

Key Findings: Women E-Mentoring in Lifelong Learning (WELL) Project

The Women in Lifelong Learning (WILL) Network is one of six specialist networks within the Universities Association of Lifelong Learning (UALL). The Women E-Mentoring in Lifelong Learning (WELL) Project was devised as a productive way to capitalise on the wealth of leadership and professional expertise within the WILL network and to share it among a time-poor and geographically dispersed membership. The scheme was launched in November 2010 and concluded in May 2011. It was co-ordinated by the WILL Network Convenor, Kate Thomas (based at UWE Bristol).

In February 2011, the Leadership Foundation for Higher Education (LFHE) awarded a Small Development Project grant of £6250 to evaluate the outcomes and benefits of the e-mentoring scheme and disseminate the findings of that evaluation as widely as possible across the higher education sector. The evaluation was carried out by the Network Convenor/Scheme Co-ordinator.

The Women in Lifelong Learning E-Mentoring Scheme

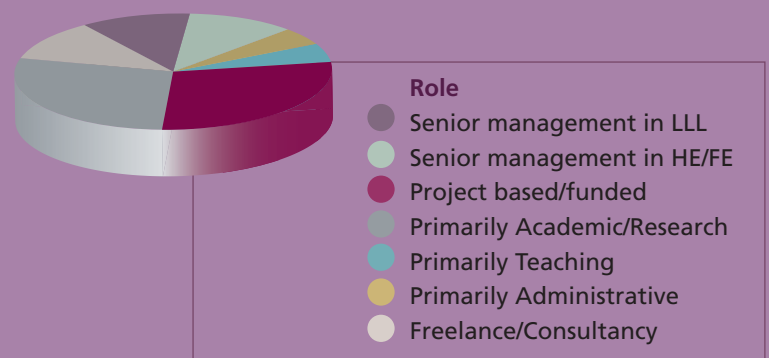
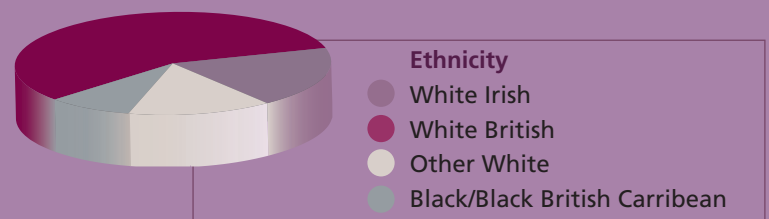
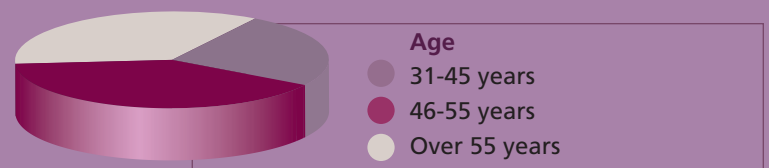
Participation in the scheme was voluntary, free of charge and open to all women working in the UK lifelong learning sector. 24 participants were drawn from a diverse range of higher education and lifelong learning institutions in England, Wales and Scotland and also included two in Canada and one in the US. All participants signed an e-mentoring agreement designed to assist in the smooth running of the scheme and committed to a minimum level of contact (once per month) throughout the six month period. 10 participated as mentors; 12 as mentees (two mentors worked with two mentees each).

Evaluation was carried out through online questionnaires and individual semi-structured interview. There was an 83% response to the interim questionnaire (March 2011) and a 66% response to the final questionnaire (September 2011). Brief individual interviews were carried out with three participants at the UALL Conference in March 2011 and telephone interviews with a further four participants in June 2011. Participants also offered informal feedback through email.

“As we have gone on I have taken more ownership over the goals we set at the beginning”

Mentee

Participant Profiles



At the interim stage:

- 85% of respondents indicated they were quite or very satisfied with their experience of the e-mentoring scheme; 10% were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied and 5% were quite dissatisfied.
- The e-mentoring process was primarily focusing on career strategies/professional development and academic research/publication.
- 70% of respondents were maintaining contact on a monthly or more frequent basis; 25 % were maintaining a more sporadic communication pattern depending on need/workload.
- When asked to identify barriers to establishing a relationship with their mentoring partner, 73% of respondents cited lack of time and 47% cited email as a communication method.
- In addition to email, 21% of respondents were using telephone and 16% face-to-face contact.
- 62% of mentee respondents felt they had been successful in defining their mentoring priorities, 39% felt they had been neither successful nor unsuccessful.
- 90% of mentor respondents felt they had been quite or very successful in responding to their mentee's mentoring goals.
- 40% of respondents envisaged continued contact with their mentoring partner(s) after the end of the scheme; 55% were not sure.

At the end of the scheme:

- 44% of respondents indicated they were very satisfied with their experience of the e-mentoring scheme; 43% were quite satisfied and 13% neither satisfied nor dissatisfied.
- Factors cited as relevant to satisfaction levels: the nature of relationship with mentoring partner (69%); whether or not the mentee's goals were achieved (44%); the communication method (31%); the level/regularity of communication (12%) . 50% of mentors also cited the level of commitment of their mentee to the mentoring process as relevant to satisfaction level.
- When asked to identify barriers to establishing and sustaining a relationship with their mentoring partner, 56% of respondents cited lack of time, 31% cited email as a communication method and 25% of mentors cited their mentees' difficulty in articulating their mentoring goals.
- 12.5% of respondents were continuing their mentoring relationship in a similar way; 31% had agreed on a more informal mentoring relationship for the future; 12.5% had ended their partnership but maintained informal/professional contact; 25% had no contact with their mentoring partner and 19% were not sure of future arrangements.
- 57% of mentees had changed their role since the start of the e-mentoring scheme.

Respondents recommended that, were the scheme to be run again, it should include:

- An introductory telephone call between new mentoring partners.
- A redesign to include mixed communication media (e-mail/ phone/Skype/face-to-face).
- The exchange of more detailed biographies prior to the start of the mentoring process.
- A facilitated opportunity for mentors/mentees to meet face-to-face if feasible.
- Enhanced guidelines on goal setting.



I feel that being from another country has not impeded the process but rather, has the potential to enrich the dialogue”

Mentor

Links

UALL www.uall.ac.uk

WiLL www.willnetwork.weebly.com

LFHE www.lfhe.ac.uk

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