

Women in Leadership in West Midlands' Multi Academy Trusts - Preliminary Report

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Overview

This research explores the gendered nature of educational leadership in schools that have freedoms to alter working practices to meet the needs of women in order to promote their progression into leadership positions. Specifically it looks at;

- the gendered construction of Multi Academy Trust (MAT) Boards in the West Midlands
- the gender split of MAT CEOs in the West Midlands

This paper provides a high level synthesis of the research findings to date. At this stage the research presents the demographic data of leaders in large MATs (5 schools or more). It does not explore the demographic in all MATs in the region, which will be reported in a subsequent iteration of this paper. Nor does it explore potential reasons underpinning the data. Future research parameters are outlined at the end of the paper.

Key Findings

Key findings indicate that the gender balance of female CEOs in MATs is not representative of females in the teaching workforce. Further there is a significant gender imbalance on MAT Boards. These gender imbalances reflect gender imbalances in the broader schools sector despite the fact that MATs have freedoms that would enable them to address these gender imbalances at Board and CEO level if they so chose.

The gendered nature of school leadership

Teaching is a gendered profession. In 2015, 64% of secondary classroom teachers were women (rising to 90% in primary schools) but only 40% of headteachers were (DfE 2015). At primary school, where men make up just over 10% of teachers, approximately 30% of headteachers are

male. If headships reflected the workforce then 74% of heads would be female and there would be 1,739 more female heads. If nothing changes women's representation in senior leadership will not match their representation in the teaching workforce before 2040 (Future Leaders Trust 2018).

Clearly, progression to leadership positions does not reflect the demographic profile of people joining the profession and working as classroom teachers. Research indicates that there are many barriers including discriminatory attitudes from governors who may expect to employ a middle-aged man, self-deselection because of confidence or the perception of what leaders do and self-deselection because of family and caring responsibilities. The latter particularly can mean women present later in their careers for leadership positions (where they may then not meet governors expectations of a senior leader).

Multi Academy Trusts

Greater autonomy for schools has been a keystone of education policy. Giving school leaders greater control over what and how they teach in the curriculum, staffing and funding has been seen by successive governments as a means of driving up standards and raising aspirations. The policy is informed by evidence of the benefits of greater autonomy in places such as Canada, Hong Kong, Singapore, Sweden and 'Charter Schools' in the USA. This control is passed from state to school when the school becomes an 'academy'. An academy is a school directly funded by the state. Schools are called academies but other schools also fall within the broader academy context such as free schools (set up by parents, teachers or others in response to demand from the local community), studio schools (for 14–19 year-olds focusing on learning through enterprise projects and real work) and university technical colleges (14-19 academies specialising in technical subjects).

The first academies opened in 2003 and prior to September 2010 there were only 203 open academies in England, making up about 6.5% of all secondary schools. The 2010 Education White Paper (DfE 2010) offered all schools the freedom to become an academy either by allowing the better schools to convert directly to academy status or by allowing poorly performing schools to join academy federations or chains, known as 'Multi Academy Trusts' (MATs). A MAT can have one or many schools. Academies are companies registered at Companies House. They are governed through articles of association. The relationship between the trust and the secretary of state for education is set out in a legal document known as the funding agreement. ‘

The freedoms that academies have include the freedom to set their own priorities for the academy, the ability to change the length of terms and school days, freedoms around delivery of the curriculum and the ability to set pay and conditions for staff.

MATs must have 'Members' who are akin to the shareholders of a company. They have ultimate control over the academy trust, with the ability to appoint some of the trustees and the right to

amend the trust's articles of association. MATs also have 'Trustees' who are responsible setting the direction of the MAT, holding officers of the MAT to account and ensuring financial probity. Trustees' are company directors and must comply with company law requirements. They are registered individually at Companies House. As charity trustees, they must also ensure that they are complying with charity law requirements.

Having an effective board of trustees is crucial to a MAT. Trustees have a strong impact on how a MAT operates, makes decisions, and ultimately, on its success. Therefore, bringing in a variety of perspectives, backgrounds, and experiences can be key to a MAT's success. One way to bring in these diverse perspectives is through gender diversity on the board.

Inclusive and diverse boards are more likely to be effective boards, better able to understand their customers and stakeholders and to benefit from fresh perspectives, new ideas, vigorous challenge and broad experience. This in turn leads to better decision-making. Lord Mervyn Davies, 2011 (in Sealy 2017)

Each academy trust is required to have a Chief Executive Officer (CEO). The CEO is the senior 'visible' leader in a Trust. According to *Ambition School Leadership* (2018) CEOs are thinkers and strategists, guardians of the flame, instructional leaders, leadership developers, orchestrators of partnership depth, quality assurers, business developers, communicators within the MAT, ambassadors for the MAT and the corporate executive.

In England there are currently 3,297 Trusts. 184 are registered in the West Midlands. Of these;

28 are registered but have no schools registered against them (empty trusts)

74 are registered as single trusts (with only one school)

82 are registered as MATs.

Of the 82 MAT's registered, 17 currently have only one school. This leaves 65 MAT's which have multiple schools. These have been used as the dataset for this research.

Methodology

Data were gathered from public records held at Companies House on MATs whose registered office used a postcode from one of the following local authority areas and who had schools operating in those areas; Walsall, Wolverhampton, Dudley, Sandwell, Birmingham, Coventry and Solihull.

The Companies House online portal allows for the retrieval of information about limited companies (and other companies that fall within the Companies Act 2006). This data returned is live and real-time. Data was checked against MAT websites for accuracy.

Findings

Analysis undertaken so far is in relation to those large MAT's who have 5 or more academies in their portfolio. This comprises 19 MATs within the West Midlands. Diagram 1 shows clearly that the percentage of male CEO's at 68% is significantly greater than the percentage of and female CEO's at 32%.

Diagram 1: Percentage of Male and Female CEO's in large MATs (n = 19 MAT's with 5 +schools)

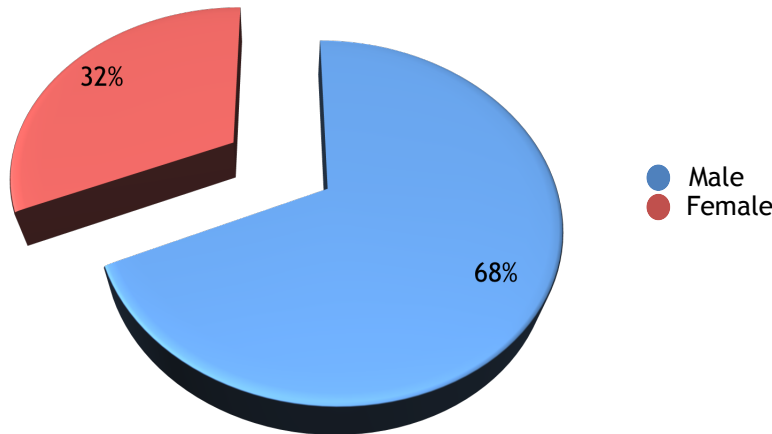
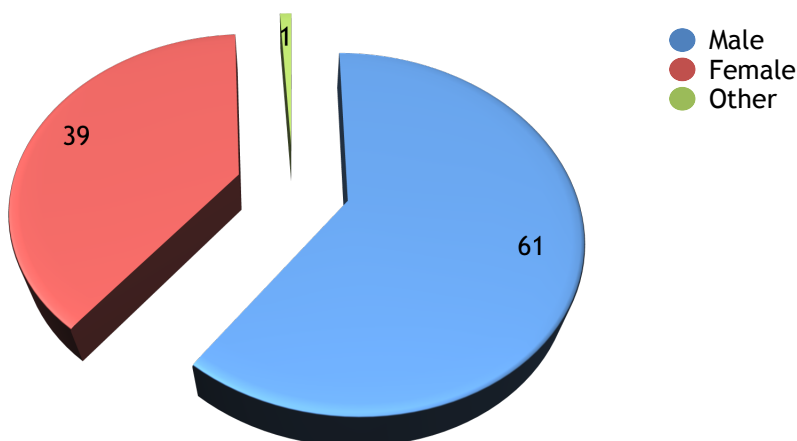


Diagram 2 details the difference in numbers of male / female officers registered at Companies House. The 19 MATs included in this survey show as having 166 Trustees registered. Of these Trustees 61% are male and 39% are female. One MAT has a social enterprises company listed as a Trustee.

Diagram 2: Number of male and female trustees registered at companies house in large MATs (n = 19 MAT's with 5 +schools)



Discussion

What this research reports is that despite the freedoms within the academies programme that would enable schools to address the gender imbalance in senior leadership they are not closing the leadership gender gap at Chief Executive Level. This is further reflected on executive Boards who have ultimate accountability for these schools. This represents a serious challenge to the region in respect of female representation in senior educational leadership positions. This is a challenge already identified within the NHS and addressed in their report ‘Women on Boards’ of 2016.

“We must continue to learn from the evidence of the difference women can and do make when able to make board-level contributions. Women on boards bring new skills and new ways of thinking, they enhance governance, work more collaboratively and ask different questions. It is a strategic priority for the makeup of boards to more closely reflect the population they serve”

Clare Marx CBE DL PRCS, President, Royal College of Surgeons (in Sealy 2016)

Ultimately this matters because it is connected to the life chances of every single young girl in the schools we serve;

“The success of women in different areas of society is interconnected, the success of women in one strata can reinforce success of women in another, creating a virtuous cycle”.

Professor Nadkarni, Cambridge Judge Business School 24 (in Sealy 2016)

The private sector achieved a doubling of women on board figures in less than five years. In-depth interviews with 34 key stakeholders (FTSE chairs, chief executive officers, executive search firms and subject-matter experts) in 2015, identified that setting ambitious but realistic targets and monitoring progress against these targets every six months along with effective championing and multiple stakeholder engagement had been significant drivers of change in enabling the private sector to move towards better gender balance. Clearly, now is the time to begin to undertake future research in this area and to ask what we can do to redress the balance.

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