Leadership Foundation for Higher Education
Small Development Project 2011
Final Report

Women E-Mentoring in Lifelong Learning (WELL)

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and

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1. Background/Context

- **The Universities Association of Lifelong Learning (UALL)** [www.uall.ac.uk](http://www.uall.ac.uk)

UALL is the professional association for the lifelong learning community within higher education and plays a leading role in national and international policy formulation, advocacy, research and practice in lifelong learning and continuing education. UALL promotes the development of a higher education system which is flexible and responsive to the needs of lifelong learning, for academic, economic and personal development, across the whole life span. UALL is a vibrant organisation with membership drawn from the higher education and lifelong sectors in the United Kingdom and overseas. The Association offers institutional, individual, associate and international membership and has well-established links with all major agencies in lifelong learning and higher education including Funding Councils, UK Government Education and Lifelong Learning Departments, University and College Associations, Quality Assurance Bodies, as well as with other national and international organisations. UALL’s federal structure reflects the four nations of the UK, incorporating the Scottish Universities Association for Lifelong Learning (SUALL) and UALL Cymru. While Northern Ireland does not have a separate organisation within UALL, it makes reports to the Executive and Council, and periodically hosts the Annual Conference. UALL’s current Chair is Professor Mary Stuart, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Lincoln.

- **Women in Lifelong Learning Network** [www.willnetwork.weebly.org](http://www.willnetwork.weebly.org)


- **The WiLL E-Mentoring Scheme**

Following the WiLL Network membership survey in 2009, an e-mentoring scheme was devised to capitalise on the wealth of leadership and professional expertise within the network and to share it among a time-poor and geographically dispersed membership. The result was a small-scale (six-month), inter-institutional scheme for women working in both academic and professional roles in lifelong learning and facilitated by the WiLL Network Convenor, Kate Thomas, then based at Bristol UWE. The scheme was launched in November 2010 and applications were welcomed from any woman working in the lifelong learning sector whose institution was one of UALL’s member HEIs. Participation in the scheme was voluntary and free of charge. 24 women applied, drawn from a diverse range of higher education and lifelong learning institutions in England, Wales and Scotland and...
UALL international members in North America Canada and one in the US. All participants signed an e-mentoring agreement designed to assist in the smooth running of the scheme and committed to a minimum level of contact (once per month) throughout the six month period (December 2010-May 2011). Ten participated as mentors; twelve as mentees (two mentors worked with two mentees each).

2. **Aims and Objectives of the WELL Project**

With the award of LFHE Small Development Project funding in February 2011, the WELL Project undertook to:

a. evaluate the outcomes and benefits of the Women in Lifelong Learning e-mentoring scheme via:
   - online questionnaires to all participants (at interim and completion stages of the WiLL e-mentoring scheme) to report experience, assess outcomes and evaluate the scheme,
   - focus group discussion to discuss experiences and interim outcomes of the e-mentoring process (at the UALL Annual Conference 2011, University of Stirling, 20-22 March) ,
   - semi-structured telephone interviews with a sample of participants on completion of the WiLL e-mentoring scheme,
   - informal email feedback.

b. disseminate the findings of that evaluation as widely as possible across the HE sector through:
   - production of a key findings document in print and electronic formats ,
   - a WELL Project Workshop featuring guest speakers and participant case studies and focusing on e-mentoring as a leadership and development tool within higher education and lifelong learning.

3. **Principal activities throughout the period of the project**

- Data collection including individual interviews, two online questionnaires and telephone interviews with e-mentoring scheme participants
- Data analysis
- Interim and final findings submitted to UALL Executive Committee (July 2011-March 2012)
- Planning, publicity and online registration for open access WELL Workshop held at The Women's Library, October 2011.
- Publication and distribution of Key Findings document
- Hosting of WELL Workshop – 26 October 2011 at Women’s Library, London Metropolitan University (attended by 40 delegates from a wide range of HEIs and related institutions)
- Progress and outcomes published on the UALL Women in Lifelong Learning website (www.willnetwork.weebly.org)

- Abstracts submitted for consideration for presentation at UALL’s North American partner, UPCEA’s annual conference (28-30 March 2012) and LFHE Staff Development Conference 2012 (but not accepted).

4. The milestones achieved or reasons for any delay or deviation

The majority of milestones achieved, although:

- WELL Workshop originally scheduled for June 2011 moved to October 2011 to benefit from completed evaluation.

- Abstracts submitted to UALL’s North American partner, UPCEA’s annual conference (March 2012) and LFHE Staff Development Conference (2012) were disappointingly not accepted, thus limiting dissemination of project outcomes across the sector.

- Submission of this final report to LFHE delayed due to ill health and Project Leader’s subsequent departure from Bristol UWE.

5. Any problems or obstacles encountered, and any action taken or required

Other than above, none.

6. Partnerships, collaborations, dissemination

A postcard featuring details of the project and including the LFHE, UALL and UWE logos was inserted into delegate packs at the UALL 2011 conference (80 delegates). News of the grant was also disseminated via the UALL newsletter, UWE’s staff magazine The Bulletin, UALL’s Women in Lifelong Learning Network e-bulletin (March) and its new website: www.willnetwork.weebly.com.

The WELL Workshop was hosted by the Women’s Library, London Metropolitan University. The key speakers included Professor Mary Stuart (VC University of Lincoln (and Chair of UALL); Professor Mary Evans (Gender Institute, LSE) and Dr Jenni Jones (University of Wolverhampton), awarded the British Association for Women Policing (BAWP) Special Recognition Award for the mentoring scheme she ran with West Midlands Association of Women in Policing. 40 delegates attended from HEIs and public sector organisations from across the UK.

The Project Leader was invited to join the Steering Group for Bristol UWE’s new Women Researchers Mentoring Scheme launched at UWE in April 2012. She served on this group from October 2011-September 2012.
7. Learning

Headline outcomes of the interim review questionnaire included:

- 85% of respondents indicated that they were quite or very satisfied with their experience of the e-mentoring scheme,
- e-mentoring is primarily focusing on career strategies/professional development and academic research/publication,
- 73% of respondents cited lack of time as a barrier to establishing a relationship with the mentoring partner and 47% cited email as a method of communication as a barrier,
- 40% of respondents envisage continued contact with their mentoring partner after the end of the scheme in May 2011; 55% of respondents are not sure,
- positive aspects of the e-mentoring scheme include having a sounding board, taking time out to focus on choices and decisions and being able to develop a mutually beneficial relationship,
- less positive aspects include lack of time to focus fully on the process, the stop start flow of email communications and, for mentees, difficulty articulating what they need from the relationship through the medium of email.

Headline outcomes of the final review questionnaire included:

- 44% of respondents indicated they were very satisfied with their experience of the scheme; 43% quite satisfied.
- Barriers to establishing and sustaining a relationship with their mentoring partner: 56% - lack of time; 31% - email as a communication method; 25% (mentors) – mentees’ difficult in articulating their mentoring goals
- 25% of respondents were continuing their mentoring relationship in a similar way; 31% had agreed on a more informal mentoring relationship for the future; 12.5% had ended their relationship but maintained informal or professional contact; 25% had no contact with their mentoring partner; 19% not sure of future arrangements.
- 57% of mentees had changed their role since the start of the e-mentoring scheme.
- Respondents recommended that, were the scheme to be run again, it should include:
  - an introductory telephone call between new mentoring partners
  - a redesign to include mixed communication media
  - the exchange of more detailed biographies prior to the start of the mentoring process
  - a facilitated opportunity for mentors/mentees to meet face-to-face if feasible
  - enhanced guidelines on goal setting.
8. Financial expenditure

As the Project Leader did not attend the UPCEA conference in the US, there was an underspend on the project budget. There was no income anticipated nor received from this project.

9. Project Outcomes

a) **Key Findings document** (attached) published in print and electronic formats circulated to all UALL member institutions and relevant interest groups within the HE/lifelong learning sector; distributed at UALL events; downloadable from the WiLL website

b) **WELL Workshop** event open to all (see 11. Dissemination Activity)

c) **Papers and presentations** given at relevant conferences and seminars: in addition to updates to UALL audiences this outcome was hindered by a) non-acceptance of papers at UPCEA and LFHE conferences and subsequently by the Project Leader’s ill-health. The project budget is consequently underspent.

10. Formal Evaluation (against Project Aims and Objectives)

The aim of the WELL Project was to evaluate the outcomes and benefits of the WiLL e-mentoring scheme – with a particular focus on learning and benefits for professional women using e-mentoring inter-institutionally - and to disseminate the findings of that evaluation as widely as possible across the HE sector.

The WELL Project successfully conducted its planned evaluation through a range of methods including individual interviews (face-to-face and telephone) and online surveys. Response rates were high and the evaluation outcomes included recommendations for future schemes.

Dissemination occurred throughout the period of the project ie:

- Interim and final reports presented to the Project Steering Group at UALL Executive Committee meetings and the UALL Annual Conference 2012.
- Publication of a Key Findings document (attached). This was circulated at the WELL Workshop in October 2011 and at UALL events in November 2011 and published online,
- the WELL Workshop – 26 October 2011 at Women’s Library, London Metropolitan University. 40 delegates from a wide range of HEIs and related institutions attended (see 12 for further information),
- Progress and outcomes published on the UALL Women in Lifelong Learning website (www.willnetwork.weebly.org)
11. Analysis of the benefits of the project

The LFHE Small Development Project funding allowed the Project Leader to conduct a robust evaluation of the methods and outcomes of the WiLL E-Mentoring Scheme and enabled the learning from the scheme to benefit the wider HE community. This evaluation would not have been viable without external funding as there was no budget attached to the role of the WiLL Network Convenor or WiLL E-mentoring Scheme facilitator; these roles were absorbed within the Project Leader’s existing workload.

The Project Leader’s reflections are as follows:

- This was an inspiring and stimulating project, providing a welcome opportunity to evaluate a self-initiated scheme and disseminate the findings. Nevertheless it required persistence and staying power to co-ordinate and sustain the evaluation alongside other work commitments in a rapidly changing HE sector,

- Similarly, e-mentoring, as with any activity outside immediate institutional obligations, is dependent on the commitment and energy of mentor and mentee. Where benefits to both mentoring partners can be seen and experienced to outweigh barriers and challenges, there is no shortage of commitment and energy

- Evaluation findings indicated that the distinctive inter-institutional aspect and relatively informal nature of the WiLL E-Mentoring Scheme had clear benefits but the lack of institutional recognition or approval may have led to higher rates of non-completion overall

- A range of evaluation methods resulted in findings rich in detail and the fact that the WELL Project (and the WiLL e-mentoring scheme) were small scale initiatives did not preclude significant variations in experiences, outcomes and challenges

- The evaluation resulted in valuable information and recommendations for future schemes, including those relating to induction and guidance activities at the start of a scheme.

- There seems to be an appetite for gender-specific scheme, particularly in relation to female employees and the scheme has the potential for application to other diversity contexts.
12. Dissemination Activity

Key Findings Document
circulated at the WELL Workshop in October 2011 and at UALL events in November 2011 and March 2012 and published online.

The WELL Workshop
A workshop was held in October 2011 at the Women’s Library, London Metropolitan University as part of the dissemination of the WELL Project findings. The Women’s Library, a cultural centre housing the most extensive collection of women’s history in the UK, seemed a particularly appropriate venue for the WELL Workshop. Originally established in 1926 as the Library of the London Society for Women’s Service, the successor of the London women’s suffrage organisation led by Millicent Fawcett, the Women’s Library is now an internationally renowned resource, available to everyone, for women’s history research. The Fawcett Society ran the Library until 1977, when it moved to City Polytechnic, later known as London Guildhall University, and now part of London Metropolitan University. In 1998 the Heritage Lottery Fund awarded a grant of £4.2 million to purchase the site of the old East End wash houses and built a new centre to house the collections. The Women's Library was renamed and moved into its new purpose-built home in 2002.

The Workshop programme included:

- presentation of the evaluation findings
- a keynote considering impact of gender in the academy
- a practical session based on the experience of a successful mentoring scheme for women in a different sector
- the opportunity for participants to consider strategies and ideas for e-mentoring within their own organisations and contexts

The Workshop was open to all but publicity was particularly targeted at:

- those working in the lifelong learning sector and tertiary education
- staff development practitioners and managers in all sectors
- equality and diversity practitioners
- researchers in Women’s and Gender studies, Leadership, Coaching and Mentoring studies
The WELL Workshop was attended by 40 delegates from a range of HEIs and public sector institutions from across the UK.

The Workshop was opened by UALL’s Chair, Professor Mary Stuart, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Lincoln. Following a summary of the key evaluation findings from the WiLL Network Convenor, two project participants, a mentor and a mentee, spoke about their experiences of the scheme. Professor Mary Evans, LSE, then gave a keynote on gender and the academy, followed by a plenary discussion. In the afternoon, Jenni Jones, University of Wolverhampton, ran a participative workshop based on her experiences of running a successful mentoring scheme for women police officers.