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Breaking Glass Ceilings

Assessing Barriers and Opportunities of Initiatives Designed to Advance Women into Senior Leadership in UK Higher Education

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Breaking Glass Ceilings: Assessing Barriers and Opportunities of Initiatives Designed to Advance Women into Senior Leadership in UK Higher Education

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By

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Abstract

Higher education institutions in the UK face challenges in addressing the gender leadership gap, with identified barriers such as caring responsibilities, work-related challenges, culture, and infrastructure. To address these issues, universities have implemented initiatives such as women only leadership development programmes, networks, coaching and mentoring, and organisational commitments such as equality, diversity, and inclusion policies and institutional charters. The term allyship is a newer emerging approach and is also being explored to support women aspiring to progress into leadership. This research study aims to critically evaluate the effectiveness of such initiatives, within a UK higher education institution.

The research adopts a qualitative multi methods approach, including an online survey completed by 173 women in the institution and 12 semi-structured interviews with men and women in the institution already defined as senior leaders. Findings highlight the effects of engagement in leadership and development initiatives, such as increased confidence and self-development, however, suggest that they often do not directly lead to more women in leadership positions due to lack of alignment to career opportunity or due to work-related and infrastructural barriers. Organisational commitments, such as policies and charters, are found to be useful in providing a framework for action plans, but they do not directly enable more women to progress due to complex structural and cultural barriers, resulting in disengagement from such initiatives by the women they aim to positively affect. Allyship, a newer concept, is discussed in two parts: formal allyship, which includes mentoring and coaching, and informal allyship, which raises awareness of gender inequality, calls out discriminative behaviour, and provides advocacy for women. The study proposes a number of recommendations including looking beyond the sector for best practice, incorporating accountability for change, impact assessing current policies, and conducting ongoing evaluation. The study also demonstrates that allyship shows potential to be a positive way forward in supporting more women into leadership roles, with the right understanding of the concept, training and support from senior leaders.

Keywords: *women, gender, leadership, career progression, development, higher education, university, allyship, policy*

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Abbreviations

Abbreviation	
EDI	Equality, Diversity and Inclusion
HE	Higher Education
HEI	Higher Education Institution
LDI	Leadership Development Initiative
UK	United Kingdom

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1   Introduction

Having a gender balanced workforce, including at leadership levels, has been found to be of significant importance to both productivity, economic growth, and innovation, and suggests that organisations that demonstrate better diversity are more likely to deliver increased profitability (McKinsey and Company, 2020). Although this is the case, women attaining leadership positions in the workplace has been an ongoing societal challenge for many years, and across different sectors (United Nations Entity for Gender Equality, 2023). Universities in the United Kingdom (UK) are no different, where although there has been some slow, positive change in recent years, there is still a lack of women visible in senior positions (Advance HE, 2021a; Burkinshaw et al., 2018). With many of the barriers that women face in this context being well documented, such as caring responsibilities, systemic issues in the workplace, and lack of management support to name a few (Diehl & Dzubinski, 2016; Morley, 2014; Shepherd, 2017), higher education providers have responded by implementing different initiatives to try to break the so-called 'glass ceiling'. Initiatives that have been introduced in universities in attempting to tackle the gender divide include leadership development programmes, women's networks, coaching and mentoring, and organisational equality diversity and inclusion (EDI) policies and action plans and charters such as the Athena Swan Gender Equality Charter. Additionally, there has been some recent evidence of some allyship initiatives taking place in higher education, though this is a newer concept for many Universities with research in the area just beginning to emerge (Nash et al., 2021; Warren & Bordoloi, 2021).

This study investigates the perceived impact of these initiatives and approaches that higher education institutions adopt to support more women into senior leadership positions, using a single UK higher education institution as the environment in which the research will take place. This will include capturing the views of both the women who aspire to attain senior leadership positions, and women and men at the institution who are already in positions of seniority.

1.2   Justification of research

Higher education institutions have expressed their ambition to changing the gender balance at leadership levels and have instigated programmes of work in an attempt to create change, yet change is either slow, or in some cases, not moving at all (O'Mullane, 2023). The Higher Education Policy Institute reports that in 2020, only 37% of senior leadership roles were occupied by women across the sector, with evidence of a wider pay gap (15.9%) than other sectors (9.75%) (Hewitt, 2020). Each year there is an equality and diversity report published by Advance HE to illustrate progress made by higher education institutions in the United Kingdom, and figures demonstrate that in 2021/22, the position was not significantly any different. Men represented 62% of senior management roles and 70% of professorship roles (Advance HE, 2023b). This suggests there is still much work to be done to reach an equal status for men and women in leadership positions within institutions. Initiatives to balance diversity at the senior level have been implemented in universities, however, less is understood about how well they have succeeded in elevating women to the "top jobs" within institutions, or how management and staff perceive them. (Westoby et al., 2021). There are several similar initiatives in operation, some visible (such as formal programmes including the national Aurora Women in Leadership programme, and charters such as Athena Swan), and some less visible, such as managers providing different forms of allyship.

To further understand the perceived impact of such initiatives, a post-92 modern higher education institution in England, employing over 4000 staff is selected to undertake research into the perceptions of how impactful these initiatives have been on supporting women into leadership. The equality figures presented nationally are comparative with the selected institution, where women represent approximately 35% of senior positions (equivalent grade 9 and above, or earning over £65K at the time of data collection) and where the institution has implemented a range of approaches to try and tackle this issue, including:

- Leadership and development initiatives designed to develop skills and capabilities of women aspiring to progress in their careers, including a staff

MBA programme; an externally ran Advance HE Aurora Programme dedicated to developing future women leaders and tackling the gap in leadership (Advance HE, 2023a); an internal coaching and mentoring academy, a women's only network, and women only seminars.

- Organisational commitments, such as local equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) policies/councils, and the Athena Swan charter, "*a framework which is used across the globe to support and transform gender equality within higher education (HE) and research*" (Advance HE, 2020a).

1.3   Research Aims and Objectives

The study aims to critically evaluate the perceived effects, barriers and opportunities of initiatives and organisational commitments that aim to support more women* into senior leadership positions within a UK higher education institution.

Specifically, the objectives are:

1. To identify and analyse current practice in the wider Higher Education sector on strategies for supporting women into senior positions.
2. To develop and design a conceptual framework to explore the key themes of the study.
3. To critically evaluate the effectiveness of current leadership development initiatives affecting leadership progression for women at a UK higher education institution.
4. To critically evaluate the effectiveness of current organisational commitments affecting leadership progression for women at a UK higher education institution.
5. To critically evaluate the potential impact of allyship on leadership progression for women.
6. Deliver academic and practice-based recommendations that will enable more women to succeed in the attainment of senior leadership positions.

The term women include transwomen and those who self-identify as women.

1.4 Research question and sub-questions

In order to employ the most appropriate methods in the research to respond to the research objectives, the following main research question is presented:

What are the barriers, effects and opportunities of initiatives and organisational commitments designed to support more women into senior leadership positions at a UK higher education institution?

In order to respond to this question, and in helping to design the research instruments, the following sub-questions were developed:

1. How do current leadership and development initiatives in place support women progressing into leadership positions in higher education?
2. How do current organisational commitments support women into leadership positions?
3. How are these initiatives and commitments perceived and experienced by staff?
4. How are these initiatives and commitments perceived by senior management within the organisation?
5. How can allyship support women accessing and attaining more leadership positions?
6. How can initiatives and commitments be used as a catalyst for change for the future?

A conceptual framework will be created from the main concepts in the literature that will act as a framework to further explore the key themes related to the study.

1.5 Research philosophy and methodology

A pragmatist philosophy will be applied to the study in order to select the most appropriate methods and tools best suited to answering the research questions within the institution (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018; Dawadi et al., 2021), rather than prioritising the worldview of the researcher. It is a philosophical approach often adopted when conducting business research that aims to be of practical benefit to an

organisation (Kelly & Cordeiro, 2020). Given that the research participants have first-hand experience with the research topic, which have subsequently shaped their opinions of the initiatives, a subjectivist stance will be taken in that participants truth is socially constructed. (Bell et al., 2019).

In order to address the research question, a post-92 UK higher education institution has been selected where a number of initiatives are in place that aim to support women into leadership positions, to form the main environment for the research study. The study will seek the perceptions and effectiveness of some of the initiatives that are currently in place, including:

- Leadership development initiatives
    - Aurora Women in Leadership Programme (a women's only leadership programme, externally ran by Advance HE)
    - Coaching and Mentoring Academy (internal programme to either train coaches and/or mentors, or to request an internal mentor)
    - Staff MBA (leadership programme)
    - Women's only talks/lectures/seminars (externally available free or at cost seminars)
    - Women's staff network (a self-supported network ran within the institution)
- Organisational Commitments
    - Athena Swan Charter (a nationally recognised charter mark available as bronze, silver or gold) accredited by Advance HE that "*is a framework which is used across the globe to support and transform gender equality within higher education and research"* (Advance HE, 2020a, para. 1).
    - Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Council and Sub-councils (Internal to the institution)
    - Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy (Internal to the institution)
- Allyship (not a formalised initiative)

A mixed methods approach will be adopted for the study and will collect data from two participant groups within the institution. The first participant group are women in the institution that are at any point in their career earning up to and including £65K per year (equivalent to grade 9) and will be targeted to respond to an anonymous online survey, designed using Qualtrics software to gain qualitative data on their perceptions of the initiatives. The second participant group are both men and women who are already in senior management positions within the institution and will be asked to participate in a semi structured 1:1 interview to gather qualitative insights into the initiatives. Professional services senior managers (such as Directors) and academic group leaders (such as Pro Vice Chancellors and Deans) will be approached to participate. As well as presenting an overview of awareness and perceptions of the various initiatives in graphical form from participant group one, NVivo will be used to undertake thematic analysis for qualitative data to allow for a deeper insight into some of the effects of the initiatives, the barriers of the initiatives and the future considerations for these areas, from a bottom up perspective (women completing the survey), and a top down perspective (senior managers participating in interviews) (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

1.6   Thesis Structure

The organisation of this thesis is structured across seven chapters as follows:

- **Chapter one** is an introduction to the research aims and objectives, and the research questions that will be addressed throughout the thesis, as well as an overview of the approaches to be taken.

- **Chapter two** presents a review of the literature, analysing the research studies in the area to better understand the previous and current landscape. This includes literature and higher education reports from a wider societal context to the barriers facing women in the higher education sector, and studies that have referred to some of the current initiatives in place. The chapter will also introduce a new conceptual framework that brings together the key concepts found in the literature and how the ideas came together to

be studied as a whole. This chapter directly responds to research objectives one and two.

- **Chapter three** presents the research philosophy, methodology, and approaches that were adopted and why, the research population targeted, the survey and interview approaches to collecting data and how it was analysed. It also takes into account research quality criteria and the ethics that were important to consider throughout the course of the study.

- **Chapter four** presents the findings which illustrates the responses to the survey and identifies the main themes that emerged from qualitative survey data, in the survey and interview responses.

- **Chapter five** analyses and discusses the findings through themes related to the conceptual framework, directly responding to research objectives three, four and five.

- **Chapter six** summarises the study's findings and makes recommendations to the academic community and to practitioners. It also highlights the limitations of the study and makes recommendations for future research, responding to research objective six.

- **Chapter seven** provides a reflective account of the research process, including support and guidance, personal challenges, and practice based change and impact.

1.7 My position in the research process

Reflexivity is essential for research conducted within one's own institution since it promotes self-awareness and reflection (Bos, 2020; Guillemin & Gillam, 2004). By taking a reflective approach, the researcher is able to explore their own potential biases, lived experience with the topic, and other factors that could influence their actions and/or interpretations of data. Seeking peer opinions, piloting research tools, challenging assumptions, and being transparent throughout the study process will all

be adopted to assure an objective point of view, as well as keeping a reflective journal throughout the study, something which Braun & Clarke (2022) advocates for.

1.8   Summary

Overall, the study aims to contribute knowledge about the institutions initiatives and commitments through evidence-based research that will help understand what is and isn't currently working to help develop future strategies that create impactful change and add value. This research will also add value to the higher education sector in general; many of whom adopt similar programmes and approaches to supporting more women into leadership, particularly in the United Kingdom.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

Research into women progressing to senior leadership roles within the higher education sector spans across several decades and reveals that although there has been small gains in the number of women securing senior positions in the United Kingdom (UK), progress remains slow (Ford, 2016; Morley, 2013a; White & Burkinshaw, 2019). In this research study, the term referring to 'senior leadership' is defined as *"the most senior staff of an organisation or business, including the heads of various divisions or departments"* (*Collins*, 2023, para. 1), or in this case, senior University positions such as Heads of Departments, Deans, Directors, Pro Vice Chancellors and beyond. In this chapter an analysis of the literature related to the topic of the advancement of women's careers in university settings, specifically addressing research objectives 1 and 2 is presented.

The design of this chapter (illustrated in figure 2.1), will start with providing an overview of the societal issues in the UK and Europe of gender equality in the context of workplace progression, with particular emphasis on the glass ceiling, and moves on to reviewing the issues specific to women in UK higher education. The purpose of this to provide a wider context on the history of gender equality issues in the UK, and the main policies and national actions taken as a result of this. Following this, a systematic approach to understanding the reported barriers that women face specifically in UK higher education were identified and analysed and moves onto discussing some of the more specific initiatives that have been implemented in the sector, and their intended effects. The purpose of these sections are to start to 'drill down' into the barriers, and to identify the initiatives that Universities have implemented in response. These fall into three main areas of leadership and development initiatives for women, top-level organisational level commitments, and allyship. As a result of reviewing the literature in this field, the chapter concludes with summarising the main research gaps, which have led to the overall research question. A conceptual framework based on the key concepts identified in the literature is presented that will serve as the foundation for exploring these themes further within the research project.
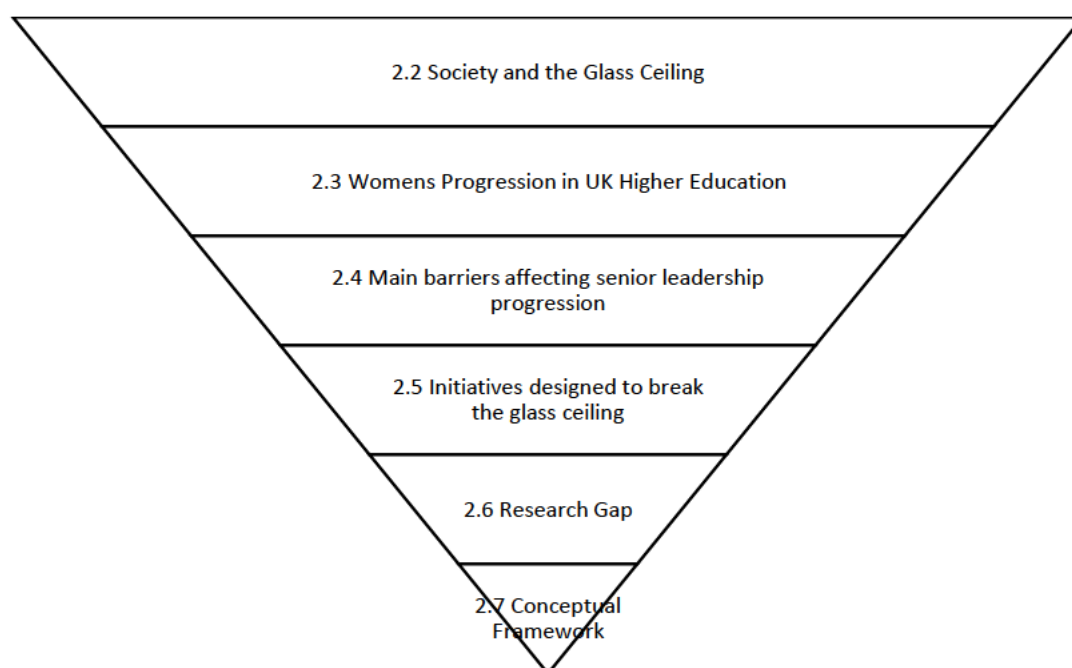
Figure 2.1: Literature Review Structure

To ensure an up-to-date analysis, current research from high-quality peer-reviewed journals and published documents such as gender equality reports have been sourced. When searching for relevant literature for this chapter, parameters were set to focus on gender equality and career progression in the workplace and included keywords such as 'gender'; 'equality'; 'inequality'; 'leadership'; 'women'; 'female'; 'UK'; 'higher education'; 'universities'; 'barriers'; 'programmes'; 'initiatives'; 'charters'; 'policy'; 'academy'; 'allies'; 'allyship'; and 'career progression'. When sourcing literature related to the research topic, it was critical to ensure that the studies referred to were relevant to the context in which this study would take place (a UK higher education institution). As a result, papers and reports from research undertaken mostly in the United Kingdom, Australia, Europe, and other Western countries were considered, where Universities had similar structural systems and initiatives in place to support women in the workplace (Graves et al., 2019; Lipton, 2017; Parker et al., 2018; Tilbury, 2019). This was important in shaping the initial conceptual framework as well as in the ability to generalise, identifying similar areas where the findings of this research may be applicable to.

2.2   Society and the Glass Ceiling

Gender equality is defined as referring to the "*equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities of women and men*" (United Nations Entity for Gender Equality, 2023), with the aim to achieve this across all societal conditions, such as access to healthcare, education and working rights. In the European Union (EU), gender directives covering working conditions, fair pay, and harassment were adopted in the 1970s (European Commission, 2007). These guidelines influenced how its member countries established policy approaches for gender equality, particularly in the workplace, on a societal level (White, 2011). However, until the late 1990s, the UK was reticent to adopt EU guidance and preferred to establish its own approaches to tackling equal opportunity (Bagilhole, 2009). In the new millennium, the UK's policy turned towards greater collaboration with the EU, which eventually culminated in the merging, reviewing, and updating of previous decrees (including the 1970 equal pay act and the 1975 sex discrimination act) to establish the Equality Act 2010. The Equality Act facilitates the exclusion of discrimination for citizens in certain circumstances, such as the workplace, and includes a number of protected characteristics (age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief and sex), to ensure that organisations and public bodies concern themselves with matters of equality as part of their judgements and policies on the way that they conduct themselves (Equality Act, 2010). This includes the legal obligation for organisations to publish information about the gender pay gap, which came into effect in April 2017 (Gov.UK, 2017). However, although Europe has made the most progress in reducing the gender pay gap from a global perspective, it is argued that women are still significantly worse off in terms of wealth accumulation across their working lifetimes, especially when they reach a senior position in an organisation (World Economic Forum, 2022). Furthermore, in the UK, it is reported that it would take a further 50 years to close the gender pay gap, where between 2020 and 2021, it widened by 2.3% (PWC, 2023).

Despite closer relations with the European Union in terms of equal opportunity, UK progress has slowed in several areas. According to the last Gender Equality Index report published by the EU pre-Brexit, while the UK ranks fifth overall in achieving gender equality, it is actually far behind other EU member states, particularly in the area of women's representation on leadership boards, accounting for only 29%

(European Institute for Gender Equality, 2019a). Even though the index reports a score of 76.9 for gender equality in the workplace, its power score is only 56.5, conveying the low figures of women sitting on leadership boards across several sectors. A criticism that the UK has faced is how gender mainstreaming principles have been rooted in the government's approaches to equality. The concept of gender mainstreaming was first formalised at the 1995 UN international conference and is defined as the *"organisation, improvement, development and evaluation of policy processes, so that a gender equality perspective is incorporated in all policies at all levels and at all stages, by actors normally involved in policy making"* (Council of Europe, 2004, p. 12). In attempting to embed gender mainstreaming into society policies, programmes and organisations, the intention was to allocate programmes, assessments, resource and effort to create an environment for change (Derbyshire, 2012; Hankivsky et al., 2019). The UK's approach to gender mainstreaming included the publishing of a government roadmap in 2019 which committed to respond to several gender equality challenges including stereotyping, work-life balance, entering and returning to work, and the reporting on gender pay gaps (Government Equalities Office, 2019). However, although a roadmap to move towards equality exists, the UK is heavily criticised for its splintered approaches in gender mainstreaming, suggesting that approaches in the UKs four jurisdictions is disjointed and confusing, and there is an absence of strategy and direction to achieve gender balance (Cairney et al., 2021; European Institute for Gender Equality, 2019b; Hankivsky et al., 2019). Moreover, the publication of the 2019 UK government roadmap does not detail how these initiatives will be evaluated. As well as the legal mandate for every organisation to disclose their gender pay gap data (Gov.UK, 2017), the UK promotes the use of an equality impact assessment, a tool which can be applied to policies and practice to ensure that an organisation (particularly public sector), is not unintentionally discriminatory towards any group (Pyper, 2020). However, the use of this tool is not a legal requirement.

With the UK withdrawing its membership with the EU in 2016, it is argued that there may be further significant consequence on economic inequality and gendered labour, and, ultimately, give the UK freedom to move away from EU directives on gender equality (MacLeavy, 2018). One example of which is the decision against the introduction of mandated targets for the representation of women on boards, as

promised by the EU member states (Guardian, 2023). Despite a higher proportion of women attending university, obtaining degrees and graduating with higher classifications in the UK (Bolton & Lewis, 2023), progress in advancing gender equality in the workplace has been slow, where men occupy more senior management positions than women (Chartered Management Institute, 2022; Marren & Bazeley, 2022). Even when women possess stronger qualifications for the top jobs, it seems that women and other minorities continue to be overlooked for the 'top' positions (Field et al., 2020).

The metaphor of the 'glass ceiling' was initially coined in several women's forums in the late 1970s by Marilyn Loden, to describe middle managers becoming stuck at a specific career level due to male counterparts' invisible and covert bias in preventing advancement into leadership (Loden, 2017). One of the responses to the glass ceiling is to have visual representation or targeted placement of women on leadership boards to be involved in decision making. There has been some positive movement in the UK in recent years (Gov.UK, 2022), however this does not imply that organisations are now 'diverse' nor have solved the equity problem and further, could lead to complacency (Manzi & Heilman, 2020). Moreover, those women who are appointed generally continue to earn less than their male counterparts (Booth et al., 2003; Field et al., 2020), and often end up being appointed to risky positions at times of crisis and therefore more likely to fail, or to be used as scapegoats, otherwise known as the 'glass cliff' (Morgenroth et al., 2020).

Several researchers use the glass ceiling to identify some of the issues that women face in the workplace so that they can be addressed; however in contrast, it is suggested that the use of the metaphor could also have potential negative implications, with those who perceive a glass ceiling present in their workplace being far more likely to identify with the barriers than those who believe their organisation has a positive culture of diversity (Barelka & Downes, 2019). In other words, *what's the point in even trying?"* (Javadizadeh et al., 2022, p. 1). Patton & Haynes (2014) argue that, whilst metaphors such as the glass ceiling help to describe some of the challenges that women face in achieving leadership status, they fail to initiate any real action within organisations to move towards change, indicating that more focused research is required.

Whilst it is evident that attempts are being made at the country-specific policy level to promote change, there is a general perception that policy is not being translated into practice in organisations, and in some cases is still discriminatory (Taparia & Lenka, 2022; Timmers et al., 2010). A commissioned report by the Chartered Institute of Management suggests that many managers see their organisations as inclusive and do not acknowledge any issues with being able to manage organisational challenges without a gender-balanced leadership board (Chartered Management Institute, 2022), which demonstrates that even with existing policies in place, challenges of diversity remain.

2.3 Women's progression in UK Higher Education

As well as many other sectors, UK Universities face similar challenges in trying to reach gender diversity, particularly at senior leadership level (Advance HE, 2021b; Manfredi et al., 2019; Morley, 2014). In the Times Higher World Impact Rankings, only 34 out of 131 UK universities feature in the top 300 world universities for gender equality, where measures studied include policies on gender equality and supporting the recruitment and promotion of women (Times Higher Education, 2022). Published statistics reveal that although there is significant representation of females working in Higher Education (54.2% in 2019/20), that the majority of women either work in support roles, on lower pay grades and/or in part-time positions (Advance HE, 2021b). A recent Advance HE Report (formerly the Equality Challenge Unit) which publishes annual equality and diversity information from UK Universities, demonstrates that at a senior level, 65% of senior managers and 72% of professors are male (Advance HE, 2021b, pp. 199–200). Data taken from HE equality reports illustrated in table 2.1, confirms that whilst there have been small improvements in numbers of women in leadership positions, that progress is insufficient in achieving gender parity.

Table 2.1: Gender Equality Statistics for Professors and Senior Managers
(Advance HE, 2019, p. 198, 2021a, p. 198, 2021b, 2023b; Equality Challenge Unit, 2016, p. 222)

Similar to the higher education workforce, the appointment of governors to UK university boards also appears to have marginally improved over the last few years (Table 2.2). However between 2018 and 2021, women representation on boards has only increased by 0.2%, with only 38% of UK institutions achieving gender parity on their boards (Lehman, 2020) suggesting there is still work to be done.

Table 2.2: University governors by gender (Lehman, 2020)

Following the widespread use of the glass ceiling metaphor, Clark Blickenstaff (2005) coined the phrase 'academic leaky pipeline', specifically referring to the higher education sector and describing the decline of academic women at various points in their careers from undergraduate to professor. This metaphor suggests that there are *"several glass ceilings along the pipeline, each less permeable than the last"* (Cooper, 2019, p. 94). However, the leaky pipeline does not take into account the 63% of professional services staff working in the sector and does not acknowledge that career paths for women may follow several different directions rather than a linear pipeline (Fyfe, 2018; Selzer & Robles, 2019). The HE equality statistics clearly tell a story of the pace of change, implying that, despite the fact that

universities appear to commit to equality and diversity change, the glass ceiling remains prevalent in many institutions today, where women continue to face a number of barriers in attaining senior leadership positions.

2.4   Main barriers affecting senior leadership progression

Previous studies have presented insights about the barriers that women face in the workplace (Cooper, 2019; Diehl, 2014; Diehl & Dzubinski, 2016), however, due to the scope and complexity of some of these issues, no far-reaching, intelligible solutions have been found (Shepherd, 2017). Findings from these studies have highlighted barriers within agency factors (based on individual capacity, choices, and experiences), and in structural barriers, such as organisational or societal culture (Diehl, 2014; Diehl & Dzubinski, 2016; Kruse, 2022). Unsurprisingly, these barriers often result in adverse effects on women who want to progress in their careers (Wroblewski, 2019). Many women face personal challenges that can limit their ability to seek out possibilities for advancement, one of which is taking time away from work for childcare or other caring responsibilities (Diehl & Dzubinski, 2016; Kandiko Howson et al., 2018; Windsor et al., 2021), and having to balance these responsibilities with workloads and career plans (Huppatz et al., 2019; Macfarlane & Burg, 2019). Nonetheless, it is suggested that the discourse of women being the main "*child carers as well as child bearers*" enables organisations to use this as a potential excuse for not making significant progress of support (Savigny, 2017, p. 647). Furthermore, it is suggested that juggling these multiple responsibilities along with considering things like travel time to the workplace, limit certain job opportunities and therefore reduce the options for leadership positions (Shepherd, 2017; Thomas et al., 2019). However even in a modern, more flexible society, and the ability to work at home, women have encountered being isolated from important networking opportunities and hence face tensions on what is to be sacrificed (Diehl & Dzubinski, 2016; Thomas et al., 2019).

The focus of supporting women to advance in their careers has in the past, been on 'fixing the women', with the suggestion that because of the lack of opportunity for engagement in leadership development, it has never been a level playing field, hence the development of women-only leadership programmes (Kolb et al., 2003; Thomas et al., 2019). Research implies that these types of programmes help women

address their own psychological glass ceiling, including a lack of self-belief and confidence in one's own abilities (Harford, 2018; Howe-Walsh & Turnbull, 2016). Conversely, other research challenges the lack of agency or 'fixing the women' such as issues with self-confidence and suggests that the barriers are more structural (Ashencaen Crabtree & Shiel, 2018; Bhopal, 2019). A study which examined the gender imbalance at senior management levels in 45 pre-1992 Universities UK universities, acknowledged that whilst agency factors are important in progressing into leadership, women involved in the study were in fact equally as likely to apply for senior positions as their male colleagues, suggesting that ambition was not part of the problem (Shepherd, 2017). The main issues identified through the study was 'homosociability', where the people with authority to recruit to other senior roles tend to select people that are similar to them, pointing towards more systemic and cultural issues of gender imbalance, a barrier also identified in other studies (Fisher & Kinsey, 2014; Manfredi et al., 2019). Furthermore, candidates that apply to senior roles that appear to go against the norm are rejected, as University culture tends to be risk averse, and therefore applicants are often chosen based on what has gone before (Shepherd, 2017). They argue that whilst initiatives that exist to elevate women's agency are positive, structural factors are one of the biggest barriers to advancement.

Structural barriers were also a key challenge identified in several other studies and include sexism issues related to being women being assigned what is perceived to be lesser responsibility in their roles (such as pastoral care) which affects progression (Ashencaen Crabtree & Shiel, 2018; Cooper, 2019), and the increase in competitive, masculine developed meritocratic systems that favour men, such as the number of research publications and esteem factors, something which deepens inequality, and has implications for women's self-confidence (Burkinshaw & White, 2017; Kandiko Howson et al., 2018; Śliwa & Johansson, 2014). Furthermore, if and when women do overcome barriers and obtain the top positions, it appears that they are heavily influenced by masculinist culture, and therefore subscribe to this way of working as they are a minority and may feel that they cannot influence change, stating that "*it is not possible to simply insert new wine into old bottles*" (Burkinshaw & White, 2017; Morley, 2014, p. 124). Their research suggests that women can only

be successful if they learn to work within the confines of the differing gendered approaches, though it is highlighted that this is not a positive way forward.

In a recent study that investigated the experiences of women's progression at one UK university (Bhopal, 2019), it is reported that there is a need to shift culture so that gender equality becomes the concern of the institution at all levels, and in all processes, from an intersectional perspective. Findings indicated that there is a need for institutions to evidence how they are committed to the equality act, and how this is reflected in policies and processes. However, even in institutions where equality policies exist, there appears to be challenges in implementation. Whilst there is commitment to the measures in equality policies, they are often delayed, unfulfilled, or not given priority (Timmers et al., 2010; Westoby et al., 2021). This brings into question the challenges of implementation of policy initiatives, which as highlighted earlier on in the chapter has also faced challenges at a national level (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2019b; Miller, 2009). These studies evidence a deeply entrenched, complex set of issues that affect women in higher education and are often difficult to tackle, made up of a set of interrelated systems that include individual choices and decisions, and organisational policies, practices and cultures (Magrane et al., 2012; Westoby et al., 2021). There are also additional considerations to be made in terms of gender equity in leadership roles from a disciplinary perspective. For example, in the 2023 Advance HE report, it stated that there was a higher number of male professor in science, engineering and technology subjects, at 74.7% (Advance HE, 2023b). One research study suggests that whilst some disciplines are more female dominant (for example nursing, teaching and social work), that men who occupy those professional groups do not encounter the same barriers as women in those professions, and hence can reach leadership status at a quicker pace (Williams, 1992).

There is a general consensus that to achieve real change in tackling gender equality, and hence, more women into senior positions, there are a multitude of factors to consider. De Vries & Van Den Brink (2016) suggest adopting a '*bifocal' approach*, where institutions should consider the near (the individual), and the far (the structural organisation) in parallel to bring about transformational change. Arguably, new theory could and should emerge from practical gender equality initiatives that are

currently taking place (albeit perhaps in isolation), suggesting that these development initiatives can be used as a catalyst for longer term change. They state, "*The current plethora of gender and diversity programs, networks and initiatives can be seen as providing opportunities for developing the gender insight and change agency of individuals, and thus ultimately contributing to transformative gender change*" (De Vries & Van Den Brink, 2016 pp. 444). However, some factors such as challenging organisational structure and culture to instigate widespread change, is much harder to achieve. Historically, previous research has tried to address challenges "*one barrier at a time*", rather than taking all factors into account collectively (Diehl & Dzubinski, 2016, p. 182). Furthermore, many of the studies mentioned above do not include the voice of professional services staff which make up a significant proportion of the workforce in Universities, nor include the views of male counterparts, which often, are the ones that have the most power to instigate change (Madsen et al., 2019). This is fundamental in trying to understand how some of the problems can be tackled.

The next phase of the literature review moves on to discuss some of the initiatives that have been put into place in some UK institutions including leadership and development initiatives, organisation commitments, and allyship, to try and address gender imbalance towards leadership levels.

2.5   Initiatives designed to break the glass ceiling

As the agency and structural barriers facing women have been discussed, the following section analyses some of the initiatives that Universities have implemented that attempt to combat imbalance of gender equality in higher education. Studies were systematically identified and analysed in the context of highlighting the intervention and their intended effects. These are presented within three main overarching categories of initiatives in 1) leadership development initiatives, 2) organisational commitments, and 3) allyship.

2.5.1 Leadership Development Initiatives

Leadership development has been identified as "*fundamental to the importance of encouraging equality and diversity in leadership and leadership roles amongst the workforce*" (CIPD, 2024). Leadership development initiatives have been established

over recent years that are exclusively designed for women in higher education institutions, such as the Aurora Women in Leadership Programme run by Advance HE, solely for women working in the sector (Advance HE, 2023a); the former 'leadership matters' course, now known as the 'Senior Women in Leadership programme' (Advance HE, 2020b); and other international programmes such as the Higher Education Resource Services programme (HERS, 2021). The first main effect evidenced by participation of these types of programmes is in the ability to increase self-development (Barnard et al., 2022; Tilbury, 2019), and in building capacity to help women to overcome imposter phenomenon and lack of resilience (Chartered Management Institute, 2022; Fyfe et al., 2017).

An Australian study that analysed the benefits of a university women's only leadership development programme found that having been on the programme it helped them to develop leadership skills from a personal perspective; for example in challenging their own assumptions, building resilience and taking risks, as well as identifying their own strengths to build on (Parker et al., 2018). In the UK, the most common women's only leadership development programme in the University sector is the 'Aurora, Women in Leadership Programme', an externally delivered programme which has had over 10000 women enrolled in the UK and Ireland since it launched in 2013 (Advance HE, 2023a). A commissioned longitudinal study started in 2015 with over 1500 research participants where findings suggested that the programme reported a number of benefits, such as challenging behaviours, increasing self-awareness and in developing confidence which achieved positive personal effects such as internal promotions or gaining increments, though this was reported more frequently by academics than professional services staff, who felt there was a distinct lack of progression opportunity or that leadership was not part of their role (Arnold et al., 2021). However, whilst these self-development benefits did not diminish over the duration of the study at an individual level, it was reported that there have been limited successes in seeing a change at a senior level, with universities leadership teams remaining un-diverse (Barnard et al., 2022).

A significant effect of leadership development programmes is in the creation and development of networks, which are seen as another influential factor in creating and accessing opportunities that contribute to the advancement of women in the

workplace (Chesterman & Ross-Smith, 2006; Mate et al., 2019; Palmer & Jones, 2019; Parker et al., 2018). Redmond et al define the advantages of networking as "*the ability to build social capital, promote new contacts, professional socialisation and emotional support.*" (Redmond et al., 2017, p. 336). Several studies point to the networking benefits brought about by leadership development programmes, such as the ability to nurture working relationships and working collaboratively (Selzer & Robles, 2019); female leader role models sharing their authentic experiences with others in order to lift other women up (Tilbury, 2019), and sustained support in helping each other overcome the barriers (Mate et al 2019). Although there appears to be value placed on networks for advancement, there are reported barriers that women face issues with accessing networks (Bird, 2011; van den Brink & Benschop, 2012), and particularly when trying to access male-dominated networks (Coleman, 2020; Maddrell et al., 2016; Westoby et al., 2021). Howe-Walsh & Turnbull (2016) report on the reasons why there was a lack of female senior representation in the STEM disciplines, suggesting that the networks (both formal and informal) were heavily weighted towards men and found consequently women were missing out on key opportunities to advance their careers. Networks that are male dominated have often been referred to as the 'boys club"', where exchanges are often invisibly powerful, key decisions are made, and support is provided to one another to create promotion or advancement opportunities, where women get left behind (Fisher & Kinsey, 2014). Likewise, a study in Australia acknowledged that although networks were fundamental to the development of women leaders, that they were more often used as an opportunity for "*companionship and comfort rather than connecting with more powerful colleagues*" (Chesterman & Ross-Smith, 2006, p. 545). It is reported that there is a need for opportunities to join both mixed networks, and women only networks in order to negotiate both safe and strategic places for further development, though in most cases women still face challenges in accessing these spaces (Coleman, 2020).

Career planning is another frequently stated effect of participation in leadership and development programmes. Career planning is "*the process of assessing personal strengths, values and aspirations, establishing goals and objectives; identifying the steps needed to achieve them; and putting this information into a written career plan, which will then be periodically reviewed and updated*" (CMI, 2024). It is seen as a

vital tool in being able to move into leadership positions (Redmond et al., 2017) and is often built into leadership programmes. Selzer & Robles, (2019, p. 120) suggest that *"once women are personally empowered by career planning, strategizing to be visible, demonstrating competence and knowing their leadership style, they have more capacity to address structural barriers."* Furthermore, Parker et al found that as part of the leadership development programme they evaluated, focussed career planning enabled women to reflect on and think about the steps in their career and where they want to be, rather than going through the motions required to 'tick the box' to progress to the next stage (Parker et al., 2018). Several studies suggest that women rarely plan their career paths in a linear fashion, as they need to be more flexible in considering their broader responsibilities outside of work, where it is more common for women to take career breaks or require flexible working arrangements for caring responsibilities at points in their career (Maddrell et al., 2016; Pyke, 2013). That said, those taking parental leave or career breaks can be perceived as negatively affecting one's career trajectory (Bhopal, 2019; Howe-Walsh & Turnbull, 2016).

In higher education, it is reported that there is often no 'straight line' into senior management, and as a result moving around in different roles is frequently observed (Fyfe, 2018; Selzer & Robles, 2019). Issues that affect career planning capability often include personal circumstance and logistical challenges. For example, one UK based study found that when University managers in the UK applied for senior roles, geographical location was less of an issue for men than it was for women (Shepherd, 2017), suggesting that location is a consideration when planning one's career. Moreover, the ability to travel across university campuses for workshops and networking opportunities to help advance careers was seen as a barrier to progression in a study conducted by (Thomas et al., 2019). Caring responsibilities equally affect women's ability to plan their career paths in comparison to male counterparts. According to Toffoletti & Starr (2016), unequal distribution of caregiving responsibilities in the home can hinder career planning and choice because plans are frequently interrupted. Even in the face of unforeseen circumstances such as COVID19, which had the potential to disrupt everyone's career goals, women continued to shoulder the majority of household caring obligations and were therefore more disadvantaged (Women in Higher Education Network, 2020). Career

planning is also affected by the guidance offered by Universities and the clarity and transparency (or lack of) progression policies. Howe-Walsh & Turnbull (2016) investigated the barriers to career progression for women in universities and found a lack of clear guidance and support provided to secure promotions, and in some cases were actively discouraged from applying. This was also highlighted by Pyke who suggests that *"meeting the criteria for promotion requires single-minded and uninterrupted focus over an extended period. It remains the case that the chance of sustaining the right conditions to build an academic career over the 15 or more years is weighed in men's favour"* (Pyke, 2013, p. 452). Furthermore, the cultural stance of working long hours and undisturbed career paths that are present in some institutions has not evolved to allow more women to apply for promotion (Harford, 2018).

Leadership development programmes have had positive effects on women in the areas of self-development, networking and career planning, however, there is evidence that suggests women often do not engage in these types of programmes because of barriers related to stress, high workloads or lack of support (Burkinshaw & White, 2017; Tessens et al., 2011). One Swedish study also reported that women do not want to be further marginalised by the perception that they need to somehow be taught how to be a leader (Peterson, 2019). Whilst the benefits of leadership development initiatives are widely demonstrated, women are often 'targeted' to engage rather than self-selecting (Gipson et al., 2017). Furthermore, it is evidenced that there are still challenges in how impact can be achieved through initiatives such as these at a more strategic level (Arnold et al., 2019; Shepherd, 2017), and that they may not resolve some of the more cultural or structural issues that may be present within Universities (Parker et al., 2018), suggesting that it is not the women that need 'fixing', but the Universities (Burkinshaw & White, 2017; Shepherd, 2017). Parker et al., (2018) contends that these types of programmes are only one part of a bigger system of initiatives that are needed to create change. Despite this, there seems to be an increasing demand for these types of programmes, as the effects have evidenced.

2.5.2 Organisational Commitments

As well as the implementation of leadership development initiatives, some universities in the UK have made a commitment to gender equality through the application to charters, with the main one in the UK being the Athena Swan Charter. Athena Swan was established in 2005 and "*is a framework which is used across the globe to support and transform gender equality within higher education and research*" (Advance HE, 2020a, para. 1). The charter was originally established to address gender inequalities in STEM, however expanded to include all disciplines in 2015 as well as professional, operational and technical service functions. Currently, awards are held by 127 institutions either at an institutional or departmental level in the UK and are ranked as either bronze, silver or gold (Advance HE, 2024). The principle of holding an award includes addressing challenges of job retention and the absence of women in senior roles, and there have been reports that demonstrate holding the charter has on the whole, been beneficial to progressing gender equality (Bhopal, 2019; Bryant, 2019; Graves et al., 2019; Kalpazidou Schmidt et al., 2020; Ovseiko et al., 2017). A study conducted in a UK University to evaluate the perceived impact of gaining an Athena Swan charter mark was conducted by Ovseiko et al. (2017) and findings suggested that the charter was perceived to be an enabler of positive change (both for structure and culture) and provided a policy framework for women and men to call out bias, support women's career development and an understanding of non-work-related responsibilities. However, many responses also highlighted the limitations of the charter, suggesting that *"there may be limits to how much Athena SWAN can improve gender equality without wider institutional and societal changes"* (Ovseiko et al., 2017, p. 12)*.* This was also reported by Barnard (2017), suggesting that where the highest (gold) awards were held, there was a lack of evidence of more balanced gender at a senior level, with much of the focus in action plans still being around leadership development and training initiatives. Athena Swan has also been criticised for the bureaucratic application procedures and workload required to obtain the charter award (Grove, 2018), where aspects of working towards the charter are frequently assigned to women or other minorities within the institution (Teelken & Deem, 2013; Tzanakou & Pearce, 2019; Yarrow & Johnston, 2023). Furthermore, Henderson & Bhopal (2022) argue that serious consideration needs to be given to who is responsible for

undertaking the workload that comes with obtaining an Athena Swan accreditation mark, where often, specialist and expert knowledge is required.

In September 2020, the UK government announced that research funding bodies would no longer have to mandate universities to comply with Athena Swan in order to apply for research funding grants (Gov.uk, 2020), putting universities at risk of not prioritising obtaining the charter in the first place. The negative feedback surrounding Athena Swan led to an independent review in 2020 which suggested the scheme should still be used as an impetus for gender equality, highlighting a number of recommendations including resolving the concerns about administrative burden, and ensuring organisational culture features as an integral part of the application process (Athena SWAN Charter Independent Review Steering Group, 2020). The panel also responded to the governments call for dropping this as a research funding application requirement, stating that there should be opportunity to implement improvements and not to *"throw the baby out with the bathwater"* (Buckingham et al., 2020). The charter is seen as a positive framework in order to facilitate and action change within Universities (Bryant, 2019; Maddrell et al., 2016; Ovseiko et al., 2017), however is yet (on its own at least), to demonstrate a significant shift in the number of women applying to, and progressing into senior roles, and therefore needs to be more than a box-ticking exercise (Bryant, 2021; O'Connor, 2019; Shepherd, 2017).

2.5.3 Allyship

There are several research studies that investigate the importance of allyship as a factor influencing the advancement of women in the workplace, though the research studies specifically related to higher education are few (De Vries, 2015; Nash et al., 2021b; Subašić et al., 2018; Warren & Bordoloi, 2021). The concept of allyship is defined as *'the actions, behaviours, and practices that leaders take to support, amplify, and advocate with others, especially with individuals who don't belong to the same social identity groups as themselves'* (Center for Creative Leadership, 2023, para. 4). Although allyship can come from both male and female leaders, male allyship is seen as an important influence in the advancement of women because "*there are too few women leaders to effect meaningful change alone, and because men constitute most of an organisations leadership, their involvement is critical*" (Madsen et al., 2019, p. 240). Current literature pays attention to the effects of

allyship, and their role in affecting change. A study which examined the perspectives of male and female behaviours to support the progression of women in Utah organisations, resulted in the effects of raising awareness in challenging discriminative behaviours that negatively affect women (Madsen et al., 2019). However, the main influencing factor that emerged as an effect of allyship was that of developmental relationships, expressing the importance of mentorship, coaching and sponsorship, and other initiatives that allow men and women to interact and provide opportunities for support.

One to one support for underrepresented groups is generally achieved through mentoring, a process by which a mentor advises and guides their mentee on navigating their career, discussing potential opportunities and how to approach them (Liautaud, 2016). Studies suggest that women looking to progress benefit from receiving mentorship in terms of developing confidence, self-esteem, knowledge advancement and accessing networks and opportunities (Mate et al., 2019; Murray et al., 2012; Obers, 2015; Palmer & Jones, 2019; Pyke, 2013). For example, several studies have evidenced the benefits of mentoring in enabling more junior colleagues to aim for progression into senior roles through lobbying, support and encouragement from their mentors (Murray et al., 2012; Parker et al., 2018; Tessens et al., 2011). In some cases, mentoring schemes can be particularly advantageous when women are mentored by senior women (Gipson et al., 2017). They suggest that this type of mentoring arrangement may facilitate a positive culture with the potential to effect change and promote women and minority academics. A study in Texas found that these types of arrangements are preferred due to a female mentors' perceived understanding of work and family conflicts, and that "*women mentors helped them develop self-awareness of their own complex identities, a finding that has not been identified in man-woman mentoring relationships*" (Palmer & Jones, 2019, p. 13). Whilst this may be the case, there are challenges to implementing this in practice. Most commonly, it is that of the availability of female senior role models available to mentor more junior colleagues (Hill & Wheat, 2017; Parker et al., 2018). One challenge faced is that of the work of mentorship itself, suggesting that as women are promoted, the role of mentorship and supporting colleagues (a person-centred task) automatically becomes part of their role, whilst male counterparts are occupied with less mentoring, and take on more decision

making and strategising tasks (Hanasono et al., 2019; Murray et al., 2012). Conversely, other studies suggest that having male mentors is more beneficial so that the difficulties and challenges women face in progression become more visible (Liautaud, 2016), and where mentorship is linked to specific opportunities that men have the power to provide (Reis & Grady, 2020). Other challenges in implementing mentoring practices as a form of leadership development in UK universities point back to issues of culture and structure. For example, Morley (2013a) highlights the negative impact that University neoliberalism and a system of ranking and performance metrics has had on the mentoring relationships, suggesting that it has created an environment where female mentors and mentees may eventually end up competing with each other.

The availability and accessibility of good mentors for women can also be a barrier (Cross et al., 2019; Hill & Wheat, 2017). For example, mentors who can provide access to new opportunities, otherwise known as 'sponsors' often hold power within the institution and are viewed as an enabler to helping the progression of the member of staff. Sponsors are defined as "*championing mentees, opening doors and leading them through, introducing them and promoting them, speaking up for them, being on the lookout for opportunities and proposing them for new responsibilities and promotions*" (Liautaud, 2016, p. 27). Sponsorship appears to create fast-track opportunities for female mentees and is more popular in Eastern cultures (Mate et al., 2019), though is not commonplace in within the higher education sector. A study in a non-education based multinational corporation, found that only female employees who were being mentored by someone in a position of power (a 'sponsor') were advocated for promotion, and that women, rather than their male colleagues were "*over-mentored and under-sponsored*" (Ibarra et al., 2010). Whilst mentoring and sponsorship is acknowledged for its positive effects by providing allyship from both men and women, research still reports that it does not necessarily result in more women in management roles (Brabazon & Schulz, 2020; House et al., 2021), once again suggesting that "*it is not the women who need fixing, perhaps it is the underlying premise of the organisation that needs fixing*" (Kottke & Agars, 2005, p. 196).

In considering who should be on the 'giving' end of allyship, Cheng et al. (2018) suggests that one of the key factors for successful allyship is to extend beyond mentoring and to provide better policies for flexible working; training male recruiting managers on setting standards and expectations on negotiation processes; monitoring staff salaries to identify where inequity is present; supporting female counterparts in their service and teaching roles so that they can be recognised for their scholarly contributions and ensuring gender parity on nomination or progression panels. An Australian University study found that male senior managers were well placed to influence change based on their gender due to the minimal professional and personal cost to them for challenging existing biased practice in comparison to women (De Vries, 2015). This was also the case in a subsequent multi-experiment study investigating gender equality as a common cause for both men and women, which found that placing men as the official advocates for change resulted in greater male participation in common cause gender equality initiatives (Subašić et al., 2018). Conversely, de Vries describes this concept as a paradox, in that "*seeking out privileged men to champion gendered change, when they have been beneficiaries of the status quo cannot be swept under the carpet*", and therefore the role of gender champions should include both genders to effect real change (De Vries, 2015, p. 33). Nash et al. (2021) also highlight this as a tension in their study that investigates male involvement in a HEI Science in Australia Gender Equality (SAGE) Athena SWAN pilot. Whilst the reflections on men being allies in this study clearly demonstrated learning that had been undertaken in exploring what is means to be an ally, and developing an understanding of intersectional issues, the women involved in this scheme felt uneasy with the men involved being referred to as 'champions' where often the workload in preparing for the charter was somewhat imbalanced (Nash et al., 2021a, p. 9). Although research into allyship (from both women and men) exists, it is an area of research that is still sparse, where more understanding is needed of what the enablers and barriers are for allies, and what the institution needs to do to effectively implement this type of support (Madsen et al., 2019).

2.6   The Research Gap and Research Question

Whilst initiatives such as leadership development programmes, organisational charters and providing allyship are seen to be positive for personal and professional development, it is suggested that this does not necessarily result in more women

securing senior leadership positions within Universities, where more work needs to be done (De Vries & Van Den Brink, 2016); Ford, 2016; Shepherd, 2017). There appears to be a lot of work being undertaken in UK institutions to try to solve the glass ceiling problem, and are targeted in different ways, through **leadership development programmes**, through **organisational commitments** such as charters and policies and through less formal arrangements such as **allyship**, which is an area less researched.

It is suggested that trying to tackle barriers in isolation is insufficient in attempting to create any meaningful change, and more research needs to be conducted to look at factors affecting progression collectively (Diehl & Dzubinski, 2016). Understanding of the collective perceived impact of these initiatives and support mechanisms within the contexts of their specific environment (i.e., in institutional environments) is limited, as is understanding of whether they lead to any difference from the middle to upper levels of the hierarchies, where fewer women hold managerial roles (Westoby et al., 2021). Furthermore, many of the previous research studies have involved mostly female academics, paving an opportunity to gather perceptions from professional services staff, who make up a large proportion of higher education (Advance HE 2019). Additionally, men as research participants in this type of research is largely absent, though suggested that their allyship, in addition to women is critical to creating any change (Madsen et al., 2019; Windsor et al., 2021). This has led to the development of the following research question, which will be explored in a single UK higher education institution in order to gather perspectives on various initiatives collectively, confined within its own systems and environment.

Research question: What are the barriers, effects and opportunities of initiatives and organisational commitments designed to support more women into senior leadership positions at a UK higher education institution?

2.7   Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework aims to bring together the main concepts to be studied to address the research question. A conceptual framework is defined as "*a network, or 'a plane,' of interlinked concepts that together provide a comprehensive understanding of a phenomenon or phenomena*" (Jabareen, 2009, p. 8), and is more

relevant to the context where the research is taking place (Samuels, 2022). In the case of this research study, the conceptual framework is central to the whole research process, and has been brought together as a theoretical foundation to help in bringing together common concepts, designing the research instruments, and in analysing the findings (Hughes, 2019). The framework has been designed using the principles of Jabareen (2009), in starting off with an expansive literature base, reading, and categorising the main constructs of data, and presenting this as the main concepts to be further explored – "*not as 'hard facts' but rather soft interpretations of intentions*" (Levering, 2002). The initial conceptual framework can then be used to further study the phenomena, collecting empirical data to explore the concepts. In order to identify the main effects and barriers that women face in universities in regard to attaining leadership positions, studies were reviewed to understand what the most common concepts were. The number of studies that made reference to certain effects and barriers are summarised in table 2.3. The full literature table, together with a summary of the types of studies, are presented in more detail, in Appendix A.

Concept	INTENDED EFFECTS								BARRIERS								
	Self-development	Networks	Career Planning	Charters	Policies	Mentorship & Coaching	Access to opportunity	Raising Awareness	Personal factors	Support (from peers, managers and home)	Stress (work-related)	Workload	Access (to new opportunities and promotions)	Selection (Selection process being bias/flawed)	Availability (of programmes, development and opportunity)	Culture	Structure
Number of studies	11	15	7	8	8	18	9	6	16	13	7	11	17	14	13	26	20

Table 2.3: Studies identifying concepts affecting women progressing into leadership.

Once the main concepts were identified, this led to the development of the framework, presented in figure 2.2. Within the framework, there are three main components illustrated on the left that categorise the main initiatives that UK universities have implemented in an attempt to support more women into senior leadership positions – 1) leadership and development; 2) organisation commitments; and 3) allyship. The intended effects of these initiatives are illustrated in the next column, that represents potential outcomes. Theoretically, the framework suggests that by universities implementing these initiatives, they will result in these intended effects that ultimately lead to enabling women to progress in their careers, highlighted by the final goal on the right hand side.
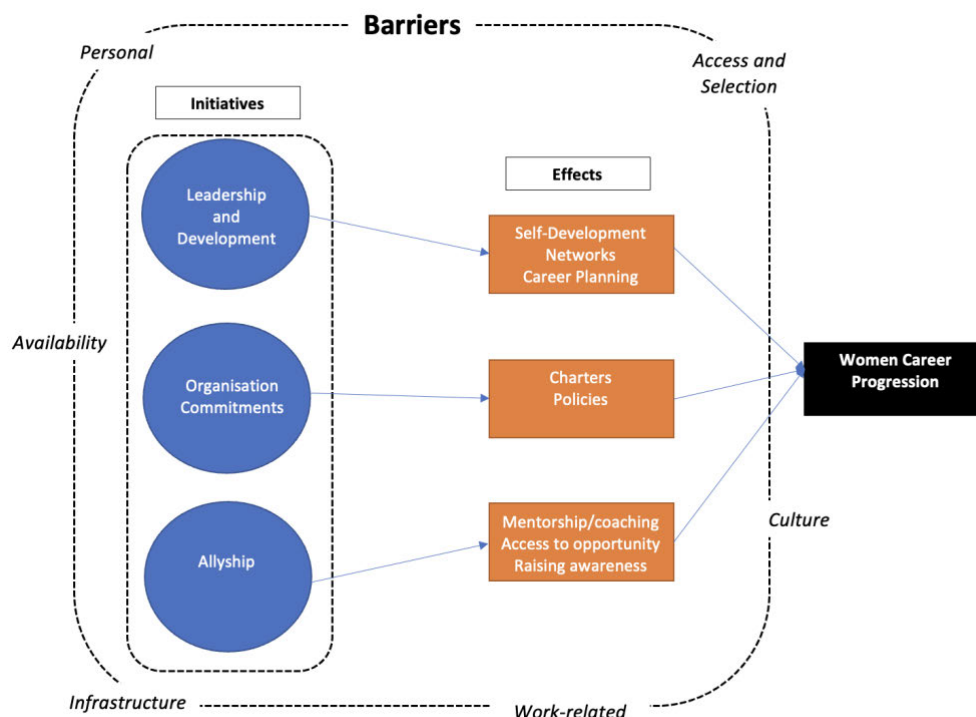
Figure 2.2: Conceptual Framework

The barriers identified through the literature are illustrated around the different initiatives, and could be applicable to one, or several of the initiatives at any one time. It is suggested that these barriers often prevent women from reaching the end goal – career progression.

2.7.2   The initiatives and effects

The first component in the framework on the left hand side - **Leadership and Development** are initiatives that universities implement to support formal leadership development of women in the workplace. The literature has demonstrated that such programmes have effects or outcomes related to increased <u>self-development</u> and awareness (Arnold et al., 2021; Barnard et al., 2022; Parker et al., 2018), developing and sustaining new <u>networks</u> (Mate et al., 2019; Palmer & Jones, 2019; Selzer & Robles, 2019), and in being able to <u>plan careers</u> more strategically and with purpose (Redmond et al., 2017; Selzer & Robles, 2019).

Within the institution that will be the main focus of the research study, these leadership development programmes include the Aurora Women in Leadership Programme, the staff MBA programme, a university women's only network, and access to women's only talks and seminars. These types of development initiatives are often either self-nominated or identified as a need by a peer or a manager. Within the context of this study, they have not been evaluated to any great extent as to their impact or perceived impact in helping women to advance in their careers.

The second component in the framework – **Organisation commitments**, includes the institutional level commitments that aim to address gender inequalities. The effects of a commitment at an organisational level, should theoretically result in, for example, charters that aim to facilitate change, and/or policies and processes that support women to progress into senior positions as equals to their male counterparts. The institution has in place, as many other institutions do, the Athena Swan <u>Charter</u>, that suggests the University is working towards addressing inequalities and to achieve gender parity through a formalised structure (Bhopal, 2019; Bryant, 2019; Graves et al., 2019; Kalpazidou Schmidt et al., 2020; Ovseiko et al., 2017). In addition, an intended effect of organisational level commitments are internally facing or local <u>policies</u> relating to equality, diversity and inclusion more broadly, and an equality, diversity and inclusion council. These types of policies are rarely discussed in published literature as they tend to be internally facing. Nonetheless, they are another initiative that universities use and should therefore be represented as they have been noted as an important factor in creating change (Timmers et al., 2010).

The third component in the framework is focussed on **Allyship**, and rather than stipulating this as male or female allyship, a broader term has been applied as the benefits of both men and women acting as allies has been demonstrated in the literature - from women allies providing safe spaces (Coleman, 2010; Palmer & Jones, 2019), to men who call out discrimination and leverage change (Madsen et al., 2019). Allyship has the potential to influence institutional change, and in turn, the number of women in leadership positions through it intended effects of effective mentoring practices (Mate et al., 2019; Murray et al., 2012); raising awareness of gender based issues (De Vries 2015, Madsen et al 2020, Subasic et al 2018) and providing access to new opportunities (Cheng et al 2018).

As suggested in the literature review, the topic of allyship has not been researched to any great depth in a higher education context (Madsen et al 2020), and how this influences career progression, Allyship is also a less formalised practice than the other components. For example, in the institution where the research will take place, it would be easier to capture how many women had engaged in formal leadership programmes, than those who had received some form of allyship, as impact of such support is rarely evaluated.

It is important to note that these three main components are not mutually exclusive. For example, mentoring is not just solely something that allies may provide, as it may also be a feature of leadership development programmes, however, it is important to gain understanding of the perceptions of how impactful these initiatives are to the institution in which the study will take place, from a holistic viewpoint.

2.7.3 The barriers

The barriers influencing women's career progression in a higher education context have been discussed in this chapter, and it is acknowledged that addressing each factor in isolation will not necessarily result in more women in leadership positions (Diehl & Dzubinski, 2016). It is therefore beneficial to look at several factors in parallel in one environment (a UK higher education institution), to better understand what the main issues are in this context, and how they might be overcome.

The barriers associated with these types of initiatives are highlighted around the different types of commitments . Personal barriers can include issues of engagement

for reasons of personal or caring responsibilities (Howe-Walsh & Turnbull, 2016; Toffoletti & Starr, 2016). Work-related barriers have been reported as management support, stress or workload (Burkinshaw & White, 2017; Tessens et al., 2011). In addition, there are also barriers related to access and selection for opportunities (Coleman, 2020; Maddrell et al., 2016; van den Brink & Benschop, 2012), and the availability of programmes and good mentorship (Cross et al., 2019; Hill & Wheat, 2017; Parker et al., 2018). Culture has also been evidenced as a barrier, referring to complex and systemic issues (Barnard et al., 2022; Morley, 2013a; Shepherd, 2017). Infrastructure barriers have also been reported as lack of resources and investment into gender based initiatives (Magrane et al., 2012; Selzer & Robles, 2019).

Whilst the impact of leadership and development, organisation level commitments, and allyship have all been researched to varying degrees, they have not been studied collectively for their perceived impact in a single higher education institution, in relation to women progressing in leadership positions. The conceptual framework provides the possibility to design a study that will provide meaningful insights to help the institution to understand if the intended effects are actually happening, and what the perceived challenges and opportunities are. It will also help the institution to help in starting to identify practical solutions to see what works and what needs to be considered for the future.

2.8   Summary

The equality data on UK institutions reveals a slow pace of change in the sector for women aspiring to be leaders. Initiatives such as leadership and development, organisational commitments and allyship to facilitate more women into leadership positions have proven beneficial, but they have not significantly changed the deficit of women leaders in higher education. The literature demonstrates that the barriers in the sector are complex and interrelated, often depending on factors such as accessibility, transparency of information, and support. The gaps in this field are largely related to understanding the factors that help or hinder progression holistically within a single higher education environment, and in including the professional services and male perspectives in some studies, which presents an opportunity to capture more inclusive insights and perspectives on the topic. In order to design a study that will respond to the research question, a conceptual framework

has been developed based on existing research studies that will help to further explore the initiatives and how impactful they are for women. The next chapter will discuss the design of the study and the methods, the instruments and approaches adopted, with their justification.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The literature in the preceding chapter highlighted the challenges that women face in advancing into leadership roles in higher education, as well as some of the initiatives that have been instigated to attempt to address the gender imbalance. Existing research has described the efficacy and problems of some of these efforts, however, often focuses on each scheme independently. Professional services staff who make up over half of the University workforce have not been included in many studies, and likewise, the voice of men has been largely absent from research samples. This is noteworthy as it is suggested that very little will change without the support of men in positions of leadership (Madsen et al., 2019). Therefore, there is a need to understand, holistically, how these initiatives and organisational commitments contribute to change (or otherwise) in the contextual environment in which they operate, representing the staff who work there. As the researcher is seeking to respond to a known institutional issue within a post-92 higher education within the UK, it is there that the research will be conducted.

The research aim is to critically evaluate the perceived effects, barriers and opportunities of initiatives and organisational commitments that aim to support more women into senior leadership positions within a UK higher education institution, and the main question to be addressed is therefore **'What are the barriers, effects and opportunities of initiatives and organisational commitments designed to support more women into senior leadership positions at a UK higher education institution?'.** This chapter details the comprehensive research approaches that will be used to answer the research question and how data will be collected and analysed, as well as providing justifications of why these approaches are the most effective choices for carrying out the research. The chapter is structured to address each stage of the research process and is summarised in figure 3.1.

Research Philosophy	•Pragmatism
Methodology	•Mixed methods
Methods	•Qualitative surveys •Qualitative interviews
Recruitment and Sampling	•Non-probability, Purposive
Data Analysis	•Thematic
Validity and Reliability	•Research quality
Ethical considerations	•Consent, researcher reflexivity

Figure 3.1: Overview of Research Process

This chapter will describe the philosophy, strategies and tools that will be used throughout the study, which are underpinned by sound ethics and quality processes.

3.2   Research Philosophy

Ontological assumptions are typically concerned with how the researcher views the world and in effect, what they believe shapes reality (Clark et al., 2021; Scotland, 2012), which can impact on the way a research study is designed. These tend to fall into two viewpoints – objectivism and subjectivism. Objectivism assumes that entities operate independently to social actors, and data can be drawn objectively from observations to make generalised 'law-like' statements about a particular phenomenon, and often adopts quantitative research through the use of statistics. Conversely, subjectivism (sometimes referred to as constructivism), takes the stance that there is no objective truth, and human participants are value-bound to the research (Clark et al., 2021; Saunders et al., 2019). This often means that knowledge gained through the research comes in different forms. This research involves the views of multiple stakeholders (managers and staff), in a higher

education institution environment that is influenced by the ideas, understandings, and behaviours of others who work there. As such, the research sits within the realm of subjectivism, which states that knowledge is created by humans' perspectives and experiences, of which there may be multiple realities (Bell et al., 2019), which is often a characteristic of organisational research.

In considering the epistemological position (or how the researcher will find out the answers to the research question), it is important to outline the philosophical stance of the researcher in relation what is being investigated within its environment, and what should be considered appropriate knowledge (Clark et al., 2021). Research philosophy is defined as "*a framework that guides how research should be conducted based on ideas about reality and the nature of knowledge"* (Collis & Hussey, 2014, p. 43). However, there is a suggestion that if the research question(s) are designed to address practical concerns or organisational problems, then it is the research question that should take precedence over any philosophical worldview, and that the methods and approaches to research should be chosen based upon their suitability to answer the research questions, and not the researchers own belief systems (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018; Dawadi et al., 2021). This is the primary justification in adopting a pragmatist perspective, as well as it being an approach that is problem centred and grounded in real world practice (Creswell, 2023). Quinlan et al (2019) suggest that only once the research problem has been defined, the approaches to be used to best address the questions can be designed, and that the philosophy grounds those choices. Pragmatism is of particular relevance to business and management research, and particularly practice-based studies where the researcher is investigating something that aimed to have eventual action-based impact on the organisation, such as this one (Hair Jr et al., 2015; Kelly & Cordeiro, 2020). Pragmatism utilises whatever methods (whether qualitative, quantitative, or a mixture of both) to gain knowledge about the phenomena transpiring, suggesting that no single viewpoint can ever offer a thorough understanding of what's going on (Kelemen & Rumens, 2008; Simpson, 2018). As the research study focuses on one UK higher education institution in context and was investigating what has arguably been a complex one to understand, capturing data from more than one perspective on how initiatives set up to help women progress in their careers work was central to the research process.

Other dominant philosophical approaches were discounted by virtue of their characteristics. Creswell (2007) cited in Dawadi et al., 2021, p. 26 suggest that *"the forced choices between positivism and interpretivism should be abandoned as it views reality as both singular and multiple."* For example, under a positivist approach, it assumes that reality is based on the observable only, and is therefore purely objective, commonly using quantitative methods for data collection (Bell et al., 2019). Hypothesis development at the start of the research process is customary under the positivist approach (Cassell, 2020), and therefore was not suitable to this study, as the research questions posed sought to understand *how* current initiatives were perceived, and thus are more exploratory in nature (Haque, 2022). Whilst quantitative methods could be adopted to provide statistical analysis on perceptions of impact for study, it would be limited, not being able to provide the depth of understanding required on the effectiveness and potential of different initiatives for women, and how they help or hinder their progression. At the opposite end of the spectrum, the interpretivist philosophical stance includes individuals being considered as players in the social environment (Bell et al., 2019). In understanding meanings behind actions, often surfacing perceptions and beliefs at a more complex level than statistical measurement could provide on its own, this approach tends to adopt more qualitative approaches to data collection (Saunders et al., 2019) . Whilst the interpretivist approach was more closely aligned with this study than positivism, criticisms of an interpretivist approach include the potential for low representations of samples, often using smaller scale, qualitative studies as a typical method (Saunders et al., 2019). As the intention of the study was to capture the views of a relatively larger sample of employees in the organisation, a more pragmatic approach was more apposite to the research.

Kelly & Cordeiro (2020) highlight the beneficial characteristics in adopting a pragmatist approach. One advantage of such an approach is the ability to generate actionable knowledge. As the study forms part of a Doctorate in Business Administration, the focus was in producing evidence-based results that would support a change in practice within an organisation, which has relative importance (Hair Jr et al., 2015; Samuels, 2022). Another advantage is in the "*recognition of the interconnectedness of experience, knowing and acting*" (Kelly & Cordeiro, 2020, p. 3;

Simpson, 2018). This was pertinent to the study since organisations frequently rely on staff interpretations and understanding of organisational processes, initiatives, or changes without ever mapping out the outcomes or relationships. In other words, the women who access these initiatives and the managers who implement them, are both influenced by them, and influence their success in turn. Adopting a pragmatist approach can help to evidence how these initiatives are viewed by both women and senior managers, and hence how successful (or otherwise) they could be. Summaries of the different philosophical approaches and their justification for inclusion/exclusion can be found in table 3.1.

Philosophy	Summary	Justification for inclusion/exclusion
Positivism	Scientific approaches, law-like generalisations, often use quantitative approaches with stated facts. Objective.	*Excluded* – Research does not solely test out existing theory to either prove or disprove a hypothesis. A practical approach to evaluation is needed to include both qualitative and quantitative data.
Pragmatism	Knowledge constructed from research leads to meaningful action. Range of methods can be used. Objective and subjective.	*Included* – The research is grounded in current practice with an emphasis on resulting change.
Interpretivism	Social science research that is more closely aligned with the deep study of perceptions, feelings. Focus on complexity and rich data. Subjective.	*Excluded* – closer alignment to the nature of the research topic, however, sample population too large to undertake with qualitative approaches alone, and some scale of measuring responses will be useful to the organisation.

Table 3.1: Types of research philosophies and their relevance to study

The literature review identified what is currently known about the barriers that women face in career progression, and some evaluations of specific programmes and initiatives exist. However, the initiatives and commitments have not been studied collectively within the institution that is to be the focus of this study. This means that the research approach is therefore exploratory, concentrating on participant experiences, detecting patterns or similarities, and will answer the 'how' or 'what' questions relevant to this study (Saunders et al., 2019). It is suggested that

pragmatism can adopt an approach to research that is either deductive, inductive, or a combination of both (abductive). Pragmatist philosophy will often adopt an abductive approach (Simpson, 2018), which works in taking an incomplete set of observations to develop best case, or probable conclusions (Samuels, 2022). To better understand the current phenomena of how initiatives help women access and attain more leadership positions, this approach was adopted to study the initial concepts drawn from the literature, and to further investigate the consequences of these concepts within a contextual environment. Simpson (2018, p. 60) describes this as "*to gather many small observations and to abductively infer their possible consequences within this ever-changing fabric of knowledge.*"

The adoption of a pragmatist stance is based on the notion of prioritising what methods will work best to address the research problem itself and is used as a foundation to make methodological choices (Dawadi et al., 2021). In exploring the phenomena of women's experiences of initiatives that intend to support them into leadership positions, research approaches adopted will be abductive and exploratory, using the conceptual framework that has been developed as a starting point for further investigating the key themes and concepts.

3.3   Research Methodology – Mixed methods

Following consideration of the research philosophy, the next phase in the research process is to make decisions about the study's methodology. In alignment with a pragmatist approach, the methods best suited to address the research questions were the focus for methodological choices. There are several definitions of mixed methods approaches - some researchers define mixed methods as adopting both qualitative and quantitative approaches to data collection (Bell et al., 2019; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018; Dawadi et al., 2021; Saunders et al., 2019). However, several researchers suggest that mixed methods can be implemented as the use of two or more methods of either quantitative (quan-quan), qualitative (qual-qual) or a mix of both (quan-qual), depending on the purpose and requirements best suited to addressing the research study (Morse, 2010; Pritchard, 2007), and has been used in a number of contexts, though universal definitions are still being debated (Anguera et al., 2018).

In order to adopt approaches that are most suitable for organisational research, Cassell et al. (2018) and Saunders et al (2019) suggest that considerations must be made in terms of practicalities such as time and resources available, as well as what the study plans to accomplish and more importantly, how. A mixed methods approach using a qualitative approach to data collection and analysis was selected and is commonplace in pragmatist research projects (Dawadi et al., 2021; Duram, 2012), which can work harmoniously and support perspectives from different lenses to support triangulation (Bell et al 2019). Furthermore, it is recognised that because there are multiple realities, there needs to be several ways to attempt to understand the problem (Duram, 2012; Saunders et al., 2019). The qualitative methods adopted for this study were considered in how to ensure the most robust and valid collection of data. As the qualitative approach provides a deeper understanding and captures rich data that may produce more meaning that numbers alone (Dawadi et al., 2021), it was important to ensure that participant voices were captured in way that allowed them to express their views without boundaries. However, as this was organisational research, there also needed to be some level of breadth that would provide the institution with some confidence that the views represented a larger population.

The research objectives developed sought to deliver recommendations to the institution on initiatives to support women, with perceptions captured from:

- Women in the institution (bottom up perspectives)
- Senior managers in the institution (top down perspectives)

Once a qualitative mixed methods approach was selected, the instruments for data collection were considered. There are several ways to collect qualitative data, most commonly focus groups, observations and interviews (Walle, 2015). However, in order to provide some breadth and scale of research results, it would be logistically impossible to schedule interviews with enough women in the institution who would represent a relevant sample of the overall population, whereas interviews with senior managers would be more feasible due to their smaller numbers. Focus groups were also a consideration, however, due to the nature of the research topic, it was felt that providing a method where anonymity could be secured would encourage participants

to be more open in responses. Therefore, in order to study the research question from the perspectives of these two participant groups, adopting a qualitative approach, and in considering the practicalities of the institution and resources available, the following approaches were selected.

- Women in the institution – Online qualitative surveys
- Senior managers in the institution (Men and Women) – 1:1 semi structured interviews

In relation to the order in which data was collected, neither participant group took priority. A 'convergent parallel design' was adopted to collect data from both participant groups (see figure 3.2), which involved the concurrent collection of data, with neither taking precedence over the other. In other words, depending on the findings, both data sets could be used to compare or strengthen the other's results (Bell et al., 2019; Creswell, 2015), as well as providing ample depth and breadth to the study (Dawadi et al., 2021), and hence providing a more holistic picture of the research question from different viewpoints.

Figure 3.2: Mixed methods approach – convergent parallel design (Creswell, 2015)

In collecting data on the perceptions of the effects, barriers and opportunities for women progressing into leadership roles, the opinions of two separate stakeholder groups (participant groups 1 and 2), took place in parallel, as whilst the findings may

be interrelated in terms of similarities and comparisons, they are not dependent on one another.

The first participant group within the institution focussed on capturing the perspectives of women that earn up to the equivalent of of £65K (up to and including grade 9 equivalent) who either experienced (or not as the case may be), the different initiatives that aim to increase the number of women in leadership positions, presented in the institution. The second participant group included capturing perspectives of both men and women who were at grade 10+ equivalent, with a particular focus on the group leadership team that sit at the top of the hierarchy within the institution. The justification of where the boundaries lay between these two groups of participants were in relation to the majority of job titles at grade 10+ being given to Heads of Departments, Deans, Directors and Pro Vice Chancellors, who have a significant responsibility for leading particular units of the organisation (hence the term 'Senior Leaders'). The data that arose from the two subunits to be investigated, enabled a rich analysis on the perspectives of leadership from both male and female leaders that have the resources and power to effect change, and from the women who have lived experiences of the current initiatives in place and how it has or hasn't supported them to progress.

The research map shown in figure 3.3 details the two groups of participants within the institution that were studied (which can also be found in Appendix B). It illustrates, from left to right, what sub-research questions they addressed, what tools were utilised in order to collect data, and how analysis was conducted. The mixed methods approach included the creation of an online survey, capturing qualitative and data for participant group 1, and for participant group 2, 1:1 semi-structured interviews were conducted, with both sets of data being collected simultaneously. It was expected that by undertaking this approach, it helped to bring together a more comprehensive, holistic account of the phenomena, as well as providing an opportunity to highlight any unexpected outcomes (Bell et al., 2019). The two methods of data collection aimed to provide a bottom up view (through surveys), and top down approach (senior manager interviews) on the aims and objectives (illustrated in the final column), effectively through questioning on leadership and development initiatives, organisational commitments, and allyship.
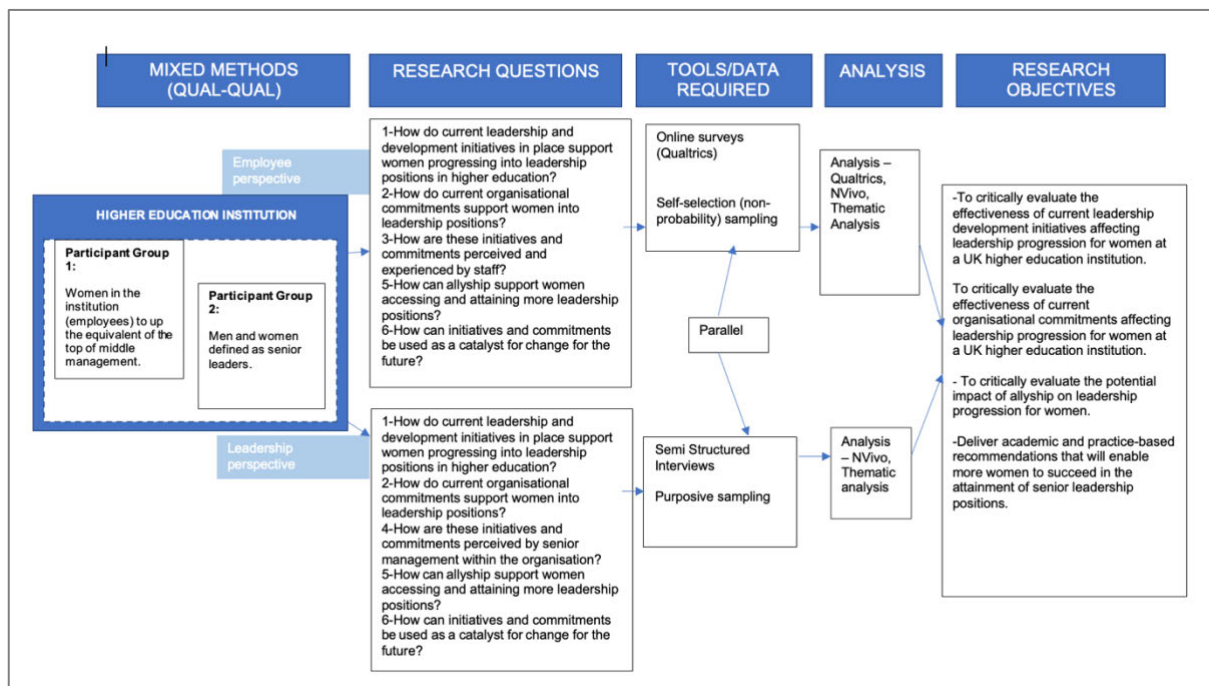
Figure 3.3: Research Map with approaches to mixed methods data collection.

To further detail the process of how the research took place, it was important to justify the data collection tools, and how they were designed and piloted.

3.3.1 Design of Online Survey: Participant Group 1

For the first participant group targeted at women working in the institution, an online qualitative survey was designed using Qualtrics software to capture some data on attitudes on particular interventions, before asking participants to record qualitative comments, and expanding on reasons for particular selections of attitude. Whilst qualitative online surveys are still not conventional in research, they provide the opportunity to capture a richness in data whist being more easily accessible using digital means (Braun et al., 2021a). The justification for adopting an online survey for was mainly in response to one of the gaps in the current body of knowledge related to women in leadership. Frequently, research studies related to the topic of women in leadership in higher education, have focussed on smaller samples of participants, which were qualitative. Whilst this provides a depth of information into the perceptions of the sample groups, in some cases it carries limitations in terms of breadth (Quinlan et al., 2019). In an attempt to add some coverage to the scale of

the research and give the institution some meaningful results, an online survey was the most suitable option, both in considering the reach, but also in terms of being easier to administer with the numbers involved (Bell et al., 2019). When designing the survey, it was critical that the questions were grounded within the original conceptual framework and appropriately worded to gather responses appropriate to addressing the research question. Whilst capturing qualitative data was the main aim, it was important to ensure that there were not too many open ended questions that would put people off from answering. Seven open ended questions were developed, with other questions providing qualitative options for selection. The online survey was split into five sections, where three of the sections were aligned to the conceptual framework, including questions relating to a) leadership and development initiatives; b) organisational commitments; and c) allyship, whereas the other two sections were focussed on introductions and summary. All three areas, as noted in the conceptual framework, included gathering perceptions on the effects of the initiatives, the barriers or challenges, and the impact on progress within the organisation as a whole. The design of the survey, and how this mapped to the conceptual framework can be found in figure 3.4.
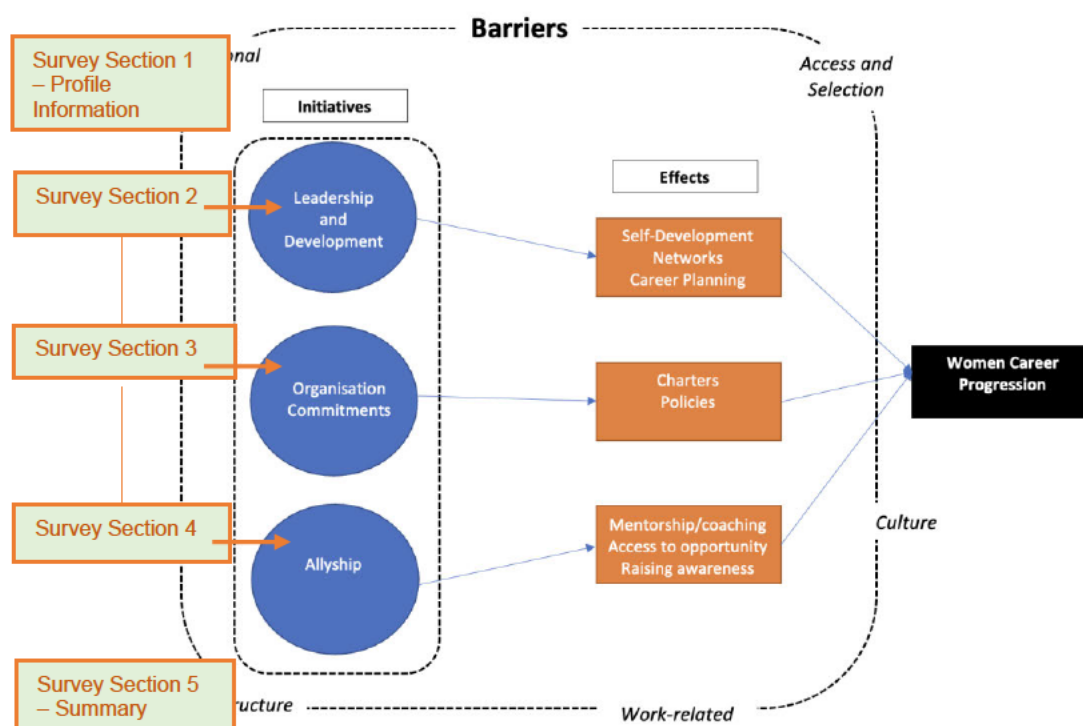
Figure 3.4: Conceptual framework with reference to survey sections

The online survey started with a front page that gave participants details of what the research study was about, who was eligible to respond, and the voluntary nature of responses which were anonymous. Having the questions as anonymous meant that participants felt reassured to respond freely and hence increase engagement (Braun et al., 2021b). Section one of the survey asked participants to respond to staff information such as whether they worked in academic or professional services roles, whether they were part-time, and at what career stage they were at. This enabled data to be captured to assess whether a sample was representative of the population in the institution. The following three sections asked questions on the three main concepts of leadership and development initiatives, organisational commitments, and allyship. For each of these sections, staff were first asked how much they knew about the initiatives, and how much they had engaged with them, before asking for perceptions. A mix of multiple choice, matrix format and open-ended questions were used in the design. Nardi (2018) suggests that when asking about attitudes within a survey, filtering techniques can be used to ascertain whether the respondent knows about the topic you are seeking attitudes towards, before asking them questions about it. This approach was implemented within the survey, as understanding whether the respondent knew about an intervention for example, was equally as important as to what they thought about it. Table 3.2 illustrates each of the three main concepts, the type of question that was asked, and the justification for it.

Concept	Survey	Type	Justification
Leadership and Development	Level of knowledge in leadership and development opportunities that exist	Matrix Likert	To understand the level at which people know about existing initiatives, the benefits and barriers identified through existing knowledge (Arnold et al., 2021; Burkinshaw & White, 2017; Parker et al., 2018; Selzer & Robles, 2019; Tessens et al., 2011; Tilbury, 2019) and perceptions of impact.
	The benefits of leadership and development opportunities	Multiple choice + other	
	Reasons for non-engagement of leadership and development initiatives	Multiple choice + other	
	Perception of impact/difference leadership and development initiatives have made to progression for women	Matrix Likert + Open ended	
Organisation	Level of knowledge in organisational commitments in existence	Matrix Likert	To understand the level at which people know about existing initiatives, the benefits and barriers

Concept	Survey	Type	Justification
	Benefits of organisational commitments	Open	identified through existing knowledge (Bhopal, 2019; Graves et al., 2019; Kalpazidou Schmidt et al., 2020) and to measure perceptions of impact.
	Barriers of organisational commitments	Open	
	Perception of impact/difference organisational commitments have made to progression for women	Matrix Likert + open	
Allyship	Level of perceived importance	Likert	To understand how allyship is perceived within the organisation, the potential benefits and drawbacks as taken from existing literature (Cheng et al., 2018; Madsen et al., 2019) and how useful it may be in the future.
	Where allyship has come from	Multiple choice	
	Benefits of allyship	Multiple choice + open	
	Barriers of allyship	Open	
	Overall usefulness of allyship	Open	
	Perceived level of available initiatives – whether they work	Multiple choice + open	
	Other comments	Open	

Table 3.2: Summary of survey and question types, and links to literature

In relation to the allyship section, participants were made aware of the definition of allyship, to avoid any confusion as it was not a term currently used frequently in the institution. "*Allyship refers to the actions, behaviours, and practices that leaders take to support, amplify, and advocate with others, especially with individuals who don't belong to the same social identity groups as themselves*" (Center for Creative Leadership, 2023, p. 4). The final section of the online survey gave participants the opportunity to give an overall opinion on the rate of progression for women in the institution, and whether the current initiatives are sufficient for development. The full list of survey questions can be found in Appendix C.

3.3.2   Design of Interview Questions: Participant Group 2

The second research instrument developed for use to target senior managers in the institution (both men and women) was a semi-structured interview schedule. Interviews are commonly used in qualitative research (Cassell, 2020), and tend to include pre-determined open-ended questions, that are designed to explore the research questions to provide rich and deep results (Given, 2012).

Similar to the survey design, the interview sections were designed to respond directly to each of the main there initiatives as illustrated in figure 3.5.
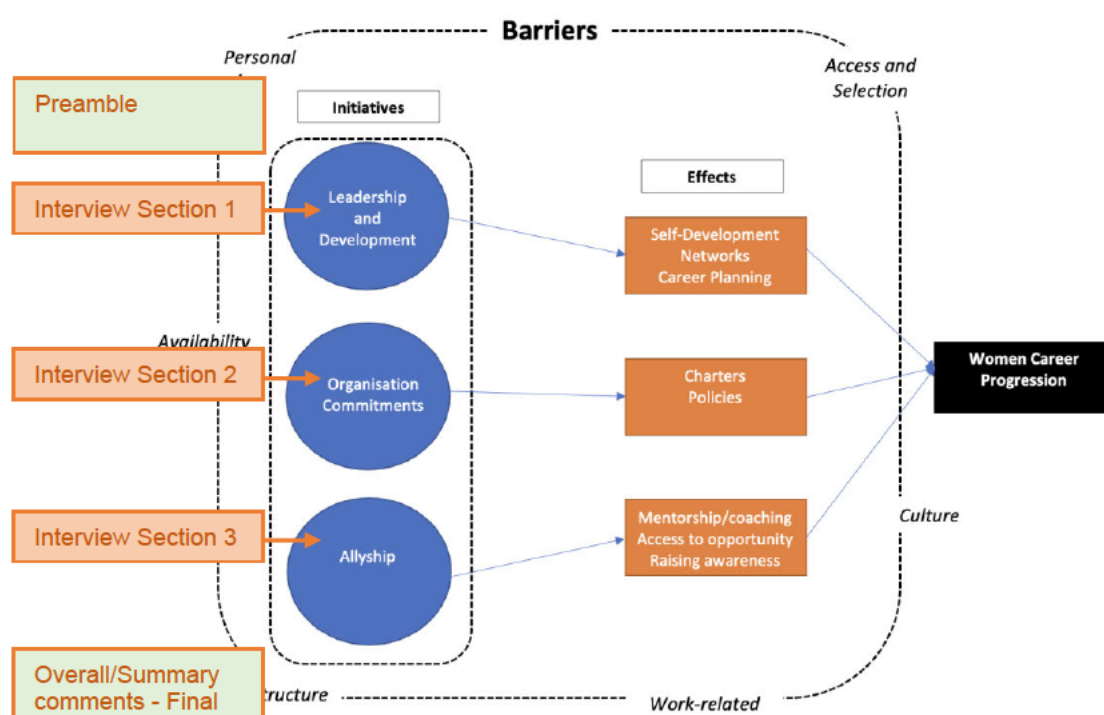
Figure 3.5: Conceptual framework with reference to interview questions

The justification for choosing interviews for this participant group was two-fold. In practical terms, the sample for this level of respondents was much smaller than the first participant group, which made interviews more logistically possible. Additionally, the interviews offered the opportunity to explore, in-depth, the factors considered in the conceptual framework from a leadership perspective. Interviews were chosen over other qualitative data collection approaches such as focus groups, as logistically, this would have been challenging due to the diary and time commitments of the participants involved, considering their senior leadership status (Cassell, 2020), and to also encourage the opportunity provide honest insights in a confidential setting. Interview participants were given the option as to whether they wanted to undertake the interview face to face or online to suit them. This was a logistical choice as some senior managers worked at other geographical locations within the UK.

The interview design started with the preamble, to explain what the research was about, that all data would be anonymised, and their rights as a research participant.

The following three sections explored the concepts of leadership and develop initiatives, organisational commitments, and allyship, using a thematic, semi-structured style. This meant that the questions could be structured around the conceptual framework, whilst still providing opportunity for exploration and further thoughts (Saunders et al., 2019). All questions were designed as open questions, which was important in attempting to get the participant to talk openly and explore the topic rather than closing off their answers (Cassell, 2020). For each of the three main concepts, the interview schedule included providing examples of what types of initiatives the questions referred to (i.e. before asking questions related to leadership and development initiatives, it was important to provide examples of the types of things being referred to for clarity such as the Aurora Women in Leadership; Coaching and Mentoring Academy etc). Each respondent was asked about the benefits, challenges or barriers, and, as leaders, how they thought challenges could be solved or improvements could be made. As with the online survey, a definition to allyship was written into the schedule and relayed to participants when asking about that particular section. The interviews were designed to last approximately 45 minutes, but an hour booked into to allow for settling into the interview and wrapping up. The interview schedule can be found in Appendix D.

3.3.3 Context – The Research Site

To further understand the context of where the research took place, and to help in defining the two groups of participants in the study, it is necessary to introduce the environment in which the research was conducted. The contextual boundaries for this research study was set within a post 1992 higher education institution (HEI) in the United Kingdom. The HEI is a modern (post 1992) university that is recognised globally, and delivers undergraduate and postgraduate degree programmes, undertakes research and has substantial links into industry both nationally and internationally. There is a main University campus, and satellite campuses located within the UK and overseas that deliver face to face teaching, as well as a number of online programmes. According to internal institutional data, there were approximately 4700 staff employed in the 2022/23 academic year (when data collection took place), with 54% women and 46% men employed. Staffing categories are shown in the following tables to demonstrate the breakdown of staff in research posts,

professional services posts, academic posts and senior management (table 3.3); and in terms of salary bands (table 3.4).

	Research	Professional Services	Academic	Senior Management
Women	4%	50%	45%	1%
Men	8%	37%	52%	2%

Table 3.3: Breakdown of staff category in the institution as at 2022/23

	Women	Men
Grades 1-3 (approx. £17– 22K)	4%	2%
Grades 4-6 (approx. £22-37K)	35%	21%
Grades 7-8 (approx. £34-57K)	51%	62%
Grade 9 (approx. £53-65K)	8%	12%
Grade 10 (£65K+)	2%	3%
Research Professorships	41%	59%

Table 3.4: Breakdown of staff salary scales in the institution at as 2022/23

The HEIs, like others in the UK, pledge to tackle gender inequality through the adoption of a range of initiatives designed to help women progress in their careers. The following areas of activity have formed the focus of investigation, linked to the conceptual framework as follows:

Leadership and development initiatives:
- Aurora Leadership Development programme – There has been investment from the University into four cohorts of 12-18 women annually on the Advance HE Aurora Women in Leadership programme, which is an external programme designed to "*develop and explore issues relating to leadership roles and responsibilities*" (Advance HE, 2023a). Women are selected based on a competitive application process involving an application, shortlist, presentation and interview, though it should be noted that the competitive nature of this may be a deterrent for those lacking confidence to apply for the

scheme. The responsibility for funding and selecting cohorts is led within the Organisation Development area of the HEI.

- Coaching and Mentoring Academy – The institution has an internal coaching and mentoring academy, aimed at developing employees and as at 2020/21, has 200 staff matched to available mentors. This is open to all staff in the University. The responsibility for funding places for training new coaches sits within the Organisation Development area of the HEI.

- Investment into leadership development activities – For example, faculties and departments may provide funding for enrolling onto MBA programmes and other qualifications.

- Women's Only network – A women's only network was formed in 2020 and as at 2022/23, has approximately 210 members. This is currently self-supported and organised through volunteers within the HEI. At the time the research was undertaken, there was currently no budget or resource to support this initiative.

Organisational commitments:

- Equality and Diversity Policy and Council – An institutional wide policy on equality and diversity is available for all staff to download and read. Governance structures exist within the HEI to deal with equality matters for both staff and students with a main council, and number of sub-councils that represent the different functions of the HEI. One of the sub-councils is related to gender.

- Athena Swan Charter – The HEI has an institutional bronze award for the Advance HE Athena Swan charter, which publishes an action plan which is evaluated and reported on every four years. There is an institutional panel that oversees the action plan on behalf of the HEI made up of staff volunteers.

Allyship:

- There are no current 'formal' allyship programmes in the University, however it could be assumed that some of this type of activity takes place informally, or more formally via the coaching and mentoring academy mentioned above.

The context of the HEI has established a variety of initiatives in place aimed at a large staff group, and therefore presented a significant sample to access to assess the effectiveness of the above initiatives that were currently in place, as well as exploring allyship, which was not formally recognised as an initiative.

3.3.4 Piloting the Research Tools

It was important that the questions and design of both the online survey and for the interviews were piloted before use, to ensure the questions were related to the research objectives, easy to follow, jargon free, error free and non-bias (Bell et al., 2019; Nardi, 2018). This is seen as particularly important when designing qualitative online surveys, to reduce the risk of user error and misunderstanding (Braun et al., 2021b). To achieve this, once the first draft of the research instruments were completed, they were piloted with five independent reviewers known to the researcher (three within the institution – who agreed they would not be participants in actual data collection, and two outside of the organisation who were less familiar with institutional terminology). The purpose of the pilot sample in this regard was to test the feasibility of the research instruments, rather than to provide any tests for conclusions of results, and those chosen reviewers were known to the researcher in order to give timely feedback, in order to keep to the deadlines of the research study and moving into live data collection phase. Initial feedback was received, and the research instruments were amended to improve wording on several of the questions, reduce the risk of misunderstanding of any terms, and to ensure clarity and ease of use. This process was repeated once more, with only two minor comments for change provided and actioned. Following feedback on the initial questions and wording, the survey was put onto the Qualtrics survey software, and was tested by the two reviewers outside of the institution, and one in the institution to check the technology worked and that the links worked.

A 'test' face to face interview also took place with one reviewer to ensure the questions worked and flowed in a real life scenario, something which is deemed to be important before the real interviews take place (Cassell, 2020; Given, 2012). The final survey and interview schedule were submitted along with the participant

information to the institutional ethics committee for final review and approval to proceed, before moving into recruitment phase.

3.4   The Sampling and Recruitment Approach

In order to address the research question of how participants perceive the barriers, effects and opportunities of initiatives and organisational commitments that intend to support women progress in their careers, it was important to consider the approaches to sampling and who would be asked to participate in the study. As already highlighted, two participant groups were identified to get a bottom up (women in the institution who earned up to £65K), and top down (male and female leaders in the institution) perspective to obtain a representative sample that would enable a complete set of views representative of the institution itself (Cash et al., 2022).

For participant group one, the population were women within the institution that were on grades from 1-9 (earning anything up to £65K GBP at point of data collection), that would be approached to complete the online, anonymous questionnaire. The participants were women only to focus on their lived experiences of the different initiatives and interventions intended to support them. The approach for sampling in this case was non-probability, self-selection sampling, which is seen as a type of volunteer sampling and is often used in mixed methods research (Saunders et al., 2019). One of the advantages of using self-selection sampling is that the research participants who accessed the survey would be more likely to want to answer the questions, or in other words, those that had no interest in the topic area would be less likely to access the questionnaire. A limitation of this type of approach are that it could lead to the sample not being representative of the whole population, and therefore could create bias (Lavrakas, 2012). However, there is an argument that selecting a sample of those who are interested in the topic is perhaps where the most learning can emerge (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), and can "*provide a basis for developing rich, in-depth insights*" (Cash et al., 2022). In order to reduce the risks of bias from certain groups or sub-groups, the study was advertised widely through multiple channels to raise the visibility of the research purpose, and the benefits to engagement with the study. This included advertising on the organisation intranet,

and emails to cascade in each unit and faculty sites rather than focussing on specific groups (i.e. targeting the women's network, for example).

Before data collection commenced, it was important to understand when to have a level of confidence that saturation had been reached, to provide meaningful results both for the institution and to generate conclusions applicable to the wider higher education community. Research suggests that with qualitative data collection, saturation is likely to be reached when no new information is forthcoming, and no new codes are being developed (Cash et al., 2022; Fusch & Ness, 2015; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This approach was adopted, as well as capturing certain demographic information at the start of the survey to ensure that responses were representative of the population of women in the institution overall. In terms of accessibility of the population, gatekeeper access was sought to advertise the study and online survey on the internal intranet, and to circulate emails to staff lists. This formed part of the institutional ethical approval process. Once approved, calls to complete the survey consisted of a first, second, and final wave, approximately four weeks apart. The population of women in this grade category at the time of data collection was 1543, and 173 responded to the survey call overall, representing an 11% of the target population. 120 survey responses were from main campus, whilst the remainder were from satellite sites both in the UK (32) and overseas (21). Whilst an 11% response rate could be deemed as disappointing, the sample of respondents reflected the make-up of the larger population, where participants experiences reported were still valid and provided accurate insights into their perceptions. Reasons for this response rate are speculative, but could have included aspects as either low morale, high workloads (and therefore a lack of time to engage), or survey fatigue. Whilst the staff concerned worked in a higher education institution, there are often multiple requests for data collection on various subjects.

The second sample population were senior leaders (both men and women) that were predominantly targeted at the 'top' of the hierarchy in the organisation. The rationale for selecting the participants at this level was to target those who have a significant management and leadership responsibility, and therefore included Deans, Directors, Pro Vice Chancellors and Deputy Vice Chancellors (that would all be on a higher grade than the women in first participant group). The literature demonstrated that

often, change cannot occur without the support of senior managers, and both men and women were selected as research participants as it has been demonstrated that men are often left out of the conversation yet hold significant power to creating change (Madsen, 2012). It was therefore important to the study to capture their views. The sampling approach for the second participant group, in conducting the semi-structured interviews was purposive sampling, otherwise known as judgement sampling (Cash et al., 2022). Purposive sampling is useful in terms of being able to access potential research participants that are best placed to answer the questions related to the research (Saunders et al., 2019). In this case, the target sample were those that work in senior leadership roles. As this information was known to the researcher and available within the organisation intranet, it was a more constructive approach in ensuring a mixed sample, that included both men and women in the organisation. Furthermore, within practice-based research, it is seen as important in ensuring representation of views of all key stakeholders related to the research topic, in order for the results to be impactful (Cash et al., 2022; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). A potential limitation of this approach could be researcher bias (Clark et al., 2021), and therefore to reduce this risk, participants were targeted based on their location (due to several campuses being in different geographical areas) and position type (either academic or professional services) within the workplace, rather than how well they were known to the researcher, as well as an attempt to get a gender balance in results. For example, the institution has multiple departmental and functional heads, at the main campus and in other geographical locations, many of whom were not known to the researcher. There were 37 senior management/leaders in the population at the time of data collection who were targeted, and emailed directly to ask if they would like to participate. 12 respondents volunteered to be interviewed (5 men, and 7 women). The roles held within the sample included 7 academic leaders (Deans, PVCs and University leadership); and 5 Professional Service leaders (Directors). In terms of location, 8 senior managers were from the main campus, whilst 4 were from other campus locations in the UK, and overseas. All volunteers agreed to be interviewed which represented a 32% of the target population, with no-one withdrawing from the process in the duration of the study.

The procedures adopted for participant sampling for both participant groups ensured that the responses would be sufficiently appropriate and beneficial to formulate

practical suggestions regarding the study's findings.

3.5 Data analysis

The data collected from both groups were predominantly qualitative, in order to gain deep and insightful perceptions of the initiatives. As part of the research design, it is important to consider how to analyse the data so that valid results can be drawn and presented (Braun & Clarke, 2022). The approach to analysis in this case, was in parallel, since data collection took place with two different stakeholder groups, and so that initial analysis could be brought together to be compared and contrasted. Figure 3.6 illustrates the approaches that were taken to be discussed further.
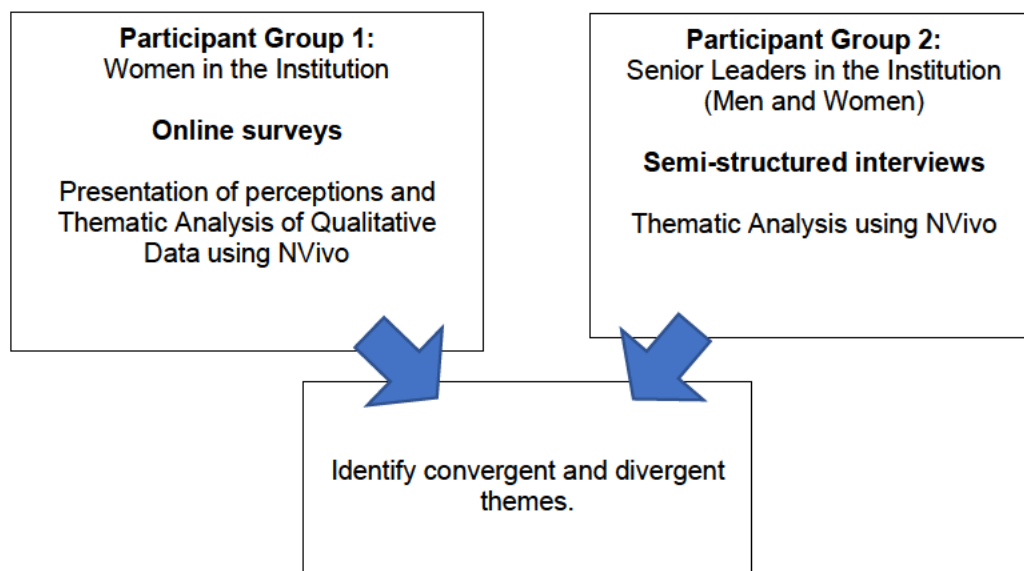
Figure 3.6: Data Analysis Approaches

For both surveys and interviews, a thematic analysis approach using NVivo was used to identify themes, patterns and key concepts within the qualitative data, related to the conceptual framework and in capturing any new, unexplored themes. Thematic analysis *"refers to forms of qualitative data analysis that principally focus on identifying, organising and interpreting themes in textual data"* (King & Brooks, 2018, p. 2).

In participant group 1 (online surveys), the 'measured' perception of participants were captured and presented as a series of graphs relating to textual data, to give

some overview of respondents levels of knowledge, understanding and opinions on the various initiatives in place in the institution. This is illustrated in the findings chapter, presenting the data that was captured on a question by question basis. To provide deeper meanings to these responses, the qualitative comments recorded in the survey were directly loaded into NVivo software ready for analysis to take place, to allow for a systematic and rigorous approach to identifying themes, (Piekkari & Welch, 2017). The analysis of qualitative data through online surveys provided the opportunity to access potential higher numbers and more diverse population than would have been practicably possible through focus groups or interviews alone (Braun et al., 2021). In participant group 2 (senior manager interviews), transcripts were first checked and verified for word pronunciation, or 'cleaned' (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018), prior to analysis, as a result of using an automatic audio transcriber. Transcripts were then uploaded to NVivo before coding began.

To analyse the data collected, a coding plan was created based on the principles of the interpretation focussed strategy, creating a template for coding (Adu, 2019), and is illustrated in figure 3.7. Stage one of the process involved setting up a pre-defined coding system in NVivo, utilising 'anchor codes' (Adu, 2019) otherwise known as 'priori themes' (King & Brooks, 2018). These anchor codes were developed from the initial conceptual framework in order to respond to the main research questions in the study, sorted into three main themes (Leadership and Development; Organisational Commitments; and Allyship). Qualitative data was read and re-read and organised into the anchor codes, where data from both participant groups were analysed separately in the first instance.
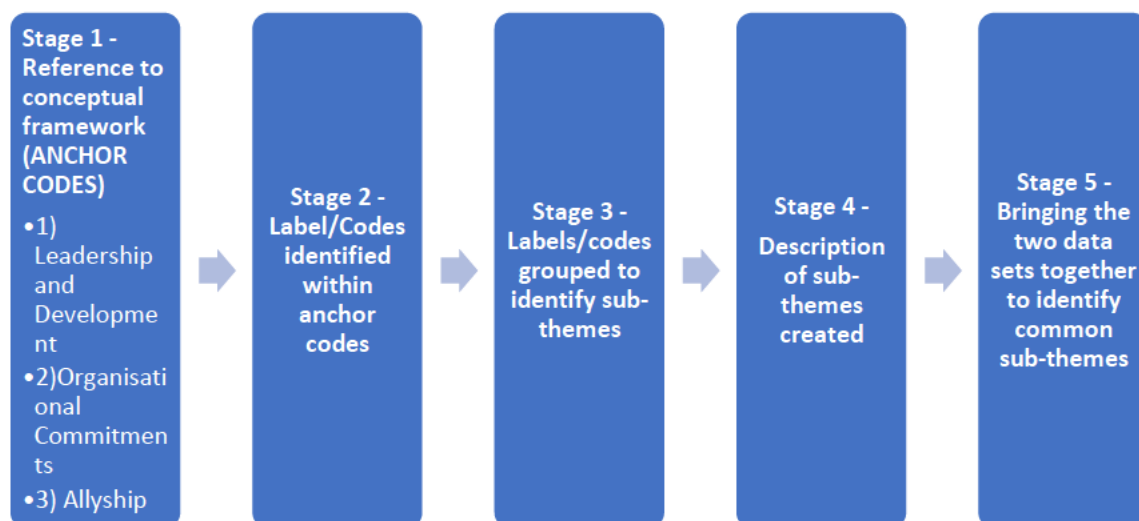
Figure 3.7: Coding process adopted for qualitative data

With the data sorted into the anchor codes, stage two of the process proceeded to look at the data in more detail. Labels were attributed to the data which represented specific concepts and were assigned codes where similar patterns had been identified. Stage three of the process then sought to iteratively revisit the labels to identify where there were shared underlying meanings, that resulted in a number of sub-themes related to the conceptual framework for further discussion. This is otherwise known as 'clustering' to explore connected patterns in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2022). The sub-themes were then reviewed several times and the description of the theme developed (stage four). Once all data had been coded; the fifth and final stage of analysis was to compare data between the two participant groups through the integration of both data sets, to see where common sub-themes had emerged. This is a useful approach in providing a holistic overview of the data, in looking for "*consistencies or inconsistencies, conflicts, contradictions and complexities*" (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018, p. 233). The resulting outcome provided an understanding of the bottom up and top down perspectives of the research topic, both related to the original conceptual framework, and in highlighting any new sub-themes. To help with organising the sub-themes, comparisons were made side by side between both sets of data to see where commonalities and differences were (see table 3.5). A completed version of this can be found in the findings chapter and completed versions in appendix G (leadership and development), H (organisational commitments), and I (allyship).

ANCHOR THEME	SUB-THEMES and References to question numbers	Description of Sub Theme	Code/ Labels	Sample Quotes	
				Participant Group 1 (Surveys)	Participant Group 2 (Interviews)
LEADERSHIP & DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES	Sub theme 1				
	Sub theme 2				
	Sub theme 3				
ORGANISATIONAL COMMITMENTS	Sub theme 1				
	Sub theme 2				
	Sub theme 3				
ALLYSHIP	Sub theme 1				
	Sub theme 2				
	Sub theme 3				

Table 3.5: Convergent comparisons (data analysis)

Analysing the data using the approaches outlined above, allowed for a deep-dive comparison in what each participant group were describing and experiencing from their respective positions within the institution.

3.6   Reliability and Validity

It is important to address how the key aspects of quality, including reliability, validity, and generalisability were ensured throughout the study. Reliability is commonly concerned with consistency and whether, if the study was to be repeated again, it would replicate the same results (Bos, 2020). However, this poses challenges for research that includes qualitative data, since the data is "*socially constructed interpretations of participants in a particular setting at the time it is conducted*" (Saunders et al., 2019, p. 205). The research itself may well produce different results, if it were replicated in another university for example, or in a different timespan, as initiatives, feelings, and perceptions about a phenomenon can change over time. It is accepted that this research study is not setting out to test a particular hypothesis, rather it is designed to develop an understanding of a phenomena within contextual and temporal boundaries yet can still be used to test results in similar contexts. In considering the reliability of the data itself, and how it is analysed, there are considerations to be made in terms of participant error/bias and researcher

error/bias (Saunders et al., 2019). The risks of participant error were mitigated by ensuring data collection tools were carefully piloted for their ease of understanding and interpretation. Participant bias was mitigated in ensuring that the advertising of the survey was undertaken widely, and through different mediums, rather than targeting particular networks or groups. For the interviews, direct voice transcription was used rather than research notes to ensure content was recorded verbatim. In terms of researcher bias, and more specifically being an inside researcher, these risks are usually addressed, for example by having more than one researcher on the team (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Since this was not possible due to the nature of the study being a doctorate project, the researcher presented and discussed analysis with a doctoral peer, and supervisor to obtain feedback and any differing perspectives.

Validity of research data is concerned with how accurately the chosen approaches to the study have measured what it originally intended to, and in particular paying attention to the risks of misinterpretation of data, or analysis throughout the research process (Flick, 2018). The research study has taken care to plan the design of research instruments, pilot them inside and outside of the institution, and has checked for any misinterpretation of results. Furthermore, ensuring that there is representativeness in terms of face validity is an important consideration in ensuring data accurately reflects the broader population. Therefore, survey respondents career stage, work mode, staff categories were collected to ensure fair representation, and likewise, senior managers targeted from both the male and female population. External validity is also an important consideration of research, or in other words how the results from the study can be generalised to serve other audiences (Quinlan et al., 2019). Braun & Clarke (2022) argue however that the thematic analysis drawn from the data should first and foremost go towards answering the research question, as there are limits to the applicability of findings to other external contexts. This research does however, go some way to providing a framework that other institutions can use to explore similar issues that they may be experiencing, and offers an opportunity to add to the growing body of knowledge that is developing in the field of women in leadership within higher education.

3.7   Ethical considerations

When conducting research, there are ethical considerations to be made. Research ethics is concerned with the respect and safety of research participants (Bell et al., 2019). It is therefore important to ensure that the research process is robust, with researcher conduct and appropriate controls considered. Practitioner researchers have an ethical duty to ensure data is represented in a transparent and clear manner, and that there should be an awareness of this through the whole process (Fox et al., 2007; King & Brooks, 2018). The researcher ensured that the study, and all of its corresponding documentation, was approved by the institutional ethical approval process, which included a two-stage peer review process, and detailed the information that was to be gathered from participants, how consent would be sought and how data would be handled. The ethical approval certificate, consent and participant information can be found in Appendix E.

3.7.1 Consent and data protection

Informed consent was required before any data collection commenced. Informed consent ensures that research participants are supplied with information on what the research is about, why they are targeted to take part, what happens during the process and how their data would be handled, to ensure they were able to make free choice on whether or not they wanted to participate. It also ensures that participants are not coerced in any way to take part (UKRI, 2021). For the survey collection, participant information was integrated into the first page of the online survey, and participants were required to consent before proceeding to the questions (see figure 3.8).

Please provide your consent to progress to the survey.

I have read and understood the above information

I agree to take part in this questionnaire survey.

I understand that, because my answers are anonymous, it will not be possible to withdraw them from the research once I have completed the survey.

I confirm that I am aged 18 or over.

Figure 3.8: Screenshot of consent options on the online survey

For the interviews, the participant information sheet and consent form was emailed at least a week prior to the interview taking place and completed consent forms received before the interview commenced. At the start of the interviews, participants were reminded of their right to withdraw comments, sections of the interview, or the interview in its entirety. The participant information and consent can be found in Appendix F, which further details how research data would be handled and stored in requirement with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). Additionally, options and clear instructions were provided on how to withdraw from the study, how responses would be anonymised, and who they should contact (both primary researcher and a secondary contact), if they had concerns about any aspect of the research process.

3.7.2 Practitioner as Researcher

Practitioner research is defined as '*focussing directly on issues of practice and is conducted by practitioners who engage in the day-to-day work whilst studying.*' (Manfra, M.M. et al., 2018). As the nature of the study means that the researcher is in effect, an insider researcher conducting research within their own institution, it is important to acknowledge and understand the benefits and risks so that appropriate measures can be taken. One important aspect of being a practitioner undertaking research in their own institution is to consider the role of reflexivity, or the relationship between the researcher and the research topic (Fox et al., 2007). One example of this is the reason for the selection of the particular research topic to be studied. Women in leadership is indeed something which has been identified nationally as a problem in Higher Education and is of interest to the researcher. It is therefore important to be aware of such motivations to pursue the topic so that they do not bias the study. One way of achieving this is through research reflexivity, which is "*the ability to critically reflect on the responsibilities of both yourself and others*" (Bos, 2020). According to Bos, researchers are increasingly expected to be accountable for their actions and to be able to justify decisions made throughout the research process to reduce the risk of bias. However, it is also suggested that insider researchers are also placed in a unique position of the situation being studied, that

can often result in researchers ending up shedding their preconceived beliefs because of learning something new, at a deeper level (Braun & Clarke, 2022). In order to address the risks, the researcher engaged in reflective practice throughout the study, keeping a journal of events, thoughts and feelings, and discussing results and interpretations of data with a peer and supervisor.

Takeda (2021) and Guillemin & Gillam (2004), also suggest reflexivity is key to ensuring sensitivity and responsibility for the research participants, that should form part of the ethical considerations for study. They discuss ethics as two separate considerations. The first, described in the previous section, is that of the 'procedures' of ethical research, such as the approvals process and documentation. The second, is described as the 'research in practice', including unforeseen events that can occur during data collection. One example of this is the impact of hierarchy. Hierarchy, or researching with peers in particular, is an important consideration in being a practitioner researcher, as some participants may know the researcher and therefore feel obliged to answer in a certain way or be reluctant to withdraw consent (Takeda, 2021). These risks need to be managed carefully, and therefore have been taken into account when designing information about the research and highlighting at consent stage the options for withdrawal. As the online survey is anonymous, there was no way for the researcher to be able to identify who may or may not respond. There were open ended questions included, and on each of these questions, there were adequate signposts to warn respondents not to disclose any information that would potentially identify the respondent. In interviews, the chances of participants being forced to respond in a certain way because of the researcher's identity were small. Since all of the participants were more senior than the researcher, they wouldn't feel under any obligation to respond in a particular way. Senior members, on the other hand, may have had the opportunity to answer questions in a way that did not draw attention to any flaws related to initiatives. Although no risk can be totally eradicated, the researcher utilised prompts or revisited questions to clarify further explanation when needed to support original comments.

3.8   Summary

The research questions were created in response to the gaps in the existing body of knowledge and the current challenges that the Higher Education Institution and the sector as a whole are experiencing in progressing more women into leadership roles. The conceptual framework, which includes the key topics to be investigated, served as the basis for the questions that formed the research instruments. The study adopts a pragmatist outlook, and rather than taking a hard philosophical stance based on belief systems, has instead been driven by the research questions themselves to develop the methods and techniques. A mixed methods approach to research was adopted, choosing two participant groups as being best suited to include in data collection that would saturate the relevant samples and hence provide validity to the results. This included an online survey advertised to women that earned up to £65K or grade 9 equivalent in the institution, and one to one semi structured interviews with both men and women at group leadership level including pro-vice chancellors, deans and directors. Prior to their launch, all research instruments were piloted to reduce the risk of participant misunderstanding. Thematic analysis formed the main strategy for the analysis of qualitative data in participant group one (survey - women), to add depth of meaning to the measured perceptions within the survey. For the second participant group (interviews - managers), thematic analysis of the interview transcripts also took place, before a convergent comparison between the bottom up and top down approaches were captured. Finally, the need for reflexivity as an insider researcher, sense-checking the data, discussing and defending analytical choices with a peer, were all crucial factors in the design of the study that responded to any potential risk of bias.

Chapter 4: Data Collection - Findings

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings captured from the data collected within the institution. The chapter is split into the following sub-sections (illustrated in figure 4.1). The chapter first presents data drawn from participant group 1 (section 4.2), where women responded to an online survey, to provide an overview of their responses, and the themes that arose as a result of thematic analysis. This is then followed by presenting the data captured from participant group 2 (section 4.3), where male and female senior managers participated in 1:1 semi-structured interviews. Section 4.4 will then summarise the findings before moving onto the discussion and analysis chapter which discusses and explores the sub themes in more detail.
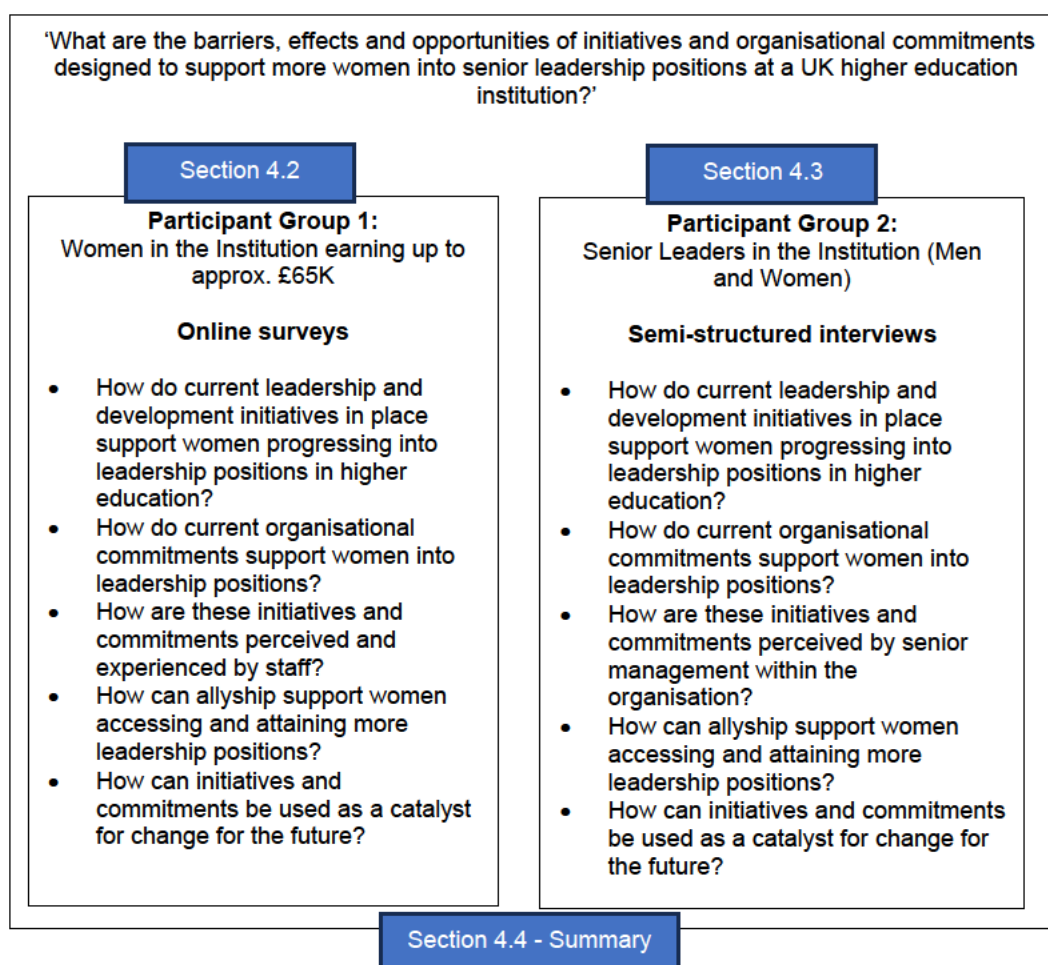
Figure 4.1: Findings Chapter Structure related to Research Question

4.2   Participant Group 1: Survey Findings

The first participant group (women working in the Institution that were at a career stage from early stages up to the equivalent or on the cusp of senior management), were approached to get their perspectives on the initiatives and organisational commitments that intend to support more women to progress in their careers to leadership level. The anonymous survey was designed using Qualtrics software, as an approved organisational tool, with questions grouped into five main sections (see figure 4.2). Section 1 captured profile data on respondents to ensure an even sample across the institution; sections 2, 3 and 4 reflected the three main factors in the conceptual framework – leadership and development; organisation; and allyship. Section 5 captured summary perspectives.
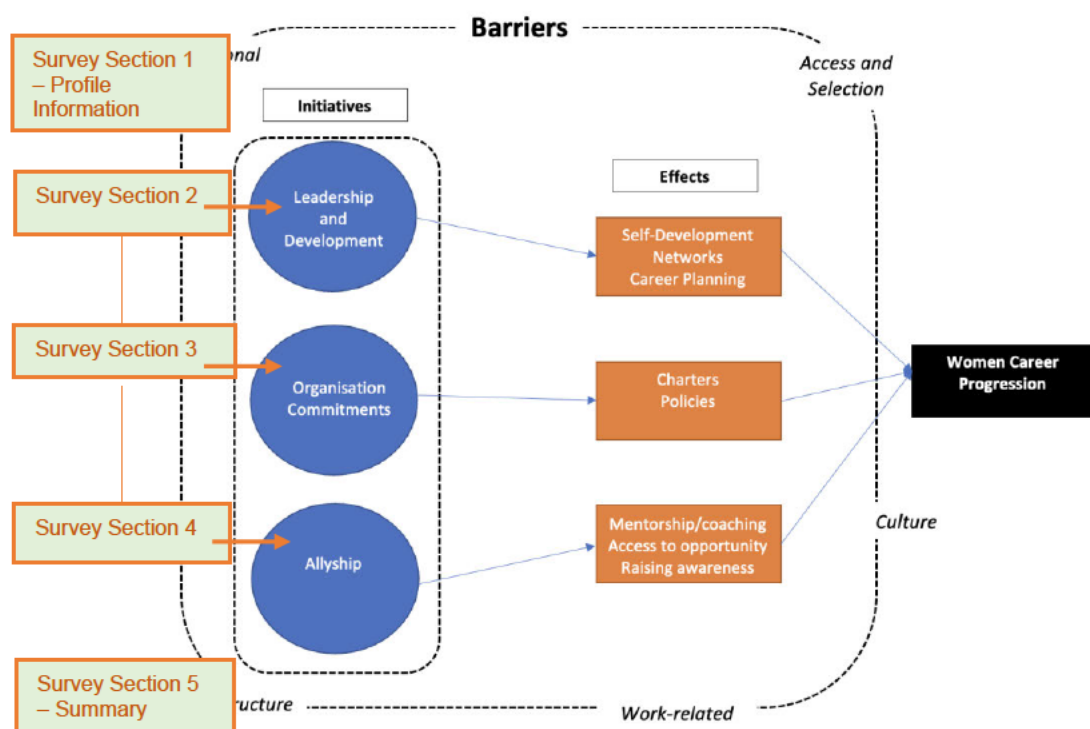
Figure 4.2: Conceptual framework with reference to survey sections

The survey was launched and advertised through the organisation intranet, through staff email lists, and through relevant networks. This process was repeated giving opportunity for responses through three waves, four weeks apart. 122 responses were captured in the first wave and 48 responses at second wave. On the third wave, responses were minimal (only an additional 3). This, alongside no new codes emerging from the data, gave a level of confidence that the sample had been saturated. A total of 173 surveys were submitted, which represented an 11% sample of the target audience. The following data presents the findings from the survey:

Survey Section 1 - Profile Information

It was important to demonstrate the breakdown of participants that responded to the survey in relation to the overall population of women within the institution, to provide some levels of confidence that the sample represents the general make-up of women within the institution. The first three questions on the survey captured this top level of data.

Section 1, Q1 - What category of staff are you?

The responses in terms of category of staff (illustrated in figure 4.3) are representative of the make-up of the university. With 55% of responses being from professional services (where the overall population is 59%); 35% academic responses being from academic staff (where the overall population is 33%); and 4% responses from research (where the overall population is 6%).
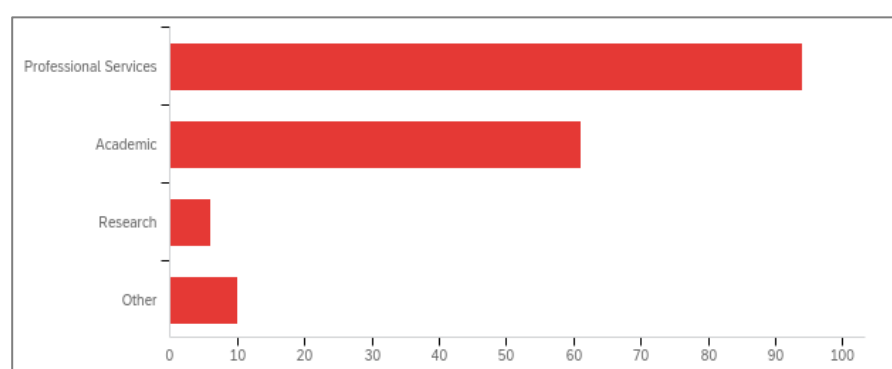
Figure 4.3: Respondents job type

Unsurprisingly, other categories were minimal at 6%, and included responses from areas such as institutional subsidiaries, international hubs or where staff had split roles across academic and professional services. This provided a level of confidence that the categories of staff were well represented in the sample.

Survey Section 1, Q2 - Are you full or part-time?

In terms of working patterns of the institution (illustrated in figure 4.4). 82% of respondents were full-time, and 18% were part-time. In terms of the overall female university population, the split is 72% full-time and 28% part-time. Whilst there is not a significant difference in numbers representing the larger population, there were not as many part-time responses. Speculatively, this could have been due to it being harder to reach part-timers, or, that part-time employees may experience survey fatigue more quickly than full-timers. They are likely to receive the same amount of opportunities to engage in research but with less time, and therefore they are not given priority.
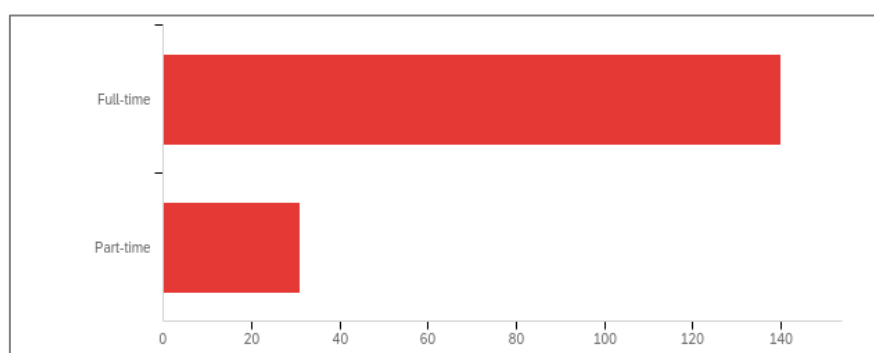
Figure 4.4. Full time and part-time responses

Section 1, Q3 - What range does your salary fit into (pro-rata)?

This question aimed to get an indication of the career stage respondents were at in relation to the overall female population. Figure 4.5 illustrates the comparison of respondents to the overall female population in the institution. This demonstrates a similar pattern, which gives some confidence that the sample has been adequately represented. 5% of respondents earned up to £22K, and 32% up to £34K. The majority of respondents (46%) were at mid-career, earning up to £51K, after which numbers start to taper off the higher the salary range, with 17% of respondents that earned up to £65K.
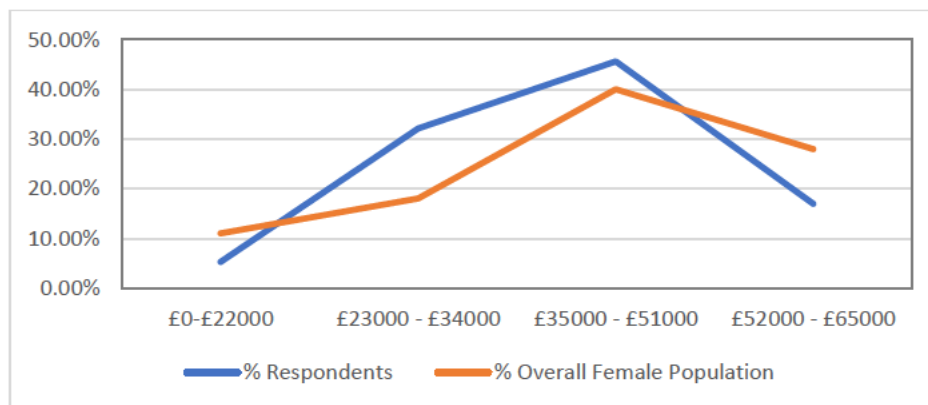
Figure 4.5: Career Stage of Respondents Vs Overall Population

In summary, the profile information collected in section 1 of the survey provided confidence that the responses captured would be representative of the professional type and career stages of the general population within the institution.

Section 2: Leadership and Development

The second section of the survey focused on the leadership and development initiatives that are currently promoted within the institution, to understand the levels of awareness of the initiatives, how they are perceived (both in terms of opportunities and barriers) and what impact they have had on women. The main leadership initiatives available to staff in the institution and therefore included in the survey were the Aurora Women in Leadership Programme, Coaching and Mentoring Academy, Staff MBA programme, Women's Only Networks and Women's only talks and seminars that are advertised to staff. Respondents were also given the opportunity to identify any other initiatives that they had experience of. The responses in this section aimed to capture responses linked to the following sub-research question: *How do current leadership and development initiatives in place support women progressing into leadership positions in higher education?*

Survey Section 2, Q1 - Please indicate your experience of the following development opportunities for women within the University group.

Figure 4.6 illustrates to what extent respondents had been exposed to and engaged with the main leadership and development initiatives currently available within the institution. An average of 13% of respondents were actively participating in the

initiatives and 9% had some level of experience with them. An average of 23% of respondents had heard of the initiatives and were interested in participation, with most women being interested in Aurora (17%), Coaching and Mentoring (27%), and Women's Seminars (18%). Remarkably, an average of 40% of respondents did not know what the initiatives were, with 28% not knowing about the Aurora programme, coaching and mentoring academy, and women only seminars.
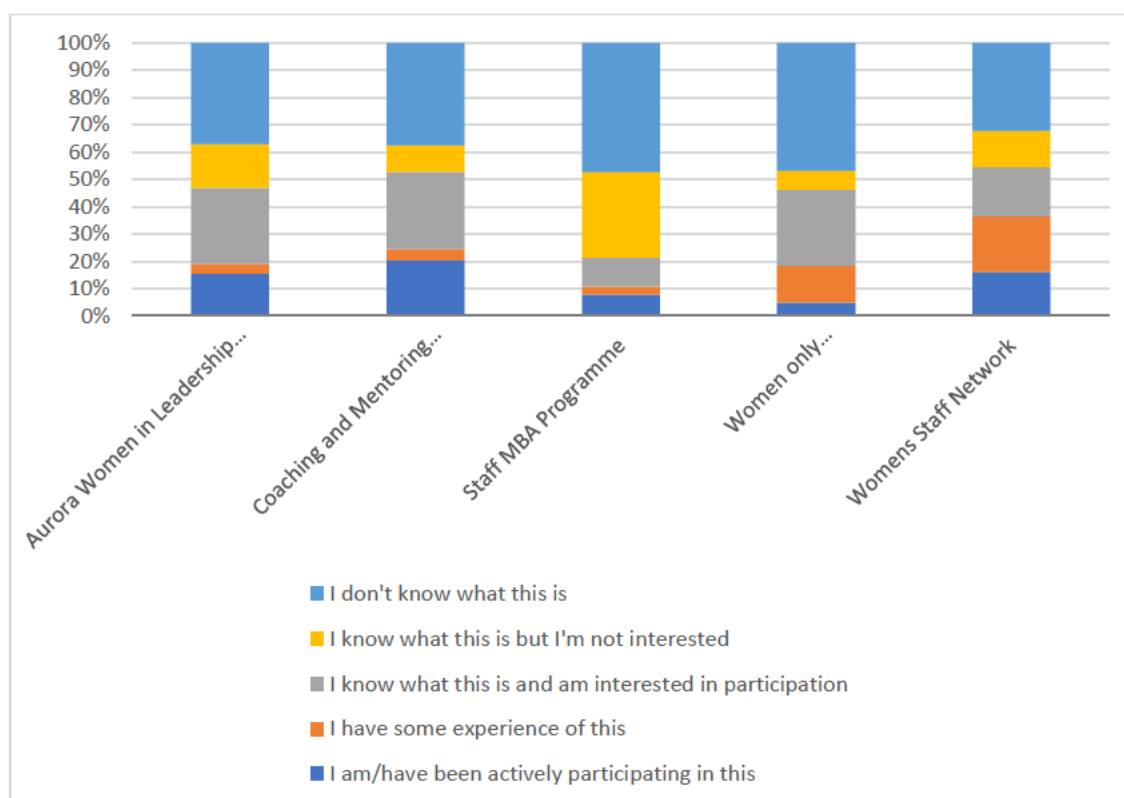
Figure 4.6. Level of awareness and participation in LDI

Survey Section 2, Q2 - If for question 2, you answered that you had participated in some of these initiatives, what benefits came from this? Select as many as apply.

To understand some of the effects of participating in these types of leadership development initiatives, respondents were asked to detail what, if any, benefits arose as a result of their participation, illustrated in figure 4.7. Out of 173 completed surveys, 44% indicated that they had received some benefits. The two biggest reported benefits that arose were in accessing new networks (27%), and similarly in self-development - i.e., building confidence, developing resilience etc (23%). The benefits less significantly reported were in being able to challenge discriminate

behaviours (8%), and in obtaining progression as a result of participation in the leadership and development initiative (12%). Respondents were given the opportunity to detail any other benefits that were not already stated, though only 3.6% responded with comments. This included solidarity, gaining information about menopause in the workplace, developing new ways of thinking, and learning from other colleagues in the organisation.
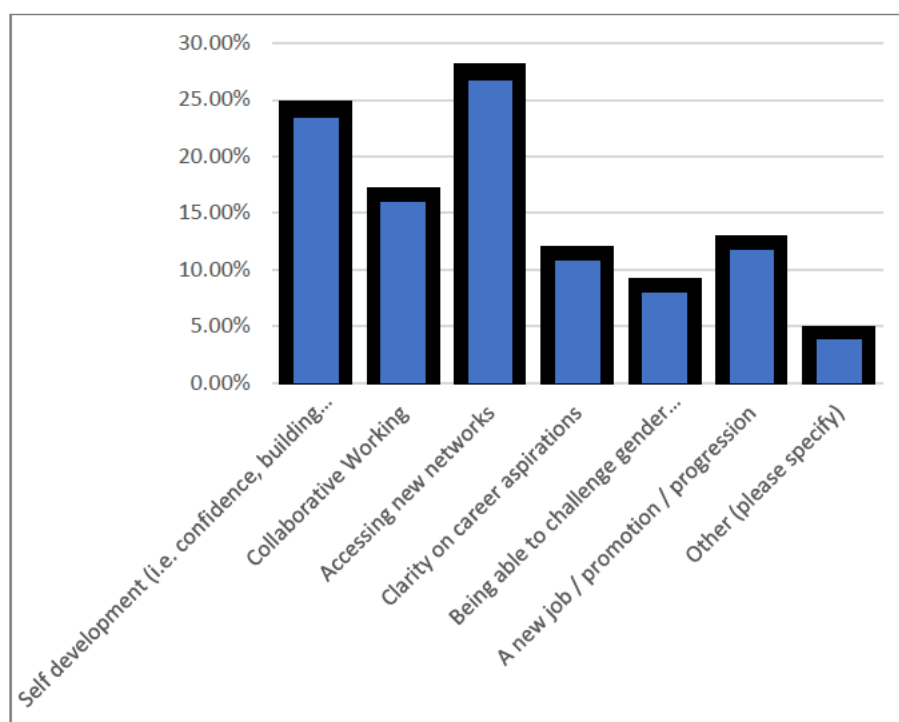
Figure 4.7. Benefits emerged from participation in LDI

Survey Section 2, Q3 - If you haven't participated in some of these initiatives, what are the reason(s) for this?

To further understand what some of the challenges or barriers there may be in relation to accessing these LDIs, respondents were asked to state any reasons they were unable to access them. 69% provided a response to this question, illustrated in figure 4.8. From the responses, the biggest inhibitors of engaging with LDIs were all work-related factors, being workload (24%), work pressures (17%), and lack of professional or management support (13%). 8% of respondents also reported being unsuccessful in applying for an LDI. Perhaps most surprisingly, caring responsibilities such as childcare were a reported barrier for only 9% of respondents. 17% of respondents added their own reasons for not accessing the initiatives and

these included, in the main, that they had not been accessed because they were not aware of them, which correlated to responses from question 1. Other reasons which were less common included having already done something similar in another institution, being in the wrong position to be able to access them, or not feeling like training is needed (2%).
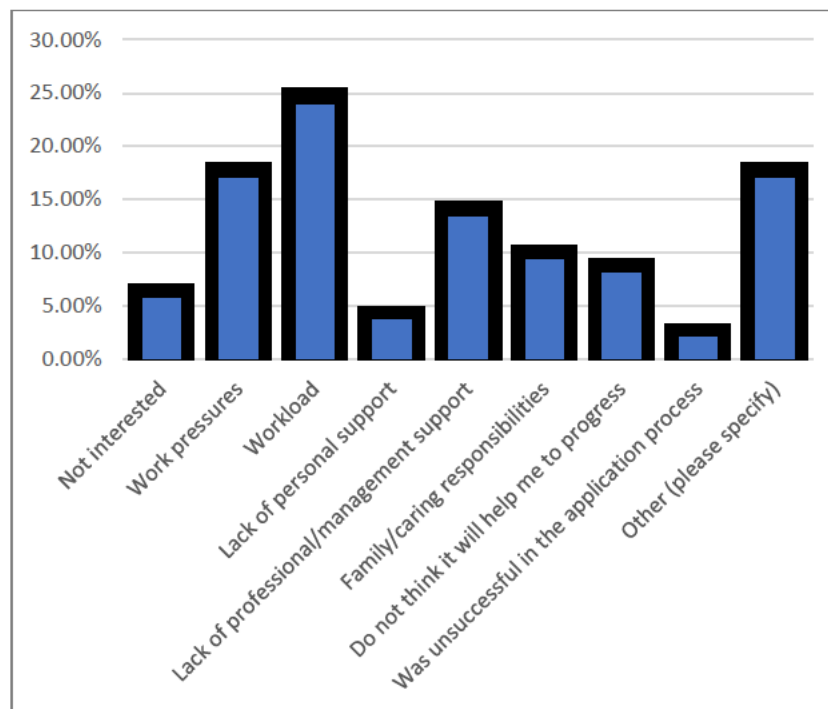
Figure 4.8. Barriers to Access for LDIs

Survey Section 2, Q4 - Please rate how you perceive the level of difference these initiatives make to increasing gender equality in senior roles within the institution.

Respondents were asked to select an option to describe the level of perceived difference that they believe the LDIs made in helping women to progress into leadership roles. Figure 4.9 illustrates similar patterns across each of the respective LDI initiatives, with only an average of 8% believing they make significant difference, an average of 25% believing they made some difference, 10% only a slight difference, and 13% believed they made no difference. In contrast, an average 44% of the population had no opinion. This was an interesting finding, which the next question provided some possible explanation for, in asking why respondents had made their chosen selection.
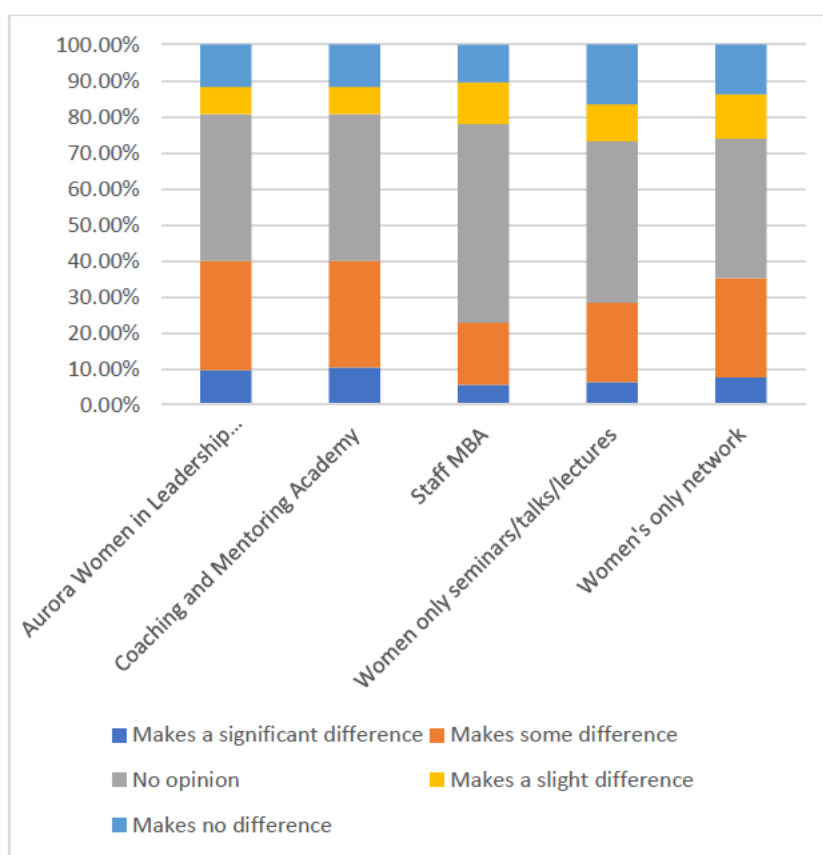
Figure 4.9. Perceived Impact of LDIs

Survey Section 2, Q5 - Please describe why you have made those selections.

Respondents were asked to provide a short narrative to further understand why they had selected the level of perceived impact. 73% of the respondents provided some qualitative comments to further explain why they had rated the initiatives in the way they had. The comments were analysed using NVivo software and data was assigned into labels. Labels were placed within broader sub-themes for further discussion in the analysis section, illustrated in Table 4.1. These sub-themes fell broadly into the categories of how visible the initiatives that existed were, or how they engaged with them, suggesting that there is a lack of both visibility and understanding of the initiatives overall. Impact, in terms of not fully understanding how engagement could help them with achieving their goals, and the levels of confidence as to whether they actually work. Self-development either gained or not gained, and the main challenges that prevent them from undertaking self-development/leadership programmes; and networks, in terms of the effects of networking and how it has helped or hindered women in their pursuit of leadership.

Interestingly, the majority of comments provided in response to this question were presented as either a barrier, or as a future opportunity for change, with only a few comments relating to career planning and self-development as an outcome of LDIs as a positive effect.

Codes/Labels	Sub-theme	Description
Visibility (31) Engagement (10)	**Visibility and Engagement**	Understanding how the initiatives are currently 'known' amongst staff, understanding who they are targeted at, whether it is inclusive, and how work may impact engagement.
Impact (37)	**Impact**	Measurement of impact in initiatives. What is the return on investment to the institution. How do they know it is working?
Confidence (15)	**Self-Development**	Issues and opportunities related to staff undertaking self (professional development), with leadership in mind.
Networking (14)	**Networks**	How networking has helped women at different stages of their career, what they are looking for from a network.
Career Planning (10)	**Career Planning**	Issues and opportunities related to engaging with career planning.
Work, Workload (15)	**Work-related barriers**	Work-related barriers to engagement in leadership and development initiatives.

Table 4.1: Sub themes identified on perceived level of impact of leadership development initiatives.

In conclusion, section 1 of the survey revealed that many respondents were unaware of Leadership Development Initiatives (LDIs) in their institutions, with the Aurora Women in Leadership programme and Women's staff network being the most visible. Barriers to engagement included work-related issues and personal barriers to a lesser extent. A large proportion of the respondents were unable to rate the level of perceived impact, which correlates with their level of awareness of the initiatives being low in the first question.

Survey Section 3: Organisational Level Commitments

In the third section of the survey, respondents were asked to provide perspectives on the organisational level commitments aimed to improve gender equality, and how

these were perceived in relation to career progression. Questions set were mainly around the perceptions of the institutions Athena Swan Charter, organisational EDI policies and council meetings. The questions in this section specifically responded to sub-research questions*: How do current organisational commitments support women into leadership positions, and how are these commitments perceived by staff?*

Survey Section 3, Q1 - Please indicate your level of knowledge of the following organisation commitments intended to promote gender equality within the University group.

In relation to the respondents' level of knowledge of organisational commitments, respondents were asked to rate their level of awareness of the Athena Swan charter and action plan, the institution equality, diversity and inclusion council and sub-councils, and the equality, diversity and inclusion institutional policy, illustrated in figure 4.10. Unexpectedly, the theme from the previous sections continued, where 30% of respondents had not heard about the Athena Swan Charter, or the EDI council and sub councils. Between 45-50% of respondents were aware of these institutional commitments but had either limited knowledge or no known details about them. In contrast, an average of 10% of respondents were either actively involved, or at least fully aware of the Athena Swan or the EDI councils and subgroups.

In relation to the EDI institutional policy, 8% had not heard about it, 20% were aware but did not know any of the detail; 33% of respondents had heard of the policy but overall knowledge was limited, whilst 32% of respondents were aware of the policy but not actively involved. Surprisingly, only 5% of respondents were actively involved with activities related to the policy.
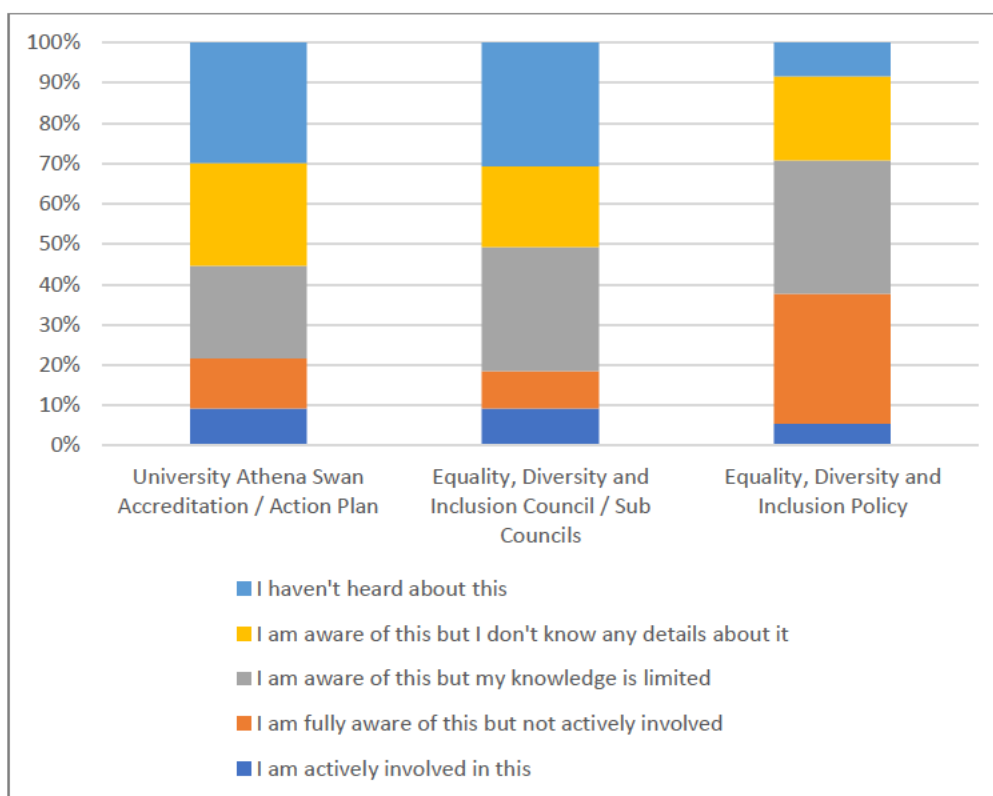
Figure 4.10. Level of knowledge of organisational commitments

Survey Section 3, Q2 – If you are aware of these commitments, what benefits do you think they bring to increasing more opportunities for women to progress?

Respondents were asked to describe the benefits of these types of commitments. Overall, 60% responded with comments, with 34% stating they were unsure / did not know, which could be attributed to those who had not heard about the charter, policy or EDI council meetings from the previous question. The remaining respondents comments were coded into the labels indicated in table 4.2, including how many times there was a reference to that area. The labels fell into managers demonstrating a commitment to change, demonstrating that the institution has some positive commitment to wanting to make that happen, and the second label of roadmaps, indicating that the charters and policies provide some framework or roadmap for change. These areas both fell into the charters and policies sub-theme and are discussed further in the discussion and analysis chapter.

Codes/Labels	Sub-theme	Description
Commitment to change (23)

Roadmaps (15) | **Charters/Policies** | How policies and charters are implemented with the intention for positive change. |

Table 4.2: Sub theme from comments on perceived benefits of organisational commitments

Survey Section 3, Q3 – What barriers do you think there are to the implementation of these commitments?

Respondents were asked to describe the barriers to implementing these types of commitments. Overall, 66% responded with comments, which was more responses than in terms of benefits reported in the previous question. 20% of those who responded stated they were unsure / did not know, which again could be attributed to those who were unaware of the initiatives. 80% of respondents provided comments that were organised into the labels identified in Table 4.3. These were subsequently put into sub-themes for further discussion in the next chapter. Culture emerged as the biggest barrier in relation to the organisational commitments to supporting women, suggesting that there needed to be a change at various levels within the institution. Again, visibility and engagement was highlighted as a barrier, which has been a common theme throughout the findings. Respondents also cited infrastructure challenges in terms of delivering on actions in the Athena Swan action plan, and in participating in EDI meetings.

Codes/Labels	Sub-theme	Description
Culture (43)	**Culture**	How institutional cultures influence the success of initiatives.
Visibility & engagement (22)	**Visibility & Engagement**	Making staff aware of organisational commitments, where to find information and how to get involved. Leading to raised awareness.
Resources (20) Structure (6)	**Infrastructure**	The physical and organisational structures needed to execute organisational commitments to gender initiatives.

Table 4.3: Sub themes from comments on perceived barriers of organisational commitments.

Survey Section 3, Q4 - How do you rate these organisational commitments in terms of creating more opportunities for women to progress in the institution?
Respondents were asked to indicate their perception of the level of impact these organisational commitments make in terms of career progression for women, illustrated in Figure 4.11. 19% of respondents felt that the Athena Swan accreditation made either some or significant difference, whilst 14% felt that it only made a slight difference, and 9% no difference. Overwhelmingly, the majority of respondents (58%) had no opinion, which could indicate the lack of knowledge and understanding of what the charter is, whether they had heard of it or not. There were similarities in relation to the perceptions of EDI councils, sub-councils and EDI policy. An average of 24% of respondents felt that they made some or significant difference, whilst 15% felt it only made a slight difference, and 13% no difference. Once again, an average of 48% had no opinion, demonstrating a lack of visibility and engagement with the commitments.
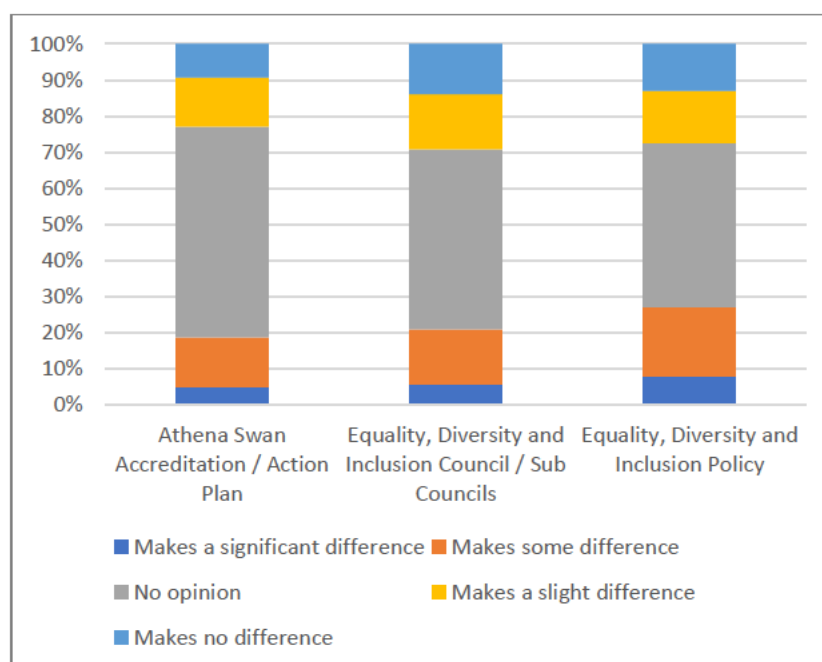
Figure 4.11: Perceived level of impact of organisational commitments

Survey Section 3, Q5 – Please describe why you have made those selections.
Respondents were asked to describe the reasons why those selections had been made. 40% responded with qualitative comments which were coded into the

following sub-themes illustrated in Table 4.4. The majority of comments fell into the sub-theme of culture, in how culture influences how successful organisational commitments can be. This was closely followed by labels associated with impact, including how policy is translated into practice, and how benchmarking is used to measure change. Participants also highlighted visibility and engagement in developing an understanding of what the organisational commitments are, and how they can achieve change through engagement and support. These themes are further discussed in the discussion and analysis chapter.

Codes/Labels	Sub-theme	Description
Culture (36)	**Culture**	How institutional cultures influence the success of initiatives.
Policy into Practice (18) Data/Benchmarking (7)	**Impact**	How commitments, policies and initiatives translate into practical change.
Visibility & engagement (10)	**Visibility & engagement**	Making staff aware of organisational commitments, where to find information and how to get involved. Leading to raised awareness.

Table 4.4: Sub themes from comments on perceived level of impact of organisational commitments.

In conclusion, this section of the survey revealed limited awareness of organisational commitments affecting women in leadership roles, with many unaware of internal policies, and the Athena Swan Charter. Though an acknowledgement or commitment to change was seen as positive in relation to roadmaps and frameworks, barriers highlighted issues of institutional culture, lack of visibility, and lack of impact.

Section 4 of the online survey explored the third element of the conceptual framework, in understanding the perceptions on the concept of allyship in supporting more women into leadership, specifically addressing the sub-research question: *How can allyship support women accessing and attaining more leadership positions?*

Survey Section 4, Q1 - How important do you think allyship is in terms of supporting more women to progress in their careers?

Expectedly, there were a large majority of respondents who felt that allyship was worthwhile, illustrated in the results in Figure 4.12. 95% of respondents agreed that allyship as a support mechanism for women was either important or very important. No one responded to indicate that allyship wasn't of any value at all. Only 2% indicated they had no opinion, and 3% felt it was slightly important.
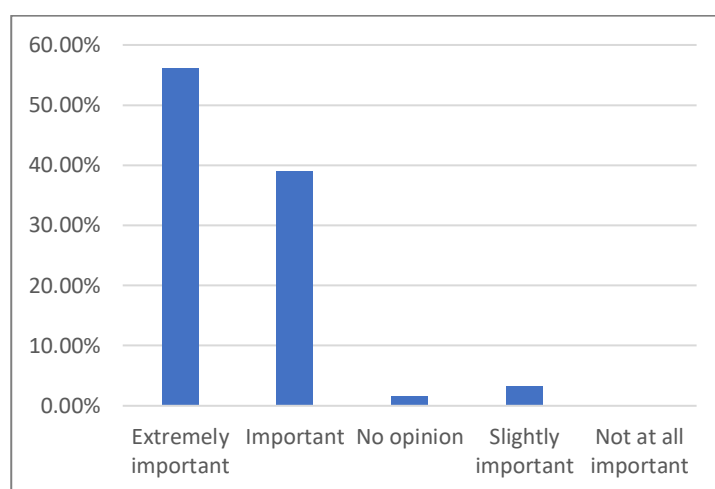
Figure 4.12: Perceived importance of allyship

Survey Section 4, Q2 - In the past, would you say you have had an experience of allyship, that has helped you to develop in your career?

To understand whether respondents had any previous exposure to allyship, they were asked to indicate this, and if they had received allyship, from whom. Results are illustrated in Figure 4.13. 75% of respondents indicated that they had received some form of allyship from senior colleagues. 37% indicated that they had received allyship from a female colleague, 9% from a male colleague, whilst 30% had

received allyship from both. 24% of respondents had not received any form of allyship in the workplace, which is significant considering the number of survey responses.
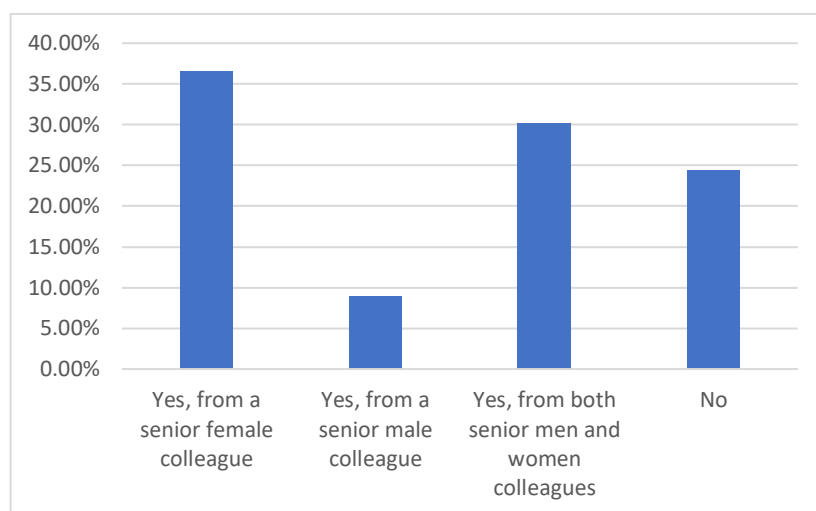
Fig 4.13: Experience of allyship

Survey Section 4, Q3 - If you answered yes to the previous question, what were the benefits of receiving allyship? (Select as many as apply)

Overall, 55% of respondents indicated that some benefits has emerged when engaging with allyship, illustrated in Figure 4.14. The three biggest benefits of engaging with allyship reported were in receiving some mentorship and/or coaching (28%) and being given access to new work assignment opportunities (25%), followed by access to new networks (17%). Benefits that did not score as highly were related to allies challenging discriminative behaviours (7%), allies raising awareness (7%) and challenging process/policy (11%). 45% of respondents did not answer this question, which suggests there were either no benefits or they hadn't received any allyship. 5% of respondents suggested there were other benefits received. Although a minority of benefits reported as 'other', this included encouragement, receiving supporting advice on how to work with a young family, confidence, understanding power and politics in the workplace, breaking stereotypes, and learning new things.
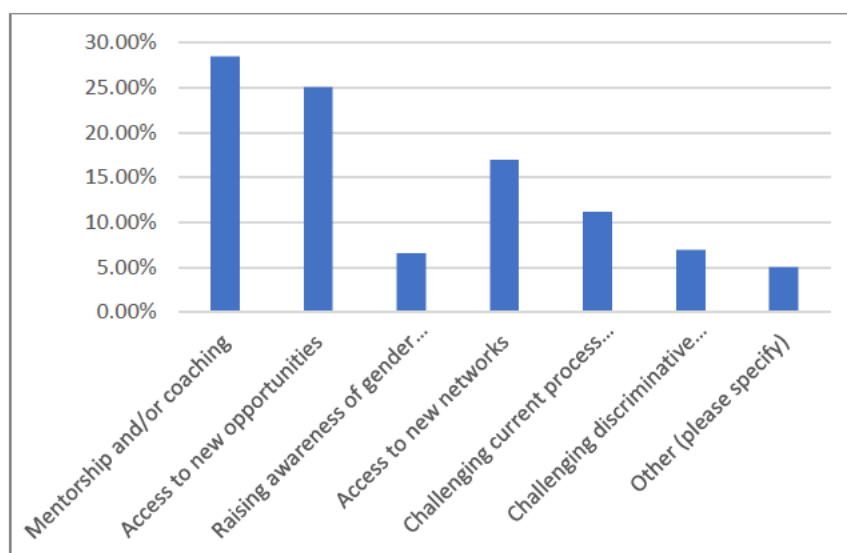
Figure 4.14: Benefits of engaging with allyship.

Survey Section 4, Q4 – What do you think some of the barriers to obtaining allyship might be?

Respondents were asked to provide narrative on what some of the barriers to receiving allyship were. Overall, 57% of respondents provided comments, whilst 43% indicated they were not sure. The data was categorised into a series of labels before arriving at two major sub-themes summarised in Table 4.5. Data evidenced challenges of infrastructure, for example in dedicating time and resource, as well as there not being enough managers that act as allies. This was followed closely with barriers in relation to confidence in developing relationships, specifically in developing trust, that is often impacted by competition and internal politics, and are described within the context of the role of the ally. These sub-themes are discussed further in the discussion and analysis chapter.

Codes/Labels	Sub-theme	Description
Resources (20) Workload (12) Availability (4)	**Infrastructure (Barriers)**	Barriers highlighted related to lack or resources, time and space to dedicate to the work.
Who (10) Trust/Bias (20)	**Ally as a role**	Understanding what it means to be an ally, who are the allies, issues of trust and bias.

Table 4.5: Sub themes from comments provided on perceived barriers of allyship.

Survey Section 4 Q5 – How useful do you think allyship is, or could be, in supporting more women into leadership positions?

51% respondents provided some comments on how useful allyship would be in the workplace, whilst 49% did not comment. A number of labels were identified through the data that were subsequently sorted into sub-themes, illustrated in Table 4.6. The Sub-themes identified were in relation to gaining support from allies through the general day to day support and encouragement to colleagues. Mentoring and coaching also emerged as a benefit of allyship, followed by allies providing sponsorship, or more formalised or direct support such as giving access to networks or new work assignments. Raising awareness was also a theme that emerged in terms of making others more aware of gender inequality issues, or directly calling out discriminative practices. Finally, ally as a role was also identified, in highlighting opportunities and the need for understand what makes a good ally, in terms of how trust is built and barriers that may exist. These themes, with supporting quotations are discussed further in the discussion and analysis chapter.

Codes/Labels	Sub-theme	Description
Support (66)	**Advocacy**	Less formal ways of supporting women, day to day micro actions that support women in the workplace.
Mentoring; coaching (10)	**Mentoring & Coaching**	Seniors who provide mentoring and/or coaching to others - see this as being an ally - more formal type of relationship.
Sponsorship (3) Opportunity (4)	**Access to opportunity**	More direct support in terms of sponsorship or patronage. Those that are taken 'under the wing' and given access to networks and opportunities in order to develop.
Challenge (3) Awareness (5) Discrimination (4)	**Raising awareness**	Raising awareness of gender inequalities, calling out discriminative practices, micro aggressions, policy and practice.
Who (7) Trust/Bias (5) Feedback (5)	**Ally as a Role**	Understanding what it means to be an ally, who are the allies, issues of trust and bias.

Table 4.6: Sub themes from comments provided on perceived usefulness of allyship.

In conclusion, section 4 of the survey highlighted an overwhelming majority of respondents viewing allyship as an important practice in the workplace. Many

respondents had experienced allyship in some form, either from women predominantly, or from both men and women, though there were still a significant proportion who hadn't experienced this at all. The main benefits of allyship reported were in receiving some form of mentorship or coaching, being able to access new opportunities and in developing networks, whilst the most significant barriers were in resourcing issues such as available time to commit, or in the ally as a role, which relates to issues of trust and bias.

Survey Section 5: Overall views

Towards the end of the survey, respondents were asked to give their overall perception of the rate of progress that the institution is making in relation to supporting and promoting women, and the opportunity to make any additional comments.

Survey Section 5, Q1 - How would you rate the progress that the institution is making in recruiting or promoting more women into senior positions?
59% of respondents felt that the institution were either making slow or no progress; whereas 34% felt that the institution was making some progress. Unsurprisingly, after the initial results demonstrated in this chapter, only 7% felt that the institution was making significant progress in recruiting women into senior positions. Results are illustrated in Figure 4.15.
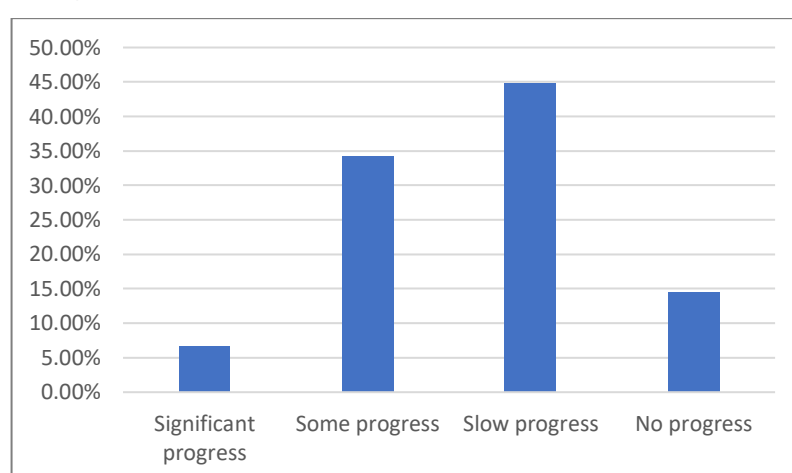
Figure 4.15: Level of perceived progress

Survey Section 5, Q2 - Are the initiatives that are currently available to support more women into leadership roles sufficient for your development?

Illustrated in Figure 4.16, respondents were asked to rate whether the initiatives were sufficient for their development. 11% of respondents felt that support was sufficient to support progression, 21% felt it was not sufficient, and 68% of respondents responded that they did not know.
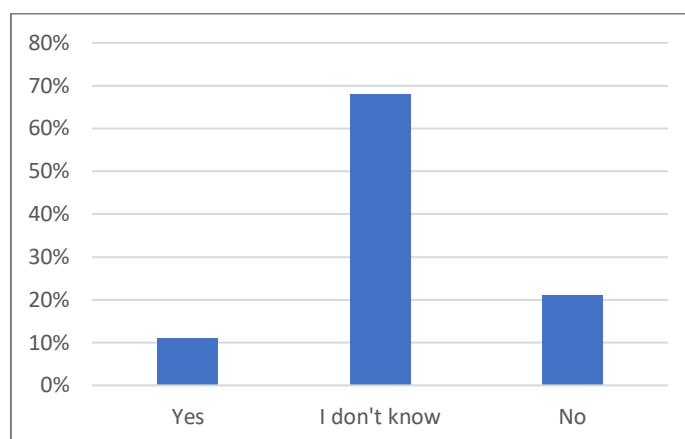
Figure 4.16: Is support sufficient for development?

Survey Section 5, Q3 – Do you have any other comments you wish to make or is there anything else you feel is important?

Survey respondents were given the opportunity to make any additional comments they wanted to share. There were 41 respondents (24%) to this question. Comments of relevance were coded into the following categories, illustrated in table 4.7, before being organised into the corresponding thematic tables, detailed in Appendix G, H and I, and further discussed as part of the discussion and analysis chapter.

Codes/Labels	Sub-theme	Description
Networks (5) Collaboration (3)	**Networking**	How networks help women in the institution, and what types of networks may be helpful.
Visibility (11)	**Visibility and engagement**	Understanding how the initiatives are currently 'known' amongst staff, understanding who they are targeted at, whether it is inclusive, and how work or personal factors may impact engagement.
Culture (17)	**Culture**	How institutional cultures influence the success of initiatives.

Table 4.7: Sub themes from comments provided 'any other'

The online surveys revealed that there were challenges with visibility and engagement leadership development initiatives and organisational commitments. There were positive benefits reported from leadership and development programmes, such as self-development and access to new networks; nevertheless, there were also challenges, most notably work-related, and in the visibility of initiatives. Allyship was seen to be particularly significant in effecting positive change, with benefits such as increased access to new opportunities and networks, mentors and coaches, and the ability to challenge established systems and policies. The majority of the women surveyed believed that the institution did not do enough to help them advance their careers. Qualitative responses were coded, and a number of themes emerged on leadership and development initiatives, organisational commitments, and allyship, which are further explored in the discussion and analysis chapter.

4.3   Participant Group 2: Interview Findings

In relation to the second participant group, members of the group leadership team (both male and female) for the institution were approached to participate in a semi structured interview, that lasted approximately one hour per interview. Senior leaders were defined as those earning over £65K per year and who had significant responsibility over a department, school or other area, including Deans, Directors and Pro Vice Chancellors. A total of 12 interviews were undertaken, representing 32% of the total sample that work at that level of seniority. Of those interviewed, 7 were women, and 5 were men. Managers were given the option of online or face to face interviews, depending on their location and availability, and 5 took place face to face, whilst the remainder took place via MS Teams. The sub-research questions that this participant group intended to explore were:

- *How are initiatives and commitments perceived by senior leaders/managers within the organisation?*
- *How can allyship support women accessing and attaining more leadership positions?*
- *How can current or new initiatives be used as a catalyst for change?*

Similarly to the survey, the interview schedule was structured to follow three main sections for exploration linked to the conceptual framework (see Figure 4.17.).
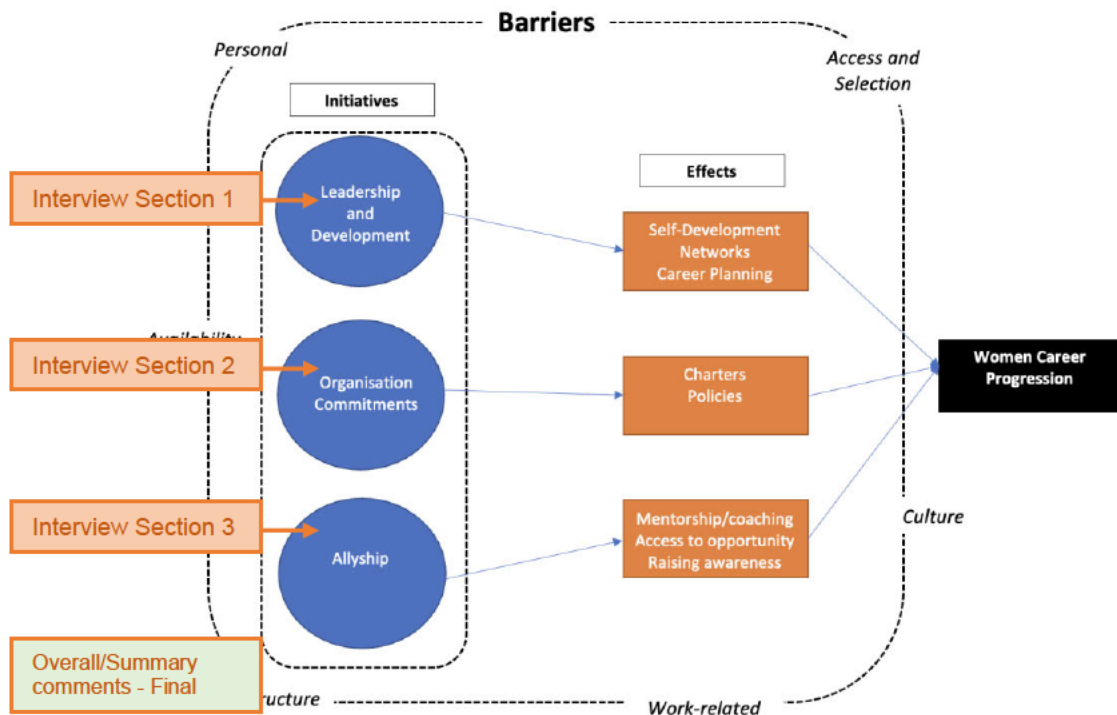
Figure 4.17: Interview sections related to Conceptual Framework

The interview questions posed were as follows:

Section1 - Leadership development initiatives (Aurora Women in Leadership; Coaching and Mentoring Academy; Staff MBA programme; Women's network; Women only talks/lectures).

1. What kinds of benefits do you think these opportunities bring to women, and to the organisation?
2. What challenges to do you think that women face in accessing these initiatives?
3. How do you see those challenges being solved?
4. To what extent do you think these initiatives help to improve gender equality at a senior level?

Section 2 - University commitments (Athena Swan; Equality, diversity and inclusion councils; equality, diversity and inclusion policy).

1. To what extent do you think these commitments help to improve gender equality at a senior level?
2. Are there any challenges with these initiatives currently?
3. Could they be improved in any way?

Section 3 - Allyship
- How important do you think allyship is in terms of supporting more women to progress in their careers?
- Have you benefitted from having an ally in your career? Can you tell me about that?
- Have you had experience of being an ally for someone? Could you tell me about that?
- What other benefits do you think allyship would bring to women in the organisation?
- What might the challenges be?

Section 4 - Overall
1. Are there any other improvements that could be made to further advance equality for women in senior positions?
2. Any other comments?

The interviews were all recorded using an automatic word translation, before being quality checked and cleaned for any mispronunciations or recording errors. Qualitative data was uploaded into NVivo and sorted into the anchor codes (leadership and development initiatives, organisational commitments, and allyship). The data was then coded within the anchor codes, before being revisited and sorted into sub-themes. The main themes that arose are detailed in Table 4.8, together with a summary explanation.

	Sub-Themes	Codes/Labels	Explanation/Meaning
L&D	**Self-development**	*Self-development (5) Purpose (7) Selection (5)*	Issues and opportunities related to staff undertaking self (professional development), with leadership in mind.
	Networking	*Networking (7)*	How networks help women in the institution, and what types of networks may be helpful.
	Career Planning	*Career Planning (6)*	Issues and opportunities related to engaging with career planning.
	Impact	*Impact (4) Outcome ineffective (5)*	Measurement of impact in initiatives. What is the return on investment to the institution. How do they know it is working?
	Visibility and Engagement	*Visibility (5) Engagement (4) Selection (5)*	Understanding how the initiatives are currently 'known' amongst staff, understanding who they are targeted at, whether it is inclusive, and how work or personal factors may impact engagement.
	Work related	*Workload barriers (3)*	Work-related barriers to engagement in leadership and development initiatives.
	Personal-related	*Personal barriers (7)*	Personal-related barriers to engagement in leadership and development initiatives.
Organisation Commitments	**Visibility and Engagement**	*Visibility (5) Engagement (3)*	Making staff aware of organisational commitments, where to find information and how to get involved. Leading to raised awareness.
	Culture	*Culture (6)*	How institutional cultures influence the success of initiatives.
	Charters and Policies	*Commitment to change (9)*	How commitments, and policies and initiatives translate into practical change.
	Impact	*Policy into Practice (8)*	How commitments, and policies and initiatives translate into practical change.
	Infrastructure	*Resources (5) Infrastructure (3)*	The physical and organisational structures needed to execute organisational commitments to gender initiatives.
Allyship	**Mentoring and Coaching**	*Mentoring/Coaching (6)*	Seniors who provide mentoring and/or coaching to others - see this as being an ally - more formal type of relationship.
	Access to opportunity (Sponsorship)	*Sponsorship (3) Patronage (1) Opportunity (1)*	More direct support in terms of sponsorship or patronage. Those that are taken 'under the wing' and given access to networks and opportunities in order to develop.
	Advocacy	*Support (6)*	Less formal ways of supporting women, day to day micro actions that support women in the workplace.
	Raising awareness	*Challenge (2)*	Raising awareness of gender inequalities, calling out discriminative practices, micro aggressions, policy and practice
	Ally as a role	*Who? (2) Trust / Bias (6) Feedback (3)*	Understanding what it means to be an ally, who are the allies, issues of trust and bias.

Table 4.8: Summary of major themes and sub-themes of interviews

The main themes that arose from the interviews related to leadership and development initiatives were in the perceived value of self-development such as confidence and resilience, networking opportunities gained and in being able to plan careers more strategically. However there were challenges related to these effects, such as ensuring women were either selecting or being selected for programmes where outcomes/aims were fully realised, and the issues of women engaging but not being able to progress afterwards because of the lack of job opportunity internally. In regard to organisational commitments, sub-themes of visibility and engagement, levels of impact and infrastructure emerged. Though there were perceived benefits in initiatives such as Athena Swan, there was recognition that many staff do not engage as a result of low visibility and awareness of the charter. Additionally, issues relating to being able to properly resource activities linked to organisational were seen as important yet challenging to achieve in practice. Themes relating to allyship fell into formal allyship, such as mentoring, coaching or sponsoring women, and in terms of more informal aspects of allyship, such as providing general support to others or raising awareness of gender quality issues in the workplace. The role of allyship emerged as not fully explored, or in some cases the aspects that needed to be further understood in terms of what makes a good ally. These sub-themes are fully discussed and analysed in the discussion and analysis chapter. Using the analytical approaches described in the methodology chapter, both data sets were brought together to draw comparisons or identify differences so that a narrative could be presented and analysed according to the sub-themes identified.

4.4   Summary

In total, 173 responses from women who completed the online survey were captured, and 12 interviews were conducted with senior managers, which have provided rich insights that explores the research question from a top down and bottom up perspective. The survey data offers an overview of attitudes toward allyship, organisational commitments, and leadership development, together with qualitative commentary that explain why those attitudes are what they are and how the factors influence women's advancement into leadership roles. Additionally, the insights acquired from the interviews will offer a leaders viewpoint into these three

areas, including how successful they are, the identified challenges and potential for future. The sub themes identified have resulted in evidence that support the effects/outcomes of initiatives, the barriers and considerations for the future. These themes will provide the structure for presenting the data analysis and discussion in the next chapter. This will result in understanding where there is significance for current and future research, and, most importantly, what this means in practice for the institution where the research took place.

Chapter 5: Analysis and Discussion

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter presents an overview of the findings from both survey respondents and interview respondents which sought perceptions on the effects and barriers of initiatives and organisational commitments that aim to support more women into senior leadership positions within the institution. This analysis and discussion chapter is structured in discussing each major variable in the conceptual framework in turn (Leadership and Development, Organisational Commitments and Allyship), drawing from the data collected with:

- Participants group 1 (women in the institution earning up to £65K), referred to in this chapter as 'survey participants' and
- Participants group 2 (interviews that took place with male and female senior managers in the institution), referred to in this chapter as 'managers'.

Within each of these sections, themes that emerged from the data are presented, and explore the main effects, barriers, and ultimately, whether they have impacted on women progressing in their careers. The analysis explores how these relate to current research, and implications for professional practice. Three new emerging themes in the areas of visibility and engagement, impact, and the role of the ally are also presented, followed by a summary of the main implications for the original conceptual framework and in presenting the new women in leadership career progression empirical framework.

5.2 Leadership and Development Initiatives

The following section of the chapter discusses the main intended effects of engaging in leadership development initiatives, which significant barriers emerged, and whether they are perceived to have impact on progression (illustrated in figure 5.1). For this institution this includes programmes such as the Aurora Women in Leadership Programme, Staff MBA, and Women's seminars and networks. Leadership and development initiatives for women are intended as a platform to gain

skills that will support women into leadership positions, whether that be through extending networks, building skills and gaining new experiences (Barnard et al., 2022). This section explicitly responds to the research objective – To critically evaluate the effectiveness of current leadership development initiatives affecting leadership progression for women at a UK higher education institution.
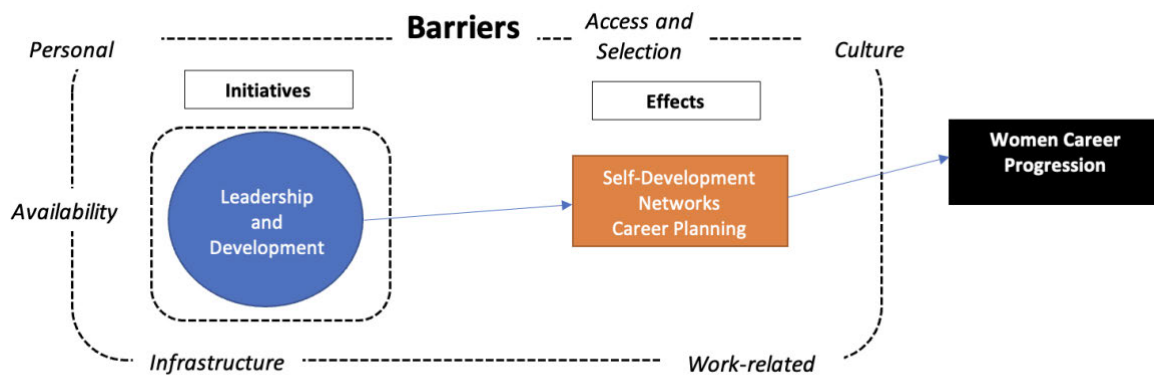
Figure 5.1: Leadership Development Initiatives – Conceptual Framework

5.2.1 Self-Development

One of the most significant benefits that arose as a result of engagement with the leadership development initiatives was in self-development, particularly in terms of building confidence, and increasing resilience, highlighted as an effect by 23% of survey respondents, and being mentioned a further 15 times in the survey comments. Women made reference to the more specific effects of programmes helping to develop their confidence. For example, survey participant 149 described how engaging in the Aurora programme helped to grow her confidence to secure a promotion: "*Personally I have found the Aurora programme to be the most impactful thing for me so far. I was able to aim high and secure a promotion, mainly due to the improvements in my confidence to do so.*" Confidence was also mentioned by participant 153, who stated "*I believe these initiatives increase the level of confidence in women and support us to apply to new opportunities and be open to new challenges*". Confidence as a main driver for involvement in these types of initiatives were mentioned several times, suggesting that these aspects of self-development are a main motivator for engagement in leadership programmes.

Likewise, over half of the managers interviewed also alluded to the self-development that women benefit from participating in these types of programmes, again specifically in relation to building confidence. Several female managers referred to women's only programmes in helping with issues of confidence, reflecting on their own journeys to leadership. Manager 1 suggested that women were less likely to put themselves forwards for progression because of confidence issues, and that was perhaps why these types of programmes were needed: *"It supports the people that are under confident about themselves to a certain extent because it gives them a vehicle that is specifically for them […]."* Another described how although they had the leadership capabilities, it helped them to stop worrying about how they presented themselves in meetings suggesting that "*sometimes you just need that programme to help."* (Manager 6). Whilst this was a lived experience from several female managers interviewed, many survey participants challenged this notion and argued that these types of women only programmes presented a feeling that women somehow needed to be fixed, where they felt patronised, and that it avoided the real issues of structure and culture. Survey participant 30 suggested that whilst women can benefit from women only programmes, they do not help in resolving the issues beyond the self: *"Initiatives help to grow confidence and allow women to aim higher and think through any ceilings that have placed above themselves - though may not help with any ceilings placed by the institution."*, whilst participant 17 suggested that women would be better supported by joining programmes that are not for women only, and that women's only programmes would not help them step out of their comfort zone:

"I believe that programmes that support knowledge are more beneficial than women's only programmes. Women need to be encouraged to actively participate in programmes where they may not have the confidence to join, not be segregated, in my opinion segregation does not create equality."

Whilst survey participants highlighted self-development as a major effect of engaging in leadership programmes, more of the comments challenged whether this was enough in helping with progression. Women's only programmes have been proven to have a positive effect on women by creating safe spaces to explore challenges and

in dealing with more dominant, masculine leadership cultures, and in being able to create leadership opportunities (Arnold et al., 2021; Barnard et al., 2022; Tilbury, 2019), however the findings supported the perception that whilst useful, they are not the 'one' answer in terms of progressive change for gender equity in leadership positions, something which is presented in the literature (Burkinshaw & White, 2017; Parker et al., 2018; Shepherd, 2017). Survey participants were suggesting that they found it patronising that women needed to be part of these programmes to be good enough to be a leader, which, although is not an intention of women's only programmes where many have found them to be extremely valuable (Arnold et al., 2021), suggests that women are starting to perceive that because they do not lead to change, they are therefore starting to lose faith in them. Research suggests that issues of self-confidence only arise where women see a leadership culture that is homogenously male, and therefore do not see themselves fitting into that way of working (Shepherd, 2017; Taparia & Lenka, 2022), which begs the question of whether confidence issues for women are really the problem, or whether it is the culture that they are working in, where leadership teams are male dominated? Interestingly, the comments by both women who completed the survey and from the managers perspective, described the benefits of leadership and development activities as increasing confidence, but did not mention the importance of resilience, in dealing with rebuttal and knock-backs. This could be because of some perception that the focus should be on more systemic change rather than women themselves needing to be tougher to succeed in masculine dominated environments (Burkinshaw & White, 2017).

Whilst self-development is an important aspect of development for any aspiring leader, it is perhaps important for the institution to consider how these types of programmes are pitched, to ensure those who access them understand the main benefits of engagement and what potential applicants will get out of them.

5.2.2 Networks

Networks, as an effect of leadership and development initiatives emerged as a theme that had many positive effects for the women surveyed. 27% of respondents indicated that they had developed new networks as a result of engaging in

leadership and development initiatives. This was mentioned a further 14 times in the qualitative comments. In the main, the women who knew about the women's only network expressed the benefits of engagement as being able to empower and support each other: *"I am really enjoying being part of the Aurora programme and as a member of the Women's Staff Network. These have really helped me with networking, looking at where I might move jobwise and collaboration with other colleagues."* (Participant 16). Similar statements pointed to the benefits of being in a 'safe space' where they could share challenges and issues they faced with other women: "*The women's network has really helped me to see I'm not alone in what I am going through."* (Participant 113) and *"I think the women's only network gives that space of ownership of being a woman around other women."* (Participant 49). Comments similar to these were repeated in the context of providing support, collaborating, and sharing in a safe space. Likewise, half of the senior manager interviews also highlighted the benefits of networking and reflected on the opportunities for sharing in that safe space. Manager 11 spoke of the benefits coming from the network and highlighted these in a similar vein to the survey respondents:

> *"From my point of view, it would be just getting women talking and sharing experience, because otherwise you get caught up in your workplace and you might feel isolated and think you're the only one. So for me across all of them, that's the biggest thing. Getting the communication lines opening, sharing experiences, women in the same situation."*

Though there were clear benefits expressed, several survey participants did acknowledge that whilst it was useful to have this space, it did not necessarily help in developing the skills needed to move into leadership roles, depending on the type of network it was. Several women acknowledged the power of a women's only network in collaborating, sharing experiences, and being exposed to role models, however the authority it had to create any significant institutional change was limited. This was reflected in comments such as "*The Women's Staff Network is a great initiative but has limited power to affect change."* (Participant 172) and *"I do belong to several women's only networks but question whether there is sufficient authoritative power or legitimacy to make significant change."* (Participant 112). Comments such as these reflected the benefits in terms of supporting environments, however the limitations in

terms of being able to use networks to leverage change. Participant 137 suggested that without engagement from those in more senior roles, effects were limited: *"I also believe that knowing and being seen by 'the right people' is the way to get ahead in the organisation and I'm not sure this network gives enough of that exposure."* The women surveyed were clearly describing the benefits of engaging in these types of networks as collaborative and supportive, however, also highlighted the difficulties in their ability to enforce change. In the manager interviews, several female senior managers expressed the positives of being a part of women's only networks, although interestingly, once again described the benefits in terms of being good for confidence building "[…] *having women only networks is a useful way to actually promote confidence."* (Manager 6). Manager 10 suggested that women's only events and networks were beneficial, but often networks in general were hard to sustain, took effort and resources in terms of time and cost, and highlighted the need for institutions to consider this when implementing these types of initiatives: *"we need to ensure that we can support women with things like childcare costs so they can go."* Collectively, all senior managers suggested that networking was a critical factor in career progression, however, the majority of examples of networks discussed in the manager interviews were predominantly about mixed gender networks. For example, one female senior manager when referring to mixed networks expressed their dislike for networking but felt that it was important as part of their role to be able to engage in these types of activities and do it well: *"I hate networking I am absolutely rubbish at it even now. I still hate it with a passion. But I think that's important."* (Manager 1). The ways in which engagement with networks were discussed was interesting and pointed towards similar benefits to that of engagement with women's only leadership programmes, in that they are beneficial for confidence building, but perhaps have limited impact in terms of exposure to opportunities for career progression.

Survey participants cited the women's network as a positive effect of leadership and development activity, though the language used in the comments suggested that the types of networking benefits were mainly in support, empowerment, and collegiality, all of which have been found to be useful in providing a safe space for women to discuss and share the challenges they face (Linehan & Scullion, 2008; Mate et al., 2019; Redmond et al., 2017; Selzer & Robles, 2019). This is an important function of networking, though has been shown to be limited in terms of building career capital

(Chesterman & Ross-Smith, 2006), where it is important for networks to include role models that can share their own experiences or create opportunities for others (Tilbury, 2019). Although some women felt that networking had limited impact on change, it is important to note that the network in the institution has only been in operation since 2020, where women may all be at different stages of the networking process. McCarthy (2004) suggests that women's networks start at a survival stage (offering a safe space to share), moving onto support (in collaboration and building confidence), and finally to voice (moving onto the network being able to collectively apply pressure and lobby for change). The network at the institution where the research took place, are likely to be in either of the first two stages, and therefore now would be an ideal time for that network to consider how they can influence wider culture and strategy in regard to women's career progression and gender equality more generally. Senior managers recognised that in order to facilitate womens participation in networking activities, it was imperative to ensure that support is in place in providing space for participation, particularly as other responsibilities can often result in a lack of time for women to pursue other interests (Fletcher et al., 2007; Thomas et al., 2019). Whilst survey participants were giving their perceptions on women's-only networks, they did highlight the limitations of the network in terms of their own career progression, particularly in relation to them gaining exposure to the 'right groups of people.' This has also been highlighted in research, where women's networks can be perceived as 'mothers meetings', and therefore result in some women avoiding them and preferring to align themselves with mixed gender networks (Perriton, 2006). It has however also been reported that accessing male dominated networks can be a challenge (Coleman, 2020; Maddrell et al., 2016; Westoby et al., 2021). Women engaging with women's and mixed networks are clearly beneficial for women aspiring to become leaders, but, in order to make the most of these networks, it is important for women to critically evaluate their worth and objectives (Coleman, 2020; Pelfrey et al., 2022). If it is for support and collegiality, then a women's only network may be the most appropriate option. However if the goal is to gain access to new career opportunities, accessing mixed gender networks might be the more beneficial route to take.

While feedback on the impact of the institution's women-only network on women was favourable, attention may now need to turn to how women as a group could start to

influence change within the institution. One way to initiate these types of conversations is to look at the composition of the network and determine if there are enough female senior leaders to act as role models with the broader community. Another is to consider arranging for male senior leaders to participate in sessions that are reserved especially for them, where they may have a focused and encouraging conversation, as allies in the workplace. The women's only network must continue to be a safe and accepting environment for women, however it is also an opportune time for the network to consider how it may leverage its power going forwards.

5.2.3 Career Planning

Gaining clarity about one's career path as an effect of leadership and development participation was highlighted as an effect by 11% of survey participants and mentioned 10 times in the qualitative comments. This suggested that it wasn't something that women perceived to be as big as an effect as other elements such as the self-development skills that one might develop. Survey participant 63 commented: *"It has helped me think more carefully about my career plans"*, though participant 9 commented that the types of people who would engage in leadership initiatives would already have started to think about their career plans more strategically: *"The people who engage in these initiatives are already more likely to spend time on career planning."* However, the respondents who did make comments suggested that even when planning one's career more strategically, it didn't necessarily help in securing those opportunities in the institution, suggesting that there were more structural barriers at play:

"I think these things can help improve gender parity in senior roles to the extent that they help women develop the necessary skills to progress, and to plan their career. However, as we lack internal talent development routes to ensure we retain and develop staff who have participated in these schemes its currently more likely they will progress outside our organisation." (Participant 100)

Several others suggested that there needed to be greater consideration in how these types of initiatives feed into progression and promotion opportunities, as part of a wider talent management approach: *"I don't think these initiatives would be taken into consideration when applying for a senior position within the group, I'm not sure*

they help with planning your career." (Participant 44), and *"Without a clearly defined progression or route onwards then it can too easily become something else to add to a workload rather than a constructive initiative."* (Participant 66). Rather than being a criticism of career planning itself, the women were describing the fact that even after engagement, there was a distinct lack of opportunity in terms of applying for and securing promotions, which could be a demotivating factor for some.

The comments provided on career planning effects by the survey participants were in contrast to senior managers who were interviewed. Half of the managers suggested that better strategic career planning was an essential leadership development function leading to promotion opportunity. Manager 5 stated: *"Having these programs in place available to people makes them aware of is the need to have a career trajectory, to understand what they need to do and and to have a bit of a less near sighted approach to their career."* Other managers spoke in the same vein, however, as noted by survey respondents, managers also acknowledged that the institution had challenges in linking those who engaged with these types of programmes to identified progression opportunities, and that a more aligned approach to talent management was needed: *"There's got to be alignment with progression policies and employment policies."* (Manager 12). There was an admission that the alignment was missing, and that this had a significant impact in the open opportunities available for women to progress. Manager 1 stated, when referring to career opportunities for those who demonstrate ambition and engage in leadership and development, *"we haven't got that, but we're working on it."*

As well as the need to have closer alignment with the progression processes in the institution, managers also suggested that they themselves have a significant role to play, to discuss career plans with their reportees as part of their engagement in leadership and development. Manager 5 admitted *"one of the things we're not doing well is we don't, managers don't, talk a lot with their reports about their career trajectory."* Manager 7 suggested that all senior managers should have the responsibility of career planning with their direct reports formalised as part of their objectives:

"I would say that every manager should have to identify opportunities for those that they line manage. And I think that should be one of their objectives for the year. What are you doing to progress the people that report to you?"

This finding was interesting, since although managers highlighted the lack of taking responsibility for career development planning with employees, they had recognised this as an important feature of the relationship.

The findings demonstrated that although career planning as an effect of engagement with leadership and development initiatives was not acknowledged to the same degree as self-development and creating new networks, that this could be because of the lack of opportunity available to them through progression and new job opportunities available internally. Managers interviewed reported a lack of congruence among women who had engaged in leadership development programmes, and the career prospects or promotions that would be accessible to them as part of their continued growth. As the managers highlighted, the ability to focus on career plans results in better reflection and better decisions about future career choices, and something which is reflected in other studies (Parker et al., 2018; Redmond et al., 2017; Selzer & Robles, 2019), which suggests it is an important feature of leadership and development initiatives and should continue to be acknowledged as so. Women have often reported challenges in career planning, where it is referred to as a messy process, with no straight line pointing upwards to management (Fyfe, 2018; Selzer & Robles, 2019). This can be for reasons such as taking into account personal responsibilities such as career breaks or maternity leave (Maddrell et al., 2016; Toffoletti & Starr, 2016), something which can be seen as managers as a negative thing (Howe-Walsh & Turnbull, 2016). This makes the skills of career planning even more important for women, as they navigate uncertainty throughout their careers.

The findings indicated that there was a lack of belief that career planning would benefit them, at least for internal progression routes, and that confidence in those paths were problematic. Research suggests that these types of opportunities are often limited because of outdated progression policies that favour the straight line, long hours, visible presence culture, which has been reported as an issue in some Universities that hinder women's ability to plan for their professional lives (Harford, 2018; Pyke, 2013). Some women may therefore be overlooked for progression or

promotion opportunities because of their non-linear career path, that may show gaps in employment, and therefore be unfairly judged about their future potential, or managers may assume that they lack ambition to progress (Huang et al., 2019). It is therefore critical that all managers are aware of this whilst discussing the career paths of women, and acknowledging that often, it is not always a straightforward route. As has been identified through the interviews with managers, it is also important for the institution to ensure that career planning is not just a feature of leadership and development programmes, but an integral part of the manager employee conversation. The importance of career planning being the shared responsibility between managers and employees is fundamental, particularly from a diversity perspective and in demonstrating the commitment creating role models for the future. By taking a collaborative approach to career planning, this can lead to creating a more supportive environment in which women can thrive (Fulton, 2023). It is therefore important that all managers understand their role in identifying and supporting women who are eager to seek out progression opportunities, and that these discussions with employees are a formalised expectation of managers, as one manager suggested, making this part of their annual objectives.

5.2.4 Work-related barriers

Whilst in the main, survey participants were positive about the different leadership and development programmes on offer at the institution, they did share several barriers in terms of engaging with them. Whilst some women cited access and selection issues, the numbers were insignificant. However, work-related barriers featured the most significantly, with 54% of respondents reporting either work pressures, workload, or lack of professional support when accessing programmes for development. The comments in the survey reiterated these issues, with similar comments including "*workload is such that I don't have time or mental energy to engage*" (Participant 138), or "*my insane workload makes it impossible*" (Participant 116). Only three senior managers highlighted work-related issues in the interviews, which was at a much lesser extent than the staff survey, referring to time constraints *"Absolutely it's the time thing that's a challenge, balancing with work"* (Manager 10) and issues in terms of lack of support by some managers, *"I think to a certain extent that also depends on the quality of the managers that people have."* (Manager 1).

Interestingly however this finding was reversed in the context of personal related barriers. When survey respondents were asked about barriers to engagement, only 13% cited personal related barriers such as caring responsibilities, or personal support, which was not as prominent as those that were work-related, whereas personal related factors featured in over half of the senior manager interviews. Manager 10 commented that family and personal caring responsibility impacts the ability to progress:

"Women, particularly at an important time in their career, end up with with the majority of caring duties. You know whether that's children or elderly relatives. Not saying it's right, but that's the way it seems to happen, and I think that then time management with the women's career becomes more challenging because of that."

Manager 12 also made a bold statement about a colleague they used to work with, who had sacrificed family for a university career: *"the only woman academic there had taken the decision very early on in their career to be sterilised so that she never had children."* Comments related to personal barriers were highlighted far more in the managers interviews, from both men and women. It could be suggested that this was the case because historically, it has always featured as one of the most significant obstacles for women, where personal factors are often reported, such as being the primary carer for children or taking on unpaid work such as household duties (Howe-Walsh & Turnbull, 2016; Toffoletti & Starr, 2016; Women in Higher Education Network, 2020). However, in contrast, the findings here suggest that the biggest obstacles for this institution are those that are present in the workplace, including workload, pressure to perform, and management support. Even though previous research has also highlighted work-related issues as barriers (Burkinshaw & White, 2017; Tessens et al., 2011), there was a noteworthy difference in how significant or problematic these were to women at this institution. The findings point towards issues of workload preventing women from engaging in initiatives that have the potential to help them progress. This is supported in the literature, where it has been demonstrated time again that women's workloads in universities may well be disproportionate, as they tend to take on the majority of diversity work, pastoral roles, or administrative tasks, more so than men (Barrett & Barrett, 2011; Burkinshaw et al., 2018; Misra et al., 2021). Clearly, there is a need for both personal and work-related barriers need to be considered by institutions, and to ensure that there is

more of a balance for the types of work that women academics and professional services staff are engaged with.

5.2.5 Leadership and Development Initiatives - Summary

The conceptual framework suggests that through engagement of leadership and development initiatives, women are better supported to progress in their careers through developing the self, development of networks, and better career planning. These effects have been evidenced through the data collected by both survey respondents and managers, and supports, in the main, that these types of initiatives are seen as valuable, with many positive perceptions reported such as developing confidence and self-efficacy. However, the findings also demonstrated that this does not necessarily lead to women progressing in their careers, suggesting that there are several challenges for the institution to address. Whilst women only programmes and networks generate a sense of value, these predominantly fall into the areas of support, collegiality and being able to share in a safe space. It was apparent from the findings that some women are starting to question the value of the women only approach, where some associate it with a sense that they need to be fixed in some way to develop into a leadership role, which is not the intention for these types of initiatives. Engagement in networks was also seen as positive, and something which should be continued, though the findings have highlighted a need to look at how women's only networks can be used as a lobbying mechanism for change. Likewise, career planning needs to have better alignment with opportunities for progression and promotion, suggesting that current processes may need to be reviewed.

In terms of the barriers that women face when participating in leadership and development initiatives, personal barriers were identified as a factor for engagement, but these did not feature as significantly as work related barriers, such as stress and pressure to perform. Work related barriers did not feature as significant in the managers interviews, suggesting a disconnect and a need for managers to acknowledge this and work on solutions to the work related barriers moving forwards.

5.3   Organisational Commitments

The second variable in the conceptual framework (illustrated in figure 5.2), discusses the perceptions on the charters and policies to provide frameworks for supporting women into leadership. For the institution where the research was conducted, this includes a bronze Athena Swan charter, an Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) council/sub councils and EDI policy. It is suggested that through these types of frameworks, that institutions can be better supported to work towards gender equity, and thus support more women into leadership positions (Advance HE, 2020a; Barnard, 2017; Ovseiko et al., 2017). This section of the chapter addresses how well these types of initiatives have supported women in the institution into leadership roles, what the current barriers are, and their future potential for helping women progress in their careers. Analysis draws on perceptions from both women in the institution, as well as the male and female senior managers. This section explicitly responds to the research objective – To critically evaluate the effectiveness of current organisational commitments affecting leadership progression for women at a UK higher education institution.
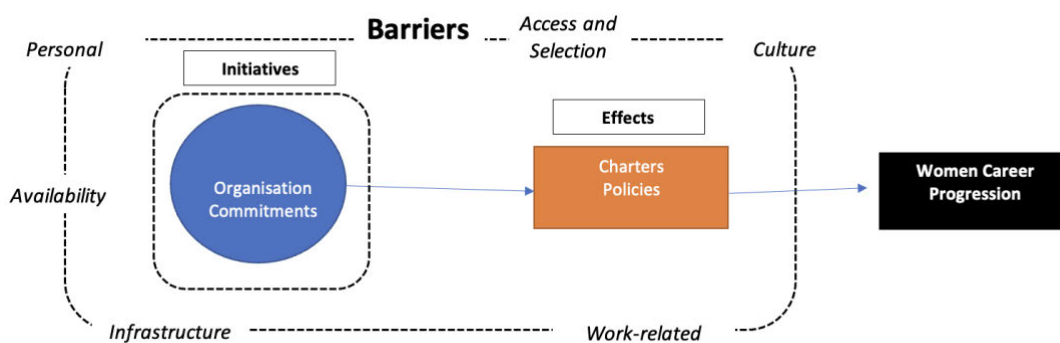
Figure 5.2: Organisational Commitments – Conceptual Framework

5.3.1 Charters and Policies

When survey participants were asked about the perceived level of impact that charters and policies had on women progressing in their career, the findings demonstrated that those who were aware of them, less than 30% across all three initiatives felt that they either made some or significant difference in helping women move into leadership roles. Survey participants also referred to these 38 times in the

qualitative comments. These included comments indicating that there were value in having them in place, including "*Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy is the only one I know anything about and feel that policies like these do make a difference in gender equality.*" (Participant 142), and *"I think those that are committed to the progression of women within the institution are involved in Athena Swan and EDI Councils and have the right attitudes and thoughts with regard to what should be done.*" (Participant 77). Whilst there were several other survey participants who commented on the value of the initiatives, there was a distinct lack of any examples or indications that this had led to positive change. In contrast, the majority of narrative provided highlighted a lack of progress, in terms of both policy work and the actions of the Athena Swan Charter. Participant 140 commented: "*A conversation is being had in principle - which is beneficial, but progress is slow.*", whilst Participant 70 said *"These initiatives are good, but the effectiveness is questionable."* Comments such as these were more common than those that highlighted their usefulness, indicating some concerns about their effectiveness for the institution. Amongst survey participants, there was a sense that the initiatives (such as Athena Swan) should be taken more seriously, to provide reassurance that the top-level management was committed to making change, something which research demonstrates is essential for success (Ng, 2008; Peterson, 2014). Charters and policies were often referred to by survey participants as 'tokenistic' or as 'tick-box'. This included statements such as, *"At times, it can feel rather tokenistic rather than a body seeking substantive change."* (Participant 112) and *"The university seeing this work as a tick box rather than an opportunity for real change."* (Participant 3)*.* There was a perception that respondents wanted to see these policy related activities being integrated into everyday processes. Participant 114 stated, *"I would like to see more activities to ensure that equality, diversity and inclusion policies are embedded in work practices rather than being pure policies."*

Interestingly, there were similar sentiments captured in the senior interviews in that they viewed the organisational commitments as important and recognised that there were challenges with them. Manager 12 commented:

"*I wouldn't be able to say what the impact has been (of Athena Swan and EDI policy and councils). I think it is does promote opportunities. It raises awareness, it*

gives frameworks to look at issues. I mean, it's important with research and having those commitments".

This comment suggests that by working on the actions related to having the Athena Swan charter makes the institution accountable with its stakeholders, including research funding bodies. Though not all funders mandate this, there is a strong push in the sector to make research more diverse, across all of the protected characteristic groups (UKRI, 2024). All of the managers suggested that both the charter and policies were important in terms of demonstrating a commitment to change, and that these were vital in providing foundations for working initiatives that would attempt to create more opportunities for women. However, senior managers agreed that these types of commitments can come across as a 'tick-box' concept, and there was recognition that there were often problems of translating policy into practice. Manager 2, when describing the impact of the Athena Swan charter suggested that the charter could be obtained even where an institution wasn't making significant progress:

"You have to have an action plan, but you can very legitimately at the end of that cycle, write on that action plan where we didn't meet any actions because we had other priorities and you would still get your Athena Swan accreditation, admittedly a bronze level, but you would still get that because you've used it to reflect on your current position and you've reported, so it doesn't drive change in and of itself, if you're not interested in driving that change."

This was a poignant statement to make, and several others evidenced similar views. Manager 6 stated: *"You know we need a very proactive kind of approach to actually making EDI more than just a tick box exercise",* whilst manager 5 stated: *"[…] I do think that it's often just sort of tick box exercise. I have to say I'm not sure that there's a big sort of commitment to really take it seriously."* These comments were noteworthy, and raised the question that if senior managers know that there isn't a commitment to take it seriously, who, in the end, is accountable for making it happen? The responses on how Athena Swan and EDI Council and Policy initiatives were perceived unveiled a discrepancy in terms of what the initiatives intend to achieve and what has actually changed in practice, which supports current research. Whilst these initiatives are purported to create positive change (Bryant, 2019; Graves et al., 2019; Ovseiko et al., 2019), there is a lack of measured change in the

institution. This suggests that whilst polices and charters exist, if they are not treated as central to the change process and have buy in from the right people, they will ultimately have limited results, something which Bhopal (2019) suggests is important to consider in translating policy to practice. Women, and managers agreed that the policies and charters were often seen as tick-box or tokenistic, which is supported in studies that suggests commitments, whilst well-intended, can often come across as disingenuous, where women often take up the majority of EDI initiative work (Cooper, 2019). This raises a critical need to address who is accountable for creating change. Whilst it is seen as important, the shared responsibility of change often results in no one being accountable. Arnold et al (2021), suggest that whilst engagement in Athena Swan charters has in some instances been used as a tick box exercise, that institutions should use it as intended to drive forward real change, investing in all areas of the action plan (Bryant, 2019). Whether it is the EDI council themselves, or the Athena Swan panel members, it is seen as important to understand what the targets are, measure what has been achieved, and communicate the next aspects on the action plan, as a step change (O'Mullane, 2023). The analysis advocates for a new approach, from initiatives regarded as compliance exercises to those that demonstrate a commitment to fundamental change. By generating action plans with the right groups of people who have authority to make things happen, should take ownership of those actions. This should mean that the institution can start to work towards a cultural shift to improve women's confidence in the commitments.

5.3.2   Culture barriers

The most predominant sub theme that emerged from the surveys data in relation to organisation commitments was culture, and in considering the effects that this can have on women progressing into leadership roles. Consideration of culture is a frequently cited barrier to progression, and something, it seems not to be easily solved (Bhopal, 2019; Burkinshaw & White, 2017). Notably, culture was mentioned 79 times in the comments provided by survey participants, both in reference to it being barrier, and in something that needs to be urgently considered for the future. Survey comments made reference to institutional culture being 'the boys club', something which is widely referenced in the literature (Diehl & Dzubinski, 2016;

Fisher & Kinsey, 2014; Harley, 2003; Kruse, 2022). Responses included those such as: *"Senior leadership at the University is a very white male demographic, I would be really pleased to see more diversity. I think a barrier is the 'old boys' network feel."* (Participant 45), and *"Our leadership remains predominantly male and behave like an 'old boys club'."* (Participant 4). Others made reference to the difficulties associated with cultural shift, particularly in the time it takes to achieve this, and that the change in culture needs to start from the top. This included comments such as *"The culture at the top is still too slow to change."* (Participant 97), and *"culture change is difficult and notoriously slow. Perhaps in another 20 years things will be different and my daughters will benefit from change brought about by initiatives introduced now."* (Participant 87). Respondents pointed to issues of the current management not being diverse enough, and that change needed to start at the top. Participant 27 suggested that without this, nothing would happen: *"Without culture change, particularly amongst senior men, these organisational commitments are fine words but little more."* These types of responses by survey participants were repeated time again, and indicated that whilst the initiatives were useful, it was the culture that prevented them from being successful.

In a similar vein, half of the senior managers when interviewed referred to culture as a potential barrier in rolling out organisational commitments and when discussing the social norms of the institution. Manager 12 questioned how much EDI initiatives were embedded in all aspects of institutional work:

"I'm not convinced how much it is a thread running through the whole group. Obviously, we configure the committees now and I think that's good. But how much it's embedded in the systems that run through the institution; how much is it part of the general just fabric of what we do?"

Manager 11 also highlighted this challenge, in suggesting that they understand and are engaged in EDI aspects of work, but do not witness it in their everyday practice: *"I've got an advantage in that I'll sit there and I'm getting the EDI presentation from XXX and I'll see that and understand it, but do I see it? Actually, in my day-to-day work, no."* This suggests that whilst policies or charters exist, the culture in the organisation is the driving force behind them, dictating how successful, or otherwise they are. Two other managers also mentioned the more complex nuances of culture, citing distinctions within departments, disciplines, and the academic/professional

service division as all having an impact on the overall culture. Manager 7 stated *"I think it's the culture of individual departments, I think is another barrier. Some are very enabling; some are less so"*, and:

> *"Education is a bit of a soft discipline, so you've got more women. So actually, you know education you don't struggle to get more women, yeah, but in other areas I think probably it's much more challenging where where women aren't so sort of, you know, evident. The professional services academic divisions are also there. I think there needs to be something done about that. I think the value of people, and that that's a biggie."* (Manager 6)

These comments represented the complexity of cultures and sub-culture change, from a disciplinary, environment (department), and type of role level.

The analysis of data in this sub-theme highlights the significant effects of culture on how well organisational commitments works, something that is echoed in the literature (De Vries & Van Den Brink, 2016; Magrane et al., 2012). EDI policies such as the one in this organisation have been reported to have had limited effect where there is an absence of cultural change that happens with them (Kolb et al., 2003). The 'old boys club' concept was repeated in the perceptions of women undertaking the survey many times and revealed that these dominant cultures have resulted in barriers that are perhaps, the most difficult of all to break down. Moreover, the data has given a large voice to those who express that this type of change can only happen from the top down, and that whilst it is important to have engagement from staff at all levels, the power for change lies with those who have the most power and influence to make things happen (Madsen et al., 2019; O'Connor, 2014). Henderson & Bhopal (2022) describe these types of roles as 'policymakers' in their work on who is involved in Athena Swan and Race Equality charter marks and suggest that Universities do not pay enough attention to the specialist knowledge that may be required to drive change forwards. In this vein, it would be useful for the institution to identify these policymakers to generate actions that lead to change.

Whilst there are clear challenges to embedding policy, charter actions and outcomes from EDI councils into the everyday practices of the organisation, a good place to start might be to actively use equality impact assessments (EIA) to all institutional policies, where this may have only happened on certain policies in the past. EIAs

have been proven to provide credible ways to ensure policies and decision making processes are fair, in ensuring equality is taken seriously in all aspects of an organisation (Advance HE, 2023c; Pyper, 2020). Furthermore, it would demonstrate a commitment from senior management that it would be starting to address systemic change throughout the institution, as it has been previously evidenced that even though policies exist, the follow through commitment in enacting policies to create change is often lacking (Timmers et al., 2010; Westoby et al., 2021).The analysis has also demonstrated the intricate challenges of sub-cultures, in the differences between roles and disciplines (De Vries & Van Den Brink, 2016). The data collected in this study has given voice to professional services staff as well as academics, and has included the perceptions of male senior managers, which is a start, but more needs to be understood in this vein, as well as how career progression is viewed across the disciplines. In considering a change in culture to support more women into leadership roles, there is a need for a paradigm shift, so that organisational commitments such as charters, policies and committees are perceived as more than compliance measures, to facilitators of actual change.

5.3.3 Infrastructure barriers

Whilst women responding to the survey and senior managers discussed the benefits and challenges to organisational commitments, one sub-theme that emerged was in relation to infrastructure, and the effect that this had on the success of these organisation level commitments. Infrastructure barriers included challenges of resource, high workloads, and structural issues, and was referred to in the survey a total of 26 times. High workloads featured as a reason why these commitments are not given as much attention as they perhaps should. Survey participants commented: *"There isn't support in terms of putting in the work loaded time or the budget for any of these commitments."* (Participant 11), whilst another stated: *"High workload and team pressures are a barrier."* (Participant 65). Participant 152 pointed to increasing demands on employees overall which left people with no room for other work, *"Even if someone has literal time to engage, they probably don't have the emotional and intellectual energy required."* There was also acknowledgement from three senior managers that resourcing EDI initiatives and putting policy into action was an issue. Manager 1 suggested that it was difficult to measure how much

resource should be put into these commitments in relation to what the return is, specifically referring to the Athena Swan charter:

"What do I think about Athena Swan? I think there's an awful lot of paperwork. There's an awful lot of administrative burden, and I'm not sure that it delivers terribly much. For me there is something about how you utilise the resource that you have, whether it be your people, your money or your infrastructure to get the best for everybody and it's very easy to lose sight of that, you know, to focus on the prize at the expense of the people."

Two other senior managers suggested that resourcing these commitments should be a priority: *"This work should be mainstreamed, so it should be properly resourced from the from the start, not just seen as a as a burden."* (Manager 8), whilst another suggested that there were those that should have specific accountability to drive these changes forwards: *"It's missing someone that's saying, right? actually, this is really important for us as an organisation."* (Manager 10).

As well as resourcing challenges, the way EDI initiatives were structured were highlighted as a factor worthy of attention. Several survey participants referred to the need for joined up thinking, decision making capabilities and dedicated specialists to drive change forward. Participant 16 stated: *"There is a lack of joined up thinking between senior team and what is happening on the ground with women working at the university."*, whilst two others highlighted that decisions related to EDI were too distributed across the group, and there needed to be more of a driving force behind it: *"Our EDI webpage has a section that is 'EDI TEAM' and that is just one officer, who is AMAZING, but that is just not good enough […]."* (Participant 77). This also came out as a strong factor in the senior managers interviews, raising questions to how EDI and positive change can be achieved through a co-ordinated and concerted effort. Manager 1 described the need for an EDI focussed framework, bringing together all elements and translating these to show managers how they can interact with them:

"What we need is a framework to work from and we don't have that. Having that infrastructure so I've built within that team some expertise, so we've got the system, we've got the expertise; we just now need to pull the two together and bring those frameworks in place and then share them with people and get managers

working with them."

Manager 2 also highlighted the need for integration of initiatives into daily practice, and described their experience of sitting on the sub-councils as too detached from the day to day:

"Here I think EDIC is designed to be more of like a ratification kind of approval body, which assumes then that a lot of the actual action is gonna take place in the layers beneath that […] I think the reality is that I get drawn into all of those groups at various points and it's quite difficult to see where the boundaries of each of the remits are. They don't meet very often, so there's no kind of momentum I think that's being built".

Infrastructure plays a pivotal role in how organisational commitments such as Athena Swan, EDI polices and EDI councils work (Kalpazidou Schmidt et al., 2020) and the challenges have highlighted issues related to this which include allocation of resources, workloads and the need for frameworks that are clear, so that all staff can see who the drivers are, where accountability and decision-making takes place and communication works. In a similar vein to culture change, research again demonstrates that without adequate resources, change will be slow or non-existent (De Vries, 2015). As has been suggested previously, those engaged with initiatives such as Athena Swan, have often done so as a good-will gesture, and therefore the work is often inadequately resourced (Graves et al., 2019; Yarrow & Johnston, 2023), and means that workloads overall increase. The analysis shows that increasing workloads are one of the main factors preventing involvement and meaningful engagement in the initiatives, exacerbated by the financial pressures on the higher education sector where funding is challenging to source (Foster et al., 2023). This could also result in discrepancies across the sector, where higher ranking institutions may fare better in resourcing EDI as they have more resources to commit (Xiao et al. 2020). That said, the disparity between the administrative burden and expected outcomes highlights the need to examine the efficacy of resource allocation within these commitments. Research suggests that to accelerate the pace of change, involvement in EDI needs to happen at all levels, including individual, communities, and organisational levels (CIPD, 2023). This means that dedicated resource, for example to co-ordinate Athena Swan action plans, raise the profile of

EDI initiatives, work on engagement, should be driven by dedicated and specialised EDI resource (Henderson & Bhopal, 2022), but also, that attention should be paid to how all senior managers engage with this function, and have a clear mandate and accountability on how they will do this. Furthermore, employees across the institution should also have any EDI related work tasks recognised in workload models, something which is reported not to happen consistently across the sector (O'Mullane 2023). The infrastructure challenges highlight the need for a more integrated, simplified approach to resource allocation, as well as improved alignment of EDI objectives with everyday practice, in order to achieve sustainable improvements.

5.3.4   Organisation Commitments - Summary

The conceptual framework illustrates that, through organisation level commitments, the institution had put into place an Athena Swan charter action plan, and EDI policies that are governed internally through an EDI council. The data analysis has demonstrated that whilst some express the need for such organisational approaches, they have not resulted in any wide-spread change for women in the institution and have therefore not led to women's career progression into leadership.

The biggest reported barrier was that of culture change, something that has been proven to be the most difficult to tackle (Ovseiko et al., 2017; Tzanakou & Pearce, 2019). The analysis however suggests that without this, efforts will continue to go unrewarded. Further research is required into the nuances of culture, both from a disciplinary, and role basis. There are several additional short-term gains that could be adopted to both demonstrate the commitment to creating more opportunities for women to progress into leadership roles. The use of equality impact assessments, on all policies and procedures in the University would provide a good starting point to understand what factors are affecting women from progressing. This work should be underpinned by data that is often collected, but not necessarily used for these purposes (for example recruitment and selection data, performance rewards, and bonuses). The use of data will aid in decision making and how existing action plans can be further developed to create more opportunities for women.

The analysis has also demonstrated the need to re-look at the resources dedicated to EDI. In having dedicated resource with specialist knowledge will ensure that the workload burden will not be put on women who get involved as a goodwill gesture, but at the same time it is important to understand how those driving forces integrate and interact with all areas of institutional activity. Furthermore, it has been found that without advocation and accountability from senior managers, the pace of change will be negatively impacted. Additionally it was clear that the issue of promoting these commitments, what they mean for the institution and more importantly, what they mean for women is important to resolve when moving forwards. If staff don't understand what the commitments are about, it can have a detrimental effect on buy-in and support. It is clear that the institution needs to develop more appropriate channels to communicate to women what the current challenges are, and what is being done about them, and most importantly, how progress will be measured. Research is demonstrating that women are shying away from EDI initiatives, either because they fear being labelled, or that by engaging will result in more diversity work leading to additional workload and therefore no change in their leadership ambitions (Javadizadeh et al., 2022). It is perhaps therefore important for senior leaders, both men and women in the organisation to take more of a role in the responsibility for change, rather than relying on grassroots projects. In adopting these approaches, it is hoped that confidence in positive change can be restored, and results of organisational commitments being taken more seriously.

5.4   Allyship

The third initiative investigated in relation to the conceptual framework was allyship (see figure 5.3). Allyship was identified as potential initiative that can positively affect women's career progression (Madsen et al., 2019; Moser & Branscombe, 2022), however had not been explored in any depth in the context of higher education. Previous literature has suggested that women can experience and benefit from allyship, with examples such as receiving mentorship or coaching, being given access to new work assignments or opportunities, or in raising awareness of equity (Madsen et al., 2019).
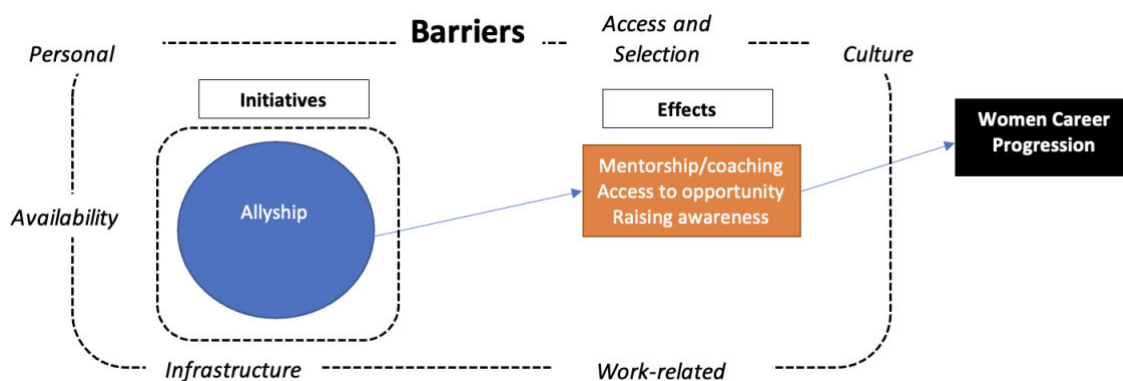
Figure 5.3: Allyship – Conceptual Framework

This section of the chapter discusses and analyses how allyship currently does or can support women in accessing and attaining senior leadership positions, what the current barriers to successful allyship are, and it's future potential for helping women progress in their careers, and explicitly responds to the research objective – To critically evaluate the potential impact of allyship on leadership progression for women. Although allyship is a less tangible feature than the other variables (in that it is not a formal programme in existence at the institution), results from the staff survey indicated overwhelmingly that allyship in the workplace was a critical factor in supporting women with their career (95%), with some having indicated some kind of previous experience of allyship (75%). This alone highlights the value of allyship efforts for fostering positive change towards more inclusive practices in a higher education environment.

When asked about the effects that allyship had on women in the workplace, 55% of the survey participants responded to indicate they had experienced some effects of allyship at some point within their career. It was known that 25% of respondents had not experienced any form of allyship in their careers, and therefore it could be concluded that the remaining 20% of the sample population who did not register a response could not identify any direct effects of engagement in an allyship arrangement. This isn't surprising, given the fact that research has demonstrated that allyship (whether male-led or otherwise) is still a relatively new concept in higher education (Madsen et al., 2019; Warren & Bordoloi, 2021) and that these types of relationships are often not 'formalised' as an initiative in any way. In addition,

several perceived barriers to allyship were expressed through qualitative comments in the survey. Overall, 57% of respondents provided comments on the barriers they had faced in receiving allyship support in the workplace, which is significant and raises questions on how it can function more effectively.

When the qualitative data from the surveys and interviews were analysed in more detail, a number of subthemes emerged. The sub-themes that were identified through the analysis of the data in relation to the effects of allyship, broadly fell into 'formal' and 'informal' allyship. The more formal aspects of allyship fell into the categories of - 1) mentoring and coaching; and 2) access to opportunity (sponsorship). The more informal aspects of allyship fell into the themes of 3) advocacy; and 4) raising awareness of gender inequality.

5.4.1 Mentoring and coaching, and Access to Opportunities (Formal allyship)

Mentoring and coaching was identified as an effect of allyship by 28% of survey participants, with qualitative references to mentorship and coaching when asked about how useful allyship could be. When discussing mentorship, several survey participants discussed this as being a valuable effect of allyship, in particular in supporting them to develop confidence in the workplace, or in diminishing imposter syndrome. For example, participant 103 stated: "*Having mentoring from senior leaders can help increase confidence and help banish imposter syndrome.*" Several participants agreed that these softer skills developments were a main benefit from the mentoring process, for example, in suggesting that *"Mentorship or access to opportunities helps build confidence and introduces missing voices into different fields."* (Participant 25). This was further evidenced in the institutions latest Athena Swan Action Plan, where over 150 women who had taken part in the institutions coaching and mentoring academy, and 59% reported an increased confidence as a result of engagement (CU, 2022). However, when mentoring and coaching came up as an effect of allyship in six of the senior manager interviews, there were distinct differences reported on the benefits of this type of relationship. Two senior managers spoke about mentoring and coaching in the same context as survey respondents, specifically recognising interpersonal skills enhancement such as confidence building as a benefit. Manager 8 suggested: *"I think women are quite often lacking in*

confidence, I certainly benefited from having a professional coach over quite a few years.", whilst manager 6 stated: *"She turned into a mentor who, you know, has had me think about things very seriously and consider things that perhaps I wouldn't have considered. She gave me confidence."* In contrast, five other senior managers suggested that the support they had received in this context, was progressively more about their mentors creating active opportunities for them rather than helping them to 'build confidence'. References to this type of arrangement included access to networks and their name being promoted to others. Manager 2 commented:

"In my own experience, him taking me to conferences and introducing me to people and things like that, they became my network. I don't know how I would have penetrated that club if you like, particularly as somebody who was first to university. I didn't have any social or political capital to exercise in that space."

Similarly, manager 7 suggested it was having someone who could put in a good word on your behalf: *"They would just automatically put my name forward, and if they hadn't have done so, I wouldn't have had some of the opportunities that I've had."* Manager 10 described this as active privilege, or as someone acting as a patron: *"We talk about mentorship a lot of the time but actually I think a better term is patronage. I've succeeded because senior people have taken me under their wing and supported me and protected me."* These five managers were in effect describing their mentors as providing sponsorship, actively creating opportunities for them by effectively giving them a 'leg up the ladder' by introducing them to their networks and putting them forward for opportunities (Macfarlane & Burg, 2019). Sponsorship was another feature of the survey where 42% of participants collectively indicated access to opportunities and networks as a positive effect of allyship. Similarly to the majority of senior managers, survey respondents perceived this 'next level' support as being valuable for career progression, specifically, in terms of having someone 'on your side' in certain environments, and in providing exposure to networks that they might not otherwise have exposure to. Participant 8 commented: *"Having a sponsor or someone on your side in senior meetings is very useful, to give you a voice when you don't have one.",* whilst participant 1 agreed *"I think it is very important.... having someone champion you and provide opportunity in terms of new learning and networking is key."*

This suggests that there were distinct differences in the perceived benefits for career progression when engaging with their coaches and mentors. Developing skills such as confidence building, self-awareness and risk taking were described as important by both women and senior managers, however, were not as impactful as sponsorship relationships where women have access to social capital, networks and work opportunities, all of which enhance exposure to leadership situations. The differences in what was perceived as being an ally in the form of a mentor, coach or sponsor clearly had nuanced differences in what helps women to progress and could be as a result of them needing different types of support at different stages of their careers. The findings largely supports research that women wanting to progress in their careers can benefit from formal mentoring programmes to develop confidence and self-esteem building skills (Liautaud, 2016; Madsen et al., 2019; Palmer & Jones, 2019) and in encouragement and support (Parker et al., 2018; Tessens et al., 2011). However, the literature also reports that these types of programmes have also had limited impact on career progression for women (Brabazon & Schulz, 2020; House et al., 2021; Meschitti & Smith, 2017). It could be suggested that the reason for this is that often, career progression is more evident when a relationship such as sponsorship or patronage provided by a senior leader creates more opportunity for women to progress (Mate et al., 2019; Searby et al., 2017). Being given access to new opportunities such as networks, job assignments or roles is something that would regularly feature as part of a patronage or sponsorship arrangement (Cheng et al., 2018) and could be more impactful for women who strive to attain the top jobs.

Within the institution, there is currently a coaching and mentoring programme in place, however sponsorship is not formalised as an initiative as such. It is clear from the findings that the institution needs to keep its formal mentoring and coaching programmes as they deliver clear benefits to women, but to further explore how allies can provide more direct sponsorship to those wanting to progress, as it can create more fast-track, impactful change (Ibarra et al., 2010; Mate et al., 2019; Searby et al., 2017). The findings show that there is a need for managers, and women, to understand the different types of allyship that a senior manager can provide, whether that be through helping someone to develop confidence and leadership skills, or through giving access to opportunities and networks that can

provide greater social capital and open doors to new opportunities for aspiring leaders.

5.4.2   Infrastructure barriers

Though there is potential to develop women's careers using these strategies, the main reported barrier to implementing this successfully was in infrastructure, particularly in large institutions such as this one. Infrastructure issues were reported by survey participants in qualitative comments in the survey when asked about potential barriers to allyship and were mentioned 32 times. These included issues related to there not being enough managers to act into these more formal 'mentor, coach or sponsor' roles or having too high a workload to dedicate the time and effort. When asked about the potential barriers, participant 116 stated:

> *"I fear that the workload means the struggle every day is to deliver to students/stay on top of admin/deal with the latest institutional change imposed from management, so initiatives like this, unless they are built in, don't work. No one has the time or headspace. Everyone is just trying to get through the work and get home at a reasonable hour."*

Other survey participants agreed with challenges of time, and capacity, describing challenges of infrastructure in terms of: *"time pressures – allies not having enough time"* (Participant 65); and *"senior positions able to have the capacity to take on the role"* (Participant 103). Participant 106 suggested that this can extend beyond work pressures and include personal commitments that can leave less time to dedicate to these types of relationships: *"The competitive nature of university careers; workload and other commitments (e.g. caring burden) that leave little time for the extra emotional and time resources allyship might require."* Others expressed a lack of availability of senior managers to act as role models, or that developing relationships with them were perceived as unattainable: *"Insufficient number of suitable role models in senior positions." (*Participant 15)*,* and *"Lack of exposure to women in leadership roles." (*Participant 45)*.* Another suggested that they didn't know how to start to develop relationships with potential allies: *"Understanding how to build allyships would be useful - I wouldn't even know how to go about building allyship with anyone, especially to help me progress my career." (*Participant 19).

Surprisingly, issues related to infrastructure were not a feature that emerged from the interviews conducted with senior managers, where barriers highlighted focussed more significantly on the role of allyship, discussed further on in the chapter. It could be suggested that these types of challenges didn't emerge as senior managers assumed it as part of their role. The findings supported wider claims that dedicating time and effort from mentors or sponsors to support women's career progression can contribute sizeably to work commitments (Macfarlane & Burg, 2019; Morley, 2013a), and that there are often a lack of senior leaders available to dedicate time and effort (Cross et al., 2019; Hill & Wheat, 2017). Though most managers might see taking on these types of roles as part of their remit as a senior manager, it is not something which is currently mandated or evaluated as part of their role. As participant 155 stated: *"It's not something in anyone's job performance review - it can be that the colleague is just lucky to get that support."*

Furthermore, it has been evidenced that women in Universities tend to take on more mentoring responsibilities than men (Misra et al., 2021; Murray et al., 2012), which needs to be a key consideration for the institution in understanding how many senior leaders have mentoring responsibilities, to whom, and in what capacity (whether it is part of a formal mentoring programme, or more informally) – particularly as there are more male senior leaders. Whilst issues of workload impacting the ability of managers engaging in this level of support, it is nonetheless an important consideration moving forwards. Supporting women to progress through engaging in these types of formal relationships requires a relentless and unwavering commitment from a top-down level, as well as a pipeline of good, available mentors, and an understanding of how these different types of relationships can play out in an allyship capacity (Madsen et al., 2019). In terms of issues of infrastructure, this is a complex problem to try and tackle in the current climate. Practically, there are not enough senior leaders who could provide sponsorship opportunities, considering the size of the institution. However, these formal types of allyship are only one part of a bigger aim that intends to tackle gender inequality and provide more opportunities for women. Informal allyship, as discussed in the next sub-theme, discusses ways in which allies can support the movement without the need for expansive resources, requiring micro changes that would ultimately result in a positive shift in culture.

5.4.3 Raising Awareness and Advocacy (Informal allyship)

Rather than recognising allyship as a more formal one to one relationship between the mentor/coach and mentee, several other sub-themes arose that define allyship taking place on a more informal, everyday level. Advocacy arose as a potential effect from survey participants when asked about how useful allyship could be, 66 times in the qualitative comments. Survey respondents claimed that being more generally supportive was vital for allyship to succeed. Participant 152 described this as being able to re-establish collegiate relationships rather than promoting an individualistic way of working: *"We need to get better about looking out for each other and championing each other. Otherwise, only the most ruthless will ever succeed because they care less about disadvantaging others in the process."* This was also expressed by other respondents: *"It's this informal and intimate support I believe that empowers women, builds their confidence, and drives them to take actions that support their advancement."* (Participant 156); and *"Support is really useful in terms of building up confidence and enabling people to see themselves in leadership roles." (*Participant 113).

Moreover, six managers also had views to offer in relation to advocacy being an effect of allyship, particularly in the unseen, or informal allyship support. They suggested that women may not always be aware of who their allies are, and perhaps don't always need to. Manager 4 reflected on how they make a point of offering positive support in a public forum, understanding that anything otherwise can cause damage to one's confidence. However, they also suggest that there needs to be a greater awareness amongst senior managers in this context:

"I think we need to be more considerate and more expressive of the contribution that someone made. When you see someone who's presenting for the first time to a leadership team - If you're asking questions, you have to be positive and so I think there's a way in which we need to educate our leaders about people coming to those groups, because it can make it can make or break someone."

Four other managers suggested that being an ally means being aware of those who have the potential to progress and either offering advice or taking a step back to let someone else shine, without a formal mentoring relationship. Manager 6 discussed

this in the context of allies being almost invisible: *"I wonder whether you know just having the nod from somebody like you know 'you're a good egg' and 'you're a safe pair of hands', and you're somebody who will get the job done. You're not always aware who your allies are."* Another suggested that taking into account practical aspects of work, such as taking a back seat on a publications authorship list: *"I think it's tiny. Little acts of just sort of, you know, of being willing to not always be the first person on the authorship list, for example."* (Manager 7), whilst another expressed this as simply providing encouragement: *"Sometimes you need somebody who says to you. You can do this, you know, get on and do it."* (Manager 11).

This suggests that being an ally doesn't always need to be a formal arrangement, as might be the case with coaching and mentoring, but more hidden or unseen advocacy that may be present whenever the opportunity arises. Warren & Bordoloi, (2021) describe this as cheerleading for others, lending an ear when needed and serving as 'reflection partners'. In order for this to happen however, it requires there to be more allies engaging in conversation with women on some of the challenges that they face (Shapiro et al., 2022; Sherf et al., 2017), that are able to provide advocacy for others adopting these micro actions. One survey participant suggested that allyship could occur informally, for example through the existing networks that the University has:

"We need to look at it through the lens of the support we already have in place and in the informal networks. Otherwise it is just another thing to add to the list of that people don't get round to." (Participant 77)*.*

This was a noteworthy point to raise, practicably, not all women in the institution would be afforded a mentoring or sponsorship relationship – there is simply not enough funding, role models or protected time for this to happen, as also evident in the literature (Pelfrey et al., 2022). Senior allies could, however, be more engaged through the existing initiatives that the institution already has in place, such as the Aurora Women in Leadership programme, or in the Women's network, as role model speakers, or as available for question answer sessions, for example. In this context, it would enable women to see senior leaders as more accessible, and in turn allow senior leaders to better understand some of the challenges that women face, thus increasing allyship in the institution in a way that doesn't require a significant

increase in workload or time commitment. This is something that the institution does not yet fully do.

As another form of informal allyship, raising awareness of gender equality by allies in the workplace was reported as an effect by 25% of survey respondents, which was nearly as many as those that recognised mentoring as an effect. This included raising awareness of gender equality issues in the workplace more generally, or by directly challenging people, policy or practice where managers can see some form of direct gender discrimination taking place, in an attempt to change behaviours. This also emerged in the qualitative comments by 12 survey respondents, though the language used in terms of awareness raising predominantly demonstrated a future tense, i.e. it would be useful, rather than demonstrating any evidence that this happens currently. For example, participant 9 stated: *"It's useful in the sense that it would signal senior (male) managers to acknowledge there is a gender gap that needs addressing."*, whilst two others commented: *"Raising an awareness of gender equality is always worth any effort."* (Participant 107), and *"Amplifying issues from outside the affected group is a good thing."* (Participant 37). Several other survey respondents also suggested the usefulness of allies raising gender inequality awareness by directly calling out micro aggressions. Participant 3 stated: *"I want those people to call out more behaviour - being an active bystander is part of 'allyship' which would help break down some barriers and therefore women may progress into those positions.",* whilst participant 27 suggested*: "Challenging discriminatory behaviours and constantly thinking, actively, about whether a process/policy/attitude/ arrangement/behaviour is discriminatory or an act of allyship can genuinely make a difference."* This suggested that some women in the institution wanted a more direct form of action by allies to increase awareness. Surprisingly, directly challenging discriminative behaviour as a form of raising awareness only emerged in two of the senior manager interviews (both women), where evidence of awareness raising was linked more to directly calling people out, in meetings, for example:

"Sometimes it's appropriate to challenge if something is inappropriate, then it should be upfront, you know, in the face of whoever said it. But I think there are other times when being an ally means being prepared to stand up and speak to somebody

else in private and just say you do realise that you have just rolled your eyes at xxx, for example." (Manager 7)

This suggests that challenging processes and behaviours do not feature as something that happens regularly in the organisation, as neither survey respondents nor senior managers had referenced this to any significant degree yet is seen to be an important aspect of providing allyship to minority groups (Cheng et al., 2018; Warren & Bordoloi, 2021). Senior managers not calling out where discrimination lies, or promoting gender inequality more directly, is a potential effect of pulling the ladder up behind and is detrimental to raising wider awareness of gender equality issues (Madsen et al., 2019). One reason why this is not currently evident, could be that challenging others can often be seen as confrontational, and by challenging those more senior people or institutional processes, can be seen as putting your neck on the line (Warren & Bordoloi, 2021). This relates to how an organisation's culture allows for such inequalities to be surfaced, or hidden, as the case may be. Research suggests that higher education culture is bound in a system where the higher the grade, the most likely you are listened to, though in women's circumstances, they are often taken less seriously, and therefore are less likely to risk their own positions (Hoyt & Murphy, 2016). It is therefore imperative that the number of male allies increase, as it is known that it costs men less social capital to challenge where discrimination is happening (Drury & Kaiser, 2014; Madsen et al., 2019). In theory, this shouldn't be difficult as there are more senior males in the institution, though there may be a need for encouragement for this type of behaviour from the top down.

The findings suggest that women in the institution would value more awareness raising and challenging of discriminative practices, which demonstrates a commitment from senior leaders to taking gender equality seriously. The concept of being an active bystander is important in this context, as it is not enough to just be a good colleague who cares about equality (Warren & Bordoloi, 2021). Whilst allies may feel they are supportive of women attaining leadership positions, they need to go one step further in challenging the underlying structures, policies and processes in an institution to make leadership more accessible and attainable for women (Sawyer & Valerio, 2018). As resources to dedicate to formal initiatives are

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constrained, the institution needs to consider how allies become more engaged in the initiatives that are already in place, both in the context of learning from women in the institution, but to also close the gap in terms of being accessible and in being able to share their own authentic leadership experiences with others. From a more practical perspective, there is a need to bring together men and women allies to assess current policies (perhaps in using equality impact assessments), in view of making them more equitable. A better understanding of what values women want to see from both male and female allies is also imperative in terms of shaping any future training around allyship, as well as reflecting these values in institutional strategy.

5.4.4 Allyship – Summary

Although allyship is a less tangible aspect than the other variables (in that it is not a formal programme, or something that is currently measured), responses from the staff survey overwhelmingly believed that allyship in the workplace was an important factor in supporting women to progress in their careers. The conceptual framework demonstrates that allyship can result in women being supported through coaching and mentoring, access to new opportunities and raising awareness. However the main barriers to achieving this was in the lack of allies in the workplace or issues of infrastructure to make it work. There is also evidence from the findings that suggest women take on allyship roles more than men, even though research suggests that men have more access to opportunity, networks and leverage to create change (Hanasono et al., 2019; Madsen et al., 2019; Shapiro et al., 2022). There is a need for the institution to understand how to make this workload more equitable between men and women that occupy more senior roles, perhaps starting with the coaching and mentoring academy, to ensure there is more of a gender balance in those that take up these types of roles. Furthermore, more understanding is needed on how to engage more men to become allies in the workplace, including exploring the benefits that men have received in being part of such initiatives in the past. Ignoring the role that culture plays in rolling out male allyship initiatives will result in further power plays, and hinder progress towards equitable progression for men and women in higher education. Therefore, it is also suggested that when current gender initiatives are reviewed, or new initiatives implemented, that they involve men as well as

women in their design, in order to engage allyship from the outset.

5.5   Emergent sub-themes

Unsurprisingly, most of the coded data was grounded in elements already presented in the conceptual framework. However, through analysis, an additional three sub-themes emerged during the study, which are covered in more detail in this section, in the areas of visibility and engagement, impact, and the role of allyship.

5.5.1   Visibility and Engagement

Visibility and engagement emerged as a major theme within the study, related to both leadership and development initiatives, and organisational commitments. For leadership and development initiatives, the staff survey indicated that almost half of the respondents (40%) were in the main, unaware of what leadership development initiatives were in the institution, which highlighted a major challenge. This was also reflected when asked about the perceived difference that the initiatives make to leadership progression. As an average of 44% had no opinion, it could be suggested that this was because they were not aware of different initiatives. In terms of visibility, there were also 41 comments related to this when asked about the perceived level of impact that leadership initiatives had on women. Participant 110 stated: *"Of those that I am aware of, I do not feel they are widely advertised, as I would not know how to access them and whether or not I would meet the criteria to access them."*, whilst participant 129 commented *"I have never heard about Aurora Women, Coaching and Mentoring Academy or the Staff MBA program and therefore have no opinion of them. Having been at the University for three years already, their overall visibility does not exist."* Comments such as these were repeated time again, indicating that the level of knowledge of what the institutional initiatives were about, or how they could help them develop, was lacking.

Interestingly, visibility and engagement also featured as a major sub-theme for the senior managers who were interviewed. The majority of managers indicated issues of how initiatives were promoted to staff, and even when they were able to access them, how individuals' profiles were raised because of it. One male manager

suggested that they should know about the different options on offer to be able to discuss opportunities with women in their team, whereas he was the one getting requests from others: *"How do you promote the existence of these programs to your female employees? They came to me with their requests, and I show my willingness to support them if they choose to do something. But the specific programmes - they came to me with their request not the other way around."* (Manager 5).

Manager 6 commented in a similar vein that they had never been asked to nominate anyone for these types of programmes, and that they had a lack of profile within the institution: *"I certainly wasn't asked for any suggestions of who might go on the programme(s), so you know clearly they're not that high profile. I haven't looked on the website to see if there's anything on there, but I don't hear anything about it."* There was a clear lack of knowledge demonstrated on the leadership and development opportunities within institution that claim to help women progress within their roles, acknowledged by managers. Within the institution, the different initiatives are run by several different departmental areas, or in the women's network case, by volunteers, which may suggest managers and employees find it difficult to know where to find information. Manager 8 also suggested that when they did enquire about an opportunity, there was never any follow up: *"I would like to understand how they're promoted, because when I enquired last about the opportunity it wasn't available, and I wasn't then told when it did come back on stream",* whilst manager 1 suggested that whilst intention was there, the lack of communications had a profound effect on access:

> *"We've got the website and we've got the booking systems and all those sorts of things. But you have to wonder how many people know about them because yeah, I know that we send lots of communications out in lots of different ways and we touch about 30% of the workforce so I'm not convinced that everybody knows about things and therefore I actually don't see them as accessible."*

With senior managers acknowledging the lack of visibility of these types of programmes internally and how women can access them, they went further with their comments than was perhaps highlighted through the surveys, in demonstrating how engagement with these types of programmes also raises the profile of potential leaders in the institution, particularly in terms of the success stories from women who

had completed these programmes, and hence raising the visibility of their benefits to others. Manager 4 stated:

"I think the other area is the profile raising of the individuals on those on those programmes. I think if you're looking at an Aurora cohort going through or an MBA cohort going through, how are we promoting - not necessarily in terms of job role, but how are we promoting their ability and the professional capability of someone and their importance to the group and what we see is that individual moving forward. I think there's a promotional aspect to it that's lacking."

In addition, managers highlighted the importance of when women should engage with these types of leadership and development opportunities, questioning whether targeting women to engage at specific points in their careers would be the right approach. Manager 4 questioned whether some women, having to go through a competitive process to join the programme, that they were perhaps already on track for leadership having already demonstrated a specific set of skills:

"It would be interesting to look at where those cohorts are coming from, where they are in their career development. I think my personal view when I've spoken to those groups, you have a very, very strong group of professionals within those cohorts. I do question whether to some extent they might be joining that programme too late."

Manager 1 shared the same view of whether women already demonstrating leadership skills were being targeted (perhaps wrongly) to engage. They commented *"I just think that we tend to develop people who would be developed anyway rather than the people that really need it sometimes."* This raises an important point about ensuring that support is aligned with women's motivations for engagement (whether they self-select or are nominated). As several managers stated, *"It's making sure people understand why they're doing it as opposed to just thinking they've got to do it."* (Manager 10), and *"So I would go back to actually. What is it you want? Actually looking at the person holistically. Are they just looking at career development and so called leadership skills? Because then I would question what they're for."* (Manager 11).

This was also the case with regards to the organisation commitments, including Athena Swan and the EDI policy and councils. For example, women who responded to the survey, were asked how much they knew about the Athena Swan Charter, and 30% of respondents had never heard of it, and a further 48% had heard of Athena Swan but had either limited or no knowledge about it. This finding was significant, in that for a charter that is currently widely advertised on the institutions website, the details of what the charter was actually about and what it aimed to achieve was either non-existent or limited. There was a similar pattern when asked about the respondents knowledge of EDI councils, where 31% had never heard about them, and 51% had heard of the councils but had no or limited knowledge. Although women were more aware of the institutional EDI policy, still, 54% of respondents had either no or limited knowledge of the details contained within it. This suggested a significant barrier in terms of how visible these organisational commitments were, and therefore, how women could benefit from them. Issues of visibility was amplified through comments on the survey in this section, mentioned 32 times, where women had highlighted this as a significant barrier. Participant 94 stated *"There is a lack of awareness of how the commitments influence and affect opportunities and individuals. I know we have Athena Swan, but I don't know anything about the action plan."*, whilst participant 10 commented *"I don't get to specifically hear about these implementations so there must be a communication breakdown somewhere."*, and *"They are not widely disseminated amongst staff, as I was not aware of 2 out of the 3 commitments."* (Participant 110). This was a common thread coming from many women, suggesting that there is a current lack of knowledge and understanding on what these commitments are trying to achieve. Additionally, when survey participants were asked about the perceived level of impact that the Athena Swan charter, the EDI councils and the policy had, the results indicated that the majority of respondents had no opinion – on average 51% across the three commitments. This further supports the notion that those respondents had limited visibility and awareness of what was trying to be achieved, and therefore could not provide a perception of impact.

The same concern emerged from six of the twelve interviews with senior managers. Manager 8 commented: *"The EDI policy is there, and not having read it recently, is there a challenge there around the visibility of these issues and challenges? And I*

think there certainly is." Manager 11, when referring specifically to Athena Swan, suggested that there was a lack of knowledge of what was contained within the Athena Swan action plan and how this translated into everyday practice, stating *"Everyone knows there is a plan (Athena Swan), but where is it? Of course, I have an overview, but how does that relate to the commentary? No idea."*

The findings suggest that visibility is a significant barrier that suggests a lack of knowing and understanding about a) what these commitments actually are, and b) what they aim to achieve from a practical sense. This was a similar finding from O'Mullane (2023) who found there was a distinct lack of operational knowledge about the charter and its implementation in three Irish higher education institutions. This suggests that other Universities face barriers of communicating to staff what activities they are undertaking to address inequalities, and in turn leads to a lack of confidence in the initiatives themselves. In terms of engagement with the initiatives, two managers highlighted that by the institution simply acknowledging that there were challenges as a starting point, might instil confidence that the issues were being taken seriously, and increase engagement across the board: "*I think if we're really serious about it, there has to be an acknowledgement and commitment through all our processes*". (Manager 12), and

"*I can't think which university it was, but really did publish an acknowledgement of we are not satisfied with gender equality and what they are trying to do to change it. I think that message of acknowledgement - I don't see that. I don't hear that. And I think that would just tilt the whole balance of how we approach things if that were the case*". (Manager 3)

The lack of visibility around what issues women face and what institutions are doing to break the glass ceiling has further perpetuated the challenges that women face. The findings have highlighted that those women, not being aware of leadership and development opportunities, Athena Swan Charter or EDI councils, therefore do not engage as a result. This is interesting, as studies are reporting more and more that women, and other minority groups are growing tiresome of diversity programmes that do not work, and therefore find alternative ways of progressing in their careers, such as seeking out male sponsors (Glass & Cook, 2020), though it is noted that this could result in inauthentic leadership styles just to 'fit in with the norm' and is

therefore not an authentic solution. The analysis has demonstrated that it is important to look at how to engage the right people. It has been reported time again that gender equality work is often carried out by women and other minority groups (Teelken & Deem, 2013; Tzanakou & Pearce, 2019; Yarrow & Johnston, 2023), so it is no surprise that if change cannot be demonstrated, the ones who are intended to benefit from such schemes start to lose interest. The findings have also demonstrated a need for the institution to follow up on the work that women have achieved through participating in these development opportunities and showcase their projects to act as roles models for others, which are seen as important in encouraging others who may lack the confidence to start to climb the ladder (Hill & Wheat, 2017; O'Connor, 2014). Furthermore, it is in the interest of the institution to understand how the work of developing women leaders contribute to the overall performance of the institution, something which research has proven to have positive effects (Sawyer & Valerio, 2018).

The analysis highlights a need for the institution to first acknowledge the issues to be solved, and to consider how they are communicating this to staff, together with how the organisation level commitments will be enacted, to ensure there is transparency and that action plans and policies and not only visible but demonstrate engagement from a range of stakeholders in an organisation.

5.5.2   Impact

In the staff survey, 8% of women suggested that they had not engaged with a LDI programme/initiative because they felt it would not help them to progress any further, and when asked about perceived impact of the different initiatives, the majority of respondents had no opinion. The impact of leadership and development initiatives came up as a theme 48 times in the qualitative comments within the survey, in terms of setting initial benchmarks, and in how change is measured through these initiatives and arose again as a sub-theme in relation to organisational commitments, a further 25 times in the comments. Many respondents suggested that whilst the initiatives were a good thing, that they did not know whether they actually resulted in positive change. Participant 14 stated *"It is difficult to know to what extent these*

types of initiatives help without the availability of data to measure their success.", whilst participant 9 commented *"Difficult to measure the impact of initiatives - anecdotally I know some female staff who participated in them have been promoted but appears to be largely down to individual initiative."*

There was a common thread that suggested there needed to be an increased use of data to see whether there is any correlation between those accessing the programmes and successfully being promoted: *"[…] what should be looked at is the percentage of staff accessing these opportunities and if this is proportionate to progression."* (Participant 72). Comments related to impact from engagement were common, and several other respondents went even further to suggest that once women had engaged with them, they took their learning outside the institution into other roles:

"There seems to be more women leaving the University especially those who are in a leadership/management position […]" (Participant 19) and "*I'm not sure they make much of a difference at the top though - most people I know who have been on them have left."* (Participant 80). This was also an issue that was raised in the senior management interviews, particularly around the 'embeddedness' of the programmes and initiatives. Manager 12 stated: *"I think you can have lots of leadership courses and I've been on some myself, but unless they're embedded within the progression criteria and then in themselves that they won't have much impact."* and *"You sort of can feel powerful for a while (after the programme) and have some really good ideas. And then you kind of revert back to the day job and things go back to exactly how they were."* (Manager 8). There was an acknowledgement that even when women expressed ambition, and engaged in the initiatives available, the opportunities for progression for them were limited.

There was also comments made by managers about how these types of initiatives could give a false sense that promotion would be an automatic right, often leaving those who access them feeling deflated: *"[…] there isn't any filtering for talent necessarily at the entrance of the programme. And therefore I think it sometimes builds an expectation and hope that can be can never be fulfilled in terms of career progression."* (Manager 9), and *"Are they designed for progression? No."* (Manager 4).

From the managers perspectives, the impact of these leadership programmes were highlighted as a challenge, particularly in understanding the opportunities for progression within the institution and what the resulting outcomes of engagement were. The majority of managers pointed to these types of issues, where ambition to progress could often lead to feelings of failure due to a misalignment between initiatives and progression policies. Managers clearly highlighted some of the challenges of leadership and development initiatives, some of which were outside of their control, such as being able to create positions for staff who have engaged. This has left staff feeling as if they should take their skills elsewhere. According to the Institutions Athena Swan action plan, the Aurora Women in Leadership programme has had 42 delegates since its inception in 2019, where 10 delegates have gone on to secure promotions (though this does not state whether it is internal or external to the institution) (CU, 2022). This correlates with the national evaluation of the Aurora programme, where 18.6% of those who completed the programme reported a promotion (Arnold et al., 2021). Although the programme evaluated well on a national scale, the level of impact at a senior level was largely absent (Barnard et al., 2022).

Also highlighted in relation to impact, was the lack of benchmarking and use of data to better understand how initiatives and commitments help or hinder women progressing. Several managers referring to leadership and development initiatives suggested that the institution needed to look beyond its own walls to see what best practice there was in other institutions, and further afield: "*We should be looking outside of Coventry, even the sector to identify best practice.*" (Manager 7), and "*How do we take best practice that's elsewhere into what we're doing and then actually say, well, can we have a look at this?"* (Manager 4). This was an important point to raise, suggesting that institutions could be learning from other sectors to see what works, that would go some way to also addressing culture change.

Women participants in the survey also commented on the lack of measurement of impact. Participant 129, who had been involved in attending an EDI council meeting described the lack of indicators that would demonstrate and track change: *"I have seen no evidence that these committees make an impact thus far. I have attended*

several equality and diversity meetings but found these had no measurable metrics or deliverables attached to them." This suggests a need to better understand what the charter, councils and policies aim to achieve, by when, and who is accountable for making it happen. Comments related to the use of data and tracking progress were repeated time again, suggesting that measuring progress was essential to understanding whether the institution was making progress. Managers also highlighted the need for better data to understand impact and drive future decision making: "*Data can support what we're trying to do, and I think when it goes beyond the senior leadership to the governing body, I think the data would help them challenge what we do.*" (Manager 7), and "*It can only be changed by using data and persistent clear arguments - anything emotive won't make any difference."* (Manager 5). The comments demonstrated a clear need for data driven decision making. Understanding what data is already available, as well as what data needs to be collected is fundamental to evidencing real impact (Bryant, 2019; Rosser et al., 2019). However, it is reported that institutions may lack more in-depth data than that already published, for example, although national gender statistics in UK higher education are widely available, there is a lack of gender related data for example on progression and promotion, and recruitment and selection, as well as across other initiatives such as who provides coaching and mentoring (Aiston & Yang, 2017; Graves et al., 2019). One potential way of measuring impact of initiatives is the availability and use of data, another aspect seen as important in measuring progress in diversity initiatives (Aiston & Yang, 2017).

Researchers have suggested that these types of programmes are needed, however they have demonstrated more benefits at the individual level, where the challenges that need addressing in Universities still point more towards the more complex parts of the system, such as culture (Burkinshaw & White, 2017; Parker et al., 2018; Shepherd, 2017). Therefore measuring the impact of these initiatives is important, not least to understanding where limited resources and funding should be allocated, but more importantly to ensure the institution is demonstrating a commitment to being accountable for progress, and in reporting this in a transparent way, which has been indicated as something needed across all institutions (Bhopal, 2019). Within the institution, whilst data on gender, pay grades and other protected characteristic data can be sourced, transparently communicating this to staff in the institution with

intended actions could result in women being more confident that progress is being taken seriously. Dedicated EDI resources within the institution is currently limited, that would perhaps take on this role, to ensure that the data was kept on the agendas of those involved in EDI activity, including the organisations EDI councils and sub councils, and acting as a golden thread that moves through all aspects of institutional culture. It is unknown to the researcher, for example, how often issues related to women in leadership are discussed at the University Board of Governors, or senior leadership meetings. There are many activities taking place in the institution, however there is limited co-ordination or reporting of these on an ongoing basis, something that is needed to build confidence, transparency, and accountability of what the institution is trying to achieve.

5.5.3 The Role of Allyship

Understanding the role of allyship emerged as an important theme in getting allyship to work effectively and was mentioned by women in the survey 54 times. Findings suggested that where perceived allyship had occurred in the institution, it had predominantly come from other women (37%), or participants had received some form of allyship from both men and women (30%), whereas those that had received male allyship alone were a minority at 9% This is an interesting finding, since it might be assumed that because more men occupy leadership positions, there would be more experiences of male allyship, as suggested by Moser & Branscombe (2022).

Comments provided in the survey reflected the importance of who is providing allyship, however did not express any preference towards men or women, acknowledging the value of both types of relationships. Participant 51 suggested that having both men and women as role models were equally important:

"Having female role models to show that is it possible to 'climb the ladder' is especially important to early career females. Male role models who show no bias toward either gender, or actively encourage those who would otherwise 'slip under the radar' are just as important."

Participant 5 suggested that male allyship may be more preferable to take the burden off women: *"Very useful, especially male allyship (to avoid women having to take on additional labour to support junior women)."* Other respondents highlighted the importance of who is providing allyship in the context of their position but recognising that they are sometimes difficult to gain access to, for example*: "It helps having allies in people 'above' you, but it's sometimes hard to make that connection because of how hierarchical the institution is."* (Participant 96)*.*

Who is providing allyship in terms of gender was only mentioned in one senior manager interview, describing the importance of not just relying on senior women to mentor, as although it may help other women in terms of role modelling, that is only one dimension of support. They commented: *"So allyship for women by women isn't the isn't the only answer. It's obviously an important answer, and it manages one dimension of that, but I think it could miss many other dimensions."* (Manager 9). This was discussed in the context of women being there to support others, but men needing to take equal responsibility, if not more, to recognise that men have an important part to play in progressing women's careers and should be encouraging this. Although research suggests that both female and male senior leaders have the knowledge and experience to share as allies to women in the workplace (De Vries, 2015), the finding that survey respondents had predominantly experienced support from senior women supports the notion that women continue to do the majority of gender equality work, which requires a great deal of emotional investment (Morley, 2013a; Nash et al., 2021b). This was again evidenced in the institutions latest Athena Swan Action plan, which suggested 64% of coaches and mentors in the institution were women (CU, 2022). There is a clear need to demonstrate to women the power of having strong female role models that can work together for the greater good (Ford, 2016), however, placing the bulk of responsibilities on women to achieve this will not result in change (Madsen et al., 2019). There is also a strong view that men, because of the power they hold in their positions, have more leverage in facilitating change and challenging where inequalities exist (Ibarra et al., 2010; Reis & Grady, 2020). Furthermore, research demonstrates that where effective male allyship occurs, they are able to be activists in challenging structure and policy where gender inequalities exist (Moser & Branscombe, 2022) as well as being able to learn about inequality from a woman's perspective and importantly to demonstrate to other

men in the workplace what it means to be a good ally (Cheng et al., 2018; Nash et al., 2021b). Both senior men and women have equal shares to play in providing allyship to women, but it is clear that more work needs to be done to ensure the workload for this is equally distributed, and visibly so, within the institution.

Another interesting finding was that even though all survey and interview participants were given a definition of what allyship was ["*Allyship refers to the actions, behaviours, and practices that leaders take to support, amplify, and advocate with others, especially with individuals who don't belong to the same social identity groups as themselves*" (Center for Creative Leadership, 2023, p. 4)]., there was insignificant evidence present in either the surveys or the interviews that allyship occurred as a result of managers seeking out those in minority groups to support them, and to help to raise awareness of equality issues in the workplace. Rather, allies were referred to more in a mentoring or coaching capacity as a standard part of the role. Manager 7 described allyship as something everyone gets involved with, not just those in senior positions: *"It's nothing to do with your job or your position, that's just, you know, sort of the person."*

Only one manager referred to allyship as specifically seeking out those in minority groups in all of the twelve interviews that took place, recognising that choosing to actively support someone who may be different to you can be challenging, but is important to ensuring allyship works effectively:

> *"You know it is hard. It's hard sometimes to do that because your natural affinity is towards people that are like you. You gotta, make that that sort of conscious decision to do it differently. I do think that all people in senior leadership positions should see their role not just to do the job they're doing at the moment, but also to look at the next group of people that are gonna come in and do those jobs and to take the right set of people under their wing to look for the talent - not just look for people like themselves but to actually make a deliberate choice to look at a diverse group of people that they will then support and and bring through because otherwise we'll never change."* (Manager 10)

This was a profound statement to make, in acknowledging that senior managers needed to actively support diversity for future leaders. With the lack of evidence of

authentic allyship being evident in the institution, it points towards a need for increased awareness, which has been shown as vital for allyship to be able to work effectively (Nash et al., 2021a). In all senior manager interviews, there was a strong sense of shared responsibility for equality and diversity initiatives in general, as a strategic priority for the institution, however there was limited evidence of how senior managers currently support those who may be different to them, which can result in an unconscious belief that they are doing this, without actually doing it. This means that in the end, no one is accountable for change. This supports research that suggests that being a good colleague is not good enough (Warren & Bordoloi, 2021), and allies, particularly men, must be prepared to engage in changing practices to make them more equitable, that may have previously benefited them (Shapiro et al., 2022).

Another aspect deemed important as part of the allyship role was in reference to trust and bias, mentioned by 20 survey respondents when asked about potential barriers to allyship. These included participants perceiving that allies may not want to share their social capital with others, as doing so may result in relinquishing power - in other words, pulling the ladder up behind them. Participant 138 commented:

"It is very important, but it relies on having people around you that do not feel threatened and/or are not competitive, and/or are also highly committed to helping others progress. Yet the whole higher ed system is designed to be cutthroat, which discourages allyship." This sentiment came across from other respondents: *"some individuals feel knowledge is power and whilst they have that knowledge and power over others, they feel secure in their roles."* (Participant 46), whilst another stated: *"people often want/need to guard their networks/contacts, because academia is so ruthless now."* (Participant 152). Another respondent suggested that allies could see helping others as a threat to their roles: *"some colleagues seeing you as competitive for their jobs."* (Participant 82). This affirms that women often perceive the environment to be more individualistic where managers are concerned with looking after one's own career more than helping others to succeed, and therefore addressing power imbalance is important to consider when introducing any type of allyship initiative (Cheng et al. 2018; Shapiro et al. 2022). The risks of trust and bias, if not addressed within the context of the role of the ally, can undermine the

effectiveness of allyship. Equally, being bias can indirectly affect an allies behaviour and actions, resulting in further discriminative practice (Subašić et al., 2018).

In addition, issues of trust extended to bias or favouritism, suggesting that allies can potentially favour certain people to be selected to be taken 'under their wing' whilst others are left behind. There were numerous survey respondents that reflected on these types of barriers: *"Perhaps being seen to be a favourite – how can you be equitable? Some people get a hand up the ladder, but sometimes if you are very different from those more senior to you, your face doesn't necessarily fit."* (Participant 80). Others also commented that "*if your face doesn't fit you may not get a good ally!*" (Participant 150), or "*May be perceived as favouritism if mentorship is ongoing.*" (Participant 40). Participant 152 went further to suggest that this type of favouritism was more prevalent from women who had achieved leadership status already, pointed to issues of women pulling the ladder up behind them: "*People often feel threatened by someone else's potential to progress and succeed, and I suspect this is why I've personally had more support from senior males than senior females; the former feel less threatened, rightly or wrongly.*" Favouritism by potential allies raises several challenges for women, where certain individuals are given direct support based on their personal relationship to an ally. This undermines the whole purpose of allyship and can further lead to resentment by other colleagues who can see someone 'climbing the ladder' as a result of those relationships (Warren & Bordoloi, 2021).

During the interviews, trust and bias was also raised by several managers. Two female senior managers also acknowledged that supporting other women meant not viewing them as a threat. Manager 3 stated:

"If you identify in your organisation people with talent and that you think can go far, then it's almost inevitable. I don't know if it's inevitable, but I think it's likely that other members of staff will believe or claim that there is favouritism. Allies have to be big and recognise that actually you know that person might go on and actually climb the ladder quicker than you, so being benevolent as is really important and seeing that someone has potential."

This suggests that there is a need for managers to accept that by supporting women may mean they climb the career ladder above the person who has provided allyship. This would be something important to embrace, in supporting and lifting others up.

However, in senior managers interviews there were also comments related to the negative effects experienced by allies if the relationship breaks down, both in terms of being seen as an irritant, or if the person receiving allyship performs poorly, how this would affect the manager. Manager 8 reflected on this type of relationship that ended up (in their case) going wrong:

"I can see that allyship relationships could go disastrously wrong, cause if you have a senior executive sponsor who appears to be promising quite a lot or supporting a more junior member and then and then ultimately can't deliver, i.e. the job doesn't become theirs and then yeah, relationships can break down if it doesn't go well, so in this particular case, I think he used me."

This was also evident from manager 5, who acknowledged that it is a risk that has to be taken: *"Sticking your neck out sometimes, so backing somebody who doesn't come up with the goods. I think if you can, you know if you put your confidence in somebody and then you're disappointed. That's a bit of a shame but I think it's always worth the risk."*

The findings suggest that allies need to be able to 'let go' of power and share with others, but as part of that process, trust is needed, and it often not easy to achieve (Shapiro et al., 2022; White & Burkinshaw, 2019). Therefore, the role of power between well-represented and marginalised groups should be a key consideration in the development of any allyship based initiative, or allyship training. Trust features as a characteristic in training for more formal roles such as mentorship (House et al., 2021), but is largely absent in the context of allyship and would therefore benefit from further research. Furthermore, designing initiatives that have the opportunity for men to contribute is key, as research has shown that by doing so, they 'buy into' the initiative more and are more willing to share their social capital (Madsen et al., 2019).

Feedback, being part of the ally role, was also highlighted in three senior manager interviews in the context of ensuring women were given the opportunity for open and honest feedback. Although not as frequently discussed as the other aspects of the

allyship role, it did contribute to understanding the role of being an ally. This was expressed as being able to provide constructive criticism to women, when necessary, even what they may not want to hear what they have to say. Manager 3 commented on the importance of this:

> *"You know, I've had female staff where I can see the fabulous potential. But I can also see where they are, perhaps going off in the wrong direction or just wrong about the way they're interpreting something. And in that situation, I would try very constructively to say actually I disagree with you. You know, I don't share your perspective on this situation and here's why, and just helping them to kind of engage in self-reflection and not retreat into a mindset of victimhood."*

Additionally, manager 9 suggested that being open and honest in this way was fundamental to nurturing leadership: *"I think feedback that you give they may not want to hear. I don't think it's for another individual to say to someone that you can't grow into being that. But they have to open their minds to that possibility, and they have to recognise that there is a growth that's required (to become a leader)."*

Feedback, as part of someone acting as an ally, is seen as a crucial part of the process, particularly when given in a constructive, but honest way (Parker et al., 2018; Tessens et al., 2011). This often takes place in more formal relationships, whether between employee and line manager, or mentor and mentee, but is a fundamental part of the role of an ally where understanding on how to do this effectively should be noted.

5.6   Summary and Framework Implications

The original conceptual framework brought together the main initiatives that Universities have implemented in an attempt to support more women into leadership positions. It illustrated the main intended effects as a result of these initiatives, and highlighted the barriers that are purported to exist, including personal factors, work-related barriers, culture, infrastructure and availability and access to initiatives. Through the data collection and analysis, these concepts have been discussed in a series of sub-themes based on their relevance to addressing the research question. The theoretical implications for the framework resulted in several interesting findings.

5.6.1 Positive effects

In terms of leadership and development (LDI), the analysis has demonstrated that women do receive positive effects of engagement in LDI, such as self-development, being part of networks, and in career planning. The initiatives demonstrated that the main value for women were in building confidence and having a safe and supportive environment in which to share learning and experiences with other women, though some highlighted the need for mixed programmes so as not to suggest that women 'need fixing'. Women value the learning gained from leadership programmes and networks, though they both have limited impact in progressing to leadership, due to either barriers present, or a distinct lack of alignment with career progression opportunity. Additionally, the organisation commitments were also found to have demonstrated some benefits to the institution, with an action plan related to the Athena Swan Charter that acts as framework for work to be undertaken in the gender equality field and demonstrates some commitment to change by the institution. Both LDI and organisational commitments have the potential to support women in career progression, and should not be removed, though it is imperative that the barriers are considered in order for women to be able to 'break through' to the leadership side.

5.6.2 'Brick wall' barriers

Whilst the framework has highlighted a number of barriers that women face in progressing into leadership, the findings suggested that some were far more

prevalent than others. Though personal related barriers (such as caring responsibilities and support), and access and selection challenges were reported, the findings suggested they were not as significant as those of work-related barriers (including stress, workload and management support). Institutional culture was also reported as a significant barrier, suggesting that without widescale, radical change, driven by leadership, it is unlikely there will be change at a rate in which is required. In addition, infrastructure issues including resourcing these initiatives and investing to ensure they succeed is an important consideration. These barriers are complex and could be regarded as *'brick wall'* barriers, something which women find extremely difficult to break through as they have little control or influence over them, but which senior management (or the 'policymakers') in the institution must prioritise in order to affect change. These structural and cultural barriers are far more prominent than those of agency factors. The findings have indicated a sense that shared responsibility for change means no one is accountable, or in other words, though managers agreed with many of the issues, it is perhaps not cemented as part of their role to lead the way in terms of enabling these initiatives and commitments to work in a more effective way. Unless these challenges are considered and resolved, the intention of these different initiatives to support more women into leadership will continue to fail.

5.6.3 Potential for allyship

Allyship has proven to be an area in which women, and managers, felt had strong potential for enabling change within the institution. That said, enabling allyship initiatives would need to ensure that staff in the institution (including managers), engaged in training to understand the concept of allyship, what different forms it can take (whether formal or informal), and who and what makes a good ally. Through formal allyship, it has been found that women have a more direct route to leadership opportunities from coaching, mentoring or sponsorship, however, this can present challenges in terms of resourcing. Through informal allyship, it provides a possible solution in the form of allies raising awareness, challenging discriminations, and advocating for women in general, thereby starting to shift culture to a more positive environment.

5.6.4 The updated framework

The initial research aim was to to critically evaluate the perceived effects, barriers and opportunities of initiatives and organisational commitments that aim to support more women into senior leadership positions within a UK higher education institution. This has been achieved through conducting research through the lens of the conceptual framework, which was originally designed through identifying the main concepts through the literature (in Appendix A). This ensured that the framework was grounded in previous research that had identified the barriers to engagement, and in the intended 'positive' effects. As well as exploring the main concepts in the original framework, several new sub-themes emerged as being important to the success of women progressing in their careers and have been added to the original framework to create the updated Women's career progression in Higher Education framework, illustrated in figure 5.4.
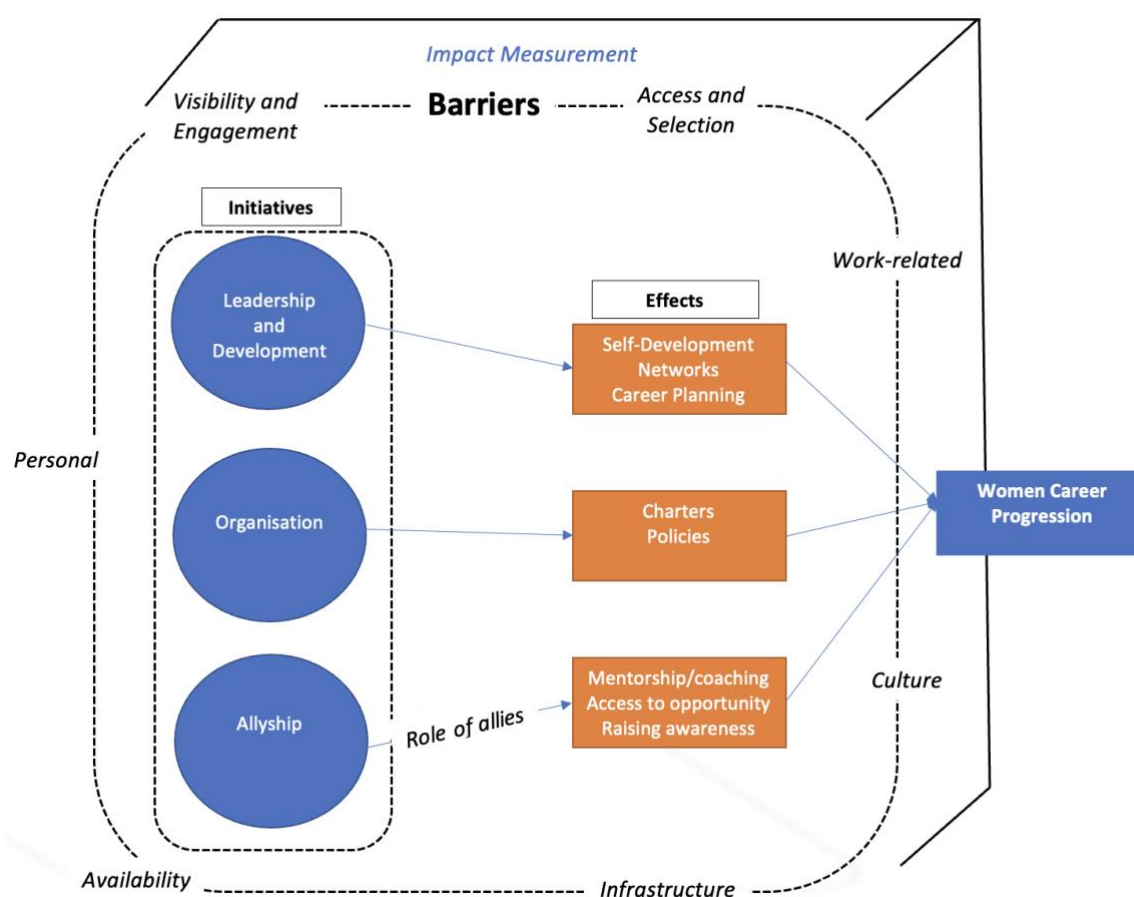
Fig. 5.4: Women's career progression in Higher Education - Empirical Framework

One of the barriers that emerged through the findings was that of **visibility and engagement.** Both LDI initiatives and organisational commitments faced a significant barrier in terms of the visibility and engagement of initiatives, with many not having any operational knowledge on how they can help them. It is unclear whether this is isolated to specific institutions, as there was only one other example that could be found that suggests visibility or lack of knowledge of initiatives was a barrier to engagement (O'Mullane, 2023). In terms of this study, the visibility of what the institution was trying to achieve has potential consequences of resulting in women lacking confidence in what the institution is attempting to do to support them and may result in overcoming some of the issues related to availability and access to programmes and networks, for example.

In relation to **allyship**, there is evidence within the findings of the need for a better understanding of the role of allyship within the institution. In practical terms, it could be suggested that there is a need for training allies with regards to some of the themes that have emerged, including understanding what allyship is (going further than being supportive); who and what makes a good ally; the importance of developing relationships (trust); the benefits to allies; and providing constructive feedback. A training programme to raise awareness of these terms would be beneficial in helping senior leaders to understand the concept of allyship, but this needs to go further in engaging in conversations (with both senior men and women), to explore how holding power and privilege can affect allyship from working effectively (Shapiro et al., 2022).

In addition, many women and senior managers highlighted the importance of continual measurement of **impact of initiatives**. Without this, the barriers continue, the initiative will continue to be perceived as tick-box, and change will continue to be negatively impacted. For the institution to improve the support that women receive, it is important that collective measurement of impact happens both at the start of implementation of initiatives (benchmarking), to understand what has worked for other institutions, or outside of the sector, and additionally, measurement of those initiatives beyond engagement, to ensure that investment in the initiatives are of value and are creating sustainable positive change. The measurement of impact

needs to take place on a continual basis at the institution, in order to address any barriers and to support women in succeeding.

This chapter has presented the analysis from online qualitative surveys within the institution, and from interviews with senior managers, highlighting convergent themes that are most important to addressing the research question. The women's career progression in Higher Education framework has provided a foundation in which to research the effects, barriers and opportunities for supporting more women into leadership positions and has shown that whilst the initiatives demonstrate value and positive effects for women, they are not yet resulting in women progressing into leadership, with some barriers being more prevalent than others. Recommendations and considerations for the future are discussed in the concluding chapter.

Chapter 6: Conclusions and Recommendations

6.1   Introduction

This research study focussed on the perceived impact of initiatives that have been designed specifically for higher education institutions in an attempt to break the glass ceiling and support more women into senior leadership positions. The initiatives that were a focus for the study included 1) leadership and development initiatives, such as women only leadership programmes, women's networks and other developmental opportunities; 2) organisational commitments such as the Advance HE Athena Swan Charter, and equality, diversity and inclusion policies; and 3) Allyship provided by senior managers. This research is important since although these types of initiatives are designed for gender equality, there has been limited research in understanding the impact they have had in institutions, and in how much they affect positive change (Westoby et al., 2021). Furthermore, allyship in higher education is an area largely under researched. Since the glass ceiling has been widely reported as a problem in UK higher education institutions, there has been slow progress reported in terms of seeing the numbers of women achieving leadership roles (Advance HE, 2019; Equality Challenge Unit, 2013, 2016).

Using a qualitative mixed methods approach, a post-92 institution in the UK was selected to evaluate the initiatives they had in place in response to the challenges facing women's career progression. This institution, at the time of data collection, employed over 4000 staff and where women represented approximately 2% of senior management roles. Two population groups were selected for data collection. The first were women who worked in the institution and earned up to £65K (participant group one) and were asked to complete an anonymous online survey on their perception of the initiatives, where 173 responses were recorded representing an 11% sample. The second participant group were male and senior female managers who were employed at grades above that, occupying roles such as Dean, Director, Pro Vice Chancellor. Similar questions were also presented in twelve semi structured interviews which were conducted (7 women and 5 men) and represented a 32% sample of senior leaders in the institution. Thematic analysis using NVivo was adopted to explore themes relevant to the three main areas of study.

This chapter focuses on summarising the conclusions from the study, and includes a breakdown of the research objectives, how the research responds to them, and practical recommendations to the academic and practitioner communities. It also summarises the limitations of the study and further research that can be undertaken, as well as the researchers own reflections on the process.

6.2   Achieving aims and objectives

The study aimed to critically evaluate the perceived effects, barriers and opportunities of initiatives and organisational commitments that aim to support more women* into senior leadership positions within a UK higher education institution. Specifically, there were six objectives, where the summary of the findings are are discussed below in response to each objective:

1. **To identify and analyse current practice in the wider Higher Education sector on strategies for supporting women into senior positions.**

This objective aimed to assess current literature on the glass ceiling, women's progression in UK higher education, the initiatives currently in place and the barriers, to fully understand what was required to be further explored and to help refine and shape the study itself. The glass ceiling concept is not a new one, where organisations both public, private and third sector, all face dilemmas on how to solve gender equality issues, specifically for women attaining senior roles (Chartered Management Institute, 2022). In UK higher education, this is no different, and whilst there has been some progress made in recent years, it has been insufficient in terms of men and women having equal opportunities and status (Advance HE, 2021a, 2021b; Equality Challenge Unit, 2010, 2013, 2016). The barriers that women face have been largely reported, and a literature review grid was developed as part of the study to see where the main effects and barriers existed in the literature (see appendix A). These included personal factors, work related factors, access and selection issues, culture and infrastructure.

In recent years, higher education institutions have had a responsibility to be seen to be making efforts in closing the career gaps between men and women and have attempted to do so through the introduction of initiatives such as the development of women's only leadership programmes, women's networks, coaching and mentoring, and other development opportunities. Institutions have also been working to achieve status from the UK Athena Swan charter, which is "*is a framework which is used across the globe to support and transform gender equality within higher education and research*" (Advance HE, 2020a, para. 1). Institutions have also developed equality, diversity and inclusion policies, and developed councils and committees responsible for driving activities forwards. Finally, the literature also pointed towards allyship, being a newer concept in higher education, where recent studies have focussed more on male allyship rather than allyship in general (Madsen et al., 2019). For the purposes of this research, allyship was defined as *'the actions, behaviours, and practices that leaders take to support, amplify, and advocate with others, especially with individuals who don't belong to the same social identity groups as themselves'* (Center for Creative Leadership, 2023, para. 4). Allyship has been seen to have taken different forms, from more formal arrangements such as senior managers providing patronage, or taking someone 'under their wing', to providing more advocacy roles such as raising awareness of gender equality issues or challenging discriminative behaviour where it occurs.

The literature demonstrated that whilst these initiatives had been put into place by institutions as a means of breaking the glass ceiling for women, there was lesser research into investigating these different aspects of leadership and development, organisational commitments, and allyship, holistically through one institution (Westoby et al., 2021). The literature evaluated also featured more heavily on data collected from the academic community, even though the sector employs a large proportion of professional services staff. These factors helped to further refine and design the methods for study.

2. **To develop and design a conceptual framework to explore the key themes of the study.**

In response to the first objective, the next stage of the research was to design a framework for which the key outcomes could be further explored. The conceptual framework, discussed in section 2.7, illustrates the three main factors for study, including 1) leadership and development initiatives, 2) organisation commitments, and 3) allyship. The framework also illustrated the intended effects of such initiatives being in place, and the barriers purported by women as shown from previous research studies. This framework was designed and provided a 'golden thread' throughout the study, to help choose the research methods, tools, design the questions and analyse data from the study. The framework also provides an opportunity for researchers to explore these key concepts in other higher education environments.

3. **To critically evaluate the effectiveness of current leadership development initiatives affecting leadership progression for women at a UK higher education institution.**

This objective set out to seek the perceptions of women working in the institution, and of male and female senior leaders on how well the current leadership and development initiatives work, including those such as the Aurora Women in Leadership programme, women's networks, staff MBA and coaching programmes. An overwhelming theme across this and the next objective, was that of visibility and engagement. Women in the institution expressed significant challenges in knowing about these various initiatives and gaining access to them. For those women who were aware of the initiatives, there were acknowledged benefits in terms of self-development, such as increased confidence, resilience, and other self-efficacy skills, however they had limited effect in terms of actually supporting women to progress into more senior roles.

Career planning as a result of engagement in development initiatives were seen as an important effect for women, particularly by senior managers, though findings suggested that this was not consistent across the board. Many senior managers

viewed talent management as something that needed improvement in the institution, referring again to the alignment of engagement with these types of initiatives to future career steps. There were reports of frustration that opportunities for promotion do not exist for women who have participated in these programmes, resulting in a loss of talent as women leave the institution to pursue other opportunities. This raises questions for institutions on how these types of initiatives can be aligned with future job prospects. In other words, what's next for women who do engage? Whilst institutions are investing thousands of pounds in external women only programmes, and staff time and resources, there needs to be some consideration on what happens after engagement, and how to capitalise on new skills, expertise and knowledge gained that can contribute positively to the leadership of the university.

Another significant finding was that the main challenges faced by women in terms of engagement with leadership programmes surprisingly were not in personal circumstance, but that of work-related barriers, something that was not recognised as a major issue by senior managers. Workloads, work stress, and support of managers were the main factors in stopping women from engaging with leadership development initiatives, where personal responsibilities such as caring, whilst featuring in the study, was not reported as significant. Managers also emphasised the problem of ensuring that programme selection processes were fair and targeted the right women at the appropriate stage of their careers. This has raised challenges about how women can be better encouraged to participate, both in terms of work-related support and in understanding what they want to get out of such programmes in order to better assess whether it is the right choice for them.

It was clear from the study findings that women value being part of a women's only network, but that in terms of impact, they have demonstrated limited change on progression opportunities. Networks were seen to be something that is needed in creating a safe space for women to share challenges, be collegial and feel supported, all of which is vital, but could be explored further to understand how women's networks can be used to lobby for change within institutions, and how they can positively affect culture.

The effectiveness of leadership and development initiatives found that (for those that were aware of them) there was some reported benefits for those who engaged, though this did not mean a direct impact on being able to access opportunities for more senior roles. The research found that leadership and development initiatives have been designed to address barriers identified at an individual level, such as building confidence and having a safe space with other women to share challenges and understand how to navigate these. Whilst the value of these initiatives should not be undervalued and are an important part of supporting women, there needs to be more clarity in institutions that communicates the specific benefits for engagement, if it is not leading to a promotion or progression of any kind. If for example, the objective is to increase self-development skills, then these types of initiatives are clearly beneficial. If, however a woman is already displaying leadership traits, and has demonstrates some levels of confidence, then other routes for development may result in a more direct impact depending on what the end goal is. In this context, senior managers have a crucial part to play in participating in discussions with women in their teams to determine the best pathways to take depending on their ambitions, and to support in aligning this with taking the next steps in their career goals.

4. **To critically evaluate the effectiveness of current organisational commitments affecting leadership progression for women at a UK higher education institution.**

This objective set out to assess the effectiveness of organisational commitments in the institution, which are initiatives that are put in place at a more strategic level to demonstrate a commitment and activities towards gender inequalities. For the institution, these were the Advance HE Athena Swan charter, and equality, diversity, and inclusion policies/councils put in place to create change. Similar to the leadership and development initiatives, there was a significant challenge with the visibility and engagement of organisational level commitments, with many research participants not being familiar with the charters or policies that the institution had in place. Even where there was some knowledge, it was limited.

The most significant reported barrier in the implementation of organisational level commitments was culture, specifically in who is accountable for ensuring these commitments work. The findings demonstrated that, despite the will of the many, change is unlikely to occur without commitment from the institution's senior leaders as policymakers, and that challenges of gender inequality at the leadership level can only be addressed through the commitment and passion of others in senior leadership roles, as they have the power to instigate change, invest resources and set priorities. Culture change takes time, but by considering the different recommendations drawn through this study, there would be step changes to work towards more positive outcomes, where initiatives can be seen to be making impacts rather than being viewed as tick box or tokenistic. Any culture change also needs to consider the role of discipline, where further sub-cultures have potential further impact (for example, with higher representations of men in in STEM, there are opportunities for higher engagement in male allyship initiatives).

Another major area reported was on the measurement of impact of these types of commitments and initiatives. Respondents, and senior managers, suggested that whilst initiatives are intended to result in positive outcomes and provides a roadmap for the institution to work towards, there needed to be more emphasis on how progress is measured. This would instil confidence in women in the institution that targets for change were being treated seriously and are a priority. It was clear that women valued having 'the conversation', but that communication was lacking on what senior managers were taking accountability for, what the targets were, and how these were being evaluated. Additionally, findings suggested that the institution would benefit from looking externally to see where best practice has occurred, even outside of the education sector.

A main barrier to the organisation level commitments was that of infrastructure. Similar to the leadership and development initiatives, there was a sense that without the proper investment of time, money and resources, the initiatives would have very limited influence on change. High workloads, how initiatives are organised, and administrative burden were cited as being problematic to progress and affects how successful they can be in the short and longer term.

It was clear that currently, the organisational commitments in place do not lead to more women attaining leadership roles, indicating that they are seen more as 'tick box' exercises rather than having any real influence over change. The findings also suggested that infrastructure affects the success of these types of initiatives, with high workload, lack of budget and ineffective staffing structures all contributing to the level of effectiveness.

5. To critically evaluate the potential impact of allyship on leadership progression for women.

This objective was included into the study as a newer concept discovered in the literature. Institutions have started to recognise that allyship is one way (though not formalised) of supporting more women into leadership positions (Nash et al., 2021b, 2021a; Warren & Bordoloi, 2021). Therefore this objective was to evaluate the potential impact that allyship would have for women looking to attain progression or promotion within the institution.

The findings indicated that allyship was overwhelmingly an important factor to consider when supporting women into leadership. This fell broadly into two main areas, formal allyship and informal allyship. Formal allyship was seen as either mentoring and coaching schemes, or sponsorship, such as senior managers actively providing a colleague with access to new opportunities or networks. This was reported by both women in the institution, and senior managers as an important aspect of allyship, and perhaps more impactful in supporting women into leadership roles than other initiatives in existence. However, some of the perceived barriers to be considered included those related to infrastructure, in particular senior managers having the time and space to actively engage in allyship activities whether it be coaching a member of staff or working on providing opportunities for others to gain experience. Factors related to issues of 'sharing knowledge and networks' also emerged as a challenge, as that meant that senior managers would need to share power, be benevolent, and put others career development before their own needs.

Informal allyship was also seen as something valuable and included senior managers or allies advocating for others in public forums, raising awareness of

gender inequality issues, or directly calling out discriminative practice where it is observed. Although many senior managers who participated in the research saw themselves as allies, many did not describe allyship in terms of where this had taken place for those in minority groups, describing it more as a supportive role in the workplace. This results in a need for more understanding, training and conversation about the role of allyship, which also came out as a theme. Many women wanted to see more of these behaviours being practiced in the workplace (becoming the 'norm') and is something that isn't as challenging as the more formal aspects of allyship as described above, as apart from training, does not require significant time investment. Although the literature presents more research from a 'male allyship' perspective, with the argument that without male allies (who hold power), very little will change (Madsen et al., 2019), this research found that women would value both male and female allies, as it was important to have strong female role models that can inspire other aspirational leaders. However, this should be approached with caution. Naturally, if there are more senior male leaders in an institution, by proxy this should mean that there are more male allies, though this is not currently the case where women often take on diversity work. It is therefore important that the balance of diversity work (who does it), is considered by managers carefully.

The potential for allyship in Universities is positive, and it has the likelihood of being another tool for supporting women into leadership, using both formal and informal approaches to the role. In order for this to be effective, more needs to be understood about how allyship can be adopted successfully, what a good ally looks like, and training delivered to senior leaders in the institution.

6. **Deliver academic and practice-based recommendations that will enable more women to succeed in the attainment of senior leadership positions.**

In terms of the recommendations based on study findings that are relevant to both the academic community, and to practitioners, these are further discussed in detail as follows.

6.2.1 Recommendations to the academic community

The study has contributed to academic practice in several ways. It has brought together key concepts in the literature to explore how initiatives support, or otherwise, women to achieve progression and promotion in a UK higher education institution. Though the study has found leadership and development initiatives, organisation commitments, and allyship as valuable in supporting women, there is much work to be done in ensuring that they work more effectively. Therefore it is proposed that the academic community can take this work further in the following ways:

- **Application of framework in other contexts**
  The framework should be applied in other contexts and environments within the higher education sector.
- **Work-related barriers**
  As work-related barriers were highlighted, there is a need for universities to consider the delegation and engagement of women in gender diversity work, including mentoring and coaching, to ensure that it is fair and equal.
- **Lobbying potential for networks**
  Whilst women's only networks have proved to be valuable for this study, and for others previous to it, there is further understanding needed in how women's only networks can move from those with intentions to support, build confidence and share in a safe space, to those that are able to lobby and influence senior management teams for change. Network leads should start to engage with senior leadership, for example, in opening up a dialogue that allows for direct feedback from the network into more formal governance structures.
- **Impact and Benchmarking**
  The study has demonstrated that there is a need to consider benchmarking, and to look outside of the sector for elements of best practice, to aid in setting out institutional priorities and how they will be achieved. The academic community should develop ways of understanding what types of benchmarking or evaluation frameworks can be used for the ongoing monitoring of initiatives.

Allyship

- It is important that further research is implemented as more allyship initiatives are introduced into Universities, to understand what makes for effective allyship, what the possible challenges may be, and what techniques might be effective for training new allies.

6.2.2 Recommendations for practice

In terms of practice based recommendations, these may be largely applicable to the institution where the research took place, however, could also be of benefit to other institutions where similar initiatives are in operation.

As found through this study, all of the initiatives, whilst seen as important, are currently having limited impact on supporting more women into leadership roles. This research has highlighted the main barriers that are preventing them from being more successful, and therefore it is recommended that the institution considers the following areas.

- **Seek external best practice**
  Understanding where other institutions have pockets of excellent practice, even outside of academia, will help the institution set benchmarks and broaden knowledge of what works. There is an opportunity to learn and share with others outside of the institution to help refine how initiatives are designed, executed, and monitored to ensure impact. This could be achieved through better engagement with professional networks.

- **Monitor ongoing impact**
  All initiatives and programmes need to have regular checkpoints built in to readdress who is engaged and whether it is leading to progress within the institution, and could possibly form part of the EDI functions within Universities, as a co-ordination role, and using available data from within the institution. This needs to be clear and visible across the institution.

- **Raise the profile of initiatives**
  To overcome issues of visibility, it is recommended to develop a communication strategy and launch for supporting women in the institution,

that acknowledges what the overarching challenges are, communicates existing targets and timescales, and details how impact of the initiatives will be measured. This will help assure women that there is a commitment at an institutional scale.

- **Question the purpose**

It is recommended that women in the institution and managers have more clarity on the purpose of leadership programmes/initiatives, what the intended outcomes are, and how it may or may not align to their future job prospects. This is important in ensuring there is a focus on retaining talent after investment of time and resource has taken place. This could be achieved through existing 1-1's between women and their managers, on the aims of engagement and aspirations for the future.

- **Mandatory objectives for managers**

It is recommended that all managers are set clear objectives on how they are supporting their direct reports that aspire to progress within the institution.

- **Accountability**

To enable initiatives to work, senior leaders need to take accountability of the initiatives ('becoming the policymakers') and lead on driving forwards some of the gender work on behalf of the institution. For example, each PVC, or DVC in an institution could take strategic leadership accountability for different aspects of EDI (i.e. Athena Swan, mentoring programmes, networks).

- **Invest for success**

Senior managers should consider how each of these areas are appropriately resourced and invested in. Considerations should include time for strategic leads, investment in a central EDI function for co-ordination and promotion, and recognition of volunteers.

- **Assess current policies and procedures**

Equality impact assessments should be undertaken across all policies and procedures in the institution that can affect women's career progression to highlight where bias may be present.

- **Implement allyship training and resources**

Allyship has proved to be an important area for development for the institution, and there needs to be some consideration about how to take this forward. There first and foremost needs to be some training delivered on

allyship, to include what allyship means, what a good ally looks like, whose responsibility it is, and how it can be done in practice. The resourcing of allyship also needs to be considered so that the work is not unevenly attributed to senior women in the institution.

6.3   Limitations and future research

As with any research study, there are boundaries of what can be achieved within the given timescales and resources available. Whilst this research provides some generalisable findings, it is bound in the context and environment of the institution in which the research took place, where the make-up of staff and senior leaders flex and change through time. The findings therefore may be limited in terms of the recommendations for other institutions, although can be used as a blueprint for other Universities to investigate specific challenges in their own contexts. Additionally, although this study has provided an analysis of the views of women in the institution on initiatives designed to support career progression, they have limitations in not fully representing the more intersectional challenges faced by women who have other protected characteristics. It would therefore be beneficial to have a series of studies that focus more on women's career progression for disabled women, women of colour, women of a certain age, or other protected characteristics. A smaller response rate from the survey participants may also constrain the ability to draw broader conclusions, however nevertheless the data remains accurate and robust from those who did respond.

Being an inside researcher can also raise potential risk of being bias, in having preconceived notions on the topic, particularly as a woman. However, these were addressed through regular reflection, using the supervisory process as peer review and checking of interpretations, and in drawing on comparisons and differences to support or challenge notions from both data sets.

The research has highlighted several areas of focus that may be useful for further study, based on the recommendations to the academic community. Areas worthy of further investigation that may follow on as a result of this study include:

1. Work-related barriers – Further research on the implications of work-related barriers on women attaining leadership positions is vital. The research has demonstrated that this was a significant issue for women in the institution, where solutions need to be further explored.

2. Women's only initiatives – Although clear benefits and challenges in engagement of women's only initiatives are apparent through this study, it has highlighted a need to further understand the motivations for engagement from a woman's perspective, and the distinct differences between women only versus mixed gender leadership initiatives.

3. Women's networks – Whilst the research has demonstrated that the benefits from women's networks are in sharing, gaining allies and providing a safe environment to share, there is opportunity to understand how women's only networks can be used to lobby culture change in institutions.

4. Cultural barriers at a micro level – Understanding the more complex issues specific to different sub-cultures (such as disciplinary groups, different roles, or different departments).

5. Policy into practice – Better understanding about how to implement best practice, and how the use of plans, charters and initiatives lead to actual change.

6. Allyship - Whilst the research has uncovered benefits and challenges to allyship, this remains an under researched area within higher education. As more allyship initiatives are formalised, they would benefit from further investigation as to their impact. Additionally, research on 'who' is providing the allyship work, and characteristics of what makes a good ally, would be beneficial.

6.4   Concluding thoughts

This research study stemmed from a passion for change for women in higher education, and to understand what helps or hinders their progression into senior leadership roles. I believe that diversity in a senior leadership team brings vast benefits to the way institutions are run, with some Universities in the UK being slower to keep up with the pace of change demonstrated in some private sector organisations. Whilst gender equality is a known societal challenge, it will take all

kinds of efforts to affect change, which is why I felt looking at the initiatives that were already in place was one important aspect, to understand how the institution can improve on what is already in place. Being able to conduct research within one UK higher education institution to look at what some of the issues, challenges, and opportunities were, have helped the institution to really understand what is needed to move forwards. However, leaders shouldn't be afraid to ditch what isn't working, and to look at embracing more radical approaches, which is why looking outside the sector on what works is an important step forward. For example, in working with professional bodies to better understand the value of evaluated mentorship and sponsorship programmes, accessing networks, training and development and for benchmarking (i.e. Advance HE). On a personal level, this research study has been transformative for me, as I have not only gained a more significant, in-depth understanding of the challenges that women face, what works, and what we can do to move forward, but I have also been able to develop new research, communication, and self-development skills that I will be able to apply in my future roles. The research has shown me that, whilst some fractures in the glass ceiling have started to emerge, it will take time and effort from everyone, but especially institutional leadership, to totally smash through. I'm hoping to still be active in my career long enough to see that happen.

Chapter 7: Reflective Diary

7.1 Introduction

Writing a Doctorate in Business Administration thesis has proved to be a significant part of my life, both professionally and personally. This critical reflection aims to look back at the various stages of the Doctorate in Business Administration (DBA) programme using Rolfe et al.'s (2001) reflective model (figure 7.1) as a framework for reflection.
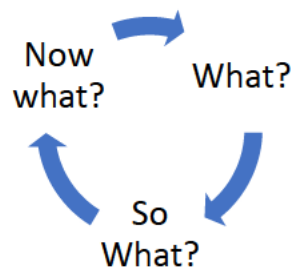
Figure 7.1: (Rolfe et al., 2001) **Reflective Model**

This framework provided me with a way to contemplate my lived experiences relating to my academic and practice journey on the DBA thus far, including scholarly development, the process of rigorous research, skills required for effective study and the practical implications for study. The reflection details my transformative experiences, how I felt about them, what was beneficial, what was challenging, **('what'),** what I learned from the experience, and what it taught me about my relationships with others **(so what?)** and what actions I needed to focus on moving forwards into the next stage of the DBA **('now what?')**. The reflection details the main learning points I have encountered on my DBA journey and are structured around the following themes (see figure 7.2).

The Research Process

Support and Guidance

Personal Challenges

Practice Based Change and Impact
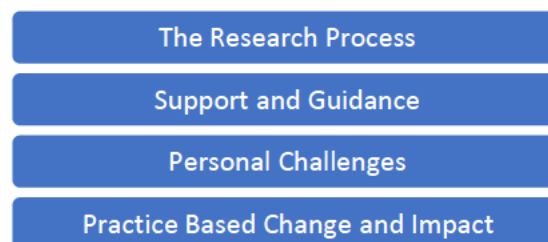
Figure 7.2: Structure of Reflective Chapter

The main areas of reflection were captured throughout my journey in the form of a diary, to explore the different experiences that have helped me to improve as a researcher, as a practitioner, and as a person. The chapter starts with reflections on aspects of the research process, including reading, writing, setting boundaries and learning to defend the study. It then moves on to reflect on the different types of support I have accessed throughout the study and how they have impacted me, including from the supervisory process, from peers, and from discipline specific communities. Also included in the reflection are challenges I have faced in getting to the stage at which I am, including becoming a more resilient person, how I have navigated the challenges and pressures of work and family life, balancing this with the DBA study. Finally, and as a key aspect of the DBA itself, are reflections on the practical implications of the study to date, including the challenges of impact in a large institution with varying levels of decision making power, how I have and will be working with my professional mentor, and what actions need to take place in the future to ensure the findings from the study are noted and acted upon.

7.2   The Research Process

Reflection Entry 1 - Balancing reading and writing….

During the initial stages of my DBA, I focussed on bringing together a draft literature review on my chosen topic of women in leadership. I found the process of developing the literature review enjoyable, frustrating, and at times enlightening! If I think back to the DBA induction, I never envisaged the number of rabbit holes that the literature would take me down into. I consider myself to be someone who likes to just get on and complete the task at hand, and therefore 'wallowing' in the literature at the start felt to me like an indulgence (even though later on in the process it had enabled me to develop a framework based on existing evidence to underpin my research focus – something which was fundamental to ensuring rigour!). My background is in project management, so I am used to a structured approach to working, with set targets. I initially set myself a target of writing 650 words a week on my literature review chapter, and this soon came to an abrupt halt a few weeks into the programme. On reflection, I found that the targets I had set myself were

unworkable, as even if I had a whole day to focus, I was often reading approximately 80% of the time, and writing, re-writing, and (often) deleting paragraphs for 20% of the time. On some days, I wouldn't write anything substantial, and would just produce a series of handwritten notes and thoughts. This started to make me feel deflated that I was already failing to meet the targets which I had set myself. Although I told myself that the time spent reading was equally important as the writing phase, I think I struggled with it initially as there was nothing substantially tangible to demonstrate for the time I was setting aside to study in the first couple of months. I recognised within weeks of starting the DBA that I had to really rethink how I approached study.

To help with this, I had a conversation with a friend who was near to the completion of her Doctorate as a means of support, and she gave me some advice which made me think differently in the way I approached carving up the time I spent on study. She told me that the initial writing should just be 'good enough' for the stage I am at, in demonstrating a good knowledge of the topic area that would inform by study, but would likely change and update the more I got into it, as it is part of the growth and development of the thesis. She also reassured me that there would be times when I may be writing 80% of the time and reading 20%, and that setting targets with some flexible tolerance either way would help. This was reaffirmed by one of the Course Directors at the next workshop and therefore reassured me that how I felt at the time was normal. I therefore started to view the work as 'continuous improvement' and something that would evolve the further into the research process I went, rather than attempting to produce something shiny and polished at a first attempt! This hasn't been an easy process, and has taken some practice, for example in 'letting go' of the first draft of the literature review and moving on, however the more people I spoke to, including my supervisor, gave me the confidence that it would eventually all fall into place.

When entering the methodology stage, I felt that I had 'found my groove' and started to learn not to beat myself up for not producing 1000s of words at a time, valuing the process of reading as equally valuable as the output. After the first three years and having drafted the introduction, literature review, methodology and findings chapter, I went through the process of feeling at times confident to completely lost, and

everything in-between! Upon starting the discussion and analysis chapter, and as initially advised by my support network, I then started working backwards and revising the literature, ensuring that any new studies were included, and that everything threaded together into a coherent story. As I started this chapter, I had a bit of a lightbulb moment, and a much needed validation of my research, when I found a recent paper that I hadn't originally put in my literature review (Westoby et al., 2021). The paper had brought together a systematic literature review of the research in my field, and I was reassured to see that the studies included in this paper I had already referred to in my own literature review. Furthermore (and more importantly), the paper included in its recommendations for future research, my own study area - "*evaluation of the impact of interventions which support changes in gender equality in academia*" (Westoby et al., 2021, p. 1052). This gave me great confidence I was on the right track and gave me the final push of motivation needed to get to the finish line. As I entered the final stages of writing up my discussion and analysis of my findings, I focussed on ensuring that I continued to read relevant reports and articles to inform my thinking and writing, and that just because I was at the stage of writing up, reading and thinking were still as fundamental to the process as when I first started.

Reflection Entry 2 – How do I know when to stop reading and set some boundaries?!...

As I reflect on the initial reading phases, I have acknowledged that another challenge for me was to know when to stop reading. There were so many filters in the literature to consider such as timespan, article type, location of study, methodology and sector, which threw up thousands of results and made me feel like I was drowning in a minefield of articles! Being able to be open to numbers of possibilities was a learning curve for me and revealed that I needed to concentrate on adjusting my perspective to one of a journey with many different routes, some of which may wind up being dead ends. After discussing this with my supervisor, she suggested that for a few weeks I just 'went with it', using mind mapping techniques and opening up to possibilities before starting to think about how I then started to set boundaries around what I was looking for.

When reviewing the literature, my initial focus of study changed. At the start of my DBA, I had initially set out to investigating the barriers that women faced in the workplace, and as I started to read, I found that the barriers were widely known and evidenced, with a literature based already well established. What wasn't so established was any critical evaluation into the impact of the interventions Universities had put into place to try and combat this issue, at least, collectively. This then became the focus of my study. It was still a big research topic, and I initially struggled with setting the boundaries around what I would study in particular. For example, I discussed with my supervisor the possibility of focussing on one protected characteristic, such as disabled women, or women from black and minority ethnic groups. Eventually, we agreed that a baseline evaluation of the impact of initiatives would be more helpful to the institution, but also open enough to allow challenges and opportunities from different protected characteristic groups to come through the data collected. My supervisor then suggested that I adopted the strategy of setting some specific keywords for study, and geographical areas, and sector specific (where possible) which helped me to place some boundaries around the literature I was considering. As a result, I developed a literature review grid to understand the breadth of papers and the common and different themes that were being uncovered. This helped me to hone-in on the work that was relevant to my study, and what I would include and exclude in the review.

In addition to setting these parameters, it helped me in the earlier stages to reflect on the type of learning style I adopt and how this related to my approaches to study. In considering Honey and Mumford Learning Styles (Honey and Mumford, 1982), I identified that I align most closely to a pragmatist, who likes to see the connections between theory and practice and enjoys working within practical frameworks. In a working environment, I tend to be very hands-on (I need to be, as a manager!), and often this involves getting things done within a given timeframe whilst managing competing priorities. In considering this alongside my doctoral study, it enabled me to challenge my thinking of how I was best able to bring all of the literature and concepts into the practical world, in order to develop my critical thinking and theoretical skills. In recognising this, it helped me to develop a framework that represented the main concepts in the literature, that would act as the foundation for my study. Recognising and being more aware of pragmatic characteristics has also

helped me to try and push my own boundaries of how I view the world, such as trying to be more open to exploring down the rabbit holes, but also knowing when to stop and know what is practicably beneficial to the study. This has helped me to evolve as a stronger researcher, and also to grow in confidence and 'know my topic'. The development of the reflective diary has helped me to keep an open mind and explore interesting new possibilities, not only for the DBA, but also in my practical role as a manager, and something that I hope continues.

Reflection Entry 3 – Learning to defend…

A key aspect of the Doctorate in Business Administration was in developing confidence in rigour for the study, and developing the narrative that will ultimately end in a defence of the research. Reflecting on where I was when I started the DBA in 2020, to where I am now, I can see how I have changed as a researcher. At the beginning of the process, I wouldn't have considered myself an expert in the area of women in leadership. As I started to go through the process of developing the literature review, over a period of the first twelve months, and revisiting this throughout the study, I feel that I now have a good understanding of the topic area. In reading about different methodologies, approaches, and data collection and analysis techniques, At the beginning of the process, I wouldn't have challenged anyone who told me that 'x' should be done this way, or 'y' methods should be adopted, but this has now changed. Through the questioning from my supervisor, and from peers and friends, it has enabled me to think more deeply about my approaches and to be able to defend why I approached this in the way that I did.

One example of this was when I submitted an ethics application to the institutional online system which included my approach to research, and my research instruments, one of which included an anonymous online survey. After receiving some constructive comments from the reviewer, they suggested that by asking open ended questions on an online survey, it would give potential for participants to be identified, and therefore asked for the survey to be changed to non-anonymous and to give participants the opportunity to withdraw their responses. I was worried about the impact of this approach, as the reason for the survey being anonymous was to be able to get as many responses as possible and would allow women to express

their opinions as openly and freely as possible, particularly as it was research within the institution. As I was further into the research process and could justify why I had approached data collection in this way, I felt confident enough to be able to negotiate a middle ground so that the study wasn't compromised but still maintained the high ethical standards of the University committee. As a compromise, the survey remained anonymous but included a warning at each open-ended question to ensure that they did not include any identifiable information.

Additionally, the nature of supervision meetings have also evolved over the duration of the DBA. At the beginning of the process, I just did what was asked of me, but through questioning techniques from my Director of Studies, she started to encourage me to justify my approaches and engage in debate, all of which helped me to prepare for the final stages of the Doctorate. As I turned to submission of the thesis, I continued to practice this approach and started to expose my research to people who currently do not know about it, in order to practice answering whatever questions may come my way.

7.3   Support and Guidance

Reflection Entry 1 – Learning from the supervisory process…

With the exception of a change in the Director of Studies near the end of my first year of study, I have had a fantastic experience with the supervision process. My first Director of Studies left the institution, which to me was unnerving as I had already established a sense of a plan and worried this may change. Nevertheless, I soon had a new Director of Studies, and our working relationship became constructive and encouraging very quickly. I have always felt challenged, but most importantly, supported and respected throughout the process. I met with my supervisor every couple of weeks, with email contact in-between where we needed to, and she has been accessible, friendly, and supportive throughout whilst providing constructive criticism and questioning my approaches. She has constantly encouraged me to keep pushing on whilst maintaining elements of self-reflection, promoting the DBA as a circular approach, rather than a linear process. I have not encountered any major challenges with this relationship, however, have been reflecting on what it takes to be able to have a collaborative supervision relationship and how I was able get the

very best out of the process. At the outset, I perceived the relationship I had with my supervisor to be straight forward, involving regular catchups, someone to ask for advice and someone who I could raise a red flag to if I went in the wrong direction. On reflection, I realise that it was much more than that. I consider one of my strengths to be the ability to work independently and autonomously, however in starting the DBA I didn't find it uncommon to experience feelings of low-confidence and self-esteem in my topic area, questioning my own ability to study at this level. This reared its ugly head on several occasions throughout the process, in particular when I started the literature review, and when I started to analyse my data. At these times, I experienced feeling lost, confused (and on the rare occasion willing to throw the towel in!). During these times, my supervisor played a key role in being a supporter of me, providing care and encouragement, which in turn helped in building my confidence, and has helped to develop a trusted relationship, something which is essential to success for the Doctorate (van Rooij et al., 2021). Of course it has not all been plain sailing. There have been times when I haven't understood the advice that was being given and felt that I should have. It has taken time to develop trust, understand each other and having the confidence to be honest when I haven't understood something. As our relationship has developed, she also came to recognise non-verbal cues and could see when I perhaps felt worried or less confident about aspects of my study. All of these aspects of the supervisory process have developed over time, and for me, has moved me from the view that that the process of supervision is a 'you say, I'll do' exchange, to me taking accountability for my thoughts, ideas and actions. The relationship for me shifted into being a collaborative process – one in which enabled me to build on my independence as a researcher and started to become knowledgeable about my subject area in a niche, yet in-depth way.

The doctoral supervision relationship has also enabled me to reflect and further develop my own leadership capabilities and has offered insights into how to better foster effective collaborations through understanding different problem solving techniques and approaches to working.

Reflection Entry 2 - Learning from Peers…

The peer support from other colleagues in the cohort has been extremely valuable. In the workshop sessions in year one, sharing our projects through presenting to each other was particularly insightful to see where there were commonalities in topics, approaches to research and challenges that we all faced. As a group, we have been encouraged to connect with one another both inside and outside of the sessions. Outside of the workshops, this has been an ongoing challenge (particularly with colleagues overseas). We have a WhatsApp group that I set up, and is used on occasion, however we have not connected as much as we thought we may have at the start. On reflection, this is no surprise since the make-up of students on the DBA means that we are all juggling busy management roles with our own research projects and family commitments, and therefore time to meet as a group was always going be a challenge. Additionally, had it not been for the COVID-19 pandemic, we would have all met face to face at the start of the programme and would have more time to get to know one another, which has been more challenging online.

In the latter stages of the programme there has been more of an opportunity to connect with each other at face-to-face sessions, such as the DBA conference which took place in July 2023. Initially I had my reservations about making time for a 2-day conference outside of the workplace, as it was a busy time of year for me, with various staff absences in the team at work. However, the outcomes of attending resulted not only in learning about others' DBA projects and where possible synergies are, but also in developing new networks with other cohorts, shared understanding, and in being questioned and constructively challenged about my research – all of which has helped in moving towards the end of the research study. I am sure that there is likely much more to be shared, discussed and experienced together that I would benefit from, and look forward to the opportunities for this.

One surprising element of peer learning that I hadn't anticipated has been in the development of relationships with two other DBA candidates who work at my institution. One of whom I already knew in a professional capacity, who was further on in the registration period, and was able to offer advice and support to me, particularly in the area of time management and how she had negotiated blocked out

time to focus on study with her manager. Since we both shared the same manager, I was able to negotiate the same arrangement for me to block out some time in the later stages of my DBA (something which I struggled with in the first two years). We set up mini writing retreats together, to motivate each other to keep moving forwards. The other relationship has been with another member of staff who works at the institution but who is in my cohort, and we share the same Director of Studies. We very quickly fell into a rhythm of meeting on a regular basis for coffee, quite often when we were both on regular Friday study days. I didn't realise at the start how much I would come to rely on this relationship. We have used each other to sense check different aspects of the research journey (such as progress review panels and ethics), to pilot research instruments, to use each other for feedback, and to discuss synergies with our research. As well as this, we have tried to keep each other grounded with a sense of perspective. For example, when one of us have had periods of low confidence or motivation, one has helped pick the other up. We have also kept a friendly competition of progress to keep pushing each other on. Discussions have often centred around organisational issues that may impact on our studies, such as time dedicated to study and the pressures of work, but we have also found space to discuss our approaches to research, our methods, and impact on the institution.

I have found much value in learning with, from and about my fellow DBA candidates, and have also developed new professional networks that I can continue to utilise in the future.

Reflection Entry 3 – Learning from the experts…

Upon applying for the DBA, one of the elements that attracted me to the programme was learning from others who were established experts in the field. I have had a great opportunity during my DBA to attend two conferences in London with the Women in Higher Education Network, which brings together a range of talented, brilliant women in higher education to discuss key topics related to career progression and barriers faced in the sector. The topics discussed were highly relatable to my own study and included navigating career trajectories, authentic leadership and breaking away from the existing cultures present within institutions. Attending these conferences not only helped me build networks, but it also helped

me identify prominent women who had published in the field and with whom I could follow up. One important example of this is a discussion I had with the CEO of WHEN, with whom I committed to stay in contact after my DBA was over in order to discuss my results and highlight information that other UK institutions could find helpful for the future.

Another external expert whom I have had the privilege of working with and learning from, is a well-established Professor who has worked at several institutions in high profile leadership roles and now runs her own women's leadership consultancy business called Women-Space. In the first year of the DBA I was lucky enough to receive some external coaching from her, and the benefits of this have been in me being able to identify next steps after I complete the DBA. The coaching was also challenging, which of course it is intended to be, and took me through some thought patterns to really challenge why I was in the career I was, why I was studying the DBA, and what I wanted to get out of it all. She presented me with an opportunity to reflect on some of what I was reading about in the early stages of my DBA, which resulted in the development of a blog piece called 'Celebrating all the Female Allies'. Extending my networks in this way means that next, I will be able to communicate my research to the wider community, whether that takes the form of peer reviewed publications, or non-academic outputs that are easily understandable in both professional and academic capacities. Having not had engaged with the conferences and coaching opportunities, I would not have felt confident to create new networks, and I would not have been able to grow in confidence in the context of my research. It has made me more self-aware in terms of taking some risks with my own learning and opening myself up to new learning opportunities. My future plans in this area are tangible – I have promised the CEO of WHEN that I would get in touch about my research once my study was finished, and that I would offer to write another blog or two for the CEO of Women-Space. I was also recently approached to deliver a session to female academics in Egypt as part of a funded project aiming to support more women into leadership positions, so my networks are continuing to extend.

7.4   Personal Challenges

Reflection Entry 1 – Navigating work, family and time pressures…

Above everything else, time management and trying to achieve a healthy work/life balance has probably had the most impact on me since commencing the DBA. At the start of the DBA the UK were in the middle of a COVID-19 pandemic. I had been working from home during this time leading the operations of an education research centre, as well as having both of my children at home (at the time aged 12 and 15), and therefore at times it was a struggle to find physical and mental space to study. When normality eventually started to resume, my role meant that I was responsible for ensuring safe return to campus for 20 of my colleagues and over 60 postgraduate candidates, with some levels of anxiety and a number of logistical problems to try and resolve along the way. Additionally, in November 2020, I went through a period of consultation at the University where, although my role was safe, my line management changed, and some immediate colleagues and friends had been placed at risk of losing their jobs. All this, whilst being classed as extremely clinically vulnerable myself from a prior stem cell transplant in 2016, meant this was an extremely challenging period on a personal level.

As part of the DBA, I was initially supposed to have 2 days a week carved out to focus on study. Although I had an extremely supportive manager, this has been challenging more often than not, due to conflicting work priorities and challenges in the sector which had resulted in some staff turnover. I had hoped that by the end of year one, I would have had my literature review and methods chapters drafted, but I ended up with only the literature review having been drafted. This resulted in a feeling of frustration and demotivation, which made me think that progress was all but impossible unless I burnt myself out. In reflecting on these work pressures, I have accepted that there is little I could have controlled at the time, due to the unprecedented nature of the pandemic and its impact on the sector, and as a result the increases on my own workload. However, there were some valuable lessons that I took away that have made it slightly more manageable for me. For example, I now question the work 'to-do' list. It was in my nature to be responsive to everyone's needs, all the time, which wasn't sustainable as I took the DBA on. In order to cope with the high workloads and in trying to 'attempt' to keep some kind of work/study/life

balance, I started to learn to delegate more, and to question the importance of things I am getting involved with. The nature of the research topic being focussed on women in leadership, and my reading, data collection and analysis has taught me to think hard about the work that I both undertake and projects that I volunteer for, in asking the question of a) how important the task is, and b) how it serves me professionally and where I want to be. Everything I approach now is impact assessed – I shifted my mindset to the DBA becoming a priority. Whereas before, I was trying to separate work and study, surely, they should be one in the same? The institution has invested in me undertaking this project, and the aim of the study is to enable the institution to benefit from its findings, so it should be as high priority as everything else, if not higher!

Of course, in reality it is not as easy as that, but for me it's been about continuously practicing these strategies to try and create a shift in mindset and maintain perspective. Prioritising competing work and family priorities will always be difficult, but as a result of the DBA (both the topic and being a practitioner-researcher), it has enabled me to better question and challenge what I am getting involved in.

7.5   Practice Based Change and Impact

Reflection Entry 1 – Navigating and planning for institutional impact…

One of my main concerns in undertaking this research study was how I was going to be able to practically influence and create change in the institution. This was a question I asked at the DBA conference in 2023 and as I moved closer to the end point, as there are several candidates working on institutional projects where we may not have the power and influence to implement the recommendations and had similar concerns to mine. In my study, what if senior leaders refused some of the recommendations based on availability of investment, resources, or even ignore them because they don't agree with them?

On the DBA, as candidates we were asked to identify a practice mentor that had authority within the institution and has the capability to enable change. My mentor was the Chief People Officer in the People Team department, whom I have met with

on occasion and has been supportive of my approaches, understands the need for change and is open and willing to listen to the findings and recommendations of the study. She also provided feedback on the tools and approaches to study. She has also introduced me to to several others in the institution that would also have a vested interest in the outcomes of the study, including a new employee experience officer with a specialist interest in equality, diversity and inclusion, and the Director of Teaching and Learning, who is also the chair of the Gender Leadership group in the institution. The recent financial challenges in the higher education sector may mean that there is not the availability of investment and resources into the outcomes of this study, or that these types of activities are not an immediate priority, which is a worry. Nevertheless, the intention is that on completion of the DBA, a summary report will be available so that considerations can be made on future actions. There is a great opportunity for impact, not least in terms of better education and awareness raising on the challenges that women face, and how senior men and women can provide valuable allyship to others, particularly in challenging financial times such as these. A further challenge is the timing of impact. Of course, any changes that result in a shift in culture can be complex and take time. However, I had a 'lightbulb' moment in attending the last DBA conference, and in listening to a colleague of mine who performs the same role as me and works in another research institute. Her DBA is focussing on 'Research Culture', and through discussion we realised that whilst we were both focussing on significantly sized topics, that there might just be some local changes based on both of our thesis findings that we could implement ourselves as a pilot, within our own institutes. As research in universities are measured in the research assessment exercise, there has been recent communication indicating that there will be a bigger focus in the next exercise on research environment, of which culture, equality, diversity and inclusion is part of (Grove, 2023), so this provides an ideal opportunity to test out some of the ideas, where we can, at a local level.). With this is mind, we have discussed the possibility of setting up several mini projects in 2024 to implement some of the findings locally, to test and see what we can achieve. The focus and remit of these projects have yet to be defined, depending on the outcomes of our thesis. Nevertheless, this is a positive step forward.

7.6   Summary

Overall, the DBA journey to date has mainly been a positive experience (with a few curve balls and hurdles to jump along the way!), and I have reflected on and learned new things about myself that I can take forward in the future. These are summarised below, as elements to work on to ensure I can work effectively and continue to learn:

- Continuing to read post DBA to aid thinking development in current and future roles.
- Continue to challenge my writing and thinking (peer reviewed publications) through seeking input from others, including my supervisor and peers.
- Continue to practice self-reflection and self-care and continue to use a reflective diary as part of my role, identifying examples and points for further learning.
- Continue to develop my networks and disseminate results from the study.
- Plan to re-connect with the Women in Higher Education Network for the dissemination of research findings, which may be of interest to the wider sector.
- Plan for the development of a further blog for Women-Space.
- Plan for peer review journal article(s).
- Set up meetings with relevant stakeholders to share findings and recommendations.
- Meet with and plan for localised impact, to ensure that as well as at an institutional level, I can adopt my findings to my immediate department and perhaps identify several pilot projects that I can instigate (with another colleague also at the final stages of their DBA).

The learning over the last four and a half years has been positively challenging, and I have learned a tremendous amount, not just about the topic area that I am studying, but also about becoming an independent researcher, how to approach research, receiving supportive criticism and embracing new experiences, as a woman, mum, wife, colleague, manager, daughter, sister, and friend. I have come to realise that writing a thesis is not just an academic process, it has provided me with an

opportunity to push the boundaries, generate new knowledge and understanding, and most importantly contribute to a growing body of knowledge that can leave a lasting mark for others to continue to build on. I am looking forward to flying the flag for women on their way to leadership roles with gusto and passion!

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Appendices

Appendix A Literature review grid with main concepts identified

| Author | Overview of research | INTENDED EFFECTS | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | | Leadership and Development Initiatives | | | Organisational Commitments | | Allyship | | | | | | | | | | |
		Self-development	Networks	Career Planning	Charters	Policies	Mentorship & Coaching	Access to opportunity	Raising Awareness	Personal factors	Stress (work-related)	Workload	Access (to new opportunities and promotions)	Selection (Selection process being bias/flawed)	Availability (of programmes, development and opportunity)	Culture	Infrastructure
Ashencaen et al., 2018	Experiences of women in UK universities and barriers faced (5-8 group discussions)										X	X		X		X	X
Barnard et al., 2022	1094 surveys on Aurora L&D Initiative impacts	X	X	X	X		X		X							X	X
Bhopal, 2019	Investigates experiences of women's progression and support for promotion in HE via case study research (HEI) interviews with 32 women				X	X				X			X		X	X	X
Burkinshaw & White, 2017	2 case studies on women in HE leadership										X	X				X	X
Coleman, 2020	60 interviews with senior leaders in UK universities - perceptions of barriers and facilitators		X	X			X			X	X		X				

| Author | Overview of research | INTENDED EFFECTS | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | | Leadership and Development Initiatives | | | Organisational Commitments | | Allyship | | | | | | | | | | |
		Self-development	Networks	Career Planning	Charters	Policies	Mentorship & Coaching	Access to opportunity	Raising Awareness	Personal factors	Stress (work-related)	Workload	Access (to new opportunities and promotions)	Selection (Selection process being bias/flawed)	Availability (of programmes, development and opportunity)	Culture	Infrastructure
Cooper, 2019	Study investigating barriers to female students and academics												X		X		X
Diehl & Dzubinski, 2016	Analysis of two studies on women leaders from differing sectors to identify and compare gender-based leadership barriers									X		X	X	X		X	
Fisher & Kinsey, 2014	Ethnographic study over 5 years on the nature and power of the academic boys club						X								X	X	X
Graves et al, 2019	Athena Swan Charter Impact Evaluation	X	X		X	X	X										X
Henderson & Bhopal, 2022	Multi-site case study investigating experiences of UK universities working on charters				X	X						X	X			X	X

| Author | Overview of research | INTENDED EFFECTS | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | | Leadership and Development Initiatives | | | Organisational Commitments | | Allyship | | | | | | | | | | |
		Self-development	Networks	Career Planning	Charters	Policies	Mentorship & Coaching	Access to opportunity	Raising Awareness	Personal factors	Stress (work-related)	Workload	Access (to new opportunities and promotions)	Selection (Selection process being bias/flawed)	Availability (of programmes, development and opportunity)	Culture	Infrastructure
Hill & Wheat, 2017	16 semi structured interviews investigating the influence of mentorship and role models in universities		X				X	X	X				X		X	X	
Howe-Walsh & Turnbull, 2016	Investigates why there is a lack of female representation at senior level for science and technology disciplines in UK universities. 20 interviews									X	X	X		X		X	
Huppatz et al., 2019	Mums experiences of maternity leave in UK HE - Interviews with 35 academics									X	X	X				X	
Kalpazidou Schmidt et al, 2020	Study analysing 16 Athena swan action plans medical sciences in a UK University	X			X	X	X									X	X

Author	Overview of research	INTENDED EFFECTS															
		Leadership and Development Initiatives			Organisational Commitments		Allyship										
		Self-development	Networks	Career Planning	Charters	Policies	Mentorship & Coaching	Access to opportunity	Raising Awareness	Personal factors	Stress (work-related)	Workload	Access (to new opportunities and promotions)	Selection (Selection process being bias/flawed)	Availability (of programmes, development and opportunity)	Culture	Infrastructure
Kandiko Howson et al., 2018	30 semi-structured interviews with female academics based in institutions in the UK investigating the gendered nature of the prestige economy in academia									X		X		X		X	X
Kruse, 2022	Qualitative study = 20 women who are university chairs						X						X		X	X	X
Macfarlane & Burg, 2019	30 interviews with female professors and a small comparison group of male professors, this research aims to investigate how women perceive their function as full professors through autobiographical recollections of their professional history.		X				X	X		X		X				X	

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Author	Overview of research	INTENDED EFFECTS															
		Leadership and Development Initiatives			Organisational Commitments		Allyship										
		Self-development	Networks	Career Planning	Charters	Policies	Mentorship & Coaching	Access to opportunity	Raising Awareness	Personal factors	Stress (work-related)	Workload	Access (to new opportunities and promotions)	Selection (Selection process being bias/flawed)	Availability (of programmes, development and opportunity)	Culture	Infrastructure
Maddrell et al, 2016	University Geography department in UK looking into gender disparity. HESA data and earlier surveys.				X	X				X			X		X		
Madsen et al, 2019	Survey of 243 men and women to identify the strategies and behaviours used by male allies.						X	X	X								
Magrane et al., 2012	Qual/Quant study on societal influences on in women's progression	X	X	X			X			X					X	X	X
Manfredi et al., 2019	Impact of recruitment firms used by HEIs and their impact on gender balance												X	X		X	X
Mate et al, 2019	Investigates the relationship between career and leadership development and culture in Australia and Vietnam and the implications for HRD. 12 interviews		X				X	X	X				X	X	X		

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Author	Overview of research	INTENDED EFFECTS															
		Leadership and Development Initiatives			Organisational Commitments		Allyship										
		Self-development	Networks	Career Planning	Charters	Policies	Mentorship & Coaching	Access to opportunity	Raising Awareness	Personal factors	Stress (work-related)	Workload	Access (to new opportunities and promotions)	Selection (Selection process being bias/flawed)	Availability (of programmes, development and opportunity)	Culture	Infrastructure
Morley, 2014	Data collected from seminars on women working in global universities	X	X				X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X
Nash et al, 2021	Study investigating male involvement in HEI AS initiatives				X	X							X	X		X	
Oveseiko et al, 2017	Secondary data analysis of 2 projects in engagement with Athena Swan charter				X	X										X	X
Palmer & Jones, 2019	Investigated the benefits of women to women mentoring as a method of helping women advance in their careers to achieve tenure - interviews 6 tenured women.	X	X				X	X					X		X	X	

| Author | Overview of research | INTENDED EFFECTS | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | | Leadership and Development Initiatives | | | Organisational Commitments | | Allyship | | | | | | | | | | |
		Self-development	Networks	Career Planning	Charters	Policies	Mentorship & Coaching	Access to opportunity	Raising Awareness	Personal factors	Stress (work-related)	Workload	Access (to new opportunities and promotions)	Selection (Selection process being bias/flawed)	Availability (of programmes, development and opportunity)	Culture	Infrastructure
Parker et al., 2018	The study investigates a leadership development programme and the value placed on how it enables more women to apply for senior positions at an Australian University = 147 responses	X	X	X			X	X						X	X		
Pyke, 2013	Investigates why there is a lack of female representation at a senior level at an Australian University. Interviews 24 women		X				X	X		X	X	X	X	X		X	X
Redmond et al, 2017	Experiences of 7 women who had achieved senior positions in an Australian University.	X	X	X			X			X							X
Reis & Grady, 2020	8 interviews with senior women to understand perceptions of mentorship	X	X	X			X	X					X	X	X	X	

Author	Overview of research	INTENDED EFFECTS															
		Leadership and Development Initiatives			Organisational Commitments		Allyship										
		Self-development	Networks	Career Planning	Charters	Policies	Mentorship & Coaching	Access to opportunity	Raising Awareness	Personal factors	Stress (work-related)	Workload	Access (to new opportunities and promotions)	Selection (Selection process being bias/flawed)	Availability (of programmes, development and opportunity)	Culture	Infrastructure
Selzer and Robles, 2019	Study based on previous surveys undertaken as part of a women's only leadership development programme to share professional development advice. Interviews with 5 women.	X	X	X										X		X	X
Shepherd, 2017	Investigates the gender imbalance in HEIs at exec level using 132 online surveys and 73 semi structured interviews									X					X	X	
Subasic et al, 2018	Experiential study on men and women as allies for gender equality				X				X					X			X
Thomas et al, 2019	Four female university employees' reflections of the workplace obstacles to gender equity									X			X	X	X		

Author	Overview of research	INTENDED EFFECTS															
		Leadership and Development Initiatives			Organisational Commitments		Allyship										
		Self-development	Networks	Career Planning	Charters	Policies	Mentorship & Coaching	Access to opportunity	Raising Awareness	Personal factors	Stress (work-related)	Workload	Access (to new opportunities and promotions)	Selection (Selection process being bias/flawed)	Availability (of programmes, development and opportunity)	Culture	Infrastructure
Tilbury, 2019	Evaluating participation in the AdvanceHE Aurora Leadership Development Programme 2018/19 as an approach to encouraging women to apply for senior roles within the university .	X	X				X			X			X	X		X	
Toffoletti & Starr, 2016	Explores women academics and work life balance - sample 31									X		X				X	X

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Appendix B Research map with approaches to data collection

MIXED METHODS (QUAL-QUAL)	RESEARCH QUESTIONS	TOOLS/DATA REQUIRED	ANALYSIS	RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

Employee perspective

HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION

Participant Group 1:

Women in the institution (employees) to up the equivalent of the top of middle management.

Participant Group 2:

Men and women defined as senior leaders.

1-How do current leadership and development initiatives in place support women progressing into leadership positions in higher education?
2-How do current organisational commitments support women into leadership positions?
3-How are these initiatives and commitments perceived and experienced by staff?
5-How can allyship support women accessing and attaining more leadership positions?
6-How can initiatives and commitments be used as a catalyst for change for the future?

Online surveys (Qualtrics)

Self-selection (non-probability) sampling

Analysis – Qualtrics, NVivo, Thematic Analysis

-To critically evaluate the effectiveness of current leadership development initiatives affecting leadership progression for women at a UK higher education institution.

To critically evaluate the effectiveness of current organisational commitments affecting leadership progression for women at a UK higher education institution.

Leadership perspective

1-How do current leadership and development initiatives in place support women progressing into leadership positions in higher education?
2-How do current organisational commitments support women into leadership positions?
4-How are these initiatives and commitments perceived by senior management within the organisation?
5-How can allyship support women accessing and attaining more leadership positions?
6-How can initiatives and commitments be used as a catalyst for change for the future?

Parallel

Semi Structured Interviews

Purposive sampling

Analysis – NVivo, Thematic analysis

- To critically evaluate the potential impact of allyship on leadership progression for women.

-Deliver academic and practice-based recommendations that will enable more women to succeed in the attainment of senior leadership positions.

Women in Leadership Survey

The study will assess the perceptions and impact of initiatives and organisational commitments that aim to support women into leadership positions within the University Group.

More specifically, this includes:
1. Investigating the impact of women's leadership and development Initiatives
2. Investigating the impact of organisational level commitments (such as Athena Swan, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Council and policy)
3. Investigating the potential of allyship* for supporting women as leaders

NB - for the purposes of this research, please note that the term 'allyship' is defined as - 'the actions, behaviors, and practices that leaders take to support, amplify, and advocate with others, especially with individuals who don't belong to the same social identity groups as themselves' (Center for Creative Leadership 2022).

The study is being conducted by Marie Sams as part of the Doctorate in Business Administration (DBA) programme. You have been selected to take part in this survey because you are a woman that works at the CU Group earning up to £65K. The term women include trans women and non-binary people who are comfortable in a female centered community (WHEN 2022).

Your participation in the survey is **entirely voluntary**, and you can opt out at any stage by closing and exiting the browser. If you are happy to take part, please answer the survey questions which seeks your perspective on current and potential initiatives/organisational commitments that intend to support more women into leadership positions. Your answers will help the researcher to analyse what is and isn't currently working within the organisation in relation to initiatives that support women's career progression, to enable recommendations for the future. **All responses are anonymous**.

Please note that this survey contains some open ended questions, which may mean there is potential for you to provide identifiable data. If this arises, please be assured that any identifiable data will be removed during the data analysis and will not be included in any outputs of this research. Responses will be held securely on a password protected University OneDrive account and will only be viewed by the researcher. All data will be deleted after submission of the final thesis and no later than 31st December 2024.

The survey should take approximately 10-15 minutes to complete. Your answers will be anonymous, and the information provided will be used in the final thesis and the production of other formal research outputs (e.g. presentations, journal articles).

The project has been reviewed and approved through the formal Research Ethics procedure at Coventry University. For further information, or if you have any queries, please contact Marie Sams, at edu083@coventry.ac.uk. If you have any concerns that cannot be resolved through the researcher, please contact the DBA supervisor, Dr Maktoba Omar at ac3371@coventry.ac.uk. If you still have concerns and wish to make a complaint, please contact the University's Research Ethics and Integrity Manager by e-mailing ethics.uni@coventry.ac.uk. Please provide information about the research project, specify the name of the researcher and detail the nature of your complaint.

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this survey. Your help is very much appreciated.

[*]

CONSENT Please provide your consent to progress to the survey.

☐ I have read and understood the above information (1)

☐ I agree to take part in this questionnaire survey. (2)

☐ I understand that, because my answers are anonymous, it will not be possible to withdraw them from the research once I have completed the survey. (3)

☐ I confirm that I am aged 18 or over. (4)

Q1 What category of staff are you?

○ Professional Services (1)

○ Academic (2)

○ Research (3)

○ Other (4) _____

Q2 Are you full or part-time

○ Full-time (1)

○ Part-time (2)

Q3 What part of the CU group are you responding from?

○ Coventry University (1)

○ Coventry University London (2)

○ CU Coventry (3)

○ CU London (4)

○ CU Scarborough (5)

○ Coventry University Wroclaw (6)

○ International Hubs (7)

○ Other (8) _____

Q4 What range does your salary fit into (pro-rata)?

○ £0-£22000 (1)

○ £23000 - £34000 (2)

○ £35000 - £51000 (3)

○ £52000 - £65000 (4)

End of Block: About you

Start of Block: Section 1 - Leadership and Development Initiatives

Q1 Please indicate your experience of the following development opportunities for women within the University group:

	I am/have been actively participating in this (1)	I have some experience of this (2)	I know what this is and am interested in participation (3)	I know what this is, but I'm not interested (4)	I don't know what this is (5)
Aurora Women in Leadership Programme (1)	○	○	○	○	○
Coaching and Mentoring Academy (2)	○	○	○	○	○
Staff MBA Programme (3)	○	○	○	○	○
Women only seminars/talks/lectures (4)	○	○	○	○	○
Womens Staff Network (5)	○	○	○	○	○
Other (please specify) (6)	○	○	○	○	○

✳

Q2 If for question 2, you answered that you had participated in some of these initiatives, what benefits came from this? Select as many as apply.

☐ Self-development (i.e. confidence, building resilience) (1)

☐ Collaborative Working (2)

☐ Accessing new networks (3)

☐ Clarity on career aspirations (4)

☐ Being able to challenge gender discrimination behaviours (5)

☐ A new job / promotion / progression (6)

☐ Other (please specify) (7) _____

☐ Not applicable (8)

*

Q3 If you haven't participated in some of these initiatives, what are the reason(s) for this?

☐ Not interested (1)

☐ Work pressures (2)

☐ Workload (3)

☐ Lack of personal support (4)

☐ Lack of professional/management support (5)

☐ Family/caring responsibilities (6)

☐ Do not think it will help me to progress (7)

☐ Was unsuccessful in the application process (8)

☐ Other (please specify) (9) _____

☐ Not applicable (10)

Q4 Please rate how you perceive the level of difference these initiatives make to increasing gender equality in senior roles within the CU group.

	Makes a significant difference (1)	Makes some difference (2)	No opinion (3)	Makes a slight difference (4)	Makes no difference (5)
Aurora Women in Leadership Programme (Advance HE) (1)	○	○	○	○	○
Coaching and Mentoring Academy (2)	○	○	○	○	○
Staff MBA (3)	○	○	○	○	○
Women only seminars/talks/lectures (4)	○	○	○	○	○
Women's only network (5)	○	○	○	○	○

Q5 Please describe the reasons why you have made those selections (up to 300 words).
Please do not reveal any personal/identifiable data in your answer.

_____

_____

_____

End of Block: Section 1 - Leadership and Development Initiatives

Start of Block: Section 2 - Organisation Commitments

Q1 Please indicate your level of knowledge of the following organisation commitments intended to promote gender equality within the University group:

	I am actively involved in this (1)	I am fully aware of this but not actively involved (2)	I am aware of this, but my knowledge is limited (3)	I am aware of this, but I don't know any details about it (4)	I haven't heard about this (5)
University Athena Swan Accreditation / Action Plan (1)	○	○	○	○	○
Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Council / Sub Councils (2)	○	○	○	○	○
Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy (3)	○	○	○	○	○

Q2 If you are aware of these commitments, what benefits do you think they bring to increasing more opportunities for women to progress?
Please do not reveal any personal/identifiable data in your answer.

_____

_____

_____

Q3 What barriers do you think there are to the implementation of these commitments?
Please do not reveal any personal/identifiable data in your answer.

_____

_____

_____

Q4 How do you rate these organisational commitments in terms of creating more opportunities for women to progress in the institution?

	Makes a significant difference (1)	Makes some difference (2)	No opinion (3)	Makes a slight difference (4)	Makes no difference (5)
Athena Swan Accreditation / Action Plan (1)	○	○	○	○	○
Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Council / Sub Councils (2)	○	○	○	○	○
Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy (3)	○	○	○	○	○

Q5 Please describe the reasons why you have made those selections (up to 300 words).
Please do not reveal any personal/identifiable data in your answer.

_____

_____

_____

End of Block: Section 2 - Organisation Commitments

Start of Block: Section 3 - Allyship

Q1 How important do you think allyship is in terms of supporting more women to progress in their careers?

○ Extremely important (1)

○ Very important (2)

○ No opinion (3)

○ Slightly important (4)

○ Not at all important (5)

Q2 In the past, would you say you have had an experience of allyship, that has helped you to develop in your career?

○ Yes, from a senior female colleague (1)

○ Yes, from a senior male colleague (2)

○ Yes, from both senior men and women colleagues (3)

○ No (4)

Q3
If you answered yes to the previous question, what were the benefits of receiving allyship? (Select as many as apply)

☐ Mentorship and/or coaching (1)

☐ Access to new opportunities (2)

☐ Raising awareness of gender inequality (3)

☐ Access to new networks (4)

☐ Challenging current process and/or policies (5)

☐ Challenging discriminative behaviours that affects women (6)

☐ Other (please specify) (7) _____

☐ Not applicable (8)

---

*

Q4 What do you think some of the barriers to allyship might be?
 Please do not reveal any personal/identifiable data in your answer.

_____

_____

Q5 How useful do you think allyship is, or could be, in supporting more women into leadership positions? (Up to 300 words).
 Please do not reveal any personal/identifiable data in your answer.

_____

_____

Q1 How would you rate the progress that the institution is making in recruiting or promoting more women into senior positions?

○ Significant progress (1)

○ Some progress (2)

○ I'm not sure (3)

○ Slow progress (4)

○ No progress (5)

Q2 Are the initiatives that are currently available to support more women into leadership roles sufficient for your development?

○ Yes (1)

○ I don't know (2)

○ No (3)

Q3 Do you have any other comments you wish to make or is there anything else you feel is important?
 Please do not reveal any personal/identifiable data in your answer.

_____

_____

Appendix D Research Instrument: Interview Schedule

Semi Structured Interview Questions
Target – Men and Women Grade 9+

1	**Housekeeping** • Start recording • Introductions • Brief on the project (split into three major sections – leadership development, university initiatives, allyship). • Reminded of the right to withdraw any comment, answer or interview in its entirety (refer to PIL). • Remind that analysis and any comment will be anonymised. • Check received participant information leaflet and consent. • 45 minutes
2	**Leadership development initiatives** ○ Aurora Women in Leadership ○ Coaching and Mentoring Academy ○ Staff MBA programme ○ Women's network ○ Women only talks/lectures • What kinds of benefits do you think these opportunities bring to women, and to the organisation? • What challenges to do you think that women face in accessing these initiatives? • How do you see those challenges being solved? • To what extent do you think these initiatives help to improve gender equality at a senior level?
3	**University commitments** ○ Athena Swan ○ EDI Council ○ EDI policy • To what extent do you think these commitments help to improve gender equality at a senior level? • Are there any challenges with these initiatives currently? • Could they be improved in any way?
4	**Allyship** • *Check definition - 'Allyship refers to the actions, behaviours, and practices that leaders take to support, amplify, and advocate with others, especially with individuals who don't belong to the same social identity groups as themselves.' (Center for Creative Leadership)* • How important do you think allyship is in terms of supporting more women to progress in their careers? • Have you benefitted from having an ally in your career? Can you tell me about that? • Have you had experience of being an ally for someone? Could you tell me about that? • What other benefits do you think allyship would bring to women in the organisation? • What might the challenges be?
5	**Overall** • Are there any other improvements that could be made to further advance equality for women in senior positions? • Any other comments?
	Thank for time Stop recording

Certificate of Ethical Approval

Applicant: Marie Sams

Project Title: To investigate and identify holistic change strategies for supporting women's leadership progression in Higher Education: A UK based case study.

This is to certify that the above named applicant has completed the Coventry University Ethical Approval process and their project has been confirmed and approved as Medium Risk

Date of approval: 14 Apr 2022

Project Reference Number: P134227

CONSENT FORM
Investigating and identify holistic change strategies for supporting women's leadership progression in Higher Education

You are invited to take part in the above research project for the purpose of collecting data on investigating the effectiveness of current and potential development and organisational initiatives affecting leadership progression for women within the Coventry University Group. Before you decide to take part, you must **read the accompanying Participant Information Sheet and Privacy Notice**

Researcher(s): Marie Sams
Department: DBA Candidate, Centre for Business in Society
Contact details: edu083@coventry.ac.uk

Supervisor name: Dr Maktoba Omar
Supervisor contact details: ac3371@coventry.ac.uk

This form is to confirm that you understand what the purposes of the research project are, what will be involved and that you agree to take part. If you are happy to participate, please initial each box to indicate your agreement, sign and date the form, and return to the researcher. Please do not hesitate to ask questions if anything is unclear or if you would like more information about any aspect of this research. It is important that you feel able to take the necessary time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

1	**I confirm that I have read and understood the Participant Information Sheet for the above research project and have had the opportunity to ask questions.**	
2	**I understand that all the information I provide will be held securely and treated confidentially. I understand who access to any personal data will have provided and what will happened to the data at the end of the research project.**	
3	**I understand my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw my participation and data, without giving a reason, by contacting the lead at any time until the date specified in the Participant Information Sheet.**	
4	**I understand the results of this research will be used in academic papers and other formal research outputs.**	
5	**I am happy for the interview to be video recorded on MS Teams / audio recorded (please delete as appropriate), and that once a transcript has been downloaded (within one week), the recording will be deleted.**	
6	**I agree to take part in the above research project.**	

Name of Participant   **Signature**   **Date**

Name of Researcher   **Signature**   **Date**

Participant Information Sheet for
Investigating and identifying holistic change strategies for supporting women's leadership progression in Higher Education

You are being invited to take part in research on investigating the effectiveness of current and potential organisational initiatives and commitments affecting leadership progression for women within the Coventry University Group.

The study is being conducted by Marie Sams at Coventry University as part of the Doctorate in Business Administration (DBA) programme in the Research Centre for Business in Society. Before you decide to take part, it is important you understand why the research is being conducted and what it will involve. The research was granted ethical approval by Coventry University's Research Ethics Committee [P134227]. Please take time to read the following information carefully.

What is the purpose of the study?

This DBA study is focused on investigating the effectiveness of current and potential organisational initiatives and commitments affecting leadership progression for women within the Coventry University Group.

The study will assess the impact of such interventions in supporting women into leadership positions, and are based within three main areas:

1. Investigating the impact of women's leadership and development Initiatives (such as Aurora, staff MBA, women's network, Coaching and Mentoring Academy).
2. Investigating the impact of organisational level commitments (such as Athena Swan, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Council and policy).
3. Investigating the potential of allyship* for supporting women as leaders

NB - for the purposes of this research, please note that the term 'allyship' is defined as - 'the actions, behaviors, and practices that leaders take to support, amplify, and advocate with others, especially with individuals who don't belong to the same social identity groups as themselves.' (Center for Creative Leadership)

Do you have to take part?
No – it is entirely up to you. If you do decide to take part, please keep this Information Sheet and complete the Informed Consent Form to show that you understand your rights in relation to the research, and that you are happy to participate. Please note down your participant number (which is on the Consent Form) and provide this to the lead researcher if you seek to withdraw from the study.

To withdraw, please email edu083@coventry.ac.uk so that your request can be dealt with promptly. You do not need to give a reason. A decision to withdraw, or not to take part, will not affect you in any way. You are free to withdraw your interview responses from the project data up to 31st January 2023.

What will happen if I decide to take part?
You will be invited to a 1:1 interview with the researcher which will take approximately 45 minutes and asked a number of questions regarding your perceptions on the three research areas outlined above. The interview will either take place on Microsoft Teams or in person (at the convenience of the participant) at a time that is suitable to you. Ideally, the researcher would like to record your responses (and will require your consent for this).

Why have you been invited to take part?
You are invited to participate in this study because you are in a senior position within the University group, and as part of this study, the intention is to gather the perspectives on the above topics from a senior perspective, from both men and women.

What are the benefits of taking part?
By sharing your experiences with the researcher, you will be helping Coventry University Group to better understand the challenges and opportunities of the above initiatives to enable further advancement in supporting women into leadership positions.

Are there any risks associated with taking part?
There are no significant risks associated with participation.

What will happen to the results of the research?
The results of this research may be summarised in the main thesis, published articles, reports and presentations. Quotes or key findings will always be made anonymous in any formal outputs.
Who will have access to the information?
Your data will only be accessed by the researcher.

Where will the information be stored and how long will it be kept for?
Your data will be processed in accordance with the Data Protection Act 2018 and the General Data Protection Regulation 2016 (GDPR) thereafter. All information collected about you will be kept strictly confidential. Your data will be referred to by a unique participant number rather than by name. Recording transcripts will be downloaded from Microsoft Teams within one week of the interview; or in the case of face-to-face interviews, will be transcribed within one week, after which the recording will be deleted. Responses in the transcripts will thereafter be referred to by participant number and you will not be identifiable in any outputs that arise from the research.

All electronic data will be stored on a password-protected computer file on a University OneDrive account, only accessible to the researcher. Your consent information will be kept separately from your responses in order to minimise risk in the event of a data breach. The lead researcher will take responsibility for data destruction, and all collected data will be destroyed on or before 31st December 2024.

What will happen next?
If you would like to take part, please complete the consent form and email this back to the lead researcher.
Researchers contact details:
DBA candidate: Marie Sams, edu083@coventry.ac.uk
Supervisor: Dr Maktoba Omar, ac3371@coventry.ac.uk
Who do I contact if I have any questions or concerns about this research?
If you have any questions, or concerns about this research, please contact the researcher, or their supervisor. If you still have concerns and wish to make a complaint, please contact the University's Research Ethics and Integrity Manager by e-mailing ethics.uni@coventry.ac.uk. Please provide information about the research project, specify the name of the researcher and detail the nature of your complaint.
Thank you for taking time to read this information sheet and for considering participating in this research.

Appendix G Leadership and Development coding and sample quotes

SUB-THEMES / REF TO DATA	DESCRIPTION	Codes/Labels	*SAMPLE QUOTES SURVEYS*	Codes/Labels	*SAMPLE QUOTES INTERVIEWS*
Self-development Survey: Awareness (SS2, Q1) Benefits (SS2 Q2)	Issues and opportunities related to staff undertaking self (professional development), with leadership in mind.	Confidence (15) SS2Q5	*"Staff MBA - completed but received no follow-up. Gained confidence but likely to take elsewhere and not reinvest in organisation". (P31)* *"I believe that programmes that support knowledge are more beneficial than women's only programmes. Women need to be encouraged to actively participate in programmes where they may not have the confidence to join not be segregated, in my opinion segregation does not create equality". (P17)* *"I find that the few programmes on offer are not addressing the real inequitable issues. I am personally not looking for inspiration from other women, or to be coached on my confidence, or how to have 'difficult conversations' at work- I have been part of those programmes and I find them frustrating and sometimes condescending. A lot of the work is also led by well-meaning white women. I am looking for radical programmes that address structural and systemic gender inequities where more than women are targeted". (P3)* *"I believe these initiatives increase the level of confidence in women and support us to apply to new*	Self-Development (5) Purpose (7) Selection (5)	*"When someone suggests to you (a programme), it just kind of puts it there, in your mind. And it perhaps makes you think a bit more seriously, and I think women quite often they're so busy dealing with the everyday, aren't they? And and keeping things afloat and, and sort of maybe worrying about how they come across in meetings. And you know, sometimes you just need that programme to help. I think." M6* *"It supports the people that are under confident about themselves to a certain extent because it gives them a vehicle that is specifically for them, but you know we focus a lot of attention for people in that cohort because there is a perceived and probably a proven fact that women are less likely to engage in things and put themselves forward, and that's the bit that I find quite sad, so I recognise we need it and I think it helps." M1* *"I think that what they do for the people that go on them is is, well, certainly give them skills, capabilities that they may not have had necessarily or actually reinforce cause you know, we we're we're supposed to feel a bit suppressed, aren't we? And and sort of not quite as good as the men. " M1* *"It's not as if they is a shortage of good women in the organisation. It's good women have their confidence built and that sort of built in belief to*

SUB-THEMES / REF TO DATA	DESCRIPTION	Codes/Labels	*SAMPLE QUOTES SURVEYS*	Codes/Labels	*SAMPLE QUOTES INTERVIEWS*
			opportunities and be open to new challenges". (P153) *"Personally I have found the Aurora programme to be the most impactful thing for me so far. I was able to aim high and secure a promotion, mainly due to the improvements in my confidence to do so". (P149)* *"Initiatives help to grow confidence and allow women to aim higher and think through any ceilings that have placed above themselves - though may not help with any ceilings placed by the institution." (P30)*		*actually take on some of the more senior roles." M10* *"I think women have got the capabilities that it's just that they haven't perhaps got the confidence, they haven't been used to being sort of up there at the front and actually, you know, promoting their ideas and pushing their ideas forward. So I think they're useful from that point of view." M6* *"I'm not sure that I've seen any evidence (initiatives)that they have worked, but I'm sure they are valuable at an individual level" M8* *"it's making sure people understand why they're doing it as opposed to just thinking they've got to do it. And I think that's where we are a bit at the moment in the in, in at Coventry that we, we know we've got to do something, but we don't know why we've got to do something and that's the other message to get across." M10* *"Great, but don't sacrifice that for the career treadmill. So I would go back to actually. What is it you want? Actually looking at the person holistically. Are they just looking at career development and so called leadership skills? Because then I would question what they're for." M11* *"I have an absolute belief that we need really strong programs. I think we need to think about them in multidimensional form rather than singular." M9*

SUB-THEMES / REF TO DATA	DESCRIPTION	Codes/Labels	SAMPLE QUOTES SURVEYS	Codes/Labels	SAMPLE QUOTES INTERVIEWS
					"Perhaps some some programmes that would allow people to mirror, to see what's required to work at that level I think would be important." M12
					"Maybe leadership should be introduced much earlier on in careers. I mean, you know a bit like you know you do a PG cert to be able to teach. Why don't you do some sort of qualification in leadership, and it might be just like an introductory programme, but you know they say, don't they, anybody can lead? You know we don't have to be more senior in an institution to have a leadership role maybe it's it's introducing something, uh, you know, quite a sort of a a sort of a basic level up to people as they come into academia about leadership, about activism." M6
					"I just think that we tend to develop people who would be developed anyway rather than the people that really need it sometimes." M1
					"It would be interesting to look at where those cohorts are coming from, where they are in their career development. I think my my personal view when I've spoken to those groups, you have a very, very strong group of professionals within those cohorts. I do question whether to some extent they might be joining that programme too late." M4

SUB-THEMES / REF TO DATA	DESCRIPTION	Codes/Labels	*SAMPLE QUOTES SURVEYS*	Codes/Labels	*SAMPLE QUOTES INTERVIEWS*
Networks Benefits (SS2 Q2)	How networks help women in the institution, and what types of networks may be helpful.	Networking (14) SS2Q5 Networking (5) Collaboration (3) SS5Q3	*"I am really enjoying being part of the Aurora programme and as a member of the Women's Staff Network. These have really helped me with networking, looking at where I might move jobwise to and collaboration with other colleagues". (P16)* *"I believe that these initiatives would leverage visibility of how women feel in academia, considering the opportunities they get, the positives of being a woman in academia as well as negatives. With the consequence of making changes to ensure that negatives are minimised. To allow women to network with like-minded others and feel like they belong. The latter would be a big positive to me, I would be interested to be part of a community that has values and interest towards women in academia and providing a platform for us". (P67)* *"I have seen first-hand through colleagues' participation in the Aurora Women in Leadership Programme how this has a positive impact to 'open doors' for women at Coventry University. I suspect this is due to network building and the knowledge gained from the programme, but also the exposure you have to senior colleagues. The fact this is a women-only initiative provides some opportunity for there to be a focus on developing women as future leaders". (P59)*	Networking (7)	*"I think that having women only networks and and and programmes is a useful way to actually promote confidence." M6* *"From my point of view would be just getting women talking and sharing experience, because otherwise you get caught up in your workplace and you might feel isolated and think you're the only one so for me across all of them, that's the biggest thing. Getting the communication lines opening, sharing experience, women in the same situation." M11* *"I hate networking I am absolutely rubbish at it even now. I still hate it with a passion. But I think that's important, the idea of a women's networking session" M1* *"One of the things that's important about them (programmes) is not so much what you're taught on them, but more the networks that you form and the links that you make during them that can then help you further on in your in your career." M10* *"Some of the external networks are even more important, of course, and the pandemic is sort of not helping that because it's been much harder to develop networks during the pandemic and maintain networks because we've not been able to go out and meet people." M10* *"But not necessarily because of the content of the course. I think it comes back again to the networking for me now obviously the content of every course will be different, and some may have higher impact than others. So, I think that*

SUB-THEMES / REF TO DATA	DESCRIPTION	Codes/Labels	SAMPLE QUOTES SURVEYS	Codes/Labels	SAMPLE QUOTES INTERVIEWS
			"The women's network has really helped me to see I'm not alone in what I am going through". (P113)

"I think the women's only network gives that space of ownership of being a woman around other women." (P49)

"The Women's Staff Network is a great initiative but has limited power to affect change". (P172)

"The most useful thing for me has been mentorship from a more senior woman and networks beyond the institutions like WIASN". (P21)

"Whilst I think the women's networks are supportive, motivating and perhaps empowering for those involved within those environments, I haven't seen any examples that they've had impact on employee progression or any coverage or feedback on these issues from those in senior roles". (P18)

"I do belong to several women's only networks but question whether there is sufficient authoritative power or legitimacy to make significant change". (P112)

"I also believe that knowing and being seen by 'the right people' is the way to get ahead in the organisation and I'm not sure this network gives enough of that exposure." (P37) | | just the networking and seeing your your colleagues, your peers is valuable." M3

"I think it's an opportunity for women to meet other women that they might not otherwise." M3

"There needs to be conversations with peer to peer groups that enable people to talk freely and so people need to be comfortable within that peer group, if that's a women only network fine if that's male female, fine.." M4

"You know you go, you're there, you're very excited and you do a lot of things and then you walk away, and you forget about it. And even though the benefits stays but you don't stay in touch with your networks." M5

"I think women only spaces give people the opportunity to to grow and to develop just through being with other women." M6

"I think for women, it's actually the the confidence that networking gives to a woman." M7

"You do need one or two sort of like red, sort of like leadership. Those that are prepared to really be the voice of those networks, but they make things better for the workforce." M7

"I think having a good network is really important and having it as a a network of support, whether it's so you've got somebody who's looking out |

SUB-THEMES / REF TO DATA	DESCRIPTION	Codes/Labels	SAMPLE QUOTES SURVEYS	Codes/Labels	SAMPLE QUOTES INTERVIEWS
					for you, who's hopefully your line manager, or just someone who shares your language." M8 *"I think women only spaces give people the opportunity to to grow and to develop just through being with other women." M6* *"Men have dominated conversations. Men have dominated events and courses. You know it's the men whose ideas are picked up on and used. And maybe the women have just gone along with it in the past, so I think that having women only networks is a useful way to actually promote confidence." M6* *"We need to ensure that we can support women with things like childcare costs so they can go to a conference for example, we really need to make sure those types of options are there, and they aren't at the minute." M10*

SUB-THEMES / REF TO DATA	DESCRIPTION	Codes/Labels	*SAMPLE QUOTES SURVEYS*	Codes/Labels	*SAMPLE QUOTES INTERVIEWS*
Career Planning Benefits (SS2 Q2)	Issues and opportunities related to engaging with career planning.	Career Planning (10) SS2Q5	*"I don't think these initiatives would be taken into consideration when applying for a senior position within the group, I'm not sure they help with planning your career." P44* *"The people who engage in these initiatives are already more likely to spend time on career planning." P9* *"It has helped me think more carefully about my career plans." P63* *"I think these things can help improve gender parity in senior roles to the extent that they help women develop the necessary skills to progress, and to plan their career. However, as we lack internal talent development routes to ensure we retain and develop staff who have participated in these schemes its currently as, more likely they will progress outside our organisation." P100* *"Without a clearly defined progression or route onwards then it can too easily become something else to add to a workload rather than a constructive initiative." (P66)*	Career Planning (6)	*"Rather than go out to the market, actually, do you realise that you've got a significant pool of talent within a specific area? If there's an opportunity, yes, let's make it an application. Let's make it open, but actually it's making internal only to allow that progression to take place." M4* *"You don't have to stay in one particular department and and we need to support and facilitate that more because that way then you keep the good people, and you get that return on the investment you've given them. But we need to be more structured about it." M1* *"There's got to be alignment with progression policies and employment policies." M12* *"I think the other challenge is that the routes that people can move into are often blocked because you have someone else in a particular role. So, I do wonder whether we need to enable more sideways move. You can keep progressing up if you like on a linear leadership journey, but sometimes do you need to move sideways and up or sideways, and I think we need to be more open to that." M4* *"We need to have career paths for people that enable them to see where their future is and that actually there is a future within the group." M1* *"Focus it on the right places that that we have people with career path succession planning their own personal development plans that they can see what they're trying to achieve and how they can get there and that we put in place those*

SUB-THEMES / REF TO DATA	DESCRIPTION	Codes/Labels	SAMPLE QUOTES SURVEYS	Codes/Labels	SAMPLE QUOTES INTERVIEWS
					facilities. We haven't got that, but we're working on it." M1 *"Having these programs in place available to people. One thing it does it makes them aware of the need to have a career trajectory, to understand what they need to do and and to have a bit of a a less near sighted approach to their career." M5* *"One of the things we're not doing well is we don't, managers don't, talk a lot with their reports about their career trajectory." M5*
Impact Impact: SS2Q4	Measurement of impact in initiatives. What is the return on investment to the institution. How do they know it is working?	Impact (37) SS2Q5	*"Although I have no personal experience of these initiatives, I believe any group that is supporting women to progress will make a difference to those that are involved with it - however what should be looked at is the percentage of staff accessing these opportunities and if this is proportionate to progression." P72* *"It is difficult to know to what extent these types of initiatives help without the availability of data to measure their success." P14* *"Difficult to measure the impact of initiatives - anecdotally I know some female staff who participated in them have been promoted but appears to be largely down to individual initiative." P9*	Impact (4) Outcome ineffective (5)	*You know you want to bring these these cohort back together again and look at the learning that could that that's come from it over that period. So I think there's a bit more about it not just being a one off intervention but a series of interventions that builds uh as as you as you go through your your your career. M10* *"I think we should be ensuring we get return on investment. And that could be all sorts of things, and it could be helping somebody to move to the next level, And, you know, give him back through the role that they have, and it could be that they then go on to give other people opportunities and support them. I mean, there are all sorts of ways it could be done. But I don't think we've got anything that's structured, and I think we put people through these programmes and then there's an anticipation that isn't realised." M1* *"And because we either get them to a point where they're really good and they believe in*

SUB-THEMES / REF TO DATA	DESCRIPTION	Codes/Labels	SAMPLE QUOTES SURVEYS	Codes/Labels	SAMPLE QUOTES INTERVIEWS
			"Whilst I think the women's networks are supportive, motivating and perhaps empowering for those involved within those environments, I haven't seen any examples that they've had impact on employee progression or any coverage or feedback on these issues from those in senior roles." P18 *"Aurora is valued by those involved and delivering - but I can't see the open support and benefits being taken up by the organisation. It's helped the individuals push forward themselves, but it doesn't feel like the organisation is proactively taking these individuals forward after investing in them." P98* *"There seems to be more women leaving the University especially those who are in a leadership/management position. Sometimes, I do feel that even when we engage with women only events, it has no recognition from leadership team that we are trying to progress." P19* *I'm not sure they make much of a difference at the top though - most people I know who have been on them have left. (P80)* *"Raises confidence in women, giving them more confidence to go further. But perhaps makes little effect on changing the underlying culture." P151*		*themselves and move on, or they're poached and and the poaching I'm less comfortable with. Actually, them saying I've done a really good job and now I can really move on I'm comfortable with, particularly because some of those people then come back" M1* *"I've talked to staff who have done these programmes a few times now and almost always the question is. You know what? What opportunities are for us, now that we've done this? And all I can say at the minute is well, have a look on the website 'cause there's lots of jobs going which is not right. We've got to do things differently." M1* *"There's a lot of experience to be gained by sideways moves. I know a colleague who has done quite a few sideways moves and took one step downwards and then went sideways again." M11* *"You get all the excellent people (on these programmes) and they're the excellent people who are looking immediately for that next opportunity. And so, I think there's a challenge, not necessarily in the programme, but I think in the routes through which those cohorts then potentially move into other into other positions, so I think the data would be interesting to see - 12 months, 24 months after who's still in the university? Have they moved or have they had to get had to go elsewhere?" M4* *"I think you can have lots of leadership courses and I've been on some myself, but unless they're embedded within the progression criteria*

SUB-THEMES / REF TO DATA	DESCRIPTION	Codes/Labels	SAMPLE QUOTES SURVEYS	Codes/Labels	SAMPLE QUOTES INTERVIEWS
			"Initiatives help to grow confidence and allow women to aim higher and think through any ceilings that have placed above themselves - though may not help with any ceilings placed by the institution." P30 *"I think they may help a little in that they prepare more women to apply for senior roles, but I think there need to be wider cultural changes to really make a difference - such as more flexible working, more listening, improved communication." P109*		*and then in themselves that they won't have much impact." M12* *"They're set up on the on a premise of something that we can't actually prove. So, there is that kind of, I guess that kind of ontological challenge I have with them in terms of why you would do it only for women." M12* *"Do they enable a person to develop? Yeah, I think they do. I think. Do they give them a wider extent of what a university group is and their own personal development? Yes. Are they designed for progression? No." M4* *"You sort of can feel powerful for a while (after the programme) and have some really good ideas. And then you kind of revert back to the day job and things go back to exactly how they were. So I think the challenge is retaining the confidence and the inquisitive and creative mind and and and creating the opportunities within your own local work area." M8* *"Do you want the best talent? But there isn't any filtering for talent necessarily at the entrance of the programme. And therefore I think it sometimes builds an expectation and hope that can be can never be fulfilled in terms of career progression. The same goes for management programmes for blokes, by the way. It's completely the fact that we don't have specific development programmes for blokes. I completely understand what we're doing here is is building a confidence." M9*

SUB-THEMES / REF TO DATA	DESCRIPTION	Codes/Labels	SAMPLE QUOTES SURVEYS	Codes/Labels	SAMPLE QUOTES INTERVIEWS
					"I don't know how many years it's been running, but I would expect that we would start to see more women moving up the ladder and I'm not quite sure that that's that's actually happening." M6 "I heard very mixed feedback from another institution when I was there last week. It was just a comment about programme X and they, you know, the women there were absolutely slating it as the conversations and nature of the event was just terrible. You know, it didn't serve them well in terms of enhancing their careers. It just wasn't what they needed. I don't know precisely what the issue was, but I've heard that before from a lot of people on those initiatives which are specifically aimed at women." M12
Visibility and Engagement	Understanding how the initiatives are currently 'known' amongst staff, understanding who they are targeted at, whether it is inclusive, and how work or personal factors may impact engagement.	Visibility (31) Engagement (10) SS2Q5 Visibility (11) SS5Q3	"Of those that I am aware of, I do not feel they are widely advertised, as I would not know how to access them and whether or not I would meet the criteria to access them". P110 "I don't really know enough about any of these and have not heard any of my colleagues talking about these". P54 "I have never heard about Aurora Women, Coaching and Mentoring Academy or the Staff MBA program and therefore have no opinion of them. Having been at the University for three years already, their overall visibility does not exist". P129 "I have not been informed of these initiatives in the workplace which is	Visibility and engagement (5) Engagement (4) Selection (5)	"So you know whatever they're doing, one would expect that if if they're doing, they're all doing sort of projects. You might hear about them." M10 (in reference to Aurora) "I would like to understand how they're promoted, because when I enquired last about the opportunity it wasn't available, and I wasn't then told when it did come back on stream" M8 "How do you promote the existence of these programs to your female employees? They came to me with their requests, and I showed my willingness to support them if they choose to do something. But about the specific programs they came to me with their request not the other way around." M5 "You know I couldn't tell you whether the Aurora programme is running this year and how many

SUB-THEMES / REF TO DATA	DESCRIPTION	Codes/Labels	SAMPLE QUOTES SURVEYS	Codes/Labels	SAMPLE QUOTES INTERVIEWS
			very concerning. It could be delivered on a monthly newsletter of what's happening to support women in the workplace which is sent to all female staff in the university and then they opt out if they aren't interested". P92 "I was never made aware of any of these initiatives when I joined the University, this would have been incredibly helpful to me joining in a new management role and supported me on my journey here and made a positive impact in my development as a leader." (P86). "I'm not too knowledgeable about women's opportunities in the group. I was invited to join the Woman's network on Microsoft Teams as my colleague plays a large role in this but without this I would not have known how to get involved. I think it's great that there are so many schemes but feel they are not shouted about and I'm not sure what impact they have". (P104) "Initiatives are not really visible in the institution - it is difficult to access them if you do not know about them". (P134) "Not enough visibility of the women's network or for additional training for women. Apart from not having enough time to go to extra training, I would not know where and when there are any sessions offered. The information for		people are on it and who's on it or what's happening with it." M6 "I certainly wasn't asked for for any suggestions of who might go on the programme, so you know clearly they're not that high profile. I haven't looked on the website to see if there's anything on there, but I don't see, you know. I don't hear anything about it." M6 "We've got the website as well and we've got the booking systems and all those sorts of things. But you have to wonder how many people know about them 'cause yeah, I know that we send lots of communications out in lots of different ways and we touch about 30% of the workforce so I'm not convinced that everybody knows about things and therefore I actually don't see them as accessible." M1 "I think the other area is the profile raising of the individuals on those on those programmes. I think you know if you're looking at an Aurora cohort going through or an MBA cohort going through, how are we promoting not necessarily in terms of job role, but how are we promoting their ability and the the professional capability understanding of someone and their importance to the group and and and what we see is that individual moving moving forward. I think there's a promotional aspect to it that's lacking." M4 "They're self-selecting, so they're going to be the sort of person who's going to be extremely dedicated to their job." M8

SUB-THEMES / REF TO DATA	DESCRIPTION	Codes/Labels	SAMPLE QUOTES SURVEYS	Codes/Labels	SAMPLE QUOTES INTERVIEWS
			support/training for academic staff—apart from mandatory training such as GDPR etc—is hidden. Management is not supportive, and information is not shared openly". (P159)		"Now some women may feel, rightly or wrongly, that there is favouritism involved in the selection process. So, if they see a colleague being nominated and they aren't themselves being nominated, then they may feel rejected or demoralized by that." M3

"How certain can we be that the mechanisms selection processes we have in place are are the right ones?" M3

"I think sometimes these programmes have been quite ring fenced. So you need someone perhaps to nominate you to do something like that and I guess there's always a danger that some people are favoured, I guess over others." M5

"It's fear that you might challenge the status quo. People don't like change generally. So you know people are more likely to nominate people who are like themselves perhaps, and I think that's a danger. I think in some respects it's perhaps easier to come to almost complete a programme outside of your institution." M6

"So they're not just open to every single woman, but there is some kind of selection process. Then being selected in the 1st place is is obviously a challenge. And I can imagine that if you wanted to put yourself forward for such a course and were rejected then it that could be really quite a devastating blow to your confidence." M3

"ultimately these courses do have a limited number of places available and as far as I'm |

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					aware there has to be some kind of nomination and selection process that people have to go through. So, I think just kind of having access to the course in the first place is clearly an issue." M3 *"For me the the the challenge sometimes it's our processes. Women might be a little bit put off with, oh, I've gotta jump through that hoop, jump through this hoop." M7*
Work-related barriers Barriers (SS2, Q3)	Work-related barriers to engagement in leadership and development initiatives.	Work-related Barriers (15) SS2Q5	*"Workload is such that I don't have time or mental energy to engage" (P138)* *"I have no opinion as my insane workload makes it impossible" (P116)*	Work-related barriers (3)	*"Their line manager. It's the biggest challenge. Like the bonus scheme, that's what the subs have, but it's dependent on how the line manager writes the statement, and I've sat in some of those meetings where you discuss who's gonna get it, and sometimes the the the statement that comes through is so poor." M7*
Personal-related barriers	Personal-related barriers to engagement in leadership and development initiatives.			Personal related barriers (7)	*"And if we get out of our comfort zone, then think about a woman and the domestic situation and them being encouraged to participate in these programmes. This is another thing that we need to look at and that has to do with their personal lives and if they are mothers. Do they have caring responsibilities. All these things so we can offer support" M5* *"Absolutely it's the time thing that's a challenge, balancing with work" M10* *"I heard she was leaving, and I was genuinely curious, and I found she didn't actually want to leave at all. There were things that as a mother and a full-time employee she wanted but couldn't access and couldn't juggle everything." M8*

Appendix H Organisational Commitments coding and sample quotes

SUB-THEMES / REF TO DATA	DESCRIPTION	Codes/Labels	*SAMPLE QUOTES SURVEYS*	Codes/Labels	*SAMPLE QUOTES INTERVIEWS*
Visibility and Engagement Survey: Awareness (SS3, Q1)	Making staff aware of organisational commitments, where to find information and how to get involved. Leading to raised awareness.	Visibility; engagement (22) SS3Q3 Visibility & engagement (10) SS3Q5	*"I don't get to specifically hear about theses implementations so there must be a communication breakdown somewhere."* P10 *"Not widely disseminated amongst staff in the group, as I was not aware of 2 out of the 3 commitments."* P110 *"Lack of knowledge around what they are and who they apply to or even how you get involved in these."* P19 *"There is a lack of awareness of how the commitments influence and affect opportunities and individuals. I know we have Athena Swan, for example, but I don't know anything about the action plan."* (P94) *"I think it's important that those commitments exist, but I don't know any of the detail so can't express a further specific opinion".* P33 *"I don't know what these groups do. So, while I do think there is valuing in having these commitments in place, I haven't heard or seen anything coming out of them".* P25 *"Athena Swan - we don't see the benefits from. The communications are poor and it's not clear how this benefits us as women directly".* P80	Visibility (5); engagement (3)	*"Everyone knows there is a plan, but where is it? Of course, I have an overview, but how does that relate to the commentary? No idea."* M11 *"There are those who don't participate, and don't show interest and don't engage and don't care. And those that don't think deeper are those who should be more actively participating."* M5 *"The EDI policy is there, and not having read it recently, is there a challenge there around the visibility of these issues and challenges? And I think there certainly is."* M8 *"All the Members on the EDI Sub Council for research are women. Can these women create change alone?"* M8 *"It it isn't only for the women to do learning; it's the blokes have to learn about themselves and how they how they mitigate and diminish some of those pushier characteristics that often leads to success and then it almost immediate failure because they're not the right person for the job either."* M9 *"So maybe we can go back and say that the other challenge is how you make the reach wider, and not limited to those who have expressed an interest"* M4 *"I think is probably the most powerful tool in. Raising awareness and opening up conversations in areas that want to get the accreditation. Not all areas do- I don't know. I think don't think there's been a push".* M8

SUB-THEMES / REF TO DATA	DESCRIPTION	Codes/Labels	*SAMPLE QUOTES SURVEYS*	Codes/Labels	*SAMPLE QUOTES INTERVIEWS*
			"I still have no idea what Athena Swan is or how my faculty is involved with it, as no one has ever talked about it before". P129		*"One of the things we're trying to gonna try and do through Athena Swan is try and get a lot more visibility out there." M2* *"You see more engagement from XXX and less from the other entities, other campuses so one of the things we need to do better is to find a way to inform people. It's not an easy thing to do because there is 7000 of us." M5* *"Individual awareness sometimes for me is more important than institutional environment because it's individual awareness that will change institutional language problems. Therefore, if we can do it, we flip that on its head and then we can do something as an institution." M5*
Culture	How institutional cultures influence the success of initiatives.	Culture (43) SS3Q3; Culture (36) SS3Q5 Culture (17) SS5Q3	*"The culture at the top is still too slow to change". P97* *"Our leadership remains predominantly male and behave like an 'old boys club'". P4* *"Senior leadership at the University is a very white male demographic, I would be really pleased to see more diversity. I think a barrier is the 'old boys' network feel". P45* *"I think a lot of initiatives are done to demonstrate the organisation is trying to change, but real change is driven by cultural shift". P60* *"They end up being about the work women have to do - while men don't consider what they need to change too". P11*	*Culture (6)*	*"I think it's the culture of individual departments, I think is another barrier. Some are very enabling; some are less so" M7* *"I've heard it too many times where people said, well, I managed to do all this and have a career. You know, absolutely that's no help whatsoever and actually diminishes people's confidence even more. You don't have to be a super woman to actually do the same job as a man. You should just be able to do it under the same terms. And I think that's something we've got to get past and just because it was tough for them doesn't mean it should be tough for everybody." M10* *"I'm not convinced how much it is a thread running through the whole group. Obviously, we configure the committees now and I think that's good. But how much it's embedded in the systems that run through the institution; how much is it part of the general just fabric of what we do?" M12*

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			"I don't think women are thought of as discriminated against, so I suspect are not at the forefront of any policies". P13 *"As mentioned above, without culture change, particularly amongst senior men, these organisational commitments are fine words but little more". P27* *"Culture change is difficult and notoriously slow. Perhaps in another 20 years things will be different and my daughters will benefit from change brought about by initiatives introduced now". P87* *"It's about who you know, and how long you've known them. I was recently overlooked for a promotion to management because I didn't have any formal management experience, all my leadership experience was overlooked, I was expected to have management experience without the opportunity to gain it. They pretend to do these activities, but when it comes to concrete action, nothing is done". P158*		*"Rightly or wrongly, a lot of women don't want to give up their lives for their job. A lot of men do, but I'd say more women than men. And that is because of our traditional role in society. And we aren't going to change that overnight". M1* *"I've got an advantage in that I'll sit there and I'm getting the EDI presentation from XXX and I'll see that and understand it, but do I see it? Actually, in my day-to-day work, no." M11* *"I think in some areas that's obviously easier than others, because obviously I think in education for instance. Education is a bit of a soft discipline, so you've got more women. So actually, you know education you don't struggle to get more women, yeah, but in other areas I think probably it's much more challenging where women aren't so sort of, you know, evident." M6* *"The professional services academic research sort of divisions. I think you know there needs to be something done about that. I think the value of people. And that that's a biggie." M6* *"The whole thing of unconscious bias is something that we need to embed into everything we do, because I don't think enough people take it seriously. Still, I mean, the training is rolled out all the time, but how do we know what's working?" M10*
Charters/Policies	How policies and charters are implemented with the intention for positive change.	Commitment to change (23) SS3Q2 Roadmaps (15) SS3Q2	*"All schemes and policies help to promote awareness of gender equality and promote women in the workplace and so should be encouraged". P76* *"I have heard of these and feel they are important. However, the work for diversity should not fall on the shoulders of those*	*Commitment to change (9)*	*"Organisations like us you would expect that we do have EDI policies, but I do think that it's often just sort of tick box exercise. I have to say I'm not sure that there's a big, big sort of commitment to really take it seriously." M5* *"I don't feel it's (gender equality) being seen as a priority up to now." M10*

SUB-THEMES / REF TO DATA	DESCRIPTION	Codes/ Labels	*SAMPLE QUOTES SURVEYS*	Codes/Labels	*SAMPLE QUOTES INTERVIEWS*
			who have been negatively impacted". P129		*"We know there's a problem, but we're not really that worried about finding a solution. That's the way I feel about it." M10*
			"They at least make a firm public commitment to increasing opportunities for women to progress, but without the culture change and support for women to back this up, they are not hugely useful, in and of themselves". P27		*"You have to have an action plan, but you can very legitimately at the end of that cycle, write on that action plan where we didn't meet any actions because we had other priorities and you would still get your Athena swan Accreditation, admittedly a bronze level, but you would still get that because you've used it to reflect on your current position and you've reported so it doesn't drive change in and of itself, if you're not interested in driving that change. " M2*
			"Identifies gaps in provision and creates collective awareness". P112		
			"They allow for an action plan to support more women into roles". P134		*"I was surprised here because of the scale of the operation, whereas well at (other institution), you would have like probably half day for something like a university EDI Council. Here we do it in 90 minutes. people feel like we don't care and we're not acknowledging that we've got a problem." M2*
			"My knowledge is limited, but I think they all provide a good starting point for conversations about this, and the commitments mean that women may feel more confident to apply for appropriate positions or support to achieve". P54		
			"I know it's (Athena Swan) a good thing. Of course, I do and has been a very long time in the sciences and engineering." P11		*"But you know, when you got senior leadership teams that are dominated by white men, there's never gonna be that massive transformational change. That's the reality." M2*
			"I think just the commitment to run those programmes and to recognise and go for the accreditation demonstrates a commitment from an organisation, so I think that's one good thing". P10		*"I don't get the feeling that the university is passionate about Athena Swan." M10*
					"Need to drive things through and being aware of our own behaviours is really important. The answer to that is yes. Is it fast enough? Probably not. What can we do to change it? I don't think I'm the right generation to ask." M11
			"The one thing I do genuinely believe is if we don't keep our people on board and we don't support them in ways we're never going to give them everything they want. Yeah, but if we don't find ways to		*"I think just the commitment to run those programmes and to recognise and go for the accreditation demonstrates a*

SUB-THEMES / REF TO DATA	DESCRIPTION	Codes/ Labels	*SAMPLE QUOTES SURVEYS*	Codes/Labels	*SAMPLE QUOTES INTERVIEWS*
			support people to get something out of it. Well, we're not going to be successful." P1		*commitment from an organisation, so I think that's one good thing". M10* *"Obviously it is about women, but the chances are if you're improving processes for women, you're improving processes for everybody actually. So, I think it's a positive experience." M10* *"I think something like Athena Swan is interesting because it forces the institution to at least understand its own position situation in terms of gender equality. And in that sense, I think it's useful because then what you can't do is you can't plead ignorance". M2* *"I can't think which university it was, but really did publish an acknowledgement of we are not satisfied with gender equality and what they are trying to do to change it. I think that message of acknowledgement - I don't see that. I don't hear that. And I think that would just tilt the whole balance of how we approach things if that were the case". M3* *"I think if we're really serious about it, there has to be an acknowledgement and commitment through all our processes". M12*
Impact Survey: Impact SS3 Q4	How commitments, and policies and initiatives translate into practical change.	Policy into Practice (18) SS3Q5 Data/bench marking (7) SS3Q5	*"A conversation is being had in principle - which is beneficial, but progress is slow". P140* *"Policies and plans need to be followed by effective action". P36* *"They provide accountability to meet these commitments within departments and this is a good thing. Beyond that I am less sure about the impact". P147*	*Policy into practice (8)*	*"The kind of the approach of having VCs roadshows, and that's a good communication, but the messaging is typically around the struggles of the sector, the impact of the pandemic, student numbers, and regulation. Come out and champion equality, diversity and how important that is to us. There's no, there's never been mentioned, so I think that's the tale, really". M8* *"You know we need a very proactive kind of approach to actually making EDI more than just a tick box exercise". M6*

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SUB-THEMES / REF TO DATA	DESCRIPTION	Codes/ Labels	SAMPLE QUOTES SURVEYS	Codes/Labels	SAMPLE QUOTES INTERVIEWS
			"It's not overly transparent of the impact these commitments are having". P98 "These commitments should make the organisation more accountable and thereby help women to progress". P99 "At times, it can feel rather tokenistic rather than a body seeking substantive change." P112 "I would like to see more activities to ensure that equality, diversity and inclusion policies are embedded in work practices rather than being pure policies." P114 "Too many meetings and administration, not enough practical solutions." P80 "The university seeing this work as a tick box rather than an opportunity for real change." P3		"It's a tick box exercise, but it's an important one, because actually if we don't get it then we don't get access to certain funds at the moment. But if I was honest, if it wasn't for that, I'd be talking about doing something different. Now I mean, I do know that there are some people who will say no, it's absolutely been great for me. And, and that's brilliant if it happens. But if I'm looking at it objectively as a business leader. I don't think it's necessarily a great return on investment for the time and energy that it (Athena Swan) takes." M1 "I think we need to educate the recruitment agencies that we use around the need for diversity in advance of anything. Any kind of recruitment taking place. We need that dialogue and then I think when we're into recruitment we can then look at the table, what does the candidate list look like? Who are we looking for?" M4 "Making sure that we project the right image of the university, so we attract a diverse applicant pool. That's something else that's really important". M10 "Data can support what we're trying to do, and I think when it goes beyond the senior leadership to the governing body, I think the data would help them challenge what we do". M7 "We can't change society overnight. Therefore, it's more what can we do and what we can do is about how we develop our own and how we build over time. That and that comes back to what we're saying about the career planning and the career paths and the support for people. That's going to take time to build, and you know, and the difficulty now, I think, is that we've got a very transient workforce." M1 "There should be a progression framework. I'm sorry I think there should be a progression framework for everybody.

SUB-THEMES / REF TO DATA	DESCRIPTION	Codes/ Labels	SAMPLE QUOTES SURVEYS	Codes/Labels	SAMPLE QUOTES INTERVIEWS
					And I mean all this rhetoric about PhD to Professor. Yeah great, terrific, but actually you're missing out on a big sector of the people who make things happen and people who have very important roles, very influential roles. Who can that make and break things so yeah, I mean, I think that that's something that really desperately needs sorting out." M6
					"I don't know the answer 'cause we try very, very hard to recruit into our senior posts diversly. The reality is that at that level you don't get as many female applicants. They don't necessarily always come out to be the best candidates and you know you can try as hard as you like, and we use executive search companies to help us to do that diversely. But we have to start doing more about growing our own and building towards that because It's tough at the top. You know, not everybody wants it". M1
					But you know there is, there is very aggressive proactive positive things that you could do to make significant impacts. Just saying well, you know. It's going to take years to get rid of the gender pay gap because of the, you know, the senior leadership team as well established. Well, why should one pro VC be paid more than another? It doesn't matter what they started on you could rectify that situation. So, it's things like that. I think that would be a clear signal to women in the institution that we're genuine about gender equality. M2
					"It's hard isn't it, because should Athena Swan be much more aggressive and start policing organisations? But then what you don't want is positive discrimination and women being promoted just for the sake of saying, well, we want Athena Swan gold. So, it's there's no easy answer to it". M2
					"We have a very good governing body which pushes us a lot, so our board of governors are key because diversity is

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SUB-THEMES / REF TO DATA	DESCRIPTION	Codes/ Labels	*SAMPLE QUOTES SURVEYS*	Codes/Labels	*SAMPLE QUOTES INTERVIEWS*
					not only an executive issue, but also a governance issue. And as it should be, and we have a good governing body that is pushing us". M5 *"A good example of that would be this new employee experience survey that has been put out. The problem with that is they can't analyze the data from any demographic graphic perspective. So, there's no way of knowing how women is experiencing it or how black staff are or whatever, which is unfortunate" M2* *"There should be things like looking at best practice, do they enable it?" M2* *"How do we take best practise that's elsewhere into what we're doing and then actually say, well, can we have a look at this? And actually, then start to make it more coherent, and then there'll be decisions." M4* *"We should be looking outside of Coventry, even the sector to identify best practice" M7* *"They (other department) seem to be able to really make it work and you could see you know that they are. It never comes off their agenda - others could learn from this". M3*
Infrastructure	The physical and organisational structures needed to execute organisational commitments to gender initiatives.	Resources (20) SS3Q3 Structure (6) SS3Q3	*"High workload and team pressures are a barrier." P65* *"Workloads are becoming more and more onerous, and workplace practices are increasingly intensive. Even if someone has literal time to engage, they probably don't have the emotional and intellectual energy required." P152*	Resources (5); infrastructure (3)	*"This work should be mainstreamed, so it should be properly resourced from the from the start, not just seen as a as a burden." M8* *"It's missing a champion. It's missing someone that's saying, right? actually, this is really important for us as an organisation. What we do is talk about knowing there's a problem, but we're not really that worried about finding a solution. That's the way I feel about it." M10*

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			"There isn't support in terms of putting in the workloaded time or the budget for any of these commitments." P11 *"There is a lack of joined-up thinking between senior team and what is happening on the ground with women working at the university." P16* *"Our EDI webpage has a section that is 'EDI TEAM' and that is just one officer, who is AMAZING, but that is just not good enough for an organisation of the size of CU Group." P77* *"Level of power held only by a few decision makers – needs a team behind it". P15* *"There is a lack of joined-up thinking between senior team and what is happening on the ground with women working at the university." P16* *"Our EDI webpage has a section that is 'EDI TEAM' and that is just one officer, who is AMAZING, but that is just not good enough for an organisation of the size of CU Group." P77* *"Level of power held only by a few decision makers – needs a team behind it". P15*		*"It's quite easy to have Athena Swan as a peripheral reporting mechanism. It's incredibly time consuming. Advance HE acknowledged that and have tried to make some changes to the process through the transformed charter, but it is time consuming, and I get asked a lot about, well, what are the real benefits of us having this given the amount of effort that needs to go into maintaining it and the short, very pragmatic answer is we are, we would be precluded from certain research funding councils if we didn't have it.." M2* *"For me there is something about how you utilise the resource that you have, whether it be your people, your money or your infrastructure to get the best for everybody and it's very easy to lose sight of that, you know, to focus on the prize at the expense of the people." M1* *About EDI work - "People have got day jobs and then feel overburdened by 'you gotta do it this one now and by'. I think there are ridiculously tight deadlines. That's not fair." M8* *"What do I think about Athena Swan? I think there's an awful lot of paperwork. There's an awful lot of administrative burden, and I'm not sure that it delivers terribly much". M1* *"What we need is a framework to work from and we don't have that. Having that infrastructure so I've built within that team some expertise, so we've got the system. We've got the expertise; we just now need to pull the two together and bring those frameworks in place and then share them with people and get managers working with them." M1* *"Here I think EDIC is designed to be more of like a ratification kind of approval body, which assumes then that a lot of the actual action is gonna take place in the layers*

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					beneath that. It's how empowered and joined up that next level really is to enable change to take place and I think only time will tell on that, but I think having things integrated is incredibly important, and with the Athena swan as one action plan, that's what we're trying to look to move towards." I think the reality is that I get drawn into all of those groups at various points and it's quite difficult to see where the boundaries of each of the remits are. They don't meet very often, so there's no kind of momentum I think that's being built". M2 *"The EDI structure should be the best of both worlds - that you keep that that local autonomy, and you have certain areas like the women's network where there is a complete freedom to express whatever the people want to express, and it's not controlled. If it was two centralised, then it might feel like it was pushing us down."* M7

Appendix I Allyship coding and sample quotes

MAIN THEME	SUB-THEMES / REF TO DATA	DESCRIPTION	Codes/Labels	SAMPLE QUOTES SURVEYS	Codes/Labels	SAMPLE QUOTES INTERVIEWS
FORMAL ALLYSHIP	**Mentoring Coaching** Survey: 28% benefit (SS4, Q3)	Seniors who provide mentoring and/or coaching to others - see this as being an ally - more formal type of relationship.	Mentoring; coaching (10) SS4Q5	*"Having mentoring from senior leaders can help increase confidence and help banish imposter syndrome". P103* *"I think a supportive and a mentor is always helpful and can be very important in encouraging all women with talent to strive to take on a leadership role". P14* *"Mentoring is a great way to empower women". P137* *"Very important to have a mentor/coach to build confidence". P42* *"Mentorship or access to opportunities helps build confidence and introduces missing voices into different fields. Thus, I find allyship very useful and hope that there are initiatives at the university that encourage these types of connections." P25*	Mentoring; coaching (6)	*"I think women are quite often lacking in confidence, I certainly benefited from having a professional coach over quite a few years." M8* *"It includes unofficial mentoring as well as official mentoring. You know, it's just knowing that somebody Is looking out for you knowing that somebody's values you." M3* *"She turned into a mentor who, who really, you know, has had me think about things very seriously and consider things that perhaps I wouldn't have considered. She gave me confidence." M6* *"In order to be formally coach within the group, you need to have done a particular programme - I think that limits the number of coaches and number of mentors that there are within the group." M4* *"It's just, it's also about having the mentor who has the ability or the authority to support" M5* *"Difficult to separate between allyship and mentors, being a good boss or a good friend." M5* *"We talk about mentorship a lot of the time but actually I think a better term is patronage. I've succeeded because senior people have taken me under their wing and supported me and protected me." M10*

MAIN THEME	SUB-THEMES / REF TO DATA	DESCRIPTION	Codes/Labels	*SAMPLE QUOTES SURVEYS*	Codes/Labels	*SAMPLE QUOTES INTERVIEWS*
	Access to opportunity (Sponsorship) Survey 37% benefit (SS4, Q3)	More direct support in terms of sponsorship or patronage. Those that are taken 'under the wing' and given access to networks and opportunities in order to develop.	Sponsorship (3) SS4Q3 Opportunity (4) SS4Q3	*"Having a sponsor or someone on your side in senior meetings is very useful, to give you a voice when you don't have one." P8* *I think it is very important..... having someone champion you and provide opportunity in terms of new learning & networking (not promotion) is key. P1* *"Being generous with networks can genuinely make a difference." P27* *Lack of networking opportunities. P43* *"People often want/need to guard their networks/contacts because academia is so ruthless now. People are understandably reluctant to give anyone else an advantage. We are becoming increasingly insular in our thinking; less community minded". P152*	Sponsorship (3); patronage (1); opportunity (1)	*"We talk about mentorship a lot of the time but actually I think a better term is patronage. I've succeeded because senior people have taken me under their wing and supported me and protected me." M10* *"In my own experience, him taking me to conferences and introducing me to people and things like that, they become my network. I don't know how I would have penetrated that club if you like, particularly as somebody who was first to university. I didn't have any social or political capital to kind of exercise in that space, so." M3* *"Certain networks, I would say are really useful actually in bringing those external perspectives because otherwise we are too inward looking." M12* *"You know people will recommend you for jobs. They will vouch for you. I think that's important because instantly your CV is viewed very differently than if it had a man's name on it." M2* *"They would just automatically put my name forward, and if they hadn't have done so, I wouldn't have had some of the opportunities that I've had." M7*
	Infrastructure	Barriers highlighted related to lack or resources, time and space to dedicate to the work.	Resources (20) SS4Q4 Workload (12) SS4Q4	*"I fear that the workload means the struggle every day is to deliver to students/stay on top of admin/deal with the latest institutional change imposed from management, so initiatives like this, unless they are built in, don't work. No one has the time or headspace. Everyone is just trying to get through the work and get home at a reasonable hour." P116*		

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			Availability (4) SS4Q4	"Time pressures – allies not having enough time" P65 "Workload pressures reducing time available to support colleagues" P5 "I for one would love to develop my younger colleagues more and pass on my support but I just don't have the time to do it in the current culture and environment we are being asked to work in" P7 "People not thinking it is their responsibility; thinking they don't have time for it and/or it not being a necessary part of their role/job." P3 "The competitive nature of university careers; workload and other commitments (e.g. caring burden) that leave little time for the extra emotional and time resources allyship might require." P106 "Senior positions able to have the capacity to take on the role". P103 "Resources and availability of 'allies' e.g. senior mentors and having the time to invest in allyship relationships are barriers". P6		

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INFORMAL ALLYSHIP	**Advocacy**	Less formal ways of supporting women, day to day micro actions that support women in the workplace.	Support (66) SS4Q5	*"I am not sure that formalising allyship, as well as coaching, as well as mentoring, is needed. It feels like just another initiative. We need to look at it through the lens of the support we already have in place and in the informal networks. Otherwise, it is just another thing to add to the list of that people don't get round to." P77* *"It's this informal and intimate support I believe that empowers women, builds their confidence, and drives them to take actions that support their advancement. This kind of allyship offers more than surface level support and infiltrates the overthinking, self-doubt and lack of confidence that are often barriers to advancement". P156*	Support (6)	*"I wonder whether you know just having the nod from somebody like you know you're a good egg and you're a safe pair of hands, and you're somebody who will get the job done. You're not always aware who your allies are." M6* *"I think we need to be more considerate and more expressive of actually the contribution that someone made. When you when you see a colleague who's presenting for the first time to say a leadership team, If you're asking questions, you have to be positive and so I think there's a way in which we need to educate our leaders as well about people coming to those groups, because it can make it can make or break someone." M4* *"You need to use every experience positively, like it might feel like **** at the time, but you've gotta use that. I only got that job at **** because of one of the women who had advocated for me saying she is capable of doing this and I want her in that role." M2* *"There's almost a hidden way of working and the way in which you work with leaders, and they all have their different personalities. So, you need those allies in order to inform your view and I think we need to be more considerate and more expressive of the contribution that someone made." M4* *"I think it's tiny. Little acts of just sort of thinking, you know, of being willing to not always be the first person on the authorship list." M3* *"Sometimes you need somebody who says to you. You can do this, you know, get on and do it. You know why you're not doing this? You could do this. How about this? Somebody who I suppose has a*

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MAIN THEME	SUB-THEMES / REF TO DATA	DESCRIPTION	Codes/Labels	SAMPLE QUOTES SURVEYS	Codes/Labels	SAMPLE QUOTES INTERVIEWS
						vision for you outside of yourself, because sometimes you don't actually think you don't consider things until someone suggests them." M1 *"We bring people in based on the experience that they have, but we don't necessarily support them in terms of ways of working where they might be engaging with the leadership team, the Board of Governors, and to some extent I think there's a view about how adequately they are supported in their development and engagement when they start to move into those into those areas." M4*
	Raising Awareness Survey: 25% benefit (SS4, Q3)	Raising awareness of gender inequalities, calling out discriminative practices, micro aggressions, policy and practice	Challenge (3) SS4Q5 Awareness (5) SS4Q5 Discrimination (4) SS4Q5	*"It would signal that senior (male) managers acknowledge there is a gender gap that needs addressing." P9* *"Challenging discriminatory behaviours and constantly thinking, actively, about whether a process/policy/attitude/arrangement/behaviour is discriminatory or an act of allyship can genuinely make a difference." P27* *"Very useful to enable women identifying and challenging gender inequalities". P16* *"I want those people to call out more behaviour- being an active bystander is part of 'allyship' which would help break down some barriers and therefore women may progress into those positions." P3*	Challenge (2)	*"Sometimes it's appropriate to challenge if something is inappropriate, then it should be upfront, you know, in the face of whoever said it. But I think there are other times when being an ally means being prepared to stand up and speak to somebody else in private and just say you do realize that you have just rolled your eyes at xxx, for example". M7* *"I guess there's micro versions of Allyship, they aren't on a day-to-day basis where you know the micro aggressions that might happen in a meeting and you want somebody to have your back and say, well, no actually X is right or wasn't that just what X said?" M2*
ROLE OF ALLYSHIP	**Ally as a Role** Survey: Comments (SS4, Q4+5)	Understanding what it means to be an ally, who are the allies, issues of trust and bias.	Who (17) SS4Q4+5	*"Very important, but it depends on who. It helps having allies in people 'above' you, but it's sometimes hard to make that connection because of how hierarchical the institution is." P96*	Who (2); Trust/Bias (6); Feedback (3)	*"You have to be able to trust. It's a very important thing. You have to be able to be non-competitive." M5* *"Sticking your neck out sometimes, so backing somebody who doesn't come up with the goods. I think if you can, you know if you if you put your*

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MAIN THEME	SUB-THEMES / REF TO DATA	DESCRIPTION	Codes/Labels	SAMPLE QUOTES SURVEYS	Codes/Labels	SAMPLE QUOTES INTERVIEWS
	Interviews: 11		Trust/Bias (25) SS4Q4/5 Feedback (5) SS4Q5	*"It helps having allies in people 'above' you, but it's sometimes hard to make that connection because of how hierarchical the institution is." P96* *"Very useful, especially male allyship (to avoid women having to take on additional labour to support junior women)". P5* *"Extremely useful. Having female role models to show that is it possible to 'climb the ladder' is especially important to early career females. Male role models who show no bias toward either gender, or actively encourage those who would otherwise 'slip under the radar' are just as important." P51* *"Perception of favourship or trying to support/promote on gender alone." P38* *"Favouritism, and also not being given a step up over others. Could turn into being patronising - some may feel like they don't need help." P134* *"Selfishness i.e. concern about one's own professional development over others." P54* *"Some colleagues seeing you as competitive for their jobs." P82* *"Some individuals feel knowledge is power and whilst they have that knowledge and power over others, they feel secure in their roles." P46*		*confidence in somebody and then you're disappointed. That's a bit of a shame but I think it's always worth the risk." M5* *"Allies have to be big and recognise that actually you know that person might go on and actually climb the ladder quicker than you, so being benevolent as is really important and seeing that someone has potential." M3* *"It's also about encouraging people to have a vision and also not being not being offended or upset when they move on when they want to progress and seeing you know, almost seeing yourself as part of their journey." M6* *"In this particular case, I think he used me" M8* *"It can come across as patronising. I might say something at a meeting, and they might think, oh, NAME made a good point. After a while I think I think, yeah, OK. I can make my own point. Thank you." M7* *"I think if you're not careful you can end up being seen as too much of an irritant." M6* *"I can see that allyship relationships could go disastrously wrong, cause if you have a senior executive sponsor who appears to be promising quite a lot or supporting a sort of a more junior member and then and then ultimately can't deliver, i.e. the job doesn't become theirs and then yeah, relationships can break down if it doesn't go well, so." M8*

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				"Favouritism, if your face doesn't fit you may not get a good ally!" P150 "May be perceived as favouritism if mentorship is ongoing". P40 "I think it's really useful, but I think senior people perhaps need to be guided on what a good ally looks like, and how not to bring their bias in when supporting those different to them. I also think it's important for allies not to be overly supportive (i.e. providing constructive criticism where it is needed)". P80 "Getting that feedback to help you self-reflect is important." P155		"If you identify in your organization, people with talent and that you think can go far, then it's almost inevitable. I don't know if it's inevitable, but I think it's likely that other members of staff will believe or claim that there is favouritism" M3 "You know it is hard. It's hard sometimes do that because you're natural affinity is towards people that are like you when you're looking for like, you know, people like you. You gotta, make that that sort of conscious decision to do it differently." M10 "So allyship for women by women isn't the isn't the only answer it. It's obviously an important answer, and it manages one dimension of that, but I think it could miss many other dimensions." M9 "You know, I've had female staff where I can see the fabulous potential. But I can also see where they are, perhaps going off in the wrong direction or just wrong about the way they're interpreting something. And in that situation, I would try very constructively to say actually I disagree with you. You know, I don't share your perspective on this situation and here's why, and just helping them to kind of engage in self-reflection and not retreat into a mindset of victimhood." M3 "I think feedback that you give they may not want to hear. I don't think it's for another individual to say to someone that you can't grow into being that. But they have to open their minds to that possibility, and they have to recognise that there is a growth that's required (to become a leader)." M9

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						"I think what's also important is giving someone honest feedback, and not just the positive stuff." M11