CRACKS IN THE GLASS CEILING

Assessing the Fabian Women’s Network’s mentoring programme

Rosie Campbell & Joni Lovenduski

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FABIAN
WOMEN
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The society was one of the original founders of the Labour party and is constitutionally affiliated to the party. We are however editorially, organisationally and financially independent and work with a wide range of partners from all political persuasions and none.

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ABOUT THE FABIAN WOMEN’S NETWORK

The Fabian Women’s Network was founded in 2005 is a network of over 2000 women, working to support and encourage women’s engagement in policy and politics. We take a lead in promoting policy that has the needs of women at its heart. We bring women from across the country from all backgrounds, from politics, industry, education and the media. We hold events on a range of subjects as well as regular receptions attracting up to 300 women. Our events are attended by movers and shakers from all sectors. We offer our members a unique opportunity to build networks and share ideas, skills and opportunities. In addition to our annual receptions we hold monthly informal networking drinks in central London. There are plans to extend these to other parts of the country.

Fabiana was established in 2011 on a new wave of British feminism and the magazine is now leading cutting edge debates on how to equip the UK for growth, reform our economy and the state, and how to encourage more women in science.

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Felicity Slater
Shama Tatler
About the mentoring programme organisers

Seema Malhotra MP was co-founder and director of the Fabian Women’s Network until November 2013. She is now FWN President and a member of the Fabian Society executive. Seema was elected Labour and Co-operative MP for Feltham and Heston in December 2011. In October 2013 she was promoted to the opposition whips office after serving for a year as parliamentary private secretary to Rt Hon Yvette Cooper MP, shadow minister for women and equalities, as well as being a member of the Justice Select Committee. She speaks and writes regularly in the national media on gender, local regional and national political issues.

Christine Megson is a long-standing member of the Fabian Society and created the mentoring programme with Seema. Her substantive career was in education including principal of Stafford College. She has worked as a consultant across all government delivery departments, including the Cabinet Office specialising in new policy delivery and designing models for integrated public services. She has worked in NGOs, a Hospital Trust and start up charities including the School Food Trust, the Innovation Unit and Apnee Sehat as an adviser, non-executive director and volunteer.

Caroline Adams has worked for the Labour Party for 18 years: nine of them for Tony Blair including seven at No.10 Downing Street. She is currently the assistant parliamentary Labour party secretary inside parliament, and works closely with the women’s PLP and the women and equalities shadow team. She is a trainer with the Labour Women’s Network. She has worked with women in Tunisia through Woman For Democracy, to increase women’s participation in the democratic processes and to ensure their voices are heard within political parties.

Mentoring Scheme Advisory Group members
Meg Munn MP (Chair)
Seema Malhotra MP
Kate Green MP (shadow minister of state for work and pensions)
Fiona Mactaggart MP (Chair, Women’s parliamentary Labour party)
Roberta Blackman Woods MP
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Ivana Bartoletti (Year 2)
Nan Sloane (Labour Women’s Network)
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About the authors

Professor Joni Lovenduski is anniversary professor of politics at Birkbeck College, University of London. She is a fellow of the British Academy and an academician of the Academy of Social Sciences. She has acted as consultant on gender and politics for UNECE, the European Commission and the Council of Europe. She directed the European Commission funded investigation of the state of the art of research on gender and politics in Europe in 1996 and 1997. She is European convener of the European Science Foundation funded Research Network on Gender and the State. In 2009 she won the Gender and Politics Award of the ECPR standing group on gender and politics.

Dr Rosie Campbell joined Birkbeck in 2003 and is a senior lecturer in politics. She has research interests in voting behaviour, political participation, representation, political careers and gender and politics. Rosie is as a member of the Political Studies Association’s (PSA) Executive Committee. She teaches modern British politics and research methods. Her book *Gender and the Vote in Britain* was published in 2006 and she has recently published in the British Journal of Political Science, British Politics, Political Quarterly and she has articles forthcoming in Political Studies and the BJPIR.

Dr Rosie Campbell and Prof Joni Lovenduski have written a report on *Gender and Political Participation* for the UK Electoral Commission.

About UNISON

UNISON is the UK’s leading trade union, with 1.4 million members delivering public services. The ‘Million Voices for Public Services’ campaign is about putting people before profit, and putting public services at the heart of our strategy for building a stronger economy and a fairer society.
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Fabian Women’s Network’s mentoring and political education programme (launched in 2011) is an exemplar of best practice in the training and recruitment of women for public and political life. The participants’ overwhelmingly positive feedback, described in this report, is testament to this.

The scheme combines a 10-month-long mentoring scheme with a political education programme, comprising of a series of linked training events, that encourage the development of a peer network alongside the one-on-one mentoring relationship. The programme is run by experienced leaders (Christine Megson, Caroline Adams and Seema Malhotra MP, particularly in year one prior to her election) and receives support from high ranking politicians.

These factors are crucial to its success. We make a number of recommendations that the organisers may wish to follow to enable the scheme to continue to develop and grow.
I would like to start by thanking Dr Rosie Campbell and Dr Joni Lovenduski for producing this report and for their support and encouragement since the Fabian Women Network (FWN) political education programme and mentoring scheme was launched in 2011.

The programme was conceived at a FWN Summer Reception in 2008, as a result of a conversation between a new Fabian student (Felicity Slater), a longstanding Fabian member and friend (Christine Megson) and myself. The concept was born, and led to two years of discussion and development, about how such a scheme could be tied to the overall strategic goals of the FWN.

We founded the FWN in 2005 after a conversation on the Fabian Executive about the shortage of women on Fabian panels, in the magazine and on our committees. We undertook internal research and found that we had no less than 70 Fabian Women parliamentarians, 15 Fabian Women ministers and six Fabian Women members of the cabinet. The problem wasn’t the number of women. It was the way the Society organised to harness their talent and invite their participation. At the launch event, it was quite astounding that the idea of such a network had struck a chord with the senior politicians, Fabian members, journalists and others who packed out the basement at the Labour party HQ, and that the idea was going to last.

The learning from the early years of the FWN, about political networks and women’s engagement was vital in designing a programme with the flexibility needed and support structures for women who would be a range of ages and from a range of backgrounds. Women’s lives change much more than men’s, which tend to follow a more linear pattern. Keeping any programme sustainable would require flexibility and strong relationship building.

The ‘political skills framework’ was developed in response to early discussions about how to give the mentoring scheme purpose. Christine and I had both had experience in setting up or being mentors on public life or voluntary sector programmes. Most mentoring schemes are geared to moving people forward on a pathway e.g. to a more senior job. We needed a structure to define a pathway or journey, and something that would also give us a way of measuring the impact of a scheme on skills or confidence. The first draft of the framework was a mapping of my own 20 years of development and growth in political life from when I joined the Labour party while still at school, with insights from my professional development in the private sector and...
what had been useful in politics too. The draft framework was tested with a range of groups and women across the party and outside. I would like to pay particular thanks to Meg Munn MP, a long time mentor of my own who gave early and as always deeply valuable advice and became chair of the advisory group for the new programme.

One final experience which made a big difference to the design of the programme and concept of using political spaces was my experience working in parliament in Harriet Harman MP’s office whilst she was leader of the opposition. The experience of working at the top of the party and in the most senior office in parliament (as someone once said, Whitehall is set up to serve the government; parliament is set up to hold the government to account and the leader of the opposition is the most senior office) gave insights that were invaluable in the development of our parliamentary and political interventions. I knew from my own experience that being in the spaces and places of power changes your sense of relationship and belonging in those places, and your sense of connection to the activity that takes place, i.e. political debate and decisions. To be able to extend and share that could have tremendous potential.

The programme was also started with a 10 year plan to grow the FWN across the regions. We aspired to see a network of alumni that would stay connected with each other and lead their own initiatives for change, and use their relationships to grow the FWN as local leaders closer to home. We have been absolutely delighted and quite overwhelmed by the self starting nature of the intakes so far, and remain hopeful that in the course of time, the balance between London and the regions will shift.

The recommendations of the authors of this report have given genuine food for thought about our strengths and weaknesses. In particular the regional challenge is one we continue to grapple with, in partnership with the wider Fabian Society about its membership base. One of the key insights in the design of the programme was the complementary range of skills to move forward on public bodies as well as in political life. Different forms of public life have much in common. This area of input has been stronger in years two and three than year one, but there is considerable potential for more.

The programme has also been of interest to other women’s political networks. Members of the team have shared insights with the Inter-Parliamentary Union and other groups and the story continues to evolve. The relationship with the Labour Women’s Network, which runs outstanding training for women seeking selection, has also been vital and I would particularly like to thank Barbara Follett and Nan Sloane for all their support. Also Christine Megson and Caroline Adams who took over so much more of the running of the programme following my by-election and who themselves have amazing stories to tell. Finally to thank the staff over the years (particularly Giles Wright and Phil Mutero) and executive of the Fabian Society for all the support and helping the Fabian Society be an amazing and inspiring ‘incubator’ not just for the FWN, but our political education and mentoring programme too.
INTRODUCTION

This report is an evaluation of the first two years of the Fabian Women’s Network mentoring programme. The methodology used includes feedback from participants from a self evaluation questionnaire before and after the 10-month programme, a focus group with the outgoing mentees as part of the closing day, and semi-structured interviews with the organisers. In this evaluation we consider the first two intakes of the programme (2011/12 and 2012/13).

Purpose of Programme

The programme is an initiative of the Fabian Women’s Network, an organisation of and for Fabian Society women. There are over 2,000 women members of the Fabian Society and many of those will be part of other networks. As one of the organisers, Christine Megson told us: “The Fabian Women’s network offers immediate access to over 2,000 women and advertising the programme on the website and through the newsletter proved highly effective.”

The programme was designed to enable women to participate in politics and public life as politicians and in public appointments. It focuses on the ‘supply side’ of political recruitment aiming to build the capacity and confidence of women seeking to perform public roles. The mechanism for doing this is a well-structured mentoring programme that brings aspirant women candidates into contact with established politicians and public figures who act as mentors. The mentees were chosen from applicants who could already demonstrate a commitment to political participation and who wanted to raise their game. Four important special features of the programme are:

1. the pairing of mentors and mentees in one-to-one relationships
2. training in party and parliamentary politics and policymaking using a thoughtfully constructed purpose designed political skills framework;
3. the use of actual political spaces for events, giving mentees access to and experience of the sites in which politics takes place,
4. the use of comprehensive self-monitoring and evaluation to provide real feedback that can be used to make improvements.

Structure of Programme

The programme includes careful processes of recruitment of both mentors and mentees, and consists
of a political education programme plus meetings between mentors and mentees. The political education programme is designed to provide training based on the political skills framework - see below - and to encourage networking among participants and between participants and party activists and leaders.

**Recruitment**

In 2011 26 MPs, peers and representatives of public bodies (including two men) and 39 mentees applied to participate in the scheme. 22 mentees and 22 mentors joined the programme. Two mentees left, and one new mentee was recruited. Three mentors were changed during the programme.

In 2012 51 applications were received from prospective mentees, of which 23 were offered mentors and all 23 completed the programme. Three mentors were changed during the programme, one because she had taken on new responsibilities and two because they wanted to support mentees who aspired to be MPs, which they felt would be a better match to their own experience.

The organisers received 85 applications for the 2013/14 programme. The mentees were drawn from various age groups and were regionally and ethnically diverse. Mentees were encouraged to network with each other and opportunities were created for networking in the programme design - a process that transforms them from individual participants into a ‘peer’ group.
## Diversity Data

**Successful Applicants to the Fabian Women’s Mentoring Scheme 2013/14**

### Age

<table>
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<th>Under 20</th>
<th>20-30</th>
<th>30-39</th>
<th>40-49</th>
<th>50-59</th>
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<th>Asian</th>
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<td>7%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>4%</td>
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### Disability

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<tbody>
<tr>
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</table>
THE MENTORING PROGRAMME

Political education programme

Each event includes formal and informal opportunities for networking and contact with established party politicians, an important element in making the participants feel that the programme and they are valued. The key elements of the year’s curriculum are the induction, parliament day, Brussels day, the residential weekend, and the closing event. A day at the Labour party headquarters, focusing on the party more than parliament, was introduced in year two.

Induction

The induction is held at Westminster. In 2011 this afternoon event which took place in the shadow cabinet room in parliament included a welcome by Ed Miliband, an introduction to the scheme by Seema Malhotra and Christine Megson (organisers) and various ‘tasters’ or introductory talks on how politics works in practice at Westminster and beyond.

Members of the advisory group also ran sessions at the induction, particularly Meg Munn MP, Kate Green MP and Fiona Mactaggart MP. (It might be useful to note that all were experienced in supporting women coming forward in political and public life roles. Meg Munn and Fiona Mactaggart had also both been women’s ministers in government and had been prominent figures in Labour party and cross-party campaigns for more women in parliament). Mentees were asked to complete an initial self-evaluation questionnaire, which was repeated at the end of the programme. A separate briefing for mentors also took place. Meetings between mentees and mentors were organised between the parties directly.

Networking was encouraged
between mentors and mentees on the day, when most would be meeting for the first time. Mentors and mentees were given packs including a guide for how to understand the mentor/mentee relationship and how to prepare for meetings.

In 2012 the introduction was led again by Seema Malhotra MP and Christine Megson with presentations by Meg Munn MP, Andrew Harrop (General Secretary of the Fabian Society), Marcus Roberts (Deputy General Secretary of the Fabian Society), Nan Sloane (Labour Women’s Network) and Kate Green MP, now also shadow minister of state for work and pensions.

The Fabian Society input was important with one of the key goals of the programme being to increase engagement of women members with the mainstream activities and outputs of the Society.

Parliament day

This day-long event was designed to offer a practical experience in a parliamentary activity as well as a general talk and tour. The principle of ‘learning by doing’ and through this accelerating learning and familiarity with parliament was important. The day included talks by leading MPs representing different functions in the Labour party in parliament (for example, opposition chief whip), observation of debates in both Houses and in Committee and a special session on private members’ bills as well as a tour of the buildings. The group exercise in preparing a private members’ bill was structured to last through the day as a team activity, with feedback in a ‘Dragon’s Den’-style session at the end of the day.

Brussels

Expanding understanding of the political world beyond Westminster gave rise to the Brussels day, which was designed in partnership with the European Parliamentary Labour party. Three women Labour MEPs ‘sponsored’ the programme members on their trip to Brussels which enabled group members to learn about the realities and extent of EU politics via a series of talks. The trip was extended in the second year of the programme to include an overnight stay.

Barnsley

A residential training weekend at Northern College with speakers and activities focusing on the personal skills elements of the political skills framework. The weekend started with a debate according to House of Commons rules, with role playing and briefings sent in advance to help with speech preparation. Informal settings e.g. ‘the fireside chat’ allowed for a greater depth of reflection and sharing of personal stories of the group, and the organisers. Speakers included senior politicians including three local Labour MPs: Dan Jarvis Angela Smith and Meg Munn, as well as the local MEP, Linda McAvan.
Evaluation

Evaluation data was gathered through questionnaires at beginning and end of the programme and a focus group at the end.

During the 2011/12 programme one mentee was selected as a candidate for parliament (Suzy Stride, Harlow), and one of the organisers (Seema Malhotra) was elected to parliament as MP for Feltham and Heston, one member was elected as a councillor for Mossley and Stalybridge (Eleanor Shember-Critchley), and others have been appointed to national public boards as trustees. The mentees who were seeking election/selection drew on the group for help with their campaigns, providing real experience of campaign politics and powerful examples of the potential for success.

In 2013 Ivana Bartoletti (from cohort one) was shortlisted as an MEP for London and her campaign coordinator was a mentee from cohort two. Three members of cohort two are actively seeking selection to be parliamentary candidates in 2015 and others have been appointed to national public boards as trustees.

Clearly the programme is attracting and supporting high calibre women with real potential to contribute to public and political life.

Analysis

The structure of the programme is admirable, combining flexibility as the scheme develops with a well-structured and varied series of events. Particularly impressive is the use of real political space and the participation of established politicians.

The flexibility of the scheme is also a strength, as the programme evolves in relation to the expressed needs and interests of the participants. This flexibility is probably costly in terms of the time of organisers. However,
this is a function of the programme being relatively new - as the first few intakes are accommodated, a store of knowledge and information will be built up that will reduce this time cost. This is evidenced in the 2012/13 programme where it is clear that the organisers had adapted the programme from the previous year, retaining strengths and developing the already excellent networking and confidence building activities still further.

Finance and Resources

The first intake of the scheme depended on private donations of £5,100, the cooperation of several women MEPs, the resources of FWN and some subsidy by the organisers, who also gave freely of their time. Mentees spent a minimum of six days on the programme events and mentors gave their time in response to mentees, a commitment that appears to have varied by each pair. In order to begin to develop a sustainable funding stream the programme organisers have used volunteers to organise a fundraising dinner and they have also received generous donations (which more than cover the costs for the third year of the programme).

The organisers are making full use of the recent graduates from the programme and have had the help of a former mentee in recruitment and a number of the events are now organised by former mentees.

In the long term, finance is a potential weakness; although flexibility and the use of existing resources make continuing the programme feasible. The scheme is not costly but depends on good will, time freely given. We recommend that a budget is prepared to be used as a basis to secure long term funding. The view of the evaluators is that there should be state funding for such programmes, perhaps managed by the electoral commission which could run a scheme to which parties and party groups could apply. Some mentees received financial assistance for their transportation expenses.

PHOTO: JC
The content of events is drawn from the political skills framework reflected in the diagram below and delivered via seminars, tasks, group work, role playing and informal conversation.

The content derived from the skills framework places a valuable emphasis on the real world of politics and what politicians actually do, something that is much less apparent to outsiders, even including party activists than most politicians realise. Were the scheme to develop its public bodies stream, a similar kind of programme should be developed including training in how to prepare for and be effective in meetings.
The pre-post questionnaires

14 of the cohort of 22 cohort one mentees (64%) and 100% of the 23 cohort two mentees completed both pre and post-programme questionnaires, only responses from participants who completed both were included in the data analysis. Attrition will almost certainly push the feedback scores up, as those who did not complete the final survey had more often dropped out of the programme. However, an element of natural fall off is inevitable in a programme like this, requiring a commitment ten months- alongside work and family life - and by excluding the non-completers we are able to make an assessment of the benefit derived from attending the full programme.

Participants were asked to rate their own skills on a scale from one (strongly disagree) to six (strongly agree) for a list of 17 statements derived from the political skills framework.

Key findings

- On every item participants’ self-ratings improved between the pre and post surveys. The most sizeable effects were spread across the political skills framework.

- Among the 2011/12 intake there were on average two-point increases in self-ratings of: knowledge of the selection processes for national election candidates and members of local and national public boards, feeling able to explain to a new member how the Labour party works at constituency and national level and knowing people on public boards or political life who participants felt they could approach personally for information or advice.

- The most sizeable increases in the political skills self-ratings among the 2012/13 intake were in understanding the selection process to be a parliamentary candidate and appointments for local or national boards, feeling that they have a strong regional and national network, believing that constituency Labour parties and local Fabian branches would be interested in asking them to speak and feeling that they know people in public and/or political life who they can approach personally for advice.
AVERAGE PRE-SURVEY AND POST-SURVEY SCORES

Political and policy understanding

“I KNOW HOW PARLIAMENT WORKS”

2011/12
Pre-survey average = 4
Post-survey average = 5

2012/13
Pre-survey average = 4
Post-survey average = 5

“THERE IS NOT ENOUGH INFORMATION ABOUT THE LABOUR PARTY AT CONSTITUENCY LEVEL”

2011/12
Pre-survey average = 2
Post-survey average = 4

2012/13
Pre-survey average = 3
Post-survey average = 4

Knowledge of how the Labour party works

“I HAVE A GOOD UNDERSTANDING OF LABOUR HISTORY, LABOUR POLICY AND POLITICAL ECONOMY”

2011/12
Pre-survey average = 3
Post-survey average = 4

2012/13
Pre-survey average = 3
Post-survey average = 4

“I COULD EXPLAIN TO A NEW MEMBER HOW THE LABOUR PARTY WORKS AT CONSTITUENCY AND NATIONAL LEVEL”

2011/12
Pre-survey average = 2
Post-survey average = 4

2012/13
Pre-survey average = 3
Post-survey average = 4
Media and communications

“JOURNALISTS AND POLITICIANS ARE INTERESTED IN MY OPINION”

2011/12
Pre-survey average = 3
Post-survey average = 4

2012/13
Pre-survey average = 3
Post-survey average = 3

“I UNDERSTAND THE PROCESS OF RUNNING FOR APPOINTMENT TO A LOCAL OR NATIONAL PUBLIC BOARD”

2011/12
Pre-survey average = 2
Post-survey average = 4

2011/12
Pre-survey average = 2
Post-survey average = 4

“I UNDERSTAND WHAT IT TAKES TO BE A GOOD EFFECTIVE REPRESENTATIVE”

2011/12
Pre-survey average = 4
Post-survey average = 5

2011/12
Pre-survey average = 4
Post-survey average = 5

Going for public or political office

“I UNDERSTAND THE PROCESS OF RUNNING FOR SELECTION TO BE A NATIONAL ELECTION CANDIDATE”
Organising and campaigning

“LOCAL FABIAN SOCIETIES AND CLPS ARE INTERESTED IN INVITING ME TO SPEAK AT THEIR MEETINGS”

2011/12
Pre-survey average = 2
Post-survey average = 3

2012/13
Pre-survey average = 1
Post-survey average = 3

“I HAVE A STRONG REGIONAL AND NATIONAL POLITICAL NETWORK”

2011/12
Pre-survey average = 3
Post-survey average = 4

2012/13
Pre-survey average = 3
Post-survey average = 4

“I KNOW PEOPLE ON PUBLIC BOARDS OR POLITICAL LIFE WHO I FEEL I CAN APPROACH PERSONALLY FOR INFORMATION OR ADVICE”

2011/12
Pre-survey average = 2
Post-survey average = 5

2012/13
Pre-survey average = 3
Post-survey average = 5

Core skills

“OTHER PEOPLE SEE ME AS A LEADER”

2011/12
Pre-survey average = 5
Post-survey average = 5

2012/13
Pre-survey average = 4
Post-survey average = 4

“I WOULD FEEL CONFIDENT TO BE A LEADING SPEAKER IN A DEBATE”

2011/12
Pre-survey average = 3
Post-survey average = 4

2012/13
Pre-survey average = 3
Post-survey average = 4

“I AM A CONFIDENT SPEECH-WRITER”

2011/12
Pre-survey average = 4
Post-survey average = 4
When the responses to all of the items are added together to create a political skills scale the average score among the 2011/12 cohort was 54 in the pre-scheme survey and 74 in the post-scheme survey and among the 2012/13 cohort the average in the pre scheme survey was 52 and 73 in the post scheme survey (out of a possible 102). Overall, the average shift in self-rated political skills across the first year or the programme was 20 percentage points and 21 percentage points in year two, statistically significant differences in both intakes.
Cohort one

The cohort one focus group was held on the 20th March 2012 and attended by 15 mentees. The session was held in the shadow cabinet room of the Houses of Parliament. The group was also attended by the organisers and a small number of mentors. The focus group was preceded by a half-hour interview with the organisers and the group itself ran for 90 minutes.

The participants were overwhelming positive about the scheme and the impact it had had on their personal development. Several interrelating themes emerged during the session.

The group repeatedly returned to the issue of confidence and self-belief and its particular relevance to political and public life. There was general agreement that women might be at a disadvantage in this regard and that they might be less likely to assert themselves in male dominated political settings.

“Politics is very male dominated - being able to speak up. [Having a women only space is] very important – sometimes you feel you can call on each other, support each other.” PARTICIPANT

“People don’t acknowledge discrimination in the workplace anymore, [it’s] important to have women only spaces where the issues can be raised. As long as there is underrepresentation of women then positive action is required to fill this gap.” PARTICIPANT

An important feature of this developing political confidence was the willingness to express political ambition.

“I’m much more open about my ambitions with my friends and family- before it’s just so embarrassing and now I will tell anybody.” PARTICIPANT

“[Now I] talk openly to other people ‘I’ve got this ambition’- we can talk about each other’s ambitions. Realising what’s possible. In the application I said I’d like to be a councillor because to say I wanted to be an MP was ridiculous and could never happen but now it seems possible/
Several participants raised the improvement in their public speaking skills as increasing their confidence. One of the organisers described watching as a fear of public speaking among some participants was transformed into a passion for debate:

“Will you give way? ‘No!’, [We] watched them grow- interrupting each other- pushed and stretched by each other.” ORGANISER

In fact the development of a peer network was repeatedly mentioned as one of the most significant contributions of the scheme to the participants’ political development.

“Men do it already every day. Men have a sense of entitlement- the sense that anything is possible, you get from this sort of solidarity. This experience has made me more of a feminist than before. Working together to create a sense of entitlement.” PARTICIPANT

“[It’s not] just about the relationship with the mentor but with the people around the table.” PARTICIPANT

Several participants reported that they felt that their performance at work and in voluntary roles had improved as a result of the programme.

“My role as a governor of a school role developed through doing this. I feel much more confident about building my role in that position.” PARTICIPANT

Another significant theme raised by the mentees and the organisers was the important role played by high profile politicians in supporting the programme. This manifested itself in several ways. It was striking how many participants referred to the first session (also held in the shadow cabinet room) and how being in that place made the possibility of a political life appear more real. The use of this room, and other Palace of Westminster resources was dependent on the good will of the MPs and administrators involved. Participants also mentioned the tour around Westminster and the Brussels trip as examples of how being present in political institutions helped them to foster a sense of belonging, perhaps even as sense of entitlement as a citizen to feel at home in the state’s political institutions.

“We needed an expert administrator for the day in parliament and the launch couldn’t have been achieved without someone from the inside. The same thing [is true] today, without someone from the inside couldn’t be here.” ORGANISER
“The fact that we can sit in the shadow cabinet room and think ‘one day I could do this’”
PARTICIPANT

The results of this study strongly suggest that access to politically significant spaces is key to the implementation of a successful political mentoring and training programme. These functions cannot be readily outsourced to outside training providers and they do more than enhance the experience. The participants were very clear that inhabiting real political spaces was necessary in order to make the leap of imagination required to view themselves as potential politicians.

The involvement of high profile politicians in the training events was crucial, it stimulated the participants and encouraged them to think of themselves as future politicians.

“Meeting these women who were already successful made me realise I just needed to get on and do it. A real shift in terms of how I was approaching everything.”
PARTICIPANT

“Ed Miliband came and spoke to us and said: ‘Be cracks in the glass ceiling.’”
PARTICIPANT

“Westminster and Brussels [trips were a] fantastic chance to experience, sitting here and having ministers giving us their expertise and time, sharing their experiences and having informal conversations with us.”
PARTICIPANT

Although the mentees were disproportionately drawn from the London area those who had come from elsewhere felt that they had particularly benefited from the experience:

“Being outside of London it can be hard seeing events going on, but I can’t always come down to them. The inclusivity of the scheme is important.”
PARTICIPANT

“[The scheme] has given me a good selection of women I can contact, especially as so many of the women around the table are from London and I’m from the Midlands I can draw upon them.”
PARTICIPANT

The mentor/mentee relationships were allowed to develop without much interference from the organisers. There was an expectation that mentors would have a meeting or telephone conversation with mentees at least once a month. This arrangement suited most participants who used their meetings with mentors for a variety of purposes from developing their CVs to discussing how to combine political life with a young family.
“Politics can be so intimidating it’s really useful to have someone you can be honest with.”

PARTICIPANT

There was a criticism that the mentees were disproportionately drawn from those currently living in the London area. The organisers explained that they did not advertise the programme too widely beyond the Fabian networks as they were fearful that they might receive too many applications to deal with effectively in the first (effectively pilot) year. This issue might be also be a reflection of Fabian Society membership tending to be stronger in London/the south-east.

There were several comments from participants suggesting that although they felt better equipped to go for political office they were less aware of the opportunities available in public life.

“Not everyone wants to be an MP” PARTICIPANT

“I feel much better informed about parliamentary and Brussels political life, but less so about public bodies”. PARTICIPANT

The quality of the mentee/mentor relationship was variable. One mentee did not have a single meeting with her mentor (despite this she felt that she had benefited from the group activities). The relationship had not broken down but it had never been properly realised. The mentee said that she had felt overly deferential toward her mentor and had not wanted to pester a busy and important politician. One of the mentors mentioned that the mentee’s failure to pester might have been interpreted as disinterest or a lack of drive. The organisers felt that the expectations could be made clearer in future and that better relationships would be made with office staff to monitor progress.

It was suggested that some more formal media training might have been useful.

“Media training it might have been too much to cover this too, but it might have been useful.”

PARTICIPANT
Cohort two

The focus group was held on the 26th of February 2013 in a Westminster Hall committee room, there were 16 mentees present. Several participants mentioned having been more active in the past and the programme offered a formal and structured way to engage or reengage.

“I had been very active in politics until about 10 years ago when my son was born and then I didn’t really participate to the same extent until a couple of years ago. I went through a very bruising selection process, in which I was unsuccessful, and it did make me think that I really wanted to be active in front-line politics but I needed to be more structured about it.” PARTICIPANT

“I think I was an observer for a long time. So I had observed what was happening in politics. I hadn’t really been seen how I might get into participating in some way, shape or form and the mentoring programme offered that opportunity, providing a window, as it were, into a new world.” PARTICIPANT

Several of the mentees described the programme as having a dramatic and positive impact on their lives, transforming their goals and leading them to make positive changes.

“I went from working in commercial management and retail to be a community organiser in the Labour movement so it’s had quite a big impact.” PARTICIPANT

“I now feel equipped to make something that’s achievable...I’ve made huge progress in terms of understanding the pieces that fit together to either pursue being an MP or a councillor or a school governor. Having the knowledge to make those decisions.” PARTICIPANT

It was clear that many of the women found participating on the scheme personally empowering and they described a change in their self-confidence and willingness to be pro-active.

“I think it’s engendered from the attitude we’ve all been encouraged to have from the very start of the process, from Christine and Caroline of when someone has done something good, ‘well get up and say something then because I’m not going to say it for you.’” PARTICIPANT
“I can hear you [Christine] in the back of my head sometimes saying: ‘Do it!’” PARTICIPANT

“I feel very passionate about women’s representation and I think that the journey that I’ve taken with this scheme is that I now feel much more personally responsible for that representation. So the onus is on me. I can sit in an armchair and rant about the fact that we’ve not got enough women in every part of our society but unless I do something about it it’s not going to happen. I’m re-evaluating how I spend my time and the commitments I make in terms of family and work life balance I think maybe I’ll be looking at things differently, than to how I was before.” PARTICIPANT

“It was apparent that the group had formed a cohort and were working together well; developing this network of political active women is one of the major achievements of the programme.

“What really sticks in my mind is when XXX decided to stand for election in XXX she was halfway through the process and then we got all of these emails and XXX said right I’m campaign manager I’m going with you and I was on a residential training weekend but even then we had these 100s of names to ring and everyone was volunteering who could do what and every minute of my day was accounted for apart from my breaks and lunch time and I still said give me 20 names and I’ll do that when I can on my way from a session to another session.” PARTICIPANT

“We had three days and we covered the entire phone list between all of these people we managed to ring up every single party member in Middlesbrough. We had hustings speeches written, we had all sorts of volunteer offers of support. Christine was absolutely fantastic in terms of motivating and encouraging us. It was just fantastic.” PARTICIPANT

“I have changed my conception of what’s possible and what’s available to me through this programme.” PARTICIPANT

The participants stressed the value of the network they had formed with each other and the experiences and skills they have to share as a group.

“I know a couple of us have been looking at local government selections; we sent out an email and the response we’ve had from
other mentees who have been councillors or stood for councillor elections has been fantastic and the information they’ve shared has been invaluable.” PARTICIPANT

“I remember sitting here 9/10 months ago and being totally overwhelmed, being amazed by the experience that collectively we’ve got and that we can share that. For me that’s been the most valuable part of the programme.” PARTICIPANT

One of the mentees mentioned that it would have been helpful to know more about each other earlier on in the programme.

Echoing the feedback from the first focus group several participants mentioned how useful it had been to have some activities run from within political institutions.

“I think is a really foreign imposing building. Depending on what your background is. But now I feel I can just come in and sit in the lobby and wait for someone, whereas a year ago I didn’t feel like that at all.” PARTICIPANT

“One of the things I totally agree with XXX about is feeling that you have some sort of right to be here, when you have the feeling that you are on the outside looking

in that this is something that is actually quite alien to you. Two or three weeks ago I wanted to go to a committee room debate I just knew it was on and I turned up here I said I wanted to get into a committee room debate and I just walked into the committee room and that is absolutely not what I would have done a year ago.” PARTICIPANT

“The idea of a group of women sitting in the shadow cabinet room and have the Chief Whip tell you what she does is something that is pretty cool.” PARTICIPANT

The mentees were overwhelmingly positive about the political education programme, again it was clear that access to high profile political actors was key.

“All the sessions in Barnsley were so useful. I don’t think I’ve ever been on another training course where it’s two days where I found everything useful. It was amazing that there were so many MPs who came along and gave us their time and hangout with us around the fire.” PARTICIPANT

Again the nature of the mentoring relationship varied by pair; several mentees stressed how much they had
benefited from their mentor’s input.

“My mentor sat down with me ..., who’s in the shadow cabinet sat down with me for over an hour and went through my CV and took it apart and put it back together and practised the interview- to get that level of stuff from somebody so senior was amazing.”

PARTICIPANT

Others reported some difficulties scheduling meetings:

“I have found that it’s been very difficult to get the appointments just because they are so busy. She’s been very willing but she’s occasionally cancelled and then it’s been much more difficult to get a date in the diary. So I guess that is just something that people need to be aware of on the programme. It’s just difficult to find the time with these sorts of people because they are so important and busy.”

PARTICIPANT

“I had a similar experience with my MP in that it was many months before we had a proper meeting, then it was 15 minutes in a hotel bar it was just very hurried.”

PARTICIPANT

Several mentees who were not aiming to stand for parliament were concerned about being paired with an MP.

“The other thing was she never said it but I wondered if she was disappointed that I didn’t come and say that I definitely wanted to be an MP, how can you help me?”

PARTICIPANT

“I didn’t have a really clear idea of what I wanted to bring to the meeting without saying I’m running for selection. I felt we were perhaps both wasting each other’s time a bit. Well hers more than mine.”

PARTICIPANT

It was also clear that the mentoring relationship was often useful for wider networking opportunities.

“One of the things I thought was really useful, she’s really good at recognising the limits of when she can help me and made introductions to others who she felt would be more useful and that’s been great.”

PARTICIPANT

The majority of the mentees were pleased with the mentoring relationship.

“[We met] probably 6 times. I met her over lunch for an hour, an hour and a half. Not just providing me
with support but having a wider discussion about her career, her experiences, the challenges she’s faced in her career.”

PARTICIPANT

PHOTO:RL
Two interviews were conducted with mentors, one by telephone and the other by email exchange. The mentors were as full of praise for the programme as the mentees had been. The comments of one mentor touched on the need for mentees to be proactive in initiating and maintaining contact with the mentor.

“She kept in contact even if she didn’t hear back from me immediately she kept in contact and that meant that eventually I would catch up with it and get back to her and the fact that she did that especially at the beginning was just fantastic.” MENTOR

Both mentors reported discussing career tactics with their mentees.

[We discussed] “tactics in her career, timings, next steps, achievable aims.....also discussed her own family and work circumstances and how these were relevant to what she had time to do, and wanted to do.” MENTOR

The mentor interviews confirmed the focus group evidence that confidence building was one of the key achievements of the programme.
LEARNING FROM THE FIRST INTAKE

The overarching structure of the programme remains intact, the skills framework and the training days were repeated in 2012/13 and were equally successful. However there is evidence that the organisers have used feedback from the first intake to inform the second year of the programme and it is clear that innovations are in the pipeline for the third year.

One of the core strengths of the programme, clearly evident in year one, was the peer support provided by the mentees; the organisers have built on this strength and actively involved the mentees (both graduates of the programme and new intake) to take a proactive role in delivering some of the activities. Graduates of the programme delivered a session on public life combined with media training (areas identified in year one as needing some development) and set up a public speaking club. Members of the year two cohort have organised a campaign to get young people more involved in politics (‘No-one ever told me about politics’ and a political book club). There is clear evidence from email exchanges between the participants and from the comments recorded in the focus groups that the mentees have used their networks, skills and growing confidence to build on the package provided by the programme. In year one of the programme there was some concern in the focus group that the programme was too London centric and this was repeated in one evaluation form in year two.

“I understand there is already talk of developing the FWN mentoring scheme into the regions and I would be extremely happy to help with this. I struggled to take full advantage of the FWN network as much as I would have liked, due to my geographical location and I am keen to improve this for next year’s participants. Travel down to London, although inevitable due to parliament and connections in the city, was often difficult and expensive and may put other Northerly women off applying for the scheme. The women based outside of the South East had to take more time off work and spend more to be part of the scheme than women in the south-east. Whilst this was completely understandable in the circumstances, I feel this issue should be looked at for the future, either through subsidies or the development of regional FWN mentoring schemes.” ORGANISER

The organisers are responding to this concern and plan to develop a North West pilot, aimed at working class women who want to go into local government and a Scottish programme is also under development.
SWOT ANALYSIS

Strengths of programme

• The selection of women who have already demonstrated a commitment enables the scheme to work with a good level of specific content about real politics.

• The content of the scheme reflects the real experience of women politicians.

• Combining mentoring with formal training.

• The training events and residential weekend helped to foster a peer network which the participants continue to benefit from.

• The use of elected politicians to motivate and encourage participants

• The use of elected politicians and their administrators to provide access to institutions and facilities.

• The use of the political skills framework to identify core competencies and to measure change over time (the pre/post questionnaires show clear evidence of self-rated learning).

• Flexibility including the ability to vary the programme to accommodate the interests of the mentees and to run it on a financial shoestring.

Weaknesses of Programmes

• Lack of geographical spread recruitment of mentees

• An under-emphasis on public bodies in the training events. However this could be developed with future intakes and it would be possible to run schemes with different emphases as knowledge and experience is gained.

• Variable quality in the mentor/mentee relationship

Opportunities

• There is considerable potential to extend the scheme to other areas including the much mentioned public bodies.

• There is potential to develop a version of the scheme around local and devolved government,

• ‘Franchising’ the concept and producing packs etc. However, the careful attention and insights from the organisers who have experienced the programme over two years is a key component of
its success, and needs to be built into any such plan.

- Perhaps consider matching mentees who do not wish to seek a seat in the House of Commons with mentors who are not currently MPs. This should widen the pool of possible mentors and may allow the programme to expand.

- Schemes of this nature might potentially be funded by the state with parties applying to central funds to run them. Alternatively aspirant mentees could apply for ‘scholarships’ to participate in the schemes.

Threats

- One of the programmes’ major strengths is the fact that it is run by experienced leaders with considerable political networks.

- The programme requires a high level of commitment, time and energy required from the organisers. There is probably considerable potential for burnout.

- The precariousness of the finances is also a potential threat and this is an area which should be looked into carefully.
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This is an admirably strong and well thought out programme that reflects well the experience of women politicians, women in public life and their understanding of what it takes to do the job. It is especially important at a time when there is evidence that women may be becoming even more reluctant to come forward as candidates for elected office. (See Hansard Society http://www.hansardsociety.org.uk/ for reports on devolution and gender, also Ruth Fox in Parliamentary Affairs and Political Quarterly.)

Moreover it is very timely for the current push (visible internationally) to increase the presence of women on publicly (and privately) appointed boards and committees. We recommend that the strand on public appointments etc. be developed and continued if possible.
The production of this report has given us the opportunity for further reflection on our organisation of the programme and where we can make improvements for future cohorts.

We knew the idea of the mentoring and political education programme was right as soon as we met the first cohort. The excitement was palpable and the sheer variety of experiences and expertise and raw talent was amazing. Our selection process worked from the outset and we haven’t changed it though we have increased the numbers per cohort as we are being overwhelmed with applications: up to nearly 100 this year (2013). It is good to see those who are not accepted one year taking our advice and then being successful in the subsequent year.

The real strength of the programme lies in the mentees and their openness to maximising every opportunity we give them. They then identify what else they would like and create further opportunities for the whole group. We really like this positive approach so everyone contributes where they can. The diagram below shows how the initial framework of compulsory activities has grown annually, with optional events organised by alumni and supportive networks of ‘buddies’.

Having a joint network reception with Labour Women’s Network on the induction day this year gave the different cohorts an opportunity of meeting and led to rapid bonding and follow up social networking. In the same way, having an overnight stay in Brussels and having dinners together has all helped their networking. The support they give each other is in many ways stronger than their relationship with their mentor and we recognise that some women get far more out of the mentor relationship than others. Inevitably busy parliamentarians have less time to give and we need to spend longer on helping some women to make the most of this time. We will continue to broaden the mentor pool as we can’t expect some mentors to do a fourth year.

The additional events programme gives greater opportunities for the women to chair a session, ask questions and try out ideas in a safe space where they are supported not judged. Few of them have debated before and rarely put in a position where they can discuss emerging policy or present ideas to senior politicians. What we observe over the year is not just the impressive number of women selected to stand for seats or councils or Europe or taken on as trustees of national charities but the visible rise in confidence which results in promotion, greater...
ease in addressing groups, writing articles and the preparedness to go for positions they would never have thought of before. The Fabian Women’s Network has thrived in recent years and many of those who have been on the programme are contributing their time and expertise to really give it a great profile. The Fabian Society offers them the opportunity to showcase their ideas through publications and events and conferences.

There is understandably a feeling that the programme is drawing too many women from London and those from outside London feel less involved. We looked at the background of our mentees and found that many of them had been brought up outside London but moved there after graduation. The growing north-west group considered a north-west mentoring group and have instead formed a north-west Fabian Women’s Network group to provide that additional networking and public speaking club and to informally mentor others so they apply for the national programme. They plan to fundraise to subsidy visits to London.

The political skills framework has shaped our activities and the political education programme adds real depth and richness. We had not made as much progress with the skills framework and education programme for public life- though many of the exercises for one are as valid for the other. This year however one of the mentees has picked up this area and with our support and support from one of the mentors is redressing the balance.

The emerging theme of our reflection is that where we haven’t quite had the time or the skill or the contacts to organise something-then one of the 75 inspiring women will do it. From fundraising to selection of participants to organising our visit to Brussels, we are having generous offers of support. We get a lot out of this programme ourselves and we know it will be sustained by these women –and we will all shortly be seeing even more of them on the national stage.

What has also become clear is that running an ongoing programme needs the support of wider political structures and leaders. We wouldn’t have come this far without the support of all the MPs and peers who have given their time, experience and active encouragement. Also the Leader of the Labour party Rt Hon Ed Miliband MP, whose words at the first induction event when he referred to the mentees as “22 cracks in the glass ceiling” inspired the title of this report. And also to Iain McNicol general secretary of the Labour party, his team and our MEPs – their openmindedness and responsiveness has been a critical factor in our success so far. Our deepest thanks to all who have helped in these foundational years of the programme.

Christine Megson, Caroline Adams & Seema Malhotra
THE GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE FWN MENTORING PROGRAMME

MENTEE COHORT 1

MENTORS AND POLITICAL PROGRAMME

2011 - 2012
MENTEE COHORT 1
Organised joint events & public speaking club

MENTEE COHORT 2
Supported each other for selection

MENTEE COHORT 1 & 2
Organised joint events & visits
Acted as ‘buddies’

MENTEE COHORT 3
Supported each other for selection
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

1. Improving the geographical spread of mentors.

2. Develop public life and local politics elements of the scheme.

3. Establish schemes for devolved assemblies and parliaments via party networks.

4. Setting out expectations about the mentor/mentee relationship early on, perhaps by introducing a session on communication skills for political life.

5. Consider introducing media training. (Enacted)

6. Produce budget as a basis to secure funding.

7. Set out and campaign for state funding for such schemes.
This report is an evaluation of the first two years of the Fabian Women’s Network mentoring and political education programme. The methodology used includes feedback from participants from a self evaluation questionnaire before and after the 10-month programme, a focus group with the outgoing mentees as part of the closing day, and semi-structured interviews with the organisers. In this evaluation we consider the first two intakes of the programme (2011/12 and 2012/13).

This report finds that the Fabian Women’s Network’s mentoring and political education programme is an exemplar of best practice in the training and recruitment of women for public and political life.

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