



**FABIAN
WOMEN**

FOOTPRINTS IN THE SAND:

FIVE YEARS OF
THE FABIAN WOMEN'S NETWORK
MENTORING AND POLITICAL
EDUCATION PROGRAMME

Rosie Campbell &
Joni Lovenduski

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ABOUT THE FABIAN SOCIETY

The Fabian Society is Britain's oldest political think tank. Since 1884 the Society has played a central role in developing political ideas and public policy on the left.

Through a wide range of publications and events the Society influences political and public thinking, but also provides a space for broad and open-minded debate, drawing on an unrivalled external network and its own expert research and analysis.

The Society is alone among think tanks in being a democratically-constituted membership organisation, with almost 7,000 members. During its history the membership has included many of the key thinkers on the British left and every Labour Prime Minister. Today it counts over 200 Parliamentarians in its number. Member-led activity includes 70 local Fabian societies, the Scottish and Welsh Fabians, the Fabian Women's Network and the Young Fabians, which is itself the leading organisation on the left for young people to debate and influence political ideas.

The Society was one of the original founders of the Labour Party and is constitutionally affiliated to the party. It is however editorially, organisationally and financially independent and works with a wide range of partners of all political persuasions and none.

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ABOUT THE FABIAN WOMEN'S NETWORK

The Fabian Women's Network is a vibrant network of over 2000 women, working to promote and facilitate women's engagement in politics and public life. We take a lead in promoting policy that has the needs of women at its heart. We bring women from across the country, industry and the media together to share knowledge, skills and opportunities.

Our quarterly magazine Fabiana, established in 2011 on the back of the fourth wave of British feminism, leads cutting edge debates across a wide range of sectors and issues, including economic growth, government reform, international politics, science and technology.

We hold regular and wide-ranging events and receptions attended by movers and shakers from all sectors.

We offer our members a unique opportunity to build networks, share ideas and develop new skills. In addition to our annual receptions and conference fringe events, we hold bi-monthly informal networking drinks in central London. There are plans in the pipeline to extend these to other parts of the country.

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With substantial assistance from

Kate Talbot, a Cambridge graduate, trained in leadership at Harvard, with extensive engagement and political experience. She was a mentee in 2012 and co-opted to the Executive Committee as assistant co-ordinator of the scheme. She is a member of the Leading Change Network based at the John F Kennedy School of Government. After leaving university, she worked in Commercial Management for M&S, running departments with multi-million pound annual turnovers. While there, she led on regional projects concerning employee engagement and ran corporate social responsibility initiatives. Kate currently works for a Shadow Cabinet Minister in Parliament.

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FOREWORD

The Fabian Society is a key player in British and international politics. Over the decades, it has helped shape the thinking of the progressive movement and pushed for greater internationalism. Fabians built the intellectual infrastructure underpinning two of the greatest assets of our society – social security and the NHS. The Fabians continue to deliver ideas for their reform so they can better meet the challenges of an evolving population's needs.

Now more than ever, the Fabians have a vital role to play. It is clear that in the UK and overseas the progressive left is at a turning point. We either reinvent ourselves, rethink our function and deliver a transformative vision for our country and the world – or face marginalisation in the political spectrum, with dramatic consequences for those we are here to serve. For example, it is time to advocate a new vision for the economy, in which financial rigour is balanced by a plan for growth and innovation, and a fresh industrial strategy for our country.

And now more than ever, a balanced economy needs women at its heart, both in politics and industry at every level.

This is the context of the Fabian Women's Network mentoring programme – not only a project to support women so they can achieve but a solid programme to enhance women's awareness of the challenges that we are facing.

Whatever field our mentees choose – politics, public bodies or a professional career in their industry – the scheme helps them bring forward the change that our system needs. This is why it is important that such a programme is rooted in the Fabian experience. Not only do we need equal representation at every level; we also need the courage of many women to gain power so they can change the nature of power itself.

We have of course made huge strides in public life, particularly within (and thanks to) the Labour party, but we still have a long way to go. In the world of finance, the situation is still bleak: the fourth report by Lord Davies (published on 26 March 2014) noted that female representation on FTSE 100 boards had reached 20.7%: 'Gender balance makes good business sense. Women make up over half of the UK population, account for nearly half of the working population, outperform men educationally and are responsible for the majority of household purchasing decisions. Women are as successful as their male counterparts at university and in their early careers, but attrition rates increase significantly as they progress through

an organisation. The under-representation of women in senior roles and at board level impacts on the performance, governance and reputation of companies, as they fail to attract and retain the widest possible range of talent'. The business case for reform has already been made for us: a better gender mix amongst senior managers is linked to better financial results.

Over the years, the Fabian Women's Network has played a pivotal role in addressing the issues of representation as well as putting forward innovative big ideas to make our political debate real, from universal childcare to more women in science, innovation and technology. I want to celebrate this contribution, particularly after passing our tenth anniversary. We have gone from strength to strength, and also expanded beyond London, thanks to the hard work of the executive committee chaired by Ivana Bartoletti.

And together with FWN's growth, the Mentoring Programme has blossomed – my heartfelt thanks go to Christine Megson and Caroline Adams, whose commitment and devotion to the project have never faded. Many women have grown within the programme and are now helping develop the project further with enthusiasm and passion.

Birkbeck University has played a key role in objectively evaluating our work and I want to thank Rosie Campbell and Joni Lovenduski for that. And I want to recognise the support the Fabian Society has given us over the years – from Andrew Harrop, Felicity Slater, Giles Wright and Phil Mutero, to all staff and Executive members. A warm thank you to our advisory group for helping us thrive, to the Labour Women's Network for working with us so we can strengthen each other, to Barbara Follett for her invaluable help and to Unison for helping publishing this booklet and for all their support over the years.

We have a long way to go – but we are doing all we can to complete the journey.

Seema Malhotra MP
Shadow Chief Secretary to the Treasury
Founder and President of the Fabian Women's Network



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Fabian Women's Network's mentoring and political education programme (launched in 2011 and now in its fifth year) continues to be an exemplar of best practice in the training and recruitment of women for public and political life. The participants' enthusiasm and commitment to the programme, demonstrated by their continued involvement as alumni and described in this report, is testament to this.

The scheme combines a ten month long mentoring programme with political education training, comprising of a series of linked 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 and Caroline Adams) and receives support from high ranking politicians. These factors are crucial to its success. The organisers responded positively to the recommendations of the first report and the programme is increasingly supported by a wide base of active and dedicated volunteers. The scheme continues to depend on the voluntary activity of its supporters which provides one of its key strengths (the development of a dense network that underpins the programme's activities) but is also potentially an area of risk as the programme continues to require a great deal of commitment in terms of time and energy on the part of the organisers.

We would encourage the executive committee to continue their practice of recruiting graduates of the programme to become involved in its organisation; thus securing institutional memory and future proofing the programme as a gateway to political and public life for women in years to come.

INTRODUCTION

This second evaluation of the Fabian Women's Network Mentoring and Political Education Programme covers the third and fourth cohorts to participate in the scheme (2013/14 and 2014/15). The methodology used includes feedback from participants from a self-evaluation questionnaire administered before and after the ten month programme, two focus groups with the outgoing mentees as part of the closing day, semi-structured interviews with six mentors and seven mentees and a short survey of current mentees and graduates of the programme.

Purpose of the programme

The programme is an initiative of the Fabian Women's Network, an organisation of and for Fabian Society women. There are over 2000 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 2000 women and advertising the programme on the website and through the newsletter and by previous mentees on social media proved highly effective. This promotion was considerably enhanced by publicity gained by FWN for the first evaluation report. The tentacles of FWN are reaching into new spaces every year bringing new intellectual and social capital into the organisation."

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. Five important special features of the programme are:

1. the pairing of mentors and mentees in one-to-one relationships, training in party and parliamentary politics and policymaking;

2. using thoughtfully constructed purpose designed political skills and public life skills frameworks;

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;

5. the generation of an extensive self-organising network of graduates of the programme.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE PROGRAMME

In September 2015 the fifth cohort started the Fabian Women's Network Mentoring and Political Education programme. To date 125 mentees have been through the programme in five cohorts and 58 women have been mentors. Between 2013 and 2015 there have been 42 mentors drawn from parliamentarians in both the House of Commons and the House of Lords, elected members of the London Assembly and Local Government, women with long experience of sitting on Boards and women from Trade Unions. New mentors have been invited to join every year: 14 women have been mentors for 3 years and 5 women have been mentors for 5 years.



Selection is a highly rigorous process undertaken by six people with careful consideration given to a spread of background, experience and geography. Between selection and induction mentees are matched with mentors, and buddies from previous cohorts.

The programme has compulsory days, a series of highly recommended events and other optional events.

It begins with a compulsory induction led by the organisers where mentees are introduced to each other and to the structure of the programme. A brief input is given by Seema Malhotra MP as President of FWN and Ivana Bartoletti as a former mentee and Chair of FWN. They highlight the opportunities created by FWN. Andrew Harrop, Director of the Fabian Society, welcomes mentees and encourages them to write for the Fabian Society.

Members of the Shadow Cabinet deliver messages of support and encouragement for women to put themselves forward for political and public life. A session is delivered by a high profile figure on the use of social media including writing a blog. This input and encouragement to write articles has resulted in mentees' contributions being published throughout the programme.

The induction is held in the old Shadow Cabinet Room and concludes with mentors meeting their mentees and networking. An addition in 2014 and 2015 has resulted in many of the "buddies" joining the networking drinks and the meal in a restaurant.



Parliament Day is a full compulsory day in the House of Commons with a tour, attendance at a Select Committee, Women's PLP, meeting with a range of MPs, Opposition Chief Whip, Labour Leader of the House and a skills exercise. Mentees take their turn in chairing sessions throughout the day.

The day concludes with drinks with members of the Shadow Cabinet or a reception held by the Labour Leader in the House of Lords. The evening before Parliament Day there is a private dinner with Johanna Baxter, member of the Labour Party National Executive Committee.

Mentees are highly encouraged to attend the Labour Party Conference where they meet up with former mentees, speak at the conference both in the main hall and in fringe events. Over 50 mentees attended Brighton 2015.

The subsidised trip to Brussels is compulsory with a visit to the European Parliament, sessions with MEPs, attendance at committees and meetings with relevant organisations such as the Parti socialiste européen. The overnight stay allows further networking for the group.

Two compulsory skills days are held in Northern College, Wentworth Castle in Barnsley where the focus is on developing and practising personal leadership skills with support from five women MPs and the organisers.

The programme concludes with a session on recruitment, selection and a focus group evaluation.

Other sessions are arranged by the organisers annually, directly in response to need:

- A half day visit to the Labour Party Headquarters where mentees are introduced to Iain McNicol, General Secretary of the Labour Party and staff leading on policy and campaigns, including aspects of the general election, local elections and mayoral elections.
- A public life speed networking session where mentees question a range of women trustees, women chairs and senior women from different public life roles including NHS Trusts, Charities, NGOs, School Governing Bodies etc.
- A trip to City Hall
- A session on dealing with the press and media.

Between 2013 and 2015 mentees and members of the FWN Executive Committee organised events including on: Childcare, FGM, Europe, Women's Voices, Women and finance, Disability, Media, and Local Government. The Public Speaking and Debating Club offered regular debates and training by international coaches. Visits were made to London City Hall to meet members of the London Assembly.

Mentees set up Facebook and WhatsApp accounts and publicised opportunities for each other to campaign, and attend a wide range of political and public life events and social events.

Outcomes of the programme

The programme has already delivered some incredible results for its participants and the Fabian Women's Network. One woman ran for MEP in London, six women were PPCs in the 2015 election and nine others ran for selection or were shortlisted. Twenty-one women were elected as first time councillors in 2014 and many were subsequently promoted into significant local cabinet roles. Many other mentees acted as agents and worked on campaigns.

A number of women have gone on to become school governors and trustees and directors on boards such as the National Society for Deaf Children. Some have set up their own charity. The majority of members on the Fabian Women's Network executive committee have participated in the programme. Four are now members of the Fabian Society Executive Committee. Two women are on the Labour Disability committee. Many are chairing or have gained positions on the committee of their local CLP. One woman is running for the London Assembly and another is selected to stand for the Welsh Assembly.

Most women who have been on the programme have gained promotion in their professional lives: to a senior role in the Guardian, Which, the King's Fund, the Cabinet Office, the UN, a Harvard leadership training course at the John F Kennedy school of government, the Office of Rail and Road, the Food and Drink Federation, Think Tanks including the Fabian Society, to the first woman Chair of Directors' UK, to adviser or assistant to shadow ministers and members of the Shadow Cabinet. Mentees have been nominated for awards including one of the top 99 foreign policy leaders under 33, shortlisted as Young Public Affairs Professional of the Year and won awards such as Migrant Woman 2015.

Women from the programme have spoken on panels or at conferences round the world including at a US Institute of Peace Conference in Washington; at the Nato Summit for Young Leaders in Cardiff; on the BBC World Service: Global Women Diaspora and in Europe with the European Socialist Party.



Mentees have worked on policy issues including childcare, FGM, disability and Europe, holding events, producing publications, and successfully lobbying for policy change. Many are involved in significant gender, political and international development research in the UK or internationally, gaining Masters and Doctorates.

Articles have appeared by mentees in significant publications: the Guardian, the New Statesman, Huffington Post and Labour List. Fabiana was founded by a mentee and now provides a forum for many mentees to contribute to. The Public Speaking Club was founded by two mentees and is continued by others. It provides debating opportunities and training in public speaking.

One mentee founded a cross party campaign called 'No one ever told me about Politics' to make politics make sense to those in their 20s and 30s. The mentoring programme has responded to requests to contribute to events supporting young women and girls such as Fearless Futures and the Girls' Network and to the development of other mentoring programmes in charities, think tanks and in developing democracies.



The success of programme is apparent in feedback from graduates:

The Fabian Women's Network is exactly what we need to see more women elected in Britain. A group of passionate experienced women work to support, mentor and inspire women who are keen to be involved in politics and striving to succeed on their political journey.

The mentoring scheme gave me the confidence to believe that I could get a career in politics.

The scheme provided me not only with essential skills to run for public office, but most importantly the confidence and support to actually carry it out. From walking the halls of the European Parliament to eating Pringles in the shadow cabinet office in Westminster, the mentoring scheme gave me an invaluable insight into the real world of politics and opened the seemingly closed doors that surround public life.

The FWN mentoring scheme gave me the confidence to go for selection. Being involved in it and getting to know so many amazing women challenged me to 'feel the fear and do it anyway'.

The mentoring programme was central to my personal development in public life. It provided me with both access to opportunity, and the self-confidence to stand for local political office, be appointed to a board of trustees of a large children's charity, write for publications including the Guardian and New Statesman and be elected to the executive committee of the Fabian Women's Network.

The FWN mentoring programme has had a life changing effect on me. The warmth and wisdom from those who run the course, my mentor and fellow mentees has enabled me to stop pondering in the political shadows and to step forward and step up in to a more active political life. The programme has set me on a journey I didn't think possible nine months ago.

Diversity of the 2014/15 Intake

The 26 mentees who made up the 2014/15 cohort ranged in age from 20 to over 50; 11 of the participants were aged between 20 and 30, 8 were aged between 31 and 39, 5 were aged between 40 and 49 and two were over fifty years old. The variation in the age of the participants reflects the organisers' strength in tailoring the programme to the specific needs of the individual mentees. In total 18 of the participants described themselves as white (69%) with 5 describing themselves as Asian, 2 as black and 1 as 'other' (mixed and Chinese were also response options).

Thus, the 2014 cohort was more representative of the ethnic diversity of British society than the House of Commons; where BME MPs currently make up 6% of all MPs compared to 13% of the British population. In terms of residential location 17 of the 26 2014/15 mentees were living in London, 5 were from the North of England, 2 from the South East, 2 from Wales and 1 from the midlands. Although mentees living in London continue to find it easier to access the programme the organisers have succeeded in reaching out to a wider group. The relative diversity of the cohort is a key strength of the programme.

FOCUS GROUPS AND INTERVIEWS

In order to provide a holistic account of mentees' experiences on the programme (to complement the survey research) we conducted focus groups with the participants and a series of short telephone interviews with mentors and mentees. The focus group research allowed the researchers to witness the group dynamics and the strength of the group relationship within each cohort. The interviews gave participants, both mentors and mentees, the opportunity to offer deep reflections on the programme and to express candid evaluations that may not be aired in a group setting.

Reasons for applying

Participants in the programme are drawn from a range of occupational backgrounds and their previous experience of politics and public life varies considerably. A sizeable proportion of the intake are already fully immersed in electoral politics and are local councillors and/or long-standing active members of the Labour Party. There is also a significant group of participants who are very new to politics and public life and first got involved within a year of the start of the scheme. Many participants work in politics, or politics related fields, and bring a high level of political expertise to the programme; others have occupational backgrounds from outside of politics or public life and are looking to become more politically engaged or to make a career change.

The scheme is aimed at women interested in pursuing a career in politics and public life and this broad remit ensures a diversity of interests and experiences among the participants. The breadth of coverage of the scheme is one of its great strengths, as it encourages participants to broaden their horizons and exposes them to possibilities that they may not have considered otherwise. Combining politics and public life also provides a challenge for the organisers who have to ensure that the public life aspect of the programme is fully developed.

The programme's organisers, Christine Megson and Caroline Adams, are adept at tailoring the scheme to meet the range of training needs and goals of the participants. The scheme is flexible and the organisers are highly responsive to the specific requirements of individual participants: offering personal support, additional networking and mentoring opportunities and facilitating initiatives put forward by participants.

The participants in the programme were motivated to apply for a variety of reasons:

Some were looking for an opportunity to boost their confidence in their political activities.

I joined when I was a candidate for the local elections. I was really daunted, a lot of people knew more than I did. I joined the scheme to learn more about the Labour party.

Focus Group Participant 2015

Others were looking to move on in their careers and felt that the scheme would give them useful resources.

I was working in public affairs and interested in making a move into a career in Westminster; but I didn't know what that would involve.

Focus Group Participant 2015.

I'm doing a PhD and I've just finished my fieldwork in Cardiff. I saw the article in the Guardian [and that the organisers] wanted people from outside of London.

Focus Group Participant 2015

I was looking for a woman's programme, a political programme. I was really attracted [to this scheme] because of the public appointments part of the programme.

Focus Group Participant 2015

Confidence building

The first evaluation of the FWN mentoring programme identified confidence building as one of the key achievements of the scheme and this continues to be an area of tremendous success. The sense that participating in the programme had led to substantial gains in the participants' confidence was a recurrent theme throughout the focus groups and interviews with mentees.

We all have different selves. The nervous anxious self who thinks I can't do anything. But every time I leave this room I think yes I can do anything. You take that away with you.

Focus Group Participant 2015

I could not put a value on the fact that I've met someone who is already doing that job who thinks I could do it too.

Focus Group Participant 2014

The scheme has increased my willingness to approach people, asking for introductions is easy now.

Focus Group Participant 2014

This scheme has opened my eyes to many things, that I should have faith in myself. I've put myself forward for things I would never have done before, like the deputy leader's position. I've set the bar a bit higher now.

Focus Group 2015

[The programme has] focused me on goals. And shown me that there are goals that I was aware of but I didn't have the confidence to pursue them. Whereas now I'm aware of ways I can attempt to reach them.

Focus Group Participant 2015

I'm relatively confident anyway, I'm at a quite senior level professionally, but it's actually given me a lot more confidence... I've started applying for CEO positions and perhaps a year ago I wouldn't have done it. I'm getting shortlisted. So it's given me a boost.

Interview with mentee 2015

Networks

The first evaluation of the FWN mentoring and political education programme noted that one of the most valuable aspects of the scheme was the way it helped participants foster networks, both among themselves and across the Labour party and their wider political interests.

The scheme helps the participants to form bonding social capital among the existing cohort of mentees and increasingly- 2015/16 will be the fifth intake- across the previous cohorts through alumni events. The residential trips play a key role in giving the participants the opportunity to develop close relationships and the challenging activities that they undertake together encourage a sense of group membership. The participants describe the development of a network among themselves as being critical to the enhancement they experience in their self-confidence. The majority of the mentees describe themselves as being in close and frequent contact, helping each other campaign, organise and as a source of advice and support. The development of this community of politically active women who are confident about their ability to participate and bring about change is one of the core achievements of the programme.

I thought that the things that people on this programme do, as councillors and standing for parliament were the things you do when you are 'grown up'. I felt these things were a long way off for me. Now I know I don't have to wait.
Focus Group Participant 2015

[The most important aspect of the scheme] The confidence building aspect of being part of a network that was so supportive and the mutual learning that emerges from that.
Mentee Interview 2015





The programme also enables participants to increase their ‘*bridging social capital*’ from a secure base. The participants are introduced to senior politicians both as a group and individually (through their mentors and through the organisers’ contacts where a need has been identified). The participants are able to make good use of these networking possibilities because they have an encouraging network of women who share their experiences and offer support.

One mentee (direct interview) described the programme as providing a ‘*way in*’ to access networks, providing an entry point to political life. Another described the scheme as offering the opportunity to ‘*step up with support*’. Whilst another said that engaging with mentees from their own cohort, previous cohorts, the organisers, mentors and senior politicians had given them ‘*footsteps in the sand to follow*’.

One mentee described how having a ‘*safe space in a political party is really special*’. The scheme provides the mentees with the opportunity to develop their skills and networks in an environment where some of the competitive and adversarial aspects of politics are put to one side and the culture is one of cooperation, encouragement and support. This provides the mentees with the resources they feel they need to undertake activities that perhaps they might otherwise find too challenging or uncomfortable.

The programme’s organisers are critical to the development of the networks:

“Christine and Caroline are absolutely fundamental. Having the two of them driving it. They have access and kudos – I don’t know how you would do it otherwise. In politics trust is everything.”

Mentee 2015

The challenges of participating in politics

During the focus groups and interviews the mentees often raised the particular challenges that women face when participating in politics.

Some of the participants identified experiences of being treated as tokens and not being taken seriously.

Someone who was on the panel for a branch selection rang me to tell me about it but told me don't worry about it though because we know who we want and you're just down because we need two women. At which point I said well I don't think I should come then. So I pulled out at that point.

Focus Group participant 2014

Others identified practices that indirectly discriminate against people with caring responsibilities.

Part of the culture change [in the local party] that needs to happen is that every key meeting was at 8pm. As a parent of young children I could not possibly be there whereas in the day time I could. Sexism was quite profound in the CLP. I took some time out and got support from the women here and from my mentor and went back fighting.

Focus Group Participant 2014.

A particularly potent issue that was raised by the mentees was the issue of how to combine a political life with family life.

That was one of the biggest challenges for me to get involved earlier on because there wasn't the mechanism or the support. Not everyone can get out in the evening.

Focus Group Participant 2014

I asked a question about this in Barnsley as I was so intrigued about how people did it.

Focus Group Participant 2014

I want to have a political career but do I wait until my daughter's old enough -until she's 16? Part of the mentoring is thinking about who I can go to for advice.

Focus Group Participant 2014

The programme specifically addresses the issue of work-life balance during the Barnsley residential weekend and several of the mentees mentioned discussing this issue with their mentors. In the 2014 focus group the mentees discussed the under-representation of women with children in politics; this is an area that might benefit from an additional session/event.

Normalising politics

Throughout the programme the mentees are exposed to living political institutions. They regularly meet in Parliament and they travel to Brussels to the European Parliament. During these events the mentees participate in question and answer sessions with senior politicians. The exposure to politics in action has the effect of demystifying politics and politicians, making politics accessible and normalising politics so that the participants can readily imagine themselves making the transition into political and public life.

We went to the whips' office to see what they actually did. That and [talking to] Dan Jarvis in Barnsley, seeing the normal side of people in these positions that they were human beings- actually you could see yourself in those roles. Whereas before I might have thought that that is the 'dark side' but I realised this is something I might actually want to do.

Focus Group Participant 2015

Meeting MPs- Demystifying their lives.

Focus Group Participant 2015

Every event I've attended I feel like I've stepped up a gear. In terms of who I am and what I want to do. I had never been to Parliament before the Parliament day. Going to the building feeling like I belonged there, feeling like I belonged in Brussels. I can't even tell you what effect that had on me.

Focus Group Participant 2014

The trip to Brussels opened up a side to politics I'd never thought about.

Focus Group Participant 2014

The use of these real political spaces and the engagement of senior politicians was identified as a key strength of the programme in the first report and it continues to be one of the aspects of the programme which makes it highly effective.

The mentoring relationship.

It is useful to have footsteps in the sand that are there to follow.
Focus Group Participant 2014

The relationship between individual mentees and mentors is always idiosyncratic and will vary from pair to pair. The majority of the participants in the scheme reported a positive and productive relationship with their mentor.

From the beginning my mentor said that having a really structured approach wouldn't suit her personality but that I could come to her with questions and she would be really honest. That worked really well. Giving you a glimpse of the day to day life of a job you think you might want- deciding how you would want to do it if you did it.

Focus Group Participant 2015

There was considerable variation in the average number of meetings with mentor/mentee reported by mentors and mentees with a large proportion reporting that they saw each other approximately 5/6 times, a smaller group reporting that they met once a month and a smaller cohort reporting that they met two or three times. Many of the mentees reported that their mentors were able to provide them with specific advice about how to navigate political institutions.





I met my mentor once a month. We both had a trade union background. I found it a bit hard to navigate trade union and Labour committees' impenetrable structures. Quite often positions or mini elections for things like that would come up almost invisibly- people even inside the structures might not know. It can be quite difficult to know how it all interacts. [My mentor helped me navigate] the whole big mass of the TU movement and know where the connections are.

Focus Group Participant 2015

Amazing- focused [she helped focus] my mind critically on how realistic my ambitions were. It's really high level career advice from someone who really knows what they talk about.

Focus Group Participant 2015

We've got a similar career path. We've worked in charities, for the party, for local government. She understands what I'm going through. Practically every external meeting I go to people are aggressive to me when I say where I work. She knows what it's like to be the public face of the Party. Everyone has an opinion about politics, and definitely about the Party. It's good to be able to speak 100% openly and honestly.

Focus Group Participant 2014

Where the mentor and mentee had failed to meet an alternative mentor was identified by the organisers. In the small number of cases where the relationship did not flourish the problem was largely one of lack of access to the mentor due to their other commitments, particularly in an election year. Several mentors and mentees suggested spending more time setting the expectations of the role of the mentee and the responsibilities of the mentee at the outset of the programme. This might be in the form of an informal contract drawn up between mentor and mentee at the first meeting setting out how the relationship will proceed by outlining approximately how often they will meet, what they will discuss, and what the mentee will prepare in advance of the meeting. One mentor suggested that mentees might send their mentors a monthly update outlining the political and public life related activities they had undertaken to keep the mentor up to date.

Given the high professional status of the mentors they are naturally very busy and many mentees reported that they had to drive the arranging of meetings by pursuing their mentor's assistant or office. It may be useful to stress this as one of the responsibilities of the mentee at the outset.

I realised that [my mentor] was very busy but able to help if I came to her with specific questions each time. I had to persist to meet her in her Westminster office but I understand that I am the one who needs to persist and as long as mentees understand if you don't get a response you have to be tenacious it is fine!

Mentee Interview 2015



The Political Education Programme

The Political education programme that runs concurrently with the mentoring is absolutely crucial to the success of the scheme. Participants reported significant gains in terms of their political knowledge base and the networking value of the training events.

'I have no debating background- I have a science background. I felt knowledge about how to structure an argument in a debate was my Achilles heel. That was a really useful exercise-I didn't have time to think you just had to do it. It just changed my view of my own limitations.'

Focus Group Participant 2015

'Over the year the activities have been really good in terms of making you push yourself- making me push myself to do things. In an arena where I could have chosen not to I may have sat back. It's shown me that things that I might be uncomfortable doing I can do.'

Focus Group Participant 2015





Several mentees mentioned how useful the public speaking training in Barnsley was.

'I remember how nervous I was at the thought of speaking in front of MPs. Public speaking- Barnsley absolutely terrifying but really, really helpful.'

Mentee interview 2015

'I found the training really good, especially Barnsley. I loved the campaigning we did as a group, as a team. Some times in the political sector you feel that you are looking over your shoulder but I felt that we came together and we really wanted to learn from each other.'

Focus Group Participant 2015

'Putting yourself in a situation that makes you nervous and uncomfortable. I was the colour of a tomato. Christine said keep putting yourself in these situations that are challenging.'

Mentee interview 2015

'There was a lot of very practical stuff, each session was very carefully tailored and absolutely jam packed. Challenged each of us in different ways.'

Focus Group Participant 2014

'The opportunity to do something I would otherwise find really scary in an environment where I will be supported. Where else can you do a debate? That for me has been over and above anything else the most important for me.'

Focus Group Participant 2014



Several mentees mentioned how useful it was to learn about the process of standing for selection and operating within the Labour party. For example, learning how the NEC works. They also described the training environment as supportive but constructively critical.

'Tailored individual, honest feedback.'

Focus Group Participant 2014

'The structured events are incredibly choreographed.'

Focus Group Participant 2014

The mentees reported that the residential trips are invaluable for cohort building.

'The mentoring scheme is about the community we create; social time and chance to get to know each other. That's nourished the relationship, perhaps more than we realised.'

Focus Group Participant 2014

'Each time we hit the ground running.'

ONLINE ABUSE AND MEDIA SEXISM

Stella Creasy. Caroline Criado Perez. Laura Bates. All women who have stepped up in to public life and run excellent campaigns. All women who have received horrendous misogynistic online abuse for doing so, and seen themselves written about in the media in terms of their gender and appearance first, and achievements second.

The mentoring programme is an excellent example of women in senior positions in public life supporting and encouraging women to take up the same positions. A significant number of women share their time, energy, and expertise in order to inspire the next generation.

Women in politics and public life are increasingly facing sexist online abuse and continue to be subject to sexist reporting from parts of the media. We commissioned a survey of all current and previous mentees, to ask them about their experiences of gendered language in the media and of online abuse aimed towards women.

We had 54 responses, and the results were stark: every single respondent said they had experienced online abuse and/ or seen gendered language in the media. Nearly three quarters personally knew somebody who had received sexist online abuse, and over 98% said they had seen it happen.

Worryingly, this is causing significant concern amongst our mentees as they decide whether or not to pursue a more prominent and public role. Over 75% said that online sexist abuse causes them ‘a fair amount’ or ‘significant’ concern when considering whether or not to take a role in public life.

THE SURVEY

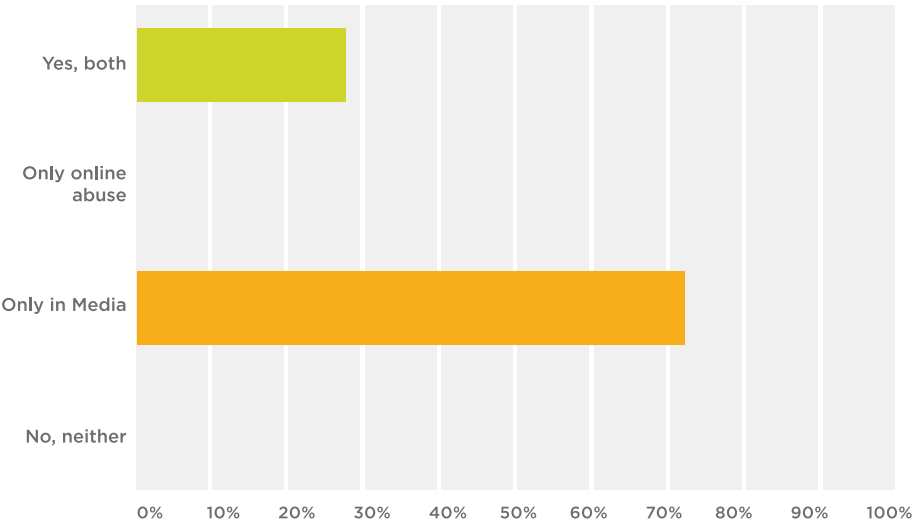
FABIAN
WOMEN

‘We are interested in whether sexist online abuse and sexist media coverage has an impact on women’s willingness to participate in public life; we would like to explore if this is an issue for our mentees’

Question One

Have you ever experienced:

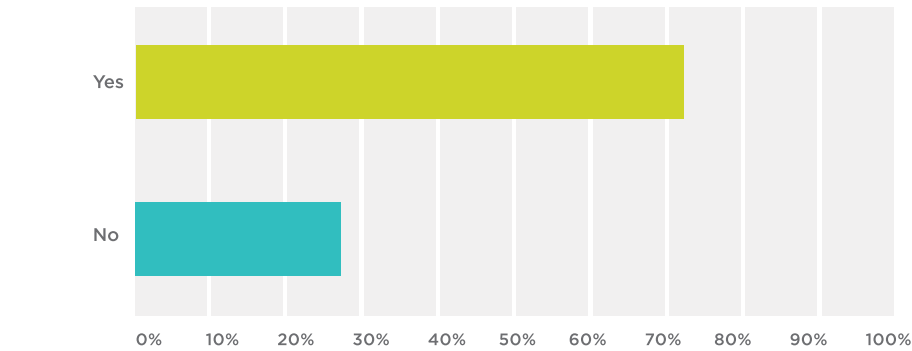
- a) sexist abuse online (email/Twitter etc.)?
- b) reading something in the mainstream media that prominently refers to a woman’s appearance/gender when these are not explicitly relevant to her job/the story?



Answer Choices	Responses	
Yes, both	27.78%	15
Only online abuse	0.00%	0
only in media	72.22%	39
No, neither	0.00%	0
Total		54

Question Two

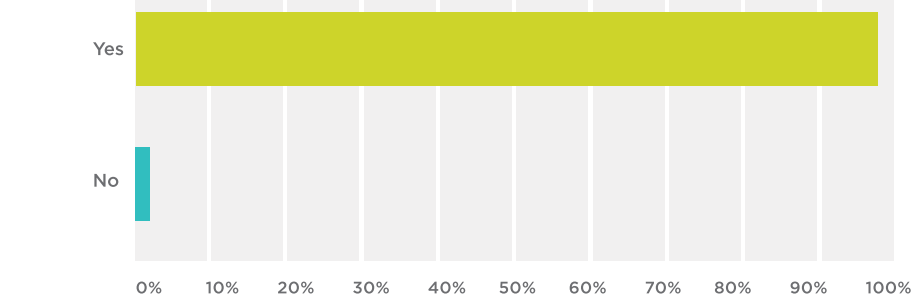
Has anyone you know experienced sexist abuse online?



Answer Choices	Responses
Yes	74.07%40
No	25.93%14
Total	54

Question Three

Have you seen a woman in public life receive sexist abuse online?



Answer Choices	Responses
Yes	98.08%51
No	1.92%1
Total	52

Question Four

If you have seen gendered language about women in the media and /or sexist abuse online, does it make you concerned about taking a more prominent public role?

	Not at all	Causes a little concern	Causes a fair amount of concern	Causes significant concern	Total	Weighted Average
Gendered language	9.26% 5	38.89% 21	27.78% 15	24.07% 13	54	2.67
Sexist abuse	9.26% 5	14.81% 8	37.04% 20	38.89% 21	54	3.06

We asked mentees for examples they have seen or experienced in terms of gendered language in the media and online sexist abuse: we found some of the answers deeply shocking. A high proportion of respondents said they had seen rape threats aimed at female politicians and public figures, some of which were extremely graphic. A number gave more personal examples:

‘I have a Facebook page for myself as a Councillor, which someone posted some pretty nasty pornographic videos to. A male constituent also requested to ‘friend’ me and then messaged me to tell me that he really enjoyed attending public meetings that I was at - I can’t remember the precise wording he used but it was to the effect that he found my presence at community meetings sexually stimulating and was watching me there.’

‘I’ve been trolled, threatened, subject to homophobic abuse, (had) very negative comments about my weight/appearance....the list goes on’

‘I have seen friends and female MPs have been abused for being ugly, or threatened with rape, or ‘needing a good shag’ when they are confrontational. I’ve personally been hassled online for ‘being a bit of alright’ or ‘being a minger’, and for aspects of my personal appearance like my hair roots.’

'When I was standing for political office, I received a number of emails from someone who disagreed with my policies. To demonstrate this, he threatened to come to my home, rape me in front of my family and pour bleach down my throat to shut me up. There was more but the details are far too graphic to publish.'

'The constant reference to the way that women are dressed or what they look like...feeling like ultimately, no matter what you do, your appearance will be the primary thing that people are interested in.'

'I have seen female MPs threatened with rape online for expressing their opinion. I would say personally that the threat of sexist abuse and rape threats is equally prohibitive to the costs of standing for Parliament...for these reasons I won't do it.'

'The reference to women MPs as the leader's "babes" or similar - the Downing Street catwalk comes to mind. The constant news space given to women's bodies or body parts, a complete lack of coverage of women's sport, and coverage of sexual violence written and presented in a titillating fashion using inappropriate language and victim blaming. I have seen rape threats, references to being fat and ugly, I have friends who have been stalked on Facebook by a cyber stalker who found them on Twitter.'

Former Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, and long-time FWN supporter Rt Hon Yvette Cooper MP, has recently brought the issue of online abuse into the limelight.

'We shouldn't stand for this. The internet is an amazing thing – a way to give a voice to the voiceless, reinvigorate democracy, inspire debate. A third of us use Facebook. A fifth of us are on Twitter. Social media is where we live our lives: work, play, gossip and chat – our new streets, offices, pubs, parks and public spaces. And that means everyone should be part of it.'

The internet has to be a way to speak truth to power and to hold the powerful to account – not a way for the powerful or the abusive to silence the truth.

But, just as we would on the streets, in the pub or at work, we have to challenge misogyny, racism, homophobia and intimidation or threats against others that are designed to silence debate.'

Our respondents had a number of ideas on how to tackle this issue. A consistent theme was that online abuse aimed at women was not taken seriously enough, and seen as something that ‘comes with the territory.’ They also called on the social networking platforms that perpetrators use to enforce more stringent codes of conduct. Others suggested that rules may be difficult to produce and enforce, and that ‘self-policing’ of naming and shaming perpetrators would be more effective.

‘We need to treat sexist language much more like we treat racist and homophobic language. I would expect somebody who used racist or homophobic slurs to lose their job and/or be told to shut up. The same should go for people who call women ‘sluts’ or ‘whores’. We should have clearer and quicker responses to the use of gendered language.’

‘Abuse should be taken seriously by the social media regulators and accounts closed down. Sexism memes particularly ones that depict violence against women must be removed far quicker.’

One mentee interviewed in 2014 requested training on dealing with trolls and tweeting.

In FWN we don’t claim to have all the answers. But clearly this needs to be taken seriously, debated, and action taken. Two former mentees – members of the FWN executive – are planning to introduce a session about resilience and mental health into the scheme.

Women have spent years being silenced by bullying, abuse, and belittling descriptions: this is the same old misogyny, but in a new format. Feminists have fought it before and we will fight it again. We cannot allow the next generation of excellent and passionate women to be intimidated out of fulfilling their ambitions in public life.

PRE AND POST SURVEYS

14 cohort three mentees and 24 cohort four mentees completed both pre and post programme questionnaires; only responses from participants who completed both were included in the data analysis. In the 2014/15 cohort two mentees withdrew from the programme for personal reasons. The participation rate in the 2014/15 survey - among those who completed the programme - was 88%; this high completion rate means that we can have confidence that the survey results are unlikely to suffer from response bias.

Participants were asked to rate their own skills on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree) for a list of 17 statements derived from the programme's Political Skills Framework.

Key findings are:

- On every item participants' self-ratings improved between the pre and post surveys.

Average pre-survey and post-survey scores

Political and policy understanding

- I know how Parliament works
2013/14 Pre-survey average=4, Post-survey average=5
2014/15 Pre-survey average=4, Post-survey average=5
- I understand the roles and responsibilities of the boards of public bodies
2013/14 Pre-survey average=4, Post-survey average=4
2014/15 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
2013/14 Pre-survey average=3, Post-survey average=5
2014/15 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
2013/14 Pre-survey average=3, Post-survey average=4
2014/15 Pre-survey average=2, Post-survey average=4

Media and communications

- Journalists and politicians are interested in my opinion
2013/14 Pre-survey average=3, Post-survey average=4
2014/15 Pre-survey average=3, Post-survey average=4
- If a radio station called me today I would feel confident taking part in a live political debate tomorrow
2013/14 Pre-survey average=3, Post-survey average=4
2014/15 Pre-survey average=2, Post-survey average=4

Going for public or political office

- I understand the process of running for selection to be a national election candidate
2013/14 Pre-survey average=3, Post-survey average=5
2014/15 Pre-survey average=3, Post-survey average=5
- I understand the process of running for appointment to a local or national public board
2013/14 Pre-survey average=4, Post-survey average=4
2014/15 Pre-survey average=2, Post-survey average=4
- I understand what it takes to be a good effective representative
2013/14 Pre-survey average=4, Post-survey average=5
2014/15 Pre-survey average=3, Post-survey average=5

Organising and campaigning

- Local Fabian societies and CLPs are interested in inviting me to speak at their meetings
2013/14 Pre-survey average=2, Post-survey average=3
2014/15 Pre-survey average=2, Post-survey average=3
- I have a strong regional and national political network
2013/14 Pre-survey average=2, Post-survey average=4
2014/15 Pre-survey average=2, Post-survey average=4

- I know people on public boards or political life who I feel I can approach personally for information or advice
2013/14 Pre-survey average=4, Post-survey average=5
2014/15 Pre-survey average=3, Post-survey average=5

Core skills

- Other people see me as a leader
2013/14 Pre-survey average=4, Post-survey average=5
2014/15 Pre-survey average=4, Post-survey average=5
- I would feel confident to be a leading speaker in a debate
2013/14 Pre-survey average=4, Post-survey average=5
2014/15 Pre-survey average=3, Post-survey average=5
- I am a confident speechwriter
2013/14 Pre-survey average=4, Post-survey average=5
2014/15 Pre-survey average=4, Post-survey average=5
- When I give a speech, I am persuasive
2013/14 Pre-survey average=4, Post-survey average=5
2014/15 Pre-survey average=4, Post-survey average=5
- I am confident in my ability to build relationships with senior party officers and politicians.
2013/14 Pre-survey average= 5, Post-survey average=5
2014/15 Pre-survey average= 4, Post-survey average=5

When the responses to all of the items are added together to create a political skills scale the average score among the 2013/14 cohort was 58 in the pre scheme survey and 77 in the post scheme survey. Among the 2014/15 cohort the average in the pre scheme survey was 51 and 75 in the post scheme survey (out of a possible 102). Overall, the average shift in self-rated political skills across the third year of the programme was 19 percentage points and 24 percentage points in year four, statistically significant differences in both intakes.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Fabian Women's Network's mentoring and political education programme continues to deliver tremendous results; the participants gain an enormous amount of confidence in their abilities as actors in political and public life. These gains are evidenced by the sizeable increases in the participants' self-evaluations from the pre and post programme questionnaires, where on average the mentees rated their own abilities between 19 and 24 percentage points higher after completing the programme. The participants gain more than skills and confidence alone: one of the most precious political resources is a wide, yet dense, social network. The FWN mentoring and political education programme draws women into a multi-layered network of their peers, alumni, organisers, mentors and supporters. The networking opportunities provided to the mentees give them resources to both get by (offering support to face and challenge barriers to participation) and to get on by drawing them into wider networks and opportunities.

The mentees are drawn from an increasingly diverse pool, with mentees drawn from young people in their twenties to the over fifties and 30% in the 2014/15 cohort from BME backgrounds. There is a predominance of London based mentees but the organisers have made considerable efforts to attract and support mentees from across the UK. In order facilitate the participation of more mentees outside of London the organisers may wish to consider:

1. Supporting the development of sister or partner organisations associated with devolved institutions;
2. Seeking additional funding for travel costs for mentees from outside of London.

The confidence building that the programme has generated, evidenced in the focus groups and interviews is impressive. The residential training event was signalled by mentees as critical to the development of the strong peer network. This is an example of best practice that demands a

great deal of time and financial resources but is clearly highly beneficial. The majority of mentees and mentors reported a very positive experience of the mentoring relationship. The mentees recounted that interacting with women who could serve as role models was invaluable. Each mentor/mentee relationship is naturally different and imposing a rigid structure on the meetings would detract from the flexibility and personal nature of the programme. However, some mentees and mentors mentioned difficulties establishing a common understanding of the expectations of the mentoring relationship. To counter this it may be useful to introduce a mechanism for setting out the parameters of the relationship at the outset.

3. The organisers may wish to consider the introduction of a 'contract' to be negotiated between the mentor and mentee during their first meeting.

It is clear from the examples of graduates of the programme that many of the participants have used the programme as a springboard into the next stage of their political and public life. These graduates make up a growing network that can be used to sustain and grow the programme. The quality of the existing programme is extremely high and given its strength and the resources that are expended we are hesitant to suggest expanding the intake, but in the longer term it may be viable to open up a twin programme targeted at public life with some shared sessions. In fact some mentees suggested offering twin tracks or choice in terms of which training events they attend and this might be facilitated by recruiting another organiser.

4. In the medium to long term the organisers may wish to consider recruiting an additional organiser to facilitate the public life track of events to run alongside the political training programme.
5. We strongly commend the way that the organisers have drawn graduates of the programme into the organisation. We recommend that they continue with this approach to retain institutional memory, future proof the programme and provide scope for expansion where appropriate.

The FWN mentoring and political education programme provides women with valuable resources to help them face the challenges to

participating in politics and public life that are often particularly difficult for women. The ability to combine family life with a political life is something the mentees raised as an area of concern. Many reported feeling encouraged by talking about this issue with women who had found a way to negotiate a life that contains both politics and family. There was also a sense that the mentees felt empowered to challenge the status quo by working collectively. The evidence of the direct experience of online abuse and exposure to the online abuse and media sexism directed at women politicians, described by Kate Talbot in her survey of current mentees and graduates of the programme, demonstrates that women in politics and public life continue to face both everyday sexism and deeply troubling and often vicious online sexist abuse. The FWN mentoring and political education programme is an exemplar of how to build resilience among women to continue to pursue their ambitions in a sometimes hostile environment and to work together to change the public sphere for the better.

REFLECTIONS FROM THE ORGANISERS

The publication of *Cracks in the Glass Ceiling* and subsequent publicity in the Observer has had far reaching consequences for our mentoring and political education programme. Having an esteemed academic institution produce such a positive report, enhanced our growing reputation and gave us credibility at home and abroad. Copies of the report travelled round the country and internationally, and have brought requests to support new mentoring programmes in organisations here, including the Local Government Association and in other countries including the Balkans and the Philippines.

The Observer article produced a great buzz which whirled round social media and raised our profile at the critical point when we were opening applications for the fourth cohort. We attracted women with a very different range of backgrounds and skills from all over the UK. They shared Fabian and Labour values, but not all of them had been members. At the end of that year these women used their networks to reach out to others, further enriching the sheer variety and large number of applicants.

So we now have 125 mentees - once you are in this network it is for life and this network has increasing lines and layers crisscrossing and joining women up in so many new ways. We have an incredibly wide range of expertise from every sector including, film-makers and a doctor, writers and a farmer, lawyers and an architect, social workers and a fashion designer, teachers, scientists, an engineer and an organic food campaigner. For the ten months on the programme women are benefiting from a mentor, a buddy, monthly events, a public speaking club, policy events, skills development and training, access to a private recruitment notice board, access to restricted places such as the Shadow Cabinet Room and access to an understanding of the daily lives of women MPs and MEPs, women in the House of Lords, women in the London Assembly, women on Boards, women in senior positions in Charities, Unions and women with tremendous experience and influence. We create as many opportunities as possible for mentees to chair events, to speak at events and to network

with others and critically to network with each other. We watch how the chemistry works from having 28 women in the room of different backgrounds, ages, ethnicity, skills and experience but all sharing the same values and wanting to support each other to achieve. We watch the growth in their confidence and self-belief as the women realise that they have the massive potential to make changes to their own and others' lives.

As the programme develops we see everyone achieve either promotion in their professional lives, selection or election to political or public office. With a tweet or WhatsApp message or Facebook page comes a picture of one mentee live on TV, another speaking at an international conference, others on the doorstep running or supporting a mentee's campaign somewhere around the UK, a job opportunity, a vital issue to lobby on and everyone cheering each other on. In Brussels last year the evening before our visit to the European Parliament one mentee arrived with an interview offer. Two hours later one mentee with had helped her prepare the material for a specialist presentation, another had worked on her delivery skills and a few of us had supported her growth in confidence. Of course she got the job and became yet another role model for others. At Party Conference we can see how many FWN mentees are chairing sessions which they have planned and organised; how many speak on an incredibly wide range of panels and how well they are networking.

As the years go on, we find so many mentees wanting to put back into the programme. So they stand for the FWN Executive and create multiple opportunities for others, they publish Fabiana, so there's a particular space for women to write, they run the public speaking club and attract world famous TED trainers to share expertise, they help us organise the programme, they speak at each other's events, and they become lifelong friends and supporters and attend each other's weddings!

We know we need to fundraise to assure the long term future of the programme. We are also very clear that couldn't run this programme without the Fabian Society as our bedrock, without the women in the Parliamentary Labour Party and access to the Palace of Westminster, without the European Parliamentary Labour Party and access to the European Parliament, without the support of Iain McNicol, General Secretary of the Labour Party, without the support of our Advisory Group to push the boundaries, without the hours and weight of wisdom given

freely by our mentors. We really need that annual surge of new mentees throwing themselves into the programme and then coming back time and again with wonderful success stories. That's what drives us and what sustains the programme.

So our thanks goes out once again to Dr Rosie Campbell and Professor Joni Lovenduski from Birkbeck, University of London and to Kate Talbot our Programme assistant coordinator and former mentee, to FWN executive members past and present, to Unison our sponsors, to all our mentors and to everyone who helps ensure our continuing success and roll call of achievement.

The FWN Mentoring Scheme relies entirely on volunteer programme co-coordinators, and of a number of other women who give up their time for free. We are committed to not charging a fee for the scheme in order to make it accessible to everyone. You can donate to FWN through the Fabian Society.

Please help us keep the scheme going, and keep it free.





FOOTPRINTS IN THE SAND

This report is an evaluation of the third and fourth years of the Fabian Women's Network Mentoring and Political Education Programme (launched in 2011). Since the publication of *Cracks in the Glass Ceiling* in 2014, the organisers have taken our suggestions for improvement on board. We hope the recommendations made in this report will lead to the scheme continuing to develop, grow, and improve.

The report finds that the 10 month programme continues to be an exemplar in the training and recruitment of women for political and public life and it delivers tremendous results.

Rosie Campbell & Joni Lovenduski

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