females on interview at the school [...] just that kind of misogynistic behaviour which I don't tolerate in my personal or my professional life, but again when you're the only female in a boardroom and it's happening quite consistently, you do call it out but it does become quite exasperating, quite exhausting, to be constantly sucked into things and my head knew that it wound me up and he would quite often shut things down, but then I felt like it was like stuff that was talked about in front of me and stuff that wasn't talked about in front of me and it became a bit of a boys' club' (system leader A).

The 'blur between the professional and personal' in workplace socialising meant,

'I was the youngest female middle leader and then senior leader and I was the custodian of the values and the ethics in the building was how I saw it and I was dealing with a very young female English Department who'd got themselves into stupid situations every weekend with senior members of male staff and I was going into my Headteacher and call them out on it and he was promoting them not knowing the kind of crap they were getting up to. So I just think that kind of culture piece about what's tolerated and what's not tolerated and the double-standards about the influence we had for child behaviour and the tolerance we had for adult behaviour in the building' (system leader A).

Calling things out drained the energy.

## 8. Correcting the situation

By contrast, one woman was increasingly frustrated by being called 'junior SLT' (senior leader E). She told her colleague and it immediately ceased. He ensured others stopped too.

## 9. Conversations with compassion

One woman was tired of the assumptions others made of her when she called out sexist behaviours in an organisation where she was out as a lesbian,



'I'm very aware that any commentary I make around things that I might perceive as, or I might read, that I think are sexist, I've been aware of a, "Yeah. Well you would say that wouldn't you?", because there's a perception of me as a gay woman that of course I'm feminist, of course I'm bra burning and at the extreme' (middle leader B).

Nevertheless, she tried to work out how to have conversations,

'Because it goes all the way back to how do you challenge? How do you challenge the small things in a compassionate way because, like I say, I'm not adversarial and I'm absolutely sure that many things that I've experienced, many of us have experienced, is completely unintentional and unthinking and ignorant in the softest definition of the implications of the [discrimination] and the effects of using a word here or some terminology there' (middle leader B).

#### 10. Fighting her own battles

A supply/substitute teacher, who was an immigrant, refused to undertake his duties and persuaded other staff to do them,

'So I just thought, "Well maybe he didn't understand what I said." I said, "Do you need me to clarify?", and he said, "No. I don't take orders from the secretary." And I said, "Well I'm not the secretary. I'm the Vice Principal" (senior leader D).

Her principal offered to sort it out saying,

"You know what? I think it's cultural and if you want, I'll go and I'll talk to him and that should do it", and I said, "No. You know what? That can't work either. You're not going to fight my battle here" (senior leader D).

On some occasions she might ignore 'banter'. For example, having been dubbed a 'princess' by colleagues in the past it was too late to rectify it (senior leader D).

#### 11. Resisting 'Big Brother'

Having established male colleagues agreed no-one should work on site one Saturday due to family reasons, the men failed to support one woman publicly when she confronted the issue. She resisted the headteacher on a number of occasions,

'I thought, "I've got no fight left", because I was fighting a lot for the staff because he wanted me to be all 'Big Brother' because I was responsible for teaching and learning at this school in special measures. So he wanted me to be all 'Big Brother' but I'd introduced a coaching culture and I was like "that goes against the grain of the values that I'm bringing into the school. I'm not doing it". So I was constantly at loggerheads with him and I was constantly trying to protect the staff because a few days after Ofsted he said, "Right. We're going to have a Mocksted next week", and I'm like, "No!" [Laughing] "You're going to run them into the ground. You'll run everyone into the ground" (education consultant C).

Budget constraints led to older, experienced and more expensive staff having their competency questioned. Subjected to additional scrutiny and offered 'extra support' (education consultant C), older teachers responded by moving on before the capability process began. Nevertheless, their careers were damaged. This happened to her husband and another colleague.



Her last fight was for a risk assessment before going on maternity leave because she did not want a culture established of not doing them. The headteacher questioned whether they were done any more,

‘two days before I went on mat[ernity] leave, he finally sat me down and did my risk assessment and a lot of the questions basically showed that I was not looked after at all. It really showed. I didn’t have a decent chair. My classrooms were still upstairs [both laughing]. It was such a vast difference from my first pregnancy where they got rid of a couple of my duties, they let me go home a little bit early. They didn’t let me, even though I wanted to, they didn’t let me do evening meetings, you know, they really looked after me in my first pregnancy in my old job. In this job I had to keep pushing for things and I kept going off sick ‘cause I was wrecked. I was just stressed’ (education consultant C).

## 12. Re-focusing on the professional

A woman leading in an international school selected from a repertoire of responses that included using humour, calling people out for discrimination and re-focusing conversations on the professional topic. Sometimes she used all three,

‘I have to carefully judge how I respond to that. So sometimes I’ll respond by humour. Sometimes I do call people on it and sometimes I have to push quite hard to get the relationship back on to a professional level [...] which would obviously be the strategic leadership of the school or whatever...’ (headteacher B).

She encouraged students to debate gender and wider diversity issues as they saw them in the school.