

International Women's Conference 8-9 March 2007, London, UK

Summary:

The National School of Government is the training provider of choice for the UK Civil Service and public sector. On 8-9 March 2007 the School hosted an International Women's Conference to coincide with International Women's Day. The theme was women's leadership globally and locally and the conference was open to public sector women in leadership roles.

This article is a report of the conference from one of the delegates, Jane Longhurst, who works as a Principal Methodologist at the Office for National Statistics.

Article:

This was an excellent conference, I learnt a lot and have taken a lot away for further thought. I would thoroughly recommend the conference to other ONS colleagues in a similar position to me, starting to move into and thinking about taking on more senior roles. The conference provided lots of examples of successful leadership and therefore provided lots of information and discussion on how to develop leadership capabilities and identify those skills that need to be enhanced. At times we did consider the barriers that are preventing women from taking up senior positions within the public sector, but we mostly focused on the positives, using examples of successful women.

The format of the conference used a mixture of keynote speakers, workshops and plenary discussions. The conference had an international feel with presenters from South Africa, Trinidad and Tobago, India and China. The best key note speakers were Jacqueline Wilson (permanent secretary Trinidad and Tobago) and Kirsty McNeill (Make Poverty History campaign). They both provided insights into their own careers and how they achieved such success. They both were very entertaining as well as providing lots of advice on leadership skills and career development.

The plenary sessions provided lots of interesting debate and the organisation of the delegates into smaller groups stimulated lots of good discussion.

I attended two workshops. The first looked at routes into public life and we explored positions such as non-executive positions, trustees on boards of charities or school governors. The workshop leaders had different experiences and they explained what the roles involved and how one should apply. They also outlined how such positions provide an alternative opportunity for personal development and the benefits for me and the ONS. I have never considered such positions before but am now interested and will explore this further.

The second workshop focused on career management and was lead by the CEO of a County Council. She provided lots of personal tips to success and we had lots of opportunity to discuss our personal circumstances in smaller groups.

On the Thursday evening we were given the unique opportunity to attend the International Women's Awards Ceremony, celebrating the success of women. Prize winners included Polly Toynbee, Baroness Amos and Dame Eliza Manningham-Buller.

In general the conference was an excellent networking opportunity. I enjoyed meeting with lots of women throughout the public sector, making me more aware of the wide range of opportunities within government outside of the statistics domain.

For me personally I felt very inspired and motivated by the conference. I took a lot away in terms of developing my own leadership skills and raising my expectations. I want to think more about my long term career plan. In order to help me with this I am going to investigate possibilities for further networking and mentoring. For the ONS this conference provides an excellent opportunity for encouraging and inspiring women to aim for more senior roles and to develop and explore the skills required.

More information on the event can be found at <http://www.nationalschool.gov.uk/women/>