

**An Investigation of Gender Equality Issues at the
Executive Level of the Northern Ireland Public
Sector:**
*Findings from a Study of Current and Aspiring Executives’
Perceptions*

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DELIVERING SOCIAL CHANGE

Gender Equality at Executive Level in the N.I. Public Sector

Forward

As Diversity Champion in the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS), I warmly welcome this report which is the culmination of an extensive three year evidence based study. It provides informative and valuable insights regarding gender equality at executive or senior level of the Northern Ireland (N.I.) public sector. The report's twelve recommendations are designed to assist delivery of gender equality at executive level across the N.I. public sector.

A new Executive Gender Equality Strategy is under development and the findings of this report will provide robust baseline information against which we can monitor change and the progress we are making towards our goal of achieving gender equality at executive level of the public sector. Two of the key objectives of the current Gender Equality Strategy 2006-2016 are the achievement of gender balance on all government appointed committees, boards and other relevant official bodies; and ensuring the active and equal participation of women and men at all levels of civil society, economy, peace building and government. The findings and recommendations of this report will add significant insights into how these objectives can be achieved.

In relation to the NICS, senior officials are already working to address the issues this report raises. Each Department now has a Board level diversity champion and I chair the Network which draws together all the champions to address diversity issues including gender equality as well as disability, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) and Black and Ethnic Minority (BEM). The Diversity Champion's Network has already commissioned research, additional to this work, on the representation of particular groups within the Civil Service and their distribution across organisations and grades.

While there is real and sustained evidence that the levels of imbalance at senior level are reducing – whether in the NICS, local government or the highest tiers of the judiciary – it is clear there is more to be done. That work needs to include public appointments and in that context, I look forward to working with Judena Leslie, the recently appointed Commissioner for Public Appointments who has already highlighted her focus on gender equality as an issue.

Professor Joan Ballantine and her team have helped to shine a light on the issues which need to be addressed. This research should act as a catalyst in assisting the N.I. public sector in addressing the ongoing gender imbalance at executive level. I look forward to the delivery of further positive change in this area.

PETER MAY

NICS Diversity Champion

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Executive Summary

This report presents the findings from stages one, two and three of a research project¹ which investigates gender equality at executive level² in the Northern Ireland (N.I.) public sector. **Stage one**³, which aimed to determine a base line for gender equality, identified a significant **degree of inequality in the gender composition** at executive level of the N.I. public sector: males and females holding 70.8% and 29.2% of all executive positions⁴ respectively (see *Table 4.1*). Additional findings from stage one are as follows:

- **Variation exists in the overall gender composition** of all executive positions among the five N.I. public sector organisational types⁵ which comprise our sample (see *Table 4.2*).
- The gender composition of both executive director and non-executive positions is **most equitable within the Health and Social Care sector (HSCNI)**, and contrasts sharply with the remaining four public sector organisational types (see *Table 4.3, Panels A and B*).
- **Notable differences** exist in the gender composition of all executives when organisations are analysed by **sponsoring government department** (see *Table 4.4*)⁶. In particular:
 - DHSSPS, OFMDFM and DSD have gender compositions which comprise between 50% and <60% males.
 - DE, DEL, NIO, DCAL, DETI, DOE and DOJ have gender compositions which comprise between 60% and <80% males.
 - DARD, DRD and DFP have gender compositions which comprise in excess of 80% males.
- **Occupational segregation exists** within the N.I. Ireland public sector (see *Table 4.5*):
 - Males hold the majority (79.0%) of Chief Executive roles within the N.I. public sector, indicating the existence of **vertical segregation**⁷.
 - **Horizontal segregation**⁸ is particularly evident in the following roles: operations (70.4% male); corporate services (65.5% male); strategy, policy and development (64.0% male); and finance (63.9% males).

¹ The research team is grateful to the Office of the Minister and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) for funding this research project.

² The authors of this report use the term 'Executive level' to refer to individuals who are members of an organisation's most senior management board. Membership comprises both 'executive directors' (more commonly referred to as board members in the private sector) and 'non-executives' (more commonly referred to as non-executive directors in the private sector).

³ Stage one involved a content analysis of publicly available data for the year ended 31st March 2012.

⁴ Stage one reports on both 'executive director positions' and 'non-executive positions' comprising a total of 2,308 positions.

⁵ The N.I. Civil Service including executive agencies; Local Government (twenty-six local councils); Non-Departmental Public Bodies (NDPBs); Health and Social Care in Northern Ireland (HSCNI) organisations; Further and Higher Education.

⁶ For a list of abbreviations, see Appendix 4

⁷ Vertical segregation refers to the tendency for men and women to be employed in different positions within the same occupations or occupational groupings. The existence of vertical segregation in the Northern Ireland context has been reported by Potter (2014) who reports that women comprise 37% of managers, directors and senior officials.

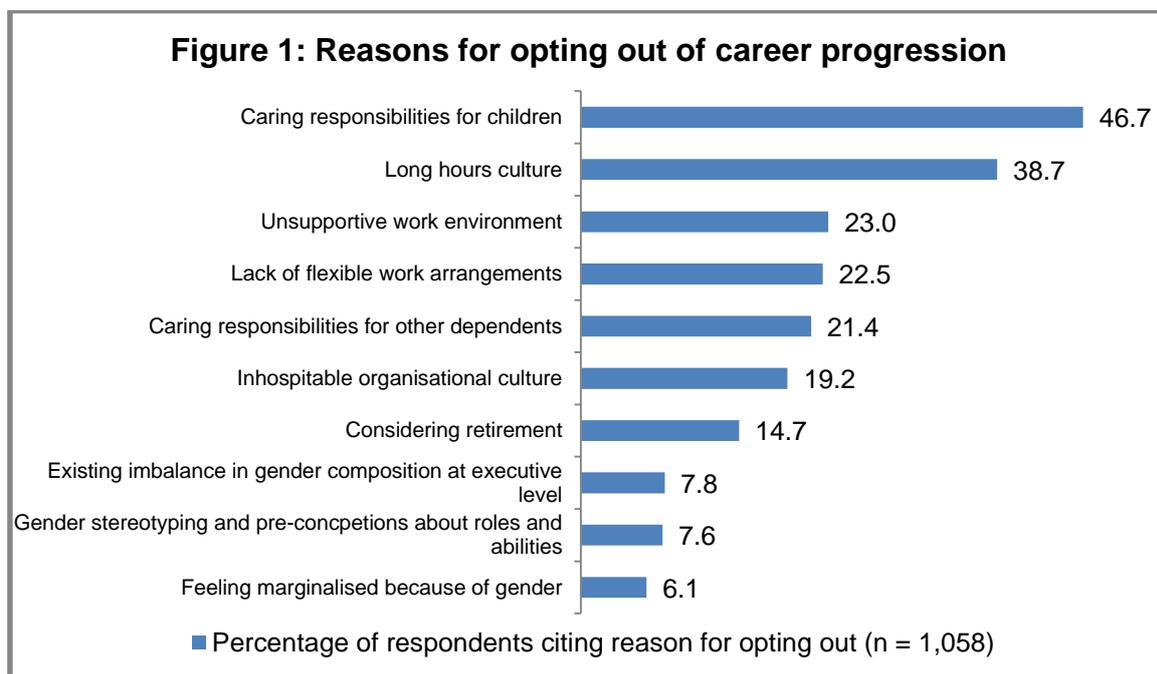
⁸ Horizontal segregation refers to the tendency for men and women to be employed in different roles or occupations.

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- Organisations with **larger senior management boards** are more likely to have **greater numbers of female executives employed**.
- There is no variation in the gender composition of Chief Executives among the five public sector organisational types (see Table 4.6).
- Organisations with a **female Chief Executive** are more likely to employ **greater numbers of female executives** at board level (see Table 4.7).
- Organisations with a **female Chair** are more likely to have a **greater number of female non executives** (see Table 4.9).

Stage two reports on a survey⁹ of attitudes of current and aspiring executives/senior managers with respect to a number of gender equality issues in the N.I. public sector (including enablers or facilitators and barriers to gender equality). The key findings of stage two were as follows.

- A large number of respondents (n=1,058) have **opted out** of career progression, either temporarily or permanently, for various reasons as shown in Figure 1: respondents opting out are more likely to be female, older, have greater caring responsibilities, are employed at lower seniority levels, and work in smaller organisations.



- Just over half of the respondents avail of 'flexi-working' and there is a low take up of other **flexible working** patterns (e.g. compressed work week) which might facilitate improved work life balance (see Table 5.7).

⁹ Perceptions were ascertained by distributing an electronic survey (between May and June 2013), to which 3,186 responses (53.3% female and 46.7% male) were received.

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- Respondents who hold a **non-executive position** believe it is beneficial to their career prospects in terms of developing their management/leadership skills and experience and enabling them to obtain opportunities to work on challenging assignments, which would not be available in their main employment (see Table 5.9).
- There is variation across the N.I. public sector in terms of the **provision and awareness of career development policies and practices** for aspiring executives (see Table 5.10).
- A number of **enablers (or facilitators) of career progression** at the individual and organisational level were identified by all respondents (see Table 5.11, Panels A and B):
 - The top five individual enablers are a *supportive spouse/partner; consistently exceeding performance expectations; demonstrating loyalty/commitment to my organisation; access to affordable childcare; and seeking out difficult or highly visible job assignments.*
 - The top five organisational enablers are *access to acting up opportunities; access to external leadership training and development programmes; in-house leadership training and development programmes; formal mentoring; and flexible work arrangements.*
 - Females indicated that all enablers were more important than male respondents (see Table 5.20, Panels A and B); females also indicated that *gender impact assessments* were an enabler of career progression whilst males did not (see Table 5.20, Panel B).
- A number of **barriers to career progression**, at the individual and organisational level, were also identified (see Table 5.12, Panels A and B):
 - Generally respondents did not view factors related to them as individuals as barriers to career progression with the exception of a *lack of management or leadership experience.*
 - Respondents were more likely to view organisational factors as barriers to career progression. The top five organisational barriers identified were: *limited advancement opportunities; limited acting up opportunities; lack of mentoring; lack of opportunities to gain visibility; and lack of recognition for work life balance.*
 - Females perceived the following factors related to them as individuals as barriers whilst males did not: *caring responsibilities for dependent children; and lack of awareness of organisational politics* (See Table 5.21, Panel A).
 - Females viewed the following organisational factors as barriers whilst males did not: *lack of recognition for work life balance; exclusion from informal networks of communication; long-hours culture; a lack of opportunities to work on challenging assignments; and colleagues' negative reactions to the use of flexible work arrangements* (see Table 5.21, Panel B).
- A number of **policies and practices** were identified as ways to improve gender equality at executive level in the N.I. Public sector (see Table 5.13).
 - The top five policies and practices identified were: *providing unsuccessful candidates with constructive feedback; interview panel training to avoid gender bias; inclusive organisational culture at executive/senior managerial levels; regular monitoring of executive/senior management level applicant data; and targeted in-house leadership training and development programmes.*

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- Other important policies and practices identified were formal mentoring, targeted external leadership training and development programmes; greater flexible work arrangements; informing potential candidates about a forthcoming vacancy; high level internal or secondment development opportunities for the underrepresented gender; statutory requirement to conduct gender reviews; and move away from competency based interviews.
- Female respondents indicated that all policies and practices identified were more important than males (see Table 5.22).
- Female respondents support the use of *'quotas for gender balance at executive/senior managerial levels'* whilst males do not (see Table 5.22).
- Female respondents were more likely to agree that **female stereotyping** exists in the N.I. public sector when compared to males (see Table 5.24).
- Females are less positive about their **organisation's gender culture** than males with respect to the existence of cronyism, the existence of a balanced management board, and the allocation of sufficient time and financial resources to promote gender equality at executive level (see Table 5.27).

Stage three reports on a series of in-depth interviews¹⁰ conducted with current and aspiring executives, both males and females, across the N.I. public sector. Building on the results of stage two, the interviews addressed a number of themes relevant to gender equality at executive level of the N.I. public sector: perceptions of the gender composition of senior boards; gender culture; flexible work arrangements; work life balance; opportunities for advancement; recruitment and progression (including personal attributes); opting out of career progression; benefits of a balanced gender board; and promoting gender equality at senior levels. The key findings of stage three were as follows.

- **Theme One: Perceptions of the Gender Composition of Senior Management Boards**
 - The majority of interviewees recognised that the gender composition of their senior management board was an issue, with females holding fewer senior positions than males (this being consistent with the results of stage one).
 - Males were more inclined to suggest that gender composition was less of an issue for their organisation than females.
 - Some notable exceptions to these general views were found within the Health sector, some smaller Non-Departmental Public Bodies (NDPBs) where the gender composition of senior boards is more balanced and within Local Government where significant progress has been made in terms of improving gender equality over a sustained period of time.
- **Theme Two: Gender Culture**

¹⁰ A total of 107 interviews were conducted (between October 2013 and December 2014) with male and female, current and aspiring executives, across the N.I. public sector.

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- Differing descriptions of organisational culture exist across the public sector. With respect to the Senior Civil Service, the majority of females recognised their organisation's culture as an issue for gender equality at senior levels. Females in particular described the culture of the Senior Civil Service as male dominated in addition to making references to a competitive, unsupportive, blame culture within some departments which has the potential to impact upon females more so than their male counterparts.
 - The Permanent Secretaries Group was seen by the majority of female executives as a cold, unwelcoming environment and public committees, where senior civil servants were questioned by Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs), were also seen as inhospitable cultures for both males and females, but more so for females.
 - The majority of interviewees within the Local Government sector perceived their organisation's gender culture as positive and as having improved over time, with improvement largely attributed to the Local Government Staff Commission's Women in Councils Initiative (implemented in 2006). The role of the political and social context was also recognised as important, with female councillors viewed as instrumental in terms of addressing gender equality issues at senior levels.
 - Within both the Health sector and NDPBs mixed views, both positive and negative, regarding organisational gender culture were expressed by interviewees. Some interviewees within Health identified an unhealthy performance and blame culture and an environment where macho expectations exist. Within some NDPBs, the existence of a macho or male dominated environment was also identified. Positive views were generally held by those in the Further and Higher Education sector.
 - In terms of the interaction between males and females in the workplace and during meetings, some females reported that they felt marginalised and isolated within the Senior Civil Service. This contrasts with Local Government where the only issue of note was that related to the timing of Council meetings. Elsewhere, mixed views were expressed with respect to the interaction of males and females in the workplace.
 - The majority of interviewees suggested that the workings of what would have been described as the 'old boys' network' had dramatically declined over the years. Despite this, interviewees across the public sector recognised the continued existence of informal male networks, generally based around sporting activities, from which they perceived themselves to be excluded. Other limited informal networks also existed around social activities, with many females feeling excluded due to caring responsibilities.
- **Theme Three: Flexible Work Arrangements**
 - Without exception, all interviewees indicated that their organisations have in place a variety of policies to support flexible work arrangements including for example, part-time hours, job share, compressed working week and term time working.
 - However, despite their existence, there is a considerable gap between the rhetoric and reality of flexible work arrangements at senior levels within the public sector. The

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overwhelming view of interviewees, regardless of gender or part of the public sector (with some minor exceptions in the Health sector), suggest that whilst public sector organisations have flexible work arrangements in place they are not readily available at senior or executive levels.

- The above view is supported by the perceptions of the majority of interviewees who indicated that their organisation expects senior managers to work on a full-time basis. This viewpoint was expressed regardless of gender or part of the public sector in which the interviewees were employed.
- As a result of views around expectations of full-time senior positions, the majority of interviewees (both males and females) perceived that it would be very difficult, if not impossible, to progress to senior levels whilst availing of flexible work arrangements. This viewpoint was held regardless of gender or part of the public sector in which the interviewees were employed.
- The few people currently availing of flexible work arrangements expressed feelings of guilt when leaving work or being absent from the physical workplace.
- Some negative perceptions of those availing of flexible work arrangements were also expressed by interviewees in terms of the difficulty of managing staff on such arrangements and the subsequent problems arising from their absence from the physical work place.
- There was very little evidence found to suggest that organisations engage in active job-redesign when individuals avail of flexible working.
- Finally, some interviewees suggested that those availing of flexible work arrangements were potentially viewed as being less committed to their organisation.

- ***Theme Four: Work Life Balance***

- The work life balance of the majority of individuals interviewed right across the Northern Ireland public sector was described as poor. This view was expressed irrespective of gender or the part of the public sector in which interviewees were employed.
- A poor work life balance was largely attributed to a long-hours culture within the Northern Ireland public sector. Again, this view was expressed irrespective of gender or the part of the public sector in which interviewees were employed.
- Aspects of the long-hours culture and subsequent poor work life balance were attributed to the demanding nature of the job and the demands of politicians, with both of these impacting on males and females.
- Some interviewees suggested that a poor work life balance represented a barrier to females in particular.
- Caring responsibilities for elderly relatives was also identified as a further factor which had a negative impact on an individual's work life balance. While this issue has the potential to impact on both males and females, it was reported as impacting more on females.

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- The ability to delegate and empower others was identified as an important factor in maintaining a good work life balance. It was noted that females were often reluctant to delegate and that this may be a factor contributing to their poor work life balance.
- Little evidence was found to suggest that senior staff lead by example in terms of promoting an appropriate work life balance within their organisations.
- A general view was expressed by interviewees, both males and female, that work life balance deteriorates as a result of progression to senior levels. This view was expressed irrespective of which part of the public sector interviewees were employed in.

- ***Theme Five: Opportunities for Advancement, Recruitment and Progression***
 - The majority of interviewees, both males and females, recognise the importance of training and education for career development and progression.
 - Mentoring was viewed as important for career development and progression by both male and female interviewees, with female interviewees placing greater emphasis on this as a key factor in their career progression.
 - There is variation in the provision of mentoring programmes across the public sector and some difficulties (e.g. matching mentees and mentors) with the mentoring process were identified.
 - There was widespread agreement among male and female interviewees across the different parts of the public sector that undertaking secondments, acting up opportunities and challenging/visible assignments is beneficial for career development and progression.
 - Some concerns were expressed by a number of interviewees with regards to the allocation of secondments, acting up opportunities and in particular challenging/visible assignments.
 - The majority view of both male and female interviewees was that the performance appraisal (or annual appraisal) process within their organisation was increasingly passive and little more than a 'tick box exercise'. However, that said, some females did highlight positive aspects of performance appraisals (e.g. mid-year reviews and personal development plans).
 - There was a widespread view throughout much of the public sector (with the exception of some Health and Education organisations) that there was little in the way of succession planning.
 - Males and females across the public sector (with the exception of Health and Education), generally perceived that there are fewer quality training and education opportunities available when compared to a few years ago. This was generally attributed to budgetary constraints.
 - There was very broad agreement among male and female interviewees from across the public sector that recruitment and selection should operate on the merit principle so that the best candidate gets the job.
 - Both male and female interviewees perceived recruitment and selection processes in the public sector as generally fair and transparent. In saying that, competency based interviews were perceived as favouring males who are generally viewed as better at 'selling themselves'

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while assessment centres were perceived as providing a more equitable environment for male and female candidates.

- Females were more likely to opt out of career progression due to issues such as caring responsibilities, the pressures associated with senior roles or an inhospitable work environment. Males were more likely to opt out of career progression due to imminent retirement.
- Confidence and resilience were viewed as particularly important personal attributes for career progression, with most interviewees suggesting that males displayed these attributes more often, and perhaps more naturally, than females.

- **Theme Six: Benefits of Gender Balanced Boards**

- The majority of interviewees, both male and female, were in broad agreement that there were significant benefits of gender balanced boards. The view was expressed irrespective of the part of the public sector in which the interviewees is employed.
- The majority of interviewees suggested that one of the benefits of gender balanced boards was that of facilitating different perspectives or points of view in terms of decision making.
- Gender balanced boards were also viewed as beneficial in terms of positively changing or moderating behaviours and in terms of facilitating the incorporation of softer skills, such as empathy and emotional intelligence, into decision making.
- There was also a general view held among interviewees that gender balanced senior boards were synonymous with the effective functioning of the board in terms of making more deliberate, collaborative and careful decision making.

- **Theme Seven: Promoting Gender Equality at Senior Levels**

- The majority of interviewees within the Civil / Senior Civil Service and the Local Government sectors, both males and females, expressed greater support for the use of targets, as opposed to quotas, as a means of addressing gender equality at senior or executive levels of the Northern Ireland public sector.
- Mixed views regarding the appropriateness of quotas were identified in the Health, NDPB and the Further and Higher Education sectors, with some in support of them and others opposed.
- Some interviewees identified a number of problems with targets including difficulties associated with setting unrealistic or unachievable targets, difficulties associated with the achievement of targets and the potential consequences of not meeting targets.
- Interviewees generally supported the idea that a senior member of staff should assume the role of gender champion within their organisation.
- Interviewees generally supported the positive role of a gender champion in terms of improving the gender culture of public sector organisations and in terms of mainstreaming gender issues at the senior level of organisations.

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- Within the Local Government sector, the concept of a Gender Champion is well established as a result of the Local Government Staff Commission's Women in Local Councils Initiative. Consistent with best practice, the majority of Gender Champions within the Local Government sector are employed at senior executive levels. The positive impact of Gender Champions within the Local Government sector was also noted.
- The concept of a Gender Champion at a senior level is not well developed in the Civil / Senior Civil Service, Health, NDPB or the Further and Higher Education sectors.

- **Recommendations**

The evidence gathered from stages one, two and three of the research project have identified a number of issues regarding gender equality at the executive level of the N.I. public sector. In order to address these issues, the following recommendations are made. These have been categorised as follows: strategic recommendations; policy recommendations; process recommendations; and data analysis recommendations. While the majority of the recommendations have been made by drawing on direct evidence from all three stages of the project, some are supported by our general observations of the N.I. public sector as a result of undertaking the research project.

- **Strategic Recommendations**

- (1) Ensure the achievement of equal participation of women and men (i.e. a minimum representation of 40% males and a minimum representation of 40% females, with the remaining 20% representation comprising either males, females or a mix of males and females¹¹) on public sector executive management boards by January 2023¹². All public sector organisations subject to Section 75 should develop policies, procedures and practices around the following:
 - (a) Establishing measurable targets (over a three year rolling period) for gender representation at executive management board level at an individual organisational level. Targets should be realistic and reflect both the gender makeup of the particular sector and current levels of gender representation within individual organisations. Targets for gender representation should be owned and managed by the most senior management teams within individual public sector organisations;
 - (b) Monitoring and reviewing progress against targets on an annual basis;
 - (c) Submitting monitoring returns (on an annual basis) on gender composition at executive management board level, together with progress against targets set, to the Gender Equality Unit, OFMDFM.

¹¹ The 40% figure was chosen as being situated between the minimum of 30% deemed necessary for a 'critical mass' and sufficient to have a sustainable impact on board performance and full parity at 50% (see Dahlerup, 1988, 'From a Small to a Large Minority: Women in Scandinavian Politics', *Scandinavian Political Studies*, Vol 11, No 4, pp. 275-297).

¹² The time period of seven years to achieve the target of 40% is consistent with that set by the European Union for achieving a target of 40% of the "under represented sex" among non-executive directors of listed companies.

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- (2) The responsibility for gender equality issues within public sector organisations is currently predominantly delegated to Equality and Diversity Officers operating at middle management levels with limited authority, in some cases, to affect change. Individual organisations should identify a Gender Champion (either a male or female), employed at the most senior level of management (e.g. Chief Executive, Permanent Secretary, Director) within their respective organisation, to take overall responsibility for setting and ensuring the achievement of measurable gender equality targets at senior levels and for the promotion of a gender inclusive culture within their area of responsibility.
- (3) Leadership training and development opportunities are viewed as both a barrier to and an enabler of career progression. While some organisations provide excellent opportunities in this regard, access generally to leadership training and development opportunities within the N.I. public sector was described as patchy or sporadic in nature. Some of this was attributed to reductions in training and development budgets. In addition, while access to female only training is available through the Chief Executives' Forum Women's Leadership Initiative, this programme has limited capacity issues which minimises the numbers of aspiring females who can avail of it. The current gap in leadership training and development opportunities is an issue which affects all parts of the N.I. public sector and requires action at a sectoral level. Consideration should therefore be given to establishing an Academy for developing professional executives/managers across the N.I. public sector. Given the current functioning of the Chief Executives' Forum, consideration should be given to whether this organisation, in a revised capacity, might fulfil this role. The Forum would act as a conduit in terms of the following:
- (a) Taking the lead in terms of the development and provision of leadership and development programmes for professional management skills and knowledge that are transferable between different parts of the public sector;
 - (b) Developing greater capacity for female only training and development opportunities to address gender specific issues for current and aspiring executives in the N.I. public sector;
 - (c) Offering specific training and development opportunities designed to address personal resilience and confidence for current and aspiring executives in the N.I. public sector;
 - (d) Facilitating mentoring and coaching relationships within and across public sector organisations.
- (4) At the time of writing, there is a concern that there is no overarching function which facilitates the sharing of best practice, including policy issues, across the N.I. public sector with respect to gender equality at senior levels. It is recommended that a Public Sector Forum for Gender Equality is established (similar in many respects to the current Public Appointments Forum) to provide a setting for public sector organisations/sectors to engage in meaningful dialogue, scrutiny and challenge regarding progress towards achieving gender equality at senior levels at a

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sectoral and overall public sector level. In this respect, the forum would act as an overview body (with no executive responsibility) and as a conduit for the sharing of experiences, problems, potential solutions and best practice. The Forum would also commission further research at periodic intervals into the perceptions of individuals employed within the public sector with respect to various gender equality issues in order to keep abreast of developments in this regard. In order to ensure the effective workings of the Forum, the following issues should be addressed:

- (a) The Public Sector Forum for Gender Equality should comprise senior representatives from the main sectors which comprise the N.I. public sector;
 - (b) The Public Sector Forum for Gender Equality should be jointly championed by both a senior male and female executive within the N.I. public sector;
 - (c) The Public Sector Forum for Gender Equality should comprise representatives from relevant external stakeholder groups (including for example the Equality Commission for N.I., the Civil Service Commission) who would act in both a support and challenge capacity;
 - (d) The Public Sector Forum for Gender Equality should also comprise an external challenge function provided by external members;
 - (e) The Public Sector Forum for Gender Equality should facilitate the establishment of a Gender Equality Working Group, whose membership would comprise equality and diversity practitioners (males and females) employed across the N.I. public sector. The Gender Equality Working Group would provide an environment for equality and diversity practitioners to share policies and their experiences of implementation, in addition to discussing problems, potential solutions and best practice with respect to gender equality at executive or senior levels;
 - (f) The Public Sector Forum for Gender Equality should be adequately funded and supported in an administrative capacity.
- (5) At the time of writing this report, the influence of ‘old boys’ networks’ was generally viewed as less of an issue when compared to some ten to twenty years ago. However, evidence collected suggests that informal networking opportunities still exist for males in particular when compared to females. In addition, a number of interviewees highlighted the importance of networking, together with a lack of female only networks to share best practice with respect to gender equality issues across the N.I. public sector. To address these issues, consideration should be given to:
- (a) Establishing an overarching Public Sector Women’s Network for current and aspiring executives throughout the N.I. public sector to share their experiences, issues, problems and solutions with respect to gender equality issues¹³.

¹³ At present, a number of female only networks (in both the private and public sectors) exist within N.I. In order to understand the workings of these networks, consideration should be given to undertaking a data collection exercise which would identify the number of female only networks currently in place, their particular focus and their effectiveness. The results of this exercise would facilitate a greater understanding of how the proposed Public Sector Women’s Network could play an overarching role within the N.I. Public Sector.

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Policy Recommendations

- (6) The evidence collected during the research suggests that while flexible working arrangements are widely available throughout the N.I. public sector, the reality is that individuals holding senior roles generally do not avail of such arrangements as a result of organisational expectations of the nature of work or negative perceptions around their use. In order to address this inconsistency, organisations should develop a gender inclusive culture at senior management levels which promotes the acceptance and use of flexible work arrangements for senior executives/managers by:
- (a) Collecting data on the uptake of flexible working arrangements at senior management levels;
 - (b) Identifying barriers to the use of flexible working arrangements at senior management levels;
 - (c) Reducing or removing barriers to the use of flexible working arrangements through effective job redesign, which should include a debate around the role of home working, remote working and hot-desking;
 - (d) Ensuring that meeting times accommodate, where possible, those availing of flexible working arrangements;
 - (e) Promoting job sharing at senior managerial levels by developing practical guidelines on its operationalisation, potential problems and solutions;
 - (f) Senior management demonstrating their commitment to flexible work arrangements through dialogue with current and aspiring executives to understand their views regarding the use of flexible working arrangements.
- (7) The work life balance of both current and aspiring executives within the N.I. public sector was generally described as poor. Furthermore, work life balance was generally viewed as a barrier to progression, for both male and female aspiring executives. Organisations should develop a culture which promotes an appropriate work life balance at senior management levels through:
- (a) Improved understanding of work-life balance issues by engaging in regular dialogue with current and aspiring executives (e.g. through audits, staff surveys, exit surveys);
 - (b) Reviewing and developing existing work-life balance policies to ensure they are clear regarding the promotion of an appropriate work life balance;
 - (c) Clearly communicating work-life balance policies and practices to current and aspiring executives;
 - (d) Publishing guidance on long hours, explaining the disadvantages of working long hours and giving practical examples of ways to achieve a better work-life balance;
 - (e) Senior managers should lead by example in the promotion of an appropriate work-life balance.

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- **Process Recommendations**

(8) Career development opportunities (i.e. secondments, challenging or highly visible assignments or projects, acting up opportunities), which are viewed as an essential component for progression to senior levels, are not always perceived to be allocated in a fair, transparent and competitive manner, despite the existence of policies in this regard. Organisations should:

- (a) Review, and revise if necessary, their existing policies for allocating career development opportunities to ascertain if they are fair, transparent and based on competitive principles as opposed to an informal allocation;
- (b) Review, and revise if necessary, their existing policies for allocating career development opportunities to ascertain if they provide equality of opportunity for both males and females;
- (c) Review, and revise if necessary, whether existing policies for allocating career development opportunities are consistently implemented at an organisational and sectoral level (where appropriate).

(9) Mentoring was widely acknowledged as an invaluable aspect of career development and progression by both males and females. However, the concept of mentoring was not always understood by individuals at an organisational level, and when made available, consistently applied within and across organisations. Public sector organisations should:

- (a) Develop and implement a policy of formal mentoring for all current and aspiring executives, with particular attention paid towards mentoring for females;
- (b) Develop and implement guidance on the matching of mentors and mentees, and re-matching where matching is found to be ineffective;
- (c) Ensure senior management commitment and buy-in to the formal mentoring policy through their participation in formal mentoring relationships;
- (d) Ensure the process of matching senior management to mentees leads to both male and female current and aspiring executives gaining equal access to these mentors;
- (e) Ensure the formal mentoring policy is available and communicated clearly to all current and aspiring executives;
- (f) Review the continued effectiveness of the formal mentoring policy through regular dialogue and feedback with mentors and mentees;
- (g) Ensure that mentors receive accredited training in the provision of mentoring, and where relevant, coaching;
- (h) Where appropriate, produce guidelines for informal mentoring.

Where organisations currently provide mentoring opportunities to current and aspiring executives, they should review the extent to which their existing policies and their implementation are sufficient and effective in terms of the above points.

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(10) With some minor exceptions, performance management (also referred to as the annual appraisal process) was described as passive (as opposed to active) and viewed as little more than a 'tick box' exercise in terms of career development across the public sector. Additionally, in some organisations there is lack of clarity around the competencies required to progress to senior management levels. Organisations should:

- (a) Review existing performance management policies and practices to ascertain if they are effective in terms of actively promoting career development;
- (b) Ensure that line managers take responsibility for discussing issues around career development with line reports as part of the annual performance management (appraisal) process;
- (c) Ensure that competencies for progression are clearly communicated throughout the organisation.

- **Data Analysis Recommendations**

(11) There is currently no centralised mechanism for collecting and reporting data on the gender composition of senior executive decision making roles for organisations which comprise the N.I. public sector¹⁴. In addition there is a lack of recruitment, selection and promotions data (i.e. with regard to applications, shortlisting and appointments) for senior decision making roles disaggregated by gender across the N.I. public sector. The Equality and Strategy Directorate, OFMDFM should collect robust and comparable data and publish an annual report (similar to the Public Appointments Report) which provides statistics on the gender composition of executive management boards for all public sector organisations subject to Section 75, together with recruitment, selection and promotions data, where appropriate. Disaggregated statistics should be reported:

- (a) By executive/senior management level;
- (b) By organisational type (i.e. Local Government, Health and Social Care, Civil Service);
- (c) By sponsoring government department;
- (d) By organisation.

(12) There is a lack of data regarding the barriers to achieving gender equality at senior management levels across the N.I. public sector. Data should be collected at an individual, organisational or sectoral basis at regular intervals to:

¹⁴ The Equality Directorate, OFMDFM currently collects some limited yearly gender equality data on decision making roles for the Senior Civil Service which is reported at an overall aggregate grade level (for the most recent report see OFMDFM, 2014a).

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- (a) Identify levels of, and reasons for, opting out of career development and progression by gender;
- (b) Identify the barriers to achieving gender equality at senior management levels (e.g. long-hours culture, work life balance, flexible working);
- (c) Develop and implement action plans to address issues related to opting out and barriers to achieving gender equality at senior levels.

Chapter 1

Introduction

Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 places a statutory requirement on public authorities, in carrying out their functions relating to Northern Ireland, to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity across a number of groups, including gender. Since its implementation, a number of studies have investigated various aspects related to the effectiveness of Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. These include studies which have considered the impact of various bodies in contributing to the aims of Section 75 (see for example, AW Trotman, 2007; Dickson and Harvey, 2006; MMMA Consultancy, 2007); those which have considered the effectiveness of compliance and guidance provided for use by public authorities (Reeves Associates, 2006; Dignan, 2005, 2006); studies investigating the development of indicators of equality and diversity in respect of Section 75 (Buchanan *et al.*, 2007; Breitenbach and Galligan, 2004) and an assessment of the impact of European Union (EU) programmes on Section 75 groups (Economic Research and Evaluation, 2005). In addition a number of studies have investigated more specifically the implementation and operation of Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 (Kremer, 2003; McLaughlin and Faris, 2004; Reeves Associates, 2007; Simon Bridge & Associates, 2007; Equality Commission for Northern Ireland (ECNI), 2007).

However, despite an extensive literature which has considered various aspects related to Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, ***no specific study to date has focused on investigating the effectiveness of Section 75 in the context of***

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gender equality at the executive level¹⁵ of the Northern Ireland Public Sector¹⁶.

The Northern Ireland public sector provides an interesting context against which to investigate gender equality at executive level. Northern Ireland is highly dependent on public sector employment, with almost one in every three members of the workforce employed in this sector (Dar, 2013). Moreover, public spending in Northern Ireland accounts for 65% (for the quarter ended October 2012) of gross domestic product (GDP) which is substantially higher than 42% for the UK as a whole (Dar, 2013)¹⁷. Furthermore, according to recent statistics, women tend to be underrepresented in politics (Potter, 2014) and public life (Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA), 2013a; CPANI, 2014) in Northern Ireland. For example, at the time of writing recent figures suggest that female representation in the Northern Ireland Assembly is currently 23.4% (of a total of 108) (Potter, 2014); females account for 11.1% of Northern Ireland members of the UK Parliament (of a total of 18) (Belfast Live, 2015); 25% of local councillors are female (Potter and Kelly, 2014); and 36% of public appointments are held by women (OFMDFM, 2014b).

Whilst some recent statistics are available regarding gender balance at senior levels for specific segments of the Northern Ireland public sector¹⁸, there still remains a significant gap in data concerning gender equality at executive level right across the Northern Ireland public sector. In this regard, little seems to have changed over the

¹⁵ The authors of this report use the term 'Executive level' to refer to individuals who are members of an organisation's most senior management board. This membership comprises both 'executive directors' (more commonly referred to as board members in the private sector) and 'non-executives' (more commonly referred to as non-executive directors in the private sector).

¹⁶ The 'Northern Ireland Public Sector' is defined as comprising organisations designated for the purposes of Section 75, with some notable exceptions. See Appendix 1 for a list of all organisations included in our research.

¹⁷ A comprehensive measure of GDP for N.I. is not available due to a lack of suitable data sources. The comparison of GDP for N.I. with the UK referred to by Dar (2013) is therefore an approximation.

¹⁸ For example, in a recent DFP (2012) review of Senior Civil Service posts as at 1st January 2010, 31% of executive posts (i.e. Grade 5 and above) were held by females while the remaining 69% were held by males.

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last ten years. For example, a decade ago, Breitenbach and Galligan (2004) argued that 'apart from data on formal politics and public appointments, data on gender and decision-making in Northern Ireland is very poor' (p.viii). They further argued that 'in other areas, new research would require to be undertaken, including women's representation in senior positions in business, whether as chief executives or board members' (p.67). The research discussed in this report addresses this important gap and in doing so aims to advance our understanding of the effectiveness of Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 in the following ways: providing baseline data on various aspects of gender equality at executive level across the Northern Ireland public sector; identifying enablers or facilitators, barriers, and best practice towards achieving gender equality within the public sector; and engaging in meaningful consultation with key stakeholders.

In order to guide the research and interpret the findings, the investigators will draw on gender regimes theory. The term 'gender regime' originated in the work of Connell (1987) and refers to the configuration of gender relations and processes at a particular historical point in time within a particular setting (for example, a private or public sector organisation). Acker (1992), one of the key proponents of the theory, argues that sex differences become embedded in the culture of organisations leading to gendered institutional regimes. Furthermore, she argues that organisations have gender regimes which consist of internal structures, processes and beliefs that result in the distribution of women and men into different tasks and positions, thereby creating inequalities (Acker 2006a, 2006b). The gender regime model consists of four dimensions of gender relations, namely a gender division of labour; gender relations of power; emotion and human relations; and gender culture

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and symbolism. Connell (2006a) argues that the four dimensional model provides a 'template for describing any organization's gender regime, as well as a framework for data collection in interviews and observation' (p. 839). She further argues that the gendered regimes approach adopted allows gender equality practitioners and researchers to understand local gender arrangements operating in specific public sector organisations and the extent to which such arrangements facilitate the advancement of gender equality. As a theoretical approach, the concept of gender regimes has been applied in the public sector. For example, Connell (2006a, 2006b) uses a model of gendered regimes to understand gender complexities in a manner that she argues is helpful in terms of understanding the implementation of gender equity policy and practice in ten Australian public sector organisations.

The remainder of this report is organised as follows. In the next chapter, the relevant literature which has investigated aspects related to gender equality at senior levels is reviewed. Chapter three provides a brief discussion of the research approach or methodology adopted to undertake the research¹⁹. In Chapter four, the findings from the first stage of the research are presented. The findings from stages two and three of the research are then presented in chapters five and six respectively. Finally, the findings from the research project are summarized and recommendations arising from the research outlined.

¹⁹ A more detailed discussion of the research approach is provided in Technical Annex One.

Chapter 2

Review of Relevant Literature

2.1 Research Context

The issue of gender equality in the workplace developed out of the recognition that women traditionally have not had the same economic opportunities as men, have held stereotypically feminine jobs, and have not received equal pay for equal work. In addition, women are under-represented at the senior levels of both private and public sector organisations.

A 2010 report prepared by the United Nations' Department of Economic and Social Affairs confirmed that women were still underrepresented in a number of areas, including senior officials and managers, and continue to bear the majority of responsibilities for caring, preparing meals and housework, regardless of whether they are working or not. The report also noted that 'while the gender pay gap is closing slowly in some countries, it has remained unchanged in others' (p. ix). Interestingly, although Hausmann *et al.*, (2010) found that although the most gender equal societies (i.e. Iceland, Norway, Finland, and Sweden) have some of the highest levels of economic participation for women, made possible by facilitating parents to combine work and family commitments, shared participation in childcare by both genders, more equitable distribution of labour at home, and a better work-life balance for both women and men, a significant gender wage gap still exists. In addition, such countries have a strong record of women in leadership positions with

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Norway, for example, adopting a 40% quota for both genders to be represented on publicly listed management boards by 2008 (Sweigart, 2012).

Over time, a number of EU treaties and directives have referred to gender equality (e.g., Directive 2006/54/EC Equal Opportunities and Equal treatment for men and women) and encouraged member states to take action where inequalities exist. Consequently, some EU member states have primarily concentrated on promoting equal opportunities employment through publicly subsidised, affordable childcare, the promotion of parental leave which is more evenly split between both parents, promoting a wider range of occupational choices among young women (e.g. Ireland and Italy), and increasing the minimum wage and re-evaluation of low paid jobs (e.g. Belgium and Denmark) (European Commission (2012). The European Commission (2012) also suggests that establishing gender specific institutions, standardised wage setting mechanisms (as in Cyprus and the Netherlands) and strengthening equalities legislation (as in Luxembourg and France) can improve gender equality across the EU.

However, despite such action, minimal progress has been made in the area of gender equality, partly as a result of low female representation at senior management levels (European Commission, 2012). Recognising this, the European Commission (EC) argues that by focussing on gender representation at higher levels, other important issues around traditional gender roles, the division of labour, women's and men's educational choices, and women's concentration in a few occupational sectors, will be addressed. Reflecting the importance of gender equality at senior managerial levels, the EC has recently proposed a 40% gender

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objective for non-executive directors of private sector organisations to be attained by 2020 and urges member states to recognise the role of the public sector in advancing gender equality.

2.2 National Context

In the UK, the Equal Pay Act (1970) and the Sex Discrimination Act (1975) were the first pieces of legislation promoting gender equality in the workplace. A more recent piece of legislation, the Equality Act (2010), brought together a range of previous equality legislation under a single framework. In addition a number of high profile reports have raised the profile of gender equality issues at senior levels within private sector organisations. For example, the Coalition Government commissioned the Davies report (2011) to undertake a review of the gender balance of boards of UK listed companies 'to identify the barriers preventing more women reaching the boardroom and to make recommendations regarding what government and business could do to increase the proportion of women on corporate boards' (p. 6). The Davies report (2011) identified an increase of women on company boards from 9.4% in 2004 to 12.5% in 2010. However, despite recognition that the rate of progress was slow, the report rejected the notion of compulsory quotas and recommended that individual organisations voluntarily address the issue of gender equality at senior levels. To that end, Davies (2011) recommended that the Financial Times Stock Exchange (FTSE) 100 should aim for a minimum of 25% female board member representation by 2015 and that FTSE 350 companies should set their own, challenging gender targets for board representation. One year later, Sealy and Vinnicombe (2012) undertook a review of women appointees to the boards of FTSE

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100 companies which indicated that the number of female executives increased by 2.5% from 2010 to 2012. However, although improvements in gender equality at senior levels have been made since the publication of the Davies report (2011), Sealy and Vinnicombe (2012) argued that the minimum target of 25% female representation on FTSE 100 companies by 2015 does not appear realistic.

Statistics on female representation in the public sector have also been reported by the UK Senior Civil Service in their report '*Promoting Equality, Valuing Diversity: A Strategy for the Civil Service*', (Cabinet Office, 2008). The report identified targets, actions and measures towards achieving equality and diversity in the UK Civil Service by 2020. The report recognised that female representation in the Civil Service had increased from 48% to 53% between 1997 and 2007, and almost doubled from 16.7% to 32.1% in the Senior Civil Service over the same period. Actions the Civil Service have taken to promote greater gender equality include changing culture, promoting leadership, and managing talent. They also established a diversity champions' network to mainstream equality and diversity into management practice; incorporated measures of equality and diversity within performance objectives linked to rewards; and held government departments and executive agencies accountable for increasing the diversity of the talent pipeline. The report also states that the outcomes of the *Promoting Equality, Valuing Diversity* strategy will be measured against targets for the representation of women and other underrepresented groups in the Civil Service. To that end, a target of 34% has been set for female representation in top management jobs and 39% female representation in the Senior Civil Service by 2020.

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2.3 Northern Ireland Context

In Northern Ireland, a number of reports confirm gender inequality within the workforce. For example, Hanvey *et al.*, (2005) found that women were under-represented in the workforce; are receiving a lower hourly wage than men, even though it is improving; and receive less compensation because they are more likely to work part-time. In addition, ECNI (2006) reported that despite females comprising a greater proportion of the population (51.3%), a higher percentage of males (70.9%) than females (54.0%) were economically active. Furthermore, economically active males were more likely than females to work full time (82.9% vs 57.0%) while females were more likely than males to work part-time (33.1% vs 6.3%). Males (9.2%) were also more likely than females (3.7%) to work in the highest occupational category of higher managerial and professional occupations. In the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS), figures produced by NISRA (2013a) also reveal that women are more likely to work part-time with the gender ratio between males and females of full time equivalent employees in the NICS at 58:42, and a ratio between males and females of 16:84 among part time workers. Occupational gender segregation across the public sector was also reported in ECNI's (2006) analysis, with greater numbers of males employed in skilled trades and more females employed in administrative and secretarial roles.

More recent, post-recession, figures on gender equality within the Northern Ireland workforce are provided by NISRA (2013b). These suggest that as at September 2013, 70.8% of working age males were in employment compared to 62.0% of females. However, there was still an imbalance in gender at senior levels with only

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5% of female employees employed as managers and/or senior officials (compared to 10.0% of men). Moreover, 20.0% of women were in administrative and secretarial occupations (compared to 6.0% of men). Additionally, recent statistics indicate that women are significantly under-represented in elected office and on public bodies. For example, Potter (2014) reports that females account for only 23.4% of the Northern Ireland Assembly, while Potter and Kelly (2014) note that females account for some 25% of councillors in the reorganised local government sector. This was following a move which saw a reduction in the former twenty-six councils to eleven super councils. Additionally, following the recent 2015 UK General Election, there are now only two (out of a total of 18) Northern Ireland female Members of Parliament (11.1%) (Belfast Live, 2015). More encouragingly two of the three Members of the European Parliament are women. Finally, a similar picture of poor female representation in public appointments in Northern Ireland has also been recently noted, with the Commissioner for Public Appointments (CPANI, 2014) reporting that whilst 35% of all public appointments were held by females in the late 1990s, this figure had dropped to 33% by 2011-2012. More recently the number of females holding public appointments has increased slightly to 36% in the year 2013-2014 (OFMDFM, 2014b).

Recognising that gender inequalities exist in the Northern Ireland context, a number of attempts have been made to address this issue. The most influential of these dates back to Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, which places a statutory requirement on public authorities to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity across a number of groups, including gender. More recently, as a response to on-going levels of gender inequality, the Office of the First Minister and

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Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) (2006) developed a 'Gender Equality Strategy 2006-2016'. Drawing on the work of the United Nations' Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, the strategy identified a number of key barriers to achieving gender equality. These included childcare/caring, health and well-being, representation in public life/decision making, affordable childcare and women-only training, education and life-long learning, access to employment, gender pay gap, work-life balance, stereotypes and prejudices linked to gender, peace-building, poverty, and gender related violence. In order to address inequalities, the strategy recommended gender mainstreaming through incremental change in policies, strategies and activities, all of which is in line with Section 75.

Whilst there have been a number of reports which have specifically documented gender inequalities in the Northern Ireland workforce, there have been a limited number which have specifically reported on gender equality at senior levels for particular segments of the Northern Ireland public sector. For example NISRA (2012) found that over the twelve year period 2000-2012, the representation of females in the Senior Civil Service, particularly at grade 5 and above, had increased from 11.3% to 32.5%. However, the report did concede that in general a lower representation of females was apparent the more senior the nature of the job. This sentiment is confirmed by the finding of the Department for Finance and Personnel's (DFP) (2012) report, *2010 Review of Gender in the NICS*, which states that whilst the overall gender profile of the NICS was 51.8% female and 48.2% male in 2010, females remain underrepresented at higher middle management levels (comprising only 38.8% of these grades) and at senior management grades (31%). Recognising that gender inequalities existed in the Senior Civil Service, the NICS has set a

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number of targets which will form part of the next review of gender in the NICS in 2013 (DFP, 2012). These targets include increasing applications from males for administrative and junior management roles by 10% and increasing female representation at higher middle management and senior management levels by 5%.

2.4 Research on Gender Equality at Senior Levels in Organisations

The following section reviews some of the key research which has investigated women at senior levels in both the private and public sectors. The review focusses on four main areas: the numbers of women in senior positions (including an overview of occupational segregation); the benefits of gender equality; barriers to achieving gender equality; and policies, facilitators or enablers to enhance gender equality at senior levels. The review will conclude with an overview of gender regimes theory, which provides the theoretical foundation for the study.

2.4.1 The Number of Women in Senior Positions

2.4.1.1 Private Sector

Women continue to be underrepresented at executive level in the private sector. For example, as of 2012, (FTSE 1000, 2014) while the numbers of women on boards had increased after three years of stagnation, women constituted only 15% of FTSE 100 board memberships and among FTSE 250 companies, only 28 women, or 4.6%, held executive directorships. While 58% of these companies had one female director, only 18.8% had multiple directors (FTSE 1000, 2014). These findings corroborate previous findings by Singh *et al.*, (2001), Vinnicombe *et al.*, (2010) and

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Sealy and Vinnicombe (2013). Moreover, with respect to female Chief Executive Officers (CEOs), it would appear that little progress has been made since the 10th Anniversary of the Female FTSE report in 2008 (Sealy *et al.*), with only three female CEOs in the FTSE 100 in the latest review (Sealy and Vinnicombe, 2013) compared to five in 2008. Another strand of research which has investigated the number of women in senior positions in the private sector is that which has considered the impact of organisational size. To that end, a number of studies (see for example, Brammer *et al.*, 2007; Hyland and Marcellino, 2002; and Hillman *et al.*, 2007) have reported that organisational size is positively associated with female board representation. In other words the larger the organisation, the more likely that females are members of the board. One of the major reasons cited for this relationship being that larger organisations are expected to face greater liabilities with regard to legitimacy and are therefore more likely to respond to societal pressures for greater gender diversity on their boards.

2.4.1.2 Public Sector

The UK public sector is dominated by women, with 65% of its workforce being female as at June 2012 (Office for National Statistics, 2012). However, despite females making up a larger share of the public sector workforce, recent studies and government statistics reveal significant under representation of women in senior managerial positions, a phenomenon known as vertical segregation (see section 2.4.1.3 below). The Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) (2008) reported that the trend emerging is one of reversal or stalled progress, with only a few significant increases in female representation at senior levels. Worryingly, the

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report warned that at the current rate of progress, it will take another 27 years to achieve equality in Civil Service top management. Interestingly, this situation had not improved three years later when the EHRC reported that women's progress reflected a trend that was 'waxing and waning; not one of constant upward movement' (2011, p. 1).

A number of studies have examined the gender composition of managerial positions within public sector organisations. For example, in the health sector, Miller (2007) reports that female representation within senior managerial levels of the National Health Service (NHS) is relatively low. Despite a predominantly female workforce, she found that females constituted only 33% of the 111 senior management positions examined (i.e. executive membership at Health Board level in Scotland). In England, female representation was slightly better with 43% of executive directorships held by woman in NHS Trusts. Miller (2007) added that even at the most senior strategic policy making level, namely the Management Executive of the Scottish Executive Health Department, there were only two female (six male) directors, and eight female (twenty male) senior managers. This approximated to a staggering 30-40% gender gap in leadership and managerial positions within the NHS.

Likewise in education, McTavish and Miller (2009a) found that within Scottish colleges and universities, while 45% of lecturers are female, only 27% are senior lecturers and a mere 14% of professors are women. Furthermore, at the level of vice chancellor or dean, females are vastly underrepresented. McTavish and Miller (2009b) also found that, within the further education sector, women account for 57%

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of the workforce, yet at senior levels only 23% of principals are female. Women are also over-represented in part-time employment with 65% of all part-time academic staff being female. Finally, Morgan and Allington (2002) found female lecturers and researchers in UK universities were twice as likely to be on fixed term contracts as their male counterparts.

In the public sector generally, research has shown (for example, Morgan and Allington, 2002; OFMDFM, 2010) that women are more likely than men to be employed under temporary and fixed term contracts. Furthermore, women tend to dominate certain key professions such as education (82%) and nursing (68%), a phenomenon known as horizontal segregation (see section 2.4.1.3 below). Moreover, women generally fail to occupy higher managerial positions or secure equal remuneration for comparable work (Hakim, 2006; Perrott, 2002). An interesting piece of work carried out by Berg *et al.*, (2012) investigated the impact of the imposition of private sector practices on the public sector and concluded that, as a result of this, women could be seen as both winners and losers. However, whilst females had progressed in both the social services and higher education (HE) institutions they investigated in Sweden and England, some women in HE were distracted from tasks such as research due to increasing administration loads which acted as a barrier to career progression.

2.4.1.3 Occupational Segregation

According to Melkas and Anker (2001, p. 191), 'gender-based occupational segregation is one of the most important factors contributing to inequality between

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men and women in labour markets around the world'. It consists of two elements, namely vertical and horizontal segregation. Hakim (1981, p. 521) states that vertical segregation exists when 'men and women both work *in the same job categories*, but men commonly do the more skilled, responsible or better paid work'. She cites schools as an example of vertical segregation, where the majority of principals are men, yet the majority of teachers are women. Consistent with Hakim's definition, Charles (2014) defines vertical segregation as a hierarchical inequality, with men dominating the highest status job roles. The second element of occupational segregation, namely horizontal segregation, exists whereby men and women are employed in different types of work. Charles and Grusky (2005) define this as a process which matches women to non-manual service work. This form of occupational segregation leads to females working in administrative and human resources' roles, which in private sector organisations do not readily lead to board positions unlike male dominated roles such as marketing and operations. In a public sector setting, horizontal segregation would manifest itself with females working in areas such as health and education. Several studies which have been conducted in the USA, confirm the existence of horizontal segregation in the public sector, with women tending to work in traditionally female roles, such as nursing and teaching. These include Kerr *et al.*, (2002), Bowling *et al.*, (2006), Sneed (2007) and Alkadry and Tower (2013).

2.4.2 The Benefits of Gender Equality

A significant body of research has focussed on the benefits that organisations might potentially gain by capitalising on the skills and potential of a diverse workforce. For example, Burke (2000) argues that excluding women reduces the pool of talent, which in turn limits the functionality of the board. In addition, Credit Suisse (2012) found that globally 'companies with at least some female board representation outperformed those with no women on the board in terms of share price performance' (p. 12) (see also Catalyst, 2011). Women also increase levels of expertise, innovation, legitimacy and influence with external groups and female employees and improve the firm's reputation and strategic direction (see for example, Bilimoria, 2000; Daley and Angelo, 1994; FTSE 1000, 2014). Moreover, Bell (2005) found that female CEOs and Chairs lead to the appointment of more senior women who earn more than those in non-women led firms, while Adams and Ferreira (2009) found that female directors have better attendance records than their male counterparts.

Karl (1995) argues that women's participation in the decision-making process of the public sector is important for two reasons. First, there can be no true democracy without the equal participation of women and men. Second, women may bring new priorities and perspectives to the organisation of society. Furthermore, Maddock (2002) argues that women are better suited to manage in the public sector for a number of reasons: they are more innovative and are motivated by a desire for change as opposed to promotion alone; they have a greater relational style of

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management than males; and they 'make work adjustments when they can see how these will improve outcomes' (p. 14).

2.4.3 Barriers to Achieving Gender Equality

A body of research has also investigated the barriers within organisational structures that qualified women experience and which prevent them from ascending to senior posts. For example, in an Opportunity Now study (2011), 52% of women reported that a lack of senior role models deterred them from advancing; 49% of women recognised gender role stereotypes and preconceptions as a barrier; and 48% of women identified personal management styles as impeding their advancement. A range of additional barriers have also been investigated in the literature (see for example Opportunity Now, 2000; Oakley, 2000; Pye, 2001; Singh and Vinnicombe, 2004; Turkel, 2004). These include lack of mentoring; management experience; opportunities to work on challenging assignments; senior management's failure to take responsibility for women's career development; previous discrimination and caring responsibilities (which lead to females not being in the 'pipeline' long-enough); and a lack of communication skills; strategic planning/change management skills; technical/specialist expertise; and an understanding of organisational politics. The Opportunity Now (2000) report also found a number of factors which have the potential to hamper career progression: the potential difficulty men have with being supervised by women; the difficulty men experience in managing women; and the fact that men may be concerned with reverse discrimination.

A range of additional barriers which largely arise due to cultural issues have also been identified in the literature. These include gender stereotyping (Klenke, 2003;

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Catalyst, 2006), informal male networks (Simpson, 2000), women not being heard at meetings and having to prove themselves more than males (Singh and Vinnicombe, 2004), work life pressures and long-hours culture. In addition, Klenke (2003) suggests that whilst men are expected to be aggressive, decisive and dominant, women are denigrated when displaying such characteristics. Gender role stereotyping is also relevant as a barrier, occurring in the types of jobs women hold, such as human resources, which rarely lead to opportunities to apply for executive roles. Consequently, glass partitions arise where females are concentrated in stereotypical jobs: this concept is generally referred to as horizontal segregation (see earlier definition). Additionally, women, due to the need for family-friendly work patterns, may accept administrative rather than managerial positions (Fraser, 2004).

Another element of the literature which has considered barriers to female progression is that related to the perceptions employees have of their line manager. The literature suggests that women may feel disadvantaged when supervised by a woman, as perceptions of female managers, tend to be negative. Indeed some women prefer a male leader as opposed to a female one, because they see women as being dominant, emotional, and more nervous and aggressive than their male counterparts (Warning and Buchanan, 2009). In addition, findings reported in the literature suggest that some of the women who have 'made it to the top' are less sympathetic towards junior females and see no need for organisational systems to be changed to facilitate greater gender equality at senior levels: this is more commonly referred to as the Queen Bee syndrome (see for example Derks *et al.*, 2011). To address some of these negative issues, Mavin (2008) argues that

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assumptions made about female relations within an organisation must be openly discussed and traditional management structures confronted.

In addition to the barriers discussed above, Pritchard (2007) reported that in the British and German university sector women did not rise to senior positions. She attributed these findings to inequalities arising from child bearing and rearing. Furthermore, she reported that women were not as strategic in their career decisions as men, not as good as males at networking (see also Newman, 2002; Wilson, 2002) and more submissive to authority. Pritchard (2007) suggests that women would need to behave in the same way as men in order to succeed. Carter and Silva of Catalyst (2010) argue that these barriers result in the pipeline to senior management positions being not nearly as robust as it should be and therefore women still lag behind men in terms of advancement and compensation.

2.4.4 Policies, Facilitators or Enablers to Enhance Gender Equality at Senior Levels

A number of studies have determined that policies in support of work life balance can enhance career progression for females in particular. A significant component of work life balance is flexible working which can help women balance caring responsibilities with work. In support of this, ECNI (2013) recommended workplace flexibility policies be utilised in Northern Ireland to improve women's work life balance. Research also indicates that flexibility will promote women's career advancement. For example, Beninger and Carter of Catalyst (2013) reported that the career aspirations of females are high if they have access to flexible work

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arrangements, but drop off if these are not available. In addition, D'Agostino and Levine (2010) ascertained that women who made use of family friendly practices took no longer to reach an executive position than those who did not. Albion (2004) also found that female workers preferred flexibility over additional pay. However, the major drawback associated with flexibility was the potential isolation problem and issues around missing important meetings. Albion (2004) argues that the latter problem could, however, be rectified as a result of better management of meetings. The issue of flexibility was also investigated by Lewis (2010) in a local government context. Lewis (2010) carried out field work in a predominantly female local government organisation which was characterised by a long-hours culture. The culture was perceived as problematic with the result that some female senior staff availing of flexibility believed that their reduced hours had to be justified by working extra hard. Lewis (2010) also found a high level of staff absences among females, particularly where males did not share family responsibilities.

Within the literature, professional development is also viewed as a policy to enhance gender equality at senior levels. For example, Doherty and Manfredi (2010) found that females within a UK university looked favourably upon positive action initiatives to ensure their progression, such as assistance with professorial applications, budget management and strategic planning. Moreover, Opportunity Now (2000) suggested a number of professional development policies including: external development programmes; identifying and developing high-potential employees; in-house leadership training; high visibility assignments (see also Silva *et al.*, 2012); cross-functional or developmental job rotation; formal mentoring programmes (see also de Vries *et al.*, 2006; FTSE 100, 2014); women's employee networks within

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organisations; numerical goals for representation of women; holding managers accountable for women's advancement; and recruitment practices that encourage women candidates. The issue of making top management accountable for women's advancement has also been identified by Barsh *et al.*, of McKinsey & Company (2013). They argue that top management should be held accountable if no women are available in the pipeline of their organisations. Their report also suggests that organisational values are important, particularly if top management espouses these values.

Policies around cultural change have also been identified as important in terms of enhancing gender equality at senior levels. For example, The PA Consulting Group (2013) argue that organisations need to first understand those systems and processes, such as the long-hours culture, that may not advance gender diversity. PA Consulting Group (2013) recommend implementing 'an integrated talent strategy which focuses on ensuring that female talent are given the challenging opportunities necessary to navigate their career path within organisations' (p. 14). This strategy should address a number of essential components including talent attraction, identification, development and deployment of female staff. Barsh *et al.*, authors of a McKinsey & Company (2012) report, also argue that it is important to address the culture of an organisation if it is impeding females' progression to senior levels. To that end, they identified that a long-hours culture needs to be challenged and a culture of sponsorship for future leaders (both men and women) needs to be established. The report also recommended that gender diversity should be treated in the same way as other strategic business initiatives. An interesting angle around cultural issues has also been identified by Prime and Moss-Racusin, the authors of a

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Catalyst report (2009), who argue that men have a major role to play in increasing gender diversity within their organisations. They also suggest that men need to recognise that gender bias exists within their organisations and that they should be motivated to champion gender equality.

Whilst policies around work life balance, professional development and cultural change can undoubtedly enhance gender equality at senior levels, Opportunity Now (2000) also identifies a number of individual strategies which females might consider as a means of facilitating or enabling them to progress to senior levels. These include: demonstrating loyalty/commitment; consistently exceeding performance expectations; gaining line management experience; seeking out highly visible job assignments; networking with influential colleagues; moving from one functional area to another; having an influential mentor; attaining a high level of business development; upgrading educational credentials; and developing leadership skills outside the office. In addition to those identified by Opportunity Now (2000), a number of further strategies to enhance greater equality at senior levels have been identified in the literature. These include issues around ambition and work ethic (Broadbridge, 2008), utilising a male management style (Tharenou, 2001), developing human capital (i.e. education, skills, and experience) and promoting social capital (i.e. networking, mentoring) (Metz and Tharenou, 2001).

The above section has discussed a number of key issues which are relevant to the debate around gender equality at senior levels: the number of women in senior positions; the benefits of gender equality; barriers to achieving gender equality; and policies, facilitators or enablers to enhance gender equality at senior levels. In the

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next and final section, an overview of gender regimes theory, which provides the theoretical foundation for the current research project, will be provided.

2.5 Gender Regimes Theory

In order to guide the proposed research and interpret the findings, the investigators will draw upon the theoretical lens of gender regimes theory. The term 'gender regime' originated in the work of Connell (1987) and refers to the configuration of gender relations and processes at a particular historical point in time within a particular setting (for example, a private or public sector organisation). Acker, one of the key proponents of the theory, argues that sex differences become embedded in the culture of organisations leading to gendered institutional regimes (Acker, 1992). Furthermore, she argues that organisations have gender regimes which consist of internal structures, processes and beliefs, which result in the distribution of women and men into different tasks and positions, thereby creating inequalities (Acker 2006a, 2006b). Acker's work has been developed to demonstrate how social practices, ranging from formal policies and procedures to informal patterns of everyday social interaction, produce inequities while appearing to be gender-neutral (Ely and Meyerson, 2000). These social practices may include socialisation processes affecting gendered identities, as well as cultural expectations and behaviours (Haynes, 2008). Connell (2006a) later developed a gender regimes model, which consisted of four dimensions of gender relations: gender division of labour; gender relations of power; emotion and human relations; and gender culture and symbolism. Connell (2006a) argued that the four dimensional model provides a 'template for describing any organization's gender regime, as well as a framework for

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data collection in interviews and observation' (p. 839). A brief description of each of the four dimensions now follows (adopted from Connell, 2006a, p. 839):

- Gender division of labour refers to the way in which organisational activities are arranged along gender lines. This means that women might be restricted to working in certain roles, which can leave little scope for advancement; for example clerical duties. In a wider setting it also refers to the division between paid work and domestic labour;
- Gender relations of power refers to 'the way in which control, authority, and force are exercised along gender lines' (Connell, 2006a, p. 839). This might lead to male organisational hierarchies reinforcing themselves as a result of men being given more opportunities in the workplace;
- Emotion and human relations refers to 'the way in which attachment and antagonism among people and groups are organized along gender lines' (Connell, 2006a, p. 839). This might lead to women feeling isolated in the workplace through being excluded from important communication networks. It might also mean that women are judged solely on their physical appearance or be seen as inherently inferior and thus unsuitable for certain roles; and
- Gender culture and symbolism refers to 'the way in which gender identities are defined in culture, the language and symbols of gender difference, and the prevailing beliefs and attitudes about gender' (Connell, 2006a, p. 839). This can lead to an organisational culture that places a premium on mainly masculine activities, such as certain sports, or tolerates displays of pornography in the workplace. It also allows sexist phrases to be used, such as 'girls' when referring to older women.

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As a theoretical approach, the concept of gender regimes has been applied in the public sector. For example, Connell (2006a, 2006b) draws on gender regimes to understand gender complexities in a manner that she argues is helpful in terms of understanding the implementation of gender equity policy and practice in ten Australian public sector organisations. She further argues that the gendered regimes approach adopted allow gender equality practitioners and researchers to understand better local gender arrangements operating in specific public sector organisations and the extent to which such arrangements facilitate the advancement of gender equality. Other work that has applied the concept of gender regimes to the public sector includes Schofield and Goodwin (2005), who also investigated organisations in Australia, and Pascall and Lewis (2004), who examined gender equality and gender policy at national and European levels.

Chapter 3

Approach to the Research

3.1 Background to the Research Project

The research discussed in this report was commissioned by the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) following an open call for research proposals as part of OFMDFM's 2011-2012 research programme. The research aims to investigate the effectiveness of Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act (1998) in the context of gender equality at executive (or senior) level across the Northern Ireland public sector. The project commenced in 1st August 2012 and concluded in autumn 2015. The research is being conducted by an experienced team comprising Professor Joan Ballantine (Ulster University), Dr Graeme Banks (Ulster University), Professor Kathryn Haynes (Newcastle University), Dr Melina Manochin (Aston University) and Mr Tony Wall (Ulster University).

3.2 Aim and Objectives of the Research Project

The aim of the research project is to determine a baseline for gender equality and investigate various gender equality issues at the executive level of the Northern Ireland public sector. In order to address this aim, the study has a number of objectives which are outlined below:

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- Objective 1: To ascertain overall gender equality levels at executive level across the Northern Ireland public sector thereby providing a baseline for the year ended 31st March 2012;
- Objective 2: To ascertain gender equality by occupation at the executive level of the Northern Ireland public sector;
- Objective 3: To ascertain the enablers or facilitators current and aspiring executives/senior managers employed in the Northern Ireland public sector perceive have supported or could support their career advancement to executive level;
- Objective 4: To ascertain the barriers current and aspiring executives/senior managers employed in the Northern Ireland public sector perceive they have faced or may face in their career advancement to executive level;
- Objective 5: To ascertain the extent to which various policies and practices would increase gender equality within the Northern Ireland public sector generally;
- Objective 6: To ascertain perceptions of organisational culture concerned with various gender equality issues within the Northern Ireland public sector;
- Objective 7: To compare male and female perceptions regarding the enablers or facilitators, barriers, and the effectiveness of organisational policies and practices concerned with improving gender equality at the executive level of the Northern Ireland public sector;
- Objective 8: To identify examples of best practice which might facilitate improved gender equality at executive level of the Northern Ireland public sector.

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3.3 Stages of the Research Project

The research project consisted of three stages. **Stage one** addressed objectives 1 and 2 and aimed to provide a baseline for overall gender equality levels and gender equality by occupation at the executive level of the Northern Ireland public sector for the year ended 31st March 2012. This was achieved by conducting an analysis of publicly available data for the 143 organisations²⁰ who comprise the sample for the study. **Stage two** addressed objectives 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7 above. This stage aimed to ascertain the attitudes of current and aspiring executives, currently employed in the Northern Ireland public sector, to a number of gender equality issues. To that end, a questionnaire was designed, piloted and distributed (between May and June 2013) to current and aspiring executives within the 143 organisations which comprise our sample. **Stage three** of the research aimed to investigate in more detail a number of themes related to gender equality at the executive level of the Northern Ireland public sector, and to that end addressed objectives 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7. In addition, stage three aimed to specifically address objective 8, namely to identify examples of best practice which might facilitate improved gender equality at executive level of the Northern Ireland public sector. Data for stage three was collected by conducting a series of interviews (between October 2013 and December 2014) with male and female executives, both current and aspiring. A more detailed discussion of the research approach adopted during stages one, two and three of the project is provided in Technical Annex One.

²⁰ A list of the organisations contained in our sample can be found in Appendix 1.

Chapter 4

Stage One: Establishing a Baseline for Gender Equality in the Northern Ireland Public Sector

4.1 Introduction

This chapter reports on the findings of stage one of the research project. The objectives of stage one were as follows: to ascertain overall gender equality at executive level²¹ of the Northern Ireland public sector thereby providing a baseline for the year ended 31st March 2012; and to ascertain gender equality by occupation at the executive level of the Northern Ireland public sector. The stage one quantitative data were collected as a result of a content analysis²² of publicly available data for the 143 organisations in our sample²³. In the remainder of this chapter, the findings of the stage one analysis are discussed.

4.2 A Baseline for Gender Equality at the Executive Level

4.2.1 Gender Equality: Overall Composition

Table 4.1 indicates the overall gender composition at executive level of the Northern Ireland public sector as at 31st March 2012. The results indicate an overall gender

²¹ For the purposes of stage one of the research, the term 'executive level' is defined as the membership of an organisation's most senior management board. This membership includes both executive director positions (including the CEO) and non-executive positions (including the Chairperson). This definition of executive is used throughout chapter 4 unless otherwise stated.

²² See Technical Annex One for a description of the content analysis process.

²³ A list of the organisations contained in our sample can be found in Appendix 1

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composition of 70.8% male (n=1,634) and 29.2% female (n=674). These figures provide a baseline for gender composition of the Northern Ireland public sector against which future progress can be assessed.

	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Male	1,634	70.8
Female	674	29.2
Total	2,308	100.0

Comparison of the above results is difficult given that no other study to date has investigated gender equality at executive level right across the Northern Ireland public sector. However, a few studies have reported on particular parts (or sectors) of the public sector and on the public appointments process across Northern Ireland. Whilst acknowledging the lack of data to make valid comparisons, the figures reported here are reasonably comparable with those in a DFP (2012) review of Senior Civil Service permanent posts as at 1st January 2010, where 31% of such posts (i.e. grade 5 and above) were held by females while the remaining 69% were held by males. When compared to figures reporting on non-executive positions only, the figures reported in Table 4.1 confirm a comparatively poor picture of gender equality at senior levels. For example, an OFMDFM (2012) report on public appointments (i.e. non-executive positions) for the year ended 31st March 2012 indicated that 33% of all public appointments in Northern Ireland were held by females while the remaining 67% were held by males. Also more recent figures reported by the Commissioner for Public Appointments in Northern Ireland (CPANI,

²⁴ The number of executives (including executive directors and non-executives) included in Table 4.1 with respect to the Senior Civil Service equals 191. This figure excludes some 95 executive directors who are employed in the Senior Civil Service but are not members of any government department or executive agencies' senior management team. For purposes of comparison, Appendix 2, Table 1 provides a comparative analysis of the overall composition of the Northern Ireland public sector including these additional 95 executive directors.

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2014) have indicated that whilst 35% of all public appointments were held by females in the late 1990s, this figure had dropped to 33% by 2011-2012.

The findings for the overall composition of the Northern Ireland public sector reported in Table 4.1 above suggest that whilst efforts have been made, public sector organisations are still some distance from achieving gender equality in the context of their statutory duty under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act (1998)²⁵. Indeed it would be fair to say that there is a considerable way to go in terms of making progress towards achieving greater gender equality at the executive level of the Northern Ireland public sector. Using the insights of Connell's (2006a, 2006b) gender regimes model outlined in chapter 2, the results of the current study indicate that **a significant degree of inequality exists in the structure of the gender relations of power at executive level of the Northern Ireland public sector between males (70.8%) and females (29.2%).**

4.2.2 Gender Equality: Organisational Type

Table 4.2 provides an analysis of the gender composition at executive level of the Northern Ireland public sector, segmented by organisational type. A number of interesting observations can be made:

- With respect to the Senior Civil Service, the figures reported indicate that only 27.7% of females are members of a senior management board²⁶.

²⁵ Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 places a statutory requirement on public authorities, in carrying out their functions relating to Northern Ireland, to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity across a number of groups, including gender.

²⁶ Note this contrasts with 32.5% of females who are currently employed in the Senior Civil Service: see Supplementary Analysis, Appendix 2, Table 2

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- The overall gender balance at executive level within NDPBs mirrors that of the Senior Civil Service, with 28% of senior management board positions held by females.
- Within Local Government, lower levels of gender equality exist with 75% of positions held by males and the remaining 25% held by females. However, it is worth noting that the poor levels of overall gender equality within Local Government organisations may be skewed to some extent by the inclusion of Councillors as a proxy for non-executive directors, the majority of whom are male (see Table 4.3, Panel B later).
- In stark contrast to the Senior Civil Service, NDPBs and Local Government, organisations which comprise the HSCNI sector provide the greatest parity in terms of gender equality at executive levels, with 54.5% of positions held by males and the remaining 45.5% held by females.

			Gender		Total
			Male	Female	
Organisation Type	Senior Civil Service *	Count	138	53	191
		% within Organisation Type	72.3	27.7	100.0
	Local Government	Count	541	180	721
		% within Organisation Type	75.0	25.0	100.0
	Non-Departmental Public Body (NDPB)	Count	675	262	937
		% within Organisation Type	72.0	28.0	100.0
	Health and Social Care in Northern Ireland (HSCNI)	Count	121	101	222
		% within Organisation Type	54.5	45.5	100.0
	Further & Higher Education	Count	159	78	237
		% within Organisation Type	67.1	32.9	100.0
Total	Count	1634	674	2308	
	% within Organisation Type	70.8	29.2	100.0	

* The numbers for the Northern Ireland Senior Civil Service exclude 95 executive directors who are employed in the Senior Civil Service but are not members of any government department or executive agencies' senior management team.

The figures found in the current study for HSCNI might come as no surprise given that the workforce of organisations within this sector are predominantly female. The

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results are also reflective of labour market studies which indicate that caring professions, such as those in the health service, have a gender imbalance which leans towards females (see for example Hanvey *et al.*, 2005). However, the results also contradict previous work by Barry and Cook (2002), and Miller (2007), which found under-representation of women in senior management positions despite women making up the overwhelming majority of the National Health Service (NHS) Scottish workforce. Finally, with respect to the further and higher education sectors, slightly better levels of gender equality at the executive level exist, with a split of 67.1% male and 32.9% female. These findings for further and higher education support previous research carried out by Pritchard (2007) and McTavish and Miller (2009b). Overall, the figures reported in Table 4.2 indicate some differences in the gender composition of executives across the five public sector organisational types within the Northern Ireland public sector.

4.2.3 Gender Equality: Executive Director/Non-Executive Positions and Organisational Type

Further analysis of the data presented in Table 4.2 was carried out to ascertain if variations exist in the gender composition of both executive director positions (see Table 4.3, Panel A) and non-executive positions (see Table 4.3, Panels B), segmented by organisation type.

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			Gender		Total
			Male	Female	
Organisation Type	Senior Civil Service	Count	111	40	151
		% within Organisation Type	73.5	26.5	100
	Local Government	Count	92	45	137
		% within Organisation Type	67.2	32.8	100
	Non-Departmental Public Body	Count	187	76	263
		% within Organisation Type	71.1	28.9	100
	Health and Social Care in Northern Ireland (HSCNI)	Count	50	40	90
		% within Organisation Type	55.6	44.4	100
	Further & Higher Education	Count	52	29	81
		% within Organisation Type	64.2	35.8	100
	Total	<i>Count</i>	492	230	722
		<i>% within Organisation Type</i>	68.1	31.9	100

			Gender		Total
			Male	Female	
Organisation Type	Senior Civil Service	Count	27	13	40
		% within Organisation Type	67.5	32.5	100
	Local Government	Count	449	135	584
		% within Organisation Type	76.9	23.1	100
	Non-Departmental Public Body	Count	488	186	674
		% within Organisation Type	72.4	27.6	100
	Health and Social Care in Northern Ireland (HSCNI)	Count	71	61	132
		% within Organisation Type	53.8	46.2	100
	Further & Higher Education	Count	107	49	156
		% within Organisation Type	68.6	31.4	100
	Total	<i>Count</i>	1142	444	1586
		<i>% within Organisation Type</i>	72.0	28.0	100

The analysis reveals a number of interesting points.

- First, with respect to executive director positions, gender equality is substantially better within Health and Social Care organisations (55.6% male and 44.4% female), followed by organisations in the Further and Higher Education sectors (64.2% male and 35.8% female) and Local Government (67.2% male and 32.8% female). Levels of equality within these three sectors compare favourably with

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those found in the Senior Civil Service (73.5% male and 26.5% female) and NDPBs (71.1% male and 28.9% female).

- Secondly, with respect to non-executives positions only, poor levels of equality exist within both Local Government (76.9% male and 23.1% females) and NDPBs (72.4% male and 27.6% female) when compared to the other three organisational types. The figures for Local Government are consistent with those of a recent review of gender issues in Northern Ireland conducted by Potter (2014) and a recent NISRA (2013a) study which indicated that only 24% of local councillors are female (comparable with Table 4.3, Panel B). However, it should be pointed out that the figure reported here for females in non-executive positions (i.e. 28%) right across the Northern Ireland public sector, are substantially less than those reported recently for public appointments (CPANI, 2014), where membership as at 2011-2012 comprised 33% females and 67% males.
- Finally, a comparison of the overall figures for all executive positions indicates that greater equality exists among executive director positions (i.e. 68.1% male and 31.9% female) when compared to non-executive positions (72% male and 28% female) across the Northern Ireland public sector.

Further analysis of the data presented in Table 4.3, Panels A and B was carried out to understand if there were significant differences²⁷ in gender balance among the five organisational types for executive and non-executive positions. The results show that HSCNI organisations have significantly higher levels of gender equality for both

²⁷ In statistics, the term "significant" is used to mean probably true or not due to chance. Put simply, this is the likelihood that a finding or a result is caused by something other than just chance. Usually, the level of significance is set at less than 5% probability ($p < 0.05$) or 1% probability ($p < 0.01$) which means that the result is at least 95% or 99% likely to be accurate (or that the result would be produced by chance no more than 5% or 1% of the time). In the remainder of this chapter we assume that significant differences are reported at the 1% level, unless otherwise stated.

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executive director and non-executive director positions when compared to the other organisation types. In contrast, the Senior Civil Service has significantly lower levels of gender equality for executive director positions only and Local Government for non-executive positions. In conclusion, the findings of Table 4.3 **show a significant degree of variation in the gender composition at executive level between different organisation types within the Northern Ireland public sector.**

4.2.4 Gender Equality: Analysed by Sponsoring Government Department

This section provides an analysis of gender equality by sponsoring government department. The analysis began by classifying all 143 organisations in our sample by sponsoring government department (see Table 4.4). Some notable variations across sponsoring departments²⁸ are apparent.

- With respect to the overall gender composition of all executives (both executive director positions and non-executive positions), organisations which fall within the remit of (see Appendix 4 for a glossary of terms used in this analysis):
 - DARD, DRD and DFP have gender compositions which comprise in excess of 80% males;
 - DCAL, DETI, DOE and DOJ have gender compositions which comprise between 70 and <80% males;

²⁸Whilst some of the organisations reporting to government departments have very limited relationships with their relevant department and have relative independence in terms of recruiting their own staff and determining their own terms and conditions of employment, it is expected that the analysis by sponsoring government department reported here will add insights not previously reported to date.

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- DE, DEL and NIO²⁹ have gender compositions which comprise between 60 and <70% males; and
- DHSSPS, OFMDFM and DSD have gender compositions which comprise between 50 and <60% males.
- With respect to executive director positions only, the gender composition ranges from 93.5% male and 6.5% female for DARD to 55.2% male and 44.8% female for OFMDFM, which represents a much higher level of gender equality.
- In terms of non-executive positions only, the gender composition ranges from 86% male and 14% female in DRD to 55% male and 45% female for DHSSPS.

Further tests were carried out on the data in Table 4.4 to ascertain if there is a relationship³⁰ between the gender of executive director positions and sponsoring government department. These tests indicated that:

- Females are more likely to hold executive director or non-executive positions in organisations that report to the DE, DHSSPS, OFMDFM, and DSD;
- Females are less likely to hold an executive or non-executive position in organisations that report to DARD, DOE, DFP and DRD.

²⁹The Northern Ireland Office (NIO) represents the UK government in Northern Ireland and has a staff of approximately 175, with offices in both Belfast and London. Whilst the NIO is not part of the Northern Ireland Executive, there are a number of bodies within this Office (i.e. the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission, the Parades Commission for Northern Ireland and the Boundary Commission for Northern Ireland) which are an integral part of the Northern Ireland public sector. For the purposes of stage one analysis, we have included these bodies and excluded all other individuals within the NIO who are located out-with the jurisdiction.

³⁰ Relationships are reported throughout chapter four at the 1% level of significance, unless otherwise stated.

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Table 4.4: Gender Composition of Executive Director and Non-Executive Positions by Sponsoring Government Departments

		Table 4.4: Gender Composition of Executive Director and Non-Executive Positions by Sponsoring Government Departments									
		Executives			Non-Executives			Overall			
		Gender		Total	Gender		Total	Gender		Total	
Male	Female	Male	Female		Male	Female					
Sponsoring Government Department #	DARD	Count	29	2	31	35	8	43	64	10	74
		% within Department	93.5	6.5	100	81.4	18.6	100	86.5	13.5	100
	DCAL	Count	29	11	40	80	27	107	109	38	147
		% within Department	72.5	27.5	100	74.8	25.2	100	74.1	25.9	100
	DE	Count	80	47	127	180	81	261	260	128	388
		% within Department	63	37	100	69.0	31.0	100	67.0	33.0	100
	DEL	Count	14	8	22	36	14	50	50	22	72
		% within Department	63.6	36.4	100	72.0	28.0	100	69.4	30.6	100
	DETI	Count	30	19	49	55	16	71	85	35	120
		% within Department	61.2	38.8	100	77.5	22.5	100	70.8	29.2	100
	DOE	Count	109	47	156	499	157	656	608	204	812
		% within Department	69.9	30.1	100	76.1	23.9	100	74.9	25.1	100
	DFP	Count	22	6	28	23	5	28	45	11	56
		% within Department	78.6	21.4	100	82.1	17.9	100	80.4	19.6	100
	DHSSPS	Count	63	45	108	82	67	149	145	112	257
		% within Department	58.3	41.7	100	55.0	45.0	100	56.4	43.6	100
	DOJ	Count	46	18	64	52	19	71	98	37	135
		% within Department	71.9	28.1	100	73.2	26.8	100	72.6	27.4	100
	OFMDFM	Count	16	13	29	26	19	45	42	32	74
		% within Department	55.2	44.8	100	57.8	42.2	100	56.8	43.2	100
DRD	Count	36	5	41	37	6	43	73	11	84	
	% within Department	87.8	12.2	100	86.0	14.0	100	86.9	13.1	100	
DSD	Count	15	8	23	24	19	43	39	27	66	
	% within Department	65.2	34.8	100	55.8	44.2	100	59.1	40.9	100	
NIO	Count	3	1	4	13	6	19	16	7	23	
	% within Department	75.0	25.0	100	68.4	31.6	100	69.6	30.4	100	
Total	Count	492	230	722	1142	444	1586	1634	674	2308	
	% Overall	68.1	31.9	100	72.0	28.0	100	70.8	29.2	100	

See Appendix 4 for a glossary of terms used in this analysis. In interpreting the above analysis, it should be borne in mind that individual public sector organisations are responsible for their own terms and conditions of employment, including recruitment and selection. That said, public sector organisations generally adopt terms and conditions of employment which are analogous to the Civil Service.

4.2.5 Gender Equality: Occupational Segregation

As discussed earlier, occupation segregation is the distribution of employees in different types of jobs (horizontal segregation) and grades (vertical segregation) across organisations. The earlier review of the literature identified that occupational horizontal segregation exists where females tend to be concentrated in jobs or roles traditionally associated with stereotypically female aptitudes (see for example Morgan and Allington, 2002). For example, at the most senior levels, this may manifest itself in terms of female executive directors being concentrated in 'softer' roles such as Human Resources, whilst male executives might dominate Chief Executive or Finance positions. In order to understand if occupational segregation exists across the Northern Ireland public sector, it was necessary to identify roles for all executives³¹ as part of the content analysis. This analysis identified six broad roles³² at executive director level: Chief Executive; Finance; Human Resources; Strategy, Policy and Development; Corporate Services; and Operations. In addition, a seventh category was identified, namely 'other' where the role of an executive was more difficult to determine from the information available. All executive positions were subsequently analysed as belonging to one of these seven possible categories. This analysis (see Table 4.5) reveals a number of interesting points:

- First, an examination of the overall gender balance for all executive director roles indicates that males hold the majority (79.0%) of Chief Executive positions within

³¹ Note it was only possible to explore occupational horizontal segregation for 'executive directors' in the Northern Ireland public sector since the specific role which non-executives play within their organisation(s) are not easily identifiable from publicly available data.

³² It should be noted that the descriptors for these six roles are not used consistently across the Northern Ireland public sector.

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the Northern Ireland public sector. This finding indicates the existence of occupational vertical segregation³³ within the Northern Ireland public sector and confirms the findings of Potter (2014);

- Secondly (excluding the 'other' category due to small numbers), occupational horizontal segregation³⁴ is also evident in the following roles: operations (70.4% male), corporate services (65.5% male), strategy, policy and development (64% male); and finance roles (63.9% male);
- Finally, the only executive director role where parity is achieved or exceeded is that of the human resources role (47.1% male and 52.9% female).

Further tests were carried out on the data in Table 4.5. Some differences were found but these were not consistent across the five public sector organisational types:

- In Local Government, females are more likely than males to hold human resources and strategy, policy and development roles and males are more likely than females to hold operations positions;
- In NDPBs, females are statistically more likely than men to hold human resources roles;
- In Health and Social Care organisations, males are more likely than females to hold corporate services roles while females are more likely than males to hold operations roles.

³³ Vertical segregation refers to the tendency for men and women to be employed in different positions within the same occupations or occupational groupings. The existence of vertical segregation in the Northern Ireland context has been reported by Potter (2014) who reports that women comprise 37% of managers, directors and senior officials.

³⁴ Horizontal segregation refers to the tendency for men and women to be employed in different roles or occupations.

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Table 4.5																				
Gender Composition of Executives by Role across the Northern Ireland Public Sector																				
			Senior Civil Service			Local Government			Non-Departmental Public Body (NDPB)			Health and Social Care in Northern Ireland (HSCNI)			Further & Higher Education			Overall		
												Gender			Gender					
			Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Executive Role	Chief Executive	Count	23	4	27	20	6	26	52	13	65	10	5	15	8	2	10	113	30	143
		% Role	85.2	14.8	100	76.9	23.1	100	80.0	20.0	100	66.7	33.3	100	80.0	20.0	100	79.0	21.0	100
	Finance	Count	10	9	19	8	5	13	16	7	23	6	2	8	6	3	9	46	26	72
		% Role	52.6	47.4	100	61.5	38.5	100	69.6	30.4	100	75.0	25.0	100	66.7	33.3	100	63.9	36.1	100
	Human Resources	Count	6	2	8	1	5	6	7	12	19	3	6	9	7	2	9	24	27	51
		% Role	75.0	25.0	100	16.7	83.3	100	36.8	63.2	100	33.3	66.7	100	77.8	22.2	100	47.1	52.9	100
	Strategy, Policy & Development	Count	25	7	32	6	11	17	28	8	36	3	5	8	9	9	18	71	40	111
		% Role	78.1	21.9	100	35.3	64.7	100	77.8	22.2	100	37.5	62.5	100	50.0	50.0	100	64.0	36.0	100
	Corporate Services ³⁵	Count	12	6	18	13	8	21	41	21	62	15	3	18	10	10	20	91	48	139
		% Role	66.7	33.3	100	61.9	38.1	100	66.1	33.9	100	83.3	16.7	100	50.0	50.0	100	65.5	34.5	100
	Operations	Count	24	10	34	43	10	53	39	13	52	13	19	32	12	3	15	131	55	186
		% Role	70.6	29.4	100	81.1	18.9	100	75.0	25.0	100	40.6	59.4	100	80.0	20.0	100	70.4	29.6	100
	Other	Count	11	2	13	1	0	1	4	2	6	0	0	0	0	0	0	16	4	20
		% Role	84.6	15.4	100	100	0	100	66.7	33.3	100	0	0	0	0	0	0	80.0	20.0	100
Total	Count	111	40	151	92	45	137	187	76	263	50	40	90	52	29	81	492	230	722	
	% Role	73.5	26.5	100	67.2	32.8	100	71.1	28.9	100	55.6	44.4	100	64.2	35.8	100	68.1	31.9	100	

³⁵ The corporate services category includes executives that hold multiple responsibilities. In some cases, this includes responsibility for finance, human resources, administration, customer services and communications.

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The above findings provide support for earlier studies (see for example, Klenke, 1996; Guy and Newman, 2004; Connell, 2006a; McTavish and Miller, 2009a, 2009b). The results of Table 4.5 indicate that **occupational segregation along gender lines exists within the Northern Ireland public sector: males are more likely to hold Chief Executive positions (i.e. vertical segregation) when compared to females; females are more likely to hold human resource positions (i.e. horizontal segregation) when compared to males, although this pattern is not uniform across all five organisational types.** These findings provide evidence of what Connell (2006a) refers to as the gender relations of power (i.e. related to Chief Executive positions) and the gendered division of labour (i.e. related to roles other than the Chief Executive) within the Northern Ireland public sector.

4.2.6 Gender Equality: Impact of Size of Board

Previous research in the private sector has identified a positive relationship between the size of an organisation's senior management board and the number of females at executive level (Daily and Dalton, 2003; Brammer *et al.*, 2007) (i.e. larger boards have more female members). The data collected during the stage one content analysis enabled the researchers to investigate if this relationship existed in the Northern Ireland public sector. The results of this analysis suggest a positive relationship between the size of an organisation's senior management board and the following: the total number of female members (including executive director and non-executive positions); the total number of female executive directors only; and the total number of female non-executives only. These results therefore provide

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evidence of a relationship between the size of an organisation's senior management board and the number of females at executive level which corroborate the findings of previous research of a similar relationship found in the private sector.

4.2.7 Gender Equality: Influence of the Chief Executive and Chair Positions

Existing research in the private sector has also identified a relationship between the gender of the Chief Executive and the total number of females at executive level. The data collected during stage one enabled the researchers to investigate if this relationship existed in the Northern Ireland public sector (see Table 4.6).

			Gender		Total
			Male	Female	
Organisation Type	Northern Ireland Senior Civil Service	Count	23	4	27
		% within Organisation Type	85.2	14.8	100
	Local Government	Count	20	6	26
		% within Organisation Type	76.9	23.1	100
	Non-Departmental Public Body	Count	52	13	65
		% within Organisation Type	80.0	20.0	100
	Health and Social Care in Northern Ireland (HSCNI)	Count	10	5	15
		% within Organisation Type	66.7	33.3	100
	Further & Higher Education	Count	8	2	10
		% within Organisation Type	80.0	20.0	100
	Total	Count	113	30	143
		% within Organisation Type	79.0	21.0	100

Table 4.6 indicates that the overall gender composition of Chief Executives across the Northern Ireland public sector is male dominated; with 79.0% of positions held by male and the remainder (21.0%) held by females. Further tests found no relationship between organisational type and the gender of Chief Executives. This

³⁶ The term 'Chief Executive' is not consistently used throughout the Northern Ireland public sector. For example, the term Permanent Secretary is used as an equivalent in the Senior Civil Service.

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suggests **no variation in the composition of the gender of Chief Executives across the five public sector organisational types.**

Table 4.7, Panels A, B and C provide further statistics regarding Chief Executive positions within the Northern Ireland public sector (including the minimum, mean and maximum number of females on senior management teams). Panel A shows data for all executive positions; Panel B provides data for female executive director positions only; and Panel C provides data for female non-executive positions only. Panel A suggests that organisations with a female Chief Executive have approximately one and a half time more females employed in all executive positions (i.e. a mean of 6.2 female executives compared to 4.17 male executives) while Panel B indicates that organisations with a female Chief Executive have over twice the number of females employed in executive director positions than those organisations with a male Chief Executive (i.e. a mean of 2.7 females compared to 1.3 males).

Table 4.7				
Total Number of Females at Executive Level by Chief Executive Officer's Gender				
Panel A: Total Number of Females at Executive Level (including executive director and non-executive positions)				
	No. of Chief Executives	Mean No. Females at Executive Level	Minimum No. Females at Executive Level	Maximum No. Females at Executive Level
Male	113	4.17	0	17
Female	30	6.20	1	15
Total	143	4.59	0	17
Panel B: Total Number of Female Executive Director positions				
	No. of Chief Executives	Mean No. Female Executives	Minimum No. Female Executives	Maximum No. Female Executives
Male	113	1.30	0	6
Female	30	2.70	0	8
Total	143	1.59	0	8

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Panel C: Total Number of Female Non-Executive positions				
* Whilst the total sample size is 143 organisations, 13 of these organisations have no non-executive directors				
	No. of Chief Executives*	Mean No. Female Non-Executives	Minimum No. Female Non-Executives	Maximum No. Female Non-Executives
Male	101	3.20	0	16
Female	29	3.62	1	10
Total	130	3.29	0	16

Panel C indicates that the number of female non-executives is similar for organisations with both a male and a female Chief Executive (i.e. a mean of 3.62 female non-executives compared to 3.20 male non-executives). Further tests found that **the gender of the Chief Executive position has a positive effect on the total number of female executives and the total number of female executive directors (also at the 1% level of significance) employed in the Northern Ireland public sector, but not the total number of non-executive positions.** These findings provide evidence of the influence of female Chief Executives in terms of improving gender equality within the Northern Ireland public sector, which is consistent with a similar relationship found by others in the private sector.

Data related to the position of Chairperson (Chair) across the Northern Ireland public sector is provided in Table 4.8. The overall gender composition of Chairs in the Northern Ireland public sector is 87.6% male and 12.4% female. This compares unfavourably with the gender composition of Chairs for public appointments of 81% male and 19% female reported by OFMDFM (2012) as at 31st March 2012 but is closer to that reported by NISRA (2013a) (i.e. 85% and 15%). Further tests suggest that whilst a higher proportion of Chairs are females within HSCNI, no difference exists in the gender composition of Chair positions across the five organisational types.

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Table 4.8					
Gender Composition of Non-Executive Chairs³⁷ by Organisation Type					
			Gender of Chair		Total
			Male	Female	
Organisation Type	Northern Ireland Senior Civil Service	Count	1	0	1
		% within Organisation Type	100	0	100
	Local Government	Count	22	4	26
		% within Organisation Type	84.6	15.4	100
	Non-Departmental Public Body	Count	56	5	61
		% within Organisation Type	91.8	8.2	100
	Health and Social Care in Northern Ireland (HSCNI)	Count	10	5	15
		% within Organisation Type	66.7	33.3	100
	Further & Higher Education	Count	10	0	10
		% within Organisation Type	100	0	100
	Total	Count	99	14	113
		% within Organisation Type	87.6	12.4	100

Previous findings reported in the public sector suggest that where the Chair is a female, this results in a higher number of female non-executives on senior management boards. To understand if the gender of the Chair has an impact on the composition of non-executives in the N.I. public sector, Table 4.9 shows the minimum, mean and maximum number of female non-executives by gender of the Chair.

Table 4.9				
Number of Female Non-Executives by Chair's Gender				
	No. of non-executive chairs	Mean No. of non-executives	Minimum No. of non-executives	Maximum No. of non-executives
Male Chair	99	3.57	0	16
Female Chair	14	5.07	1	11
Total	113	3.75	0	16

The results indicate that public sector organisations with a female Chair have a mean number of female non-executives which is nearly one and a half times greater

³⁷ There are a total of 113 Non-executive Chairs in 143 organisations. There are 30 organisations with no non-executive Chairs and where the Chief Executive acts as Chair. In order to avoid double counting, these organisations have been excluded from this analysis.

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(i.e. 5.07 female non-executives) than those organisations with a male Chair (i.e. 3.57 male non-executives). Further tests indicate that **the gender of the Chair has a significant and positive impact on the number of female executives within the N.I. public sector.** This finding corroborates other studies reported in the private sector.

4.3 Key Findings and Conclusions

This chapter has discussed the findings of stage one of the research project which aimed to ascertain overall gender equality levels at executive level across the Northern Ireland public sector, thereby providing a baseline for the year ended 31st March 2012; and to ascertain gender equality by occupation at the executive level of the Northern Ireland public sector. The researchers acknowledge that given the passage of time between the date of publication of this report (January 2016) and the date of data collection for stage one (year ended March 2012), the gender composition at executive level of Northern Ireland public sector organisations may have altered. Additionally, it is acknowledged that during this time, organisations may have revised or implemented new human resource policies or initiatives that may have impacted upon the gender composition at executive level of the Northern Ireland public sector. Notwithstanding, the key findings emerging from stage one of the research are summarised below:

- Overall, there is a significant degree of inequality in the structure of the gender division of labour at executive level (including executive director and non-executive positions) in the Northern Ireland public sector (70.8% male and 29.2% female) (see Table 4.1).

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- A significant degree of variation exists in the overall gender composition of executives among the five organisational types of the Northern Ireland public sector (see Table 4.2).
- The gender composition of both executive director and non-executive positions is closest to parity within organisations in the Health and Social Care sector and this contrasts sharply with the remaining four public sector types (see Table 4.3, Panels A and B).
- Notable differences exist in the gender composition of executives when organisations are analysed by sponsoring government department (see Table 4.4):
 - DARD, DRD and DFP have gender compositions which comprise in excess of 80% males;
 - DCAL, DETI, DOE and DOJ have gender compositions which comprise between 70 and <80% males;
 - DE, DEL and the NIO have gender compositions which comprise between 60 and <70% males; and
 - DHSSPS, OFMDFM and DSD have gender compositions which comprise between 50 and <60% males.
- Occupational segregation (both vertical and horizontal) exists within the Northern Ireland public sector (see Table 4.5):
 - Males hold the majority (79%) of Chief Executive roles, indicating the existence of vertical segregation³⁸ within the Northern Ireland public sector;

³⁸ Vertical segregation refers to the tendency for men and women to be employed in different positions within the same occupations or occupational groupings. The existence of vertical segregation in the Northern Ireland context has been reported by Potter (2014) who reports that women comprise 37% of managers, directors and senior officials.

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- Horizontal segregation³⁹ is particularly evident in the following roles: operations (70.4% male); corporate services (65.5% male); strategy, policy and development (64% male); and finance roles (63.9% males).
- There is a positive relationship between the size of an organisation's senior management board and the number of females at executive level.
- There is no significant variation in the composition of the gender of Chief Executives across the five public sector organisational types (see Table 4.6).
- The gender of the Chief Executive position has a significant and positive effect on the total number of female executives (i.e. the total of executive directors and non-executive directors) and female executive directors employed in the Northern Ireland public sector (see Table 4.7).
- There is no significant variation in the composition of the gender of the Chairperson across the five public sector organisational types (see Table 4.8).
- The gender of the Chair has a significant and positive impact on the number of female executives within an organisation (see Table 4.9).

4.4 Gender Regimes in the Northern Ireland Public Sector

In the earlier discussion, the theory of gender regimes was introduced as a way of understanding gender equality in the public sector. Drawing on this theory, the findings presented in this chapter provide some insights into the first and second of Connell's four dimensions of gender relations, namely the division of labour and the

³⁹ Horizontal segregation refers to the tendency for men and women to be employed in different roles or occupations.

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division of power within the Northern Ireland public sector. With respect to a division of labour, there is evidence to suggest a gendered division of labour exists:

- Between men and women holding different occupational roles (specifically horizontal segregation) in the Northern Ireland public sector (see Table 4.5).

The findings of stage one of the research also provide evidence of gender relations of power within the Northern Ireland public sector:

- Between men (70.8%) and women (29.2%) in terms of the overall gender composition of the Northern Ireland public sector (see Table 4.1);
- Between men and women within all sectors, with the exception of Health and Social Care, of the Northern Ireland public sector, (see Table 4.2);
- Between men and women who hold executive positions (68.1% male and 31.9% female) and non-executive positions (72.0% male and 28.0% female) in the Northern Ireland public sector (see Table 4.3, Panels A and B);
- Between men and women holding Chief Executive positions within the Northern Ireland public sector, (see Table 4.6); and
- Between men and women holding the non-executive Chair position within the Northern Ireland public sector, (see Table 4.8).

This chapter has summarised the findings from stage one of the research which addressed objectives one and two of the research project. In the next two chapters, the findings from stages two and three of the research project will be discussed.

Chapter 5

Stage Two: A Survey of Current and Aspiring Executives' Attitudes to Various Gender Equality Issues in the Northern Ireland Public Sector

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter reported on the findings of stage one of the research project. In this chapter, the focus shifts to reporting the results of stage two of the research project. Whilst stage one of the research specifically addressed objectives 1 and 2 of the overall research project (see Chapter 3, Section 3.3), stage two addresses objectives 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7 as outlined below:

- Objective 3: To ascertain the enablers or facilitators current and aspiring executives/senior managers employed in the Northern Ireland public sector perceive have supported or could support their career advancement to executive level;
- Objective 4: To ascertain the barriers current and aspiring executives/senior managers employed in the Northern Ireland public sector perceive they have faced or may face in their career advancement to executive level;
- Objective 5: To ascertain the extent to which various policies and practices would increase gender equality within the Northern Ireland public sector generally;
- Objective 6: To ascertain perceptions of organisational culture concerned with various gender equality issues within the Northern Ireland public sector;

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- Objective 7: To compare male and female perceptions regarding the enablers or facilitators, barriers, and the effectiveness of organisational policies and practices concerned with improving gender equality at the executive level of the Northern Ireland public sector;

In order to address the above objectives, stage two involved the design and distribution of a semi-structured electronic survey to current and aspiring executives/senior managers across the 143 Northern Ireland public sector organisations identified in the stage one content analysis⁴⁰. The survey was administered between May and July 2013. Whilst a total of 4,051 responses were received, 865 of these were discarded as these respondents did not complete all questions necessary for analysis purposes. This resulted in a total of 3,186 useable responses⁴¹. The remainder of this chapter reports on the findings of these responses.

In the next section, demographic data describing the personal characteristics of the respondents and their respective organisations is first presented in order to contextualise the findings of the attitudinal data. In section three, attitudinal data

⁴⁰The stage two survey was aimed at current and aspiring managers across the Northern Ireland public sector. Unfortunately, it was not possible to identify the size of the population of current and aspiring managers and therefore apply a probability sampling approach. Given this difficulty, a snowball sampling approach was adopted to ensure that the survey captured the views of as many current and aspiring executives as possible. Snowball sampling makes use of known contacts within the population of interest in order to recruit future subjects. This method of sampling is used by researchers in cases where the population is difficult to access, as was the case in the current research project. Consequently, as the size and demographic structure of the population of interest was not known, it was not possible to weight the data collected. For further details of the sampling approach, see section 1.3.3 of Technical Annex One.

⁴¹The research methodology or approach adopted during stage two of the research project is discussed in more detail in Technical Annex One. It should also be noted that an insufficient response rate was achieved for non-executives during stage two of the research. As a result, stage two reports on the attitudes of executive directors (both current and aspiring) only.

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regarding the facilitators or enablers, barriers, policies and practices and organisational culture are reported for all respondents (i.e. current and aspiring male and female). Section four provides a comparative analysis of male and female views for all attitudinal data collected in the survey. Finally, the key findings of stage two are presented and conclusions provided.

5.2 Demographic Data

5.2.1 Respondents' Personal Demographics

The personal demographics which describe the respondents to the study are presented in Table 5.1.

Table 5.1		
Personal Demographic Data: Survey Respondents (n=3,186)		
Panel A: Gender		
	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Male	1,489	46.7
Female	1,697	53.3
Total	3,186	100
Panel B: Age range		
	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Less than 30	153	4.8
31 - 35	304	9.5
36 - 40	372	11.7
41 - 45	491	15.4
46 - 50	673	21.1
51 - 55	696	21.9
56 - 60	360	11.3
Over 60	137	4.3
Total	3,186	100
Panel C: Marital status		
	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Married	2,249	70.6
Single	468	14.7
Cohabiting	177	5.6
Divorced	158	5.0
Separated	69	2.2
Widowed	29	0.9
Prefer not to say	23	0.7
Civil Partnership	12	0.4
Surviving Civil Partner	1	0
Total	3,186	100

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Panel D: Partner's occupational status		
	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Employed (Public Sector)	1,388	43.6
Employed (Private Sector)	637	20.0
Self-employed	290	9.1
Retired	164	5.1
Stay at home parent	101	3.2
Unemployed	70	2.2
Student	21	0.7
I do not have a partner	515	16.2
Total	3,186	100

Table 5.1 Personal Demographic Data: Survey Respondents (continued)		
Panel E: Caring responsibilities		
	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage of respondents (n = 3186)</i>
Child/Children	1,570	49.3
Elderly relative	723	22.7
Sick or infirm relative	201	6.3
Disabled relative	183	5.7
Other	52	1.6
None	1,112	34.9
Panel F: Responsibility for caring for child(ren) under the age of 18		
	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Joint with partner	1,188	75.6
You	146	9.3
Joint with grandparents	50	3.2
Your partner	41	2.6
Grandparents	15	1.0
Other	132	8.4
Total	1,572	100
Panel G: Qualifications		
	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
No qualifications	9	0.3
Vocational (e.g. N.V.Q.)	37	1.2
GCSE/'O' Level	291	9.1
'A' Level	319	10.0
HNC/HND	235	7.4
First degree	710	22.3
Professional qualification	625	19.6
Masters' degree	704	22.1
PhD/Doctoral degree	256	8.0
Total	3,186	100

Panel A indicates that of the 3,186 useable responses received, roughly equal percentages of male (46.7%) and female (53.3%) current and aspiring executives/senior managers participated. Whilst this does not reflect the gender composition reported in stage one (namely 70.8% male and 29.2% female) for executives (including executive directors and non-executives) in the Northern Ireland

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public sector, it is interesting to note that the gender balance of respondents is more equal when we include aspiring executives. Panel B illustrates the variation in age range of the respondents with the largest groups falling within the age ranges of 46-50 (21.1%) and 51-55 (21.9%). Panel C presents data on marital status and indicates that the majority of respondents are married (70.6%), with the next largest group being single (14.7%). Panel D provides an overview of the occupational status of survey respondents' partners. The analysis reveals that the majority of respondents' partners are employed in the public sector (43.6%) whilst some 20.0% are employed within the private sector. Panel E shows the caring responsibilities of respondents: the majority of respondents have caring responsibilities for children (49.3%), followed by those with caring responsibilities for elderly relatives (22.7%). Interestingly, 34.9% of the respondents have no caring responsibilities. Panel F indicates that 75.6% of respondents share caring responsibilities for children with their partners, although 9.3% of survey respondents care for their children by themselves. Finally, Panel G indicates that the majority of survey respondents have attained either a first degree (22.3%), a masters' degree (22.1%) or professional qualification (19.6%).

5.2.2 Respondents' Organisational Demographics

Organisational demographics describing the respondents' current employment was also collected in the stage two survey. To that end, data with respect to the type and

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size of organisation the respondents were employed within was collected.⁴² This data is presented in Table 5.2.

Panel A: Type of public sector organisation		
	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Government Department/Executive Agency ⁴³	2367	74.3
Non-Departmental Public Body	317	9.9
Health and Social Care	165	5.2
Local Government	163	5.1
Further and Higher Education	155	4.9
Other	19	0.6
Total	3186	100
Panel B: Organisation size		
	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Between 1 and 9 employees	24	0.8
Between 10 and 49 employees	138	4.3
Between 50 and 249 employees	421	13.2
250 employees or more	2603	81.7
Total	3186	100

Table 5.2, Panel A indicates the number of respondents employed within each of the five public sector types. The majority of survey respondents (Panel A) are employed within Government Departments/ Executive Agencies (74.3%). While the majority of respondents are employed within Government Departments/Executive Agencies, a sufficient sample size was obtained from the other four parts of the Northern Ireland public sector to enable a sub-group analysis. Panel B indicates the size of organisation in which survey respondents are employed (measured using number of employees as defined by the categories detailed in the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2010). The majority of respondents are employed in an organisation with more than 250 employees (81.7%). This may be expected as the majority of survey respondents are employed within Government

⁴² Further demographical data is presented in Appendix 5, Table 1 to indicate the seniority (or grade) at which survey respondents are employed and membership of their organisations' management/board teams.

⁴³ Government Departments/Executive Agencies encompasses those employed in the Northern Ireland Civil Service, including the Senior Civil Service.

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Departments/Executive Agencies which accounts for a total employment of 27,959 employees (NISRA, 2013b).

5.2.3 Respondents' Personal Employment Demographics

In order to more fully understand the characteristics of the respondents, the stage two survey also collected personal employment demographic information. This included length of service in the public sector, year of appointment to current position, participation in recruitment and promotion programmes, career progression and working patterns. This section of the survey also collected data on whether respondents held a non-executive position outside of their main employment, the number of non-executive positions held, type of organisation in which the non-executive position is held and length of service as a non-executive. Data concerning non-executive positions was collected in order to understand if this experience helped facilitate personal development and improve the chances of respondents advancing to an executive position within the Northern Ireland public sector. Finally, respondents' views regarding the benefits of holding a non-executive position were also collected. All the above data is presented in the discussion which follows.

5.2.3.1 Length of Service and Participation in Recruitment and Promotion Processes

Table 5.3, Panel A indicates when respondent were recruited to their current position. The results suggest that over 20.9% of respondents were appointed to their current position in the last two years, 39.3% in the last five years (i.e. between 2009 and 2013) and 60.7% in the 20 years prior to 2009. These results suggest that

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a large percentage (i.e. 39.3%) of respondents have held the same role within their organisation for up to five years while the remaining respondents have held their current position in excess of five years.

Panel A: Period of appointment to current position		
	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Last 1-2 years (2012-2013)	667	20.9
Last 3-5 years (2009-2011)	588	18.4
Last 6-10 years (2004-2008)	1,042	32.7
Last 11-15 years (1999-2003)	560	17.6
Last 16-20 years (1994-1998)	119	3.8
Greater than 20 years (1993-)	210	6.6
Total	3186	100
Panel B: Length of service in the public sector		
	Frequency	Percent
1 – 5 years' service	301	9.4
6 – 10 years' service	385	12.1
11 – 15 years' service	413	13.0
16 – 20 years' service	287	9.0
21 – 25 years' service	441	13.8
26 – 30 years' service	534	16.8
31 – 35 years' service	511	16.0
36 – 40 years' service	263	8.3
41 – 45 years' service	44	1.4
46 – 50+ years' service	7	0.2
Total	3186	100

Table 5.3, Panel B indicates the respondents' total length of service in the public sector. The largest groups of respondents have between 26 and 30 years' service (16.8%) or between 31 and 35 years' service (16.0%) in the public sector. The results also suggest that 56.5% of the respondents have more than 20 years of service in the public sector. Thus the majority of respondents have had what could be described as a long-term career in the public sector.

Table 5.4 provides additional insights into the respondents' service in the public sector in terms of their participation in career progression.

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Table 5.4		
Survey Respondents' Experience/Participation in Recruitment and Promotion		
Panel A: Promotion/appointment to current position from...		
	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Within current public sector organisation	2185	68.6
Another public sector organisation	565	17.7
A private sector organisation	257	8.1
The voluntary sector	41	1.3
Other	138	4.3
Total	3186	100
Panel B: Participation in internal/external recruitment/promotion processes		
	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Not currently participating in recruitment/promotion	1328	41.7
Currently participating in recruitment/promotion	690	21.7
Not currently participating in recruitment/promotion, but intend to in the future	562	17.6
Not currently participating in recruitment/promotion, as no positions available	408	12.8
Not currently participating in recruitment/promotion, and don't intend to in the future	196	6.2
Total	3184	100

Panel A indicates that 68.6% of survey respondents have experience of a recruitment or promotion process within their current public sector organisation and some 95.7% have experienced some form of career development or progression through promotion or appointment to their current position in the public sector. Furthermore, Panel B shows that 21.7% of respondents (i.e. n=690) are currently participating in a recruitment or promotion process while the remaining 78.3% of respondents (3,184-690 = 2,494) are not. Of these 17.6% intend to participate in recruitment/promotion in the future while 6.2% do not intend to participate in future recruitment/promotion. In addition, 12.8% (n=408) indicated that they would participate if such positions were available.

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5.2.3.2 Opting Out of Career Progression

Respondents not currently participating in recruitment or promotion processes (n=2,494 or 78.3% of respondents) were asked to indicate if they had consciously opted out of career progression, either temporarily or permanently, and if so to provide reasons for doing so. Of these respondents, a total of 1,058 respondents indicated that they had either temporarily or permanently opted out of career progression. Table 5.5, Panels A to E provide demographic details for respondents who have stated that they have opted out of career progression (n=1,058).

Panel A: Gender		
	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Male	380	35.9
Female	678	64.1
Total	1,058	100
Panel B: Age range		
	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Less than 30	15	1.4
31 - 35	76	7.2
36 - 40	123	11.6
41 - 45	176	16.6
46 - 50	260	24.6
51 - 55	247	23.3
56 - 60	122	11.5
Over 60	39	3.7
Total	1,058	100
Panel C: Marital status		
	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Married	801	75.7
Single	115	10.9
Cohabiting	38	3.6
Divorced	56	5.3
Separated	22	2.1
Widowed	11	1.0
Prefer not to say	10	0.95
Civil Partnership	5	0.5
Surviving Civil Partner	0	0
Total	1,058	100

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Panel D: Qualifications			
	Frequency	Percentage	
No qualifications	2	0.2	
Vocational (e.g. N.V.Q.)	17	1.6	
GCSE/'O' Level	97	9.2	
'A' Level	94	8.9	
HNC/HND	67	6.3	
First degree	200	18.9	
Professional qualification	250	23.6	
Masters' degree	240	22.7	
PhD/Doctoral degree	91	8.6	
Total	1,058	100	
Panel E: Organisation type			
	Frequency	Percentage of Total Number Opting Out (%)	Percentage of Total Respondents (n=3,186) (%)
Government Department/Executive Agency	757	71.6	32.0
Non-Departmental Public Body	115	10.9	36.3
Health and Social Care	77	7.3	46.7
Local Government	50	4.7	30.7
Further & Higher Education	52	4.9	33.5
Other	7	0.6	36.8
Total	1,058	100	33.2

Of the 2,494 respondents not currently participating in a recruitment/promotion process, 1,058 (42.4%) have indicated that they have opted out of career progression to executive level, either on a temporary or permanent basis⁴⁴. The majority of those opting out are female (64.1%) (Panel A), located in the age ranges 46-50 (24.6%) and 51-55% (23.3%) (Panel B), married (75.7%) (Panel C) and have higher levels of qualifications (18.9% hold a first degree, 23.6% a professional qualification, 22.7% a masters' degree and 8.6% a PhD) (Panel D). Finally, Panel E indicates that the respondents opting out are employed right across the five public sector types. Indeed the results suggest that somewhere in the region of approximately one third of all respondents from all five organisational types have opted out of career progression to executive/senior management level. These results would seem to indicate that valuable resources are potentially being lost from

⁴⁴ Unfortunately the survey did not ask respondents to indicate separate reasons for both 'temporary' and 'permanent' opt outs, hence overall views are presented here.

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the Northern Ireland public sector particularly given the fact that 73.8% (i.e. n=781) of the respondents opting out of career progression hold a professional or third level qualification. This is likely to have a consequential effect in terms of reducing the future talent pool from which executives and senior managers might be drawn from within the Northern Ireland public sector.

Table 5.6 provides the reasons why respondents have opted out of career progression. The most common reasons cited were as follows: caring responsibilities for dependent children (46.7%) and the long-hours culture (38.7%). Respondents also indicated (but to a lesser extent) that an unsupportive work environment (23%), lack of flexible work arrangements (22.5%), caring responsibilities for dependents other than children (21.4%) and an inhospitable organisational culture (19.2%) were important in their decision to opt out of career progression. A large number of respondents also indicated 'other' reasons for opting out of career progression. These included issues around opportunities not being available, potential disruption caused by career progression, bias in the selection process, stress in the workplace and content with current level of responsibility. Finally, it should be noted that a sizeable number of respondents indicated that none of the reasons provided for opting out were relevant. Unfortunately it is not possible to explore this issue further.

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	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage respondents opting out of career progression (n = 1058) (%)</i>
Caring responsibilities for dependent children	494	46.7
Long-hours culture	409	38.7
Unsupportive work environment	243	23.0
Lack of flexible work arrangements	238	22.5
Caring responsibilities for dependents other than children	226	21.4
Inhospitable organisational culture	203	19.2
Considering retirement	156	14.7
Existing imbalance in gender composition at executive/senior	82	7.8
Gender stereotyping and preconceptions about my roles and abilities	80	7.6
Feeling marginalised because of my gender	64	6.1
None of the above	359	33.9
Other	227	21.5

5.2.4 Flexible Working Policies and Patterns

The survey also obtained data regarding the flexible policies respondents believe are available within their organisation, together with the respondents' working patterns. Respondents indicated that they are aware of a wide range of flexible working arrangements being offered within their respective organisations. Table 5.7, Panel A indicates that large numbers of respondents are aware that their organisation offers flexi-time working (90.1%), reduced hours (75.6%), term-time working (72.5%), job-sharing (64.2%) and compressed workweek (49.1%). On the contrary, less than one third of the respondents believe that their organisations offer a combination of home and office working (29.2%). These results would seem to suggest that there exists a high level of awareness of the existence of flexible working policies throughout the

⁴⁵ Note, respondents were permitted to indicate multiple responses for opting out.

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Northern Ireland public sector, with the exception of a combination of home and office working.

Panel B shows the flexible working policies respondents avail of. The results indicate that whilst 25.5% of respondents have a traditional working pattern of Monday-Friday, 9am-5pm, the majority of respondents enjoy a flexi-time working pattern (50.5%). There is also some use being made of reduced hours by the respondents (10.6%).

Table 5.7		
Flexible Working and Work Patterns		
Panel A: Flexible working policies available within my organisation		
	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage of respondents (n = 3186)</i>
Flexi-time working	2870	90.1
Reduced hours (i.e. less than 35 hours)	2410	75.6
Term-time working	2311	72.5
Job-sharing	2044	64.2
Compressed workweek	1565	49.1
Combination of home and office working	929	29.2
Don't know	191	6.0
Other	119	3.7
Panel B: Respondents' work patterns		
	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Flexi-time working	1610	50.5
9am - 5 pm (Mon-Fri)	811	25.5
Reduced hours (i.e. less than 35 hours)	337	10.6
Combination of home and office working	88	2.8
Compressed workweek	65	2.0
Term-time working	22	0.7
Job-sharing	6	0.2
Other	247	7.8
Total	3186	100

A comparison of the flexible working policies which respondents believe their organisation offers (Panel A) and respondents work patterns (Panel B) raises a number of important points. First, in all cases the take up of flexible working patterns by the respondents is considerably less when compared to the number of

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organisations who are believed to offer such patterns. In particular there is some variation between what is perceived as available and respondent take up of the following: term-time working; job-sharing; compressed work week; reduced hours; and a combination of home and office working. Secondly, flexi-working appears to be the only flexible work pattern which exhibits a reasonable take up within the Northern Ireland public sector. Reasons for the low levels of flexible working patterns will be addressed further in stage three of the research project.

5.2.5 Respondents Holding Non-Executive Positions Outside of their Main Employment

The survey collected data on whether respondents hold a non-executive position in another organisation, number of non-executive positions held, type of organisation in which non-executive position is held and length of service as a non-executive. This data is summarised in Table 5.8.

Panel A: Respondents currently holding a non-executive position(s)		
	Frequency	Percent
Yes	297	9.3
No	2889	90.7
Total	3186	100
Panel B: Number of non-executive positions currently/previously held		
Number of non-executive positions	Number of Respondents Holding N non-executive positions	Percent of respondents holding non-executive positions
1	139	46.8
2	77	25.9
3	42	14.1
4	17	5.7
5	6	2.0
6	5	1.6
7	1	0.4
8	2	0.7
9	1	0.4
10+	7	2.4
Total	297	100

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Panel C: Types of organisations in which non-executive positions currently held		
Organisation type	Frequency	Percent
Voluntary sector	187	51.5
Public sector	126	34.7
Private sector	50	13.8
Total	363	100
Panel D: Length of Service as a non-executive (including current and previous appointments)		
	Frequency	Percent
1 – 5 years' service	115	38.7
6 – 10 years' service	92	31.0
11 – 15 years' service	40	13.5
16 – 20 years' service	28	9.4
21 – 25 years' service	10	3.4
26 – 30 years' service	7	2.4
31 – 35 years' service	3	1.0
36 – 40 years' service	1	0.3
41 – 45 years' service	1	0.3
46 – 50+ years' service	0	0
Total	297	100

Panel A indicates that 297 or 9.3% of respondents currently hold a non-executive position in addition to their primary employment in the public sector. Panel B indicates that the 297 survey respondents have previously held or currently hold either a single non-executive position (139 respondents or 46.8%) or multiple non-executive positions (the remaining 53.2% have previously held/hold two or more non-executive positions). Panel C shows that whilst the majority of respondents who currently hold non-executive positions (a total of 363 positions) occupy these positions across the voluntary sector (51.5%), a significant number of positions are also held in the public (34.7%) and private (13.8%) sectors of Northern Ireland. Finally, Panel D indicates that the majority of survey respondents have held (including previous and current positions) non-executive positions between 1 and 5 years (38.7%) or between 6 and 10 years (31.0%). Further analysis (not shown in Table 5.8) indicates that those who hold or have previously held non-executive positions tend to be older, are employed at higher managerial levels in their current organisation, work in smaller organisations (measured by number of employees) and work outside Government Department/Executive Agencies.

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The extent to which survey respondents holding a non-executive position believe that such experience has been beneficial to them is shown in Table 5.9 (male and female views have been combined here).

	Mean^a	5 (%)	4 (%)	3 (%)	2 (%)	1 (%)
Develop your management or leadership experience beyond that developed in your main employment	3.94	28.3	44.8	19.9	6.4	0.7
Develop your management or leadership skills beyond those developed in your main employment	3.93	26.3	47.8	19.5	5.1	1.3
Obtain opportunities to work on challenging assignments, which would not be available to you in your main employment	3.58	20.1	38.6	22.9	16	2.4
Enhance your chances of success in terms of being appointed to an executive/senior management position in your main employment in the future	3.15	8.5	26.5	42.2	17.3	5.4
Gain access to leadership training and development programme(s), which would not be available to you in your main employment	2.90	9.9	19.1	30	33.4	7.5
^a Scale: 5 = strongly agree, 4 = agree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 2 = disagree, 1 = strongly disagree						

The results suggest that survey respondents generally believe that holding a non-executive position is beneficial to their career prospects within their main employment. For example, the majority of respondents strongly agreed/agreed that holding a non-executive position would be of benefit in terms of developing their management/leadership experience (73.1%) and skills (74.1%) beyond that developed in their main employment. In addition, the majority of respondents strongly agreed/agreed that holding a non-executive position is of benefit in terms of enabling them to obtain opportunities to work on challenging assignments, which would not be available in their main employment (58.7%). In terms of enhancing their chances of being promoted to a more senior position within their main employment, whilst 35% of respondents are positive in this regard, a large number

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(42.4%) are ambivalent about this. Finally, when asked if holding a non-executive position would provide access to leadership training and development programmes not available in their main employment, 40.9% disagreed that this would and a further 30% were ambivalent. Despite the less positive responses to the last two issues reported in Table 5.9, the results of the survey generally suggest that holding a non-executive position is beneficial to respondents' main employment.

5.2.6 Career Development: Policies and Practices

Table 5.10 indicates the extent to which respondents believe that various policies and practices exist within the Northern Ireland public sector for aspiring executives. A number of points are worthy of note. First, the results indicate a great deal of variation: for example, 75.4% of respondents believe their organisation provides acting up opportunities; 58.2% external leadership, training and development opportunities, and 51.8% internal leadership training and development opportunities. In contrast, the remaining policies and practices are not perceived by the respondents as being widely available within their organisation: cross-functional/developmental job rotation (45.7% do not offer); formal mentoring with a senior executive (38.9% do not offer); informal mentoring/sponsoring (30.9% do not offer), and access to employee networks (34.7% do not offer).

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Table 5.10 Career Development Policies and Practices								
	Yes		No		Don't know		Total	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
Acting up opportunities	2357	75.4	457	14.6	312	10.0	3126	100
Access to external leadership training and development	1800	58.2	415	13.4	880	28.4	3095	100
In-house leadership training and development	1600	51.8	655	21.2	831	26.9	3086	100
Informal mentoring/sponsoring	784	25.9	937	30.9	1311	43.2	3032	100
Informally advising potential candidates about an upcoming vacancy	717	24.1	1106	37.2	1151	38.7	2974	100
Employee networks	511	17.2	1029	34.7	1428	48.1	2968	100
Formal mentoring with a senior executive	503	16.6	1180	38.9	1349	44.5	3032	100
Cross-functional/developmental job rotation	410	13.8	1352	45.7	1199	40.5	2961	100

Secondly, there would appear to be a lack of knowledge around the existence of policies and procedures for aspiring executives. For example, 48.1% of respondents do not know whether their organisation offers access to employee networks, 44.5% do not know whether their organisation offers formal mentoring with a senior executive and 43.2% do not know whether their organisation offers informal mentoring/sponsoring. This limited awareness is interesting and worthy of further examination in stage three of the research.

5.3 Respondents' Views on Gender Equality Issues at Executive Level⁴⁶

One of the key aims of the stage two survey was to ascertain respondents' views with respect to: the facilitators or enablers of career progression; barriers to career progression; policies and practices which may enhance gender equality at executive level; and general views with regards to gender equality within their organisation. The remainder of this section addresses each of these issues.

⁴⁶ Section 5.3 reports on the combined responses for both male and female respondents. Comparative responses for males and females are presented in Section 5.4.

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5.3.1 Respondents' Views on Enablers or Facilitators to Career Progression

Table 5.11 indicates the extent to which respondents (male and female) agreed that a range of enablers or facilitators, both individual (or personal) and organisational, could/did help facilitate career progression to executive level. Panel A indicates agreement (i.e. a mean score >3) that all the personal strategies (with the exception of employing domestic help) could (or did) facilitate career progression to executive level. However, whilst the mean score for all enablers or facilitators is in excess of 3, a supportive spouse or partner (mean=4.08) and consistently exceeding performance expectations (mean=3.71) are viewed as particularly beneficial to career progression.

With respect to organisational strategies, Panel B indicates agreement (i.e. a mean score >3) that of all the strategies (with the exception of gender impact assessments of organisational policies) could (or did) facilitate career progression to executive level.

Table 5.11 Enablers/Facilitators of Career Progression to Executive Level						
Panel A: Individual strategies						
	Mean^a	5 (%)	4 (%)	3 (%)	2 (%)	1 (%)
A supportive spouse/partner	4.08	40.3	36.6	17.0	2.9	3.2
Consistently exceeding performance expectations	3.71	21.7	45.9	18.9	9.2	4.3
Demonstrating loyalty/commitment to my organisation	3.37	15.15	37.2	25.2	14.8	7.6
Access to affordable childcare	3.35	19.5	24.4	37.0	10.1	9.0
Seeking out difficult or highly visible job assignments	3.33	9.8	37.6	33.5	13.9	5.2
Networking with influential colleagues	3.28	11.4	35.5	29.6	16.6	6.9
Upgrading educational credentials	3.20	8.9	33.7	33.	17.3	7.0
Obtaining an influential mentor/sponsor	3.18	11.0	30.0	33.4	17.0	8.6
Physical appearance (i.e. dressing professionally)	3.18	6.1	34.4	37.4	15.9	6.2
Employing domestic help	2.68	4.8	15.6	39.1	24.4	16.1

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Panel B: Organisational strategies						
	Mean^a	5 (%)	4 (%)	3 (%)	2 (%)	1 (%)
Access to acting up opportunities	3.75	20.3	49.7	18.7	6.9	4.4
Access to external leadership training and development programme(s)	3.55	13.1	46.6	26.5	9.8	4.0
In-house leadership training and development programme(s)	3.52	11.9	46.9	26.6	10.2	4.4%
Formal mentoring programme(s)	3.39	12.0	38.0	32.2	12.3	5.4
Flexible work arrangements (e.g., compressed work week, reduced hours, term-time working, flexi-time)	3.38	14.6	33.9	31.8	14.2	5.4
Cross-functional/developmental job rotation	3.32	9.4	37.7	33.9	13.2	5.7
Identifying and developing high-potential employees	3.32	13.2	34.0	31.8	14.1	7.0
Access to employee networks	3.18	5.3	32.4	42.3	14.7	5.3
Exit interviews to investigate reasons for non-progression to executive level	3.17	6.9	33	36.7	17.1	6.4
Gender impact assessments of organisational policies	2.91	6.3	16.4	48.8	19.0	9.6
^a Scale: 5 = strongly agree, 4 = agree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 2 = disagree, 1 = strongly disagree						

However, three of these strategies appear particularly beneficial: acting up opportunities (mean=3.75); access to external leadership training and development opportunities (mean=3.55); and access to in-house leadership training and development opportunities (mean=3.52). The only organisational strategy which respondents did not agree would (or did) facilitate career progression to executive level was 'gender impact assessments of organisational policies': almost half (48.8%) of respondents neither agreed nor disagreed and a further 28.6% disagreed or strongly disagreed that this organisational strategy could (or did) enhance career progression. This result could indicate a lack of awareness of what a gender impact assessment is, or a belief among respondents that such assessments are not particularly effective.

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5.3.2 Respondents' Views on Barriers to Career Progression

Table 5.12 summarises respondents' views with respect to a range of individual and organisational barriers to career progression to executive level. The individual barriers relate to personal attributes and circumstances, whilst organisational barriers relate to opportunities in the workplace, the work environment and organisational culture.

Panel A generally shows that the respondents disagree that the individual barriers listed acted as a barrier to career progression to executive level (i.e. mean score of <3). For example, the majority of respondents expressed their disagreement with the following: feeling marginalised as a result of gender (mean=2.40); reporting complaints of inequality (mean=2.59); caring responsibilities for dependents other than children (mean=2.68); and making use of flexible work arrangements (mean=2.75). Only a lack of management or leadership experience (mean=3.12) was viewed as a possible individual barrier to career progression.

Table 5.12						
Barriers to Career Progression to Executive Level						
Panel A: Individual barriers						
	Mean^a	5 (%)	4 (%)	3 (%)	2 (%)	1 (%)
A lack of management or leadership experience	3.12	8.5	37	19.1	28.5	6.9
Lack of awareness of organisational politics	3.03	6.5	30.6	30.1	24.8	8.0
A lack of management or leadership skills	2.99	7.3	31.1	22.9	31.0	7.8
Caring responsibilities for dependent children	2.84	7.9	23.1	27.6	27.0	14.2
Using flexible work arrangements	2.75	6.1	17.2	33.8	31.0	11.9
Caring responsibilities for dependents other than children	2.68	4.6	18.2	33.0	29.6	14.6
Reporting concerns/complaints regarding inequality	2.59	4.15	10.4	39.8	31.4	14.2
Feeling marginalised because of my gender	2.40	3.5	10.9	28.8	35.8	21.0

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Panel B: Most Important Organisational Barriers						
	Mean^a	5 (%)	4 (%)	3 (%)	2 (%)	1 (%)
Limited advancement opportunities	3.61	20.1	42.5	19.6	14.2	3.6
Limited acting up opportunities	3.56	18.6	42.4	19.7	15.6	3.8
Lack of mentoring	3.24	7.2	39.0	28.9	20.0	4.9
A lack of opportunities to gain visibility	3.14	7.9	35.9	23.8	27.4	5.0
Lack of recognition for work-life balance	3.11	9.3	28.8	31.5	24.1	6.3
Failure of senior leadership to assume responsibility for my career advancement	3.11	9.1	28.5	32.3	24.0	6.0
Other Organisational Barriers						
	Mean^a	5 (%)	4 (%)	3 (%)	2 (%)	1 (%)
Exclusion from informal networks of communication	3.06	6.8	28.7	34.0	25.4	5.2
A lack of opportunities to work on challenging assignments	3.04	6.5	33.9	22.7	31.1	5.8
Long-hours culture	3.00	7.65	24.3	34.8	26.6	6.6
Inhospitable organisational culture	2.85	6.3	20.1	34.8	29.7	9.1
Colleagues' negative reactions to the use of flexible work arrangements	2.81	6.1	19.2	33.3	31.8	9.5
Unsupportive work environment	2.81	6.5	18.8	34.7	29.4	10.6
Least Important Organisational Barriers						
	Mean^a	5 (%)	4 (%)	3 (%)	2 (%)	1 (%)
Existing imbalance in gender composition at executive/senior managerial levels	2.76	6.2	15.9	36.4	30.5	11.0
Lack of senior visibly successful role models of the same gender	2.72	6.4	16.0	33.1	32.5	12.0
Gender stereotyping and preconceptions of my role and abilities	2.67	4.6	15.5	34.9	32.5	12.5
Supervisors' negative reactions to the use of flexible work arrangements	2.60	4.9	14.7	32.0	32.5	16.0
Negative comments about your gender (e.g. insults or negative jokes)	2.30	3.0	7.0	31.2	35.1	23.8
^a Scale: 5 = strongly agree, 4 = agree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 2 = disagree, 1 = strongly disagree						

With respect to organisational barriers, Panel B indicates that respondents view some of the potential barriers as more of an obstacle to career progression than others. For example, the most influential barriers were reported as: limited advancement opportunities (mean=3.61); and limited acting up opportunities (mean=3.56). In addition, there was also agreement (but not as strong as the first two barriers listed) that the following could be (or were) barriers to career progression: a lack of mentoring (mean=3.24); a lack of opportunities to gain visibility

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(mean=3.14); a lack of recognition of work-life balance (mean=3.11); and failure of senior management to assume responsibility for my career development (mean=3.11).

It should also be noted that the respondents did not perceive a number of potential barriers listed in Panel B as actual barriers: negative comments about gender (mean=2.30); supervisors' negative reactions to the use of flexible work arrangements (mean=2.60); gender stereotyping and preconceptions of the respondent's role and abilities (mean=2.67); and a lack of senior visibly successful role models of the same gender (mean=2.72). Interestingly, 'existing imbalance in gender composition at executive/senior managerial levels' is not viewed as a barrier (mean=2.76)

In summary, whilst Table 5.12 offers a mixed picture as to respondents' attitudes to whether individual attributes and circumstances and opportunities in the workplace, the work environment and organisational culture could act as barriers to career progression, a number of organisational barriers were perceived as a problem. These results would appear to indicate that more can be done to reduce the impact of individual and organisational barriers to career progression.

5.3.3 Respondents' Views on Policies and Practices to Increase Gender Equality

The survey also ascertained respondents' views on various policies and practices which could increase gender equality at executive level. This included views on

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promoting positive action in the recruitment and promotion process, targeted development opportunities, changing working patterns and conducting gender reviews. A summary of respondents' views in this regard is provided in Table 5.13.

The respondents were in general agreement that almost all of the policies and practices outlined in Table 5.13 would increase gender equality at executive level. The highest rated policy or practice was that of 'providing unsuccessful candidates with constructive feedback' (mean=4.08). Whilst most public sector organisations already provide feedback for unsuccessful candidates on request, this result would seem to indicate that respondents would welcome constructive feedback (not only on request), and that this feedback could potentially improve gender equality at executive level. In addition, respondents appear positive that a range of other policies and practices could increase gender equality at executive level: interview panel training to avoid gender bias (mean=3.76); an inclusive organisational culture at executive/senior managerial levels (mean=3.75); regular monitoring of executive/senior managerial level applicant data (mean=3.73); and targeted in-house leadership training and development programmes (mean=3.71). In addition, a range of other policies and practices (listed in the table 'Other Policies and Practices) are identified as important by the respondents in terms of improving gender equality at executive level. Taken together these policies and practices listed in Table 5.13, for which agreement is indicated (i.e. mean >3), might usefully act as a 'checklist' against which public sector organisations in Northern Ireland might assess their own offerings in this regard as a means of improving gender equality at executive levels.

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Table 5.13						
Policies and Practices to Improve Gender Equality at Executive Level						
Most Important Policies and Practices						
	Mean^a	5 (%)	4 (%)	3 (%)	2 (%)	1 (%)
Providing unsuccessful candidates with constructive feedback	4.08	31.0	20.9	14.2	2.8	1.1
Interview panel training to avoid gender bias	3.76	19.8	47.8	23.4	6.3	2.7
Inclusive organisational culture at executive/senior managerial levels	3.75	16.3	49.7	28.1	4.0	1.9
Regular monitoring of executive/senior managerial level applicant data	3.73	16.6	46.6	31.3	3.9	1.6
Targeted in-house leadership training and development programme(s)	3.71	15.7	51.0	24.6	5.8	2.9
Other Policies and Practices						
	Mean^a	5 (%)	4 (%)	3 (%)	2 (%)	1 (%)
Formal mentoring programmes	3.69	13.0	53.1	26.5	5.2	2.2
Targeted external leadership training and development programme(s)	3.69	15.7	48.5	27.2	5.8	2.8
Greater flexible work arrangements (e.g. flexi-working, homeworking, job-sharing)	3.68	18.4	44.5	26.0	8.3	2.8
Informing potential candidates about a forthcoming vacancy at executive/senior managerial levels	3.63	12.3	49.5	29.0	7.2	2.1
High level internal or secondment development opportunities for the underrepresented gender	3.36	11.9	40.0	27.3	13.5	7.3
Statutory requirement to conduct gender reviews	3.31	12.3	29.9	40.1	12.0	5.7
Move away from competency based interviews	3.29	20.1	21.6	32.3	19.7	6.4
Least Important Policies and Practices						
	Mean^a	5 (%)	4 (%)	3 (%)	2 (%)	1 (%)
Quotas for gender balance at executive/senior managerial levels	2.76	8.8	18.3	32.2	22.0	18.7
Positive action in shortlisting process (i.e. shortlist males or females only)	2.36	4.0	14.0	22.1	33.9	26.0
Positive action in the appointment process (i.e. appoint males or females only)	2.33	3.8	13.3	22.1	34.0	26.9
^a Scale: 5 = strongly agree, 4 = agree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 2 = disagree, 1 = strongly disagree						

Whilst there are high levels of agreement reported in Table 5.13, overall respondents do not agree that the policies concerned with positive action would lead to increased gender equality at executive level, namely: gender quotas at executive level (mean=2.76); positive action in the shortlisting process (mean=2.36); and positive action in the appointment process (mean=2.33). This would suggest that survey respondents are comfortable with policies and practices which increase equality of

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opportunity, but are generally not in favour of taking action that may entail some form of positive discrimination. It is also interesting to note that those policies or practices which are focussed on positively affecting one gender over another score lower than those which have the potential to benefit both males and females. This issue will be explored in more detail in stage three of the research.

5.3.4 Respondents' Views on General Statements about Gender Equality

In addition to the above perceptions, respondents were asked their views on a number of statements about gender equality at executive level including: beliefs about current/aspiring executives; beliefs about female stereotyping; views of themselves in terms of gender equality; and views of their organisation, its gender culture and the interaction of males and females in the workplace. These issues will now be discussed.

5.3.4.1 Respondents' Views on Beliefs about Current/Aspiring Female Executives

Table 5.14 provides data regarding respondents' beliefs about current/aspiring female executives. The data suggests that the majority of respondents are in agreement that valuing the contribution female executives/senior managers make is important (mean=3.71) and that females bring a unique perspective to decision-making and problem solving (mean=3.40). These positive views of the role of females at executive/senior management levels are encouraging.

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Table 5.14						
General Statements about Gender Equality at Executive Level						
Beliefs about current/aspiring female executives						
	Mean^a	5 (%)	4 (%)	3 (%)	2 (%)	1 (%)
Valuing the contribution female executives/senior managers make is important	3.71	18.9	47.0	24.3%	5.8	4.0
Women bring a unique perspective to decision-making and problem solving at executive/senior managerial levels	3.40	14.4	35.1	33.0	11.2	6.3
Recruitment practices that encourage female candidates to apply for executive/senior managerial positions is important	3.35	8.8	44.2	26.9	13.6	6.5
Holding senior executives/managers accountable for the advancement of aspiring female executives is important	3.06	5.4	31.2	35.8	19.5	8.1
Female executives/senior managers face frequent put downs for being too hard	2.66	3.2	17.7	32.7	34.8	11.6
Few women in my organisation want to do what it takes to get to executive/senior managerial levels	2.50	2.1	15.2	27.8	40.1	14.9
Female executives/senior managers face frequent put downs for being too soft	2.29	1.0	7.3	28.4	45.9	17.3
^a Scale: 5 = strongly agree, 4 = agree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 2 = disagree, 1 = strongly disagree						

In addition there is general agreement that recruitment practices that encourage female candidates to apply for executive/senior managerial positions are important (mean=3.35). However, there is less agreement with the statement that 'holding senior executives/managers accountable for the advancement of aspiring female executives is important' (mean=3.06). With respect to the remaining statements in Panel A, respondents do not agree with the following: female executives/senior managers face frequent put downs for being too hard (mean=2.66) or too soft (mean=2.29); and few women in my organisation want to do what it takes to get to executive/senior managerial levels (mean=2.50). The responses to these final three statements are encouraging.

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5.3.4.2 Respondents' Views on Beliefs about Female Stereotyping

Table 5.15 indicates respondents' views about various female stereotyping statements.

Table 5.15 Beliefs about Female Stereotyping						
	Mean^a	5 (%)	4 (%)	3 (%)	2 (%)	1 (%)
Women managers have their ideas challenged more often than male managers	2.73	4.4	18.8	32.7	33.5	10.6
Women managers have to perform much better than male managers to succeed	2.89	8.8	25.5	24.1	29.2	12.3
Compared to male managers, female managers must continually prove themselves	2.79	6.4	24.1	24.2	32.4	12.9
Compared to male managers, female managers are often uncomfortable in taking credit for their success	2.77	7.0	22.1	26.4	29.4	15.0
Women managers have their work judged more critically than male managers	2.70	6.2	19.6	26.9	33.0	14.4
Women managers must behave in a typically masculine way in order to be taken seriously	2.49	2.9	15.0	25.7	40.4	16.0
^a Scale: 5 = strongly agree, 4 = agree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 2 = disagree, 1 = strongly disagree						

The results indicate that respondents generally expressed a level of disagreement with the female stereotyping statements regarding: female managers ideas being challenged (mean=2.73); performance (mean=2.89); proving oneself (mean=2.79); feeling uncomfortable with taking credit for success (mean=2.77); women being judged more critically than male managers (mean=2.70); and women managers having to behave in a typically masculine way in order to be taken seriously (mean=2.49). Whilst these results would suggest that issues around female stereotyping are not a significant issue within the Northern Ireland public sector, they do, however, show room for improvement.

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5.3.4.3 Respondents' Views of Themselves in Terms of Gender Equality

Table 5.16 provides respondents' views of themselves around various gender equality issues at executive level. The data indicates that the majority of respondents would be comfortable working at executive level (mean=3.73) and there appears to be some awareness, although this could be better, that gender equality at executive/senior managerial levels is discussed in organisational strategies/policies (mean=3.21). With respect to the remaining statements in Table 5.16, the overwhelming majority of respondents expressed disagreement when asked if they would have difficulty being supervised by a man (mean=1.84) or a woman (mean=1.93) or if they expected to encounter (or have encountered) organisational barriers to career progression because of gender (mean=2.53). However, it is interesting to note that more respondents disagreed/strongly disagreed than strongly agreed/agreed that they are confident they would be promoted to an executive/managerial position than an equally qualified experienced person. This finding might indicate an issue around confidence in terms of career progression.

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Table 5.16 Individual Views about Gender Equality						
	Mean^a	5 (%)	4 (%)	3 (%)	2 (%)	1 (%)
I would be comfortable working at executive/senior managerial levels in my organisation	3.73	17.0	53.9	16.4	10.3	2.4
I am aware that gender equality at executive/senior managerial levels is discussed in my organisation's corporate strategies and/or policies (e.g. Corporate Plan, Equality Scheme, Human Resources Policies)	3.21	6.4	35.2	36.2	17.1	5.1
I am confident I would be promoted to an executive/senior managerial level position rather than an equally qualified/experienced person	2.81	3.0	16.5	47.9	23.8	8.9
I expect to encounter OR have encountered organisational barriers to my career progression because of my gender	2.35	4.5	13.2	19.1	39.2	23.9
I have difficulty being supervised by a woman	1.93	2.2	3.3	16.4	42.1	36.1
I have difficulty being supervised by a man	1.84	1.9	0.5	15.4	43.6	38.6
<i>^a Scale: 5 = strongly agree, 4 = agree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 2 = disagree, 1 = strongly disagree</i>						

5.3.4.4 Respondents' Views of their Organisation and its Gender Culture

Tables 5.17, 5.18 and 5.19 indicate respondents' perceptions about their organisation's gender culture.

5.3.4.4.1 Positive Views of Gender Culture

Table 5.17 indicates some positive aspects of the respondents' organisation's gender culture around: transparency in relation to promotion to, and development opportunities for executives/senior managerial positions (mean=3.20); progress made to promote gender equality in the last five years (mean=3.17); progress to promote gender equality irrespective of equalities obligations (mean=3.16); and to a lesser degree, effective communication when implementing policies which promote gender equality at executive/senior managerial levels (mean=3.07). The final two

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statements in Table 5.17 reinforce these positive aspects of gender culture within the respondent organisations, namely: men are not concerned with reverse discrimination (mean=2.87); and an informal culture of 'jobs for the boys' does not prevail (mean=2.77).

Table 5.17 Positive Views about Gender Culture						
	Mean^a	5 (%)	4 (%)	3 (%)	2 (%)	1 (%)
My organisation works in a transparent manner in relation to promotion to, and development opportunities for, executive/senior managerial positions	3.20	9.5	36.7	25.5	20.4	7.9
My organisation has made good progress in the last five years to promote gender equality at executive/senior managerial levels as a result of equalities obligations (e.g. Sex Discrimination Order Northern Ireland, Section 75 Northern Ireland Act)	3.17	3.7	25	58.9	9.3	3.1
My organisation has made good progress in the last five years to promote gender equality at executive/senior managerial levels irrespective of equalities obligations	3.16	4.0	23.4	59.9	9.7	3.0
My organisation communicates effectively when implementing policies which promote gender equality at executive/senior managerial levels	3.07	2.6	25.5	52.9	15.5	3.8
Men in my organisation are concerned with reverse discrimination	2.87	4.3	13.4	52.6	24.6	5.1
Within my organisation an informal culture of 'jobs for the boys' still prevails	2.77	7.4	21.3	26.0	31.1	14.2
^a <i>Scale: 5 = strongly agree, 4 = agree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 2 = disagree, 1 = strongly disagree</i>						

5.3.4.4.2 Negative/Neutral Views of Gender Culture

Table 5.18 indicates that respondents hold some negative views of their organisation's gender culture around the existence of cronyism (mean=3.12) within the Northern Ireland public sector. Additionally, public sector organisations do not appear to actively encourage individuals to take on non-executive or equivalent roles in external organisations (mean=2.46) with the result that organisations could be

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missing out on the significant benefits of such roles (see Table 5.9). Table 5.18 also indicates a number of more neutral views concerning the allocation of sufficient financial (mean=2.94) or time (mean=2.95) resources to promote gender equality at executive level; and the extent to which organisations have a balanced management board/corporate management team (mean=2.97).

Table 5.18 Negative/Neutral Views about Gender Culture						
	Mean^a	5 (%)	4 (%)	3 (%)	2 (%)	1 (%)
Cronyism (showing favouritism to certain individuals, especially appointing them to positions of authority) is still rife within my organisation	3.12	13.2	25.0	30.8	23.0	8.0
My organisation has a balanced management board/corporate management team in terms of gender	2.97	4.9	27.7	34.4	25.9	7.1
My organisation has allocated sufficient time resources towards promoting gender equality at executive level	2.95	2.6	12.6	66.2	14.6	4.0
My organisation has allocated sufficient financial resources towards promoting gender equality at executive level	2.94	2.3	10.9	68.9	13.8	4.0
My organisation actively encourages me to take on non-executive or equivalent roles in external organisations	2.46	1.7	8.6	35.7	42.5	11.6
^a <i>Scale: 5 = strongly agree, 4 = agree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 2 = disagree, 1 = strongly disagree</i>						

5.3.4.4.3 Interaction between Males and Females in the Workplace

Table 5.19 indicates respondents' responses regarding the interaction between males and females in the workplace. All responses indicate that relations between males and females in the Northern Ireland public sector are generally good (mean<3 indicating disagreement with each statement) and that there is mutual respect between males and females in terms of body language, affording both sexes time to air their views, and the value attached to views made in meetings. However, whilst the results are generally good, there is still room for improvement in this regard.

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	Mean^a	5 (%)	4 (%)	3 (%)	2 (%)	1 (%)
During board/senior/management meetings, males display signs of negative body language when females are speaking	2.54	1.9	6.9	47.1	31.4	12.6
During board/senior/management meetings, views expressed by males are valued more highly than views expressed by females	2.52	2.2	7.5	43.7	33.6	13.0
During board/senior/management meetings, males are afforded more time to speak than females	2.49	2.0	5.0	46.0	33.9	13.1
During board/senior/management meetings, females display signs of negative body language when males are speaking	2.42	1.0	1.8	48.9	35.4	12.9
During board/senior/management meetings, females are afforded more time to speak than males	2.41	1.2	1.8	46.8	37.2	13.0
During board/senior/management meetings, views expressed by females are valued more highly than views expressed by males	2.37	0.9	1.6	44.9	39.1	13.5
^a Scale: 5 = strongly agree, 4 = agree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 2 = disagree, 1 = strongly disagree						

5.4 Comparative Analyses of Male and Female Perceptions and Experiences

The previous section discussed the perceptions of all respondents, namely the combined views of males and females. In this section, the views of males and females are compared in order to address objective seven of the research project. To that end, the remainder of this section explores whether male and female respondents have different views with regards to: the enablers or facilitators of career progression; the barriers to career progression; policies and practices that might increase gender equality; and gender equality generally.

5.4.1 Opting Out of Career Progression: Further Insights

Earlier in this chapter, it was noted that 1,058 respondents (33.2% of all respondents) had indicated one or more reasons for opting out of career progression (see Table 5.6). Further tests⁴⁷ were carried out on this data to understand if the decision to opt out of career progression differs between males and females. The results reveal that females are more likely to opt out of career progression than males due to the following reasons⁴⁸: caring for dependent children; caring for dependents other than children; lack of flexible work arrangements; unsupportive work environment; long-hours culture; existing imbalance in gender composition at executive level; feeling marginalised as a result of gender; and gender stereotyping and pre-occupations about roles and abilities. In contrast, males are more likely than females to opt out of career progression as they are considering retirement. Taken

⁴⁷ See Technical Annex Two, Table 1 for more details of these tests.

⁴⁸ All differences reported in section 5.4 are reported at the 1% level of significance unless otherwise stated.

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together, these results provide important insights into the issue of opting out, with females being much more likely than their male colleagues to opt out of career progression in the Northern Ireland public sector.

In addition to the above analysis, further testing of the data was undertaken to understand factors which might predict which individuals might opt out in the Northern Ireland public sector. Eleven potential factors were identified: gender, age, marital status, number of caring responsibilities, number of children, level of education, organisation type, seniority level, organisation size, length of service and holding a non-executive position. The results⁴⁹ of this additional analysis indicate the following:

- Females are more than twice as likely as males to opt out of career progression;
- As an employee's age bracket increases they are 20% more likely to opt out;
- As the number of caring responsibilities increases, employees are 46% more likely to opt out;
- As the number of children increases, an employee is 22% more likely to opt out.
- As the seniority level of an employee increases by one grade, the employee is 17% less likely to opt out of career progression; and
- When compared to employees in micro organisations, employees in small organisations are 70% less likely to opt out of career progression, whilst employees in medium organisations are 73% less likely, and employees in large organisations are 78% less likely.

⁴⁹ The results of this further analysis are presented in Technical Annex Two, Table 2.

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Whilst these findings support previous research which suggests that females opt out of career progression at higher levels than males, the findings with regards to caring responsibilities and children contradict some previous research. For example, in a study of MBA graduates working in the private and public sectors, Galinsky *et al.*, (2009) found that women with and without children or other caring responsibilities are opting out of career progression at similar rates (p. 60). Despite this, **the results reported here shed new light on the factors that affect an individual's decision to opt out of career progression within the Northern Ireland public sector.**

5.4.2 Enablers or Facilitators of Career Progression: a Comparison of Male and Female Perceptions

The data presented earlier in Table 5.11, Panels A and B indicated that survey respondents generally agreed that a range of individual and organisational strategies could enable or facilitate career progression to executive level. In this section, differences in male and female perceptions in this regard, are presented (see Table 5.20, Panels A and B).

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Table 5.20				
Difference in Male and Female Views Regarding the Enablers/Facilitators of Career Progression				
Panel A: Individual strategies				
	Gender	N	Mean	Differences⁵⁰
A supportive spouse/partner	Male	1482	4.05	No
	Female	1674	4.11	
Access to affordable childcare	Male	1453	3.05	Yes
	Female	1642	3.62	
Consistently exceeding performance expectations	Male	1476	3.63	Yes
	Female	1678	3.79	
Demonstrating loyalty/commitment to my organisation	Male	1479	3.28	Yes
	Female	1673	3.45	
Employing domestic help	Male	1454	2.40	Yes
	Female	1632	2.94	
Networking with influential colleagues	Male	1470	3.13	Yes
	Female	1662	3.41	
Obtaining an influential mentor/sponsor	Male	1464	3.02	Yes
	Female	1658	3.32	
Physical appearance (i.e. dressing professionally)	Male	1466	3.07	Yes
	Female	1664	3.28	
Seeking out difficult or highly visible job assignments	Male	1470	3.22	Yes
	Female	1661	3.43	
Upgrading educational credentials	Male	1475	3.18	No
	Female	1670	3.22	

The results in Table 5.20 (Panels A and B) indicate that female respondents agree to a greater extent than males that each of the individual and organisation strategies listed enable or facilitate career progression, with the exception of a supportive spouse/partner and upgrading educational credentials. These differences are reflective of previous research in the public sector which identified similar strategies as enabling female career progression.

⁵⁰ All differences reported in the following tables are reported at the 1% level of significance unless otherwise stated.

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Panel B: Organisational strategies				
	Gender	N	Mean	Differences
Cross-functional/developmental job rotation	Male	1476	3.21	Yes
	Female	1675	3.41	
Access to employee networks	Male	1474	3.07	Yes
	Female	1667	3.28	
Exit interviews to investigate reasons for non-progression to executive level	Male	1468	3.08	Yes
	Female	1656	3.25	
Access to external leadership training and development programme(s)	Male	1476	3.44	Yes
	Female	1663	3.65	
Flexible work arrangements (e.g. compressed workweek, reduced hours, term-time working, flexi-time)	Male	1474	3.12	Yes
	Female	1672	3.61	
Formal mentoring programme(s)	Male	1470	3.24	Yes
	Female	1659	3.52	
Gender impact assessments of organisational policies	Male	1463	2.65	Yes
	Female	1657	3.14	
In-house leadership training and development programme(s)	Male	1471	3.40	Yes
	Female	1663	3.62	
Identifying and developing high-potential employees	Male	1470	3.19	Yes
	Female	1659	3.43	
Access to acting up opportunities	Male	1476	3.60	Yes
	Female	1669	3.88	

An additional finding of note in Table 5.20 is the different views put forward by male and female respondents with regards to gender impact assessments of organisational policies. Whilst such assessments were not considered an important organisational strategy when male and female attitudes were combined (see Table 5.11), the separate analysis provided above indicates that female respondents generally agreed that they are an important organisational strategy to facilitate gender equality at executive levels, while male respondents do not. This may reflect a view that this practice would enhance a female respondents' career progression at the expense of that of a male respondent. However, it is not possible to confirm whether this is the case from the current analysis. Overall the findings outlined in Table 5.20, Panels A and B suggest **that female respondents view most of these**

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enablers or facilitators of career progression as more important than male respondents.

5.4.3 Barriers to Career Progression: a Comparison of Male and Female Perceptions

Table 5.21, Panels A and B, provides an analysis of male and female respondents' views of the potential barriers to career progression at executive level.

Table 5.21				
Difference in Male and Female Views of Barriers to Career Progression				
Panel A: Individual barriers				
	Gender	N	Mean	Differences
A lack of management or leadership experience	Male	1481	3.09	No
	Female	1669	3.14	
Lack of awareness of organisational politics	Male	1475	2.94	Yes
	Female	1670	3.10	
A lack of management or leadership skills	Male	1484	3.00	No
	Female	1674	2.98	
Caring responsibilities for dependent children	Male	1475	2.50	Yes
	Female	1658	3.13	
Using flexible work arrangements	Male	1476	2.50	Yes
	Female	1666	2.97	
Caring responsibilities for dependents other than children	Male	1470	2.48	Yes
	Female	1644	2.87	
Reporting concerns/complaints regarding inequality	Male	1478	2.46	Yes
	Female	1658	2.70	
Feeling marginalised because of my gender	Male	1473	2.17	Yes
	Female	1658	2.60	

The data for individual barriers (Panel A) suggest that the only barriers perceived as an obstacle to career progression are lack of management or leadership experience; lack of awareness of organisational politics; and caring responsibilities for dependent children, the latter two of which are perceived as barriers for females only. When male and female views are compared, differences exist for all, except two individual barriers. These findings are reflective of previous work in the public sector.

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Table 5.21, Panel B offers a more mixed view of male and female perceptions of organisational barriers. In general terms, male respondents do not view most of the items in Panel B as barriers to their career progression, with the exception of: limited advancement opportunities (mean=3.49); lack of acting up opportunities (mean=3.41); and a lack of mentoring (mean=3.10). In contrast, female respondents view more of the items in Panel B as representing barriers to their career progression (with the exception of: unsupportive work environment (mean=2.90); inhospitable organisational culture (mean=2.93); lack of senior visibly successful role models (mean=2.97); gender stereotyping (mean=2.89); supervisors' negative reaction to using flexible work arrangement (mean=2.78); and negative comments about their gender (mean=2.43). This finding is particularly interesting as it contradicts previous findings in a public sector context.

Panel B: Most Important Organisational Barriers				
	Gender	N	Mean	Differences
Limited advancement opportunities	Male	1468	3.49	Yes
	Female	1663	3.72	
Limited acting up opportunities	Male	1473	3.41	Yes
	Female	1669	3.69	
Lack of mentoring	Male	1473	3.10	Yes
	Female	1669	3.35	
A lack of opportunities to gain visibility	Male	1478	3.03	Yes
	Female	1675	3.24	
Lack of recognition for work-life balance	Male	1470	2.91	Yes
	Female	1666	3.28	
Failure of senior leadership to assume responsibility for my career advancement	Male	1473	3.02	Yes
	Female	1666	3.18	
Other Organisational barriers				
	Gender	N	Mean	Differences
Exclusion from informal networks of communication	Male	1469	2.91	Yes
	Female	1667	3.20	
A lack of opportunities to work on challenging assignments	Male	1484	2.95	Yes
	Female	1675	3.12	
Long-hours culture	Male	1463	2.83	Yes
	Female	1659	3.15	
Colleagues' negative reactions to the use of flexible work arrangements	Male	1475	2.54	Yes
	Female	1665	3.04	
Existing imbalance in gender composition at executive/senior managerial levels	Male	1466	2.49	Yes
	Female	1664	3.00	
Least Important Organisational barriers				
	Gender	N	Mean	Differences
Unsupportive work environment	Male	1467	2.72	Yes
	Female	1659	2.90	
Inhospitable organisational culture	Male	1475	2.75	Yes
	Female	1666	2.93	

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Lack of senior visibly successful role models of the same gender	Male	1461	2.44	Yes
	Female	1657	2.97	
Gender stereotyping and preconceptions of my role and abilities	Male	1475	2.42	Yes
	Female	1662	2.89	
Supervisors' negative reactions to the use of flexible work arrangements	Male	1470	2.40	Yes
	Female	1651	2.78	
Negative comments about your gender (e.g. insults or negative jokes)	Male	1468	2.16	Yes
	Female	1646	2.43	

Finally, when male and female perceptions are compared, the results of Panel B indicate that in all cases, females perceive organisational barriers as more important than male respondents. Overall, the results in Table 5.21 indicate that **in general many of the individual and organisational barriers are not viewed as obstacles to career progression; however, female respondents agree that more of the barriers listed are obstacles to their career progression than male respondents.**

5.4.4 Policies and Practices for Increasing Gender Equality: a Comparison of Male and Female Perceptions

Table 5.22 provides an analysis of male and female views regarding policies and practices for increasing gender equality. The results indicate that men and women share similar views with regard to the policies and practices listed, with the exception of quotas. However, whilst male and female respondents are broadly in agreement with each other, differences are reported for all practices, with females indicating greater agreement than their male counterparts⁵¹.

⁵¹ All differences in male and female perceptions regarding the importance of policies and practices are reported at the 1% level of significance with the exception of 'Moving away from competency based interviews' which is reported at the 5% level of significance.

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Interestingly, the results in Table 5.22 also indicate that generally male and female respondents do not believe that one gender or the other should benefit from positive action in the short-listing or appointment process (despite the fact that differences in male and female scores were found). Whilst this is contrary to previous work, it may represent a view that career progression should be based on merit. However, the finding with respect to quotas corroborates previous work. Overall these results suggest that **male and female respondents' views are similar regarding all policies and practices with the exception of quotas, which females see as marginally having the potential to increase gender equality at executive level in their organisation.**

Most Important Policies and Practices	Gender	N	Mean	Differences
Providing unsuccessful candidates with constructive feedback	Male	1431	3.99	Yes
	Female	1618	4.15	
Interview panel training to avoid gender bias	Male	1432	3.62	Yes
	Female	1616	3.88	
Inclusive organisational culture at executive/senior managerial levels	Male	1430	3.57	Yes
	Female	1615	3.90	
Regular monitoring of executive/senior managerial level applicant data	Male	1427	3.58	Yes
	Female	1605	3.85	
Formal mentoring programmes	Male	1430	3.53	Yes
	Female	1615	3.84	
Targeted in-house leadership training and development programme(s)	Male	1429	3.49	Yes
	Female	1610	3.91	
Targeted external leadership training and development programme(s)	Male	1421	3.45	Yes
	Female	1608	3.89	
Greater flexible work arrangements (e.g. flexi-working, homeworking, job-sharing)	Male	1430	3.48	Yes
	Female	1624	3.85	
Informing potential candidates about a forthcoming vacancy at executive/senior managerial levels	Male	1426	3.47	Yes
	Female	1615	3.76	
High level internal or secondment development opportunities for the underrepresented gender	Male	1432	3.03	Yes
	Female	1613	3.65	
Statutory requirement to conduct gender reviews	Male	1429	3.06	Yes
	Female	1609	3.54	
Move away from competency based interviews	Male	1429	3.24	Yes
	Female	1624	3.34	
Least Important Policies and Practices				
Quotas for gender balance at executive/senior managerial levels	Male	1420	2.40	Yes
	Female	1598	3.09	
Positive action in shortlisting process (i.e. shortlist males or females only)	Male	1438	2.19	Yes
	Female	1625	2.52	
Positive action in the appointment process (i.e. appoint males or females only)	Male	1436	2.16	Yes
	Female	1618	2.49	

5.4.5 Individual Views on Gender Equality: a Comparison of Male and Female Perceptions

The stage one literature review suggested that current and aspiring female executives face a number of challenges with regards to their leadership. Females often face being stereotyped and compared unfavourably to male colleagues, and it was also suggested that inhospitable cultural norms and behaviours persist. In order to gain further insights into some of these issues in the context of the Northern Ireland public sector, a comparison of male and female perceptions is conducted regarding: beliefs about current/aspiring female executives; beliefs about gender stereotyping; individual views about gender equality; and views about gender culture.

5.4.5.1 Beliefs about Current/Aspiring Female Executives: a Comparison of Male and Female Perceptions

Table 5.23 shows responses to a number of statements regarding beliefs about current/aspiring female executives. A number of conclusions can be drawn from these results. First, males indicate less agreement with all the statements when compared to females. Secondly, there are differences between male and female respondents' perceptions for all beliefs about current and aspiring female executives/senior managers. Finally, there are only two areas where the views of males and females are divergent, namely, 'female executives bring a unique perspective to decision-making and problem solving', and 'senior management should be held accountable for aspiring female's career progression'. In both cases, females are in agreement with these statements whilst males are not.

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Beliefs about current and aspiring female executives				
	Gender	N	Mean	Differences
Valuing the contribution female executives/senior managers make is important	Male	1411	3.50	Yes
	Female	1607	3.90	
Women bring a unique perspective to decision-making and problem solving at executive/senior managerial levels	Male	1411	2.97	Yes
	Female	1604	3.78	
Recruitment practices that encourage female candidates to apply for executive/senior managerial positions is important	Male	1407	3.06	Yes
	Female	1601	3.61	
Holding senior executives/managers accountable for the advancement of aspiring female executives is important	Male	1407	2.77	Yes
	Female	1601	3.32	
Female executives/senior managers face frequent put downs for being too hard	Male	1414	2.33	Yes
	Female	1606	2.96	
Few women in my organisation want to do what it takes to get to executive/senior managerial levels	Male	1408	2.24	Yes
	Female	1603	2.72	
Female executives/senior managers face frequent put downs for being too soft	Male	1415	2.02	Yes
	Female	1608	2.52	

5.4.5.2 Beliefs about Female Stereotyping: a Comparison of Male and Female Perceptions

Table 5.24 indicates male and female views about female stereotyping. A number of conclusions can be drawn. First, males indicate less agreement with all the statements when compared to females. Secondly, there are differences between male and female respondents' perceptions for all beliefs about female stereotyping. Finally, the views of males and females are divergent for all statements with the exception of 'women managers must behave in a typically masculine way in order to be taken seriously' (both males and females disagree with this statement).

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Table 5.24 Difference in Male and Female Views Regarding Beliefs about Female Stereotyping				
	Gender	N	Mean	Differences
Women managers have to perform much better than male managers to succeed	Male	1413	2.22	Yes
	Female	1611	3.48	
Compared to male managers, female managers are often uncomfortable in taking credit for their success	Male	1409	2.09	Yes
	Female	1604	3.36	
Compared to male managers, female managers must continually prove themselves	Male	1414	2.15	Yes
	Female	1605	3.35	
Women managers have their work judged more critically than do male managers	Male	1415	2.10	Yes
	Female	1606	3.24	
Women managers have their ideas challenged more often than male managers	Male	1416	2.24	Yes
	Female	1612	3.16	
Women managers must behave in a typically masculine way in order to be taken seriously	Male	1413	2.06	Yes
	Female	1607	2.86	

Whilst some of these findings corroborate previous research, they also highlight that **the perceptions and experience of current and aspiring females with respect to various female stereotypical attitudes is quite different to those of males in the Northern Ireland public sector.** These differences could indicate a lack of understanding due to differences in experiences or a belief among male respondents that equality legislation and practice has created a level playing field (which offers a different actual experience for female respondents). Alternatively, they may represent a view among male respondents that female executives are treated in the same way as male executives and that it is up to them to compete with their male counterparts. It is beyond the scope of the stage two data analysis to address this question. However, this area will receive further investigation in stage three of the research project.

5.4.5.3 Beliefs about Views of themselves: a Comparison of Male and Female Perceptions

Table 5.25 indicates male and female views of themselves around various gender equality issues at executive level. A number of conclusions can be drawn from the

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analysis. First, males indicate both less and more agreement with the statements when compared to females. Secondly, only three of the statements indicate differences between male and female respondents' perceptions of themselves. Finally, the views of males and females are convergent for all statements. Overall, these results suggest that **male and female respondents have similar individual views about gender equality.**

	Gender	N	Mean	Differences
I would be comfortable working at executive/senior managerial levels in my organisation	Male	1393	3.76	No
	Female	1566	3.70	
I am aware that gender equality at executive/senior managerial levels is discussed in my organisation's corporate strategies and/or policies (e.g. Corporate Plan, Equality Scheme, Human Resources Policies)	Male	1395	3.30	Yes
	Female	1559	3.13	
I am confident I would be promoted to an executive/senior managerial level position rather than an equally qualified/experienced person	Male	1388	2.76	Yes
	Female	1559	2.86	
I expect to encounter OR have encountered organisational barriers to my career progression because of my gender	Male	1392	2.03	Yes
	Female	1562	2.64	
I have difficulty being supervised by a woman	Male	1396	1.90	No
	Female	1570	1.96	
I have difficulty being supervised by a man	Male	1396	1.87	No
	Female	1570	1.81	

5.4.5.4 Respondents' Views of their Organisation and its Gender Culture: a Comparison of Male and Female Perceptions

Tables 5.26, 5.27 and 5.28 indicate male and female respondents' perceptions about their organisation's gender culture.

5.4.5.4.1 Positive Views of Gender Culture

Table 5.26 indicates male and female positive views of their organisation's gender culture. A number of conclusions can be drawn from this analysis. First, males indicate more agreement than females for all of the statements, with the exception of

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‘within my organisation an informal culture of ‘jobs for the boys’. This indicates that males generally view their organisation’s gender culture in a more positive light than female respondents. Second, there are differences in all male and female perceptions, which implies that females have different views of their organisation’s culture than do males. Finally, there are two statements where divergent perceptions exist between males and females: ‘men in my organisation are concerned with reverse discrimination’ (males=3.00 and females=2.76); and ‘within my organisation an informal culture of ‘jobs for the boys’ still prevails’ (males=2.48 and females=3.02).

	Gender	N	Mean	Differences
My organisation works in a transparent manner in relation to promotion to, and development opportunities for, executive/senior managerial positions	Male	1398	3.31	Yes
	Female	1567	3.10	
My organisation has made good progress in the last five years to promote gender equality at executive/senior managerial levels as a result of equalities obligations (e.g. Sex Discrimination Order Northern Ireland, Section 75 Northern Ireland Act)	Male	1385	3.28	Yes
	Female	1551	3.07	
My organisation has made good progress in the last five years to promote gender equality at executive/senior managerial levels irrespective of equalities obligations	Male	1388	3.28	Yes
	Female	1548	3.05	
My organisation communicates effectively when implementing policies which promote gender equality at executive/senior managerial levels	Male	1384	3.19	Yes
	Female	1544	2.96	
Men in my organisation are concerned with reverse discrimination	Male	1384	3.00	Yes
	Female	1545	2.76	
Within my organisation an informal culture of ‘jobs for the boys’ still prevails	Male	1394	2.48	Yes
	Female	1567	3.02	

5.4.5.4.2 Mixed Positive and Negative Views of Gender Culture

Table 5.27 indicates that male respondents generally hold different and positive views about their organisation’s gender culture when compared to females. For example, in direct comparison to male respondents, females believe: cronyism exists within their organisation (mean=3.31); their organisation does not have a balanced

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management board/corporate management team (mean=2.83); and their organisation has not devoted sufficient time (mean=2.80) or financial resources (mean=2.79) to promoting gender equality. The only statement where agreement exists between males and females (both disagreeing with the statement) is that related to 'my organisation actively encourages me to take on non-executive or equivalent roles in external organisations'. This result suggests that organisations could be missing out on the potential benefits which respondents reported from holding non-executive positions earlier (see earlier Table 5.9).

	Gender	N	Mean	Differences
Cronyism (showing favouritism to certain individuals, especially appointing them to positions of authority) is still rife within my organisation	Male	1390	2.92	Yes
	Female	1562	3.31	
My organisation has a balanced management board/corporate management team in terms of gender	Male	1390	3.13	Yes
	Female	1547	2.83	
My organisation has allocated sufficient time resources towards promoting gender equality at executive level	Male	1390	3.12	Yes
	Female	1550	2.80	
My organisation has allocated sufficient financial resources towards promoting gender equality at executive level	Male	1379	3.10	Yes
	Female	1554	2.79	
My organisation actively encourages me to take on non-executive or equivalent roles in external organisations	Male	1387	2.49	No
	Female	1561	2.44	

5.4.5.4.3 Interaction between Males and Females in the Workplace

Table 5.28 indicates respondents' responses around the interaction between males and females in the workplace. A number of points are worthy of note. First, all responses, for both males and females, indicate that relations between males and females in the workplace are generally good. Secondly, females are in greater agreement on all statements than males. Thirdly, differences are reported between male and female responses for all statements. Finally, despite differences, there are no divergent views between males and females in terms of agreement/disagreement with any of the statements.

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Table 5.28
Difference in Male and Female Views Regarding Interaction between Males and Females in the Workplace

	Gender	N	Mean	Differences
During board/senior/ management meetings, views expressed by males are valued more highly than views expressed by females	Male	1383	2.25	Yes
	Female	1549	2.77	
During board/senior/ management meetings, males display signs of negative body language when females are speaking	Male	1378	2.30	Yes
	Female	1548	2.76	
During board/senior/ management meetings, males are afforded more time to speak than females	Male	1371	2.26	Yes
	Female	1535	2.69	
During board/senior/ management meetings, females display signs of negative body language when males are speaking	Male	1379	2.32	Yes
	Female	1541	2.52	
During board/senior/ management meetings, views expressed by females are valued more highly than views expressed by males	Male	1386	2.28	Yes
	Female	1544	2.45	
During board/senior/ management meetings, females are afforded more time to speak than males	Male	1384	2.34	Yes
	Female	1550	2.47	

In conclusion, the views presented in this section for female respondents may be expected to some extent in light of previous research. The results reported here demonstrate the **existence of some conflicting views with respect to organisational gender culture (i.e. informal culture, cronyism, balanced management board, allocation of sufficient time and financial resources) across the Northern Ireland public sector.** These differences in perceptions will be further explored in stage three of the research project.

5.5 Summary of Key Findings

Stage two of the research project investigated the perceptions of current and aspiring male and female executives/senior managers in terms of the enablers or facilitators and barriers to progression to executive level, and various other gender equality issues in the Northern Ireland public sector. An electronic questionnaire was designed and distributed between May and June 2013. A total of 3,186 usable responses were received from current and aspiring executives, representing a gender balance of 53.3% female and 46.7% male. An analysis of this data identified a number of key findings.

5.5.1 Opting Out of Career Progression

- A large number of respondents (1,058 representing 33% of those responding to the survey) have indicated that they have opted out of career progression. Whilst almost 15% of those opting out are considering retirement, a number of additional reasons were noted: caring responsibilities for children (46.7%) or other dependents (21.4%); long-hours culture (38.7%); unsupportive work environment (23.0%); lack of flexible work arrangements (22.5%); inhospitable organisational culture (19.2%); existing imbalance in the gender composition at executive level (7.8%); gender stereotyping and pre-conceptions about roles and abilities (7.6%); and feeling marginalised because of my gender (6.1%).
- Respondents who opt out of career progression are more likely to be female, are older, have more caring responsibilities (both for children and other

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dependents), are employed at lower seniority levels (i.e. junior management), and work in smaller organisations.

- Females are more likely than males to opt out of career progression due to: caring responsibilities for dependent children and others; lack of flexible work arrangements; unsupportive work environment; long-hours culture; existing imbalance in gender composition at executive level; feeling marginalised as a result of gender; and gender stereotyping and pre-occupations about their roles and abilities.
- The following factors help predict the type of individual who will opt out of career progression: gender (female); age (older); increased number of caring responsibilities; increased number of children; and are employed in lower levels of seniority.

5.5.2 Flexible Work Policies

- Just over half of the respondents avail of 'flexi-working' within the Northern Ireland public sector.
- There is a low take up of other more flexible working patterns within the Northern Ireland public sector (i.e. term-time working; job-sharing; compressed work week; reduced hours; and a combination of home and office working) which might facilitate better work life balance.

5.5.3 Benefits of Holding Non-Executive Positions outside of Main Employment

- Respondents holding a non-executive position outside of their main employment believe that it is beneficial to their career prospects in terms of:

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developing their management/leadership skills (74.1%) and experience (73.1%) beyond that developed in their main employment; and enabling them to obtain opportunities to work on challenging assignments, which would not be available in their main employment (58.7%)

- 35.0% of respondents agreed that holding a non-executive position beyond their main employment would enhance their chances of progression to a more senior position within their main employment, while 22.7% of respondents disagreed.
- 29.0% of respondents agreed that holding a non-executive position would provide access to leadership training and development programmes not available in their main employment, while a further 40.9% disagreed.

5.5.4 Career Development: Policies and Practices

- There is a great deal of variation within organisations in terms of the perceptions of respondents regarding the provision of various career development policies and practices: 75.4% stated their organisation offer acting up opportunities; 58.2% external leadership, training and development opportunities, and 51.8% internal leadership training and development opportunities. In contrast, perceptions suggest there are limited opportunities for cross-functional/developmental job rotation (45.7% do not offer); formal mentoring with a senior executive (38.9% do not offer); informal mentoring/sponsoring (30.9% do not offer), and access to employee networks (34.7% do not offer).
- There also appears to be a lack of knowledge around the existence of career development policies and procedures for aspiring executives (for example:

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44.5% of respondents do not know whether their organisation offers formal mentoring with a senior executive; and 43.2% do not know whether their organisation offers informal mentoring/sponsoring).

5.6 Male and Female Views Combined and Compared

5.6.1 Enablers or Facilitators of Career Progression

- A number of personal (or individual) enablers or facilitators to career progression were identified as important to both males and females: a supportive spouse/partner; consistently exceeding performance expectations; demonstrating loyalty/commitment to one's organisation; access to affordable childcare; seeking out difficult and highly visible job assignments; updating educational credentials; networking with influential colleagues; obtaining an influential mentor/sponsor; and physical appearance.
- A number of organisational enablers or facilitators to career progression were identified as important to both males and females: acting up opportunities; access to external and in-house leadership, training and development programmes; formal mentoring; flexible work arrangements; cross-functional/developmental job rotation; identifying and developing high potential employees; and exit interviews.
- When male and female perceptions are compared, differences were found for all enablers or facilitators of career progression (with two exceptions). In all cases, female respondents indicated that the enablers or facilitators are more important to their career progression than their male counterparts.

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5.6.2 Barriers to Career Progression

- A number of personal (or individual) barriers to career progression to executive level were identified (combined views of male and female respondents): a lack of management or leadership experience; and a lack of awareness of organisational politics.
- A range of organisational barriers to career progression to executive level were identified (combined views of male and female respondents): limited advancement and acting up opportunities; lack of mentoring; lack of opportunities to gain visibility; lack of recognition for work life balance; failure of senior management to assume responsibility for my career advancement; exclusion from informal networks of communication; and a lack of opportunities to work on challenging assignments.
- When male and female views are compared, differences were found for all barriers to career progression (with the exception of a lack of management or leadership experience or skills). Additionally, females agree that some of the individual barriers and most of the organisational barriers are more of an obstacle to career progression than males.

5.6.3 Policies and Practices to Improve Gender Equality at Executive Level

- A number of policies and practices to increase gender equality at executive level were identified (combined views of respondents): providing unsuccessful candidates with constructive feedback; interview panel training to avoid gender bias; inclusive organisational culture at executive/senior managerial levels; regular monitoring of executive/senior managerial level applicant data; targeted in-house and external leadership training and development

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programmes; formal mentoring; greater flexible work arrangements; informing potential candidates about forthcoming vacancies; high level internal or secondment opportunities; statutory requirement to conduct gender reviews; and move away from competency based interviews.

- The following were not generally supported by respondents (combined views of respondents): positive action in the short-listing and appointment process.
- When male and female views are compared, significant differences were found for all policies and practices to increase gender equality at executive level (females providing higher levels of agreement than males).
- Finally, when male and female views are compared, females marginally support the use of quotas for gender balance at executive/senior managerial levels are important, while males do not.

5.6.4 Views on General Statements about Gender Equality at Executive Level

- Positive views (combined views of respondents) were generally expressed regarding beliefs about current/aspiring female executives/senior managers.
- Positive views (combined views of respondents) were also expressed about female stereotyping which would indicate that stereotypical attitudes to females are not an issue in the Northern Ireland public sector.
- When male and female views are compared regarding beliefs about current/aspiring female executives/senior managers, significant differences were found for all statements: however, despite this the views of males and females are not divergent.

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- When male and female views about female stereotyping are compared, significant differences were found for all statements: females perceiving the existence of female stereotyping attitudes more so than males.

5.6.5 Views on Respondent's Organisation and Gender Culture

- A number of positive views (combined views of respondents) of the respondents' organisation's gender culture were identified (e.g. my organisation works in a transparent manner in relation to promotion).
- A number of negative or neutral views (combined views of respondents) of the respondents organisation's gender culture were also identified (e.g. cronyism, allocation of sufficient and financial resources).
- A number of positive views (combined views of respondents) were expressed regarding interactions between males and females in the workplace.
- When views are compared, a mixed picture exists. Females are more negative about their organisation's gender culture than males with respect to cronyism, balanced management board, and the allocation of sufficient time and financial resources to promote gender equality at executive level.
- When views are compared with respect to the interaction between males and females in the workplace, males and females generally hold similar positive views.

5.7 Gender Regimes in the Northern Ireland Public Sector

The analysis of data collected during stage two of the research project has highlighted examples of each of the four dimensions of Connell's (2006a, 2006b) model of gender regimes within the Northern Ireland public sector, namely: gender division of labour; gender relations of power; emotion and human relations; and gender culture and symbolism. With respect to the first of these, the analyses indicate that females are twice as likely as males to opt out of career progression due to caring responsibilities for children and other dependents, and a lack of flexible work arrangements. Evidence was also found that females who have opted out of career progression are more likely to value domestic support than their male counterparts, which might suggest that females are expected to be the primary carer for their children. Additionally, when compared to females, males do not perceive caring responsibilities for children or a lack of recognition for work life balance as barriers to career progression. Taken together, these examples provide evidence that a ***division of labour appears to exist*** within the Northern Ireland public sector for current and aspiring executives/senior managers.

Moving onto the second dimension of Connell's (2006a, 2006b) model of gender regimes, evidence was found to suggest that females opt out of career progression due to a perceived imbalance in gender composition at executive/senior management levels. Furthermore, females are also more likely than males to view their organisation's culture of promotions as gendered or gender biased in favour of males. For example, females are more likely to report examples of cronyism.

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Collectively these examples are suggestive of the ***existence of biased gender relations of power*** within the Northern Ireland public sector.

In terms of the third dimension of gender regimes, namely emotion and human relations, the findings reported that females opt out of career progression due to an unsupportive work environment and feelings of being marginalised because of their gender. Furthermore, females, when compared to males, agree that colleagues' negative attitudes to the use of flexible work arrangements and exclusion from informal networks of communication are barriers to their career progression. Additionally, female respondents when compared to their male counterparts are more likely to view interactions between the sexes within their organisation as gender biased in a number of ways. For example, females perceive that female managers (when compared to male managers) must continually prove themselves, have their work judged more critically, have their ideas challenged more often, and are often uncomfortable for taking credit for their success. The above examples seem to suggest that ***some negative and prejudicial emotions and human relations*** between male and female current and aspiring executives/senior managers exist in the Northern Ireland public sector.

Finally, with respect to the fourth dimension of gender regimes, namely ***gender culture and symbolism***, evidence was reported that females opt out of career progression due to gender stereotyping and pre-conceptions about their roles and abilities. Moreover, males, when compared to females, believe that gender impact assessments of organisational policies are not an enabler/facilitator of career progression and that a long-hours culture is not a barrier to career progression.

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Further evidence of gender culture and symbolism is also evident in terms of females' perceptions of their organisation's gender culture. For example, when compared to males, female respondents are more likely to agree that female managers bring a unique perspective to decision making and problem solving, that it is important to value the contribution of female executives/senior managers, that organisations should hold senior executives/managers accountable for the advancement of aspiring female executives/senior managers and that organisations have recruitment practices that encourage females to apply for executive/senior managerial positions. Furthermore, in terms of perceptions around the achievement of gender equality within their respective organisations, male respondents are more positive than females that their organisation has made good progress in this regard in the last five years and that their organisation has a gender balanced executive/senior management team. These examples would appear to indicate that male and female respondents hold different and conflicting beliefs and attitudes about ***their organisation's gender culture and symbols of gender equality*** at executive/senior management level within the Northern Ireland public sector.

5.8 Concluding Comments

This chapter has reported on the findings of stage two of the research project which has investigated current and aspiring executives/senior managers' attitudes or perceptions towards various gender equality issues at executive level in the Northern Ireland public sector. In the next chapter, the findings from the third and final stage of the research project, which investigated some of the issues discussed in this chapter, will be presented.

Chapter 6

Stage Three: A Qualitative Study of the Perceptions of Current and Aspiring Executives' Attitudes to Various Gender Equality Issues in the Northern Ireland Public Sector

6.1 Introduction

The previous two chapters reported on the findings of stage one and two of the research project. In this chapter, the findings with respect to stage three of the research project are presented. Stage three of the research specifically addressed objectives 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8 as outlined below:

- Objective 3: To ascertain the enablers or facilitators current and aspiring executives/senior managers employed in the Northern Ireland public sector perceive have supported or could support their career advancement to executive level;
- Objective 4: To ascertain the barriers current and aspiring executives/senior managers employed in the Northern Ireland public sector perceive they have faced or may face in their career advancement to executive level;
- Objective 5: To ascertain the extent to which various policies and practices would increase gender equality within the Northern Ireland public sector generally;
- Objective 6: To ascertain perceptions of organisational culture concerned with various gender equality issues within the Northern Ireland public sector;
- Objective 7: To compare male and female perceptions regarding the enablers or facilitators, barriers, and the effectiveness of organisational policies and practices

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concerned with improving gender equality at the executive level of the Northern Ireland public sector;

- Objective 8: To identify examples of best practice which might facilitate improved gender equality at executive level of the Northern Ireland public sector.

Stage three involved conducting interviewees with 107 individuals, both current and aspiring executives, across a number of organisations in the N.I. public sector. The interview process sought to understand current and aspiring executives' views or perceptions with respect to a number of gender equality themes:

- Gender composition of senior management boards;
- Gender culture;
- Flexible work arrangements;
- Work life balance;
- Opportunities for advancement, recruitment and progression;
- Benefits of gender balanced boards; and
- Promoting gender equality at senior levels.

In the remainder of this chapter the findings of each of the above themes is presented.

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6.2 Theme One: Perceptions of the Gender Composition of Senior Management Boards

Drawing on the findings of stage one of the research (see chapter 4) which identified a significant degree of inequality between males (70.8%) and females (29.2%) holding the most senior or executive positions in the N.I. public sector, the first part of the interview process sought to explore interviewees' perceptions of the gender composition of the most senior management/executive board of their organisation.

6.2.1 Perceptions of the Gender Composition of Senior Management Boards: Senior Civil Service⁵²

When asked if there were any gender equality issues in terms of the gender balance at senior or executive level within their organisation, the majority of interviewees, both males and females, provided responses indicating that a gender imbalance existed within the Senior Civil Service. Typical statements included the following:

'Yes, it is an issue, because even looking at the factual profile of the organisation and indeed in the gender reviews, which we carry out at the NICS, it is clear and the facts speak for themselves, that there is an under representation of females in the Senior Civil Service... if we are thinking particularly about senior grades in the Civil Service [i.e. the Senior Civil Service] the figures and the statistics speak for themselves. ... I would say the male dominated culture probably applies fairly well across departments' (Current Executive, Female, Senior Civil Service).

⁵² The Senior Civil Service comprises those employed at grades 5 and 3, the twelve Permanent Secretaries and the Head of Civil Service. In total there are approximately 250 individuals who make up the Senior Civil Service in N.I.

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'I mean like the Senior Civil Service, depending on numbers, which can change at any one point in time, there would be a disparity of female staff at the senior grades' (Current Executive, Male, Senior Civil Service).

'I think you only actually have to look at the balance in the Senior Civil Service to know that there absolutely definitely are issues' (Current Executive, Female, Senior Civil Service).

'I would prefer a better balance, particularly at the senior level and the senior level I would describe as Grade 5, Grade 3 and Permanent Secretary' (Current Executive, Male, Senior Civil Service).

'It's noticeable when you're round the table and it's all grey haired men looking back at you and that is odd' (Current Executive, Male, Senior Civil Service).

'I think it's fair to say as with all the civil service departments there is a gender imbalance at senior levels in favour of male and the tendency to a gender imbalance at more junior levels towards female' (Aspiring Executive, Female, Civil Service).

'There's a statistical imbalance, there's a shortage statistically' (Aspiring Executive, Male, Civil Service).

Contrary to the above perceptions, there were some parts of the Senior Civil Service where a gender balance was perceived to exist. For example:

'The good thing about this department is as well as [number] of the senior Grade 3 deputy secretaries are female and there are a number of female Grade 7s and female Grade 5s, so that's a welcome change' (Current Executive, Female, Senior Civil Service).

'I suppose over the last 10 years perhaps on reflection females have become more represented at those senior levels but certainly where we are now, intuitively at senior level and then at my own level, at Grade 7 ... it feels like a gender balance' (Aspiring Executive, Male, Civil Service).

Notwithstanding differences in perceptions, some male interviewees suggested that good progress had been made over the years in terms of improving female

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representation at senior grades, both at a department and overall Senior Civil Service level:

'In terms of our Senior Civil Service, we have had a good track record of getting women into our Senior Civil Service positions and our recent experience is very strong and I think that reflects the wider Civil Service and the wider employment experience. ... There is certainly nothing obvious which would point towards why we have more males than females' (Current Executive, Male, Senior Civil Service).

'I think it is recognised that the position and the gender balance at Senior Civil Service levels has dramatically improved, so the hope would be that that would eventually feed through' (Current Executive, Male, Senior Civil Service).

'... the top of the organisation will be more dominated [in the future] by women simply because of the numbers that are there and coming through (Aspiring Executive, Male, Senior Civil Service).

In addition, some interviewees suggested that the current imbalance will be resolved over time due to more equal representation which exists in the current talent pool within their organisation. For example:

'Well I think an obvious issue is that women are underrepresented at Senior Civil Service level, so that is an issue in its own right. It is an issue which isn't as bad as it was a decade ago ... I think things have improved fairly dramatically over the course of the last decade and I think it's an issue which will continue to improve, quite simply because the balance of representation at what we would call the feeder grades, that would be Grade 6 and Grade 7 is actually very good now, it's about 50/50 in terms of representation and that has progressed over a period of time. So one would expect, to the extent that we promote from within ... the fact that the feeder grades are broadly in balance now should ultimately be reflected in the senior grades' (Current Executive, Male, Senior Civil Service).

'Yes, I was going to say our ... Director is a woman and we've just appointed a Grade 3 ... is a woman so that gives you an idea that it is getting better and I think that simply reflects that women are now appearing more and more on our generic Grade 5 pools and so on and performing more strongly and I would see that trend probably continuing until at least 50/50 and beyond, to be honest' (Current Executive, Male, Senior Civil Service).

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'I think departments have changed. I think in the past you wouldn't have got that balance ... but now if you look at for example [name of various departments] would have probably more females than males at the Senior Civil Service levels, that's Grade 5 and above' (Aspiring Executive, Male, Civil Service).

Interestingly, one interviewee indicated that female representation in the senior grades of the Senior Civil Service was not 'too bad' when compared to equivalent levels in the private sector:

'... at Grade 3 level it's about 75/25 for male to female [representation] and Grade 5 level it's about 60/40. ... Well, if you compare it to the private sector where the top FTSE companies is 16% of females at top positions, that's obviously pretty good. I tried to look at some international comparisons ... in the public sector ... and see that 21% of females in the French public sector and 15% in the German. So again, that's not too bad' (Current Executive, Male, Senior Civil Service).

There was also a recognition by some interviewees that although there was an issue in terms of gender imbalance within the Senior Civil Service, there was no clear understanding of why this was the case or that there was little that could be done about it:

'I think I'm right in saying that any man or any women that has worked here [in this department] has had an equal opportunity to progress. There just happens to be more men here than there are women, I don't know why that's the case' (Aspiring Executive, Male, Civil Service).

'My honest answer is I am aware of it [i.e. gender imbalance], I feel there is very little we can do about it' (Current Executive, Male, Senior Civil Service).

On a more positive note, the following quote recognises the progress which has been made over time in terms of gender equality at the senior levels and the important role that females play in the workings of the Senior Civil Service:

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'I have seen over time the number of women increase and the roles of the women taking on stronger roles and less of, in the past I think there might have been a tendency to put the female staff under the HR role, there's a greater autonomy in terms of the type of roles that women take on' (Current Executive, Female, Senior Civil Service).

Some interviewees, predominantly female, also specifically referred to the concept of a glass ceiling in the context of the Senior Civil Service. Whilst current executives suggested that the glass ceiling existed at grade 3 level, aspiring executives perceived the glass ceiling falling between grades 7 (the Civil Service) and 5 (the Senior Civil Service). There was also some suggestion that females who manage to break through the glass ceiling adopt male traits because 'it's a man's world' and as a result they tend to be less sympathetic to other females beneath them. This might result in females 'pulling up the ladder' behind them:

'I just think there is a glass ceiling of some description and to me, the shape of that is about I think, the belief that the resources have been centralised and managed in a particular way and I don't think it takes a very balanced view of people who are outside that kind of special group that are known' (Current Executive, Female, Senior Civil Service).

'I think there are a number of positives, family friendly for most people, you know, who can, ... there are opportunities up to a point but I do think there is that glass ceiling. The glass ceiling has moved up. It used to be at grade 5 and now it's at 3. We need to get it to Permanent Secretary'. (Current Executive, Female, Senior Civil Service).

'Well if you make it through the glass ceiling and above 7, you're there; you have made it, pull up your ladder and move on. You're in the male dominated environment..... let every girl fight for themselves. Look down and through the glass ceiling but don't be putting the arm down to help anybody ... I think females who are successful have a fear that they need to pull the ladder up and move on because it's a man's world and you have to behave like a man (Aspiring Executive, Female, Civil Service).

'I think it's a bit like that, those females when they have sort of reached the glass ceiling it's kind of for themselves but they don't do much to bring the others up behind them, the other females, there's none of that' (Aspiring Executive, Female, Civil Service).

6.2.2 Perceptions of the Gender Composition of Senior Management Boards:

Other Sectors

6.2.2.1 Health Sector

When compared to the Senior Civil Service, the majority of interviewees within the Health sector recognise the existence of more balanced senior management boards within their organisation in terms of gender. For example:

'So in pure numbers it's [the senior management board of our organisation] probably reasonably well balanced' (Current Executive, Female, Health).

'I think everyone here is given equal opportunities to progress within the organisation and I think the proof of the pudding, both within the organisation I currently work in and more generally within the Health Service, is actually the number of executives at a senior level that are female, which would, on the basis of a rough estimate, not seem to be inconsistent with the split of men and women in the wider Health Service work force'. (Current Executive, Male, Health).

'In senior levels I'm confident that it's [i.e. gender equality in terms of the numbers] not an issue, and if you were to join the top team you would see that certainly there are more women than there are men; but the men themselves have an equal opportunity to compete for the post' (Current Executive, Female, Health)

However, despite the positive comments regarding the gender balance of senior management boards, a few interviewees suggested female participation in senior roles does not reflect the proportion of females who work in the Health sector:

'If you are working on a proportionate basis, because we have four times as many women working in this organisation as men you would think you would have four times as many women than men in management positions, but we don't' (Current Executive, Female, Health).

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6.2.2.2 Further and Higher Education Sector

Consistent with perceptions reported in the Senior Civil Service, there was recognition that the majority of senior positions within Further Education colleges continue to be male dominated. For example the following interviewee talked about the sector as a whole:

'If I look at the Sector in general there's six colleges, the senior teams ... continue to be quite male dominated, except probably in the field of Human Resources where a lot of the Directors are women, in fact the majority. ... interestingly in the finance side it's half and half ... But in the curriculum side, in the business development side it's almost entirely men. So, if we were looking at the Deputy posts in those colleges again they're almost overwhelmingly male, in fact I think they are all men' (Current Executive, Female, Education).

While the Further Education sector continues to be male dominated in terms of senior positions, the gender balance of senior positions of two of the organisations interviewed was perceived to be much more positive. For example:

'... we've a good gender balance. In fact we've more women in that senior team than men. ... And it's not typical of organisations in general [in the sector]. ... we've always had women at senior management levels in terms of role models for people to say, well yeah, I can get to that, you know. ... [and] people in the lower management levels are aspiring to come through' (Aspiring Executive, Female, Education).

'I think I'm incredibly lucky to be actually working in an organisation that [number] of the Directorate out of the [number] Directorate are female and a number of the Senior Leadership Team are female and there are female people that I can look to as role models. I think we are very rare, we're the exception rather than the rule, very much so and, yeah, I feel very lucky in that I'm currently working in an organisation that takes that view' (Aspiring Executive, Female, Education).

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With respect to Higher Education, there was greater consensus (albeit not full consensus) that the gender balance at senior levels was reasonably good. For example:

'I'd have to be honest and say you know, quite often I get asked about gender equality obviously because I'm a woman. But when I look around the [name of organisation] the [senior managers], a [number] of them are female. I think the [name of organisation] demonstrates that females can make it in senior management and have made it and there are many examples of good role models. And I also think we've actively engaged in initiatives such as the SWAN [Scientific Women's Academic Network] Athena, which is to encourage women into leadership and management' (Current Executive, Female, Education).

However, contrary to the above perceptions, one male interviewee suggested that gender equality issues still existed within his organisation. In order to deal with this issue, a Gender Initiative had been implemented some years earlier. The ethos of the initiative was explained as follows:

'Absolutely yeah [issues around gender equality still exist], absolutely I mean [name of organisation] has been running a ... Gender Initiative for quite a few years that was specifically established to ... provide support for women [type of job], encouragement, mentoring opportunities, experience all sorts of things, to encourage women to think about career progression and to consider applying for promotions and all the rest and it's been a very important initiative, it's led by one of the [most senior executives], it's a very active initiative' (Current Executive, Male, Education).

There was also recognition within Higher Education that the gender balance of those in the feeder grades had improved over time and that no barriers were perceived to exist in terms of females progressing to senior levels:

'Well there certainly were [gender equality issues] and there certainly are not so many as there were. ... it's important there's a pipeline. ... I think in terms of [the pipeline] ...it must be about 50/50 if not slightly more, female. So that is the pipeline coming through' (Current Executive, Male, Education).

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'If you take out a percentage of female members of staff at lower grades then those at upper grades are much lower. There's an imbalance, although improving, I think. ... I think we have a situation where we're improving [i.e. gender equality] across all of these grades ... including the fractions appointed into the traditional [male dominated parts of the organisation]. We are improving our promotions to ... females relative to males and again we have good statistics going back a number of years that show that when females apply they tend to get promoted as opposed to men; the success rates are higher. ... So and I think there's a timing issue partly in this, you know; it only happens every three years. ... So it's something I would hope would grow in the future' (Current Executive, Male, Education).

Despite the progress referred to above, it was also noted that females have not traditionally fared well in terms of holding the most senior positions (for example, Chief Executive Officer) within the Further and Higher Education sector.

6.2.2.3 Local Government Sector

Within the Local Government sector, greater consensus of opinion was expressed by interviewees in terms of whether gender equality at senior levels was an issue. For example, the following male interviewees did not believe there was an issue in terms of gender equality at senior levels within their organisations:

'Well I personally don't [think gender equality is an issue]. I think that you know we have quite good policies in this regard. Although I do have some issues I think in my mind about how much harder it is for women to break through that ceiling because of other reasons you know. I think there's probably a need for more support for talent within the organisation. With that said we, you know, we do encourage, you know, we've got a women's steering group, we've got opportunities for women's development, some of my own team have been on that' (Current Executive, Male, Local Government).

'I don't see any [issues], I mean ... [name of council] seems fairly well split. So from my personal experience I don't have any' (Aspiring Executive, Male, Local Government).

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'I don't believe so. At the moment the Senior Management team, the Corporate Management team as we call it, is made up of the Chief Executive and 4 Directors. ... [It's] fairly well balanced' (Current Executive, Male, Local Government).

Consistent with other sectors, one male interviewee also talked about the good progress that had been made in terms of gender equality within his organisation over the past two decades:

'I guess I have the benefit of being here, I think, 21 years and I see what it was like 21 years ago and I see what it's like now. 21 years ago at the executive level, Chief Executive Directors were all male. Now it's well balanced. In fact, it might actually be more females than males, but it's certainly fairly equally balanced. I also look down to see, because it's very important in terms of the pulse of the organisation, which would be the Head of Services [i.e. the talent pool] and the people that are managing a greater number of people, and that's fairly well balanced as well within the organisation. I think there are some, still some areas which are probably potentially a bit more male dominated. ... But I think, by and large, I think the organisation has moved in the time that I've seen to a more equal base' (Current Executive, Male, Local Government).

Females employed within the Local Government sector generally held similar perceptions to their male counterparts above when asked if there were any gender equality issues. For example:

'No I don't see any issues here in ..., as a Senior Management Team we've actually got a very good mix of genders' (Current Executive, Female, Local Government).

'I haven't experienced in this particular Council, I haven't. There would be quite a lot of female managers and our Chief Executive is female. I would say it was fairly balanced' (Aspiring Executive, Female, Local Government).

Consistent with male perceptions, some females also referred to the significant progress that had been made within their organisations with respect to improving

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gender equality at senior levels over a sustained period of time. Some of this change was attributed to the Local Government Staff Commission's Women in Local Councils Gender Equality Initiative or other local change initiatives (e.g. as a result of securing European funding) which provided the context for change to take place. In discussions around these various initiatives, the importance of engaging males in such initiatives was also identified:

'From a historical point of view I personally was involved in the gender equality agenda within the Council as far back as say 2002-2003. At that point in time ... I was in a corporate role and we probably had 34% of our workforce was female and 24% of our managers were female so there was a bit of an imbalance, but more importantly at the senior management level there were no female senior officers and no female officers on the management team. So you would get to the monthly Council meetings and effectively the top team were all male and at that stage that there was a very strong political agenda in terms of addressing the gender imbalance within the Council.

So I was asked to ... look at the issue and in that context secured about £300,000 for a European funding project which was between ourselves and [another cross border region] ... who also were having issues in terms of the gender balance of their work force. Now ... within five years of that project now we, and I think the figure's still current, we have about 37-40% of our managers are female. So we actually have very successfully addressed the gender balance issue. And in part that's been due to a number of confidence building initiatives that were part of that project.

'We did involve men as the [Gender] Champions ... Because of the fact if you left them outside of the loop then it was seen as a women only agenda and as I say I think the fundamental challenge is to make men take ownership of the gender agenda' (Aspiring Executive, Female, Local Government).

'I'd like to think that I have done a significant amount to change the outlook and make-up of the senior management personnel in ... [name of Council] in an organisation where it was largely a male senior management team. And I ... developed a project ... which was about modernising the organisation, because it was a very old-fashioned organisation with ... very old-fashioned ways of doing things. ... a lot of organisational development and individual development introduced ... appraisal processes and personal development plans. ... And we have much more balanced, from a gender point of view, certainly, if not on other bases, a much more balanced arrangement in terms of from Heads of Service up to director level' (Current Executive, Female, Local Government).

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While the majority of male and female interviewees were positive about their organisation in terms of the gender composition of their senior management board, one interviewee working within a rural council commented that her organisation has an all-male senior team. Consistent with earlier comments, this particular interviewee also suggested that a glass ceiling still existed for females within her organisation:

'I think it is an issue the fact that we have all-male senior management team, completely male. Now, at my level, yes, there are females, a number of females, but we do not seem to have broken through the glass ceiling in this council. Now when you look at other councils, that is not the case, in fact some councils now, particularly over the last number of years, some councils in Northern Ireland have appointed a number of female Chief Executives and a number of female directors. As yet, we haven't. We would still be viewed and it's not a criticism, it's just an observation, but we would still be viewed as very traditional I suppose, in our approach here' (Current Executive, Female, Local Government).

6.2.2.4 Non-Departmental Public Bodies Sector

Within NDPBs, the majority of interviewees perceived the existence of issues with respect to gender equality at senior levels within their organisation. Among the issues identified by interviewees within this sector were those relating to historical inequalities, the existence of a glass ceiling, females predominating in lower grades, a feeling of having to 'try harder and demonstrate a track record of success' when compared to male colleagues and issues around the gender culture of the organisation. For example, typical comments were as follows:

'There are certainly issues around gender representativeness [within our organisation] and I think part of that at a senior level has got to do with historical gender inequalities based partly on prejudice' (Current Executive, Male, NDPB).

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'The real issue seems to be this glass ceiling thing that's the real issue for women to get to [name of senior position] and above, that's the real challenge, the real nut that needs to be cracked and that's a national issue it's not just a local one ' (Current Executive, Female, NDPB).

'Yes they're [i.e. administrative type posts] more than 60% female, but of course, and as is typical in the public sector, generally women predominate in the lower grades and don't seem to work their way up into the higher grades' (Current Executive, Female, NDPB).

'I suppose I have always felt that you have to try harder and clearly demonstrate a track record of success, probably more so than male colleagues. ... I've always felt that I have to try harder, I have to clearly demonstrate, you know, probably fight for those promotions more so than male colleagues who would seem to slip up the ranks more easily' (Current Executive, Female, NDPB).

Interestingly one female within the NDPB sector identified that gender equality at senior levels was an issue in the context of flexible working arrangements. This particular interviewee suggested that availing of flexible work arrangements would be seen as a barrier to progression:

'I do not necessarily think that the gender equality is an issue. I think that the issue arises whenever you want to do flexible working arrangements and move up the chain - and for me that would be a barrier rather than what gender you are. I mean we've plenty of women at the senior level in this organisation and our Chief Executive is female, so I would never say that gender equality is an issue, but I think there is an issue with flexible working and part-time hours at a senior level' (Aspiring Executive, Female, NDPB).

Contrary to the above perceptions, one female interviewee suggested that no issues existed within her organisation. Interestingly, she suggested that her current organisation was the first she had worked for where an evenly balanced senior board existed:

'It's the first organisation I have worked for where we are actually completely evenly balanced ... in terms of the directors and Chief Executive we are evenly balanced there' (Current Executive, Female, NDPB).

6.2.3 Summary of Findings:

Theme One – Perceptions of the Gender Composition of Senior Management Boards

Drawing on the analysis of interviewee comments across the N.I. public sector, the main findings with respect to theme one are as follows:

- The majority of interviewees indicated that the gender composition of their organisation's senior management board was an issue, with females holding fewer senior positions than males.
- When presented with the raw figures indicating an imbalance, some minority views were also expressed suggesting that there were no issues with the gender composition of their senior management board.
- When male and female views are compared, males were more inclined to suggest that gender composition was less of an issue for their organisation than females.
- Some notable exceptions to these general views were expressed by interviewees employed within the Health sector, where the gender composition of senior boards is reasonably balanced if not trending towards a greater proportion of females; some smaller NDPBs where more gender balanced senior management boards exist; and within Local Government where significant progress has been made in terms of improving gender equality at senior levels over a sustained period of time.

6.3 Theme Two: Gender Culture

The second part of the interview process explored interviewees' perceptions of gender equality at executive level in terms of the gender culture of their current organisation and the Northern Ireland public sector generally. To that end, this included a discussion of:

- Descriptions of gender culture;
- Interaction between males and females in meetings; and
- The existence of informal networks.

The analysis of interview data suggests that while there was greater consensus regarding theme one, mixed views were expressed in relation to gender culture and whether this was an issue for individual organisations and the public sector more generally. These views will be discussed in the remainder of this section.

6.3.1 Gender Culture: Senior Civil Service

6.3.1.1 Descriptions of the Gender Culture

The culture of the Senior Civil Service was generally described by female interviewees (but also one male), as male dominated. For example:

'It is a male bastion and will continue to be. The whole culture of I suppose this alpha male ... so the whole system then potentially needs to change at the top, there needs to be change in that culture' (Current Executive, Female, Senior Civil Service).

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'I don't believe there's a culture of sexism but I do believe there is a perception of a culture of male domination because 12 of those 13 people around the table [i.e. the Permanent Secretaries]... are male' (Current Executive, Male, Senior Civil Service).

Contrary to the above perceptions, one senior male executive, when asked to describe the culture of the Senior Civil Service in terms of gender equality suggested the following:

'I think that we are well disposed towards gender equality, we are fair in our decision taking, but we're probably not as engaged with the issue as we should be both from the point of view of the future of the organisation and the future of society as a whole. I think we have an obligation not only to reflect society but to be a role model for the rest of the public sector' (Current Executive, Male, Senior Civil Service).

While the culture was generally described as male dominated, this was not uniformly referred to by interviewees as a possible reason for the lack of female progression to the very senior levels of the Senior Civil Service. For example, some interviewees suggested that females did not want to progress to more senior grades, others that there was a personal bias against females and that the senior management environment was a very harsh one:

'My perception is there are a lot of factors at work and I actually think the main factor is that women, not enough women want to be in those higher grades and that that issue becomes stronger the higher up you go. Now again, that's not a scientific survey, it's based on occasional conversations I would have with female colleagues' (Current Executive, Male, Senior Civil Service).

'I do think there is a definite personal bias against females in the Senior Civil Service.... I mean there's been [number] appointments to [senior grade] and all [number] of them have been male ...in the last [number of] months. Now, nobody is going to tell me that we don't have excellent Grade 3 females' (Current Executive, Female, Senior Civil Service).

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'I would say that it would be a nightmare and to be able to survive that and to be able to start to change that culture or even to be, I suppose recognised and respected, because that is a different way of working. I would say that that would be a major issue that any woman thinking about joining a strategic team, whether that's the Permanent Secretary's Group, or whether it is a group of very strong grade 3s in a department' (Current Executive, Female, Senior Civil Service).

'You got to be hard. You know, you have got to be able to take knocks, you have got to be able to take extreme pressure, you have got to be able to take the criticism, you have got to be able to take ministers and their advisors literally screaming at you, you got to be prepared to take the phone calls when you are at a concert of a band you particularly like. It's tough, it's hard; there is nothing soft or cooperative or collegiate or anything about senior management. If you want to be a senior manager you have got to want to play the power game' (Aspiring Executive, Female, Civil Service).

Caring responsibilities and a long-hours culture were also identified, by both males and females, as potential barriers to female progression to more senior levels within the Senior Civil Service. For example:

'I think it is still a fact that the burden of caring responsibilities continues to fall disproportionately on women and Senior Civil Service posts probably carry greater pressure in terms of well the work itself but also the working hours that are expected of individuals, so that may mitigate against some women wanting to apply for senior posts' (Current Executive, Male, Senior Civil Service).

'I don't think it's [i.e. gender equality] a direct issue, but I think from time to time it is almost an indirect issue. I think that it is in the context that, particularly at the SCS [Senior Civil Service] level, you're 'all hours worked', so you're at the beck and call in theory 24 hours a day, 365. We don't get paid overtime; we are just expected to do our bit, which can be difficult for people with children, elder responsibilities whatever, and in addition to that a lot of senior meetings and things are still done on the basis of efficacy, so if 8 o'clock [a.m.] suits most of them, it will be 8 o'clock'. (Current Executive, Female, Senior Civil Service).

A few interviewees also identified a blame culture within certain government departments as being responsible for lower levels of female representation at senior levels:

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'... but that culture is you know, make a step wrong and we will get you and I think that doesn't attract women' (Aspiring Executive, Female, Civil Service).

'It [i.e. Senior Management Team] is I sense more of a blame culture, if something goes wrong they try very hard to point the finger at somebody and I am not used to that' (Current Executive, Female, Senior Civil Service).

6.3.1.2 Interaction between Males and Females in Meetings

The interaction between males and females during meetings was an area where some females felt marginalised and isolated. For example, some females believed that their male colleagues showed them a lack of respect when making valid points at meetings. In addition, the Permanent Secretaries Group was seen by the majority of female executives as a cold, unwelcoming environment. There was also widespread agreement that the Civil Service is old-fashioned, slow moving, conservative, bureaucratic and risk averse, which may have implications for any significant pace of change that might be achieved in the future regarding gender equality at the very senior levels of the Senior Civil Service. While males in general were much more likely to be complimentary about the culture in the Civil/Senior Civil Service, the majority of females referred to the competitive, unsupportive, blame culture of some departments which has the potential to impact upon females more so than their male counterparts. Finally, public committees, where senior civil servants were questioned by Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs) were also seen as inhospitable cultures for both males and females, but more so for females.

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Some of the negative aspects of human relations between males and females in the workplace and at meetings were made by interviewees as follows:

'Also at meetings as a woman you can make a point and it'll just get lost in the air but some of these men will say something and it'll be excellent, you know, it's kind of very subtle too' (Aspiring Executive, Female, Civil Service).

'To generalise, if I am allowed to do that. ... I know that I have heard it said that even in senior meetings where there are just, even the dynamic of meetings, that a woman can say something, but it doesn't necessarily carry the same weight as when a man does' (Current Executive, Female, Senior Civil Service).

'It's a totally different working environment when you're in a room full of men you have to hold your own more, you have to be a person who can speak out and sort of you feel that you are representing the female side as well as your own work side' (Aspiring Executive, Female, Civil Service).

'I have seen scenarios, a group that I was involved in last year, one particular female, I would put it down to she was bullied to be honest with you, absolutely appalling and it was commented on by me and lots of others in terms of how she was treated (Current Executive, Female, Senior Civil Service).

While some negative comments were made by females in particular regarding the interaction between males and females in the workplace, senior males generally commented about this interaction in a more positive way. For example:

'I don't see any evidence of any sexism or discrimination or anything like that. ... I don't get a sense of discrimination or lack of respect between males and females' (Current Executive, Male, Senior Civil Service).

One senior male executive suggested that females add a different dynamic to meetings which are beneficial in nature:

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'I suppose it's quite hard to put a handle on it, I just think sometimes males' behaviour becomes self-perpetuating and I think females in the room, in my experience just bring about a slightly different dynamic and I find it hard to describe but it's, I just believe it's beneficial and I notice it more, if you're looking at diversity, I mean you're just looking at the male/female thing but there's obviously male/female/race/ability etc. and again, I think those are factors that also impact on the dynamic of a room' (Current Executive, Male, Senior Civil Service).

Another area where a number of comments were made regarding the interaction of males and females was with respect to the workings of the most senior tier of the Civil Service, namely the Permanent Secretaries Group (PSG). Senior females who had attended PSG meetings in the past generally reported negative feelings associated with for example, isolation and exclusion. For example:

'It [i.e. the Permanent Secretaries Group] has improved but it's still not there yet, and certainly now that they are again an all-male group, you know, they revert to type in the sense that if you're unfortunate enough to have to go and deputise for your Permanent Secretary it's like going to an old boys' club where they're all... They'll be polite and they'll say hello to you and you have coffee, but they instantly talk about football or cricket or things you're not going to be remotely interested in' (Current Executive, Female, Senior Civil Service).

'The Permanent Secretaries are all male. It isn't a camaraderie, you know. It's very difficult to put your finger on exactly what I'm talking about. It's hard to break into it' (Current Executive, Female, Senior Civil Service).

'I've told him [a permanent secretary] ... now that there aren't any female Permanent Secretaries that those of us in the Senior Civil Service below that feel that it's a cold place for women' (Current Executive, Female, Senior Civil Service).

Another interviewee described her experience of attending PSG as follows:

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'You go up [i.e. to the Permanent Secretaries Group], it's all full of men, the room is full of men except maybe one or two women who are taking the notes. That's the way it is. And the men, they all come in and you're sitting there. For me, you know, you can imagine how it goes, you've never, you've hardly ever been there; you go in and it's a big long table and you don't know who sits where, right, so you don't know how it operates. So you sit down and there's coffee at the other end of the room. Well, they come in and they start talking and they talk quietly about things, you know, in a kind of shorthand way and you don't know what that there's about because you're not party to that discussion.

... You sit at the table and some of them say hello to you, some of them who know you don't say hello to you but they sit down. And you're very much an outsider, you know, and it's not just me, it's not my imagination. ... When you talk to [other women they'll] tell you, [they] hate it too.

So you're very much outside this club and now that the two women who were the Permanent Secretaries aren't there, and now that [name of woman has] retired as well, the only women that are there are the administrative support to PSG. So it's a very hostile feeling environment, in my view' (Current Executive, Female, Senior Civil Service).

6.3.2 Gender Culture: Local Government

When compared to the Civil Service, the gender culture within the Local Government sector was generally perceived by interviewees to be more positive. The majority of interviewees suggested that the gender culture of the sector had improved over time. This improvement was attributed to a change in organisational culture brought about as a result of the Local Government Staff Commission's Women in Councils Initiative which had been implemented and rolled out across the Local Government sector in 2006. Interviewees also indicated the importance of understanding the gender culture of Local Government organisations in their political and social context, given their role of interacting with local communities and their representatives. To that end, in many parts of the sector, female Councillors have been instrumental in terms of addressing gender equality issues at senior levels.

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With respect to the issue of change over time, a number of interviewees indicated that the gender culture of the Local Government sector had changed considerably over the last 20 years or so. For example, one interviewee compared the culture of the sector some years ago with that of today, while at the same time recognising the potential barriers for females which still exist today:

'I mean, working with councillors particularly there would have been [i.e. some years ago] a very sort of condescending attitude to women in Councils, I think that has changed, you know, and there are a lot more women as professionals now and, if you're at a meeting, the women aren't there to make the tea. They are participating at a meeting that kind of thing. So there has been a change over that period of time and I think now there would be a lot more equality between men and women, but I suppose the sort of hidden issues in terms of, particularly in Councils were the meetings. The Council meetings are held in the evenings' (Aspiring Executive, Female, Local Government).

Another interviewee explained the change processes which had occurred as one of evolution as opposed to revolution. Furthermore, this interviewee recognised the importance of changes in gender equality at the political level (i.e. Councillors). For example:

'I can see change in terms of females, maybe it is having more opportunity or whether they're now, they feel they can go forward to it. I have no idea, it's just been an evolution rather than a revolution.

I do think there's an acceptance ... even at the political level. You can see more females starting to appear [i.e. at very senior levels] and I think that's just the....that's the change in the culture over the [past] 20 years' (Current Executive, Male, Local Government).

The positive impact on gender equality at the political or Councillor level was also recognised by other interviewees. In particular there was recognition that female Councillors have acted as champions or role models for gender equality within the

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Local Government sector and that this has been positive. For example:

'We've had a number of very strong female Councillors. ... So we've had very strong female Champions among our political cohort as well. So it's [i.e. gender equality] always been sort of nearly mainstreamed in terms of the agenda, so it's, they've been high profile so they've been role models and they've been champions' (Aspiring Executive, Female, Local Government).

6.3.2.1 Descriptions of the Gender Culture

Reflecting on the changes which have occurred in the Local Government sector, interviewees were asked to describe their organisation's gender culture. While the majority of interviewees responded in a positive manner, some of the comments provided below suggest that the issue of gender equality at senior levels is still very much on the agenda and that there is further room for improvement in this regard:

'I think it is contemporary. I think it is supportive, I think it's open and fair and progressive' (Current Executive, Female, Local Government).

'I think it's fair. I think it's aspirational as well. I think we'd like to see more gender equality. More to do' (Current Executive, Male, Local Government).

'It's very good, it's very good at manager level, really quite through the organisation I think because, you know, we're in, a lot of the people are in a generation where that's expected. I still find at Councillor level, you know, it's, there's a lot to be desired' (Aspiring Executive, Female, Local Government).

'Progressive, positive and changing' (Aspiring Executive, Female, Local Government).

'I think we're a fair organisation in terms of gender' (Current Executive, Male, Local Government).

'Work in progress. I mean I definitely don't think we can rest on our laurels' (Current Executive, Female, Local Government).

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Very few negative comments regarding the gender culture of Local Government organisations were reported by interviewees. However, one such example referred to male dominated 'pockets' or areas within their organisation:

'I think there's a lot of people don't realise that the culture in certain pockets is still really male dominated and it's still difficult for women to break through in that' (Aspiring Executive, Female, Local Government).

Generally, within the Local Government sector there is an acknowledgment by interviewees that significant progress has been made in terms of gender equality issues at senior levels. However, as stated earlier, interviewees also recognised that the level of cultural change which has occurred has taken some time to accomplish. Some interviewees also recognised that gender equality has become so mainstreamed within their organisation that it is no longer an issue. As a result, there is now less emphasis on gender equality within the majority of Local Government organisations (although this is not universally the case). Rather the focus has now shifted towards tackling broader diversity issues. Both of these points are supported by the following comment from a senior current executive:

'But certainly I think it's a cultural difference and that changing culture has taken quite a long time. ... Yeah, definitely, it's as if it's [i.e. gender equality] sort of mainstreamed into everything that we do and the various policies. ...

I think the gender thing, if you think about Northern Ireland and politics and where we've come from, the gender issue from an equality point of view was quite an easy one almost politically to tackle. But now there's other issues to tackle. So that's maybe why it seems that it [i.e. gender] has dropped down' (Current Executive, Female, Local Government).

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6.3.2.2 Interaction between Males and Females in Meetings

Within the Local Government sector, interviewees generally did not identify any significant negative issues in terms of the interaction between males and females at meetings. For example, the following comments were fairly typical:

'I think there's a good camaraderie to be honest, in our Management Team' (Current Executive, Female, Local Government).

'... actually I would say it's all fairly equal [i.e. in meetings]' (Aspiring Executive, Female, Local Government).

Interestingly, and in parallel with some earlier views expressed by interviewees in the Senior Civil Service, an interviewee within the Local Government sector felt that a senior female executive had adopted what she described as male macho traits as a result of working within a predominantly male senior team. The interviewee felt that this senior female executive had acted in a very aggressive manner to her during meetings. The interviewee explained this as follows:

'I have gone into management teams in other organisations where there has been a female director on it and it has been very different [to my own organisation]. Very aggressive ... whether it was that she felt she had to be aggressive. I almost felt that whether she felt she had to assert her authority more because she was the only female on the management team and therefore you as a female coming in she really had to assert her authority to show that look, I'm as good as all the rest of the guys on this and I am just as much a guy as the rest of them.

I don't know but I remember that was my concept at the time and I wasn't the only one to feel that, extremely aggressive ... I would not want to be like that. ... I often think you can make your point and you can be assertive without being aggressive, there is a very big difference between the two, but sometimes I feel that actually women don't always follow that and sometimes let themselves down in terms of their style that way' (Current Executive, Female, Local Government).

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A number of interviewees also raised a number of issues with respect to Council meetings. First, while suggestions were made by some interviewees that Council meetings had in the past not been a particularly nice place for females, there was some recognition that things have changed over time. Despite this change, the timing of Council meetings was still felt to be a barrier to progression, particularly for females with caring responsibilities. For example:

'... So there has been a change [in gender culture] over ... time and I think now there would be a lot more equality between men and women, but I suppose the sort of hidden issues in terms of, particularly in Councils where the meetings, the Council meetings are held in the evenings. It makes it very difficult for women with very young children to participate fully or apply for Director and Chief Executive posts because that is one of the things you have to be committed to attend meetings in the evening, almost 24/7, you know, to answer queries from councillors' (Aspiring Executive, Female, Local Government).

Secondly, although things have changed, some interviewees reflected on the culture of Council meetings in terms of male like traits. Despite this, there was recognition that males and females are generally treated equally by elected members. For example:

'There's a lot of posturing, if you ever do go to those [Council] meetings you can see it, so there is' (Aspiring Executive, Female, Local Government).

'Do the Elected Members give women, senior managers or male managers a harder time? I think it's the same and I think they will say it's down to the business. You know, if they're not happy about something they'll tell you, whether you're male or female' (Current Executive, Male, Local Government).

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6.3.3 Gender Culture: Other Sectors

6.3.3.1 Health Sector

Within the Health sector, mixed views, both positive and negative, regarding organisational gender culture were expressed by interviewees. For example, the following positive comments were provided:

'I don't see any obstacles. ... I would say in terms of opportunities for people to go on, you know, any succession plan, any development thing I wouldn't perceive that there's any gender issues ... I think our organisation is pretty neutral' (Aspiring Executive, Male, Health).

'There are certainly no gender equality issues here... You talk about the glass ceiling; I suspect my experience of it is that it's through personal choice' (Aspiring Executive, Female, Health).

'There are equitable arrangements in the trust to allow people to develop' Current Executive, Female, Health).

'It is very positive, celebrates difference, in terms of male, female, any of the gay, lesbian... all of those things, a very open straightforward organisation' (Current Executive, Male, Health).

In contrast, some negative perceptions about gender culture were also expressed by interviewees. Typical comments referred to macho expectations and the difficulties for females of working in an unhealthy performance culture:

'I think the culture is still very male if you know what I mean..... carnivorous'. (Current Executive, Female, Health).

'This is a world of grey suits and men and you either have to decide to fit in or not' (Aspiring Executive, Female, Health).

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'It's hard wired in, that there's, there's a macho expectation of big hours equals hard work equals good performance equals whatever' (Current Executive, Male, Health).

'So I think the very, very aggressive thing and it's very male, I find, it's certainly predominated in Northern Ireland for a long time and I find that doesn't work for a start and it's all pervasive and if you're not doing that shouting and roaring and kicking and screaming then there is a perception, I believe that you're not good. She's a nice girl but she's not going to get the results. I think it's quite a macho culture in that regard. ... I think there is, in some pockets, a very unhealthy culture that's a very aggressive and a perception that if you're not a kind of alpha male type figure that you're not as effective, which is really very serious' (Current Executive, Female, Health).

Consistent with elements of the Senior Civil Service, the existence of a blame culture was also identified in part of the Health sector as follows:

'It's a wee bit dark... there is such a blame culture that the capacity of the system to be cautious then produces something totally counterproductive. I mean if you get blamed for absolutely everything then you don't want to take responsibility. If you've made a mistake then you get hung out to dry. So the only way to not have that happen to you is to not make a mistake. What does anybody do when they're not making a mistake? They don't do, so that just absolutely implodes on the culture.

But the other thing that I find most distressing about the culture is the hierarchy, who are not allowed to speak. This impacts on females more ... because generally males will still try and speak. And it's an environment, we carefully control you, we bring you up and we teach you not to annoy the system, we teach you not to challenge your manager' (Current Executive, Female, Health).

Interestingly one female executive suggested that although she believed there was equality of opportunity for males and females within the Health sector, she believed that a senior management environment was only conducive to females with strong self-esteem and self-confidence:

'I think there is equality of opportunity, but only for women who have got a very strong self-esteem and self-confidence. I don't think there is a very supportive culture within health at a collegiate level. There tends to be a strong kind of competitive culture, and your success might restrict my

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success therefore there isn't that, which I think is unfortunate' (Current Executive, Female, Health).

In terms of the interaction between males and females in the workplace, interviewees generally did not perceive there to be any issues within their particular organisation. However, a few interviewees expressed negative concerns around meetings between Health organisations and the Senior Civil Service. For example:

'We were all in the process of going to our [type of] meetings with the department and there was a mention of one woman who was going to be there and there was a very sarcastic remark made about what she might contribute and I made a comment which was well actually she's only new to the job and my experience is she's very bright, she's very able, ... and there was snigger, snigger, snigger from the men' (Current Executive, Female, Health).

6.3.3.2 Non-Departmental Public Bodies Sector

Consistent with Health, interviewees within the NDPB sector also suggested a mixed picture with respect to their perceptions of the gender culture of their organisation. For example, the following positive comments were provided by interviewees, some of which were attributed to attempts to move beyond legislative responsibilities and the absence of a male dominated culture. For example:

'I would say it's quite progressive and I think there's evidence for that around some of the initiatives that we're driving beyond our legislative responsibilities, like a lot of that flexible working stuff, part of it is a statutory obligation but we're away beyond that and we didn't need to. ... The gender action plan has been integrated into a diversity, equality and good relations action plan that I think it is a pretty good document' (Current Executive, Male, NDBP).

'I think it is, yeah absolutely, inclusive [i.e. the culture]. As I said in terms of opportunities within [name of organisation] you know I think it's open, transparency, opportunities are there. ... there's definitely not a male dominated culture that you have to be male and macho and all of that and

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if you're a women you shouldn't be at the table type thing. No absolutely none of that' (Current Executive, Male, NDPB).

Additionally, some of the positive aspects of their organisation's gender culture were attributed to changes which had occurred over time given the movement of certain staff. However, there wasn't a sense that the resulting change in culture had necessarily been planned in any way. For example:

'I think a few of the old crusties did go you know, we did find this organisation would have been run by the barons, you know, the old guard, and most of whom, all of whom probably have now retired and a lot of the women would have been quite traditional [too] ... There is a much broader balance of women and men at each level in the organisation [now]. Have we consciously done anything? I don't think we would have probably done anything more than any other organisation in relation to family friendly policies and flexible working, things like that. I would say that this a very flexible organisation; our boss, the Chief Executive, I would say when people ask, he doesn't have children of his own but unlike many people who don't have kids of their own is acutely aware of those of us who do and the demands that are placed on us. ... And I think that we try and concentrate the work hard while we are here to allow, we don't have a regime of people working late into the evening and I think that tone is set from the top definitely, but I don't know that it is necessarily a conscious thing, I just think it is the culture of the organisation' (Aspiring Executive, Female, NDPB).

'It's [i.e. the culture] very different now ... both in terms of the makeup of the organisation, the whole culture of women holding senior positions has changed dramatically, it's the norm, you know and certainly the fact that there are so many females for example [in senior roles] I think demonstrates that the organisation creates equality of opportunity, it's a fair organisation and there are opportunities for anyone irrespective of their background to develop themselves and put themselves forward for promotion if that's what they aspire to do, it's very different' (Aspiring Executive, Female, NDPB).

Despite the above positive comments, there were also some, although fewer, negative comments about gender organisational culture within NDPBs:

'It would be tough because they are all very macho [i.e. at senior management level]' (Aspiring Executive, Female, NDPB).

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'I think because it's a male dominated environment, also it's culturalised around the male because [the type of work] is, I suppose it has been and continues to be, it has this kind of slightly macho attitude. ... I think it's far more difficult ... for other women to progress in the organisation' (Current Executive, Male, NDPB).

Notwithstanding the improvements in gender culture, which have clearly taken place over time within NDPBs, one interviewee recognised that further progress could be made in this regard and that some negative attitudes still remained within her organisation. The interviewee clarified this statement by adding that negative attitudes were not so much a problem at the most senior level of her organisation but more so at middle management. However, such attitudes have the potential to impact on females and their progression.

'How would I describe the culture now? Very much concerned about fairness and equality and much more accommodating, much more welcoming. However, still some residual barriers and still some residual dinosaur attitudes. ... Those who have progressed to high rank tend to be those who are seen as broad minded and accommodating etc., etc. so it's more likely to be in the sort of [middle management level]. I have heard some really horrendous dinosaur attitudes from ... staff who perhaps don't want to see young thrusting, upcoming colleagues overtaking them you know' (Current Executive, Female, NDPB).

Another interviewee, employed in an organisation which has a predominantly male senior management team, raised the issue of confidence among females (which was also raised in the context of females holding senior positions in the Health sector) and the impact of this on their ability to work in such an environment:

'I think it's confidence and probably again because the higher up you go, the more you are working in a male dominant environment, so therefore you'll maybe perceive it to be more difficult. Whereas the men, you know, if they socialise together it's probably easier to chat with the men, they will be more confident then about going for that next step, whereas the women may not be' (Current Executive, Female, NDPB).

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In terms of the interaction of males and females in the workplace and meetings in particular, generally positive comments were provided by interviewees. For example:

'I don't think males really object to females, you know, because, this is going to sound silly but, ... everybody will take their turn and in our ... team, as I say, we've more females than males but, I mean, they'll take their turn at minute taking and take their turn at doing the tea and they'll take their turn at organising events' (Aspiring Executive, Female, NDPB).

However, one interviewee employed in an NDPB provided an example which mirrors other comments made earlier in this section, that females might find it hard to 'be heard' in formal meetings when they are working in a male dominated senior board. Additionally, where females are 'heard' there may be a perception that they are being argumentative.

'The [senior executive] challenged me [in a formal meeting] ... and she said it's very hard to get a word in when you guys are speaking and other [females] feel the same way about it. I'm not being pass remarkable, it was a very mature conversation but I think that [in] a male dominated environment males try to dominate, I think it's far harder for females to get their views heard, to be listened to and be actioned. ...

I think that what happened as well as those who do can be seen to be overly assertive and have a reputation for that, so where a bloke becomes forceful they're seen as being strong, whereas a female becomes forceful sometimes they're seen as just being difficult or argumentative or whatever and I think that's part of the kind of gender construct that male organisations tend to have, maybe males have where females are concerned' (Current Executive, Male, NDPB).

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6.3.3.3 Further and Higher Education Sector

The gender culture within organisations comprising the Further and Higher Education sector appeared to be more supportive and inclusive in nature, particularly when compared to the Senior Civil Service and the Health sector. For example, interviewees generally described the gender culture of their organisations in a positive way as follows:

'I don't see a gender divide inside the [name of organisation] that I would see everywhere and anywhere else, it's very, very progressive in that manner' (Aspiring Executive, Female, Education).

'I think [the organisation] is very inclusive. And not only about gender, you know, in all aspects, I think [our] environment tends to be very inclusive and Northern Ireland as a culture is not terribly inclusive, so .. I think [we] stand out in that environment' (Aspiring Executive, Male, Education).

'I would say it's [i.e. gender culture] transparent. It's open. It's competitive. It's fair' (Current Executive, Female, Education).

A further interviewee referred to the influence of robust policies and procedures around gender equality at senior levels as follows:

'This organisation? ... I'm a member of the senior management team. We have very structured well informed HR [Human Resources] policies and procedures about equality. Section 75, very robust, systematic recruitment policies whether it's external recruitment or internal recruitment. You know, in terms of promotion, internal promotion over recruitment, the panel members have gone through robust training with HR advisors being present. Never, I would have to say, at any stage, has the word gender been mentioned at any interview internally or externally that I've sat on as a panel member or otherwise' (Current Executive, Female, Education).

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Despite the above positive comments, there were a few minor examples provided by interviewees of the existence of a male macho culture within their organisation. For example:

'I couldn't hand on heart preclude the fact that there isn't maybe some element of macho culture existing in say the engineering section in one of the [locations] for instance, because of the particular personality and background of say the manager in that area' (Current Executive, Male, Education).

In terms of the interaction between men and women in formal settings, some interviewees provided evidence consistent with that discussed earlier, particularly in relation to females having their opinions challenged more so than their male counterparts and females adopting male macho characteristics, including for example, aggressiveness.

'I think sometimes female leaders can be quite aggressive (in meetings) or feel that they have to be quite aggressive' (Aspiring Executive, Female, Education).

This particular interviewee also referred to meetings in which she had been the only female in attendance. In such situations, this interviewee suggested that males would challenge her ideas and as a result she felt that she had to prove herself 'over and over again'.

'They [i.e. males] might sometimes challenge you, you know. ... I've ... felt that I've had to prove myself over and over again, absolutely. ... I constantly feel that I am proving myself' (Aspiring Executive, Female, Education).

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Interestingly, one senior female executive suggested that females tended to progress better in organisations with more flexible cultures, which are characteristic of organisations in both the education and health sectors:

'I think women do better in more open, more flexible cultures, you know, I think they just do. Because there's a greater openness to it. I think women do less well in hierarchical, very traditional structures' (Current Executive, Female, Education).

6.3.4 Informal Networks in the Northern Ireland Public Sector

In order to understand the gender culture of the N.I. public sector, interviewees were also asked to comment on the extent to which informal networks (e.g. the old boys' network), which might benefit one gender to the exclusion of the other, still existed within their organisation and/or sector. While feedback from interviewees across the N.I. public sector was mixed in this regard, there was a general recognition that the workings of what would have been described as the 'old boys' network' had dramatically declined over the years. That said, some female interviewees still recognised the existence of informal male networks, generally based around sporting activities, from which they perceived to be excluded. Other limited informal networks also existed around social activities with many females being excluded due to caring responsibilities.

6.3.4.1 Informal Networks in the Health, Education and NDPB Sectors

The majority of interviewees from the Health sector, both male and female, indicated that informal networks based around for example the old boys' network did not exist.

For example:

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'None that I'm aware of now. There may well be some. I mean the Masons or something like that, I don't know. I'm not aware of any' (Aspiring Executive, Male, Health).

'No it's [i.e. the informal network] gone now and I have to say that this organisation is very much committed to the merit principle' (Aspiring Executive, Female, Health).

Despite the above comments, one interviewee identified the existence of an informal network which developed over time as a result of attendance at formal leadership programmes. This particular interviewee, however, felt excluded and unable to avail of this network due to the timing of the programme and her caring responsibilities

'There's informal networking as well where again, they just seem to be these networking groups setup and a breakfast type programme, you know, where everyone meets at the [name of location] at 8am and they do a breakfast morning. ...

[Would there be an expectation that you would engage in the formal meetings and the informal networks and the breakfast meetings and all of that?] Yeah and they [everyone else] would feel they needed to be at all of those and they would need to be seen at those.

[Do you feel you just would not be able to do that at the minute due to caring responsibilities?] Definitely' (Aspiring Executive, Female, Health).

Within the Education sector, while the majority of interviewees suggested that informal networks had largely disappeared, some did still recognise their existence based on for example, sporting activities or specialist areas. For example:

'I think in many aspects of science and engineering I've come across there really is an old boys' network, you know' (Aspiring Executive, Male, Education).

'Well, informal networks are, I just think women are very poor at that ... I think that simply men seem to have networks which allow them to talk to each other. That's it, the drink, you know, the pint in the pub on Friday night, the golf, the rugby, the GAA, the football, there just are mechanisms, you can't think of the female equivalence of that. ...

Now, there's a Women in Business network which is very, very good and you've things like that, so my informal network with senior women in

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Northern Ireland is very informal, it's almost my friendship network, so there are women in senior work in Northern Ireland who I would phone and I would talk to and I've known for a very long time and I would lift the phone to them and they to me. But, it's really informal' (Current Executive, Female, Education).

Finally, within NDPBs there was consensus that the old boys' network was less prevalent than in the past. For example:

'I think ... the old boy network is less prevalent now, you still see vestiges of it but not the way I would have experienced in my early [years]' (Current Executive, Female, NDPB).

However, one interviewee from the NDPB sector did recognise the existence of an old boys' network but added that it was very difficult to 'point to' the exact workings of the network.

'And then there's definitely still out there generally, you know, the old boys' network. No, you see this is it, you can't really point to, but you're still very conscious, you know, that there's a lot goes on in the golf club and different social events. And the problem is, because you have less females at those senior levels, you know, and if you look in the Civil Service, you know, there are no female Permanent Secretaries, so therefore there's just the old boys' club.

So therefore you typically have men interviewing, and I know nowadays they try and get, you know, one female on the panel and all the rest of it. But you're still being primarily interviewed by men. ... So I mean most of this stuff you can't really put your finger on specific examples. But it would just be that, you'd sort of still feel there's that general perception and there is, you know, jobs for the boys. I know it is harder now because of the recruitment processes now, equality legislation and so on' (Current Executive, Female, NDPB).

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6.3.4.2 Informal Networks in the Civil / Senior Civil Service

The majority of those interviewed (about two thirds) in the Civil / Senior Civil Service perceived that informal networks, for example, the old boys' network was a thing of the past. However, about one third of those interviewed believed that an element of an old boys' network continues to exist and remain influential. Among the concerns expressed were those around an influential 'clique' of men who had joined the Civil Service at a similar time and via a similar scheme (the majority of whom had progressed to senior positions) and the influence of sport. Females generally suggested that they were more likely to be part of an informal network formed as a result of gaining access to past training and leadership courses. Finally, some interviewees perceived that males were more effective than females in terms of networking and that they had greater opportunities to do so.

The following comments were made by interviewees who refuted the continued existence of the old boys' network within the Civil / Senior Civil Service:

[Are there any informal networks at play in the Senior Civil Service?] 'No, I honestly don't, I really don't' (Current Executive, Male, Senior Civil Service).

'Some people have made the accusation about the old boys' club but personally I don't see that and I can show examples of where that very definitely hasn't been the case. Sometimes I think some people may have perceptions, which are wrong perceptions, and it can be easy to say Oh that particular person got, is in that position because they are part of the "old boys' network" or whatever and they all play golf together and so on, but actually I think whenever you look at the individuals I don't think the truth actually bears that out' (Aspiring Executive, Male, Civil Service).

'The permanent secretaries have to attend so many things, they wouldn't have time to have an old boys' network... the old days of when they all

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used to go to rugby matches and things are long gone' (Current Executive, Female, Senior Civil Service).

Adopting an opposing view, a number of interviewees argued that informal networks still existed within the Civil / Senior Civil Service. Such networks were viewed as being beneficial to males in particular in terms of progressing to senior levels. In addition, there were some perceptions that informal networks were primarily developed around certain professions or developed in informal settings such as sporting activities. For example:

'There definitely is [an old boys' network]. ... The number of people who have said to me about the last four appointments, that they have been the four golden boys, they were always going to get them' (Current Executive, Male, Senior Civil Service).

'Oh there are still networks definitely because you're talking about a fairly small cadre of people out of the total service. ... There is a small, I wouldn't even call it a network, I'd say more a clique, there's a very small knot of males, yes who are very influential, very senior positions, with very strong personalities and egos ... that would be quite macho, quite testosterone charged. There're key players and they have tended to stay as a group and a clique together. It's more that they started off in a particular department' ... but I would not say that is representative of the Senior Civil Service as a whole' (Current Executive, Female, Senior Civil Service).

'... but you know, the word on the street was that was his [very senior] job' (Current Executive, Female, Senior Civil Service).

'There would be less of it [i.e. informal networks] than there would have been when I came in ten years ago, but still very much so within the likes of certain specialist units' (Aspiring Executive, Female, Civil Service).

'I have to say that there are social networks that I have been unable to participate in that are not official networks. What do I mean by that? I mean rugby, I mean the pub on a Friday night, I mean networking because of 5-a-side football. ... I think they [i.e. informal networks] happen through a natural process ... they're something I can't control and I'm never going to be in. ... I haven't any hard evidence but I would suggest it has to be

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advantageous to be able to have networks at those levels' (Aspiring Executive, Female, Civil Service).

One interviewee suggested that while networks based around sporting activities are not deliberate, they are potentially divisive in terms of generating gender inequalities. While little can be done about informal networks based on sporting activities, it is important to recognise the potential impact of these and the often negative perceptions that those unable to access such networks have of them:

'The Golf Society is a perfectly innocent way of getting along, but I think even sport segregates men and women. So that the mechanisms that ought to bind us together, bind bits of us together' (Current Executive, Female, Senior Civil Service).

Another female perceived the entire Senior Civil Service, including the Permanent Secretaries Group, as an old boys' network.

[Is the Permanent Secretaries Group viewed as an old boys' club?] 'Very much so. I also think that within the Civil Service it is an old boys' club at Senior Civil Service grade. I do. [What evidence do you have for that?] I know one of the guys here who ... has been up in a number of [senior grade] competitions and has got nowhere because a lot of it is if your face fits. I personally believe that but I have no evidence to back that up. But I think very much that old boys' culture and network and what school did you go to. I think it still exists [i.e. the old boys' club]. ... Having said that they themselves know they have to redress the imbalance of males and females at high levels' (Aspiring Executive, Female, Civil Service).

Interestingly one female interviewee also expressed concerns that females would not be able progress to the Permanent Secretaries Group for some time to come. Her argument was presented as follows;

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'The current Head of the Civil Service is a male and his entire team is male, He [i.e. the Head of the Senior Civil Service] has a group of very ambitious males who are as I say, not in the twilight of their careers ... and he has a strong sub-group of 3's, all male ready to step up to the plate and fewer females in that pool, so on the balance of probability and while I'm by no means a mathematician, it would strike me as quite obvious if you did your sums but that's highly unlikely [that a female with progress to Permanent Secretary level]' (Aspiring Executive, Female, Civil Service).

This interviewee also felt that the impending reduction in the number of departments within the N.I. Civil Service was likely to have a further detrimental effect on the chances of females progressing to the most senior levels of the Senior Civil Service:

'I think a grave doubt has been cast in my mind that we had a pool of females at 3, not a big pool but we had a pool and not one has got their foot through the door and an outsider very capable, I have no doubt a very capable officer, but with the limited experience at 3 was able to slip through the net. ... you [also] have a Civil Service that is likely to reduce in size of departments so the opportunities for that position will be reduced pro rata, [so] women ... have even less chance, i.e. there's less movement and less scope [for progression]' (Aspiring Executive, Female, Civil Service).

6.3.4.3 Informal Networks in the Local Government Sector

The majority of interviewees within the Local Government sector referred to the existence of an informal old boys' network in the past tense. Interestingly, one interviewee also referred to the historical negative impact of the network in terms of maintaining the status quo of female representation in senior roles:

'So I don't think there's that old boys' network anymore but ... like any organisation [we] will have informal networks which help people survive and feel part of an organisation' (Current Executive, Male, Local Government).

'...managers showing favouritism to each other in terms of providing opportunities to other managers to [special jobs or secondments]. But that is really reduced. The Director who was over us at that stage has left, as has the Chief Executive. So they facilitated it. Well the Director seemed to facilitate a lot of that' (Aspiring Executive, Female, Local Government).

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'I do think that there was a fair measure of jobs for the boys in here... looking out for individuals who were all men, protecting the interests of their male colleagues and looking after their male colleagues... I think it has changed and certainly I think the majority of staff welcomed the fact that people were afforded opportunities, that they could see new people who were very capable moving up' (Current Executive, Female, Local Government).

Contrary to the above perceptions, a number of other interviewees suggested that aspects of the old boys' network still remains within the Local Government sector. For example, one interviewee suggested that networks still exist within certain parts of his organisation at Head of Service (as opposed to Director) level while another perceived the old boys' network is still playing out at the Councillor level of the sector.

'I'm not sure if it's [i.e. the old boys' network] at director level but certainly I think there is some legacy issues where you do have that. ... Maybe heads of service. ... Old boys' network, [involves] people who have been employed here 20, 25 years' (Aspiring Executive, Male, Local Government).

'I wouldn't see that [i.e. the old boys' club] very often now, you might see it ... at the actual Councillors' level, you know, but that's politics and you will find politics nearly impacts on everything you do anyway. ... The one place I noticed it the most was with our old Chief Executive, definitely an old boys' network there, you could see it working in that' (Aspiring Executive, Female, Local Government).

Two further interviewees held quite diverse opinions about the vestiges of the old boys' network as a result of the reform of Local Government, with one suggesting that any remnants of the old boys' club would disappear throughout the sector as a result of the reform process, and another perceiving that the network would continue to play out within her organisation.

'If there are [i.e. an old boys' club], they'll be gone by 1st April. That's the bottom line' (Current Executive, Female, Local Government).

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'Some of these guys are complete dinosaurs, they really are. The majority of them now are all moving on with the RPA [Review of Public Administration] process, but I think some of them are fairly unreconstructed. Sadly, I would say that some of the guys who have been appointed in this next era of Local Government are just young dinosaurs, you know. ... And I have one of them here [in this organisation]. I have real concerns that all of my really bright able women will lose out in this process, which is very unfortunate. And maybe I misjudge him, but I can only base my impressions on his relationship to me over the last three years, and if that's anything to go by it'll be jobs for the boys here' (Current Executive, Female, Local Government).

Interestingly another interviewee within the Local Government sector compared her perceptions of the existence of an old boys' network with that of the Senior Civil Service as follows:

'No, I don't think it's as bad in local government [as the Senior Civil Service] but you see, you've got to remember that local government is a lot more about delivery and really about making a difference to people in the [region], really making a difference and I think if you demonstrate that then it's not as much about like who you know and the old boy's network and who you play golf with, that just does not exist in local government the way it does in the Civil Service' (Current Executive, Female, Local Government).

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6.3.5 Summary of Findings:

Theme Two - Gender Culture

The key findings from an analysis of theme two are as follows.

- Differing descriptions of organisational culture exist across the public sector. With respect to the Senior Civil Service, the majority of females recognised their organisation's culture as an issue for gender equality at senior levels. Females in particular described the culture of the Senior Civil Service as male dominated in addition to making references to a competitive, unsupportive, blame culture within some departments, which has the potential to impact upon females more so than their male counterparts.
- The Permanent Secretaries Group was seen by the majority of female executives as a cold, unwelcoming environment and public committees, where senior civil servants were questioned by Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs) were also seen as inhospitable cultures for both males and females, but more so for females.
- The majority of interviewees within the Local Government sector perceived their organisation's gender culture as positive and as having improved over time, with improvement largely attributed to the Local Government Staff Commission's Women in Councils Initiative (implemented in 2006). The role of the political and social context was also recognised as important, with female councillors viewed as instrumental in terms of addressing gender equality issues at senior levels.

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- Within both the Health sector and NDPBs mixed views, both positive and negative, regarding organisational gender culture were expressed by interviewees. Some interviewees within Health identified an unhealthy performance culture, a blame culture and an environment where macho expectations exist. Within some NDPBs, the existence of a macho or male dominated environment was also identified. Positive views were generally held by those in the Further and Higher Education sector.
- In terms of the interaction between males and females in the workplace and during meetings, some females reported that they felt marginalised and isolated within the Senior Civil Service. This contrasts with Local Government where the only issue of note was that related to the timing of Council meetings. Elsewhere, mixed views were expressed with respect to the interaction of males and females in the workplace.
- The majority of interviewees suggested that the workings of what would have been described as the 'old boys' network' had dramatically declined over the years. Despite this, interviewees across the public sector recognised the continued existence of informal male networks, generally based around sporting activities, from which they perceived themselves to be excluded. Other limited informal networks also existed around social activities, with many females feeling excluded due to caring responsibilities.

6.4 Theme Three: Flexible Work Arrangements

Theme three aimed to address the issue of flexible work arrangements and their availability and use at senior levels within the Northern Ireland public sector. In doing so, the following aspects were explored:

- Availability of flexible work arrangements at senior levels;
- Organisational expectations of full-time work;
- Progression to senior levels while availing of flexible work arrangements; and
- Perceptions of others working with flexible work arrangements.

6.4.1 Availability of Flexible Working Arrangements at Senior Levels

The vast majority of interviewees indicated that although their organisations have a wide range of flexible work arrangements in place, the reality is that it is extremely difficult for senior managers to avail of such arrangements. This view was expressed regardless of gender or part of the public sector, with the exception of some aspects of the Health sector. Consistent with this, the majority of interviewees were unable to provide examples of individuals at senior levels who were currently availing of flexible work arrangements. For example within the Civil Service the following interviewees provided comments which were fairly typical of those made right across the public sector:

'... job share, part time, reduced hours. Absolutely none [at senior levels, i.e. Grade 5, are availing of it]. And even at grade seven it's actually very difficult. I know a couple of grade sevens who do part time and it's very, very difficult.... Not only to get them [i.e. the flexible work arrangement] but

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to actually make it work. Yeah, it's very different [i.e. the rhetoric and the reality of flexible work arrangements]. ... I can't think of a job at Senior Civil Service level, where it would be easy to do it on a part time, thinking about part time as the flexible, I can't think of any job that would be easy to do' (Aspiring Executive, Female, Civil Service).

'Notwithstanding all the flexible working alternatives that exist, I think it's very difficult for staff to get access to those at senior levels. There are some, we have some part time senior staff but we don't have many. ... It's at the senior levels that I think there is an innate resistance to flexible working' (Current Executive, Male, Senior Civil Service).

'There are no part time workers or no one availing of compressed hours. Partial retirement is the only thing [i.e. at the more senior levels]. ... It [i.e. flexible work arrangements] would be in the minority at Grade 7. It [i.e. flexible work arrangements] increases as you go down through the grades to where you get to the administrative grades where it would be a lot higher' (Aspiring Executive, Male, Civil Service).

'There is no such thing as reduced hours or part time working [i.e. flexible working arrangements] once you are in the senior level. If you need to be at home with your children, you are at home with your laptop or you are putting them to bed and then doing two hours' work at night and that is the reality' (Aspiring Executive, Female, Civil Service).

'I think there would be a perception that for most SCS [Senior Civil Service] posts it would be difficult to work reduced hours and when I say reduced hours that's say a four day week or....term time or finishing every day at 2pm' (Current Executive, Male, Senior Civil Service).

Similar views to those above were also shared by those working in the NDPB, Health and Local Government sectors. For example;

[Is it really the reality that if you become more senior you really can't avail of these flexible work arrangements, the two don't really sit side by side very well?] 'They probably don't. I mean formally yes you can, they're [i.e. flexible work arrangements] open to everybody but from what I can see, you know at the senior levels that people are working all the hours that God sends basically. It's not because they're being directed to do that but you know they've, it's their drive and they're doing it and feel that they have to do it maybe to complete the work' (Current Executive, Male, NDPB).

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'I would say a reduced hours would be difficult. ... I don't think it's ever been applied for or done, by all account' (Aspiring Executive, Female, NDPB).

'I don't think that I could say I would go down to a four day a week and then think that I would be in with a chance of getting the director post. ... I think sometimes they [i.e. senior management] want to see total commitment to your job and that you will do absolutely everything that you need to do to deliver on your role and therefore I would imagine that at Director level the Chief Executive is looking for someone who certainly does five days a week and is there to act up in her role and everything else that comes with that' (Current Executive, Female, Health).

'Well, I think there's a perception that you do need to work full time [i.e. at more senior levels]. I've noticed that in the job adverts they're all full time, so they are. But to be honest, I think I could cope perfectly well on 30 hours a week [which is my current work pattern], to me that's almost full time. So I think there's a perception out there that, you know, you need to be full time but I don't think that's actually true' (Aspiring Executive, Female, Local Government).

One senior female interviewee, employed in the Senior Civil Service, echoed the above comments in the context of a particular flexible working arrangement, namely job sharing. However, this interviewee who has recently considered moving from a full-time position to a flexible work arrangement, openly recognised that the responsibility for identifying a solution to her request to work flexibly would be placed upon her and not her employer. This approach to designing a job sharing opportunity appeared to be consistent across the public sector:

'No, I really don't [think flexible working and Senior Civil Service work together]. [Why is that?] I think it's the nature of the work. Flexible working would work if it was job share where you could split it [the job]. I mean between you and me, I would like to be down to a four-day week, but I'm sitting struggling thinking how am I going to make this. Because I have to come up with the solution. I think particularly Grade 3, but also Grade 5, particular Grade 3, you would have to be able to split the duties' (Current Executive, Female, Senior Civil Service).

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When further asked if this interviewee believed that there is a will within the Senior Civil Service to actively redesign jobs to facilitate flexible working at the more senior levels, this interviewee, replied 'Absolutely not'. The difficulties of making a job sharing arrangement work were reiterated by a senior male executive as follows:

'Job sharing is one of the hardest arrangements to manage in terms of reduced hours because usually you're relying on two people agreeing an arrangement that has to sustain over a period of time. My own preference is if somebody wants to work reduced hours, like they could only do three days a week, it's better to find an accommodation that doesn't depend on somebody else. ... So job sharing at Senior Civil Service level, I don't see how you could make that work, I'm not saying it would be impossible but when I think of all my [staff] ... I could see all sorts of difficulties there unless you got two very likeminded people' (Current Executive, Male, Senior Civil Service).

Following on from the above comments, a number of interviewees also suggested that even where flexible work arrangements are in place, there is a perception that individuals availing of such arrangements will not receive the equivalent reduction in their workload.

'... compressed hours ... you know they would [pay] lip service 'oh yes you could work for four days a week or whatever', but the reality would be on that fifth day, your e-mail box would be filling up with things that must be done that day or deadlines you know' (Aspiring Executive, Female, Civil Service).

'I know a female grade seven ... who has asked to go on compressed hours. She has responsibility for her elderly father and she has tried several times, various different ways of trying to work flexibly, and she has already made enquiries about working four days a weekand being told yes of course we will allow that but we won't reduce your work load' (Aspiring Executive, Female, Civil Service).

'I always tell people to be really careful before they do anything contractually because if people say I want to work 4 days a week I will say to them you'll end up working 5 and getting paid 4, that's what will happen to you' (Current Executive, Female, Local Government).

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The above examples illustrate the difficulty in accessing flexible work arrangements and the gap between the rhetoric and reality of flexible work arrangements at senior levels. The perceptions of interviewees suggest that responsibility is placed on the individual to find a solution, there is little willingness or engagement on behalf of organisations to facilitate an investigation of how flexible work arrangements might be implemented and the nature of the work makes it difficult to facilitate. This overall view is largely echoed right across the public sector. For example, a male interviewee from the Local Government sector responded as follows when asked if he could explain why there were no senior managers availing of flexible work arrangements within his organisation:

'I think it's just the nature of the jobs...I mean, you know I work 12 hours a day' (Current Executive, Male, Local Government).

This highlights a key problem in that if senior staff wished to avail of flexible work arrangements, the reality is that their workload would make it very unlikely that this would be possible. In addition, the attitudes of aspiring and current executives quite often make it difficult for them to avail of flexible work arrangements. For example the following interviewee who has never availed of a flexible work arrangement in her career believed that she could not even avail of flexi-time (i.e. working within core hours), despite the fact that she is entitled to use this scheme within her organisation. This attitude, however, could potentially be linked to organisational expectations around the full time nature of senior positions (this issue will be discussed in more detail in the following sub-section).

'I don't use flexi-time, no, because I've always felt that at this level you are here to do a job and you do whatever needs done' (Aspiring Executive, Female, Civil Service).

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What is particularly clear from interviewees' comments across the public sector is that in general there is a perception that it is very difficult, if not impossible, for senior managers, male or female, to avail of flexible work arrangements. An additional and related point is the lack of recognition among interviewees of the poor example this sets for aspiring females who may wish to avail of flexible arrangements as they progress. The lack of flexible working at more senior levels may therefore be acting as a barrier to encouraging females to aspire to more senior levels. This issue was raised several times by female interviewees when discussing issues around gender culture, but in the context of flexible work arrangements, few interviewees explicitly mentioned that the lack of senior managers availing of flexible work arrangements could discourage females from aspiring to more senior levels. However, this could potentially be explained by organisational expectations of full-time working. Alternatively, it may also be partly attributable to the existence of an informal flexible working culture operating at senior management levels. For example:

'At [the more senior] level I'm not aware of anybody of either gender having a formal flexible working arrangement, I know certainly of one female ...at [a fairly senior] level who has a formalised flexible arrangement but I also think that at that [more] senior level, the role whilst extremely demanding does create opportunity for a wee bit of flexibility that [at lower levels they] may not have, you know someone who has a [work] pattern that's rigid that they're required to work, whereas I manage my own diary and appointments, well I've a secretary who does it but I control that in a sense. So for example, if I were to have a particular family commitment the potential is there to balance that in a more informal way than having a need for a formal working arrangement' (Aspiring Executive, Female, NDPB).

The above example provides some evidence to suggest that flexible work arrangements at senior levels operate in a much more informal way within organisations, thereby providing senior managers with the flexibility to manage their home, personal and/or family commitments. Whilst this was not the case for all

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interviewees, informal flexibility at senior levels was common for males and females in most parts of the public sector. Additionally, the availability of flexi-time (via a formalised system) in the Local Government sector for senior managerial levels (albeit not uniformly provided across the sector) appears to provide a level of flexibility which is sufficient to the extent that far less people in this sector feel the need to adopt other formalised flexible work arrangements:

[So it seems to me that because you facilitate flexi-time in Local Government you're giving people that flexibility which in itself maybe is just enough to stop people then wanting the big extras?]. 'Yeah, it should be enough and as well I mean, if you need a day off for appointments as we all have, you know, doctor's appointments with kids especially or whatever, the flexi-time allows you to work it up ... it's flexible enough to allow you .. that sort of [flexibility] you know. It's not rigid' (Current Executive, Male, Local Government).

'Certainly flexi-time is embraced by everyone because everyone benefits from that' (Aspiring Executive, Female, Local Government).

However, in contrast to the Local Government sector, flexi-time is not available to those employed in the Senior Civil Service:

'Well, flexi work arrangements don't apply at Senior Civil Service level, so once you get beyond 6 they don't have flexi-time anymore' (Current Executive, Female, Senior Civil Service).

The absence of flexi-time in the Senior Civil Service potentially removes an important and beneficial element of flexibility which is present in, for example, the Local Government sector.

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Whilst flexi-time is formally available for individuals employed just below the Senior Civil Service (namely grades 6 and 7), a number of interviewees reported negative experiences of its use even at this level:

'You're expected to do whatever hours your job requires and in actual fact there would be an expectation even in some parts of the civil service, that that should be the case at grade six and grade seven. Because I know a girl who at grade seven came into an organisation and the Chief Executive said to her, 'oh flexi, none of my other grade sevens work flexi' and ... this guy [a grade 3] was being quite a strong character and quite a domineering sort of an individual, and this girl would be a very capable girl, but I don't know anybody else that would have pushed back at him, but she stuck to her guns and refused to be put under pressure by him, and he had to, there's nothing he could do, because it was in her terms and conditions, but frowned upon' (Current Executive, Female, Senior Civil Service).

'In practice, I would be entitled if you like to use flexi. In practice most grade fives would frown on a grade seven who is counting hours and even if I did count my flexi-time I couldn't take it anywhere, I can't even take my annual leave. I mean apart from people with children who take their annual leave because they have to cover school holidays and so on, almost nobody at grade seven and above in the civil service takes their full quota of annual leave. I know people who are carrying forty, fifty days. You know, it really grates when people say the civil service, ah the civil servants are getting thirty days of leave a year and twelve public holidays and whatever. Most, unless you have a good, a good reason being, usually children's school holidays, you know it is not expected that you take all of that leave' (Aspiring Executive, Female, Civil Service).

These comments appear to suggest that although individuals at this level are entitled to flexi-time, line managers have expectations which contrast with its use. Thus, and again in contrast to the Local Government sector, aspiring executives may not be able to avail of the flexibility which flexi-time can potentially give them.

6.4.2 Organisational Expectations of Full-Time Work

Approximately three-fifths of all interviewees identified that there was an expectation that senior positions will always be based on full-time contracts. Supporting this,

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interviewees reported that senior positions are generally advertised on a full-time basis and that within organisations there is a lack of willingness to examine job-redesign, agile working, or home working. Furthermore, a number of interviewees, predominantly female, implied that there was a gender bias in this regard as their organisation was prepared to facilitate job redesign for, mostly male, senior managers close to retiring, a scheme more commonly known as 'partial retirement'. This rigid approach in allowing flexibility and a tendency to 'turn down' requests from individuals for a more accommodating work pattern were widely mentioned. Such a culture is seen to be less accommodating for females when compared to males. Finally, a number of female interviewees voiced their concerns that despite availing of reduced hours and getting remunerated accordingly, they generally worked significantly more hours than they are contracted to.

There was widespread agreement, among both male and female interviewees, in the public sector that senior positions are only workable on a full time basis. For example, a female interviewee stated the following when asked if she could foresee a situation where senior jobs could be designed to afford greater flexibility:

'I know I should say yes particularly coming from my background as a HR director but I just don't believe you can. Now many years ago I have seen a situation in England where two women job shared, a Chief Executive job, it didn't last very long. Well it probably lasted a couple of years. They argued because they wrote in the professional press that actually what the organisation was getting was one and a half Chief Executives because by the time you've done the handover and here's this, that and the other you put in more than half time. My honest view is that certainly jobs at this [very senior] level are not doable unless you're giving it full time plus, that's my view' (Current Executive, Female, Health).

This view was also expressed by male interviewees with regards to full time working at senior levels. Interestingly the following comment referred to the expectation of

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full-time working at senior levels as part of the culture of the organisation (i.e. the Senior Civil Service):

'Yes. It [i.e. the expectation of senior jobs on a full-time basis] is part of the culture. It would not be considered the norm as you go up through the grades for people to work part time. It's just the nature of the job' (Aspiring Executive, Male, Civil Service).

The above interviewee provided some greater explanation as to why this culture was prevalent.

'Now if you took for example at Grade 7 level, the number of grade 7s, the pool of grade 7s you have is much smaller, so if an individual decided to go part time and they are working in what is in effect a full time post it is very difficult for a manager to get someone to partner them or work alongside them. Whereas if you were in an administrative officer grade where there are a thousand people working it is easier to get a match, which will allow a person to work part time but still enable another person to fill in the rest of hours so you are still getting the full job done. As you move up it is harder to get that arrangement in place, and where somebody wants to go part time or wants to do compressed hours and you still have a full time job to be done it is a lot harder to approve that, because you won't get the full time job done' (Aspiring Executive, Male, Civil Service).

This interviewee highlights the practical difficulty of accommodating flexible working at more senior levels with respect to matching those who would like to job share or reallocating work to others in order to facilitate flexible work arrangements. The difficulty of accommodating more flexible work arrangements was noted as complicated even in those parts of the public sector which have greater gender balance at senior levels such as in the Health sector. In fact, one female senior manager in Health stated the following with respect to managing staff on flexible work arrangements;

'We have requests for working less hours, requests for working four day weeks instead of five day weeks, term time, and you find those that are left are really struggling to pick up the pieces. So we are encouraged to offer this flexible working and we do that as best we can, but it gets to a stage,

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and we're probably at that stage now, where another request would send us over the edge' (Aspiring Executive, Female, Health).

The practical difficulties alluded to above, highlight the potential reluctance on the part of managers to approve all flexible work arrangement requests. A number of other interviewees, including some males, acknowledged their perceptions that senior jobs are just far too busy and that consequently there is some resistance to flexible work arrangements at senior levels. For example, a senior male civil servant when discussing organisational expectations around flexible working patterns stated the following:

'At the senior levels ... I think there is an innate resistance to flexible working. [And why is that?] Because of the presumption that senior jobs are too busy. [My impression is based on] listening to conversations and when people have applied for flexible working and said oh no, I'm afraid that post could never be part time. I think the default position of the most senior staff is oh, we couldn't do that, rather than an attitude of how can we make this work?' (Current Executive, Male, Senior Civil Service).

This above highlights two potential issues: first, organisations expect that senior management positions are very busy and thus could not be undertaken on anything other than a full time basis. Thus, there is a presumption against the use of flexible working at senior levels. Second, the culture is such that there is a reluctance to examine how any flexible work arrangement could be accommodated at senior levels.

One female interviewee went even further and indicated that senior managers in her organisation felt that flexible work arrangements were bothersome. For example:

'It is definitely the case that [the senior management] don't like this nonsense of partial, part-time working and partial retirement, they just think

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it is a flipping nuisance. They would do away with it probably, but I would say it's probably because it is inconvenient for them' (Current Executive, Female, Senior Civil Service).

The above quotation illustrates some aspects of the negative culture around the use of flexible working arrangements. In contrast, aspects of the culture within the Health sector are far more accepting of flexible work arrangements. For example, the following interviewee suggested that the culture is more supportive of such arrangements and that this is largely due to the presence of a greater number of females within the organisation.

'There is an accepting culture, in that it is accepting of the flexible work arrangements. It is also supportive, and this is probably down to the larger number of females in the organisation who are more likely to request flexible work arrangements' (Aspiring Executive, Female, Health).

6.4.3 Progression to More Senior Levels while Availing of Flexible Work Arrangements

In terms of progressing to senior levels whilst availing of flexible work arrangements, the vast majority of interviewees stated that it was simply not possible to reach the most senior levels of their organisation while working anything other than full-time hours. The view that it is not possible to progress whilst availing of flexible work arrangements was common throughout the public sector (with the exception of one organisation in the Health sector) and was held regardless of gender. For example, one male senior manager in the Senior Civil Service talked about the experiences of females who had been selected for promotion but had not taken up their positions because they wished to work on a flexible basis:

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'I know women who have been selected for promotion to the Senior Civil Service but never took up the positions or never went for the final interview, because they wanted to work part-time and they knew it would be so hard to get a Senior Civil Service job with reduced hours' (Current Executive, Male, Senior Civil Service).

Another aspiring female, again employed in the Civil Service, went even further and suggested that availing of flexible work arrangements would effectively 'write off your chances of promotion'. This particular interviewee also suggested that flexible work policies are not monitored in terms of their effectiveness:

'I would say it's probably an unspoken thing, but I would think that if you went for something like term time working at Grade 7 level, you are probably effectively writing off your promotion chances. ... Nobody is monitoring how effectively these [flexible work arrangements] are being implemented, there's a tick box thing to say we have a policy' (Aspiring Executive, Female, Civil Service).

Another Senior Civil Service interviewee, currently availing of a flexible work arrangement, talked about her perceptions of being able to retain a flexible work pattern should she be successful in an ongoing promotion competition. Worryingly, this interviewee perceived that she would be unduly disadvantaged if she raises the issue:

'That's an issue, I've gone for this grade [number] competition, how far I'll get in it, I don't know, but one thing in the back of my mind ... I have [a number of] young children, I work [a flexible work pattern] ... but I would have misgivings. If I were successful I would obviously be asking the question, I would like to continue this work pattern. I suspect that once I ask that question, I'll either, if I was on a list I would move to the bottom of the list or I just wouldn't get placed at all. Personally I don't think at grade [number] level the service is ready for it yet, I think it has to be and I think that's one area it does, and that was what I was alluding to, I think this grade [number] competition is going to throw up a lot of challenges because I think a lot of, or some of, the women anyway who come through in that competition will have family' (Current Executive, Female, Senior Civil Service).

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Interestingly, the view that it is not possible to progress to more senior levels whilst availing of flexible work arrangements was not always viewed as affecting only females. For example, one aspiring female senior manager in an NDPB suggested that the issue affected both males and females:

'I think it's, for me it is a difficult question [i.e. do you feel that gender equality at the senior levels is an issue?]. I do not necessarily think that gender equality is an issue. I think that the issue arises whenever you want to do flexible working arrangements and move up the chain and for me that would be a barrier rather than what gender you are. I mean we've plenty of women at the senior level in this organisation and our Chief Executive is female, so I would never say that gender equality is an issue, but I think there is an issue with flexible working and part-time hours at a senior level' (Aspiring Executive, Female, NDPB).

An additional aspect which was raised in the context of progression to senior levels and availing of flexible work arrangements, was that of being absent from the workplace. A few interviewees suggested that it would be very difficult for very senior staff to avail of flexible working arrangements because of their lack of availability and visibility in their workplace. For example an interviewee from the Education sector stated the following:

'I think as you become more senior, it's obviously much more difficult to say you know 'I'm not going to be here, I need to be off' because you're expected to be there, you've a management role...' (Current Executive, Female, Education).

The above comment is very much aligned with the earlier discussion regarding organisational expectations that senior jobs are based on full-time working hours.

Another interviewee from the Health sector raised similar concerns as follows:

'...speaking bluntly as a manager myself ... it is problematic to have senior staff [on a flexible working arrangement]. ... could my [Director] job be done on four days a week? I don't think it could be is the difficulty. I think there's an expectation not just around the volume of work, it's probably

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less the volume of work if anything, because there's always ways of doing that with a bit of imagination, but more the practical issues of availability. What does that feel like and does that lend itself to someone at a senior level working part time? I'm not sure that it does' (Current Executive, Male, Health).

In contrast to the above comments, one senior executive from a Health organisation was much more positive regarding the role of flexible work arrangements at senior levels. This interviewee suggested that flexible working within his organisation was not viewed as a barrier to progression to senior levels, including the position of Director.

'I don't see any barrier to these directorate posts not being taken up by someone in a more flexible way of delivering the service. Actually in fact I think it would be quite welcome, you know; I think if one of the issues is pressure in terms of, you know, work/life balance and to be able to share [i.e. job share] that seems to be a reasonable way forward. I suppose just the people who presented themselves to date, you know, haven't asked for that as a consideration' (Current Executive, Male, Health).

However, despite the above positive comment, this interviewee confirmed that there were no examples of individuals availing of flexible work arrangements at the director level within his organisation. Despite this, this particular organisation appears to have a positive and progressive attitude toward flexible work arrangements. This was partly explained by the following comment in which the interviewee recognises the need to retain talent as individuals progress to senior levels. It is interesting to note that at the time of interviewing, there was greater acceptance and uptake of flexible working arrangements within this organisation up to assistant director position, when compared to a number of other organisations participating in stage three of the research. Interestingly although the interviewee did not specifically provide a rationale for the more positive workings of flexible workings within this organisation, discussions with other interviewees in the same organisation gave the

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impression that the environment is one in which flexible working functions well, primarily as a result of a critical mass of females in senior roles.

'Our approach to flexible working, it's very progressive, you know, so we do have actually another part of the initiative in terms of trying to foster that commitment. ... And it's creating an environment that allows people to opt in, or indeed opt out, in terms of how they wish to move forward. I think part of our approach to that is to try and hang on as best we can to the talent we have, so we have a whole range of flexible working policies and procedures that I hope allow us to hang onto people who probably, if they weren't there, would have no other choice but to give up their job. ... It's certainly a recognition that basically we have to continue to strive to recognise that people, you know, need to be helped and supported if we want them to develop to the best they can. ...

And there are times when we have to accept that the family will take priority and that basically for a while people will give their commitment to that part of their life and then hopefully if they're successful in that will come back and be able to make, if they wish, a further contribution to the management of the service. ...

The proof's in the pudding. You know, we never ever have suffered as a result of people, you know, availing of flexible working. If anything, I believe it's helped us retain the talent that we have in terms of the calibre of people that we have seen coming forward and I think ... [the] organisation has benefited considerably because of that, you know. And that extends to all posts within the [organisation]. ...

The nature of our workforce is always going to be predominantly female. You know, we have 80%, 85%, but I suppose it's more a recognition of that talent is where you find it and that's basically it's to get the best out of the population that you have, staff population. You need to make sure you retain whoever they are as long as you possibly can, you know. And as I say, for me it's basically making sure that if there are difficulties and problems that you're experiencing that we've a range of policies and procedures that allow your manager to bring about a solution to that' (Current Executive, Male, Health).

Interestingly, another interviewee within the same organisation saw flexible working, alongside coaching, succession planning and empowering individuals, as a catalyst for achieving good levels of gender equality at senior levels:

'I think it comes down to the culture [regarding the acceptance of flexible working at senior levels]. It's a number of things working together. It's all that coaching, it's all that succession planning, empowering people, and working in tandem with that, then you have the flexible working, the informal and those provisions in situ. And it's the catalyst at the top of the organisation where you now have 58% of our workforce are female in senior manager roles' (Aspiring Executive, Female, Health).

6.4.4 Perceptions of Others Working with Flexible Work Arrangements

Approximately half of all interviewees discussed their perception of others who avail of flexible work arrangements. There appeared to be three key issues around the perceptions of others. First, there was a view that those who avail of flexible work arrangements felt guilty when leaving work early or are absent from work when compared to full-time employees. Secondly, a number of interviewees, predominantly males, also identified the practical difficulties of managing staff availing of flexible work arrangements. Finally, some interviewees voiced a perception that senior managers view presence at work as an indicator of an individual's commitment to their organisation. With respect to the first issue, namely having feelings of guilt for leaving the workplace earlier than full time staff, the following comment provides a good example of this within a Health organisation:

'I think it's probably more like a feeling of guilt that I wouldn't be available for meetings or to deal with...or I'd be leaving colleagues who I know are also working very hard and in my own team they're all flat out. I mean they always have piles of stuff to do and they're also doing piles of stuff, and I suppose I feel as their boss I need to be...and maybe I'm not setting them a very good example' (Aspiring Executive, Female, Health).

'I have feelings of skulking away from a looking up point of view, but I'm also conscious of the optics of things to my staff as well' (Current Executive, Male, Health).

With respect to the second issue, a number of senior managers expressed their views around the difficulty of managing a number of staff availing of flexible work arrangements. For example, a male interview in the Senior Civil Service stated the following:

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'I think at times I get frustrated [with flexible work arrangements] because this does create management difficulties. If somebody is granted reduced hours working it maybe suits one branch, but it may not suit in another, so you become less flexible in management terms when you have a quarter of your people who are on reduced working but it's a good thing ... Job sharing, again, this is a personal opinion, job sharing is one of the hardest arrangements to manage in terms of reduced hours because usually you're relying on two people agreeing an arrangement that has to sustain over a period of time' (Current Executive, Male, Senior Civil Service).

This view was not confined to the Senior Civil Service. For example, a male interviewee in the Health sector offered a similar opinion when reflecting on how other people react to accommodating those availing of flexible work arrangements:

'You get other people saying, 'well, it doesn't suit me on Wednesday morning and I'm here, by the way, five days a week, how come I have to turn my life into something different for two people who are here two and a half days a week' (Current Executive, Male, Health).

To some extent, this issue feeds into the third issue identified by interviewees, namely individuals availing of flexible work arrangements are perceived as having less commitment to their organisation than those who work full time. One interviewee in Education who has had extensive experience of flexible work arrangements spoke at length about her perceptions in this regard. In particular, she recognised the negative messages that senior managers can help create regarding a lack of commitment:

'I can remember when I did job share I used to get comments like, 'oh we can never get hold of one of you', although there was always one of us here. But I think people used irrational...they blamed the job share for things that were nothing to do with the job share, about not being able to get things done or get hold of us or get advice or whatever. ... I think there's a bit of a perception as well that people who want to job share, because they've got commitments, in terms of their work life balance, they may be counting their hours; they're not giving their all to the organisation. And I think there's a difficulty there sometimes with some senior managers who have staff themselves that job share, whether they be male or female, may be giving that kind of negative feedback to their

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staff, not directly but in terms of their attitude towards the job share and things like that perhaps' (Aspiring Executive, Female, Education).

6.4.5 Summary of Findings:

Theme Three - Flexible Work Arrangements

The key findings from an analysis of theme three are as follows:

- Without exception, all interviewees indicated that their organisations have in place a variety of policies to support flexible work arrangements including for example, part-time hours, job share, compressed working week and term time working.
- However, despite their existence, there is a considerable gap between the rhetoric and reality of flexible work arrangements at senior levels within the public sector. The overwhelming view of interviewees, regardless of gender or part of the public sector (with some minor exceptions in the Health sector), suggest that whilst public sector organisations have flexible work arrangements in place they are not readily available at senior or executive levels.
- The above view is supported by the perceptions of the majority of interviewees who indicated that their organisation expects senior managers to work on a full-time basis. This viewpoint was expressed regardless of gender or part of the public sector in which the interviewees were employed.
- As a result of views around expectations of full-time senior positions, the majority of interviewees (both males and females) perceived that it would be

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very difficult, if not impossible, to progress to senior levels whilst availing of flexible work arrangements. This viewpoint was held regardless of gender or part of the public sector in which the interviewees were employed.

- The few people currently availing of flexible work arrangements expressed feelings of guilt when leaving work or being absent from the physical workplace.
- Some negative perceptions of those availing of flexible work arrangements were also expressed by interviewees in terms of the difficulty of managing staff on such arrangements and the subsequent problems arising from their absence from the physical work place.
- There was very little evidence found to suggest that organisations engage in active job-redesign when individuals avail of flexible working.
- Finally, some interviewees suggested that those availing of flexible work arrangements were potentially viewed as being less committed to their organisation.

6.5 Theme Four: Work Life Balance

Theme four investigated the issue of work life balance within the Northern Ireland public sector. The analysis of interviewee data highlighted a number of important aspects of work life balance which are outlined below.

- Work life balance and long-hours culture; and
- Progression to senior levels: implications for work life balance.

In the remainder of this section, the findings with respect to the above aspects will be discussed.

6.5.1 Work Life Balance and Long-Hours Culture: Civil/Senior Civil Service

When asked to describe their current work life balance, the vast majority of interviewees in the Civil / Senior Civil Service suggested that it was very poor. This view was held irrespective of gender. The vast majority of interviewees attributed their poor work life balance to the existence of a long-hours culture within their department. For example:

'Yes, there is a culture of long hours or has been and I think some departments are more heavily pressed than other departments or some posts within departments are heavier than other posts within departments, and you can just get lucky or unlucky where you are placed' (Current Executive, Male, Senior Civil Service).

'It's the exception to the norm and I think it is seen fairly much as that. There are so few, it's just assumed that if you are in the Senior Civil Service you will work full time and full time means whatever hours it takes in the day, whatever evening functions you have to go to, if you have to work at the weekend, it's whatever hours it needs to get the job done.'

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There's very much a long-hours culture in the Senior Civil Service' (Current Executive, Female, Senior Civil Service).

'It's such a busy department and you'd have meetings starting at 4.30pm which you know are going to go on until 6pm. ... My children have remarked to me that since I've took this job that I'm not home for dinner' (Current Executive, Female, Senior Civil Service).

'Almost nobody at grade seven and above in the Civil Service takes their full quota of annual leave. I know people who are carrying forty, fifty days' (Aspiring Executive, Female, Civil Service).

An exception to the above views was expressed by one male interviewee who stated that a long-hours culture did not exist within his organisation. However, the description of his working pattern would suggest the opposite, namely that he is in fact engaged in a long-hours culture:

'I am one of the first out of here [during the week] but I work at weekends, I work at night time, I work on Sundays, sometimes I work an entire weekend because I have to ... and you know I don't mind taking calls at night time. ... I've no issues' (Aspiring Executive, Male, Civil Service).

A number of interviewees suggested that aspects of the long-hours culture were attributed to the relationship between the Civil Service and local ministers:

'...the pressure of work has increased, because we have local ministers. They are bounced in the supermarket on various subjects and are much more accessible to the local media' (Current Executive, Female, Senior Civil Service).

'The female grade five that I worked for was being paid for reduced hours and officially going at 3 o' clock. She worked all the hours that were, irrespective of children and that was expected of her and nothing less would have ... ministers don't stop e-mailing you or phoning you because it is past 3 o' clock and you are not working anymore' (Aspiring Executive, Female, Civil Service).

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Additionally, issues around a long-hours culture and associated work life balance were further reinforced by two senior managers who identified these as potential barriers to progression to senior levels, predominantly for females but in some cases males also:

'I think there are issues around work/life balance, particularly women who have children and I think there's a general sense now, and this actually applies increasingly to men as well as women, is that the climate, the atmosphere, if you like, that we work in at Senior Civil Service level is increasingly difficult, it's increasingly politicised, there's a sense that the rewards for moving into the Senior Civil Service aren't sufficient to compensate for the extra hours you have to work, the criticism you get from politicians, the criticism you get from media, all these factors are at work and I think, as I say, they don't just affect women they affect men as well and it's becoming an increasing factor' (Current Executive, Male, Senior Civil Service).

'... are there barriers? I can only speculate and it's a personal opinion, I think it is still a fact that the burden of caring responsibilities continues to fall disproportionately on women and Senior Civil Service posts probably carry greater pressure in terms of well the work itself but also the working hours that are expected of individuals, so that may mitigate against some women wanting to apply for senior posts' (Current Executive, Male, Senior Civil Service).

Interestingly, a few interviewees also mentioned the issue of caring responsibilities for elderly relatives. This issue has affected both senior males and females (but more so females) in terms of having a negative impact on their work life balance.

For example:

'I also know of people who have been driven to breakdowns by trying to you know run a career and caring responsibilities. In my experience that tends to be women higher up who have acquired caring responsibilities for elderly relatives. I guess when you have children you make a conscious decision that that is, you know something you are prepared to, you know, accept. Later on in life when you have worked your way up and you have been happy with your work-life balance, suddenly finding that you have got caring responsibilities that are incompatible with what you have been doing before, I think is more difficult and I have seen a lot of people, again male and female, struggling with that particular one, because they have risen up, they are older, they are at a senior level, they have been able to accept a work-life balance that is heavily weighted towards work and then you know

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life suddenly expands its demands on you and the system doesn't accommodate that at all, um short of taking a career break' (Aspiring Executive, Female, Civil Service).

A number of interviewees argued that one significant way of managing one's work life balance is the skill of empowering others and delegating responsibility for work. Whilst this was recognised as an important factor in maintaining a good work life balance, a number of interviewees suggested that females in particular are often reluctant to delegate work, which is likely to have implications for their work life balance. For example:

'I think the secret of work life balance is not to [be] a control freak and to be quite willing to empower other people to actually get on and do their jobs' (Current Executive, Female, Senior Civil Service).

'Yes some of the females, I know, will, they'll stay there till they die and they will make arrangements for the other things to be done, whereas the man will pass it off to the person who works with them and say 'right I have to go, I've got to do this' (Current Executive, Female, Senior Civil Service).

'If you get to that stage [i.e. the Senior Civil Service) you do have the ability to delegate but maybe a lot more, it is crucial that you delegate more and I think it's about that delegating responsibility because that responsibility is still with yourself so how do you let go and give people the ownership to get stuff done. ...I think women are definitely more control freaks than men. I think women naturally want to see things done to the final degree and would be much more checking and asking for stuff to be done and sent to them in drafts, and men would just assume that if it's being done by a woman then it's being done right. Most of women I know at Grade 5 level are very controlling in nature and like things to be done right and therefore are very demanding' (Current Executive, Female, Senior Civil Service).

Interestingly one senior male executive made the following comment about individuals who work long hours:

'As a matter of personal prejudice, I think if someone is working long hours there is either something wrong with the system or there is something

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wrong with them and in the first case we need to do something about it and in the second case they need to do something about it. ... Sometimes there are particular points of pressure on people, that's fine, that's one, that's ok and that doesn't impinge on people's general work life balance. Then there's either something wrong with the job, some individual is trying to do two people's or three people's work and that's just unfair and that needs to be sorted out. Or the individual is not capable of rising to the next level, they haven't yet made that transition and aren't willing to let go enough' (Current Executive, Male, Senior Civil Service).

Whilst work life balance was generally perceived to be relatively poor, there was very little evidence found that senior staff lead by example in terms of promoting an appropriate work life balance. Some exceptions to this were as follows:

'I make sure that people here aren't working long hours, that's from a selfish point of view as well, I want them to be fresh and go round and tell people to go home because I see it as a very bad sign, you need to work very intensively but once you've done that you need to cut it down' (Current Executive, Female, Senior Civil Service).

'At the moment I think it's [i.e. work life balance] pretty much spot on. I've got the flexibility to work from home, I've got the laptop and my Grade 5 is very supportive, she is in a similar position, she has children of a similar age and her priorities are her children and she doesn't work term time and would work from home occasionally as well, so she's very supportive of that' (Aspiring Executive, Male, Civil Service).

6.5.2 Progression to Senior Levels - Implications for Work Life Balance: Civil /Senior Civil Service

The general view among interviewees was that work life balance will deteriorate the more senior one progresses within the Civil Service. For example:

'The higher up you go the less the life features in the work life balance' (Aspiring Executive, Female, Civil Service).

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'If I got a grade 5 I would be working at least ten hours a day and working unsociable hours on a regular basis in the evenings' (Aspiring Executive, Female, Civil Service).

However, a contrary view to the above was expressed and supported by a few female and male interviewees as follows:

'Sometimes the higher you go the less you have to do, so I would think there's maybe some cases where women can manage their work life balance a bit better the higher up they go, because they have better structures below them' (Aspiring Executive, Female, Civil Service).

'If you are willing to delegate and trust people then you can manage any job at any level without it unduly affecting a decent work/life balance' (Current Executive, Male, Senior Civil Service).

6.5.3 Work Life Balance and Long-Hours Culture: Other Sectors

6.5.3.1 Health Sector

Within the Health sector, interviewees indicated that there was generally a long-hours culture for senior managers. At the very senior levels the existence of a long-hours culture was confirmed by both male and female executives:

'Within Health and Social Care there's the perception that once you go into the very high level or the senior executive roles, you know, you do have to work quite a bit at home and work through emails and home working to make up the ground that you haven't covered because you're attending meetings or whatever. And that would feed into your weekends as well as at night' (Current Executive, Male, Health).

'I don't have any at all [i.e. work life balance], I would work 7 days a week, I could show you evidence, I could take you to my emails and show you me clearing my emails at 4am in the morning, honestly I don't have any work life balance whatsoever' (Current Executive, Female, Health).

The long-hours culture is exasperated by a number of factors, for example:

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'Yes, big time, yeah absolutely [there is a long-hours culture]. Everybody at my level and a good bit up they would have remote access at home, they've got a Blackberry, a mobile and ...' (Current Executive, Female, Health).

In some cases there is a perception that the number of hours required to work at senior levels is excessive:

'There is a perception that the hours that you have to do are huge. You know, ... the stories that some directors have told in terms of working to 8.30, taking home their emails, working till 11.30, and then coming in at 8 am the next day to start their day..' (Current Executive, Male, Health).

The existence of a long-hours culture was also confirmed by aspiring executives.

For example:

*'Everybody is e-mailing all evening, ... my Blackberry, I get as many emails in the evening, as during the day it just puzzles... but I am as bad in that I would answer an email on my leave or answer emails on Saturdays and Sundays...
We end up with meetings at 5pm, we end up with meetings at 6.30pm, particularly I would meet quite a lot with GPs. GPs want to meet out of hours and you find, and that's a difficult commitment for me having a child because I don't mind doing work when I get him to bed and I can do as much work I please, he's sleeping and that's fine, but going out and having to get somebody to come and physically mind him is much more difficult so that's where this flexible working can prove, or the way of trying to balance your home life can prove, difficult' (Aspiring Executive, Female, Health).*

One aspiring executive who noted that she works an average of 50 hours per week, suggested the following:

'I don't know any good senior manager who works 37.5 hours. I mean there would be the expectation I think as well, it wouldn't just be, it's cultural that you work long hours or that you work hard, everybody works hard, so..'. (Aspiring Executive, Female, Health).

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The existence of a long-hours culture was also an issue for the few interviewees who were availing of flexible work arrangements. For example, one interviewee who is employed on a three day week suggested the following:

'Yeah, I would say the reality is that I'm doing probably about four days a week if it was all added up' (Aspiring Executive, Female, Health).

When asked to provide reasons for the existing long-hours culture, the same interviewee suggested the impact of efficiency savings and the nature of roles at senior levels in particular:

'I think it's the workload and it's the continual efficiency savings that we're having to make, so if a job goes it's being divvied out, you know, elsewhere. So I think it's just the sheer size of the roles that people are doing and I do think that the extra hours culture is put on mostly at the top of the organisation' (Aspiring Executive, Female, Health).

6.5.3.2 Further and Higher Education Sector

The existence of a long-hours culture was also reported by the majority of interviewees, both males and females, within the Further and Higher Education sector. One particular Further Education organisation has more recently placed more emphasis on the health and well-being of staff following feedback from their yearly staff survey:

'as a result of our survey two years ago last year we brought in a big health and well-being initiative and we looked at 4 areas of health and well-being ... physical health, mental health, diet and I can't remember what the fourth one was ...

So we looked at all those 4 areas and brought in a whole lot of initiatives and we have our own fitness suites which we found staff weren't using very often and very much, so we had a whole push on those. We had a whole push on things like staff discount schemes, we had different speakers in, we pushed our Care Call employers assistance programme, a whole range of initiatives that the Senior Management Team supported. And we had our first health and well-being days in April which were very well attended.

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So I suppose in those kinds of initiatives, yes, we would try to push that culture forward in terms of, you know, people thinking about their whole health and well-being inside work and outside work because, you know, they impact on each other.

In terms of that whole health and well-being initiative, ... we do talk about work life balance in that and people being able to manage the two parts of their life' (Aspiring Executive, Female, Education).

However, despite the existence of the above initiative, another interviewee from the same organisation when asked if a long-hours culture existed within her organisation responded as follows:

'Of course there is ... I think the availability of email and the availability of communication, the phone. We all, the senior managers, phone. Great, I have to say they have enabled me to do things and let other people get on and make decisions for them, but you're constantly available' (Current Executive, Female, Education).

Interviewees within the Further and Higher Education sector reported a range of experiences in terms of their own personal work life balance. For example:

'I probably work more than I should work' (Aspiring Executive, Female, Education).

'It varies quite a bit [i.e. work life balance], so most evenings I do some work, not every evening but most evenings; certainly Monday to Friday, or let me say Sundays, Sunday to Thursday certainly. You know, as a [job role] we have this unremitting grind on a Monday morning of management board and operating boards and cycles' (Aspiring Executive, Male, Education).

'I've made a conscious effort [re my work life balance] and it's got better. I used to take work home on a regular basis' (Aspiring Executive, Female, Education).

'I'd start work at 8am and I'd do sort of half an hour or 45 minutes before I leave the house, and I come to work. I leave work about 5.30pm, 6pm. Go home, get something to eat, sit down again at about 8 o'clock, and work 'til about midnight, half midnight.... Saturday morning I do a bit of shopping and stuff and then I work probably all weekend. But I love it. It's how I want things to be' (Aspiring Executive, Female, Education).

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'It's not very good [i.e. my work life balance] ... I try to avoid weekends if I possibly can but inevitably usually Monday is the day of the [organisational] Management Board and usually there's quite a lot of papers with it, and I would usually look at them on a Saturday or Sunday. I might come over here on a Saturday to read the papers or take them home and read them on the Sunday... A lot of the research stuff you try to fit it into your sort of daytime work, but inevitably you end up doing a lot of stuff in the evening' (Current Executive, Male, Education).

6.5.3.3 Non-Departmental Public Bodies Sector

The above comments are echoed in the other sectors of the public sector. For example, the majority of interviewees in the NDPBs involved in stage three indicated that there was a long-hours culture within their organisation. For example:

'... a short working week is 50 plus hours' (Current Executive, Male, NDPB).

'...we have a flexible work policy obviously, we work the normal flexi hours but I would tend probably to work a 50 hour week at least and that's in the office, that wouldn't be going out at night or weekend to events' (Current Executive, Female, NDPB).

The existence of a long-hours culture was perceived by a senior executive as a barrier for those with dependants:

'I think long hours is also a big barrier to people with dependants and the constant on-call culture' (Current Executive, Female, NDPB).

Furthermore, one interviewee suggested the following impact of a long-hours culture on females in particular:

'... for those who are committed there is a very long-hours [culture] and I think it's worse for females. I think they work harder to prove themselves

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in organisations, so they sacrifice more and spend longer hours doing it and they're more conscientious. The conscientious females are far more conscientious than the men' (Current Executive, Male, NDPB).

6.5.3.4 Local Government Sector

Within the Local Government sector the majority of the interviewees (17 out of 20) commented on the impact of their role on their work life balance. It is generally accepted that those in senior roles have long working hours, are contactable 24/7 and have high volumes of work, all of which affect work life balance. Other important factors impacting upon work life balance in a Local Government context include the influence of key stakeholders from the voluntary sector and local councillors, who tend to hold meetings in the evening. It was also widely acknowledged that a supportive family is an important factor for a good work life balance, although there is a general perception that females hold the majority of household and child care responsibilities, in addition to their employment. It is noticeable that the majority of respondents who acknowledge the importance of family support are females. In contrast male respondents appear to consider balancing work and life as an achievement of their own initiative to manage their workload and general work commitments, such as the requirement to be contactable 24/7 and meet deadlines. The view that a senior person should be able to manage a considerable workload and appear committed while working long hours is also widespread.

Although not provided on a consistent basis throughout the Local Government sector, some flexibility is afforded to senior executives and managers through the use of flexi-time and time off in lieu (TOIL). This is in contrast with for example, the

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Senior Civil Service where flexi-time is not available. Flexi-time was described by one senior interviewee as part of a family friendly policy.

'It's [i.e. my work life balance] not good which is why I make a point of always using flexi' (Aspiring Executive, Male, Local Government).

6.5.4 Progression to Senior Levels - Implications for Work Life Balance: Other Sectors

Worryingly, the vast majority of interviewees in the other sectors acknowledged that work-life balance deteriorates as one progresses to more senior levels.

'It would be horrendous. My director, I don't know if she sleeps, my Director and my Chief Executives are the hardest workers I have ever come across. They're very, very good and very effective, but they do an awful lot of hours and if you spoke to either of them I think you would gather that from them. I don't know how they deal with the workload that they have' (Aspiring Executive, Female, Health).

'He [a Director] works all the hours God sends. I get emails from him at half six in the morning and still get emails from about eight and nine. I mean you talk about work life balance. Those jobs really would make it extremely difficult to have a work life balance' (Aspiring Executive, Male, Health).

Additionally, when looking into the future, another current executive suggested the following:

'But that [i.e. poor work life balance] will change radically over the next four to five years and that alone will force the organisation to examine its work/life balance policy, because the populations coming behind in terms of women will not be prepared to work the long hours, the basically complete commitment to an organisation that has been there in the past. And they will insist that there is a balance within the organisation if we are to retain them, otherwise they'll just go somewhere else' (Current Executive, Male, Health).

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A deteriorating work life balance being associated with promotion to a more senior role was also raised by interviewees within NDPBs. For example:

'I would certainly like to become possibly a Head of Branch or a Grade five, however, I do have concerns about how I could manage that in terms of the rest of my life. ... I feel confident that I could manage the work, but I would be ... uncertain about the effect that it would on my other commitments, my motherly commitments' (Aspiring Executive, Female, NDPB).

'I do think that there is a part of me that now thinks if I got to the next level that will be okay, and that might be as much as I want to do, because I would still want to have that work life balance.. in putting everything together I think my ambition is kind of tapered' (Aspiring Executive, Female, NDPB).

6.5.5 Summary of Findings:

Theme Four - Work Life Balance

The key findings emerging from the analysis of theme four data are outlined below:

- The work life balance of the majority of individuals interviewed right across the Northern Ireland public sector was described as poor. This view was expressed irrespective of gender or the part of the public sector in which interviewees were employed.
- A poor work life balance was largely attributed to a long-hours culture within the Northern Ireland public sector. Again, this view was expressed irrespective of gender or the part of the public sector in which interviewees were employed.
- Aspects of the long-hours culture and subsequent poor work life balance were attributed to the demanding nature of the job and the demands of politicians, with both of these impacting on males and females.

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- Some interviewees suggested that a poor work life balance represented a barrier to females in particular.
- Caring responsibilities for elderly relatives was also identified as a further factor which had a negative impact on an individual's work life balance. While this issue has the potential to impact on both males and females, it was reported as impacting more on females.
- The ability to delegate and empower others was identified as an important factor in maintaining a good work life balance. It was noted that females were often reluctant to delegate and that this may be a factor contributing to their poor work life balance.
- Little evidence was found to suggest that senior staff lead by example in terms of promoting an appropriate work life balance within their organisations.
- A general view was expressed by interviewees, both males and female, that work life balance deteriorates as a result of progression to senior levels. This view was expressed irrespective of which part of the public sector interviewees were employed in.

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6.6 Theme Five: Opportunities for Advancement, Recruitment and Progression

Theme five explores the similarities and differences in how males and females across the Northern Ireland public sector approach opportunities for advancement. In addition, theme five also examines how males and females interact with recruitment, selection, career development and progression processes. In particular, this theme examines:

- Training and education;
- Mentoring;
- Secondments, acting up opportunities and challenging/visible assignments;
- Performance appraisals and succession planning;
- Limitations in development opportunities;
- Recruitment and selection;
- Competency based interviews and assessment centres;
- Opting out of career progression; and
- Personal attributes viewed as important to career progression.

6.6.1 Training and Education

A number of examples of the importance of training and education to career progression were offered by male and female interviewees in all parts of the public sector. A typical example offered by a male interviewee in the Senior Civil Service, when asked about what was important to his career progression, was as follows:

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'I left school with O Levels so through my time in the Civil Service I went from a BTEC certificate through to a degree and postgraduate diploma, I think that helped significantly in my career' (Aspiring Executive, Male, Senior Civil Service).

Similar views were also apparent in Local Government. For example, one female interviewee identified that it was not just her academic education, but also specific management training that had been important to her career progression.

'They [i.e. academic qualifications] were [important to career progression], they were. But also the Diploma in Company Direction. I think moving up in management is not just about academic ability, but that helps. But also being trained in leadership and management skills' (Current Executive, Female, Local Government).

Again, interviewees in an NDPB also expressed the view that training and education have been very important to their career development:

'In terms of career development, the one thing which effectively changed my career was doing an MSc' (Current Executive, Male, NDPB).

The above illustrates how important training and education is viewed with respect to achieving career progression. In common with other parts of the public sector, these views were also expressed by males and females in the Health sector. A good example offered by a female interviewee was as follows:

'I was very fortunate that I had opportunities to undertake my degree while I was working in the [Health] service, and although that was a struggle with a young family, it was certainly a huge opportunity. I think the other aspect of personal development was the opportunity to go on the top leaders programme in the Kings Fund. ... and that was not so much a sort of an educational or skills development thing, it was a sort of a personal development thing in terms of understanding, you know your influencing skills, and all of those sort of soft abilities. So certainly I think that the opportunities that the Health Service was able to give female staff during that period was very significant for myself' (Current Executive, Female, Health).

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Overall, it was very clear from the interviewees that for most senior managers their training and education is a very important factor in career development and progression. While not all interviewees had achieved a higher education qualification, the overwhelming majority had achieved at least an undergraduate degree and many had also obtained a Masters' degree. Interviewees also generally highlighted that investment in staff training and education is a key element of providing opportunities for advancement. This perception was held by both males and females across the public sector. Furthermore, there did not appear to be much in the way of differences in the views expressed by those working in the Civil/Senior Civil Service, Local Government, NDPB, Health, or Education sectors.

There was one particular area where there were distinct differences between male and female approaches to training and education, namely some females avail of both mixed and single gendered (or female only) training. While male interviewees generally perceived that female only training did not affect them, female interviews across the public sector generally expressed support for the principle of female only training (largely offered by the Chief Executives' Forum Women's Leadership Programme) as a means of proactively assisting them in career development and progression. For example, the following interviewees from the Health sector were particularly favourable towards female only training:

'... my experience of the Women's Leadership Programme is that they were able to create an environment whereby women could talk freely about the issues they face and you could argue about the legitimacy of some of them, people should feel free to be critical about some of the issues that women might feel stand in their way. But certainly I found that very quickly it became an environment where women could be very honest about the issues they're facing and also then trying to look at ways of dealing with those issues. And particularly within the context of advancing in the workplace. So I mean it's not a whinging kind of environment, and my

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experience of the Women's Leadership Programme that kind of whinging certainly wouldn't be tolerated. There's no point in that, but it's looking at these issues and working out strategies for dealing with them' (Current Executive, Female, Health).

'[What would you see the role of a female only training being?] Well I just think you know, maybe trying to help females understand. To help understand how to maybe either behave or perform better in a world that is dominated by men. Where you are not seen to be the hysterical, emotional female, which is you know, I try not to be but I do know that I am a very passionate person, and if I feel very strongly about something then you know I'll maybe say that in a way that maybe is not the best way for people to hear' (Aspiring Executive, Female, Health).

While generally positive comments were provided with respect to female only training, a few interviewees expressed their reservations that it did not appeal to them or that it may be perceived inappropriately. For example, one interviewee from the Health sector expressed her concerns as follows:

'I've never applied to go on the [Chief Executives' Forum] Women's Leadership course, because it doesn't appeal to me. I actually have a bit of an issue with it in terms of why would women be different? Maybe that sounds a wee bit hard, I don't know. I just feel that mentoring or executive coaching is more powerful for women. To understand what drives you, what are your crumple zones, is really powerful I think, because then when you know it, you can control it. Just to have the opportunity to have a safe conversation is more important for women, because we internalise stuff and men generally externalise stuff, 'it's somebody else's fault that didn't go right', whereas we all say, 'well what could I have done better' (Current Executive, Female, Health).

This view was also supported by another female interviewee in Health who had attended the female only training offered by the Chief Executive's Forum:

'I found a lot of very confrontational females [on the Women in Leadership course] and the people that came to speak to us were what I would call, ball busters. And it was 'you go in and you stand up like a man and you wear a red suit because it's a power suit'. Whereas I think it's more about giving value to the things that women make a better job of than men, rather than trying to make us behave [like men] so we can go in to a board room

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and shout and be rude and intimidating and that will somehow make you successful' (Aspiring Executive, Female, Health).

This view was not confined to the Health sector with one interviewee working in the Education sector offering a similar view:

'I don't like that idea of training for females only anyway, I think it highlights people in a gender specific basis rather than an ability basis or a need basis or a training need basis. I don't think it's appropriate' (Aspiring Executive, Female, Education).

The above comments provide evidence of mixed views regarding the importance of female only training with some females supportive of the principle and others opposed. Despite this, there was widespread acknowledgement of the importance of training and education to career development and progression. Similarly, there was also a general perception that the quantity and quality of training had reduced within organisations in recent years right across the public sector and that this has affected both males and females seeking to develop their careers.

6.6.2 Mentoring

There was a real sense from many interviewees that mentoring from more senior colleagues had been very important in their career development and progression. While this view was common among both male and female interviewees, there was definitely a general sense that female interviewees valued the mentoring they had received more highly than male interviewees. For example, one female interviewee had received informal mentoring from a more senior male colleague:

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'Yes I did, I've been lucky through my career, I've had a couple of line managers as I have gone along who have been people that I've respected very highly and who have actually given me time and I suppose mentored me in a very unofficial way. They've all been male, but that's just been the nature of the organisation itself' (Current Executive, Female, Senior Civil Service).

The above comment was quite typical of female interviewees who had received informal mentoring and went on to progress to a senior role. Interestingly, in sectors other than the Civil / Senior Civil Service, mentoring is often pursued with someone outside the individual's organisation. This was explained by one female interviewee in Local Government as follows:

'Council staff would I suppose volunteer, they would indicate an interest in mentoring and through the Women in Local Councils programme there would have been a sort of a programme of matching, you know, one officer with a more senior woman in order to, or it's been done, you know, externally as well as a female Council officer and somebody from an external trainer or consultant who's able to help them with mentoring issues and preparing for interviews and that kind of thing' (Aspiring Executive, Female, Local Government).

In the Health sector, the notion of collaboration in terms of providing access to formal mentoring is already in place. In this regard, two health organisations involved in stage three of the research are involved in a shared cross-border network which facilitates the delivery of a formal mentoring programme⁵³. This programme was viewed very positively and represents an example of best practice. For example, one male interviewee who had been on the scheme spoke about its usefulness as follows:

'Yes, it [i.e. the formal mentoring programme] was an opportunity that was given and it's been given on a couple of occasions where you could spend time with a mentor and you got a few sessions of an hour or so each.... I filled in some sort of questionnaire [for matching purposes] and depending [on] who was available they slotted me with somebody. ... I think again it

⁵³ While individuals within the two Health organisations referred to the programme as providing 'formal mentoring', technically the programme constitutes a coaching programme.

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[i.e. the formal mentoring programme] was fairly useful as a stepping outside of your normal day to day activity, thinking about how you manage, it was probably more around how I manage and the kinds of people that I'm working with and how I need to work with them' (Aspiring Executive, Male, Health).

The above positive view was reiterated by a female interviewee who had also participated in the Cross Border programme. This particular interviewee highlighted the specific benefits for females as follows:

'[what we] have is a mentoring network, and certainly I know that most of the mentors that we would have in the organisation would be female. And we have recently done a programme with a Cross Border Organisation that I'm part of, and they trained a number of our staff in formal mentoring. So again to me that, if we just touch back on that confidence thing, sometimes it is helpful and I have had the privilege of executive coaching and it is enormously helpful I think for someone to go into a safe space and say 'I am thinking about this job, or I am ready for a change'. And I would mentor women on the Women in Leadership Programme, so I am one of the mentors for it as well ... it really is that safe space, to maybe explore you know, what you really feel about your career, and where you are at this point in it, and what those sort of drivers are for you personally' (Current Executive, Female, Health).

In addition to the shared cross-border network which provides access to mentoring, the above organisation has also developed an internal mentoring capability which predominantly comprises senior females. For example:

'...we have a critical mass of females now in senior roles, you now [who are] excellent mentors....' (Aspiring Executive, Female, Health).

The comments above highlight just how positively the formal mentoring programme is viewed, particularly for female interviewees in terms of providing a space in which to have conversations around career development and progression.

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While there are some very good examples of mentoring in the public sector, a number of interviewees indicated they had never been offered access to a formal mentoring programme within their organisation and they felt this was something that was lacking.

'I've never been offered formal mentoring. Now that is one area that I think is lacking, also the fact that when I became a Grade 7 there was no induction' (Aspiring Executive, Female, Civil Service).

This female interviewee was not atypical. Indeed a number of interviewees expressed a desire to avail of a more formal mentoring arrangement. Whilst some interviewees had not been able to gain access to any formal mentoring, due mainly to their position, other interviewees indicated problems with the mentoring relationship they had availed of within their organisation: difficulties in terms of being matched with an unsuitable mentor, ineffectual mentoring relationships, and uncertainty about their ability to request an alternative mentor. For example:

'I don't know how they pick them [the mentors] ... How do they match you? [the mentor and the mentee]. I have [been assigned a mentor]. [Has it been successful?] That's why I'm asking how were they matched, because he's so totally [in] a different type of work than me. He's an IT specialist. I actually need somebody who has been through the pain that I'm going through, whereas IT is very different, it's very straight down the line, you either do this or you do that. [Is there any recourse, can you come back and say well, this isn't working, give me a different one?] Yes I can. I've had the first conversation with him and I've said look, I'll have a chat with you again about March time, we'll see how things go and then after that I think I'll just maybe go back to Corporate HR and say it's not working ... I'm not even sure if I would want somebody else at this point. What I have done is gone and put my name down for the Women's Leadership Programme' (Current Executive, Female, Senior Civil Service).

The above comment highlights a particularly negative experience of the formal mentoring process. It would appear that this particular interviewee has been put off

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formal mentoring due to the unsuitability of the person with whom they had been matched. This represents a particular challenge in the formal mentoring process and a key issue on which the success of formal mentoring relies, particularly for aspiring females.

6.6.3 Secondments, Acting Up Opportunities and Challenging/Visible Assignments

There was widespread agreement among male and female interviewees across the different parts of the public sector that undertaking secondments, acting up opportunities, and challenging/visible assignments were beneficial for career development and progression. For example:

'[Now, you said that there's a flatter structure there so there's less opportunities for acting up but getting the good jobs is a way of raising your profile, is it?] .. Oh yes, absolutely, you need to have the high profile work to have any chance of promotion' (Aspiring Executive, Female, Civil Service).

This view was shared by many other interviewees, with one male interviewee in the Senior Civil Service stating the following with respect to acting up opportunities:

'They're [acting up opportunities] an excellent opportunity to develop your competency in holding the post and give you the experience. It also gives you examples for the competency based interviews to say 'yes, I can do this job and I've already displayed the competencies' (Aspiring Executive, Male, Senior Civil Service).

While most interviewees felt that undertaking a secondment, acting up opportunity, or a challenging/visible assignment is hugely helpful for career development and progression, some interviewees (particularly female interviewees) felt that the

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allocation of these opportunities was not always undertaken in a competitive and transparent manner. For example, one female interviewee referred to a recent acting up opportunity within the Senior Civil Service. This interviewee perceived that the appointment to the acting up opportunity had not been wholly transparent and competitive, and that the position had been earmarked for a preferred candidate:

'Well I mean that is a particular case which I would have thought was a situation that might have prevailed like years ago, where people, hands were put on people and they were moved around. So you get the impression there's quite a male dominated top tier, well they're completely like, you know, a significant male dominated top tier who have been earmarked and moving around... Well, I don't think it [i.e. the allocation of the acting up opportunity] is transparent. ... There was no competition, no expressions of interest. ... I mean this [i.e. the result] came as a complete surprise to us' (Current Executive, Female, Senior Civil Service).

A similar view to the one above was shared by another female interviewee who openly talked about 'golden boys' and the perception that she did not stand a chance of getting a particular acting up opportunity:

'I said at the outset four golden boys. I was never getting that post...'
(Current Executive, Female, Senior Civil Service).

These were not particularly widespread views overall, but those interviewees who did share these views were quite open and vocal in sharing their perception that people are sometimes earmarked for opportunities and this gives them an advantage when it comes to promotion processes.

6.6.4 Performance Appraisals and Succession Planning

In terms of performance appraisal, the majority view that it was a relatively passive process was expressed by both male and female interviewees throughout the public sector. For example:

'It [i.e. the performance appraisal process] is dead ... At one point, and again, given my role and my role in learning and development, I was an absolute advocate of performance management and all that involved, not to point a finger in too much one direction, the advent of [an online system] killed performance management stone dead. ... Performance management has become a bureaucratic, systematic, technological process which is a distraction to a professional relationship between two people whereby you simply agree what's required, review progress and get feedback' (Aspiring Executive, Male, Civil Service).

This view was echoed by another interviewee who described his experience of the performance appraisal process as follows:

'When it takes place it's farcical. [When does it take place?] Rarely. ... It's supposed to be [an annual process] but most of the time it happens by way of ... I think the last one that I had lasted about 15 seconds where my line manager said to me, you've done very well, I have nothing to say, have you any questions' (Aspiring Executive, Male, Civil Service).

The above comment reinforces the negative aspects of the previous one. In this case, the interviewee is suggesting that the performance appraisal process has been reduced to the point where there is little or no discussion taking place between employees and their line managers. This example highlights what is considered to be a very passive process with little interaction or discussion around career development or progression. This view is not peculiar to either male or female interviewees, although was more prevalent in the Civil / Senior Civil Service compared to other parts of the public sector.

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While there was a clearer view that the performance appraisal process within many organisations had become passive, some positive elements were identified by female interviewees in terms of mid-year reviews and personal development plans.

For example:

'The appraisal process itself doesn't really lend anything to career development and the automation of it now ... makes it easy for all of us to be quite lazy in terms of when we fill in appraisal forms what we say and how much value we add to the process. Now the appraisal process in terms of midyear reviews and personal development plans still happen and you would still encourage people and you would talk about ... any training issues, any career development issues, and some people I would maybe talk with have been in that post long enough and I've moved a few people about for career development purposes, but the other side of it now is that the opportunities to say get a transfer, or if an opportunity coming up from another area and so on, it is much more rigid now. It is much more inflexible because of the processes that underpin it' (Current Executive, Female, Senior Civil Service).

The above comment indicates that there are potentially still positive elements to performance appraisal even in parts of the public sector where there is not a particularly positive view of the process overall.

In terms of succession planning, interviewees, both males and females across the public sector (with the exception of the Health sector), generally suggested that there was very little succession planning conducted at either an organisational or sectoral level. For example, one interviewee when discussing succession planning and talent management described it in the following way:

'We have struggled in the Civil Service on talent management because we don't know what it is. ... But it is, at its loosest, talent management or succession planning or personal development or whatever you want to call it, I think we're a bit haphazard at it, we talk a good fight but I don't think we fight a good fight' (Current Executive, Male, Senior Civil Service).

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Similar views were expressed in other parts of the public sector, including Education and Local Government.

An exception to these views was found in one Health organisation where there is proactive succession planning initiative in place. The initiative was developed out of an awareness within the organisation that there was an issue in terms of individuals seeking to progress to senior levels and having the confidence to do so. The initiative, which is open to both males and females, is largely led from the top of the organisation with senior directors actively participating and bringing to bear their experience as executives. The individuals on the programme learn by doing and as a result develop a range of competencies. As part of the succession planning initiative, all participants are also offered the opportunity to be paired with a mentor.

The initiative was explained by a number of interviewees as follows:

'The whole succession planning and growing your own talent. So we have put in situ succession planning targeted at our Senior Management level' (Aspiring Executive, Female, Health).

'We would have leadership programmes and succession planning, ...and those sessions are set up at the senior management team level and human resources at the [name of external organisation] ... that gives it a wee bit of independence, and everyone from [junior management] and up is invited to attend succession planning, so it's not targeted at any individual or at any group of individuals and we all get the opportunity to attend that and do different workshop scenario. ... So I think we're very good at giving everybody an opportunity to move forward So, I know others [i.e. Health organisations] might have different types of leadership programmes that they do and other things like that, but ours tends to be this succession plan is the key focus and it has ran for probably the last three years, because I attended the first year of it and it puts you in a really good frame of mind for interviews and you get personal feedback from ... you also get feedback from a peer that you've worked within your group.... [Did the succession planning help you in terms of your own career progression?] I think it definitely did' (Aspiring Executive, Female, Health).

'It's a very proactive succession planning programme. ... we have senior management succession programmes and I would attend each of those

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programmes at the end when people are doing feedback on their projects, and certainly that's been very successful. I think we've sent practically all of our senior managers through that programme, and what that does is a wee bit like what the top management programme did for me, which is to explore your skills as a senior manager, develop your competencies, your skills, your soft skills; and certainly the feedback from that is that is has been incredibly helpful. ... So on the internal succession planning programme, those people are now available as mentors to the staff who go through that programme' (Current Executive, Female, Health).

While the above comments are indicative of a successful succession planning initiative at the organisational level within the Health sector, another interviewee suggested that there is little in the way of discussion which takes place around succession planning at the sectoral level:

'Would we talk about succession planning [at the sectoral level]? Not really...' (Current Executive, Female, Health).

The above comments would suggest that succession planning at a sectoral level with the N.I. public sector is at an early stage of development. In addition, succession planning at an organisational level also appears to be in its infancy with the possible exception of some organisations in the Health sector.

6.6.5 Limitations in Development Opportunities

There was a perception among both male and female interviewees across most of the public sector, although not quite as prevalent in Health and Education, that there were decreasing levels of development opportunities available. This was noted regardless of whether interviewees were discussing training, education, secondments or acting up opportunities. Furthermore, decreasing opportunities

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were primarily attributed to a lack of resources and current budgetary constraints on the public sector. For example:

[Do you think there is anything else your organisation could do in terms of development opportunities?] 'I think development opportunities, if we had more money and it was definitely there ... I mean, there is problem at the minute, we just cannot afford it' (Aspiring Executive, Female, Health).

While there was a perception that opportunities were limited due to for example budgetary constraints, some interviewees did indicate that there are still some opportunities for development and that it is the responsibility of individuals themselves to actively seek these. For example, one male interviewee in Health made the following comment:

[Do you think at the moment there are sufficient leadership and development for individuals who want to progress?] 'Yes I think it's a good organisation to work for in that respect, but you do have to seek out the opportunities. No-one is going to come and spoon feed you' (Aspiring Executive, Male, Health).

This was not a particularly uncommon view with a number of interviewees suggesting that opportunities for advancement had to be identified by the individual themselves. Again, this view was not restricted to either male or female interviewees, nor confined to one part of the public sector.

6.6.6 Recruitment and Selection

Generally, it was not possible to detect any differences between the views held by male and female interviewees with respect to issues around recruitment and selection processes. For example, with respect to the application of the merit

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principle, there was very broad agreement among male and female interviewees from across the public sector that recruitment and selection should operate on the basis of this principle so that the best candidate gets the job. Therefore, at a philosophical level, most interviewees accepted the merit principle. In terms of the merit principle, a typical comment from interviewees on their view of this was as follows:

'Yes, absolutely [I am in favour of the merit principle]. I don't think discrimination to redress a previous discrimination would, you know, I think if you're looking at, you know we've been talking about any obstacles that perhaps are there to the recruitment in the first place and to redress those pool issues' (Current Executive, Male, Senior Civil Service).

The above view was typical of others right across the public sector. However, some concern was expressed, by both male and female interviewees, that there are flaws in recruitment and promotion processes. Both male and female interviewees expressed the view that the best candidate does not necessarily get the job and it is in fact those who are best at completing the application process and conducting themselves at interview who get the job, regardless of their actual experiences or qualities. For example, one male interviewee in health bemoaned the fact that it had become all about the process and not the outcome:

'I think sometimes the only thing about our recruitment process is we get obsessed about the process and not about the product' (Current Executive, Male, Health).

While interviewees in general felt that the merit principle was the best approach against which to judge and appoint candidates, there was some concern that on

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occasions the process, and those involved in it, meant that the merit principle was not always applied to best effect.

6.6.7 Competency Based Interviews and Assessment Centres

Concerns were expressed by interviewees in relation to competency based interviews. Perhaps most importantly in the context of this research, a number of female interviewees felt that competency based interviews were in general a disadvantage for them. For example, one female interviewee in the Civil Service when asked her thoughts on competency based interviews made the following comment:

'The competence based interviews definitely favour people with self-confidence, people with the ability to focus on themselves and their achievements. They don't encourage a corporate view, because you have got to say 'I did this, I achieved that, I delivered that'. So they therefore favour people you who view the world like that, whereas I know people who just can't stop saying 'we did this, my team did that'. I do think women do have more difficulty in saying 'I do this, I do that' or at least women of my generation do. I suspect women coming up through the system now aren't so inhibited and might well say to you, 'heck no I am happy enough, I will tell anybody how good I am'' (Aspiring Executive, Female, Civil Service).

The vast majority of females interviewees supported the ethos of the above comment, stating that competency based interviews were more beneficial to males, when compared to their female counterparts.

A number of interviewees perceived assessment centres as being more effective in terms of obtaining the right or best person for the job when compared to competency based interviews. Some interviewees went even further and suggested that not only are assessment centres better at identifying the right person for the job, but they also

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provide a better environment for women in which they can compete against others for positions they may not have done if the process did not include an assessment centre. For example, one female interviewee in the Senior Civil Service gave the following response when asked what she thought about assessment centres:

'I actually think the assessment centres are very good, because I actually think females don't sell themselves. I mean we work on the basis of competence based interviews. A competence based interview is about selling yourself, the great 'I am' and I actually think females, particularly in Northern Ireland, are not good at that. We are team people' (Current Executive, Female, Senior Civil Service).

Interviewees' comments generally suggested that assessment centres provide a better environment for female candidates to display their skills, abilities and competences compared to a competency based interview which was felt to favour males as they are generally perceived to be better at selling themselves. These views were not necessarily confined to female interviewees. Indeed, a number of male interviewees also expressed the view that assessment centres offered an approach which did not favour one gender over another.

6.6.8 Opting Out of Career Progression

During stage two of the research project, opting out of career progression was identified as an important issue with large numbers of respondents either temporarily or permanently opting out. Given the importance of this issue, it was further investigated during stage three in the context of career progression. The overall responses of interviewees tend to suggest that females are more likely to opt out of career progression when compared to their male counterparts. Additionally,

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consistent with stage two findings, females were more likely than males to opt out of career progression due to caring responsibilities. For example;

'I think there are a lot of females who have decided that because of their domestic responsibilities that they can't even avail of the grade five opportunity, they're not even prepared to risk that' (Aspiring Executive, Female, Civil Service).

'I have not been in that position, but I know many women within the civil service and elsewhere who have made compromises on their ambitions or what they do in work in order to have a better work-life balance and in particular in order to have more time with children, and it would be one of the prime comments that I hear when women don't go up on boards' (Current Executive, Female, NDPB).

'I would actually, yes, [go for promotion] if I didn't have a [age] year old [parent]. I am realistic enough to know that [he/she] is not going to be around forever. I do want to try to spend some time with [him/her]. At the minute I can juggle a fair bit because I've got [number of children] at university and [number] finished and [number] still at school, and they're pretty much managing themselves, so I have time then to spend with my [parent]. I think at a Grade [number] level that would be different, I think I would be on call much more' (Current Executive, Female, Senior Civil Service).

Caring responsibilities were generally felt to be the most important reason for females opting out of career progression. However, there were a number of other reasons given for opting out which were much more prevalent for female interviewees when compared to male interviewees. These include the decisions to opt out due to the demands of more senior posts. For example:

'In Health and Social Care, there is a relentless, relentless culture of high performance and nothing must go wrong, and if anything goes wrong it's a scandal. So there's lot of pressure and you'll find some people holding back, both genders actually holding back from the top posts, because they would be thinking, 'do I really want to leave myself exposed to this amount of public accountability and barracking'. And I do get concerned about the succession planning for our organisation in terms of who will actually put their heads above the parapet' (Current Executive, Female, Health).

'You are at the beck and call of all of those politicians up the hill, a very demanding minister, getting kicked around the assembly committee, PAC [Public Accounts Committee], you name it, and why would you, for £60,000 a year or whatever it is that the grade 5 gets you now...and people think that there is a lot of stress, hassle, grief' (Current Executive, Female, Senior Civil Service).

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'Just the complexity of the job and the demands. It is a highly demanding job and on a personal level in terms of what that would require, it's something I wouldn't be willing to give...So the constant presence, which is what is required of you understandably as a Chief Executive. It doesn't matter what day of the week it is, it doesn't matter what hour of the day it is. If you have 40 councillors and there's a call from any one of them, you can't switch your phone off. And those demands are very real and I fully recognise that and see it as something that just wouldn't be for me' (Current Executive, Female, Local Government).

The above views were common across all parts of the public sector, and while affecting both males and females, the view was expressed more frequently by females.

In a similar vein, a larger number of females, when compared to males, indicated they were opting out of career progressions due to an inhospitable organisational environment. For example:

'Some people would have said to me, a Director post, if I got a million pounds I wouldn't want it sort of thing.....I suppose you have to deal with a lot of things that are unpleasant to deal with. Things like HR issues....you've also got the Councillors making heavy demands on your time and you have to balance what they're asking you to do. Because you could have one Councillor saying 'I want this' and another Councillor wants something different. So that trying to keep them feeling that you've dealt with them properly. But in [name of council] there have been a lot of HR issues, grievances, disciplinarians, harassment...But at the Director level you're kind of left with all the tough nuts that nobody else has been able to crack' (Aspiring Executive, Female, Local Government).

In contrast with female interviewees, male interviewees were more likely to cite the decision to retire as a reason for opting out of further career progression:

'I will be 57 within the next month, I will have 38 years of service, the pensions are changing...[Getting out] would be my aspiration. Now, that's not to say I expect to be spending my time playing golf, walking the dog and gardening, because I will try and do something else. But really, this is a hugely political organisation in every sense

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and...I'm not sure that I could be bothered with the continuing politics around it' (Current Executive, Male, NDPB).

6.6.9 Personal Attributes Viewed as Important to Career Progression

Interviewees were asked what they perceived to be the most important attributes for career progression. During interviews it was clear that two attributes in particular were perceived as very important to career progression, namely resilience and confidence.

6.6.9.1 Confidence

The majority of female interviewees recognised the importance of confidence as an attribute which would enable them to progress to senior levels. This view was largely held right across the public sector and irrespective of whether or not the interviewee was an aspiring or current executive. For example typical comments from female interviewees within the Senior Civil Service in this regard were as follows:

'Absolutely, [confidence is an essential attribute] at senior level, yes' (Current Executive, Female, Senior Civil Service).

'For women to go into that kind of maybe intimidating [male dominated] environment they'd have to be very resilient and confident, and I think that confidence is a key thing. Confidence in knowing that you would be taken seriously within that senior group and indeed with the people that you work for, and people who are working to you, it is confidence in all of those levels' (Current Executive, Female, Senior Civil Service).

Similar comments were also provided by interviewees from the other sectors. For example:

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'I think you need confidence ... first and foremost you need to have self-awareness so that you know your strengths and your blind spots. And then I think you need a willingness to grow and develop. And then I think you need a commitment to work hard and not try and take shortcuts. Because I think, you know, you become exposed if you haven't put the work in and you maybe progressed at a high pace without investing in those three things. I think confidence grows with all of those things because you know exactly what it is about yourself, you can bring to something or somebody and you know your own limitations' (Current Executive, Female, Local Government).

'... that's one of the big issues [for females in our organisation], confidence, belief, self, you know, self-belief. It's certainly not ability, you know, let's put it like that' (Aspiring Executive, Female, Local Government).

A number of male interviewees across all parts of the N.I. public sector also recognised the importance of confidence as a personal attribute to career progression for females in particular. For example:

'I know that one or two of them [i.e. females that put themselves forward for progression] needed a little nudge and confidence would have been an issue there' (Current Executive, Male, Senior Civil Service).

'It [i.e. confidence] probably applies more to women than men but as I say, I couldn't, I'm relying on anecdote and perception, I don't have anything in particular to back that up' (Current Executive, Male, Senior Civil Service).

'Well, do they [i.e. females] lack confidence? Not all of them now. I think, my sense of it is probably more fundamental than that. I think they're more questioning about their own ability. And would, you know, have a tendency to post mortem decisions they take in the context of their own ability, rather than saying 'well, I've done that, now I'll move on' (Current Executive, Male, Local Government).

The issue of confidence levels was also raised in a number of other contexts. For example, the following quotation recognises differences between males and females in terms of their level of confidence during promotion interviews:

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'Definitely [there is a difference between confidence levels for males and females]. I think there is a real confidence issue and I think it's more because of the fact they [i.e. females] feel they have too many things [e.g. caring responsibilities] being juggled at the same time. ... I've sat on boards ... as a panel member and it's very obvious when you sit as a panel member the difference between males and females coming to sit opposite you. Females tend to be very nervous. They tend to be much more nervous in front of you than males ... and I don't know how you build that self-confidence in females and maybe men are more naturally confident ... In front of our panels the females tended to be really nervous compared to the males' (Current Executive, Female, Senior Civil Service).

Additionally, some interviewees suggested that females have a higher level of self-doubt than their male counterparts and that females are more likely to admit to having a lack of confidence:

'I think women, probably have a higher level of self-doubt [than men] which may link to all the other commitments that they have and have to juggle and deal with. So they have to nearly think through all those things before they can imagine say being in a particular [senior] position. And I'm not sure men would have that same challenge, so they wouldn't demonstrate those doubts. Some women manage them to overcome them and others stay stuck' (Current Executive, Female, Local Government).

'I think females admit it [i.e. lack of confidence] more than men. I don't know necessarily that we face it more, I think we recognise it more, we're more self-aware, we're emotionally intelligent sometimes' (Aspiring Executive, Female, NDPB).

Interviewees suggested that confidence may manifest itself in a number of ways. For example, a number of interviewees suggested that males generally have a greater level of confidence and as a result are more likely to put themselves forward for promotion even where they do not meet all of the criteria.

'I think that men don't self-analyse as much as women and they would be prepared to put themselves forward without thinking am I capable of doing this job, I mean I would think am I capable of doing this job and then I'd go for it. I think a man would go for it whether they thought they were capable or not or wouldn't even think about the capability whereas I think that's pretty true, that a woman will only go for it if she thinks she's capable' (Current Executive, Female, Senior Civil Service).

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'I know an awful lot of females who would make excellent SCSs [Senior Civil Servants] and they will not, simply because they don't have the confidence to go for it' (Current Executive, Female, Senior Civil Service).

'I think that's the difference between men and women ... We like to gain a bit of confidence before we put ourselves forward and then by all means go forward, whereas I think men sometimes think well, if the opportunity comes along to apply for it we'll just apply anyway' (Current Executive, Female, Senior Civil Service).

6.6.9.2 Resilience

An additional attribute which was viewed as essential to career progression was that of resilience. Interviewees right across the N.I. public sector recognised this as an important attribute. For example, within the Civil/Senior Civil Service, a number of interviewees recognised the need for resilience when dealing with difficult decisions.

For example:

'You would have to be a very robust and resilient and emotionally strong person' (Current Executive, Female, Senior Civil Service).

'You need internal resilience. The ability to take the setbacks, keep at the thing despite all the signals. You need to avoid becoming jaded and cynical, can't do rather than can do. A lot of the time civil servants get the implicit message, 'look conform, it's easier' (Current Executive, Male, Senior Civil Service).

'I think resilience.....you get battered around a lot, you take a lot of batterings and you've got to let it... and maybe the two are the same thing, two sides of the same coin, you let it wash over you and off you and you dust yourself up and you go on again because if you took it to heart, the batterings that you get, you would be crushed and you would have crawled away a long time ago and said "I do not want this"' (Current Executive, Male, Senior Civil Service).

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Within the Health sector, a number of interviewees also recognised the importance of developing resilience. Again, females tended to discuss this attribute in a more personal context than males. For example:

'You need to have personal resilience and the ability to say 'actually I'm not working anymore, I'm doing something else'' (Current Executive, Male, Health).

'Resilience is absolutely essential [because of the way you are treated]' (Current Executive, Female, Health).

'You need resilience, which is back to what I was talking about earlier on in the sense of being able to leave things behind me. I'm the type of character if somebody upsets me, I'll tell them that they've upset me. I won't not say it and then go away and fester about it. I think that resilience is about self-confidence, is about realising that you yourself have limitations that you can't do everything, and about being able to say 'no' as well as 'yes'.....I can understand where people's resilience can be impacted, because they just really find it very, very difficult to get through the work. So therefore I think that from, I'm beginning to think about this, a gender issue, if you're not able to do those hours outside of work because you've got other responsibilities at home, this can have an impact on your resilience' (Aspiring Executive, Male, Health).

Within the Education sector, females were more likely to suggest that resilience was an important attribute to their career progression. Examples of comments within this sector were as follows:

'Personally resilient. I don't mean tough as in the way you treat people, I mean you have to take the brickbats that come your way and just shrug them off' (Aspiring Executive, Female, Education).

'I mean one of the things that have come up a lot in these sorts of senior roles is emotional resilience and support, and I think men manage things differently... Women are perhaps well more emotional and therefore how they handle it is quite difficult. I think one of the things that I've always thought is sometimes women think that to do these roles you have to be male, you have therefore to behave like a male and you have to not show your emotion or whatever it is males do. And actually I've never thought that' (Current Executive, Female, Education).

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'If you look at it in terms of Northern Ireland, this is more of a glass ball, a goldfish bowl. Being you know head of public sector body here is much more in the public light than it would be elsewhere. So you have to have that resilience here' (Current Executive, Male, Education).

Similar views were also expressed by interviewees within the Local Government sector. Within this sector, the issue of resilience was identified as important by both males and females as follows:

'Well, I would say the resilience is thick-skinned, thick-skinned/resilient. You absolutely have to be resilient, not just necessarily in relation to dealings with Elected Members, but I have 275 staff and, you know what, not everybody's nice. Some people are difficult and part of my role is to make sure that either I deal with them or I get somebody to deal [with it]' (Current Executive, Male, Local Government).

'I think you have to be strong, there's no doubt about it, and not everybody is equipped for....I mean the stuff that I've experienced the last couple of years here, I think would have put a number of people on their backs, because it was... And for me, whilst I haven't collapsed, I've chosen to get out of it because I know the toll it has taken on me...I mean and everybody's got complications in their family, whether they're caring for elderly parents or whatever, you know, and it's very difficult when you're in that sort of situation where you don't have someone who is just making it all happen for you, where you're going to bring yourself out' (Current Executive, Female, Local Government).

'Ok, I think you need to be, I'd say resilient comes top of my listbecause at this level there are lots of highs and there are lots of lows. So you need to be able to deal with the knocks because it is...there's pressure and there are lots of decisions to be made. So you need to be good at making decisions and processing information to get to make those decisions. I think you need to be quite firm' (Aspiring Executive, Female, Local Government).

Finally, within the NDPB sector, resilience was also recognised as an important attribute by both male and female interviewees.

'I think you have to be very resilient because things won't always go well and you will have to deal with some very challenging circumstances so I think you have to be resilient' (Current Executive, Female, NDPB).

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'Because it strikes me that there's one thing that people absolutely need in contemporary working is resilience, because there are so many unrealisable, unrealistic demands and expectations that have to be managed and that these can be, I mean personalised in a way that people actually internalise them as if somehow they are deficient. And actually it's just a function of the situation that you're in and for some people that can have a very, very difficult effect. We had somebody who was our HR person and I thought gosh, as an HR person it feels like they had a kind of bit of a breakdown, but I think it was a wider mental health issue, I think, because they felt the union had been really, really getting at them. And no matter what we said, you know, it's not you, it's the organisation, you have to represent it, so some people don't have that resilience' (Current Executive, Female, NDPB).

'One is resilience, without a shadow of a doubt in terms of being able to deal with the range of pressures and issues' (Current Executive, Male, NDPB).

'I think resilience, stamina, yeah. Is an important part of it. Yeah you couldn't do it without stamina and being able to stick at it day in day out and. You know because a lot of it is, you know it's tough going at times' (Current Executive, Male, NDPB).

6.6.10 Five - Opportunities Summary of Findings:

Theme for Advancement, Recruitment and Progression

The key findings emerging from theme five are as follows:

- The majority of interviewees, both males and females, recognise the importance of training and education for career development and progression.
- Mentoring was viewed as important for career development and progression by both male and female interviewees, with female interviewees placing greater emphasis on this as a key factor in their career progression.
- There is variation in the provision of mentoring programmes across the public sector and some difficulties (e.g. matching mentees and mentors) with the mentoring process were identified.
- There was widespread agreement among male and female interviewees across the different parts of the public sector that undertaking secondments, acting up opportunities and challenging/visible assignments are beneficial for career development and progression.
- Some concerns were expressed by a number of interviewees with regards to the allocation of secondments, acting up opportunities and in particular challenging/visible assignments.
- The majority view of both male and female interviewees was that the performance appraisal (or annual appraisal) process within their organisation was increasingly passive and little more than a 'tick box exercise'. However, that said, some females did highlight positive aspects of performance appraisals (e.g. mid-year reviews and personal development plans).

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- There was a widespread view throughout much of the public sector (with the exception of some Health and Education organisations) that there was little in the way of succession planning.
- Males and females across the public sector (with the exception of Health and Education), generally perceived that there are fewer quality training and education opportunities available when compared to a few years ago. This was generally attributed to budgetary constraints.
- There was very broad agreement among male and female interviewees from across the public sector that recruitment and selection should operate on the merit principle so that the best candidate gets the job.
- Both male and female interviewees perceived recruitment and selection processes in the public sector as generally fair and transparent. In saying that, competency based interviews were perceived as favouring males who were generally viewed as better at 'selling themselves', while assessment centres were perceived as providing a more equitable environment for male and female candidates.
- Females were more likely to opt out of career progression due to issues such as caring responsibilities, the pressures associated with senior roles or an inhospitable work environment. Males were more likely to opt out of career progression due to imminent retirement.
- Confidence and resilience were viewed as particularly important personal attributes for career progression, with most interviewees suggesting that males displayed these attributes more often, and perhaps more naturally, than females.

6.7 Theme Six: Benefits of Gender Balanced Boards

Stage three of the research also aimed to understand interviewees' perceptions concerning the benefits of gender balanced boards in the Northern Ireland public sector. The majority of interviewees, irrespective of gender or which part of the public sector they are employed in, indicated that gender balanced boards are beneficial in the context of the Northern Ireland public sector as follows:

- Facilitating different perspectives or points of view;
- Changing or moderating behaviour;
- Incorporating softer skills into decision making;
- Representative of population served; and
- Facilitating more deliberate, collaborative and careful decision making.

6.7.1. Gender Balanced Boards: Facilitating Different Perspectives or Points of View

The majority of interviewees suggested that one of the benefits of gender balanced boards was that of facilitating different perspectives or points of view in terms of decision making. For example:

'... males and females have different perceptions of various things and I think by having that balance you get a very good balance of views' (Aspiring Executive, Male, Civil Service).

'Certainly I think that a mixture of different people, be it from gender or from different backgrounds or whatever is positive, because you get away from the old school, old boys' club and stuff of that nature; which is so

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important in that I think the more exposure you have to different viewpoints and different perspectives, the better, and the better decisions you get'. (Aspiring Executive, Male, Health).

'Where you have a Board that more sort of properly represents the diversity of a group, then you ensure you have a wider range of perspectives brought to any issue' (Current Executive, Male, Education).

'I think that if you have a gender balance on a board you will tend to find that the females on the board will ask the very simple, very direct questions that probably will relate mostly to people. And women will tend to bring a better balance to the discussion. And they will tend to get away from things like just the money or the performance to the impact on people, the impact on staff, the impact on the organisation, the impact on morale, the impact on how people feel they're being treated. I just think that women bring a different kind of a perspective and they tend to view things in a slightly different way, so that they tend to look at things which are about outcomes for people, for individuals' (Current Executive, Female, Health).

'I think a mixture is good at any level. Men and women do think differently. They think differently about how they would organise things, they think differently about how they would go about doing things. I think women are very good at translating the strategy into actual management and operational issues. I think they've got the edge on men on that one, and actually delivering the goods. Even at every level, course team level, management level, a balance is good' (Current Executive, Female, Education).

'Male and female managers do look at the world differently. I think female managers are generally more sympathetic to other employees for example. They probably can juggle more things at once than men can do. Whereas men, not always now, these are all generalities, sometimes men will just take a decision. Sometimes you need that and sometimes you don't' (Current Executive, Male, Local Government).

Two interviewees also suggested the implications of not having gender balanced boards within individual public sector organisations as follows:

'Not having that representativeness in a group I think means that you're starved of their viewpoints and their expertise and their challenge function and their alternative thinking and their alternative experiences and plus their alternative experiences of the culture of the organisation' (Current Executive, Male, NDPB).

'People bring an added benefit from their own perspective and their own experiences. And to exclude and not have that benefit and that experience

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from one section or another, means that the particular organisation is at a loss and is suffering as a result. So I think people do, because of their experience and because of their knowledge and ability, bring an added benefit to the collective. Without that added benefit, then the collective is so much weaker' (Current Executive, Male, Health).

6.7.2 Gender Balanced Boards: Changing or Moderating Behaviour

A number of interviewees also commented that gender balanced boards can be beneficial in terms of changing or moderating group behaviour. For example, interviewees suggested that a gender balanced board can play a role in terms of females moderating male behaviour and softening alpha male tendencies. Interestingly, the majority of these comments were provided by males as follows:

'Well I think if you get all men together in positions of power, depending on what they're like, you can get alpha males around the table and it's all about that kind of behaviour, whereas if there's women around as well it tends to soften some of that, balance it out a bit, but as I said it depends on the people really' (Current Executive, Male, Senior Civil Service).

'It is a more enjoyable experience with a wider gender mix around the table. I wouldn't particularly look forward to working with a single gender mix of either gender. They bring their own backgrounds and perspectives and, all things being equal, probably a broader range of perspectives. ... I think it's more about the general balance and feel of things, it feels more straight forward when there is that mix. I think in my experience here it is more likely that males will turn a relatively straight forward situation into an angry situation, and it is more likely that women will become quite emotional in those situations, so they moderate each other in a balanced board' (Current Executive, Male, Health).

'I think you get different perspectives. Within the ... some of the men would get very hot under the collar and it has been very useful for the women at times to say, 'now hold on a minute here, you need to see it this way, or maybe that's not really what they meant by that' and it has calmed it down and has just been super. ... At times women bring a more caring, softer approach to things, which in a male dominated environment isn't a bad thing. I think the decisions are more considered, because you get a broader perspective on it. They [women] aren't aggressive in the way some of the men could be, they haven't adopted those characteristics...They would be able to help us understand the impact of something, such as

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career break applications or promotion applications' (Aspiring Executive, Male, Education).

Another interviewee likened the benefits of a gender balanced board to the role of independent board members:

'It's a bit like independent board members, now we've had experience of women as independent board members, ...one of the many benefits of having independent board members is a slight difference in the behaviour of the other people in the room, and I think having women on a board has the same beneficial effect. It changes the group behaviour in the room, people are a bit more precise in what they're saying, a bit more careful in the attitudes they take, and that's a good thing. ... I think that you also get a more rounded set of views which is what you're looking for generally in boards. I mean, in principle the Departmental Board exists as an advisory body to the Permanent Secretary and you're looking for issues to be taken on as wide a spectrum of views as you can get and as comprehensively as you can, and it is beneficial having women in that consensus. You get a slightly different set of issues brought forward. I suppose a group of men in a room will behave differently from a mixed group, they will be slightly more relaxed, they will be tolerant of one another's jokes and so on, to the point where they risk re-enforcing a wrong attitude and in leadership you don't want that. In a mixed group they'll be a bit more careful and as I say, inhibited in a good way' (Current Executive, Male, Senior Civil Service).

6.7.3 Gender Balanced Boards: Incorporating Softer Skills into Decision Making

A number of interviewees also recognised that females draw on softer skills, (for example, empathy, emotional intelligence and self-awareness) in decision making situations within their organisations. This has the potential to provide different perspectives or alter the atmosphere in meetings. For example:

'There is some truth in the stereotypes that are often presented, which is there's a softer side where sometimes a female would look at something and a harder side to a male. I wouldn't overstate it, but there's some element of truth in it, and I think it just gives a different perspective. I think it does change the atmosphere positively. If you have a reasonable 50/50

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sort of thing, it encourages the gender from both sides to speak up. If you're eight to one or something like that, I could see how that would be difficult' (Current Executive, Male, Health).

'Well, I think women naturally maybe are more considerate sometimes of the feelings and the softer skills and implications than men. So I think it's good to have a balance of both. I'm just, you know, everybody brings something different to the table. I mean specifically what do women bring? I mean women again, and this is where I, you know, generic, you know, women tend to be quite diligent and quite good ethics, maybe more than men' (Current Executive, Female, NDPB).

'I think females bring a totally different skills set, now that's just my own view. I would believe that we have empathy and emotional intelligence, self-awareness and a lot of times [are] more diplomatic' (Aspiring Executive, Female, NDPB).

6.7.4 Gender Balanced Boards: Representative of Population Served

A number of interviewees from all sectors of the N.I. public sector recognised the important role a gender balanced board plays in terms of serving the community which it represents. This was particularly the case for the Local Government sector but was also mentioned in the context of the Civil Service. For example:

'It sends out a very strong message that a department is trying to be representative of the people we serve and trying to be more representative of the external audience, 50% women, 50% men.....Men and women approach things in different ways – i.e. men are more direct, women consider all of the issues more – neither is good on its own so a balance is needed' (Aspiring Executive, Female, Civil Service).

'It is about representing the community that you serve so how can a board of completely males understand what the issues are affecting women? ... I do think that there is difference between men and women and I think that those sort of traits on both sides to have both of it, I mean there's no way I'd be saying it should be all women either, it should be as mixed as it can be' (Current Executive, Female, Local Government).

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'No I think you need the mix, you know. I think you need a mix of gender to really get the balance that you want in terms of the ideas and the, you know, the [way], culturally, you need to be. And, particularly for a council who's relating to right across all of our citizens, if we're dominated one way or the other, how can you relate to everybody? You know you need that mix and that balance to get the right decisions' (Current Executive, Male, Local Government).

6.7.5 Gender Balanced Boards: More Deliberate, Collaborative and Careful Decision Making

Some interviewees also suggested that a gender balanced board is generally more deliberate, collaborative and careful in terms of their approach to decision making.

For example:

'The more representative that group [i.e. senior management] can be then probably the better job it's going to do ... [in terms of] bringing a diverse range of perspectives. So I think the more diverse it is then it feels better, it breeds more confidence but actually it will make better decisions' (Current Executive, Male, NDPB).

'A balanced board is more likely to say 'well look let's stop and think about this, I think so and so is making a valid point' rather than just blathering on with things as we might otherwise tend to do. It would also be, I suspect, a wee bit more deliberative, consultative and supportive' (Current Executive, Male, Senior Civil Service).

'I don't think it's peculiar to the public sector or anything, I think it's just culturally the way women operate and they will have a tendency to be more collaborative in their style and less confrontational. I think they're more pragmatic, I think they try to focus on solving the problem, rather than how they're going to look when they come out of it' (Aspiring Executive, Female, Health).

'I think women just bring a different, more open perspective, I find women easy, more open to listen to ideas and not ... being blinkered and come in with a fixed view, and we would still see that when we have a balanced board, but you can see some people who will come in and say "This is my point of view and I'm not moving" whereas the women are more open to discussion' (Current Executive, Female, NDPB).

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'I think if we had a more balanced board I don't think we'd make as many mistakes. I genuinely don't, because I think we would take more time to consider things' (Current Executive, Female, Senior Civil Service).

'... women they're very methodical and maybe more analytical, more careful. Don't take short cuts that men might take' (Current Executive, Male, NDPB).

6.7.6 Gender Balanced Boards: General Comments

In addition to the benefits discussed above, a number of interviewees provided some general additional comments regarding the benefits of gender balanced boards. For example:

'It's dead easy. I mean it's the balance of skills and the attributes that both male and female bring and the fact that we complement each other as opposed to a totally one dimensional view of how things should be done' (Current Executive, Female, Senior Civil Service).

'I've long held a view that a team that has a proper gender balance is a better team...' (Current Executive, Male, Senior Civil Service).

'It is in general but not always, ... a more enjoyable experience with a wider gender mix around the table than would necessarily be the case, either way you're working. I wouldn't particularly look forward to working with a single gender mix of either gender' (Current Executive, Male, Health).

'We all bring to an issue what insights we have and that includes insights that are gender driven, so the issues that women bring to, I suppose particularly take something like organisational change, won't replicate those of men ... but I would be confident that if you stay with a male group you'll have a narrower range of issues' (Current Executive, Male, Senior Civil Service).

'Male and female do see things, topics, differently and it's good to have that mix' (Current Executive, Male, Local Government).

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'You get that, you know, it's the old story, isn't it, whatever it is, from Venus and Mars. People [i.e. males and females] just look at things differently' (Current Executive, Male, Health).

'Quite a few problems if you don't have a balance within your trust board and within your senior team, because people do bring added benefit from their own perspective and their own experiences. And to exclude and not have that benefit and that experience from one section or another, to my mind means that the particular organisation is at a loss and is suffering as a result, you know. So I think people do, because of their experience and because of their knowledge and ability, do bring an added benefit to the collective. Without that added benefit, then the collective is so much weaker' (Current Executive, Male, Health).

'I also think in general, females have a greater eye for detail and I think as well as that they are ambitious to see things through because it's so important. ... [females also have more] self-awareness and emotional intelligence, I just believe we can resolve situations much quicker, much more accurately. Pick up on things, more astute as far as what body language is telling you, what somebody's saying and what they really mean' (Aspiring Executive, Female, NDPB).

6.7.7 Summary of Findings:

Theme Six - Benefits of Gender Balanced Boards

The key findings which emerged from an analysis of interviewees' comments around the benefits of a gender balanced board are outlined below:

- The majority of interviewees, both male and female, were in broad agreement that there were significant benefits of gender balanced boards. The view was expressed irrespective of the part of the public sector in which the interviewees is employed.
- The majority of interviewees suggested that one of the benefits of gender balanced boards was that of facilitating different perspectives or points of view in terms of decision making.
- Gender balanced boards were also viewed as beneficial in terms of positively changing or moderating behaviours and in terms of facilitating the incorporation of softer skills, such as empathy and emotional intelligence, into decision making.
- There was also a general view held among interviewees that gender balanced senior boards were synonymous with the effective functioning of the board in terms of making more deliberate, collaborative and careful decision making.

6.8 Theme Seven: Promoting Gender Equality at Senior Levels

6.8.1 Promoting Gender Equality: Quotas and Targets and the Role of Gender Champions

Stage three of the research project also sought to understand interviewees' perceptions of the mechanisms which might be used to improve gender equality at the executive or senior levels of their organisation and the overall public sector. To that end a number of issues were investigated:

- The use of targets and quotas as a means of improving gender equality; and
- The role of a gender champion.

6.8.2 Quotas and Targets: Civil / Senior Civil Service

Within the Civil / Senior Civil Service, the majority of male and female interviewees, both aspiring and current executives, were opposed to the use of quotas as a means of improving gender equality at senior levels as they felt that appointment and promotion to senior positions should be based on the merit principle. Generally, there was more support for targets as a means of improving gender equality, although some male executives were also cautious in this regard.

In general, female interviewees were opposed to the use of quotas to enhance gender equality at senior levels because of the potential dangers associated with

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tokenism. For example, the following comments were representative of females' views:

'I am uncomfortable with it and I think those women who would get on that way would always be seen as kind of a tokenistic position and it was created for them' (Current Executive, Female, Senior Civil Service).

'Absolutely not [i.e. in favour of quotas] and I've thought about this recently ... My feeling about that is ... there are enough good women in the Civil Service to make it without the quotas, I really do feel that and I also think that if there are quotas there will be a feeling that women have got there because of it' (Current Executive, Female, Civil Service).

An additional reason given by interviewees, both male and female, who were opposed to the use of quotas, was couched around conflicts with the merit principle.

For example the following comments were typical:

'I'm not [in favour of quotas]. ... my concern has always been that a person that comes through on the basis of the quota may not be perceived to have got there on merit' (Current Executive, Male, Senior Civil Service).

'We set our minds firmly against quotas; we believed that it was not appropriate to advance equality of opportunity by that sort of opportunity' (Current Executive, Male, Senior Civil Service).

'I'm not sure about quotas ... for all that I've said I believe we have to have a system that delivers people on merit and allows equal opportunities, so how do you achieve that with quotas? I just don't know how that would work, I don't have the answer, what we need is a change of culture' (Current Executive, Female, Senior Civil Service).

'I don't really like a blunt instrument like this because I think there's a danger of turning off the enlightened people that I have by bringing in quotas, it's a good stick to have in your back pocket, but I'm not sure I actually want to produce it and use it on anybody' (Aspiring Executive, Female, Civil Service).

Interestingly, a number of other interviewees, both males and females, suggested that while they would not be in favour of quotas, they would welcome organisational

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culture change as a means of enhancing gender equality at senior levels. For example:

'On balance, I wouldn't personally favour quotas but what I would favour is organisational cultural change in order to get the results. It's a bit like in the wider society people talk about why don't we have more women in public life, the Government, Parliament and so on? People talk a lot of things but they don't do [anything about] it' (Current Executive, Male, Senior Civil Service).

'Should there be quotas for the number of women senior civil servants and the pass mark for a woman in a board therefore be less than for a man? No I don't think that's right and I do think you know it's about the culture of the organisation, the work-life balance, the perception of what a grade whatever post is, can you address it' (Aspiring Executive, Female, Civil Service).

An additional and important point was also made by a number of interviewees about the difficulties of implementing quotas in organisations where a small number of senior personnel exist. For example:

'The trouble is that whenever you get to that level [i.e. senior levels] it all becomes very personal because you're dealing with small numbers. Quotas I think are fine whenever you're dealing with large numbers' (Aspiring Executive, Male, Civil Service).

Within the Civil / Senior Civil Service, there was far more agreement that targets, as opposed to quotas, are a more appropriate means to enhance gender equality at senior levels. Examples of the views of interviewees in favour of target were as follows:

'I think targets are definitely a good thing to have, whether it is gender or any other form of perceived discrimination ... I think the trouble whenever you start talking about quotas then it becomes personal, because what you're effectively saying is one group of people are going to have a perceived advantage over another, which is equally wrong' (Aspiring Executive, Male, Civil Service).

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'It's around having a target, having a set of actions, seeing what comes out; reporting on what comes out, changing your set of actions accordingly' (Current Executive, Male, Senior Civil Service).

'Targets are okay if you have the means to effect change, but there's no point setting targets unless you have levers to pull to hit those targets, otherwise you're fooling everybody and being a little bit dishonest' (Current Executive, Male, Senior Civil Service).

'Targets are certainly something to work towards and aspire towards' (Aspiring Executive, Male, Civil Service).

'I do think it would be beneficial. I mean if we are reflecting everywhere on boards, the government has targets and stuff for females on boards and stuff, external boards and stuff, why shouldn't the Civil Service set targets for more females at senior level. ... I think there needs to be a target set to strive [towards] across all Civil Service departments to get more females into Senior Civil Service grades including Permanent Secretaries' (Aspiring Executive, Female, Civil Service).

Whilst there was more support for the use of targets, a number of interviewees expressed concerns with the use of targets as follows:

'No. I wouldn't [be in favour of targets] because I think you should be there on merit, irrespective' (Current Executive, Male, Senior Civil Service).

'A target is akin to a driver, be it consciously or subconsciously, it's something that if you don't meet you will be, for whatever reason, held to be in some way deficient' (Current Executive, Male, Senior Civil Service).

'I don't like targets, I don't like the word targets. I think if we talk about outcomes, indicators and actions, now of course we need to have some kind of performance measure within the actions, but I always think about targets, you set a target, people focus on meeting that target and it doesn't matter whether that target actually will meet your outcome or not, as long as they achieve the target they tick the box, and that's why I want to try to get away from targets' (Current Executive, Female, Senior Civil Service).

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Other interviewees felt that targets should be part of a process that recognises and attempts to eliminate barriers, while others talked about the process of setting targets:

'A target shows a commitment, but underpinning that target you should be actively knocking away any barriers that stop women applying. So you wouldn't have any criteria that would be inadvertently discriminatory, like for example you wouldn't have a criteria in the job description that says 'this is 9 - 5 every day and there is no prospect of any remote working or flexibility' or anything like that' (Current Executive, Male, Senior Civil Service).

'Well, if you're going to set a bold target you might as well do it really bold. So there's no point just going for 50/50 on NDPBs, 50/50 out of the whole lot [i.e. the public sector]. ... [a] bold target helps shape minds at times, it actually makes people take a sharp intake of breath sometimes when they're trying to think about what they need to do' (Aspiring Executive, Female, Civil Service).

In addition, a number of other interviewees pointed to the dangers of setting unrealistic or unachievable targets, the damaging consequences of not meeting targets and potential ways of dealing with these problems:

'Arguably more harm will be done by having that target in whatever period of time, it seemed to have failed and then people say, you see you can't do it. But if people said no, we didn't reach it only because this key stage didn't work and that's because we haven't thought through X or Y or for whatever reason. We're going to fix that and we've got a set of new targets ... if your targets don't work you don't just beat yourselves up as I think we have done and say oh no we're bad or we've failed, you say right why did this not work? Well we did an analysis at every stage, we're now going to improve that target, we going to have new targets and you refresh the plan and you don't give up. I think that's a very intelligent way of going about it' (Current Executive, Male, Senior Civil Service).

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6.8.3 Quotas and Targets: Local Government

Consistent with the views of the Civil / Senior Civil Service, the majority of interviewees within Local the Government sector were opposed to the use of quotas as a means of improving gender equality at senior levels. Only three interviewees (all female) within the sector suggested that quotas might encourage more females to apply for senior posts. The importance of the merit principle was also highlighted as the main reason for opposing the use of quotas.

Typical responses from interviewees in the Local Government sector opposed to the use of quotas to improve gender equality at senior levels were as follows:

'I'm not so sure I would do [i.e. introduce quotas]... we haven't had a quota and it's worked' (Current Executive, Male, Local Government).

'No. I would rather just the best person got the job, be [it] a male or a female, you know, as long as you're all given the same opportunity' (Aspiring Executive, Female, Local Government).

'My reaction to that [i.e. quotas] is no in the sense that I think it should be about the merit of the individual. And whether it's male/female competing, you know one against the other; I think it's about the right person for the job based on their capability, their attributes' (Aspiring Executive, Female, Local Government).

'I'm not in favour of quotas, you know ... in local government when there isn't a sort of boarding system or anything, where people are applying for individual jobs, it's very hard to work a quota and I think people are better to get development opportunities and confidence building, that kind of thing and be prepared and given the skills they need to apply for jobs rather than be given the job because they're a woman' (Aspiring Executive, Female, Local Government).

'I've never really liked quotas, sort of positive discrimination if you want, because I'm just purely a believer in the best person for the job' (Current Executive, Male, Local Government).

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Interestingly, while one current male executive was generally not in favour of quotas, he recognised that more needed to be done around creating the circumstances to enhance gender equality:

'I understand the rationale for it [i.e. quotas] and I ... sympathise with the thinking behind it. I think however, it's a bit like quotas for MPs. I think you have to create the circumstances which make it easier for women to compete for the jobs rather than artificially create a circumstance where they get a job. I think if they get a job in those circumstances it has the potential to make their life harder in the organisation because there will be some resentment around that. And I think as a senior manager, that's a problem for you' (Current Executive, Male, Local Government).

In parallel with views from the Civil / Senior Civil Service, interviewees expressed concerns regarding the dangers of tokenism as a possible result of the introduction of quotas:

'No I don't believe in quotas because I think it's artificial and I do then think that what you're doing is recognising that women need a leg up. Not that women need a leg up but then be judged ... You're only on the management team because you're a woman and you're not up to the job. I do think that in most instances it's because women have been left on the side-lines and their confidence undermined, and I think that the investment in that confidence building and challenging them to do their own personal plans, and just praising them will make far more benefit in a longer term than quotas' (Current Executive, Female, Local Government).

As suggested earlier, only three interviewees agreed that the use of quotas could improve gender equality at the senior level of organisations. These individuals expressed their views as follows:

'I would be in favour of quotas.... Because what's going to happen otherwise? It just isn't going to happen. Take PSNI, would it have happened? It wouldn't have happened' (Current Executive, Female, Local Government).

'Yes even if there were the negative connotations' (Current Executive, Female, Local Government).

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'Yes, but I wouldn't want to be one of the quota' (Current Executive, Female, Local Government).

Consistent with the views of the Civil / Senior Civil Service, greater support for targets as opposed to quotas was expressed by interviewees in the Local Government sector. Some of the reasons for this relate to uncertainty expressed about the workings of quotas. For example:

'Honestly, I'm not sure about that [i.e. quotas]. I'm not sure. I've never seen or read much evidence to suggest that that's worked elsewhere' (Current Executive, Female, Local Government).

'I don't really agree with quotas because I think that quotas, is it really going to change the culture, is it really going to address the problem? I don't know enough about it. I'm sure there's some research out there that would maybe say something completely different. It's almost like a sort of a forced way of doing something and, you know, my question would be, is there not an easier way of addressing the problem?' (Current Executive, Female, Local Government).

Additionally, it was clear that not all interviewees understood how a quota system would work in practice. For example, within Local Government the following quotations reveal two very contrasting views:

'People don't understand, it's ignorance, they don't understand what we mean by quotas or by targets, they don't understand that, they think that means we're going to go out onto the street and ask any numpty out there "sure come on in and be a director". They have no idea that you're talking about ..., if you've two equally qualified candidates and one's a man and one's a woman, you take the woman. ... You still have to be competent' (Current Executive, Female, Local Government).

'Totally against it, 100% against it, positive discrimination as far as I'm concerned, [it] is discrimination. If I was a male and was the best person for the job I would be gutted if it was given to a female because they were female and they came second' (Aspiring Executive, Male, Local Government).

6.8.4 Quotas and Targets: Health, NDPBs, Further and Higher Education

Within the other sectors of the Northern Ireland public sector, there were mixed views expressed regarding the use of quotas and targets for improving gender equality at senior levels. For example, the following were typical arguments made in favour of adopting quotas:

'If there are benefits to be had through a quota system, they're clearly articulated and can be shown; I don't think anybody should say no' (Current Executive, Male, Health).

'I have no difficulty at managerial grades in considering or adopting a quota based system or more positive discrimination or positive action measures to allow a situation whereby we are better represented by not just females but by all underrepresented groups at management grades' (Current Executive, Male, NDPB).

'I think I would [be in favour of quotas]. ... Because I think you make progress faster basically' (Current Executive, Male, NDPB).

'I wouldn't be adverse to it because I do think it is more difficult for women, I really do' (Current Executive, Female, Health).

'I think it's [i.e. quotas] the only way it's [i.e. gender equality] going to happen ... I would actually feel so because no one's going to get there without having some merit, but I think an opportunity to nudge organisations in a different direction is one thing, but it is endemic and it's a bigger, always it comes back to how this organisation values, at it's very basis, how it values the role of the mother in the home. And if that's not supported sufficiently or paid sufficiently then all the rest is crumbling because, you know, women just aren't being supported with their child care arrangements and their home life in order to make their career work for them' (Aspiring Executive, Female, NDPB).

'Well, I'm not, I'm totally for them ... you talk to politicians and public servants in places like Norway and Sweden and Denmark and they go, of course you have quotas, why would you not have quotas. If you've done everything else and it's not changing then there just comes a point where you say, we've had enough of this. Now I know quotas are very, very difficult for people but why not?' (Current Executive, Female, Education).

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A number of interviewees within the other sectors also expressed negative views against the use of quotas, particularly in terms of their perceived polarisation from the merit principle. For example:

'[No] because, and maybe this is too simplistic, but because I believe it undermines the principles of merit, I think that's really what it comes down to' (Aspiring Executive, Female, NDPB).

'I would say no, because my principle would be that if you're capable of doing the job and you have the skills set then that should be the thing that's the deciding factor, not whether or not you're capable and are female or male, and we happen to be short of females or short of males. So no, I wouldn't really be on for [quotas], unless you were looking at an organisation that was so imbalanced and you felt it was to the detriment of the organisation not to have a fair gender mix' (Aspiring Executive, Male, Health).

'I'm reluctant about quotas, because I mean it depends what you mean by a quota. If it becomes an absolute, then I'm not so sure about that. I would be much happier with the idea of moving towards some sort of target to do that. I know we would do a quota system and it would just turn into bureaucracy' (Current Executive, Male, Health).

'We're not into quotas or reverse quotas, because that's taking things a step too far' (Aspiring Executive, Female, Health).

'I think it is almost inevitable that the women who achieve the positions as a result of a quota will always be viewed as having been given some kind of special favour' (Current Executive, Female, Health).

With respect to the use of targets, similar positive views to those expressed within both the Civil Service and Local Government sectors were expressed by interviewees from the other sectors of the Northern Ireland public sector. For example:

'Certainly there's nothing wrong with targets. I think the only way to measure how successful you are or not is to keep looking and keep refining, and to say where you're going to as an organisation and to see if

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what you're doing is realising the potential that's in your organisation' (Current Executive, Male, Health).

'I suppose there's no harm in a target and the good thing I suppose about targets is it would make people think 'well how are we going to achieve those'. And the only way of achieving them is by increasing the percentage of female applicants. I think it's more about 'why is it only 20% [of females applying] and what can we do as an organisation to increase that pool', and then everyone can compete on a level playing field' (Aspiring Executive, Female, Health).

'I think that if you get a variety of views, you get better decisions, so in that context it'd [targets] probably be a good idea. The rationale for it would need to be very well explained to people, so they wouldn't begin to think that the only reason you got that job was because you were a woman, or because you were black, or because you were a man, or whatever it happens to be' (Aspiring Executive, Male, Health).

'I think it [i.e. a quota] undermines the authority and position of women or any underrepresented group if they end up in a job on the basis of a quota, I much prefer the term 'target'. And I think, especially within the public sector, you know, that old adage of 'what gets measured gets done or what gets managed, gets done maybe' (Current Executive, Male, NDPB).

Conversely, some interviewees also expressed negative views about the use of targets to increase gender equality at senior levels:

'In general I am not in favour of anything that singles women or men out for special treatment. It is something that needs to be monitored but whether we set targets for it, I am not so sure' (Current Executive, Male, Health).

'I think we just need to be careful that when you set targets it should always be on merit. And I think that maybe sometimes is a difficult circle to square. I would just be wary that it might end up being counterproductive and you wouldn't want it to be counterproductive' (Aspiring Executive, Male, Health).

'We don't set targets for ... to have let's say 30% of their ... staff female by a certain date. And I guess the reason we don't do it is I suppose because targets might mean that what you do, it's more important to hit the targets than to get the right people in post' (Aspiring Executive, Male, Education).

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The above discussion has focused on the use of quotas and targets as mechanisms for improving gender equality at the executive level of the Northern Ireland public sector. Interviewees across the public sector generally provided greater support for the adoption of targets as opposed to quotas, as a means of improving gender equality. This view was principally explained by the perception that the application of a quota contradicts the workings of the merit principle and may therefore lead to issues around tokenism.

6.8.5 Promoting Gender Equality: The Role of Gender Champions

Interviewees across the N.I. public sector generally acknowledged the importance of gender champions within their organisations and the public sector in general as a means of enhancing gender equality at senior levels. Additionally, and consistent with previous literature, the majority of interviewees recognised that gender champions should hold senior roles within their respective organisations.

6.8.5.1 The Role of Gender Champions: Local Government

Within the Local Government sector the concept of a Gender Champion is well established as a result of the Local Government Staff Commission's Women in Local Councils Initiative. The key objective of the initiative, which was launched in 2006, was to progress more women into senior positions. To facilitate this, each council was expected to nominate Gender Champions from both full time officers and Councillors. Consistent with best practice, the majority of Gender Champions within the Local Government sector are employed at senior levels (for example, Chief

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Executive Officers or Directors). The impact of the gender champions within Local Government was explained by one interviewee as follows:

'Without boasting too much, eight years on we have 25% women ... the feeder group is now increased by, well it increased by a lot because we have now roughly about 50/50 women in second tier positions and it moved very fast. And why did it move fast? Because we created the Gender Champions and we nurtured them and we brought them in and we showed them what to do. And these were political, you had to nominate, each political party had to give us a Champion and that was the main political parties giving us one each, whose job it was within their party to promote women in Local Government. And that was even at Councillor level, because we then got a number of Chief Executives nominated. There was a Council Champion for each Council. And some of them gave us [i.e. nominated] Chief Executives because they said this person is the most influential person to make it happen. Others gave us Heads of Human Resources and two councils gave us ... a change agent ... who will make this happen for you. And we brought them together and ... we funded lots of initiatives with them at local level.

And they would run things like a Women in the Community event which maybe two hundred people who had achieved things [attended], and within the community being brought together and nurtured. And then they would have an event for the various community groups and particularly the Councillors were very good at this and they moved on to creating, like a synergy within the community to say Local Government will be a welcoming place' (Current Executive, Male, Local Government).

The role of females as Gender Champions was seen as important within Local Government organisations.

'She really championed women, encouragement of women to advance' (current Executive, Female, Local Government).

'We've had very strong female Champions among our political cohort as well' (Aspiring Executive, Female, Local Government).

However, interestingly male gender champions were often viewed as being more instrumental in terms of embracing and promoting gender equality at senior levels within Local Government than females. For example:

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'The best Champions we had I would say would have been two of the Chief Executives who were male Chief Execs and they immediately embraced it' (Current Executive, Male, Local Government).

'He took it [i.e. the Gender Champion role] on willingly ... he really integrated the notion of supporting women in the workplace ... regardless of ... whether it was learning and development, whether it was family friendly policies, whether it was promotion opportunities. There were things that were done quietly within our policies that reached a number of parts of life in an organisation as opposed to a whole bells and whistles thing' (Current Executive, Female, Local Government).

'He [a former Chief Executive] at the time spearhead the whole Gender Champion initiative ... for the whole of Northern Ireland, he spearheaded that ... he did it through the Staff Commission ... He did it for the whole of the sector' (Current Executive, Female, Local Government).

The importance of involving males and a senior member of staff in Gender Champion initiatives was also reiterated by interviewees as follows:

'We did involve men as the Champions [i.e. as part of the Women in Local Councils Initiative] ... because of the fact if you left them outside of the loop then it was seen as a women only agenda and as I say I think the fundamental challenge is to make men take ownership of the gender agenda' (Aspiring Executive, Female, Local Government).

'If you don't get the chief or a high up person behind it [i.e. the gender champion], it won't happen' (Current Executive, Male, Local Government).

More recently, within the Local Government sector, the issue of gender equality has more generally now been subsumed under the diversity banner and as a result Gender Champions have morphed into Diversity Champions. This seamless transition was explained by one interviewee as follows:

'It's almost like it's [i.e. gender equality] mainstreamed, you know. ... it just seemed to happen naturally' (Current Executive, Female, Local Government).

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A further interviewee explained in more detail how the focus on equality has shifted as a result of this transition. Interestingly this interviewee is of the view that gender equality is no longer an issue within the Local Government sector:

'The gender champions now have been overtaken, we're not promoting gender champions anymore so they've all got equality diversity champions now. But there's nowhere that I can think of that where, you know, gender issues are still a problem that we're aware of, I think they're all accepted. A lot of them would do sort of gender initiatives throughout the year in terms of Women in Local Councils week. In a lot of the Councils the focus is maybe moved away from the actual Council and their employees, you know, to issues in the community, you know, and try to encourage role models in the community and offer training and development opportunities for women in the community, addressing issues like domestic violence in the community and that kind of thing' (Aspiring Executive, Female, Local Government).

One interviewee within a Local Government organisation, however, voiced concerns about the move away from gender to diversity champions. Her arguments relate to the potential dilution and importance of gender equality issues at an organisational level:

'They [i.e. the Local Government sector] now are moving away from that and making it not gender only, it's ...and diversity but we didn't, we kept ours [i.e. focus on gender]. ... I just refused to have it merge into that [i.e. equality] and to be diluted by it' (Current Executive, Female, Local Government).

6.8.5.2 The Role of Gender Champions: Civil/Senior Civil Service, Health, NDPBs, Further and Higher Education

Within the remaining sectors, the concept of a gender champion is not as prominent or visible when compared to the Local Government sector. For example, within the Civil / Senior Civil Service gender champions were rarely mentioned by interviewees

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and when specifically asked if a gender champion existed within their department, interviewees generally indicated that they were not aware of one. Despite the lack of visible gender champions, there was some discussion around the concept of a gender champion within one government department. Interviewees talked about two issues in this regard, attempts to nominate a gender champion in the past and the importance of getting buy-in from males, whether in their role as a gender champion or in their role as an influential policy maker:

'There was discussion of trying to get a champion at the time before I left [i.e. some years ago] ... and one of the issues was we had tried to get a male member of the senior team to [be] the gender champion rather than a female. ... it didn't come to fruition [even though] the background work was there. I think the rationale [i.e. for wanting a male gender champion] is because you always feel that you're a female trying to push the gender issue, there's that woman again. Whereas if you have a male trying to do it, genuinely pushing for that increased representation the other males tend to listen to a male more than what they will listen to a female, so it's an easier sell coming from a person who's likeminded trying to drive the gender forward so we just didn't get to that stage' (Aspiring Executive, Female, Civil Service).

'Some of it [i.e. gender equality at senior levels] is finding enlightened men. I think enlightened men will help get the message through much more than enlightened women, I think as soon as any woman stands up to speak about gender inequality in their heads they're thinking oh God, here they go again because it's always seen as a woman talking about women's issues and I think that debate needs thrown on its head, it needs men signed up to the gender equality, if we're honest, that's where the power and decision making sits, whether we like it or not, it sits generally with men. So unless there are enlightened men signed up to gender equality I don't think we're going to get anywhere' (Aspiring Executive, Female, Civil Service).

Within the Civil / Senior Civil Service, an additional issue which was raised by a number of interviewees was that related to the level of seniority of those responsible for gender equality issues at a departmental level. Feedback from interviewees suggested that such issues were the responsibility of Equality Officers, all of whom

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are employed at grades below the Senior Civil Service. Whilst positive comments were received concerning the work of Equality Officers, there was a general feeling that gender equality issues at the senior level of organisations should be the overall responsibility of senior civil servants, a view which is consistent with the ethos of gender champions in the Local Government sector. For example:

'I think all issues of that nature, be it gender equality, be it succession planning, be it talent management, whatever, within departments should come to the Departmental Board. Of course somebody has to deal with the nitty gritty on a day to day basis but I think those ... issues need to come to the Departmental Board because the board chaired by the Permanent Secretary typically is responsible for the management of the department, it shouldn't stay invisible down at that level' (Current Executive, Male, Senior Civil Service).

Similarly a senior female current executive recognised that the makeup of the Equality Practitioner's Group comprised individuals employed outside of the Senior Civil Service. In response to this, it was noted that recently there had been some discussion around attempts to reconstitute this group to include senior civil servants (employed at grades 3 and 5) in order to promote further gender equality issues at the senior levels of organisations. Finally, the important role which OFMDFM plays, in terms of the development and roll out of the gender equality strategy as a means of promoting gender equality at senior levels across all departments, was also highlighted.

Elsewhere in the public sector, there was very limited discussion around the concept of a gender champion with the exception of one NDPB and one organisation in the

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Further and Higher Education sector. Within the NDPB sector the importance of a very senior gender champion was identified:

'The people that are doing the leg work and doing the monitoring and maybe organising initiatives consider the lower level but you need a champion at a senior level. ... I think there are two sides to this, one is I think you need somebody who passionately believes in equality and the benefits of diversity, not just from a sort of values point of view but even from a very selfish operational delivery; understands the benefit of a diverse and a representative workforce and if a person has that really honestly passionately held belief then they should be the champion whether they're male or female, that said, the power of [women's names] as positive role models is something that us men can't do for women' (Current Executive, Male, NDPB).

Within the Education sector, specific initiatives aimed at enhancing gender equality within senior positions are in place, namely the SWAN initiative and a gender initiative. While the SWAN initiative has multiple objectives, one of these relates to the advancement of females into senior academic positions. The following comment from a current male executive summarises the ethos of both initiatives within one organisation:

'What we are trying to show with the SWAN process and the [gender initiative] process is to ensure that there is an appropriate environment that is building a proper pool of appropriately qualified people and appropriately experienced people... This is what the [gender initiative] process is about, it's about giving women access to good quality information and encouragement and a proper sort of informed critical assessment of their profile rather than them sitting thinking 'I've gotta have this, this and this, until I have all this in place I couldn't possibly think about applying for a [senior] job like this'. If you're talking to someone, a woman who's in a senior position, she might say 'no, no this is brilliant, this is brilliant, don't worry too much about that, you'll be fine' and that's the sort of thing that does seem to have encouraged people to step forward sooner' (Current Executive, Male, Education).

6.8.6 Summary of Findings:

Theme Seven - Promoting Gender Equality at Executive Level

The analysis of interviewees' comments with respect to theme seven identified a number of findings:

- The majority of interviewees within the Civil / Senior Civil Service and the Local Government sectors, both males and females, expressed greater support for the use of targets, as opposed to quotas, as a means of addressing gender equality at executive or senior levels of the Northern Ireland public sector.
- Mixed views regarding the appropriateness of quotas were identified in the Health, NDPBs and the Further and Higher Education sectors, with some in support of them and others opposed.
- Some interviewees identified a number of problems with targets including difficulties associated with setting unrealistic or unachievable targets, difficulties associated with the achievement of targets and the potential consequences of not meeting targets.
- Interviewees generally supported the idea that a senior member of staff should assume the role of gender champion within their organisation.
- Interviewees generally supported the positive role of a gender champion in terms of improving the gender culture of public sector organisations and in terms of mainstreaming gender issues at the senior level of organisations.
- Within the Local Government sector, the concept of a Gender Champion is well established as a result of the Local Government Staff Commission's

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Women in Local Councils Initiative. Consistent with best practice, the majority of Gender Champions within the Local Government sector are employed at senior executive levels. The positive impact of Gender Champions within the Local Government sector was also noted.

- The concept of a Gender Champion at a senior level is not well developed in the Civil / Senior Civil Service, Health, NDPB or the Further and Higher Education sectors.

6.9 Best Practice: Case Studies

Objective eight of the overall research project aimed to identify examples of best practice which might facilitate improved gender equality at executive level of the Northern Ireland public sector. This objective was achieved via the process of conducting in-depth interviews with a number of individuals within any one organisation. As a result, the research team were able to identify a number of best practice case studies. Details of these case studies are provided in Technical Annex Three.

Chapter 7

Conclusions

7.1 Introduction

Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 places a statutory requirement on public authorities, in carrying out their functions relating to Northern Ireland, to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity across a number of groups, including gender. Despite this, no specific study to date has focused on investigating the effectiveness of Section 75 in the context of gender equality at the executive (or senior) level of the Northern Ireland Public Sector. The research project discussed in this report addresses this gap and in doing so aims to advance our understanding of the effectiveness of Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 in the following ways: providing baseline data on various aspects of gender equality at executive level across the Northern Ireland public sector; identifying enablers or facilitators, barriers, and best practice towards achieving gender equality within the public sector; and engaging in meaningful consultation with key stakeholders.

7.2 Summary of Findings: Stage One

The findings from stage one of the research project indicate that a gender imbalance exists in the Northern Ireland public sector with only 29.2% of all executive positions held by females. This finding is consistent with other work which has explored gender equality in public life in the Northern Ireland context. For example, Potter (2014) noted that women are significantly under-represented in elected office in the

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Northern Ireland Assembly (representing only 23.4% of members) while Potter and Kelly (2014) report that females account for only 25% of councillors in Northern Ireland. Additionally, only two out of a total of eighteen (11.1%) Members of the UK Parliament are females (Belfast Live, 2015) and some 36% of held public appointments were held by females during the year ended 31st March 2014 (OFMDFM, 2014b). While the data collected during stage one of the current research project did not permit the researchers to observe progress over time, the findings would suggest that organisations have a considerable way to go, in terms of their statutory duty under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity between males and females at the executive level of public sector organisations.

7.3 Summary of Findings: Stage Two

Stage two of the research project identified a number of significant findings.

- First, females are more likely to opt out of career progression for a number of reasons, including caring responsibilities, long-hours culture, unsupportive work environment and lack of flexible work arrangements.
- Secondly, a number of enablers (or facilitators) of career progression at the individual level were identified by respondents, the top five being: a supportive spouse/partner, consistently exceeding performance expectations, demonstrating loyalty/commitment to my organisation, access to affordable childcare and seeking out difficult or highly visible job assignments.
- Thirdly, a number of enablers (or facilitators) of career progression at the organisational level were also identified by respondents, the top five being:

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access to acting up opportunities, access to external leadership training and development programmes, in-house leadership training and development programmes, formal mentoring and flexible work arrangements.

- Fourthly, a number of barriers exist for females in particular when seeking to progress within the public sector: individual barriers related to caring responsibilities and a lack of awareness of organisational politics; organisational barriers related to a lack of recognition for work life balance, exclusion from informal networks of communication, a long-hours culture, a lack of opportunities to work on challenging assignments and colleagues' negative reactions to the use of flexible work arrangements. Males and females both perceived a number of other barriers to career progression: limited advancement opportunities, limited acting up opportunities, a lack of mentoring and lack of opportunities to gain visibility.
- Fifthly, a number of policies and practices were identified as mechanisms for improving gender equality at executive level in the Northern Ireland Public sector. The top five policies and practices were: providing unsuccessful candidates with constructive feedback; interview panel training to avoid gender bias; inclusive organisational culture at executive/senior managerial levels; regular monitoring of executive/senior management level applicant data; and targeted in-house leadership training and development programmes. Other important policies and practices identified were formal mentoring, targeted external leadership training and development, greater flexible work arrangements and high level internal or secondment development opportunities for the underrepresented gender. Females indicated that all policies and practices were more important than males.

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- Finally, with respect to views about gender culture, females are less positive about their organisation's gender culture than males with respect to the existence of cronyism, the existence of a balanced management board, and the allocation of sufficient time and financial resources to promote gender equality at executive level. Female respondents were marginally more likely to support the use of quotas for gender balance at executive/senior managerial levels, when compared to males.

Taken together, the results of stage two suggest that there is significant room for improvement within the Northern Ireland public sector in terms of improving gender equality at the executive level of organisations.

7.4 Summary of Findings: Stage Three

Building on stage two, the third and final stage of the research project explored a number of gender themes in greater detail:

- Perception of the gender composition of senior management boards;
- Gender culture;
- Flexible work arrangements;
- Work life balance;
- Opportunities for advancement; recruitment and progression;
- Benefits of gender balanced boards; and
- Promoting gender equality at senior levels.

The key findings for each of these themes will now be summarised.

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7.4.1 Theme One: Perceptions of the Gender Composition of Senior Management Boards

- The majority of interviewees indicated that the gender composition of their organisation's senior management board was an issue, with females holding fewer senior positions than males.
- When presented with the raw figures indicating an imbalance, some minority views were also expressed suggesting that there were no issues with the gender composition of their senior management board.
- When male and female views are compared, males were more inclined to suggest that gender composition was less of an issue for their organisation than females.
- Some notable exceptions to these general views were expressed by interviewees employed within the Health sector, where the gender composition of senior boards is reasonably balanced if not trending towards a greater proportion of females, and some smaller NDPBs where more gender balanced senior management boards exist.

7.4.2 Theme Two: Gender Culture

- Differing descriptions of organisational culture exist across the public sector. With respect to the Senior Civil Service, the majority of females recognised their organisation's culture as an issue for gender equality at senior levels. Females in particular described the culture of the Senior Civil Service as male dominated in addition to making references to a competitive, unsupportive, blame culture within some departments which has the potential to impact upon females more so than their male counterparts.

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- The Permanent Secretaries Group was seen by the majority of female executives as a cold, unwelcoming environment and public committees, where senior civil servants were questioned by Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs), were also seen as inhospitable cultures for both males and females, but more so for females.
- The majority of interviewees within the Local Government sector perceived their organisation's gender culture as positive and as having improved over time, with improvement largely attributed to the Local Government Staff Commission's Women in Councils Initiative (implemented in 2006). The role of the political and social context was also recognised as important, with female councillors viewed as instrumental in terms of addressing gender equality issues at senior levels.
- Within both the Health sector and NDPBs mixed views, both positive and negative, regarding organisational gender culture were expressed by interviewees. Some interviewees within Health identified an unhealthy performance and blame culture and an environment where macho expectations exist. Within some NDPBs, the existence of a macho or male dominated environment was also identified. Positive views were generally held by those in the Further and Higher Education sector.
- In terms of the interaction between males and females in the workplace and during meetings, some females reported that they felt marginalised and isolated within the Senior Civil Service. This contrasts with Local Government where the only issue of note was that related to the timing of Council meetings. Elsewhere, mixed views were expressed with respect to the interaction of males and females in the workplace.

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- The majority of interviewees suggested that the workings of what would have been described as the 'old boys' network' had dramatically declined over the years. Despite this, interviewees across the public sector recognised the continued existence of informal male networks, generally based around sporting activities, from which they perceived themselves to be excluded. Other limited informal networks also existed around social activities, with many females feeling excluded due to caring responsibilities.

7.4.3 Theme Three: Flexible Work Arrangements

- Without exception, all interviewees indicated that their organisations have in place a variety of policies to support flexible work arrangements including for example, part-time hours, job share, compressed working week and term time working.
- However, despite their existence, there is a considerable gap between the rhetoric and reality of flexible work arrangements at senior levels within the public sector. The overwhelming view of interviewees, regardless of gender or part of the public sector (with some minor exceptions in the Health sector), suggest that whilst public sector organisations have flexible work arrangements in place they are not readily available at senior or executive levels.
- The above view is supported by the perceptions of the majority of interviewees who indicated that their organisation expects senior managers to work on a full-time basis. This viewpoint was expressed regardless of gender or part of the public sector in which the interviewees were employed.

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- As a result of views around expectations of full-time senior positions, the majority of interviewees (both males and females) perceived that it would be very difficult, if not impossible, to progress to senior levels whilst availing of flexible work arrangements. This view was held regardless of gender or part of the public sector in which the interviewees were employed.
- The few people currently availing of flexible work arrangements expressed feelings of guilt when leaving work or being absent from the physical workplace.
- Some negative perceptions of those availing of flexible work arrangements were also expressed by interviewees in terms of the difficulty of managing staff on such arrangements and the subsequent problems arising from their absence from the physical work place.
- Finally, some interviewees suggested that those availing of flexible work arrangements were potentially viewed as being less committed to their organisation.

7.4.4 Theme Four: Work Life Balance

- The work life balance of the majority of individuals interviewed right across the Northern Ireland public sector was described as poor. This view was expressed irrespective of gender or the part of the public sector in which interviewees were employed.
- A poor work life balance was largely attributed to a long-hours culture within the Northern Ireland public sector. Again, this view was expressed irrespective of gender or the part of the public sector in which interviewees were employed.

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- Aspects of the long-hours culture and subsequent poor work life balance were attributed to the demanding nature of the job and the demands of politicians, with both of these impacting on both males and females.
- Some interviewees suggested that a poor work life balance represented a barrier to females in particular (but also in some cases to males).
- Caring responsibilities for elderly relatives was also identified as a further factor which had a negative impact on an individual's work life balance. While this issue has the potential to impact on both males and females, it was reported as impacting more on females.
- The ability to delegate and empower others was identified as an important factor in maintaining a good work life balance. It was noted that females were often reluctant to delegate and that this may be a factor contributing to their poor work life balance.
- Little evidence was found to suggest that senior staff lead by example in terms of promoting an appropriate work life balance within their organisations.
- A general view was expressed by interviewees, both males and female, that work life balance deteriorates as a result of progression to senior levels. This view was expressed irrespective of which part of the public sector interviewees were employed in.

7.4.5 Theme Five: Opportunities for Advancement, Recruitment and Progression

- The majority of interviewees, both males and females, recognise the importance of training and education for career development and progression.

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- Mentoring was viewed as important for career development and progression by both male and female interviewees, with female interviewees placing greater emphasis on this as a key factor in their career progression.
- There is variation in the provision of mentoring programmes across the public sector and some difficulties (e.g. matching mentees and mentors) with the mentoring process were identified.
- There was widespread agreement among male and female interviewees across the different parts of the public sector that undertaking secondments, acting up opportunities and challenging/visible assignments are beneficial for career development and progression.
- Some concerns were expressed by a number of interviewees with regards to the allocation of secondments, acting up opportunities and in particular challenging/visible assignments.
- The majority view of both male and female interviewees was that the performance appraisal (or annual appraisal) process within their organisation was increasingly passive and little more than a 'tick box exercise'. However, that said, some females did highlight positive aspects of performance appraisals (e.g. mid-year reviews and personal development plans).
- There was a widespread view throughout much of the public sector (with the exception of some Health and Education organisations) that there was little in the way of succession planning.
- Males and females across the public sector (with the exception of Health and Education), generally perceived that there are fewer quality training and education opportunities available when compared to a few years ago. This was generally attributed to budgetary constraints.

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- There was very broad agreement among male and female interviewees from across the public sector that recruitment and selection should operate on the merit principle so that the best candidate gets the job.
- Both male and female interviewees perceived recruitment and selection processes in the public sector as generally fair and transparent. In saying that, competency based interviews were perceived as favouring males who were generally viewed as better at 'selling themselves' while assessment centres were perceived as providing a more equitable environment for male and female candidates.
- Females were more likely to opt out of career progression due to issues such as caring responsibilities, the pressures associated with senior roles or an inhospitable work environment. Males were more likely to opt out of career progression due to imminent retirement.
- Confidence and resilience were viewed as particularly important personal attributes for career progression, with most interviewees suggesting that males displayed these attributes more often, and perhaps more naturally, than females.

7.4.6 Theme Six: Benefits of a Gender Balanced Board

- The majority of interviewees, both male and female, were in broad agreement that there were significant benefits of gender balanced boards. This view was expressed irrespective of the part of the public sector in which the interviewees is employed.

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- The majority of interviewees suggested that one of the benefits of gender balanced boards was that of facilitating different perspectives or points of view in terms of decision making.
- Gender balanced boards were also viewed as beneficial in terms of positively changing or moderating behaviours and in terms of facilitating the incorporation of softer skills, such as empathy and emotional intelligence, into decision making.
- There was also a general view held among interviewees that gender balanced senior boards were synonymous with the effective functioning of the board in terms of making more deliberate, collaborative and careful decision making.

7.4.7 Theme Seven: Promoting Gender Equality at Senior Levels

- The majority of interviewees within the Civil / Senior Civil Service and the Local Government sectors, both males and females, expressed greater support for the use of targets, as opposed to quotas, as a means of addressing gender equality at executive or senior levels of the Northern Ireland public sector.
- Mixed views regarding the appropriateness of quotas were identified in the Health, NDPBs and the Further and Higher Education sectors, with some in support of them and others opposed.
- Some interviewees identified a number of problems with targets including difficulties associated with setting unrealistic or unachievable targets, difficulties associated with the achievement of targets and the potential consequences of not meeting targets.

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- Interviewees generally supported the idea that a senior member of staff should assume the role of gender champion within their organisation.
- Interviewees generally supported the positive role of a gender champion in terms of improving the gender culture of public sector organisations and in terms of mainstreaming gender issues at the senior level of organisations.
- Within the Local Government sector, the concept of a Gender Champion is well established as a result of the Local Government Staff Commission's Women in Local Councils Initiative. Consistent with best practice, the majority of Gender Champions within the Local Government sector are employed at senior executive levels. The positive impact of Gender Champions within the Local Government sector was also noted.
- The concept of a Gender Champion at a senior level is not well developed in the Civil / Senior Civil Service, Health, NDPB or the Further and Higher Education sectors.

7.5 Recommendations

The recommendations detailed below are developed from evidence gathered from stages one, two and three of the research project. To that end, the recommendations draw on data collected from organisations comprising the following five sectors: Civil / Senior Civil Service, Local Government, Non-Department Public Bodies, Health and Social Care and Further and Higher Education. The recommendations made have been categorised as follows: *strategic recommendations; policy recommendations; process recommendations; and data analysis recommendations*. While the majority of the recommendations have been made by drawing on direct evidence from all three stages of the project, some are supported by our general observations of the N.I. public sector as a result of undertaking the research project.

The recommendations aim to address the various issues identified during all stages of the research project. While the authors make no claim that the recommendations are all-inclusive, it is anticipated that the recommendations, if adopted, will empower senior management teams within the Northern Ireland public sector to bring about real and meaningful change in terms of gender equality of executive level positions over time. It should be noted that the recommendations below are not specific to any one part of the public sector. Rather, it is anticipated that individual organisations/sectors (where appropriate) will consider each of the detailed recommendations and assess the extent to which action is required at an individual organisational or sectoral level. Finally, the researchers acknowledge the current challenges facing organisations comprising the Northern Ireland public sector. In

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particular, at the time of writing, the Northern Ireland public sector faces severe on-going financial budgetary pressures together with a current embargo on recruitment and substantive promotion within some parts of the overall sector, both of which may initially limit progress in terms of achieving the recommendations outlined below. Despite these pressures, the researchers believe that organisations comprising the Northern Ireland public sector can make meaningful progress towards achieving the recommendations below and thereby achieve greater gender equality at executive level.

7.5.1 Strategic Recommendations

(1) Ensure the achievement of equal participation of women and men (i.e. a minimum representation of 40% males and a minimum representation of 40% females, with the remaining 20% representation comprising either males, females or a mix of males and females⁵⁴) on public sector executive management boards by January 2023⁵⁵. All public sector organisations subject to Section 75 should develop policies, procedures and practices around the following:

- (a) Establishing measurable targets (over a three year rolling period) for gender representation at executive management board level at an individual organisational level. Targets should be realistic and reflect both the gender makeup of the particular sector and current levels of gender representation within individual organisations. Targets for gender representation should be owned and managed by the most senior management teams within individual public sector organisations

⁵⁴The 40% figure was chosen as being situated between the minimum of 30% deemed necessary for a 'critical mass' and sufficient to have a sustainable impact on board performance and full parity at 50% (see Dahlerup, 1988, 'From a Small to a Large Minority: Women in Scandinavian Politics', *Scandinavian Political Studies*, Vol 11, No 4, pp. 275-297).

⁵⁵ The time period of seven years to achieve the target of 40% is consistent with that set by the European Union for achieving a target of 40% of the "under represented sex" among non-executive directors of listed companies.

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- (b) Monitoring and reviewing progress against targets on an annual basis;
- (c) Submitting monitoring returns (on an annual basis) on gender composition at executive management board level, together with progress against targets set, to the Gender Equality Unit, OFMDFM.

(2) The responsibility for gender equality issues within public sector organisations is currently predominantly delegated to Equality and Diversity Officers operating at middle management levels with limited authority, in some cases, to affect change. Individual organisations should identify a Gender champion (either a male or female), employed at the most senior level of management (e.g. Chief Executive, Permanent Secretary, Director) within their respective organisation, to take overall responsibility for setting and ensuring the achievement of measurable gender equality targets at senior levels and for the promotion of a gender inclusive culture within their area of responsibility.

(3) Leadership training and development opportunities are viewed as both a barrier to and enabler to career progression. While some organisations provide excellent opportunities in this regard, access generally to leadership training and development opportunities within the Northern Ireland public sector was described as patchy or sporadic in nature. Some of this was attributed to reductions in training and development budgets. In addition, while access to female only training is available through the Chief Executives' Forum Women's Leadership Initiative, this programme has limited capacity issues which minimises the numbers of aspiring females who can avail of it. The current gap in leadership training and development opportunities is an issue which affects all parts of the Northern Ireland public sector and requires action at a sectoral level.

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Consideration should therefore be given to establishing an Academy for developing professional executives/managers across the Northern Ireland public sector. Given the current functioning of the Chief Executives' Forum, consideration should be given to whether this organisation, in a revised capacity, might fulfil this role. The Forum would act as a conduit in terms of the following:

- (a) Taking the lead in terms of the development and provision of leadership and development programmes for professional management skills and knowledge that are transferable between different parts of the public sector;
 - (b) Delivering female only training and development opportunities to address gender specific issues for current and aspiring executives in the Northern Ireland public sector;
 - (c) Offering specific training and development opportunities designed to address personal resilience and confidence for current and aspiring executives in the Northern Ireland public sector;
 - (d) Facilitating mentoring and coaching relationships within and across public sector organisations.
- (4) At the time of writing, there is a concern that there is no overarching function which facilitates the sharing of best practice, including policy issues, across the Northern Ireland public sector with respect to gender equality at senior levels. It is recommended that a Public Sector Forum for Gender Equality is established (similar in many respects to the current Public Appointments Forum) to provide a setting for public sector organisations/sectors to engage in meaningful dialogue, scrutiny and challenge regarding progress towards achieving gender equality at senior levels at a sectoral and overall public sector level. In this respect, the forum would act as an overview body (with no executive responsibility) and as a

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conduit for the sharing of experiences, problems, potential solutions and best practice. The Forum would also commission further research at periodic intervals into the perceptions of individuals employed within the public sector with respect to various gender equality issues in order to keep abreast of developments in this regard. In order to ensure the effective workings of the Forum, the following issues should be addressed:

- (a) The Public Sector Forum for Gender Equality should comprise senior representatives from the main sectors which comprise the Northern Ireland public sector;
- (b) The Public Sector Forum for Gender Equality should be jointly championed by both a senior male and female executive within the Northern Ireland public sector;
- (c) The Public Sector Forum for Gender Equality should comprise representatives from relevant external stakeholder groups (including for example the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, the Civil Service Commission) who would act in both a support and challenge capacity;
- (d) The Public Sector Forum for Gender Equality should also comprise an external challenge function provided by external members;
- (e) The Public Sector Forum for Gender Equality should facilitate the establishment of a Gender Equality Working Group, whose membership would comprise equality and diversity practitioners (males and females) employed across the Northern Ireland public sector. The Gender Equality Working Group would provide an environment for equality and diversity practitioners to share policies and their experiences of implementation, in addition to discussing problems, potential solutions and best practice with respect to gender equality at executive or senior levels;
- (f) The Public Sector Forum for Gender Equality should be adequately funded and supported in an administrative capacity.

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(5) At the time of writing this report, the influence of ‘old boys’ networks’ was generally viewed as less of an issue when compared to some ten to twenty years ago. However, evidence collected suggests that informal networking opportunities still exist for males in particular when compared to females. In addition, a number of interviewees highlighted the importance of networking together with a lack of female only networks to share best practice with respect to gender equality issues across the Northern Ireland public sector. To address these issues, consideration should be given to:

- (a) Establishing an overarching Public Sector Women’s Network for current and aspiring executives throughout the Northern Ireland public sector to share their experiences, issues, problems and solutions with respect to gender equality issues⁵⁶.

7.5.2 Policy Recommendations

(6) The evidence collected during the research suggests that while flexible working arrangements are widely available throughout the Northern Ireland public sector, the reality is that individuals holding senior roles generally do not avail of such arrangements as a result of organisational expectations of the nature of work or negative perceptions around their use. In order to address this inconsistency, organisations should develop a gender inclusive culture at senior management

⁵⁶ At present, a number of female only networks (from both the private and public sectors) exist within Northern Ireland. In order to understand the workings of these networks, consideration should be given to undertaking a data collection exercise which would identify the number of female only networks currently in place, their particular focus and their effectiveness. The results of this exercise would facilitate a greater understanding of how the proposed Public Sector Women’s Network could play an overarching role within the Northern Ireland Public Sector.

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levels which promotes the acceptance of and use of flexible work arrangements for senior executives/managers by:

- (a) Collecting data on the uptake of flexible working arrangements at senior management levels;
- (b) Identifying barriers to the use of flexible working arrangements at senior management levels;
- (c) Reducing or removing barriers to the use of flexible working arrangements through effective job redesign, which should include a debate around the role of home working, remote working and hot-desking;
- (d) Ensuring that meeting times accommodate, where possible, those availing of flexible working arrangements;
- (e) Promoting job sharing at senior managerial levels by developing practical guidelines on its operationalisation, potential problems and solutions.
- (f) Senior management demonstrating their commitment to flexible work arrangements through dialogue with current and aspiring executives to understand their views regarding the use of flexible working arrangements.

(7) The work life balance of both current and aspiring executives within the Northern Ireland public sector was generally described as poor. Furthermore, work life balance was generally viewed as a barrier to progression, for both male and female aspiring executives. Organisations should develop a culture which promotes an appropriate work life balance at senior management levels through:

- (a) Improved understanding of work-life balance issues by engaging in regular dialogue with current and aspiring executives (e.g. through audits, staff surveys, exit surveys);
- (b) Reviewing and developing existing work-life balance policies to ensure they are clear regarding the promotion of an appropriate work life balance;

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- (c) Clearly communicating work-life balance policies and practices to current and aspiring executives;
- (d) Publishing guidance on long hours, explaining the disadvantages of working long hours and giving practical examples of ways to achieve a better work-life balance;
- (e) Senior managers should lead by example in the promotion of an appropriate work-life balance.

7.5.3 Process Recommendations

(8) Career development opportunities (i.e. secondments, challenging or highly visible assignments or projects, acting up opportunities), which are viewed as an essential component for progression to senior levels, are not always perceived to be allocated in a fair, transparent and competitive manner, despite the existence of policies in this regard. Organisations should:

- (a) Review, and revise is necessary, their existing policies for allocating career development opportunities to ascertain if they are fair, transparent and based on competitive principles as opposed to an informal allocation;
- (b) Review, and revise is necessary, their existing policies for allocating career development opportunities to ascertain if they provide equality of opportunity for both males and females;
- (c) Review, and revise is necessary, whether existing policies for allocating career development opportunities are consistently implemented at an organisational and sectoral level (where appropriate).

(9) Mentoring was widely acknowledged as an invaluable aspect of career development and progression by both males and females. However, the concept of mentoring was not always understood by individuals at an

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organisational level, and when made available, consistently applied within and across organisations. Public sector organisations should:

- (a) Develop and implement a policy of formal mentoring for all current and aspiring executives, with particular attention paid towards mentoring for females;
- (b) Develop and implement guidance on the matching of mentors and mentees, and re-matching where matching is found to be ineffective;
- (c) Ensure senior management commitment and buy-in to the formal mentoring policy through their participation in formal mentoring relationships;
- (d) Ensure the process of matching senior management to mentees leads to both male and female current and aspiring executives gaining equal access to these mentors;
- (e) Ensure the formal mentoring policy is available and communicated clearly to all current and aspiring executives;
- (f) Review the continued effectiveness of the formal mentoring policy through regular dialogue and feedback with mentors and mentees;
- (g) Ensure that mentors receive accredited training in the provision of mentoring, and where relevant, coaching;
- (h) Where appropriate, produce guidelines for informal mentoring.

Where organisations currently provide mentoring opportunities to current and aspiring executives, they should review the extent to which their existing policies and their implementation are sufficient and effective in terms of the above points.

- (10) With some minor exceptions, performance management (also referred to as the annual appraisal process) was described as passive (as opposed to active) and viewed as little more than a 'tick box' exercise in terms of career development across the public sector. Additionally, in some organisations there is lack of

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clarity around the competencies required to progress to senior management levels. Organisations should:

- (a) Review existing performance management policies and practices to ascertain if they are effective in terms of actively promoting career development;
- (b) Ensure that line managers take responsibility for discussing issues around career development with line reports as part of the annual performance management (appraisal) process;
- (c) Ensure that competencies for progression are clearly communicated throughout the organisation.

7.5.4 Data Analysis Recommendations

- (11) There is currently no centralised mechanism for collecting and reporting data on the gender composition of senior executive decision making roles for organisations which comprise the Northern Ireland public sector⁵⁷. In addition there is a lack of recruitment, selection and promotions data (i.e. with regard to applications, shortlisting and appointments) for senior decision making roles disaggregated by gender across the Northern Ireland public sector. The Equality and Strategy Directorate, OFMDFM should collect robust and comparable data and publish an annual report (similar to the Public Appointments Report) which provides statistics on the gender composition of executive management boards for all public sector organisations subject to Section 75 together with recruitment,

⁵⁷ As stated earlier, the Equality Directorate, OFMDFM currently collects some limited yearly gender equality data on decision making roles for the Senior Civil Service which is reported at an overall aggregate grade level (for the most recent report see OFMDFM, 2014b).

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selection and promotions data, where appropriate. Disaggregated statistics should be reported:

- (a) By executive/senior management level;
- (b) By organisational type (i.e. Local Government, Health and Social Care, Civil Service);
- (c) By sponsoring government department;
- (d) By organisation.

(12) There is a lack of data regarding the barriers to achieving gender equality at senior management levels across the Northern Ireland public sector. Data should be collected at an individual, organisational or sectoral basis at regular intervals to:

- (a) Identify levels of, and reasons for, opting out of career development and progression by gender;
- (b) Identify the barriers to achieving gender equality at senior management levels (e.g. long-hours culture, work life balance, flexible working);
- (c) Develop and implement action plans to address issues related to opting out and barriers to achieving gender equality at senior levels.

7.6 Gender Regimes in the Northern Ireland Public Sector

The analysis of data collected during the three stages of the research project has highlighted examples of each of the four dimensions of Connell's (2006a, 2006b) model of gender regimes within the Northern Ireland public sector, namely: gender division of labour; gender relations of power; emotion and human relations; and gender culture and symbolism. With respect to the first of these and consistent with stage two findings, the analyses of interview data suggests that females are more likely to opt out of career progression due to caring responsibilities and a long hour's culture and associated work life balance. In addition, findings suggest that females bear the majority of caring responsibilities in the home, and this has implications for their progression to senior levels. Some concerns were also raised by females in particular around the allocation of challenging and visible assignments, which are viewed as highly influential to career progression. Consistent with stage two, these examples provide evidence of a ***division of labour*** within the Northern Ireland public sector for current and aspiring executives/senior managers.

With respect to the second dimension of Connell's (2006a, 2006b) model of gender regimes, namely gender relations of power, findings suggest that females are also more likely than males to view their organisation's recruitment and promotion processes as gendered. For example, females were more likely to report examples of cronyism and that they were disadvantaged by competency based interview processes. These examples are suggestive of the ***existence of biased gender relations of power*** within the Northern Ireland public sector.

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In terms of the third dimension of gender regimes, namely emotion and human relations, the findings suggest that pockets of a male macho culture still exist within the Northern Ireland public sector, particularly within the Senior Civil Service. In addition, females reported negative attitudes among their colleague to the use of flexible work arrangements and exclusion from informal networks. Additionally, findings suggest that more gender balanced boards would result in more informed and careful decision making. These examples would suggest that **emotions and human relations** within the Northern Ireland public sector are gendered to some extent.

Finally, with respect to the fourth dimension of gender regimes, namely **gender culture and symbolism**, evidence was reported that a long-hours culture is a particular barrier to female career progression. Further evidence of gender culture and symbolism is also evident in terms of females' perceptions of their organisation's gender culture. For example, when compared to males, female respondents are more likely to agree that female managers bring a unique perspective to decision making and problem solving, that it is important to value the contribution of female executives/senior managers, that organisations should hold senior executives/managers accountable for the advancement of aspiring female executives/senior managers and that organisations have recruitment practices that encourage females to apply for executive/senior managerial positions. Furthermore, in terms of perceptions around the achievement of gender equality within their respective organisations, male respondents are more positive than females that their organisation has made good progress in this regard in the last five years and that their organisation has a gender balanced executive/senior management team.

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These examples would appear to indicate that male and female respondents hold different and conflicting beliefs and attitudes about their organisation's gender culture and symbols of gender equality at executive/senior management level within the Northern Ireland public sector.

7.7 Concluding Remarks

The evidence collected during stage three of the research project in particular indicates a mixed picture in terms of the existence of gender equality issues at executive or senior management level. On the one hand, evidence was found to suggest that some parts of the Northern Ireland public sector have achieved considerable success in terms of demonstrating good levels of gender equality at executive or senior levels (i.e. in terms of the number of senior positions held by females). On the other hand, the evidence also indicates that significant parts of the Northern Ireland public sector have some way to go in terms of achieving gender equality in senior positions. In addition, despite the fact that some organisations and sectors have made better progress in terms of the number of females currently holding senior executive positions than others, the evidence collected suggests that a number of gender equality issues still persist right across the Northern Ireland public sector.

Whilst the analysis presented in this report has addressed the objectives of this study, the sheer quantity and multi-dimensionality of the data collected during stages two and three in particular could be used to carry out further analyses in a number of areas including the following:

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- Perceptions (male and female) within each of the five organisational types of the Northern Ireland public sector (i.e. Government Departments/Executive Agencies; Local Government, Non-Departmental Public Bodies; Health and Social Care; and Further and Higher Education);
- Perceptions (male and female) of the most senior executives within the Northern Ireland public sector;
- Perceptions of alternative Section 75 groups (i.e. age, marital status and persons with and without dependents);
- Perceptions of female or male respondents only;
- Perceptions of respondents (male and female) with alternative working patterns;
- Perceptions of respondents (male and female) who hold non-executive positions; and
- Perceptions of respondents (male and female) with various levels of educational attainment.

The above analyses are, however, beyond the scope of the current project and would require the allocation of additional resources, both time and cost, to undertake.

Appendix 1:

List of Public Sector Organisations Included in Our Sample

Department for Agriculture and Rural Development

Government Department

Agriculture and Rural Development

Executive Agency

Forest Service

Rivers Agency

Non-Departmental Public Bodies

Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute

Foyle, Carlingford and Irish Lights Commission (Loughs Agency)

Livestock and Meat Commission for Northern Ireland

Northern Ireland Fishery Harbour Authority

Department for Culture, Arts and Leisure

Government Department

Culture, Arts and Leisure

Non-Departmental Public Bodies

Armagh Observatory and Planetarium

Arts Council of Northern Ireland

Libraries Northern Ireland

National Museums Northern Ireland

Northern Ireland Museums Council

Sport Northern Ireland

Waterways Ireland

Foras na Gaeilge

Ulster-Scots Agency

Department of Education

Government Department

Education

Executive Agencies

Education and Training Inspectorate

Non-Departmental Public Bodies

Belfast Education and Library Board

South Eastern Education and Library Board

Southern Education and Library Board

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North Eastern Education and Library Board
Western Education and Library Board
Council for Catholic Maintained Schools
Northern Ireland Council for Curriculum, Examinations and Assessments
The Staff Commission for the Education and Library Boards
Youth Council for Northern Ireland

Further & Higher Education Bodies

Queens University Belfast
Ulster University
Belfast Metropolitan College
Northern Regional College
North Western Regional College
South East Regional College
Southern Regional College
South West Regional College
Saint Mary's University College
Stranmillis University College

Department for Employment and Learning

Government Department

Employment and Learning

Non-Departmental Public Bodies

CITB Construction Skills
Colleges Northern Ireland
Industrial Court
Industrial Tribunals and Fair Employment Tribunals - Northern Ireland
Labour Relations Agency
Ulster Supported Employment Limited

Department for Enterprise, Trade & Investment

Government Department

Enterprise, Trade & Investment

Executive Agencies

Northern Ireland Authority for Utility Regulation

Non-Departmental Public Bodies

Invest Northern Ireland
Northern Ireland Tourist Board
Health & Safety Executive Northern Ireland
Consumer Council for Northern Ireland
InterTrade Ireland

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Tourism Ireland Limited

Department of the Environment

Government Department

Environment

Executive Agencies

Northern Ireland Environment Agency

Driver & Vehicle Agency Northern Ireland

Non-Departmental Public Bodies

Local Government Staff Commission for Northern Ireland

Northern Ireland Local Government Officers' Superannuation Committee

Local Government

Antrim Borough Council

Ards Borough Council

Armagh City and District Council

Ballymena Borough Council

Ballymoney Borough Council

Banbridge District Council

Belfast City Council

Carrickfergus Borough Council

Castlereagh Borough Council

Coleraine Borough Council

Cookstown District Council

Craigavon Borough Council

Derry City Council

Down District Council

Dungannon and South Tyrone Borough Council

Fermanagh District Council

Larne Borough Council

Limavady Borough Council

Lisburn City Council

Magherafelt District Council

Moyle District Council

Newry and Mourne District Council

Newtownabbey Borough Council

North Down Borough Council

Omagh District Council

Strabane District Council

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Department of the Finance & Personnel

Government Department

Finance & Personnel

Executive Agencies

Land & Property Services

Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency

Department of Health, Social Services & Public Safety

Government Department

Health, Social Services & Public Safety

Non-Departmental Public Bodies

Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service

Northern Ireland Guardian Ad Litem Agency

Northern Ireland Social Care Council

NHS

Belfast Health and Social Care Trust

South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust

Northern Health and Social Care Trust

Southern Health and Social Care Trust

Western Health and Social Care Trust

Northern Ireland Ambulance Service Health and Social Care Trust

Health Social Care Board

Public Health Agency

Patient and Client Council

Business Services Organisation

Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority

Northern Ireland Blood Transfusion Service Agency

Northern Ireland Medical and Dental Training Agency

Northern Ireland Practice & Education Council for Nursing and Midwifery

Department of Justice

Government Department

Justice

Executive Agencies

Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service

Northern Ireland Prison Service

Forensic Science Northern Ireland

Youth Justice Agency

Compensation Agency

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Non-Departmental Public Bodies

Police Service of Northern Ireland
Office of the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland
Probation Board for Northern Ireland
Northern Ireland Policing Board
Northern Ireland Legal Services Commission
Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland
Northern Ireland Police Fund
RUC George Cross Foundation

Office of the First Minister & Deputy First Minister

Government Department

Office of the First Minister & Deputy First Minister

Non-Departmental Public Bodies

Commissioner for Children and Young People
Commission for Victims and Survivors for Northern Ireland
Northern Ireland Judicial Appointments Commission
Strategic Investment Board Limited
Planning Appeals Commission
Special EU Programmes Body

Department for Regional Development

Government Department

Department for Regional Development

Executive Agencies

Roads Service

Non-Departmental Public Bodies

Northern Ireland Water
Northern Ireland Transport Holding Company
Belfast Harbour Commissioners
Londonderry Port & Harbour Commissioners
Warrenpoint Harbour Authority

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Department for Social Development

Government Department

Department for Social Development

Executive Agencies

Social Security Agency

Non-Departmental Public Bodies

Northern Ireland Housing Executive

Ilex Urban Regeneration Company Limited

Charity Commission for Northern Ireland

Northern Ireland Central Investment Fund for Charities

Disability Living Allowance Advisory Board (Northern Ireland)

Northern Ireland Office

Non-Departmental Public Bodies

Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission

Parades Commission for Northern Ireland

Boundary Commission for Northern Ireland

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Appendix 2

Supplementary Analysis: Gender Composition of the Northern Ireland Public Sector using all 246 Senior Civil Service Executives

Table 1 below shows a comparative analysis to that provided in Table 4.1 (Chapter 4), of the overall gender composition of the Northern Ireland public sector. It was noted earlier that the data presented in Table 4.1 included 191 executive directors employed in the Senior Civil Service. However, it was also noted that a further 95 executive directors who are employed in the Senior Civil Service (making a total of 286) are not members of any government department or executive agencies' senior management team. For comparative purposes, Table 1 below includes these additional 95 executive directors. This analysis reveals an overall gender balance of 70.3% male and 29.7% female. The inclusion of these additional Senior Civil Service executive directors does not, however, significantly alter the overall gender composition of the Northern Ireland public sector reported earlier in Table 4.1: namely, 70.8% male and 29.2% female.

Appendix 2 - Table 1		
Gender Composition at Executive Level of the Northern Ireland Public Sector (including both executive directors and non-executive positions)* (n=2,363)		
	Frequency	Percent
Male	1689	70.3
Female	714	29.7
Total	2403	100

* The above numbers include data provided by NISRA for the Senior Civil Service which comprises 246 executive directors as at 1st January 2012. The Senior Civil Service includes those employed at Grades 5 and 3, Permanent Secretary level and the Head of the Civil Service. The data above also includes the 40 non-executives of government departments or executive agencies' senior management team.

By way of comparison, the additional 95 executive directors are also included in Table 2 below which shows the gender composition at executive level of the five public sector types. This data can be compared with that presented earlier in Table

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4.2 (Chapter 4). The inclusion of these additional executive directors reveals some differences in the overall gender composition of executives within the Senior Civil Service when compared to Table 4.2: the gender balance below is 67.5% male and 32.5% female, which compares with a balance of 72.3% male and 27.7% female reported in Table 4.2. The better gender balance reported in Table 2 reinforces the fact that a number of females who are employed in the Senior Civil Service are not, however, members of their organisation's most senior board.

Appendix 2 - Table 2					
Gender composition at Executive Level (including executive director and non-executive positions) by organisation type (n=2,363)					
			Gender		Total
			Male	Female	
Organisation Type	Senior Civil Service*	Count	193	93	286
		% within Organisation Type	67.5	32.5	100
	Local Government	Count	541	180	721
		% within Organisation Type	75.0	25.0	100
	Non-Departmental Public Body	Count	675	262	937
		% within Organisation Type	72.0	28.0	100
	Health and Social Care in Northern Ireland (HSCNI)	Count	121	101	222
		% within Organisation Type	54.5	45.5	100
	Further & Higher Education	Count	159	78	237
		% within Organisation Type	67.1	32.9	100
	Total	Count	1662	701	2363
		% within Organisation Type	70.3	29.7	100

* Data for Senior Civil Service supplied by NISRA comprising 246 full-time executives plus 40 non-executives identified as a result of the content analysis.

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Appendix 3

Stage Two Questionnaire: Gender Equality at Executive Level of the Northern Ireland Public Sector

Section A: About you and your organisation

1. What is your gender?
 - a. Female
 - b. Male

2. What is your age?
 - a. Less than 30
 - b. 31-35
 - c. 36-40
 - d. 41-45
 - e. 46-50
 - f. 51-55
 - g. 56-60
 - h. Over 60

3. What is your marital status?
 - a. Single
 - b. Married
 - c. Civil Partnership
 - d. Cohabiting
 - e. Separated
 - f. Divorced
 - g. Widowed
 - h. Civil Partnership Dissolved
 - i. Prefer not to say

4. What is your partner's occupational status?
 - a. Unemployed
 - b. Student
 - c. Stay at home parent
 - d. Employed (Private Sector)
 - e. Employed (Public Sector)
 - f. Retired
 - g. I do not have a partner

5. What caring responsibilities do you have?
 - a. Child/Children
 - b. Elderly relative
 - c. Sick or infirm relative
 - d. Disable relative
 - e. None

6. Can you indicate how many dependent children you have in each age range?
 - a. Pre-school
 - b. Primary school
 - c. Secondary school

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7. Who has responsibility for the care of your child(ren) under the age of 18?
 - a. You
 - b. Your partner
 - c. Joint with partner
 - d. Joint with grandparents
 - e. Grandparents
 - f. Other (please specify)

8. What is your highest level of educational qualifications attained?
 - a. No qualifications
 - b. Vocational (e.g. NVQ)
 - c. GCSE/'O' Level
 - d. 'A' Level
 - e. HNC/HND
 - f. First degree
 - g. Professional
 - h. Masters' degree
 - i. PhD/Doctoral degree

9. How many employees does your organisation employ?
 - a. Between 1 and 9 employees
 - b. Between 10 and 49 employees
 - c. Between 50 and 249 employees
 - d. 250 employees or more

10. Which type of public sector organisation are you employed by?
 - a. Government Department/Executive Agency
 - b. Local Government
 - c. Non-Departmental Public Body
 - d. National Health Service
 - e. Further & Higher Education
 - f. Other (please specify)

11. What is your grade/position within your organisation? (*Example given for Government Department/Executive Agency*)
 - a. Permanent Secretary (Grade 2)
 - b. Deputy Secretary (Grade 3)
 - c. Assistant Secretary (Grade 5)
 - d. Grade 6
 - e. Grade 7
 - f. Deputy Principal
 - g. Staff Officer
 - h. Non-Executive/Independent Executive

12. Which of the following are you a member of? (please indicate the most senior team/board) (*Example given for Government Department/Executive Agency*)
 - a. Departmental Management Board
 - b. Senior Management Team
 - c. Other Management Team/Committee
 - d. None of the Above

13. How many years of service do you have in the public sector?

14. What year were you appointed to your current position?

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- 15.** I was promoted/appointed to my current position from:
- A private sector organisation
 - Within my current public sector organisation
 - Another public sector organisation
 - The voluntary sector
 - Other (please specify)
- 16.** Are you currently in discussions or participating in an internal/external recruitment process regarding a possible promotion to executive level or a more senior position than you currently hold?
- Not currently participating in recruitment/promotion
 - Currently participating in recruitment/promotion
 - Not currently participating in recruitment/promotion, but intend to in the future
 - Not currently participating in recruitment/promotion, as no positions available
 - Not currently participating in recruitment/promotion, and don't intend to in the future
- 17.** Have you consciously opted out of career progression to executive level, either temporarily or permanently due to the following? (please tick all that apply)
- Caring responsibilities for dependent children
 - Caring responsibilities for dependents other than children
 - Lack of flexible work arrangements
 - Unsupportive work environment
 - Inhospitable organisational culture
 - Long-hours culture
 - Existing imbalance in gender composition at executive level
 - Feeling marginalised because of my gender
 - Gender stereotyping and preconceptions about my roles and abilities
 - Considering retirement
 - None of the above
 - Other (please specify)
- 18.** Since joining the public sector, have you taken any of the following? (please tick all that apply)
- Career break
 - Maternity leave
 - Paternity leave
 - Adoptive leave
 - Dependent leave
 - None of these
- 19.** What is your general working pattern?
- 9am – 5pm (Mon-Fri)
 - Flexi-time working
 - Term-time working
 - Job-sharing
 - Compressed work week
 - Reduced hours (i.e. less than 35 hours)
 - Combination of home and office working
- 20.** Which of the following flexible work arrangements does your organisation offer? (please tick all that apply)
- Flexi-time working
 - Term-time working
 - Job-sharing
 - Compressed work week
 - Reduced hours (i.e. less than 35 hours)
 - Combination of home and office working

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21. Does your organisation offer the following for aspiring executives? (please answer either **yes**, **no** or **don't know**)

- a. Formal mentoring with a senior executive
- b. Informal mentoring/sponsoring
- c. In-house leadership training and development programme(s)
- d. Access to external leadership development programme(s)
- e. Acting up opportunities
- f. Employee network(s)
- g. Cross-functional/developmental job rotation
- h. Informing potential candidates about a forthcoming vacancy at executive level
- i. Other (please specify)

22. In addition to your main employer, do you hold any non-executive positions?

- a. Yes
- b. No

23. Number of non-executive positions held to date (including current positions)

24. Type of organisation non-executive position(s) held?

25. Type of non-executive position(s) held.

- a. Private Sector
- b. Public Sector
- c. Voluntary Sector

26. How many years has it been since you were first appointed to a non-executive decision?

27. To what extent do you agree disagree that your experience as a non-executive in another organisation has helped you to...	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagreed	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Develop your management or leadership skills beyond those developed in your main employment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Develop your management or leadership experience beyond that developed in your main employment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Obtain opportunities to work on challenging assignments, which would not be available to you in your main employment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Gain access to leadership training and development programme(s), which would not be available to you in your main employment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Enhance your chances of success in terms of being appointed to an executive position in your main employment in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

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Section B: Enablers/Facilitators of Gender Equality at Executive Level

28. To what extent do you agree/disagree that the following would/did help facilitate YOUR career advancement to executive level within your current organisation?	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Individual Strategies					
A supportive spouse/partner	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Access to affordable childcare	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Consistently exceeding performance expectations	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Demonstrating loyalty/commitment to my organisation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Employing domestic help	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Networking with influential colleagues	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Obtaining an influential mentor/sponsor	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Physical appearance (i.e. dressing professionally)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Seeking out difficult or highly visible job assignments	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Upgrading educational credentials	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Organisational Strategies					
Cross-functional/developmental job rotation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Access to employee networks	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Exit interviews to investigate reasons for non-progression to executive level	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Access to external leadership training and development programme(s)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Flexible work arrangements (e.g., compressed work week, reduced hours, term-time working, flexi-time)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Formal mentoring programme(s)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Gender impact assessments of organisational policies	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
In-house leadership training and development programme(s)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Identifying and developing high-potential employees	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Access to acting up opportunities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Have you any other comments with regard to enablers/facilitators of gender equality at executive level?

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Section C: Barriers to Gender Equality at Executive Level

29. To what extent do you agree/disagree that the following could be/were barriers to YOUR career advancement to executive level within your current organisation?	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
<i>Barriers related to me as an individual</i>					
A lack of management or leadership skills	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
A lack of management or leadership experience	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Caring responsibilities for dependent children	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Caring responsibilities for dependents other than children	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Feeling marginalised because of my gender	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Lack of awareness of organisational politics	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Reporting concerns/complaints regarding inequality	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Using flexible work arrangements	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Barriers related to my organisation</i>					
A lack of opportunities to work on challenging assignments	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
A lack of opportunities to gain visibility	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Colleagues' negative reactions to the use of flexible work arrangements	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Exclusion from informal networks of communication	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Existing imbalance in gender composition at executive level	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Failure of senior leadership to assume responsibility for my career advancement	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Gender stereotyping and preconceptions of my role and abilities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Inhospitable organisational culture	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Lack of mentoring	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Lack of recognition of need for work-life balance	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Lack of senior visibly successful role models of the same gender	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Limited advancement opportunities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Limited acting up opportunities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Long-hours culture	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Negative comments about your gender (e.g. insults or negative jokes)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Supervisors' negative reactions to the use of flexible work arrangements	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Unsupportive work environment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Have you any other comments with regard to barriers to gender equality at executive level?

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Section D: Increasing Gender Equality at Executive Level

30. Section D: To what extent do you agree/disagree that the following would increase gender equality at executive level in the Northern Ireland public sector GENERALLY?	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Positive action in shortlisting processes (i.e. shortlist males or females only)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Positive action in appointment process (i.e. appoint males or females only)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Formal mentoring programmes	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Greater availability of flexible working arrangements (e.g., flexi-working, homeworking, job sharing)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
High level internal or secondment development opportunities for the underrepresented gender	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Inclusive organisational culture at executive level	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Informing potential candidates about a forthcoming vacancy at executive level	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Interview panel training to avoid gender bias	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Move away from competency based interviews	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Providing unsuccessful candidates with constructive feedback	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Regular monitoring of executive level applicant data	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Statutory requirement to conduct gender reviews	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Targeted in-house leadership training and development programme(s)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Targeted external leadership training and development programme(s)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Quota for gender balance at executive level	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Have you any other comments with regard to increasing gender equality at executive level in the Northern Ireland public sector generally?

Gender Equality at Executive Level of the N.I. Public Sector

Section E: General Statements about Gender Equality at Executive Level

31. Section E: To what extent do you agree with the following statements?	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
<i>Your beliefs about female executives (both current and aspiring)</i>					
Female executives face frequent put downs for being too soft	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Female executives face frequent put downs for being too hard	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Few women in my organisation want to do what it takes to get to executive level	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Holding senior executives accountable for the advancement of aspiring females is important	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Recruitment practices that encourage female candidates to apply for executive positions is important	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Women bring a unique perspective to decision-making and problem solving at executive levels	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Valuing the contribution female executives make is important	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Your beliefs about female stereotyping</i>					
Women managers have their ideas challenged more often than male managers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Women managers have to perform much better than male managers in order to succeed	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Women managers must behave in a typically masculine way in order to be taken seriously	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Compared to male managers, female managers must continually prove themselves	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Women managers have their work judged more critically than do male managers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Compared to male managers, female managers are often uncomfortable in taking credit for their success	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>My individual views</i>					
I have difficulty being supervised by a man	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I have difficulty being supervised by a women	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I expect to encounter/have encountered organisational barriers in my career progression to executive level because of my gender	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am confident I would be promoted to an executive level position rather than another candidate of a different gender, but with the same qualifications/experience as me	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I would be comfortable working at executive level in my organisation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am aware that gender equality at executive level is discussed in my organisation's corporate strategies and/or policies (e.g., Corporate Plan, Equality Scheme, Human Resources Policies)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

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<i>What I think about my organisation</i>	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My organisation works in a transparent manner in relation to promotion to, and development opportunities for, executive positions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Within my organisation an informal culture of 'jobs for the boys' still prevails	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
My organisation actively encourages me to take on non-executive or equivalent roles in external organisations	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
My organisation has allocated sufficient financial resources towards promoting gender equality at executive level	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
My organisation has allocated sufficient time resources towards promoting gender equality at executive level	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Cronyism (showing favouritism to certain individuals, especially by appointing them to positions of authority) is still rife within my organisation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
My organisation communicates effectively when implementing policies which promote gender equality at executive level	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
My organisation has a balanced management board/corporate management team in terms of gender	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
My organisation has made good progress in the last 5 years to promote gender equality at executive level as a result of equalities obligations (e.g., Sex Discrimination Order Northern Ireland, Section 75 Northern Ireland Act)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
My organisation has made good progress in the last 5 years to promote gender equality at executive level irrespective of equalities obligations	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Men in my organisation are concerned with reverse discrimination	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
During boards/senior/management meetings, male executives are afforded more time to speak than female executives	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
During boards/senior/management meetings, female executives are afforded more time to speak than male executives	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Views expressed by male executives are valued more highly than views expressed by female executives	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Views expressed by female executives are valued more highly than views expressed by male executives	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
During boards/senior/management meetings, male executives display signs of negative body language when female executives are speaking	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
During boards/senior/management meetings, female executives display signs of negative body language when male executives are speaking	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Have you any final comments with regard gender equality in the Northern Ireland public sector?

Thank you for completing this questionnaire – it is much appreciated.

The next stage of our research will consist of interviews with both executives and aspiring executives. If you would like to take part in an interview, please place your email in the box below.

Appendix 4 Glossary of Terms

DARD = Department of Agriculture and Rural Development	DCAL = Department of Culture, Arts, and Leisure
DE = Department of Education	DEL = Department for Employment and Learning
DETI = Department of Enterprise, Trade and Industry	DOE = Department of the Environment
DFP = Department of Finance and Personnel	DHSSPS = Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety
DOJ = Department of Justice	OFMDFM = Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister
DRD = Department for Rural Development	DSD = Department for Social Development
NIO = Northern Ireland Office	NDPB = Non-Departmental Public Body

Appendix 5 Respondents to the Survey – Further Organisational Demographics

Appendix 5, Table 1 provides data regarding the seniority (or grade) at which survey respondents are employed and their membership of management/board teams within their respective organisations.

Appendix 5:Table 1		
Seniority and management board/team membership of survey respondents		
Panel A1: Seniority - Government Departments/Executive Agencies		
	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Permanent Secretary (Grade 2)	7	0.3
Deputy Secretary (Grade 3)	15	0.6
Assistant Secretary (Grade 5)	46	1.9
Grade 6	45	1.9%
Grade 7	327	13.8
Deputy Principal	675	28.5
Staff Officer	1037	43.8
Other	215	9.1
Total	2367	100
Panel A2: Management board/team membership - Government Departments/Executive Agencies		
	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Departmental Management Board	33	1.4
Senior Management Team	247	10.1
Other Management Team/Committee	637	26.0
None of the above	1529	62.5
Total	2446	100

Panel B1: Seniority - Local Government		
	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Chief Executive	7	4.3
Director	13	7.9
Head of Department	41	25.6
Line Manager	59	36.0
Other	43	26.2
Total	163	100
Panel B2: Management board/team membership - Local Government		
	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Executive/Senior Management Team	42	23.2
Departmental/Service Area Management Team	57	31.5
Other Management Team/Committee	34	18.8
None of the above	48	26.5
Total	181	100

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Panel C1: Seniority - Non-Departmental Public Bodies		
	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Chief Executive/Managing Director	21	6.6
Director	38	11.9
Head of Department	52	16.4
Line Manager	127	39.9
Other	79	25.2
Total	317	100
Panel C2: Management board/team membership - Non-Departmental Public Bodies		
	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Executive/Senior Management Team	86	24.6
Departmental Management Team	73	20.8
Other Management Team/Committee	86	24.6
None of the above	105	30.0
Total	350	100

Panel D1: Seniority – Health and Social Care		
	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Chief Executive/Managing Director	3	1.8
Director	16	9.7
Assistant/Co-Director	46	27.9
Directorate Manager/Line Manager	71	43.0
Senior Consultant	9	5.5
Consultant	3	1.8
Other	17	10.3
Total	165	100.0
Panel D2: Management board/team membership – Health and Social Care		
	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Trust Board	15	5.9
Executive/Senior Management Team	35	13.8
Departmental Management Team	117	46.3
Other Management Team/Committee	81	32.0
None of the above	5	2.0
Total	253	100.0

Panel E1: Seniority - Further & Higher Education Organisations		
	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Vice Chancellor/Principal	2	1.3
Pro-Vice Chancellor/Director	6	3.9
Dean	4	2.6
Head of Department/School	46	29.7
Professor	73	47.0
Other	24	15.5
Total	155	100.0
Panel E2: Management board/team membership - Further & Higher Education		
	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Executive/Senior Management Team	34	16.4
F&HE Board/Council	10	4.8
Senior Management	46	22.1
Other Management Team/Committee	76	36.5
None of the above	42	20.2
Total	208	100.0

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Panel F1: Seniority - Other Public Sector Organisations		
	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Chief Executive/Managing Director	2	10.5
Director	2	10.5
Head of Department	3	15.8
Line Manager	4	21.1
Other	8	42.1
Total	19	100.0
Panel F2: Management board/team membership - Other Public Sector Organisations		
	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Executive/Senior Management Team	4	19.1
Senior Management	5	23.8
Other Management Team/Committee	7	33.3
None of the above	5	23.8
Total	21	100.0

Panel A1 illustrates the positions of respondents employed in Government Departments/Executive Agencies: 68 are employed in the Senior Civil Service (this represents approximately 28% of the total Northern Ireland Senior Civil Service) and a further 45 and 327 are employed at grades 6 and 7 respectively. The remaining respondents (including deputy principal and staff officer) can be classified as aspiring managers. Whilst Panel A1 indicates that 18.5% of total respondents employed in Government Departments/Executive Agencies are employed at grade 7 and above, Panel A2 illustrates that 37.5% currently hold a board or management team position and are thus afforded the opportunity to engage in managerial decisions by their employer.

The results shown in Panel B with respect to Local Government indicate that 73.8% of respondents hold an executive/managerial position and a similar number, namely 73.5%, currently hold a board or management team position within their respective organisation. In terms of Non-Departmental Public Bodies (see Panels C), 74.8% of respondents hold an executive/managerial position while 70% currently hold a position on a board or management team. An even higher number of respondents employed in the Health and Social Care sector hold an executive/managerial

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position (89.7%) while 98% currently hold a position on a board or management team. A similar trend exists in the context of Further and Higher Education where 84.5% of respondents hold an executive/managerial position and 79.8% currently sit on a board or management team. As the number of respondents from 'Other Public Sector Organisations' is small, they are not commented upon here. Overall, Table 1 demonstrates that the respondents to the stage two survey are employed at various levels, including senior executive/management, middle, junior and aspiring management.

Appendix 6

Interview Protocol: Stage Three

ABOUT YOUR ORGANISATION

1. Is gender equality at executive/senior management levels an issue within your organisation and/or more generally within the Northern Ireland public sector?
2. What do you think currently works in terms of achieving gender equality at executive/senior management levels within your organisation and/or more generally within the Northern Ireland public sector?
3. Within your organisation, are there any specific plans or initiatives to address gender equality issues at executive/senior management levels?

CAREER PROGRESSION

4. What have been the key events that have shaped your career?
5. Are you actively pursuing/or have expectations to progress to senior managerial/executive level?
6. Have you, or do you know of others who have, opted out of career progression? What are the reasons for this?

FLEXIBLE WORK ARRANGEMENTS

7. Can you tell us how flexible work arrangements operate in your organisation in terms of policy and its practical application?
8. How did/do flexible work arrangements affect you in terms of your career progression (and what are other's perceptions of this)?

WORK LIFE BALANCE

9. What is the reality of work-life balance at executive/senior management levels within your organisation and how does this reflect your organisation's policy?
10. From a personal perspective, how would you describe your work life balance? As you progress to more senior levels do you foresee any problems with regards to work-life balance (e.g. caring responsibilities)?

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OPPORTUNITIES FOR ADVANCEMENT

11. What opportunities for advancement were/have you been offered, and how were you made aware of them, as you progressed to more senior levels in your organisation?
12. Are you aware of the full range of opportunities for advancement in your organisation, or any other opportunities for advancement in your organisation that you may not have been offered?
13. What more could your organisation do in terms of preparing individuals for career progression to senior managerial/executive level?

RECRUITMENT/PROMOTION

14. What is your opinion of your organisation's current recruitment/promotion processes in terms of improving gender equality at senior managerial/executive level (e.g., gender balanced recruitment panels)?
15. Can you tell us of any positive or negative experiences you have had of recruitment/promotion processes within the public sector?

INFORMAL NETWORKS

16. Are you aware of any informal networks which exist at senior managerial/executive levels within your organisation?
17. What influence do these informal networks have on an individual's career progression to executive/senior management levels (for members and non-members)?

PERSONAL ATTRIBUTES

18. What personal attributes do you believe contribute to successful career progression to senior managerial/executive level?
19. Who should take responsibility for developing these attributes?

ORGANISATION CULTURE and HUMAN RELATIONS

20. How would you describe your organisation's culture regarding gender equality (i.e. how things get done in your organisation)

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21. How do males and females interact (body language, tone, appearance, use of language/terminology, supervision) in formal (e.g. meetings) and informal settings (e.g. in the office generally)?
22. What else could be done to change your organisation's culture to increase gender inclusivity?

PROMOTING/IMPROVING GENDER EQUALITY

23. Is there anything else your organisation could do regarding gender equality at /senior managerial/executive level? (i.e. positive action, quotas, constructive feedback for unsuccessful candidates, monitoring applicant data, interview panel training, informing potential candidates of upcoming vacancies).

Appendix 7 Participant Information Sheet

Section A: The Research Project

1) Title of project	An Investigation of Gender Equality at Executive Level across the Northern Ireland Public Sector
2) Purpose and value of study	<p>The purpose of this study is to identify baseline figures for gender balance at executive levels across the Northern Ireland public sector, examine the influence of various organisational, cultural and behavioural factors on gender diversity at executive level, and identify the impact of these factors on individuals.</p> <p>This study will help public sector organisations understand the influence their policies and practices have on gender balance at executive level and provide an understanding of executive/senior and aspiring managers' perceptions around issues of gender equality at executive level.</p>
3) Invitation to participate	<p>You have been invited to participate in the study following an indication on your part that you would be willing to participate in further research, or alternatively as a result of the position you hold. Your contribution is crucial to the success of this project and would be very much appreciated. This project has been given full unconditional approval from the ethics committee at the University of Ulster.</p>
4) Who is organising the research?	<p>Professor Joan Ballantine, Mr Tony Wall and Dr Graeme Banks (University of Ulster); Professor Kathryn Haynes (Newcastle University); Dr Melina Manochin (Aston University)</p>
5) What will happen to the results of the study?	<p>The results of this research will be disseminated throughout the Northern Ireland public sector and at conference presentations, workshops / seminars, and papers published in academic journals.</p>
6) Source of funding for the research	This research is being funded by the OFMDFM
7) Contact for further information	<p>Professor Joan Ballantine joan.ballantine@ulster.ac.uk Telephone: +44 (0)28 90366204</p>

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Section B: Your Participation in the Research Project

1) Why you have been invited to take part?	You have been invited to take part in this study of Northern Ireland public sector organisations because you are either: A policymaker/stakeholder A Chief Executive A Director of Human Resources A current or aspiring executive/senior manager
2) Can you refuse to take part in the research?	You can refuse to take part without having to provide a reason. By informing the researcher that you do not wish to take part in this research, your contact information will be deleted from all records kept and you will not be contacted further.
3) Can you withdraw at any time, and how?	If you agree to take part in this research, you still have the option to withdraw at anytime by informing the researcher. You are not required to provide a reason for withdrawal.
4) What will happen if you agree to take part (brief description of procedures/tests)?	An interview will be conducted with you to discuss your experiences regarding gender equality at executive/senior management levels. With your permission, the interview will be digitally recorded and transcribed onto electronic format. Please be assured that the transcribed interviews will not be traceable to you and all personal information will not be included on the transcripts.
5) Are there any risks involved (e.g. side effects from taking part) and if so what will be done to ensure your wellbeing/safety?	No
6) Agreement to participate in this research should not compromise your legal rights should something go wrong	
7) Are there any special precautions you must take before, during or after taking part in the study?	No
8) What will happen to any information/ data/samples that are collected from you?	Collected information will be analysed for research purposes only and secured in password-protected electronic files that only the research team will have access to. In accordance with University policy they will be destroyed after 10 years.
9) What are the benefits from taking part?	You will be provided with an electronic copy of the final report.
10) How will your participation in the project be kept confidential?	None of your personal information will be disclosed or discussed with anyone. Your responses will be treated with complete confidentiality - neither your name nor that of your organisation will be published.

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Appendix 8 Consent Form

Research Project: An Investigation of Gender Equality at Executive Level across the Northern Ireland Public Sector

Consent for Participation in Interview Research

I volunteer to participate in a research project conducted by Professor Joan Ballantine, Ulster Business School, University of Ulster. I understand that the project is designed to gather information about Gender Equality at Executive Level in the Northern Ireland Public Sector. I will be one of approximately 60 people being interviewed for this research.

1. My participation in this project is voluntary. I understand that I will not be paid for my participation. I may withdraw and discontinue participation at any time.
2. I understand that most interviewees will find the discussion interesting and thought-provoking. If, however, I feel uncomfortable in any way during the interview session, I have the right to decline to answer any question or to end the interview.
3. Participation involves being interviewed by researchers from the University of Ulster. The interview may last approximately 1 – 2 hours. Notes will be written during the interview. The interview will also be recorded for subsequent transcription, which will be verified by me for accuracy before being used for research purposes. If I do not wish to be recorded, I will indicate when asked at the outset of the interview.
4. I understand that the researchers will not identify me by name in any reports using information obtained from this interview, and that my confidentiality as a participant in this study will remain secure. Subsequent uses of records and data will be subject to standard data use policies which protect the anonymity of individuals and institutions.
5. No person from my organisation will either be present at the interview or have access to raw notes or transcripts. This precaution will prevent my individual comments from having any negative repercussions.
6. I understand that this research study has been reviewed and approved by the Ulster Business School's Research Ethics Filter Committee. For research problems or questions regarding subjects, the Ulster Business School's Research Ethics Filter Committee may be contacted via Mr Tony Wall (ap.wall@ulster.ac.uk)
7. I have read and understand the explanation provided to me. I have had all my questions answered to my satisfaction, and I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.
8. I have been given a copy of this consent form.

My Signature

Date

My Printed Name

Signature of the Investigator

For further information, please contact:
Professor Joan Ballantine
Telephone: 028 9036 6204
Mobile: 0787 6682044

Email: joan.ballantine@ulster.ac.uk

Technical Annex One

1.1 Research Approach

The research project comprised the following key components for stages one, two and three:

1. Project inception: a series of discussions were held with the Client, OFMDFM, in order to agree the scope, focus, timescales and outputs of the research project. These discussions subsequently led to the production and agreement of a Project Initiation Document (PID) prior to the commencement of the research project in August 2012.
2. Setting the research in context: this aspect of the research involved a detailed review of key publications from both the academic and practitioner literature in order to set the research in context.
3. Establishing an Advisory Group as part of the governance arrangements for the research project: this involved a consideration of the following issues:
 - (a) Role of the Advisory Group: to oversee any issues that may require advice and assurance, including for example ethical issues, data disclosure/protection requirements, methodology and other aspects of project design.
 - (b) Responsibilities of the Advisory Group: to provide advice and assurance to the project research team regarding the design of data collection instruments, sampling strategy, data analysis procedures, and communication and dissemination of research outputs.

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- (c) Composition of the Advisory Group: the Advisory Group comprises a number of stakeholders who represent the various elements of the Northern Ireland public sector (for example, the Northern Ireland Civil Service, Local Government and Non-Departmental Public Bodies).
4. Deriving a working definition of 'executive level': the process of agreeing a working definition was an iterative one involving numerous discussions with both the Client and the Advisory Group. Given the diversity of the Northern Ireland public sector, a number of possible definitions were considered, including those based on salary levels, grade and membership of an organisation's most senior management board. However, given the difficulty of comparability across different public sector organisational types, it was agreed that membership of an organisation's most senior management board was considered the most appropriate means of defining 'executive level'.
5. Agreeing on the composition of the senior management board: the 'most senior management board' of public sector organisations comprises both 'executive directors'⁵⁸ and 'non-executive directors'⁵⁹. The 'executive directors' are normally employed on a full-time basis and would include for example, the Chief Executive Officer, the Finance Director and the Human Resource Director. On the other hand, 'non-executive directors' (including the Chairperson), are employed on fixed term appointments and the level of remuneration they receive varies depending on the type of public sector body, the size of the organisation and time commitment required. According to the UK Corporate Governance Code

⁵⁸ The term 'executive director' is not used in a consistent manner throughout the Northern Ireland public sector to denote individuals who are members of an organisation's most senior board. For example, alternative terms in the Senior Civil Service are Permanent/Deputy Secretary.

⁵⁹ The term 'non-executive' is also not used in a consistent manner throughout the Northern Ireland public sector. Alternative terms would include board members, committee members, council members, commissioners, trustees and councillors. For the purposes of stage one of the research, we use the term 'non-executive directors' as an all-encompassing term.

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(Financial Reporting Council, 2012), 'non-executive directors' should constructively challenge and help develop proposals on strategy' (p.6). For the purposes of this research, ***stage one reports on both executive directors and non-executive directors who comprise an organisation's most senior management board; stage two reports on current and aspiring executive directors/senior managers' attitudes only⁶⁰; and stage three reports on current and aspiring executive directors/senior managers' perceptions.***

6. Ascertaining which organisations comprise the Northern Ireland public sector (i.e. the population) and those to include in our sample for the purposes of the research study: given the aim of the research project is to investigate gender equality at executive level in the context of Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act (1998), it was felt appropriate that the population be defined as organisations designated for the purposes of Section 75. However, initial investigations of publicly available data together with discussions with the Client and the Advisory Group indicated that obtaining the necessary data to conduct a content analysis for all of the organisations which comprised the population was likely to be problematic. As a result, 143 organisations comprised the sample for the purposes of stages one, two and three of the research project⁶¹. These organisations were organised into the following five categories for analysis purposes:

⁶⁰ During stage two, an insufficient response rate was achieved for non-executives. Therefore, stage two reports on the attitudes of executive directors only.

⁶¹ A number of organisations have been excluded from the research study: trade unions (not directly funded by the public sector); voluntary not-for-profit-organisations (for which data availability was an issue); organisations reporting to bodies outside Northern Ireland; organisations which were in transition at the time of data collection; and organisations which would result in double counting of data.

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- (a) Organisations comprising the Northern Ireland Civil Service⁶² (twelve departments and the Northern Ireland Office) and executive agencies;
 - (b) Organisations comprising Local Government (twenty-six local councils at the time the research was conducted);
 - (c) Organisations defined as Non-Departmental Public Bodies (NDPBs) (all those accountable to the twelve government departments);
 - (d) Organisations comprising Health and Social Care in Northern Ireland (HSCNI) (six Health and Social Care Trusts, plus associated organisations, e.g. NI Blood Transfusion Agency, Patient and Client Council);
 - (e) Organisations comprising Further and Higher Education (six further education colleges, two universities and two teacher education training colleges).
7. Facilitating a Stakeholder Engagement event in March 2013: the objectives of this event were as follows: to publicise the gender equality research project to the Northern Ireland public sector; to encourage 'buy in' to the study; and to inform participants that a questionnaire would be distributed during stage two of the research project and that their participation would be welcomed.
8. Stage one of the research project: this stage aimed to provide a baseline for overall gender equality levels and gender equality by occupation at the executive level in the Northern Ireland public sector for the year ended 31st March 2012. This was achieved by conducting a content analysis of the 143 organisations⁶³

⁶² The Northern Ireland Civil Service comprises the Civil Service (all grades up to and including Grade 6 and the Senior Civil Service which includes Grade 5 and above). For the purpose of the research, a current 'executive' is defined as someone employed in the Senior Civil Service (i.e. grades 5 and 3, Permanent Secretaries and the Head of the Civil Service) while an aspiring executive/senior manager is defined as someone employed in what are known as the 'feeder grades', namely grade 6 and below of the Civil Service.

⁶³ A list of the organisations contained in our sample can be found in Appendix 1.

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who comprise the sample for the study (further details of the research methodology adopted during stage one is provided in section 1.2 below).

9. Stage two of the research project: this stage aimed to ascertain the attitudes of current and aspiring executives, currently employed in the Northern Ireland public sector, to a number of gender equality issues. To that end, a questionnaire was designed, piloted and distributed to current and aspiring executives within the 143 organisations which comprise our sample (further details of the research methodology adopted during stage two is provided in section 1.3 below).
10. Stage three of the research project: the final stage of the research project aimed to investigate in more detail a number of gender equality themes at the executive level of the Northern Ireland public sector. This was achieved by carrying out a series of interviews (n=107) with male and female executives, both current and aspiring (further details of the research methodology adopted during stage three is provided in section 1.4 below).

1.2 Stage One

1.2.1 Research Methodology: Data Collection

The data for stage one of the research was collected by conducting a content analysis of publicly available data. Data collection was undertaken between September 2012 and December 2012. The data collection process involved first sourcing the annual reports and accounts for all 143 organisations contained in the sample for the year ended 31st March 2012 (i.e. the most recent annual report and accounts). A content analysis of these documents was then undertaken to ascertain the membership of each organisation's most senior management board. Where the

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required information was not available in the annual report and accounts, a search of other relevant sources located on organisational websites (i.e. organisational charts, minutes of board meetings) was next undertaken. In total, 2,308 executive level positions (including executives and non-executives) were identified across the sample as a result of the content analysis process. The data collected as a result of the content analysis process enabled the researchers to ascertain the following: breakdown of the most senior management board, both by gender and by executives and non-executives; total size of the management board; the gender of the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and the Chairperson; and the occupational roles held by each executive (i.e. human resources, finance).

Following an initial data collection process, the accuracy of the data was ascertained by first comparing the data sourced from annual reports and accounts for the year ended 31st March 2012 with other data located on organisational websites (e.g. the most recent minutes of the most senior management board). A second round of data verification then took place which necessitated the research team contacting all 143 organisations by telephone (with the exception of the twelve Civil Service departments⁶⁴) to confirm the accuracy of the data collected.

⁶⁴ Verification of the data collected by the researchers for the twelve Civil Service Departments was facilitated by comparisons with data received from the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA). The data provided by NISRA included all those employed in the Senior Civil Service as at 1st January 2012, namely 246 individuals employed at either Grade 5 or 3, Permanent Secretary or Head of Civil Service level. A comparison of the data collected by the researchers and the data provided by NISRA highlighted an important distinction, namely that 55 individuals employed at Senior Civil Service level were not members of any government department's or executive agencies' senior management team. In chapter 4, we report on the total number of executives who are members of a senior management team (i.e. 191). However, for comparison purposes, we provide a supplementary analysis using the data supplied by NISRA comprising 246 executives (see appendix 2).

1.2.2 Data Analysis

Following completion of the data verification process, data for the entire sample was entered into SPSS⁶⁵, a statistical software package which is widely used by social science researchers. The data were then analysed to provide a baseline for gender equality at executive level of the Northern Ireland public sector. Descriptive data were initially analysed using frequency counts to identify patterns within the data. Subsequently, patterns in the data were explored by testing for associations or relationships in the data.

1.3 Stage Two

1.3.1 Research Methodology

The second stage of the research project aimed to ascertain the attitudes of current and aspiring executives with respect to a number of gender equality issues in the Northern Ireland public sector. These include attitudes around the barriers to gender equality and the enablers or facilitators of gender equality. Given that only limited evidence exists regarding gender equality issues at the executive level of the Northern Ireland public sector, a questionnaire was considered the most appropriate means of ascertaining views across the public sector. In the next section the approach adopted to develop the questionnaire is discussed in more detail.

⁶⁵ Statistical Package for the Social Sciences.

1.3.2 Designing the Questionnaire⁶⁶

The design of the questionnaire necessitated consideration of a number of factors which are discussed below:

1. The design process began by clarifying the information to be obtained from the questionnaire to address the objectives of stage two of the research. This was achieved via discussions with the Advisory Group who recommended that the survey should focus on a comparison of male and female views with respect to the following issues: perceived enablers or facilitators and barriers to career progression to executive level; and processes and practices that might increase gender equality at executive level of the Northern Ireland public sector.
2. The content and wording of individual questions: this process was facilitated by a review of existing relevant academic and practitioner studies which had considered the above gender equality issues in alternative research contexts (for example, the private sector and alternative geographical contexts) (see for example, Opportunity Now, 2000; Broadbridge, 2008; Ismail and Ibrahim, 2008; Tlaiss and Kauser, 2010; Smith et al., 2012; D'Agostino and Levine, 2010). The survey mainly used closed question types and pre-coded responses to provide uniformity of response, thus making the survey less time consuming and more user-friendly. Finally, where possible each question was kept as short and clear as possible, and double-barrelled and negative questions were avoided. The process of developing questions was an iterative one of design, reflect and amend. As part of the iterative process, the Advisory Group were widely

⁶⁶ A copy of the questionnaire is provided in Appendix 3.

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consulted to ensure that the questionnaire was fit for purpose and sufficiently tailored to reflect the gender equality issues of interest to the Northern Ireland public sector.

3. Ordering of questions: consistent with previous academic and practitioner studies, demographic questions were asked first in order to put respondents at ease before moving on to attitudinal questions. This was felt to be the most logical ordering of questions in order to encourage participants to respond and deal with each of the research objectives.
4. Ensuring validity and reliability: in order to ensure that the questionnaire provided valid and reliable results, the survey was pre-tested via peer review and pilot tested among a sub-sample of the targeted population, which were recommended by the Advisory Group.
5. Nature of the questionnaire: a number of options were considered by the research team including a self-administered or interviewer administered questionnaire (to be conducted via telephone or individual visits to organisations). The self-administered option was considered to be the most appropriate given the desire to administer the questionnaire to all 143 organisations. Additionally this method was deemed to be less time consuming, more efficient and had the potential to reduce the risk of respondent bias when compared to the interviewer administered approach.
6. Distribution of the questionnaire: two options were considered by the research team, postal or email distribution. Discussions with the Advisory Group together with considerations around the financial costs, time commitment and effectiveness of both options led to a decision to distribute the survey by email. To that end, it was agreed that the most effective way to distribute the

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questionnaire would be via Survey Monkey. This method of distribution made it possible to have a series of filter questions in the questionnaire, thus ensuring that participants only had to respond to the questions most relevant to them.

7. Covering email and instructions on the completion of the questionnaire: a covering email which briefly explained the purpose of the study and encouraged participation in the study accompanied the survey. This email was tailored depending on the type of public sector organisation it was sent to. In addition, instructions were provided at the outset of the Survey Monkey questionnaire to explain the purpose of the study, give guidance on completion of the questionnaire and as a means of reassuring potential respondents that all responses would remain anonymous.

1.3.3 Sampling

Two approaches to sampling, namely probability and non-probability sampling, were considered by the research team. Probability samples are those in which every unit in the population has a known, non-zero chance of being selected in the sample. Whilst a probability sample would help ensure that respondents reflect the population, namely current and aspiring executives, unfortunately, it was not possible to use this form of sampling due to the difficulty of identifying current and aspiring executives in a standardised manner across the Northern Ireland public sector. Given this difficulty, it was decided to adopt 'snowball' sampling, a form of non-probability sampling. Snowball sampling makes use of known contacts within the population of interest in order to recruit future subjects. This method of sampling is used by researchers in cases where the population is difficult to access, as was the

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case in the current research project. Whilst the sampling approach adopted during stage two has the potential to make generalisations beyond our sample of respondents difficult, it did ensure that the widest possible distribution of the survey was possible. Despite this, it is anticipated that the results will broadly reflect the views of current and aspiring executives within the Northern Ireland public sector.

1.3.4 Data Collection

Snowball sampling was facilitated in a number of ways. First, members of the Advisory Group distributed the questionnaire to their stakeholder groups together with an accompanying email, which provided support for the research study and invited both current and aspiring executives to participate in the study. Second, the research team contacted (by email) the CEO of all public sector organisations (with the exception of the Northern Ireland Civil Service) included in the stage one content analysis, inviting current and aspiring executives to participate in the survey. Third, the questionnaire was distributed to all delegates who had attended the Stakeholder Engagement Event in March 2013 and for whom email addresses were known. Fourth, the questionnaire was distributed throughout the Northern Ireland Civil Service via ITAssist⁶⁷ together with a supporting covering letter from Corporate Human Resources. Finally, the questionnaire was distributed to executives in the Northern Ireland public sector for whom electronic contact details had been collected during stage one of the research from publicly available sources.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ Distribution of the questionnaire via ISAssist made it possible for the researchers to access all executives, both current and aspiring who are employed in the Northern Ireland Civil Service (including the Senior Civil Service).

⁶⁸ Whilst the terminology used to denote executives, both current and aspiring, across the Northern Ireland public sector varies by sector (i.e. Health, Education, Civil Service, NDPBs and Local Government), the researchers use the terms 'current and aspiring executives' in a consistent manner

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The survey was initially distributed on Monday 20th May 2013 with a first reminder distributed on 3rd June, a second reminder on 17th June, and a final closing date of 5th July. A total of 4,051 responses to the survey were obtained by the closing date. Of these, 865 responses were excluded from the analysis as these respondents did not complete all questions necessary for analysis. This resulted in a total of 3,186 useable responses, representing 78.6% of responses received. Since a non-probability sampling approach (i.e. snowball sampling) was adopted during stage two of the research, it was not possible to ascertain the total size of the population. As a result, it was therefore not possible to determine an overall response rate to the survey.

1.3.5 Data Analysis

The statistical analysis of survey responses was conducted using SPSS (v20). As the survey was conducted electronically it was possible to download responses directly into SPSS, thus avoiding clerical input errors. At this stage it is normal practice to test for non-response bias by examining differences between early and late responders. However, as this study uses a non-probability sampling approach (i.e. snowball sampling), it is not possible to know the specific features of the entire population from which survey respondents are drawn. Consequently, it is not possible to measure differences between the survey sample and the population in order to identify potential non-response bias.

during stage two of the research project. As a result, it is inevitable that an element of self-nominating oneself as a current or aspiring executive has taken place during stage two of the research project.

1.4 Stage Three

1.4.1 Research Methodology

Stage three of the research aimed to investigate in more detail some of the issues discussed in chapter 5 with respect to aspects of gender equality at the executive level of the Northern Ireland public sector. To that end, stage three addressed objectives 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7. In addition, stage three aimed to specifically address objective 8, namely to identify examples of best practice which might facilitate improved gender equality at executive level of the Northern Ireland public sector. Given that very limited evidence exists regarding gender equality issues at the executive level of the Northern Ireland public sector, data for stage three was collected by conducting a series of interviews with male and female executives, both current and aspiring. In the next section the approach adopted to develop the interview protocol is discussed in more detail.

1.4.2 Designing the Interview Protocol

In order to guide the interview process, and thereby ensure that the objectives of stage three were achieved, the research team designed a semi-structured interview protocol prior to commencing interviews. The initial development of the interview protocol was primarily informed by the findings of stage two of the research project and by drawing on the relevant literature. This resulted in the production of a draft interview protocol which was subject to scrutiny by the research project's Advisory Group. As a result of detailed discussion with members of the Advisory Group, the interview protocol was subject to amendments and subsequent approval. In order to

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ensure that the interview protocol was 'fit for purpose', the research team piloted it with a member of the Advisory Group. Feedback from this pilot suggested that the interview protocol was robust to the various sectors of the Northern Ireland public sector and that it was fit for purpose in the sense that the data collected would enable the research team to address objectives 3 through 8. A copy of the interview protocol is provided in Appendix 6.

1.4.3 Sampling

Consistent with stage two of the research, 'snowball' sampling was adopted and used as the starting point for stage three of the research. Snowball sampling makes use of known contacts within the population of interest in order to recruit future subjects. To that end, potential interviewees were initially identified from the stage two survey which asked respondents to indicate if they would be willing to participate in interviews during stage three with the research team. This enabled a number of potential interviewees to be identified. Where possible, all potential interviewees were classified by the research team by organisation, by sector and whether they held an aspiring or current executive role. This process enabled the research team to ascertain which of the potential interviewees, and therefore public sector organisations, might form part of stage three of the research.

The number of individuals selected to take part in stage three was considered in the context of the funding available to undertake this stage of research. To that end, funding was available for 60 interviews to be undertaken. Given the necessity to collect data across the Northern Ireland public sector, the research team felt it

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appropriate to interview two current executives (one male and female), two aspiring executives (one male and female), and the chief executive (or equivalent) of each organisation chosen to take part in stage three⁶⁹. While funding was made available to conduct 60 interviews, as the interviews proceeded it became apparent to the research team that in order to ensure full coverage of the Northern Ireland public sector, a greater number of interviews would have to be conducted. As a result, a total of 107 interviews were conducted involving some 30 organisations.

1.4.4 Organisation and Conduct of Interviews

Potential interviewees were contacted to ascertain their willingness to participate in stage three of the research. Contact was initially made with the most senior potential interviewee (i.e. the Chief Executive Officer or equivalent) in order to secure their participation and obtain 'buy-in' to the research project. Thereafter, contact was made with current and aspiring executives within the same organisation to secure their participation. Upon securing participation, a one page summary of the research project and a consent form were sent to each interviewee prior to the interview. A copy of both documents is provided in Appendices 7 and 8.

The majority of interviews were conducted at the interviewees' place of employment. All interviews were conducted by either one or two members of the research team. Prior to the commencement of each interview, the interviewer provided a brief summary of the research project and collected the completed consent form from the interviewee. Although the consent form asked interviewees for their consent to use a

⁶⁹ It was not always possible to interview the numbers of desired individuals within each organisation which took part in stage three due to issues of access and availability of senior executives.

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digital recorder for the purposes of later transcribing the interview, the interviewer also asked permission in this regard prior to the commencement of each interview. On average each interview lasted approximately one and a half hours. All interviewees were assured by the research team that their anonymity and confidentiality would be reassured and that their personal details would not be reported in any findings.

1.4.5 Coding of Interviews

All digital recordings were transcribed verbatim and checked for accuracy. Following this, each transcription was uploaded onto NVIVO⁷⁰. The research team subsequently coded each interview using the following broad themes:

- Theme One: Perceptions of the Gender Composition of Executive Management Boards
- Theme Two: Perceptions of Gender Culture
- Theme Three: Flexible Work Arrangements
- Theme Four: Work Life Balance
- Theme Five: Opportunities for Advancement, Recruitment and Progression
- Theme Six: Benefits of a Gender Balanced Board
- Theme Seven: Promoting Gender Equality at Senior Levels

⁷⁰ NVIVO is a software package which provides a platform for analyzing all forms of unstructured data (http://www.qsrinternational.com/products_nvivo.aspx).

1.4.6 Analysis of Interviews

Given the number of interviews conducted, the process of analysing the interview data in order to derive a consistent picture of the findings with respect to each of the key themes was a very complex one. To that end, individual members of the research team independently conducted an analysis of the key themes. This facilitated a comparison of the overall findings for each theme with a consensus of the general findings being agreed through a process of discussion. The analysis of each key theme is supported by providing appropriate quotations from both aspiring executives and current executives (which includes the views of Chief Executive Officers and their equivalents).

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Technical Annex Two

Table 1			
Reasons why Females are more likely than Males to opt out of career progression			
	Chi-square	df	Sig. (p)
Caring responsibilities for dependent children	159.84	1	0.00
Caring responsibilities for dependents other than children	20.36	1	0.00
Lack of flexible work arrangements	64.00	1	0.00
Unsupportive work environment	7.57	1	0.01
Long-hours culture	44.94	1	0.00
Existing imbalance in gender composition at executive	43.24	1	0.00
Feeling marginalised because of my gender	9.09	1	0.00
Gender stereotyping and pre-conceptions about my roles and abilities	50.75	1	0.00

Table 2					
Regression analysis of predictor variables that influence the decision to opt out of career progression					
	Expected effect	B	S.E.	Exp (B)	Sig.
Constant		0.09	0.72	1.09	0.90
Female	+	0.84	0.10	2.30	0.00
Age	+	0.19	0.03	1.20	0.00
Number of caring responsibilities	+	0.38	0.07	1.46	0.00
Number of children	+	0.19	0.05	1.22	0.00
Government Departments/ Executive Agencies					0.00
Local Government		-0.55	0.20	0.58	0.01
Non-Department Public Bodies		-0.17	0.15	0.84	0.25
National Health Service		-0.17	0.19	0.85	0.37
Further & Higher Education		-0.66	0.20	0.52	0.00
Other		-0.01	0.57	0.99	0.99
Seniority Level	-	-0.18	0.05	0.83	0.00
Micro organisation					0.04
Small organisation	-	-1.20	0.73	0.30	0.10
Medium organisation	-	-1.32	0.71	0.27	0.06
Large organisation	-	-1.54	0.71	0.22	0.03

*R*² = 0.25 (Hosmer & Lemeshow), 0.10 (Cox & Snell), 0.14 (Nagelkerke). Model χ^2 (14) = 229.56, *p* = 0.00

Technical Annex Three

Best Practice Cases

This section of the report presents a number of best practice cases, developed within either individual organisations or sectors, which have been frequently identified as playing an important role in promoting gender equality at senior levels within the N.I. public sector. The initiatives selected as models of best practice are as follows:

- Case Study 1: The Chief Executives' Forum: Women's Leadership Initiative
- Case Study 2: Local Government: Women in Local Councils Initiative
- Case Study 3: Health: Flexible Working, Succession Planning and Coaching
- Case Study 4: Education: Gender and SWAN Initiative

Each case study is presented by drawing on the narrative of interviewees to explain their role in promoting gender equality at senior levels. It is also acknowledged that other initiatives have played an important role in enhancing gender equality within the N.I. public sector. Thus, the following cases are examples of, but are not exclusive in terms of best practice.

Case Study 1: The Chief Executives' Forum: Women's Leadership Initiative

1.0 Background

The overall aim of the Chief Executives' Forum Women's Leadership Initiative is to develop leadership capacity across the N.I. public sector. This is achieved by offering females holding senior management positions within the public sector the opportunity to develop their leadership potential, improve their networking skills and engage in a supportive learning community. At the time of writing the initiative is in its 13th year of operation and currently has the capacity to support twenty senior female managers per annum. The latest iteration of the initiative consists of four modules together with one theme day (e.g. Women in Politics) which is scheduled over a ten month period, running from April to January each year, and delivered at various locations in Ireland and England. The programme is designed to facilitate participation, action learning, reflection in flexible learning sets and the sharing of knowledge and experience with other females in similar positions, both within and beyond their own area of the public sector. The initiative is also instrumental in terms of developing mentoring relationships with other senior female executives in the public sector and facilitating the recognition of influential female role models, thus contributing to the empowerment of females in senior executive roles.

According to the Chief Executives' Forum⁷¹, the initiative offers a number of individual and organisational benefits. In terms of the former, the initiative addresses, among other things, issues around a better understanding of oneself,

⁷¹ Chief Executive's Forum: Women's Leadership Initiative, 2015-2016.

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self-confidence, personal effectiveness, leadership skills, self-directed development, continuous learning and support networks. In terms of organisational benefits, the initiative is argued to develop, among other things, a deeper understanding of strategic and organisational development, the opportunity to develop wider networks, a greater capacity for effective leadership and working in groups, a greater willingness to innovate and take risks within a management team, and a better sense of adaptability in situations of ambiguity and change.

1.1 Stage Three: Feedback from Interviewees

Feedback from interviewees during stage three identified a number of females across the public sector (with the exception of the Education sector which is not well represented) who have participated in the Women's Leadership Initiative. While some issues around limited capacity (i.e. maximum of twenty participants per annum) and the cost of the programme (particularly in the current environment of cost cutting) were identified by interviewees, feedback from participants generally suggests that the initiative has played a significant role in shifting sector-wide mentalities to a more gender balanced approach in the N.I. public sector. According to interviewees, the initiative has been particularly beneficial in terms of the following:

- providing a safe environment to discuss issues relevant to female senior managers;
- facilitating the development of self-confidence and self-esteem;
- providing access to a network of female senior managers across the N.I. public sector and facilitating the development of mentoring relationships.

1.2 Providing a Safe Environment to Discuss Issues Relevant to Senior Managers

Interviewees suggested that the initiative has provided an environment within which females can talk freely and honestly about issues facing them in terms of their progression to senior levels. Additionally, some interviewees talked about the benefits of the environment in terms of learning from other females across the public sector. For example the following comments were made in this respect:

'But I think certainly my experience of the Women's Leadership Programme is that they were able to create an environment whereby women could talk freely about the issues they face and you could argue about the legitimacy of some of them, that's entirely....people should feel free to be critical about some of the issues that women might feel stand in their way...But certainly I found that very quickly became an environment where women could be very honest about the issues they're facing and also then trying to look at ways of dealing with those issues. And particularly within the context of advancing in the workplace. So I mean it's not a whinging kind of environment, and my experience of the Women's Leadership Programme... certainly that kind of whinging wouldn't be tolerated. There's no point in that, but it's looking at these issues and working out strategies for dealing with them' (Current Executive, Female, Local Government).

'[I thought the Women's Leadership Initiative was] great...what I enjoyed about that course was, that was a modular course, which ran over a period of a year and it was women from various parts of the public sector and to me it was ... time out to meet with other people and just get a sense of what it was like in other parts of the public sector. ...a lot of people who went through that course eventually ended up being promoted and moving on' (Current Executive, Female, NDPB).

'Women I work with were there [i.e. on the programme] to think about how they could improve their work-life balance and how they could present themselves in a professional way' (Current Executive, Female, Senior Civil Service).

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1.3 Development of Self-Confidence and Self-Esteem

Interviewees also suggested that the Women's Leadership Initiative has been instrumental in terms of developing their self-confidence and self-esteem. For example:

'I did that [i.e. the Women's Leadership Initiative], which was probably the only female course I've ever been on and ... I have to say, [I] learned a lot, met some fabulous ... senior females from a range of different organisations, both people who were on the course and people who were brought in as specialists and facilitators and giving presentations to the course. So I think in terms of that self-esteem, self-confidence piece there is something there and that kind of network of senior women who actually you find experience exactly the same thoughts, just in a different environment to you. So I think before I went into that I wouldn't have been a great advocate for it, but I think there are benefits ...' (Aspiring Executive, Female, NDPB).

1.4 Providing Networking Opportunities and Mentoring Relationships

One of the most significant benefits of the initiative identified by female interviewees was the potential to develop networking opportunities, both during the initiative and thereafter. Additionally, interviewees highlighted the significance of the initiative in terms of gaining access to a network of female senior managers across the N.I. public sector and not just within their particular sector of employment. For example:

'Realistically the whole point of the Women in Leadership [programme] is the network to be able to speak to like-minded people, and you can't really do that in an open forum with males' (Aspiring Executive, Female, Civil Service).

'[the] thing that was useful ... was the networking with other women ... we met with people from the trusts, the councils and different [organisations]' (Current Executive, Female, NDPB).

'... I found it [i.e. the Women's Leadership Initiative] good in terms of networking and to this day I still network with some of those people and

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they were from a real mixture, from Civil Service, and I was the only person from Local Government on it actually that particular year. So networking, sharing best practice, learning support, a support mechanism so I suppose that's very much what I got out of it' (Aspiring Executive, Female, Local Government).

'I think it was excellent, the Women's Leadership Programme. ... it was the opportunity to ... network with other women in similar and some completely dissimilar jobs, and just those 6 or 7 days over the year we all met up and there were groups in-between. Our group still meets so it was extremely useful for the 6 of us, we still would meet up maybe twice a year just to chat and it's not all about work anymore, it's very much about that' (Current Executive, Female, NDPB).

'We've done this informally [i.e. networking following attendance on the Women's Leadership Programme], [we said] we would meet up on the first Thursday of every month and whoever comes, comes; there's no pressure on people. And you meet up and you do discuss work things and issues and problems and things like that' (Current Executive, Female, Senior Civil Service).

'... the cohort that I was in [the Women's Leadership Programme], the learning set, we still meet up every 3 or 4 months and its bit of a girls' lunch and a glass of wine ... I know that if I have a particular issue about something I can phone up one of those girls and just bounce something off them, which is great. But one of the things the initiative....actually what they did was they put you in contact with a mentor' (Current Executive, Female, NDPB).

An additional feature of the Women's Leadership Initiative identified by interviewees is the mentoring facilities available, whereby a participant is assigned a mentor for the duration of the programme. For example, one female commented on this as follows:

'... one of the things the initiative, actually what they did was they put you in contact with a mentor. ... They ... chose somebody who had been one of the [very] senior [participants]. ... I was paired up with a Chief Executive of a hospital trust' (Aspiring Executive, Female, NDPB).

1.5 Summary

The above comments from a number of interviewees who have participated in the Chief Executives' Forum Women's Leadership Initiative suggest that the programme has a number of advantages in terms of providing opportunities for development, networking and mentoring for senior female managers in the N.I. public sector. The interviewees' perceptions suggest that over the years, the initiative has undoubtedly been instrumental in terms of playing an important role in promoting gender equality at senior levels of the N.I. public sector.

Case Study 2: Local Government: Women in Local Councils Initiative

2.0 Background

The Local Government Women in Local Councils Initiative was launched in January 2006 in order to address gender imbalances at both senior officer level and political representation within the sector. The initiative originated from the development of a strategy which aimed to target female under-representation and bring about a major cultural shift in the Local Government sector. While the Local Government Staff Commission played a pivotal role in the development of the strategy, a range of other key stakeholders were also heavily involved, including for example, the Equality Commission, trade unions, the Northern Ireland Local Government Association (NILGA), and representatives from the main political parties.

The initiative comprised the following principle components:

- Declaration of Principles: councils were required to commit to a series of principles of equality and the promotion of a culture where females felt able to participate fully.
- Gender Champions: each council was required to nominate two gender champions, one internal officer and one at the political level, namely councillor level. Gender champions essentially drove cultural change at the individual organisational level.
- Gender Action Plans: in order to promote equality of opportunity, individual councils were required to develop, monitor and report on the achievement of gender action plans. Gender action plans were used as a means of

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communicating and embedding the principles of equality within organisational policies (e.g. around flexible working and work life balance) and procedures.

2.1 Gender Champions

One key aspect of the initiative was the identification of gender champions (one internal officer and one councillor) within each council. The importance of the gender champion was explained by one interviewee as follows:

'... the gender champions initiative was vital in terms of it wasn't just seen as an initiative that [was] running from the centre [i.e. the Local Government Staff Commission], ... there were individuals in each Council that were promoting it and taking it forward on a day to day basis' (Aspiring Executive, Female, Local Government).

While the approach to nominating an internal officer as gender champion within each council was not necessarily consistent across the sector, the importance of nominating an officer, normally at a senior level, with influence to drive the initiative forward was recognised as particularly important:

'...each Council would have taken a different approach, I mean some would have, maybe the Chief Executive would have taken responsibility for it ... In other Councils it was maybe a Director that was responsible for it. ... In other Councils it would have been a Human Resources' person, ...but it would tend to be somebody fairly senior and somebody who would have influence across departments and that could obviously drive it ... rather than just let it sit in a desk drawer somewhere' (Aspiring Executive, Female, Local Government).

Additionally the importance of nominating a strong female Councillor to lead in the political role as gender champion and subsequent role model was also identified as follows:

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'...we've had very strong female Champions among our political cohort as well. So it's always been sort of nearly mainstreamed in terms... so the agenda, ... they've been high profile, so they've been role models and they've been champions' (Aspiring Executive, Female, Local Government).

2.2 Success of the Initiative

Interviewees within the Local Government sector indicated that the Women in Local Councils Initiative has resulted in a number of benefits for females at senior levels. First the initiative has been successful in terms of raising the profile of females and their success rates in achieving senior positions within the sector generally. For example in 2005, females held none of the twenty six Chief Executive positions within the sector. By 2010 this had risen to four positions (i.e. 15.4%). Further progress in this regard has been made in the most recent reorganisation of the Local Government sector with females accounting for four of the eleven (36.4%) Chief Executive positions within the new Super Councils. Success has also been achieved in terms of greater female representation at both director level and second-tier officer posts in the sector. The success of the initiative was reiterated by a number of interviewees as follows:

'I think the [Women in Local Councils] initiative has been very successful in terms of raising the profile of women in local councils and certainly in terms of providing training and development opportunities for women and even in terms of numbers, of getting more women into Chief Executive roles and more women aspiring to be Directors and Chief Executives' (Aspiring Executive, Female, Local Government).

'[The] Women in Local Councils Initiative. Now that in itself I think was good in that it identified that there were gender equality issues in Local Government, at senior officer level and political representation, I mean in terms of politics here [we] were very underrepresented as well. So to me there was no doubt and I think, you know we signed up to that at Council level and that was a sign that at both sides there was recognition, you know political and officer, that we were underrepresented, we didn't have enough women in this organisation....And the result of that was the

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establishment of our women's steering group' (Aspiring Executive, Female, Local Government).

More generally, the success of the initiative in terms of supporting females in the workplace was also reiterated by another interviewee as follows:

'We really integrated the notion of supporting women in the workplace. Regardless of you know whatever it might be, whether it was learning and development, whether it was family friendly policies, whether it was promotion opportunities. There were things that were done quietly within our policies that reached a number of parts of life in an organisation as opposed to whole bells and whistles thing' (Current Executive, Female, Local Government).

Additionally, a further interviewee suggested that the initiative has been particularly successful for her organisation:

'I think [name of Council] is a lot better than most organisations in that, and probably better than the Civil Service by miles, in that firstly we've got female politicians and they are the role model, and we've got a third of our politicians are female and that's not bad compared to some places, it's a lot better and certainly a lot better than it used to be. We've got a female chief executive' (Current Executive, Female, Local Government).

2.3 Development of the Initiative: Training, Development, Mentoring, Networks

Some of the councils within the Local Government sector have developed the Women in Local Councils Initiative over time within their organisation and as a result have facilitated the provision of female-only leaders' programmes, mentoring and coaching (albeit limited) for females, access to female only networks and access to seminars and conferences organised around Women in Local Councils Week and International Women's Day. For example, the following interviewee referred to some of these opportunities as follows:

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'I think the [Women in Local Councils] initiative has been very successful in terms of raising the profile of women in local councils and certainly in terms of providing training and development opportunities for women. ... there would have been a lot of conferences and seminars where people would have been encouraged to think about being mentored and coached, and encouraged to approach people directly if they wanted to be mentored and to actually approach the individual and say, 'I'd be interested would you mentor or are you free to mentor me'' (Aspiring Executive, Female, Local Government).

Another interviewee referred to the importance of the networks which have developed as a result of the initiative:

'it's about the networking ...is such an important part and connections and relationships. And building that network that traditionally women haven't really had outside of work ...networking, you know, is so beneficial in terms of ... providing support' (Aspiring Executive, Female, Local Government).

2.4 Summary

The Women in Local Councils Initiative has clearly been influential in terms of addressing gender inequalities at senior levels within the Local Government sector. Feedback from interviewees suggests that the Initiative has resulted in a change to the culture of the Local Government sector in addition to significant increases in the number of females holding senior positions.

Case Study 3: Health: Flexible Working, Succession Planning and Coaching/Mentoring

3.0 Background

One organisation within the health sector has been particularly proactive in terms of reducing the barriers that females in particular face when progressing to senior positions. To that end, a number of practices within the organisation were identified as promoting gender equality: a positive culture around flexible work arrangements; a senior management succession planning programme; and the provision of extensive coaching/mentoring for aspiring executives.

3.1 Culture Around Flexible Work Arrangements

The organisation has developed a positive culture around its approach to flexible working arrangements. For example, within the organisation a number of senior executives, including Assistant Directors, currently avail of various flexible work arrangements including part-time and job share arrangements. Furthermore, flexible working arrangements are widely offered across the organisation and interviewees have indicated that this is a positive step towards the inclusion of flexible work arrangements for senior staff. For example, the following interviewees described the culture of their organisation in this regard as follows:

'It's [i.e. the trust's approach to flexible working] certainly a recognition that basically we have to continue to strive to recognise that people need to be helped and supported if we want them to develop to the best they can, and that basically we do that through a range of initiatives. And it's not any one thing that's going to produce the goods, it's going to be for individuals

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like a menu system that whatever they need their manager's able to pick the appropriate package for them to continue to develop as an individual....And there are times when we have to accept that the family will take priority and that basically for a while people will give their commitment to that part of their life and then hopefully if they're successful in that will come back and be able to make, if they wish, a further contribution to the management of the service' (Current Executive, Male, Health).

'... we have said very, very clearly, we will give you time off during the summer months, term time working, should you facilitate child-minding arrangements. We will give you additional time off, six months on half pay should you have a problem with your carer and your caring arrangements break down, we have special duty payments; we will facilitate your return to work following maternity leave for a period, should you find that of difficulty, give you a chance to make the necessary arrangements' (Current Executive, Male, Health).

'[Name] is a really supportive Director and would be very keen to promote the whole idea of flexible working' (Aspiring Executive, Female, Health).

The culture of the organisation is such that to date no individual who has requested flexible working has been refused, even though it was acknowledged that this can be a challenge for very senior posts. Additionally, there is recognition within the organisation that flexible working is effective in terms of retaining talent within the organisation. For example:

'We never ever have suffered as a result of people availing of flexible working. If anything, I believe it's helped us retain the talent that we have in terms of the calibre of people that we have seen coming forward, and I think the trust as an organisation has benefited considerably because of that' (Current Executive, Male, Health).

While there were no examples of those at director level availing of flexible work arrangements at the time of interviewing, a senior manager within the organisation suggested that flexible working within his organisation were not viewed as a barrier to progression to senior levels, including the position of Director:

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'I don't see any barrier to these directorate posts not being taken up by someone in a more flexible way of delivering the service. Actually in fact I think it would be quite welcome, you know; I think if one of the issues is pressure in terms of, you know, work/life balance and to be able to share [i.e. job share] that seems to be a reasonable way forward. I suppose just the people who presented themselves to date, you know, haven't asked for that as a consideration' (Current Executive, Male, Health).

The culture of the organisation is also positive in terms of a recognition for the need to prioritise family friendly policies that would enable an individual to balance work life commitments while developing their career. To that end, the organisation has a number of policies which go beyond those commonly found in other organisations, namely a phased return from maternity leave policy (i.e. a four week period which acts as a bridge for those returning from maternity leave, but where full remuneration is protected) and a work break scheme where staff can take leave to care for a dependent relative (during which time they receive half of their normal remuneration). Interviewees have suggested that a significant element of the positive culture towards flexible working arrangements within the organisation has been the desire to retain well qualified and capable talent. However, additionally, interviewees also suggested that the organisation has a 'critical mass' of females at senior levels who have worked together to ensure that flexible working arrangements at that level are effective.

3.2 Senior Management Succession Planning Programme

Within this particular organisation there is also a proactive senior management succession planning programme in place. The programme aims to develop competencies in terms of individuals progressing to senior levels. Led from the top of the organisation, the Chief Executive and senior directors actively participate in

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the programme and bring to bear their experience as executives. The programme is conceived around the participants learning by doing and the development of a range of competencies. The ethos of the programme was explained by a number of interviewees as follows:

'Succession planning and growing your own talent. ... we have put in situ succession planning targeted at our senior management level.... and that was trying to tease out talent or potential talent that would go forward to feed into the Director tier and, obviously, Chief Executive role in this organisation or elsewhere in Health and Social Care. ... And there's a big emphasis on first line management as well to try and spot, talent spot, even as early on in that, in the lower grades' (Aspiring Executive, Female, Health).

'We would see it [i.e. the succession planning programme] as an inclusion process in terms of trying to use it like a diagnostic tool for people who would go in and try and look, at the personal level, what their strengths and weaknesses are. And at the end of it people would have a much clearer idea or focus of what they wanted to do in their career. And if they believe, for instance, the senior role would be an option for them, recognising of course what people may decide today that mightn't be an option for tomorrow. So it nearly has to be a buy-in to the process that okay, maybe you're not ready now but perhaps another year or later on you would be' (Current Executive, Male, Health).

'It's a very proactive succession planning programme. ... we have senior management succession programmes and I would attend each of those programmes ... when [participants] are doing feedback on their projects, and certainly that's been very successful. I think we've sent practically all of our senior managers through that programme, and what that does is a ... bit like what the top management programme did for me, which is to explore your skills as a senior manager, develop your competencies, your skills, your soft skills; and certainly the feedback from that is that is has been incredibly helpful. ... So on the internal succession planning programme, those people are now available as mentors to the staff who go through that programme' (Current Executive, Female, Health).

'....you'll see in the succession planning there's group work and there's a whole mix and there's individual work too and it's looking at leadership traits, all the stuff that you would....but then it's getting into real role plays and playing, you know, real life case studies....So there would be observational sessions where you'd be observed as part of the team dynamic' (Aspiring Executive, Female, Health).

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One aspect of the succession planning programme is the desire to retain staff and maximise opportunities from within the organisation. This was explained as follows:

'[The succession planning programme is] trying to maximise opportunities from their own staff rather than having to bring people in from outside' (Aspiring Executive, Female, Health).

In addition to the above programme, the organisation also engages in more conventional succession planning by investigating the potential gaps in senior management positions as a result of planned retirements. This subsequently triggers the need for staff development via the senior management succession planning programme explained above. For example:

'..and we do look at succession planning. So for example a piece of work that I'm doing at the minute is looking at retirement dates and when our current Directors and Assistant Directors are likely to retire and are there any hotspots in the organisation that we're going to have to put extra development into' (Aspiring Executive, Female, Health).

3.3 Coaching/Mentoring Provision within the Organisation

As part of the senior management succession planning programme, aspiring executives are encouraged to engage in coaching/mentoring via a partnership with the EU funded Cooperation & Working Together (CAWT) network which brings together health professionals from the island of Ireland. Those aspiring to senior positions are encouraged to participate in a minimum of three coaching/mentoring sessions. The ethos of coaching was explained as follows by a number of interviewees:

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'...we have offered every one of the participants [on the succession planning programme] the opportunity of a coach... an external coach. ... We're part of the CAWT Network, Cooperation & Working Together, and one of the initiatives we have taken on would have been a project where we actually have trained up about 15 to 20 head coaches in our respective organisations. And that's called CAWT Networking....we have allowed the opportunity to allow people to go through various programmes, including succession planning ... and for a coach to help them talk through some of the opportunities in what they see as being their future or whatever' (Current Executive, Male, Health).

'...coaching ... it's empowering as well. It helps you sort of tune in to what it is that you need to do to make that next move in the organisation' (Aspiring Executive, Female, Health).

The network of coaches includes those both outside of the organisation and individuals from within the organisation who have availed of coaching themselves.

This was explained by one interviewee as follows:

'The main one would be our coaching programme and we have a number of really highly trained coaches, actually just in the last couple of years. They have all gained a recognised qualification and I think it....was weeks and weeks it took, that they all went, and very senior people in the organisation...Assistant Directors and Heads of Service... And then that is actively promoted within the organisation' (Aspiring Executive, Female, Health).

Indeed one interviewee suggested that coaching and succession planning work complement each other. For example:

'Coaching is another initiative.....They're common denominators [succession planning and coaching]. Many people that went through the succession planning [have] also seen the value in doing the coaching as well. The two worked in tandem. That's about helping you to cope better with pressure and that's giving you the skills and the tools to perform at the next level' (Aspiring Executive, Female, Health).

The process of matching participants to potential coaches was explained by one interviewee as follows:

'Well, certainly what happens at the minute is that we would say, look, you can take advantage of this and we are quite happy if it's open-ended. We

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believe you should do a minimum of three sessions. Of course the initial contact would be through the intranet of the trust where all the lists of CAWT coaches are there and they basically have a small résumé for each of them. You phone the one that you believe you will have most interest in, then create a contract that they will work together. Normally it's over the phoneIt's whatever the coach and the individual wish to discuss. We haven't tried to limit it in terms of saying it's to do with the management of change or how you're working within your role or what you wish to do in terms of the future. It really is an open discussion of whatever it is that you want to speak to the coach about, and it could be even your family situation or things that go on outside of work completely. We are not aware of what those conversations are and it's completely anonymised, and people have the opportunity of obviously having two or three sessions, or if they need more they take more' (Current Executive, Male, Health).

3.4 Summary

The comments provided above from a number of interviewees would appear to indicate that the practices described have been beneficial in creating a culture within which females in particular can aspire to senior levels. While all of the practices are available to both males and females, it would appear that they are more beneficial to the latter. For example, while the senior management succession planning programme is available to both males and females within the organisation, the benefit of the coaching/mentoring network appears to have been particularly beneficial to females who comprise almost 90% of those availing of it within this particular organisation.

Case Study 4: Education: Gender Initiative and SWAN Initiative

4.0 Background

Within the education sector, one organisation has implemented two specific initiatives which are designed to address gender equality issues, namely a Gender Initiative and the SWAN initiative. Feedback from interviewees across the organisation suggests that both initiatives have been successful in terms of the promotion of gender equality at senior levels.

4.1 The Gender Initiative

The Gender Initiative has three primary aims: to promote an ethos of gender equality across the organisation; to mainstream examples of best practice within the organisation; and to become a leader in the sector in terms of providing equality of opportunity for males and females. The aims of the initiative are achieved in a number of ways. First, the initiative provides an opportunity for females to share their views with senior managers at the institutional levels on issues, policies and practices which they deem important to their progression. Second, the initiative is owned and driven by local teams who engage with its gender agenda. Third, action plans are developed and implemented at the local level to achieve equality of opportunity. Finally, the initiative is supported by the organisation's most senior management team with regular communication taking place between this team and those with overall responsibility for the initiative.

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The overall ethos of the initiative was described by one interviewee as follows:

'What we have in place is the gender initiative and the processes ... I mean the data we look at, we look at the promotions data every year ... two concerns, we want to make sure that there are a proportionate, an appropriate number of women that are applying for promotion and we want to make sure that there is the... whenever you look at the success rate that there are no obvious problems or barriers happening there...' (Current Executive, Male, Education).

4.2 The Gender Initiative: Encouraging More Females to Apply for Promotion

One aspect of the Gender Initiative has been that of providing females with access to good quality information and a critical assessment of their profile. Another aspect of the initiative has been that of getting more females to apply for promotions. In this respect, one interviewee made the following comment:

'... the gender initiative is about ... giving women access to good quality information and encouragement and a proper sort of informed critical assessment of their profile rather than them sitting thinking 'I've gotta have this, this and this, until I have all this in place, I couldn't possibly think about applying for a job like this'' (Current Executive, Male, Education).

'Well in the past what the gender initiative identified initially as an issue was there was proportionally fewer women were applying in the first place; of those people who applied the success rate was reasonably equal but there were a lot fewer women applying. So a key part of the gender initiative strategy over recent years has been to increase the number of applicants and I think that's been successful and it's reflected in more and more women being appointed to senior academic positions' (Current Executive, Male, Education).

4.3 The Gender Initiative: Mentoring

An additional and significant aspect of the Gender Initiative has been the provision of mentoring for aspiring females. According to one interviewee, the mentoring aspect of the initiative has been instrumental in terms of identifying and addressing the need

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to encourage more females generally to apply for promotion. In addition, the mentoring process has provided valuable feedback with respect to interview processes such that interview panels are now fully briefed and are required to take into account periods of absences, due to for example, career breaks and maternity leave, when making promotion decisions. Mentoring has also been viewed as particularly important for younger females within the organisation in terms of being paired with a more senior experienced female member of staff. The following comments about mentoring were made by interviewees:

'On the promotions side one of the things that came out of the monitoring was a) the need to encourage more women to apply and b) the need to make sure that panels were acting appropriately. So encouraging people to apply this is where [the] gender initiative stepped in to provide mentoring, encouragement and support and on the success rate, the sort of thing like making sure panels were appropriately briefed and taking full account of the career breaks and those sorts of situations' (Current Executive, Male, Education).

'I mean if women see other women having success then that will encourage them to see themselves in those sorts of situations, that's where the mentoring role in the gender initiative was so important because younger women, members of staff, had an opportunity to talk with and spend time with more experienced, more senior women and could get, understand the sort of hassles involved in everyone's life and that these sorts of things happen but that there's ways of overcoming them. So the mentoring process I think was quite important and it helped deal with some of those issues, and then the more success you see I think that feeds in itself' (Current Executive, Male, Education).

4.4 The Athena Scientific Women's Academic Network (SWAN) Initiative

Within the organisation, the Athena Scientific Women's Academic Network (SWAN) Initiative was originally implemented within the areas of science, engineering and technology (SET). The SWAN initiative has a number of principles which essentially

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aim to address gender inequalities and promote a change in culture and attitudes. While the SWAN initiative was initially implemented within SET areas, it has since become embedded more widely within the organisation. To that end, a number of gender champions, who have responsibility for advancing gender equality at a local level, have been identified throughout the organisation. This has subsequently led to a network of gender champions, which has been instrumental in terms of facilitating those with similar interests and challenges to collaborate in smaller groups in addition to sharing examples of best practice. Interestingly, the position of gender champion has also provided an opportunity for those holding such positions to gain managerial experience since champions have been co-opted to their Management Board by virtue of this responsibility, thereby potentially opening up further opportunities for female career progression. At the local level, SWAN related actions and activities are communicated via staff meetings, networks, and senior management meetings. Moreover, information about the workings of the SWAN initiative and its achievements are widely disseminated at an institutional level via a newsletter and organisational website.

Consistent with the Gender Initiative, the SWAN initiative is also heavily supported by senior management within the organisation. This was supported by the following statement from one interviewee:

'He [the head of the organisation] got involved in a very serious way in the whole SWAN process, so yes I think he's clearly committed to it' (Current Executive, Male, Education).

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While specific statistics are not available regarding the success of the SWAN initiative in terms of the numbers of females progressing to senior levels since its implementation, a number of interviewees referred to the positive aspects of the SWAN initiative in terms of improving gender equality. For example, interviewees suggested that the SWAN initiative had resulted in changes to policies around females returning from periods of maternity leave. For example:

'... one of the things we do, for example, in the SWAN schools that came out of our ... action plan was that we would give all females returning from maternity leave a semester free from [type of activity] to pick up their [other type of activity]' (Aspiring Executive, Male, Education).

'Part of our SWAN remit is that when people return from maternity, they don't have [type of activity] for six months and we try to look at all of their duties so they're not overloaded on that initial period' (Aspiring Executive, Female, Education).

Another interviewee talked about the positive change in culture which has taken place within the organisation as a result of the initiative:

'SWAN has absolutely made a huge change, huge difference to us....it's made a change to the culture, SWAN has definitely helped change the culture. It's definitely made it [i.e. gender equality] much more mainstream. It's enabled us to have open conversations in promotion committees, in probation committees, in ways in which in the past we wouldn't have had or it would have been much more argumentative and perhaps less supportive. So I think SWAN itself and the backing of the [head of the organisation] behind it and the real push he gives to the whole initiative' (Aspiring Executive, Male, Education).

4.5 Summary

In the absence of statistics regarding the success of both initiatives, interviewees' perceptions seem to suggest that both the Gender Initiative and the SWAN initiative

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have resulted in positive changes to working practices and the organisation's culture. Indeed it would appear that the organisation has made significant progress in terms of promoting an appropriate environment as explained by one interviewee:

'What we are trying to do with the SWAN process and the Gender Initiative process is to ensure that there is an appropriate environment that is building a proper pool of appropriately qualified people and appropriately experienced people' (Current Executive, Male, Education).

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