

# Women in Leadership

Research Project Report



Melbourne Archdiocese  
Catholic Schools

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**Contributions**

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# Introduction

This report presents the findings of qualitative research undertaken by Melbourne Archdiocese Catholic Schools (MACS) office staff as part of the Women in Leadership (WIL) Research Project 2023.

The purpose of the research was to learn from female leaders via symposium breakout groups and table conversations, focus group discussions and one-on-one interviews about the enablers, opportunities and challenges that could help or have helped:

- women to aspire to leadership roles
- female leaders in Catholic education
- women's participation in senior leadership in Catholic education to increase.

The research has been situated within a broader base through a commissioned literature review and environmental scan. Conducted for MACS in 2023 by Dr Amanda Heffernan from The University of Manchester, the review (Heffernan, unpub.) provided specific insights into the enablers, opportunities and challenges that impact on women in leadership – not just in education, but across other industries and businesses internationally.

This research provides an evidence base for future workforce planning and leadership development, supporting the MACS vision and strategic intention to attract, develop and retain women as providing high-quality spiritual and educational leadership in our schools and across the system.

## Background

The mission and action of the Catholic school are based firmly on three central tenets of Catholic social teaching:

1. an understanding of the human person as made in the image of God
2. a commitment to community and the common good
3. an advocacy for and service to those who are at the margins.

Respect for the dignity of the human person is particularly evident in the encounters that Catholic principals have within their communities every day. Principals and leaders within a Catholic workplace need to be able to identify those who are disadvantaged and marginalised in their community, and find ways to offer hope and support.

The 'Victorian Catholic Professional Standard for Principals' (ed. Rennie, forthcoming) outlines what principals are expected to know, understand, do and be. The Standard captures the context of the Catholic school as a critical first lens through which to understand leadership in the Catholic context. Principals of Catholic schools are required to be people of faith within the Catholic tradition, who demonstrate an active relationship with God and are willing and able to share with others in the school community how that relationship informs their leadership. They are sacramental leaders in the school community, confident and comfortable leading prayer and liturgy. Informing their leadership, Catholic school principals are also required to have substantial knowledge and understanding of the Catholic tradition.

Principals of Catholic schools demonstrate qualities and capabilities expressed through the three leadership requirements:

1. Vision and values
2. Knowledge and understanding
3. Personal qualities, social and interpersonal skills.



These three requirements are exercised within six areas of professional practice:

1. Leading a Catholic school community
2. Leading teaching and learning
3. Developing self and others
4. Leading improvement, innovation and change
5. Leading the management of the school
6. Engaging and working with the community.

Preparation to lead in the Catholic context is as important as preparation to lead teaching and learning. Both are integral to leading ongoing improvement, innovation and change. Opportunities to gain the knowledge, skills and confidence to lead across the complex entity of a Catholic school and system through postgraduate study are essential.

## Rationale for the research

A 2019 Heartbeat check by Workday of 60,000 employees across 43 countries found that staff in women-led organisations show a greater understanding of, and belief in, their corporate strategy and maintain a deeper conviction in their roles than their male peers (Workday 2021).

While women constitute an impressive 81% of the MACS workforce (WGEA 2023a), relative to the number of total employees, women are under-represented as principals (40%). This contrasts with the 51% of principals reported as female in 2023, as outlined in Table 1 (see below). The findings from this research are not merely numbers; they are narratives of resilience, ambition and the unwavering spirit of women breaking barriers. Female leaders are integral to the success of leadership of Catholic schools and the sustaining of school cultures that are consistent with our mission. In a Catholic school, leaders foster a culture of professional learning and growth, where expertise is developed and shared, creating the best conditions for all teachers and students to flourish.

Current Australian data (McEwan, McPhillips & Pepper 2023) highlight that there is a significant disparity between the proportion of women undertaking careers in education and the proportion of leaders in Catholic schools who are female. McEwan, McPhillips and Pepper (2023, p. 42) reported that '[a]lmost 8 in 10 (79%) of all respondents either strongly agreed or agreed with the statement "Women should be fully included at all levels of church leadership".' Within Catholic schools, women are more likely to be leaders in primary and small schools, while they are under-represented in secondary schools (see Table 1).

Further to this, data from the reporting period of 2022–23 for the Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA) indicated a discrepancy in the representation of women in management positions within MACS, with women representing 62% of all management positions (WGEA 2023a). While MACS currently does not have a policy or strategy for equal remuneration between women and men, only 46% of organisations in the education and training industry have such a policy or strategy in place (WGEA 2023b). To date, no analysis of the gender pay gap has taken place within MACS; however, the discrepancy in the representation of women in management positions may be impacting the gap (median total remuneration gender pay gap of 15.2%) (WGEA 2023a).



**Table 1: Number of principals in 2023 by gender and school size**

Type/size	Female	Male	Total	Percentage female
Primary – small	53	39	92	58%
Primary – medium	34	31	65	52%
Primary – large	52	60	112	46%
Secondary – small	3	1	4	75%
Secondary – medium	2	3	5	40%
Secondary – large	22	24	46	48%
Combined – medium	1	1	2	50%
Combined – large	4	3	7	57%
Special	4	3	7	57%
<b>Grand total</b>	<b>175</b>	<b>165</b>	<b>340</b>	<b>51.5%</b>

Source: CIS, November 2023

## Our Catholic context

As Benjamin and Burford (2021, p. 10) observe:

We are long past the time in history when leadership in ministry was formally recognised as the exclusive preserve of the ordained and consecrated religious who had taken religious vows.

While the distinctive nature and role of ordained ministry are recognised and respected, '[l]eadership in ministry [also] belongs to, and is exercised by, members of the [laity]' (Benjamin & Burford 2021, p. 10).

Catholic schools and parish communities, often working in partnership, are places where Catholic culture, faith and identity are enhanced and developed. In his letter of introduction to *Working Together in Mission*, Episcopal Vicar for Catholic Schools Very Reverend Mark Reynolds (2021) highlights that it is:

... together that we must work and minister, be it as priest, principal, member of staff, parent and, most importantly, students so as to ensure that the lived experience of Catholic education at the local level, be that in primary or secondary, is a genuine expression of who we are as missionary disciples of Jesus Christ.

To realise the MACS vision, it is essential to recognise the contributions that both women and men make in shaping the faith formation of self and others, and enriching the viability, growth and sustainability of Catholic schools and the wider Church community.



## Alignment with MACS 2030

As strategic theme 3 of *MACS 2030: Forming Lives to Enrich the World*, 'Enabled Leaders' commits to carefully select, invest in and empower employees to deliver excellence across our system (MACS 2022). Recognising the critical role that school leadership plays in enabling learners to flourish, the WIL Research Project established an evidence-based research initiative to inform a workforce development strategy.

Female leaders are integral to the success of leadership in Catholic schools and the sustainment of school cultures that are consistent with our mission.

Informed by empirical research, the WIL Research Project was developed to research, document and determine the best way to invest in and empower female leaders to deliver excellence across Catholic education. This was achieved by working with female leaders in 2023 to learn more about the enablers, opportunities and challenges for women in the leadership of Catholic schools.

Specifically, the WIL Research Project committed to:

- recognising the critical importance of female leaders
- conducting research to develop a timely and geographically relevant evidence base from which MACS can develop policy and processes
- identifying proactive succession planning that addresses the current imbalance of female leaders and the attrition of strong, courageous, visionary female religious leaders
- identifying and activating the collective capacity of female leaders to contribute to the MACS strategy.

## Literature review

This qualitative research project is situated within a broader research base in relation to the participation of women in leadership. A literature review was undertaken to explore drivers of cultural change that successfully enabled women to take up leadership roles in organisations – not just in education, but across sectors and industries in Australia and internationally.

In this review (Heffernan, unpub.), key enablers for women's participation in leadership were identified and are summarised as follows:

- Commitment to cultural change
  - 'Upstander' (organisations and) individuals who are advocates for equity and inclusion
  - Data, transparency and accountability
- Strategic and transparent recruitment, selection and promotion models
  - Redesigning selection panels and criteria – transparent hiring and promotion practices
  - Rethinking 'fit' and reducing unconscious bias when 'tapping' leaders
  - Succession planning
- Flexible working conditions, including job sharing and varied models of principalship/ leadership
- Mentoring, role models and support networks
- Targeted development and support or formal leadership preparation programs
- Making workloads manageable.

The enablers were consistently identified as key policies, cultural shifts and levers for enabling greater proportions of women to take up leadership positions and remain within those roles (Heffernan, unpub.). They require a commitment to change at organisational and individual levels.

The literature review provided additional context to the responses that the women who participated in this research made.



# Research project methodology

The WIL Research Project was undertaken in accordance with the ethical principles and protocols of respect, research merit and integrity, justice and beneficence, as outlined in 'Ethical Conduct in Research: Values, Principles and Implications for MACS commissioned research undertaken by independent consultants not affiliated with a university' (MACS, unpub.).

Applying a grounded theory approach (Glaser & Strauss 1967; Corbin & Strauss 2008), the WIL Research Project encompassed a year-long qualitative investigation of women in leadership, aiming to examine their lived experiences and perceptions. The findings from the study were collected via five major engagements:

1. a symposium in March 2023 to launch the research project, and share some of the findings and preliminary recommendations from the literature review
2. five focus groups involving 22 female leaders in Catholic education to explore the enablers, opportunities and challenges identified in the literature review
3. semi-structured one-on-one interviews with 19 current and aspiring female leaders to identify the individual and collective enablers, opportunities and challenges they have experienced in their own career paths, and how these aligned with the focus groups and findings from the literature review
4. a brief survey to evaluate and rate particular factors, and their level of influence on leadership development and aspirations
5. a series of videos of a diverse range of current female leaders at different career stages and in different settings to explore key issues and impacts on their leadership in Catholic education.

A thematic mixed methodology was adopted to identify the individual and collective perceptions of female school and system leaders in Catholic education in Victoria to investigate the enablers, opportunities and challenges that women have experienced in pursuing their leadership aspirations.

The research findings highlight the challenges, as well as enablers and opportunities, that current female leaders perceive as essential in allowing women to be more present, visible and represented in the leadership structures and profile within Catholic schools and across the system.

## Findings

Considerable overlap was identified between the enablers and the opportunities reported by the women in the research project, influenced by their different career stages, experiences and current positions. A number of the challenges that the participants reported having experienced point to opportunities for MACS at the system level.

A high-level overview of challenges at the personal level, enablers and opportunities is captured in the videos embedded throughout this report.

Insights from the research findings result in 10 recommendations.

## Key enablers

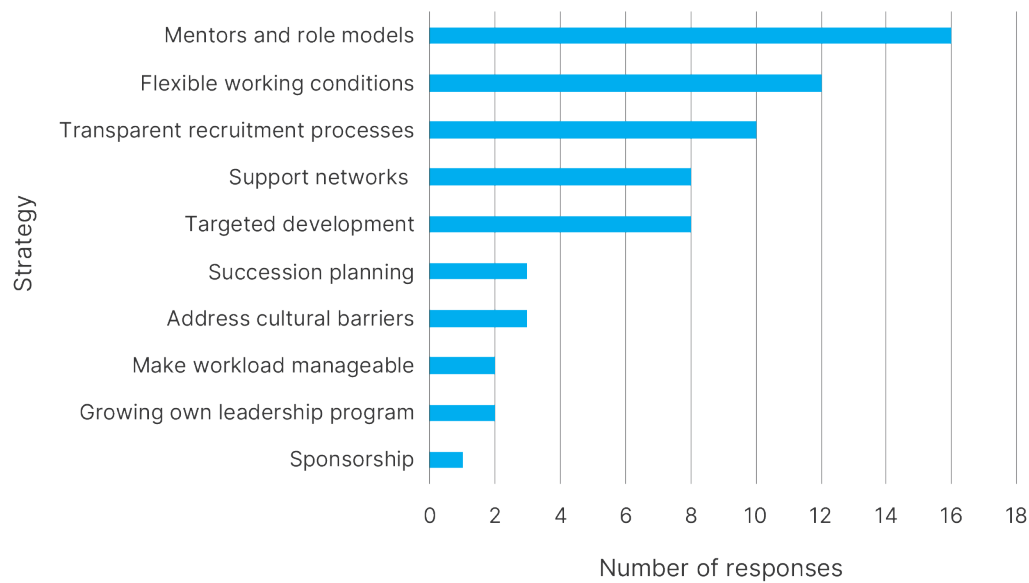
The literature review (Heffernan, unpub.) identified several key enablers to tap into women's leadership. These are consistent with the reported experiences of the focus group participants and individual interviewees.

These enabling strategies (summarised and quantified by frequency of theme by the 22 focus group participants – see Figure 1) are explained in further detail below.



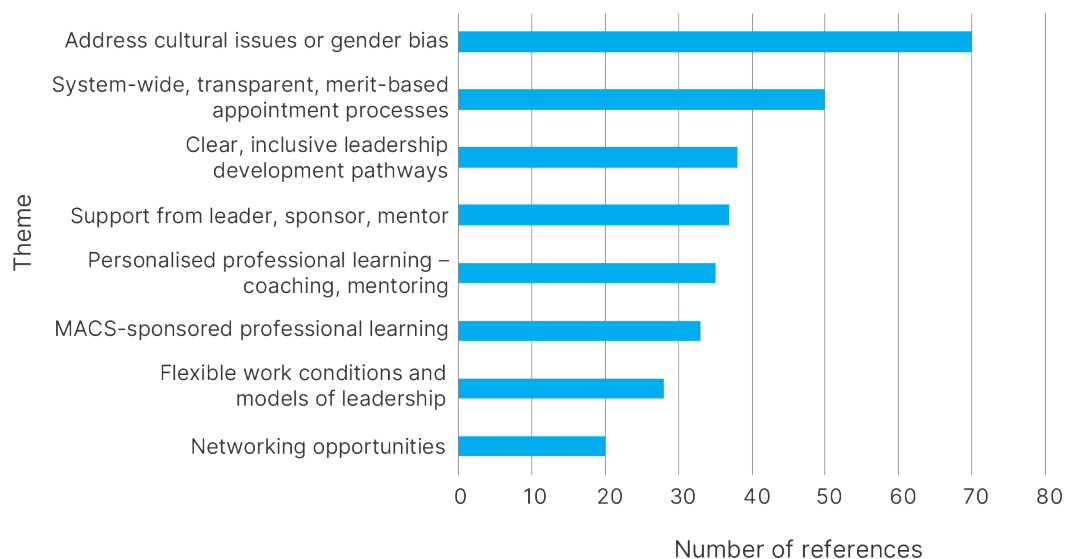


**Figure 1: Strategies for enabling women’s visibility and representation in leadership, ranked by applicability for adoption by MACS in the focus groups**



The responses of the 19 interviewees, analysed thematically, indicate that addressing barriers such as cultural issues and gender bias, and introducing a transparent, merit-based selection process would be the most impactful enablers of women’s leadership (see Figure 2). Respondents’ commentary on clear, inclusive leadership development pathways included advice in relation to mentors for a broader cohort of aspiring leaders, as well as flexible and specific professional learning opportunities and initiatives.

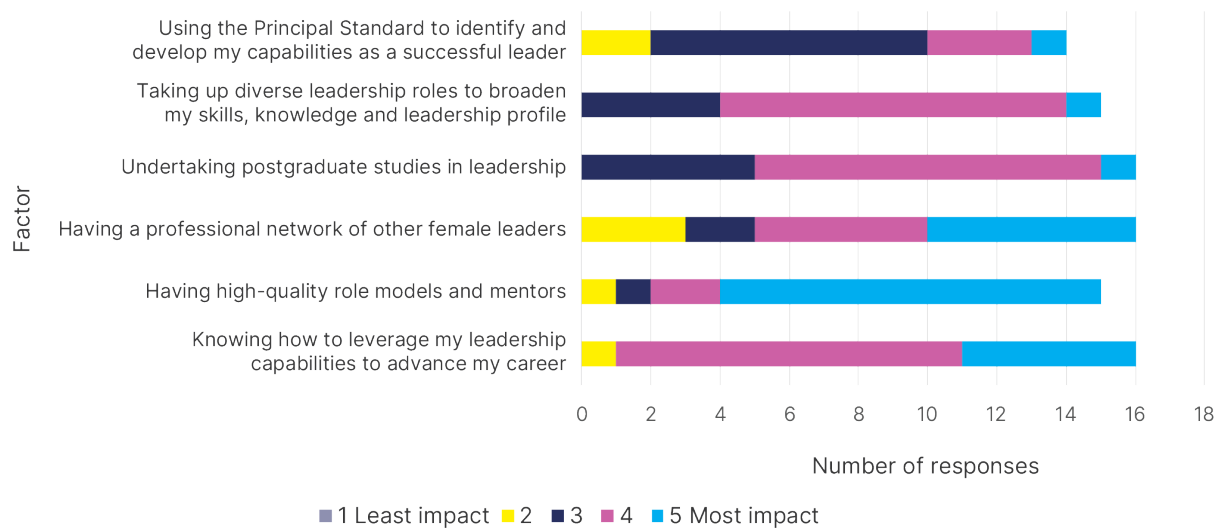
**Figure 2: Enablers identified by the 19 interviewees, prioritised by frequency of reference in responses**



The 19 interviewees were also asked to rate the significance of a range of factors (see Figure 3) and the impact of opportunities (see Figure 4) contributing to their personal leadership development.

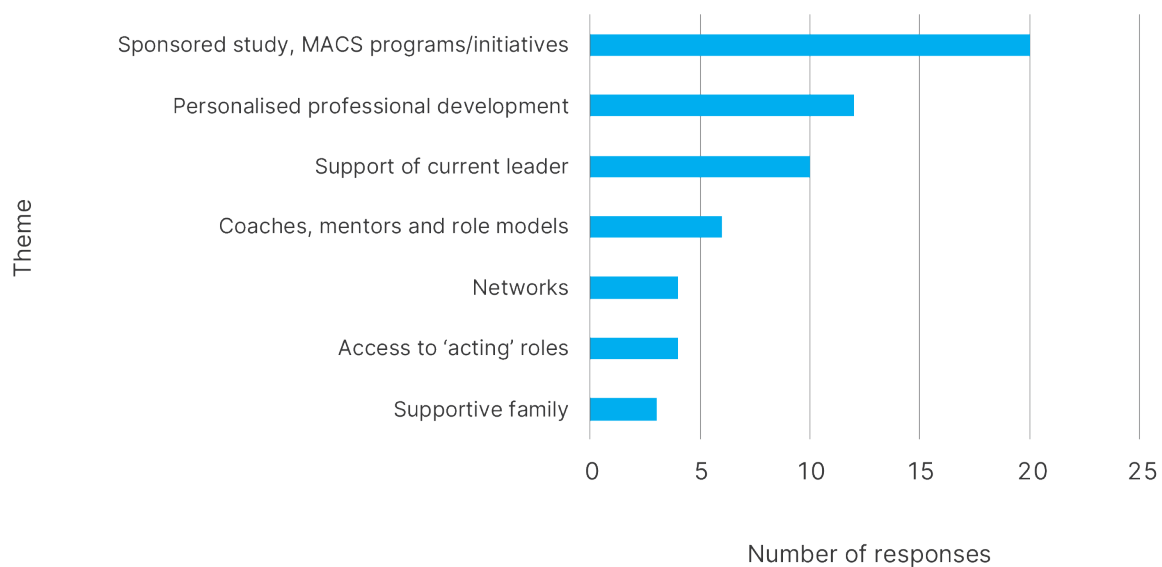


**Figure 3: Response to interview question 1: The degree of influence of specific factors on career development**



Recognising the importance of knowing how to leverage their own leadership capabilities, respondents identified role models and mentors, professional networks, leadership opportunities and postgraduate study as similarly important.

**Figure 4: Response to interview question 5.1: ‘Describe the key opportunities that have had the greatest impact on your leadership development, especially within your Catholic education context’**



Synthesising the analysis of themes from the focus group participants and the individual interviewees, five key enablers emerged:

1. MACS Sponsored Study, and leadership development programs and initiatives
2. Personalised professional development, including coaching and mentoring
3. Personalised professional development, including role models, and access to leadership opportunities and ‘acting’ roles
4. Access to professional networks
5. Flexible working conditions and leadership models.

The five key enablers identified within the research project align with the findings of the literature review and are discussed below. The appointment process providing access to acting roles, as outlined in key enabler C, was reported as a barrier by many of the women in the study and is therefore discussed in the ‘Key challenges’ section.



## Key enabler A: MACS Sponsored Study, and leadership development programs and initiatives

The term ‘targeted professional learning’ related to postgraduate study, sponsored study tours and opportunities to undertake acting leadership roles or work in system-based roles. The professional learning gained was reported by the women to have resulted in increased confidence and competence to pursue further leadership opportunities.

Sponsorship of targeted professional learning enabled women to complete a master’s degree, primarily in educational leadership or theology, and incentivised them to complete their studies, despite other demands.

A lot of the support and the motivation I’ve had has been part of sponsored study programs – both in terms of my master’s in RE and my postgrad studies in ed leadership. Having that financial support to complete those when you’re working full-time, I think it has been very important (Interviewee I p. 77).

It was widely reported that system support played a key role in leadership formation. MACS and school-sponsored professional learning were identified as being highly valued and impactful on leadership development. Encouraging women to undertake leadership development initiatives – such as attending national and international conferences and study tours, and undertaking acting leadership positions and secondments – ignited and nurtured their leadership aspirations and self-efficacy, as the following reflections demonstrate:

I was very fortunate to go to Rome for three weeks with fellow principals and ... that experience would have to have been one of the most reflective and empowering opportunities for me as a Catholic leader – to be able to be in a place that I could immerse myself, but also make the connections to why I lead in a Catholic school (Interviewee H p. 71).

A couple of years ago, my principal put my name forward to attend a principal conference over in Amsterdam. They weren’t able to get the numbers for principals and he said: ‘Well, what about aspiring principals?’ ... I was accepted ... and that was just fantastic, being able to be around other principals and hear how they work, and ... the conversations that they have just really broke down that barrier of what the role is (Interviewee M p. 113).

Leadership development programs and initiatives and self-selected professional learning dominated participant responses. The participants reported seeking to develop specific skill sets and attributes which they believed would enhance their self-efficacy and provide more opportunities for leadership. However, the themes contributing to the summary above (see Figure 4) are worth noting specifically, as targeted development is already occurring on many different levels and via different mechanisms. It is having significant impact on women’s leadership careers and combining to make women feel ‘recognised and valued’ (Interviewee I p. 76).

### Video 1: Enablers

The impacts of perceived unsustainable leadership demands on the potential pool of future leaders and on the longevity of women promoted to leadership roles were seen as substantive elements in limiting potential for the achievement of the MACS 2030 strategic plan.

See Video 1 for enabling factors for women in leadership ([https://bit.ly/WiL\\_Enablers](https://bit.ly/WiL_Enablers)).



Consequently, the recurring elements recorded in Table 2 demonstrate the breadth of opportunities that women currently access or would like to access.

**Table 2: Key themes underpinning the impact of targeted professional development reported by participants in the focus groups and interviews**

Theme	Percentage	Examples
MACS Sponsored Study, and leadership development programs and initiatives	38%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Formal study</li> <li>• Pathway to Principalship and middle leaders programs</li> <li>• Opportunities to tell our stories and network</li> <li>• Targeted professional development for women</li> <li>• Women-only programs (e.g. the 2023 Women in Leadership Symposium)</li> <li>• Role models (e.g. regional leadership consultants, line managers, panel at the 2023 Women in Leadership Symposium)</li> </ul>
Having principal's or current leader's support	30%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coaching, mentoring</li> <li>• Being encouraged to apply for acting roles</li> <li>• Being appointed to acting roles</li> </ul>
Personalised professional development	22%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Study tours (Boston)</li> <li>• Pilgrimages (Rome)</li> <li>• Women on boards, Australian Council for Educational Research</li> <li>• Principals working together</li> <li>• Budgets for own professional learning</li> <li>• Time to work with leadership teams on formation</li> </ul>
Networking	10%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regional networks, professional associations, principal associations</li> <li>• MACS providing more networking opportunities for office staff</li> </ul>

### Recommendation 1

That MACS establishes a cross-functional reference group, comprising key women and men from school and system to oversee the holistic implementation of the recommendations presented throughout this report.

### Recommendation 2

That ongoing leadership development across and throughout the career span is nurtured via MACS:

- continuing to support sponsored study
- providing further professional learning initiatives that enable women to undertake formal leadership development through postgraduate study, short courses and programs, study tours, pilgrimages and events.



## Key enabler B: Coaching, mentoring and sponsors

As noted in the review by Heffernan (unpub.), coaching and mentoring are often ‘conflated’ (p. 14) and the respondents to this study frequently used the two concepts interchangeably. While implementation of the two may overlap in practice, mentoring offers scope to incorporate the concept of advocacy. Generally, the participants sought both leaders who inspired them and leaders who could help them ‘to step up’ (Interviewee Q p. 145).

A majority (72%) of the 22 focus group participants identified mentors (coaches) and role models as the number one strategy with the potential to be adopted by MACS to increase women’s visibility and representation in leadership (see Figure 1). Most (67%) highlighted the personal and professional impact that this enabler (or its absence) had on their own career development.

Advocacy, aligning with mentoring, was mentioned by only 13% of the research participants, suggesting either that there has been limited use of this element or that it remains largely unrecognised across MACS for women in leadership roles.

Heffernan (unpub., p. 14) noted that: ‘Sponsors connect women to career opportunities, make them visible to other leaders, support them and lift their profile’.

As one participant observed:

I think we have greater scope to actually formalise ... sponsorship of women. I think that men in general do get greater support in relation to that whole sponsoring type of thing (FG 4 p. 64).

Interviewees and focus group participants reported that coaching, mentoring and sponsoring (advocacy) had a significant impact on their personal and professional leadership development. Though most did not recall having had defined career goals when they considered teacher training, many recalled being identified early in their careers as having leadership potential, and being coached and supported by their principals or leaders to develop that leadership capacity.

... he tapped me on the shoulder and said: ‘How about some further study and then look at an RE position?’ So again, the opportunities came from them actually saying: ‘We think you can do this. We’re seeing these things in you. Go for it’ (Interviewee I p. 78).

Many interviewees acknowledged that they would never have pursued leadership opportunities without the mentoring and support of their leaders. Occasionally, this was referred to as ‘shoulder tapping’, but for most it was recalled as a crucial motivation in providing the direction, learning opportunities and leadership roles that enabled them to become leaders.

... having mentors and people who believe in you is absolutely fundamental to people continuing on as leaders (Interviewee N p. 134).

### Recommendation 3

That MACS increases the visibility and representation of women in leadership via:

- expansion of informal coaching and mentoring initiatives and programs
- initiation of executive leadership coaching opportunities through on-the-job experiences for aspiring leaders.



## Key enabler C: Role modelling

The literature review (Heffernan, unpub., p. 15) highlighted the value of inspiring role models in supporting women and there was strong agreement that role models – both male and female – played a very influential role in leadership formation. Several participants reflected on how their leadership styles had been influenced by the strong role models they had in the school settings where they worked. Strong role modelling was also closely linked to addressing discrimination, as the most influential role models had been mentors or coaches as well.

I think even just seeing women in those other roles and watching them, knowing that they've been successful, and watching the way their pathways have unfolded because ... I suspect women's leadership pathways are much more complex than men's pathways (Interviewee E p. 43).

I never wanted to be a principal, to tell you the truth. My dream was to be a deputy ... But I have loved the ... female principals that I've worked with. They've been compassionate, strong women who believe strongly in Catholic education and empowering communities. So that's what I've loved (Interviewee R p. 156).

### Benefits of role models

As noted above, role models are a powerful enabler for women aspiring to leadership. Their importance is highlighted by the growth of the WomenEd network – originally established in the United Kingdom (Fuller & Berry 2019) and now with networks across several countries including Australia. Such networks enable women to see 'other leaders who are similar to them' (Heffernan, unpub., p. 15), and open up new possibilities and opportunities through modelling, networking and mentoring.

Without mentors, women don't necessarily see themselves as having that leadership trajectory (FG 5 p. 47).

To be able to be linked with a strong mentor is pretty exciting and, just by osmosis, sometimes by being in the room with them ... you actually learn more (FG 1 p. 4).

Relevant, multifaceted coaching and mentoring appear to enable the participants to feel supported and well prepared to pursue leadership careers. All of the interviewees and most (73%) of the focus group participants reported the benefits of being coached by both female and male leaders throughout their leadership journey, motivating them to take on more challenging and demanding roles.

System-led formal mentoring programs were seen as integral to raising the visibility of female leaders and enabling them to thrive. This was both in developing greater self-efficacy, and in learning new skills such as delegating, managing conflict, reducing the isolation of being a leader in a contested environment, and helping women in challenging situations to access specific and confidential guidance and support.

A smaller number of participants (30%) had set up informal mentors and a minority (10%) had completed coaching courses to better support aspiring leaders in their own schools because 'it's very sparse in co-ed settings' (FG 1 p. 2). However, formal mentoring programs offered by MACS were perceived as only being available to newly appointed principals as part of their one-year induction program and 'you need to choose your own mentor' (FG 2 p. 13).

There was strong agreement across the participants that mentoring needed to be made accessible to everyone throughout their leadership careers. Respondents also suggested that mentees should be involved in the selection of a MACS-appointed mentor, as there had been instances where the appointed mentor had not been a strong fit, thereby reducing the efficacy of the relationship.

They presented all the mentors and the mentors all introduced themselves. And I said ... this person sounds like they'd be a nice fit. But there was no choice at all around who your mentor was (FG 1 p. 9).



## Limitations of role models

Notwithstanding the participants' enthusiasm for role models, mentoring and networking as fundamental to their professional development, leadership stereotype role models were identified as a potentially limiting factor to aspirational principals.

It's got to be the right person for the job, whether it's male or female ... Being aware of unconscious bias is part of it and ... it's got to come down to the right people for ... the right positions (Interviewee Q p. 166).

The participants generally attributed limitations regarding the function of role models to gender bias and lack of transparency in the selection of leaders. Several interviewees reflected that, in some instances, female role models with specific traits and characteristics were more commonly endorsed and there was a lack of cultural diversity in female leaders.

... there were the same ... women who repeatedly got chosen ... and yet there were a whole lot of women who did want to help. It wasn't quite right (Interviewee S p. 164).

One leader, after reflecting on the awkwardness of her interactions with the mentor she was appointed, suggested that MACS might consider a different approach:

... rather than linking people up, sometimes it could be saying: 'We're going to support you to have a mentor. Are there any people you can think of that you would like to have as a mentor?' And then, if they [can't] ... 'We can link you up with someone' (Interviewee D p. 41).

Another explained that self-appointed mentors worked well for her:

I've got about four mentors. How many do I need? It's probably ... more critical to find the right match. You might be assigned a mentor, but if it's not a right match for you, it's not going to help at all (Interviewee Q p. 147).

I already work with a coach and have done for quite a while, just independently. I have found there's high trust there and I have high regard for her as ... a colleague and a knowledgeable leader. We have a fabulous working relationship. She asks me really hard questions. I really enjoy those rigorous conversations (FG 5 p. 46).

### Recommendation 4

That MACS involves newly appointed principals in the selection of their mentor.

## Key enabler D: Access to professional networks

The research indicated the participants found that networking provides targeted support for personal and professional leadership growth, and deepened their engagement with MACS system and regional priorities. Formal and informal networks were often seen as strategic opportunities for developing leadership acumen and self-efficacy. The participants reported that they used their networks to identify potential mentors and explore leadership challenges generated, for example, by COVID-19, wellbeing issues, system changes or feelings of isolation.

Networking – building your experience, building relationships with other people, learning from them. I think that's a really important part of continuing to grow as a professional (Interviewee K p. 86).

Networks encourage women to be part of associations and go on different committees, so you get the bigger picture and you don't get too bogged down in your own school (Interviewee S p. 165).

Participants highlighted the positive impact of the MACS Women in Leadership Symposium held in March 2023. They reported that it provided the opportunity for them to feel valued and validated for the work they do, and that it allowed them to learn about themselves and others through the sharing of stories.



One leader commented in their focus group: 'I know my women's network is key for me. I really love my network and that's where I get my energy' (FG 3 p. 29).

Based on the responses from the participants in the focus groups, there was a perception that current networks mostly appeared to be male dominated, with men as office bearers and setting agendas. As a consequence, while the participants valued the opportunities to work with colleagues, there was an underlying frustration that they reinforced a masculinised norm.

I think networks are important because ... there are more males in the top positions and ... we still find that in our primary schools, although it is becoming more female, being able to form female networks is needed. In my principal network ... there are only a few of us and it is still very largely a male network. So, as females, we have banded together and made our own network (FG 1 p. 5).

I think having networks like ... the symposium we went to for women in leadership [led us to] expanding out and knowing that there are things targeting women around us, working together ... I've done the Women in Advanced Leadership course as well, but being able to create that network across women of different ranging experiences and school sizes, and those sorts of things is really important (FG 1 p. 5).

### **Recommendation 5**

That MACS establishes a women's leadership network to support women in addressing the barriers and challenges to achieving equitable access to opportunities supporting their development as impactful leaders across the system.

## **Key enabler E: Flexible working conditions**

Flexibility in both hours of work and leadership models was cited as a priority for participants in all the focus groups and the individual interviews. Just over half of the focus group participants (55%) observed that flexibility in managing workloads and responsibilities would attract more women to leadership roles. Increased support for job sharing, working from home and working as a leadership team rather than as distinct individuals were put forward as being high-impact models of professional leadership and development, supporting succession planning as well as enhancing on-the-job learning, team building and shared responsibility.

In accordance with research findings of the literature review (Heffernan, unpub., pp. 12–13), participants in the research project were consistent in the view that role flexibility would make workloads more manageable, enable work, family, study and caring responsibilities to be met, and substantially increase the attractiveness of leadership roles. Further, it would support wellbeing and increase responsiveness to the additional demands or expectations placed on working parents.

One participant spoke of taking long service leave one day a week to care for an ageing parent and support her grandchild. Had she been able to job share, it would have added to her 'longevity in the role by enabling me to be a really good role model for other women' (FG 1 p. 2).

Others noted:

I'd love to go part-time and be a three-day a week principal and ... mentor a new person coming in (FG 2 p. 13).

I think the model in Western Australia where employees can work for four years on 80% salary and then have the fifth year off would be a positive change (FG 3 p. 20).





Another focus group participant stated that a significant cultural change would be required to support new models and ways of working flexibly:

I think a lot has to do with culture, and our values and our belief systems ... about efficiency or working hard, rather than prioritising work–life balance. This particularly impacts women who are trying to maintain their roles at home as well (FG 3 p. 24).

Some participants had already raised flexibility requirements when appointed to new roles, with one explaining:

When I got this job, my son was only five and I said: 'There are days when I'm going to need to do the school run and there are days where I might not need to, but I want to.' And she said: 'Oh, we don't really do flexibility.' And I said: 'Well, we need to work on that' (Interviewee B p. 19).

Interview participants consistently prioritised flexible working conditions among the top three opportunities and practices that would enhance the visibility and advancement of female leaders across the system by sustaining women in leadership for longer periods of time.

Flexible working conditions would make workloads more manageable ... particularly if you think having children and being a mum shouldn't be detrimental to your role (FG 4 p. 34).

We have many hats that we wear and many people that we're caring for. For example, I've got older parents now and ... to be able to have some flexibility in our work would, I think, be positive (Interviewee A p. 5).

## Benefits and limitations of greater flexibility

The results of this study confirm the desirability of responsive, agile and supportive models and strategies focused on job sharing and the creation of leadership teams.

Recognising that increased flexibility would require cultural change in the way leadership is conceptualised across Catholic education, participants identified the value of reducing barriers for leaders at all stages of their careers. Acknowledging the challenge, one participant referred to a model in Western Australia where employees could work for four years on 80% salary and then have the fifth year off.

Together with the benefits to be derived from mentoring, role modelling and sponsoring, increased flexibility was seen as a significant step towards making the workload demands of executive leadership more manageable and, in consequence, more appealing.

As Heffernan noted, 'aspiring leaders have real concerns about the unsustainable workloads required of leaders, and the subsequent risks to their health and relationships' (unpub., p. 19).

## Video 2: Catholic identity

Research participants regularly referred to the faith leadership aspect of their roles as leaders of a Catholic school and to personal faith.

See Video 2 for Catholic identity and faith leadership (<https://bit.ly/CatholicIdentity>).



### Recommendation 6

That MACS investigates alternative models of principalship and streamlining of services provided to school leaders to make workloads more manageable, enhance the wellbeing of leaders and address the sustainability of principalship through more attractive working arrangements.

Factors to consider include:

- flexible working conditions to cater for leaders seeking to work part-time or job share
- open structures which encourage collaborative, networked leadership opportunities to foster teams of leaders, rather than simply leaders of teams.

### Catholic identity and faith leadership

While the Australian Professional Standard for Principals outlines what principals are expected to know, understand and do, the context of the Catholic school adds a critical extra dimension. A principal in a Catholic school is called to be a witness to the person and message of Jesus in their very being, in the manner in which they lead their school communities and in the Catholic faith they demonstrate.

## Key opportunities

Four interview questions focused specifically on key opportunities that had already impacted interviewees' leadership development and on those that would enable them to take the 'next steps' in achieving their leadership aspirations. The participants were then asked to identify the opportunities and practices that would support the advancement of women's leadership goals and achievements, and to identify particular enablers.

A wide range of networks, programs and initiatives already offered by MACS and the Leadership Development team had strong endorsement, as they provided diverse opportunities which supported women at various career stages. The regional networks were valued both for networking and for responsive on-the-job support aligned with the local contexts within which the participants worked.

For aspiring leaders, the MACS programs and networks also provided informal coaching and mentoring opportunities, and social networks aligned with MACS priorities. Moreover, there was a very positive endorsement of sponsored postgraduate studies, the Pathway to Principalship – Exploring Readiness Program and the Principal Induction Program, and recommendations for programs for middle leaders.

### Video 3: Opportunities

Several participants were ready to apply for principalship in schools beyond MACS, to take on bigger challenges or to extend leadership development.

See Video 3 for opportunities that develop leadership capacity

([https://bit.ly/WiL\\_Opportunities](https://bit.ly/WiL_Opportunities)).

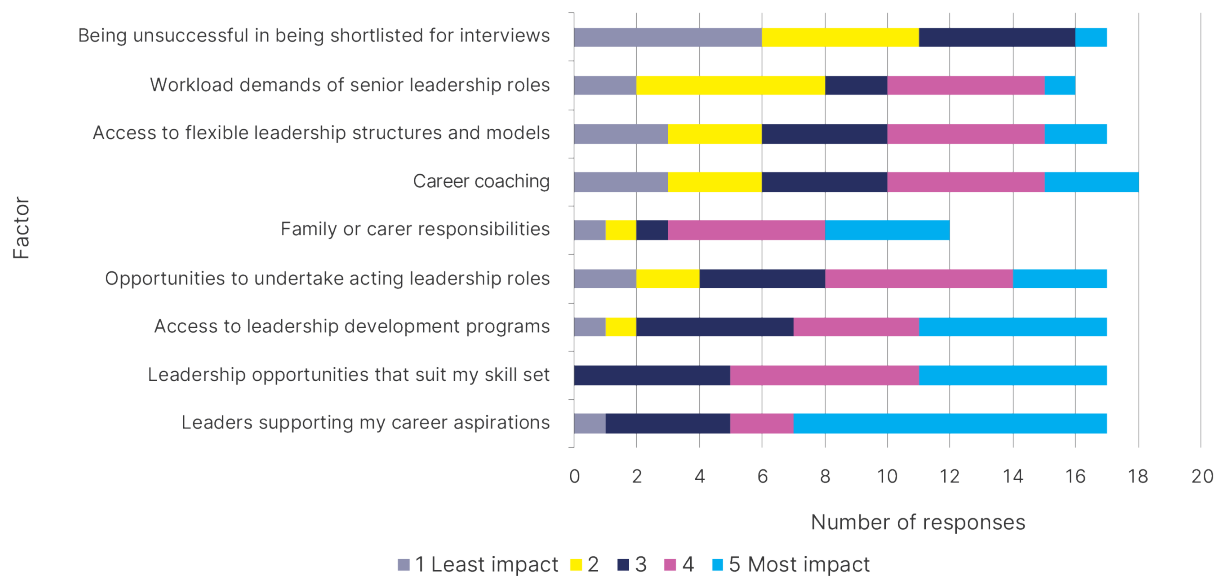


Personalised professional development included onsite opportunities such as acting positions, opportunities to lead new initiatives in the school or across parts of a region, participation in external programs through the Leadership Development team, study tours to Rome and Boston, pilgrimages and the 2023 Women in Leadership Symposium. These were recognised as opportunities sponsored by MACS, though respondents reflected (in the context of this study) on the personal benefits, rather than who sponsored them.

Leadership support, and access to leadership development and professional learning programs (see Figure 5) affirmed Heffernan’s contention that:

Effective programs can provide women with opportunities for growth and identity development, building support networks with other aspiring leaders, while developing their skills and knowledge about leadership, relationships and communication (unpub., p. 5).

**Figure 5: Response to interview question 2: The degree of impact of specific factors on career development**



Interestingly, almost 20% of the women taking part in this research were looking beyond MACS for new challenges and opportunities, commenting that either the culture of the organisation was too rigid and masculinised, or that their optimal leadership development opportunities lay outside the organisation because there was, as yet, no career path beyond their current position.

Significantly, formal mentoring and the creation of women’s leadership networks were seen as strong opportunities for ongoing leadership engagement allowing women to:

... be part of a network and work alongside or meet and speak with other leaders, other female leaders, around opportunities or problems or concerns (Interviewee M p. 115).

## Key challenges

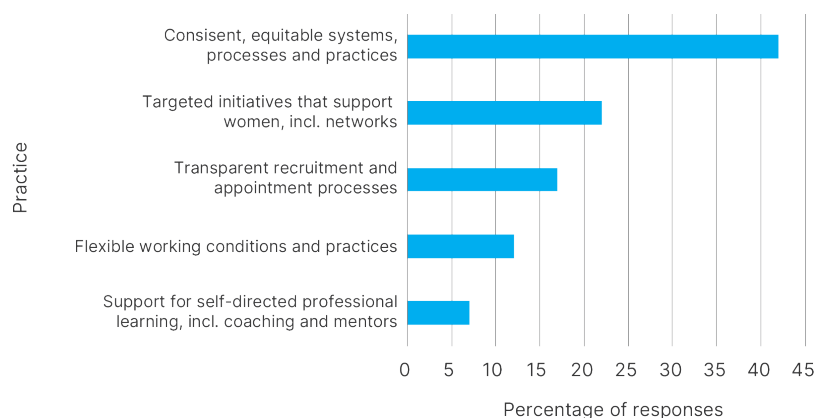
A focus on challenges combines the responses from interview questions 5.3 and 5.4, and elements from focus group questions 1 and 2, which elicited suggestions on opportunities and practices that would enhance women’s access to, and success in, undertaking senior leadership roles (see Figure 6). There were common threads across all participants that identified gaps in current supportive enablers and opportunities for women. Commentary amplified the calls to address some of the entrenched discriminatory workplace systems, practices and structures, which were also identified in the literature review as barriers to inclusive participation.



As the comments and observations included across the report suggest, the women involved in this research were very keen to see cultural change to inform future leadership roles and structures. Their experiences, in turn, strongly support recommendations for increased system support, succession planning and coaching for new leaders transitioning into higher levels of leadership.

The findings for flexible working conditions and targeted or self-directed professional learning have been discussed in more detail in previous sections of this report, but highlight the need to challenge traditional views of merit-based selection (Heffernan, unpub., p. 11), masculinised constructs of ‘fit’ for leadership roles (Heffernan, unpub., p. 10), and either the conscious discrimination against women or the unconscious bias that many women referred to in the focus groups and interviews.

**Figure 6: Response to interview question 5.3: Opportunities and practices to enhance participation of female leaders in Catholic education, ranked by frequency of responses**



As Figures 2 and 6 highlight, removing any barriers to the implementation of equitable systems, processes and practices, offering targeted support initiatives, and providing transparency in leadership recruitment and appointments would address 81% of identified concerns for women in Catholic educational leadership roles.

### Key challenge A: Cultural and organisational change to address gender discrimination

The single most substantial challenge for the women in this study was gender discrimination across all levels of leadership (see Figure 2). Although not always named as such, many had experienced gender bias and received explanations based on stereotypes as to why they were not successful in obtaining roles. For 75% of the research participants, addressing gender discrimination was seen as a top priority for MACS.

### Video 4: Challenges

At the personal level, participants raised a range of challenges.

See Video 4 for discussion regarding challenges facing leaders ([https://bit.ly/WiL\\_Challenges](https://bit.ly/WiL_Challenges)).



Based on the 2022–23 WGEA data, MACS was one of the 47% of organisations that had consulted with employees on issues concerning gender equality in the workplace; however, MACS currently does not have a policy or strategy regarding gender equality in the workplace (WGEA 2023a). While beyond the scope of this study, informal discussion among respondents indicated that remuneration tied to school size ignores the reality that the responsibilities of the principal do not differ on this basis. Furthermore, it was discussed that, in smaller schools, there is less infrastructure of individuals in paid positions of responsibility to whom the more routine demands of management can be delegated.

Many (68%) focus group participants and interviewees believed they had, at some point, experienced negative bias in the recruitment and appointment processes within MACS and independent Catholic schools, and endorsed the need for greater transparency in the recruitment processes and gender or power balance on the appointment panels.

Table 3 presents the key issues identified in focus groups and interviews relating to lack of transparency and accountability in the treatment of women, and Figure 7 (see below) summarises the major themes.

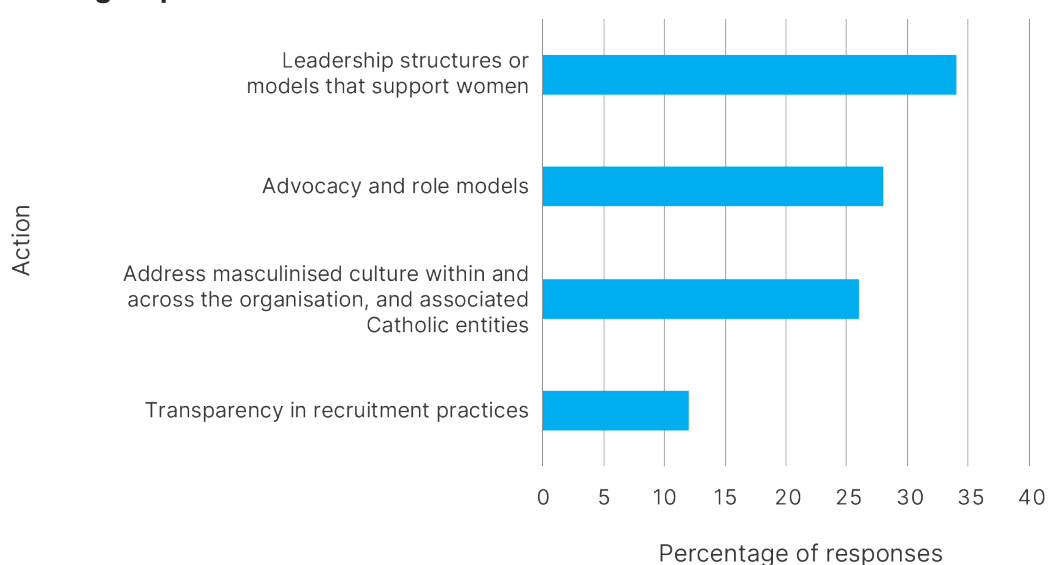
**Table 3: Key challenges to be addressed by MACS reported by participants in the focus groups and interviews**

Theme	Percentage	Examples
Leadership structures or models that support women	34%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Avoid pigeon-holing women into roles that do not lead to principalship</li> <li>• Encourage talent identification</li> <li>• Provide encouragement or support along the journey</li> <li>• Provide greater opportunities for women to act in different leadership roles</li> <li>• Lead other leaders to promote gender diversity</li> <li>• Have robust mechanisms for attracting and retaining female leaders</li> <li>• Ensure representation of women across leadership roles</li> <li>• Ensure women have access to leadership positions rather than managerial roles</li> <li>• Create structured leadership pathways and succession planning</li> <li>• Investigate how many women take long service leave and enrichment leave in comparison to men, and the dollar value as well</li> <li>• Engage men in rich leadership conversations about gender diversity</li> <li>• Have visible, transparent and equity-based processes for applying for acting roles</li> </ul>
Advocacy and role models	28%	<p>Essential to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• changing people’s perceptions and practices</li> <li>• calling out discriminatory behaviours</li> <li>• minimising the isolation experienced by female leaders</li> <li>• ensuring women support other women</li> </ul>



Theme	Percentage	Examples
Address masculinised culture within and across the organisation, and associated Catholic entities	26%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emphasise the need for cultural change – from inside both the organisation and individuals</li> <li>• Address the governance and strategic issues that have enabled gender bias and discrimination against women</li> <li>• Focus on what the person brings to the role</li> <li>• Provide more equity in acting position appointments</li> <li>• Keep women connected during their child-rearing years</li> <li>• Ensure accountability for transparency in hiring</li> <li>• Provide support for women in rural and regional areas who can't get to meetings at MACS</li> <li>• Know you've got good support from the system</li> <li>• Learn from First Nations leaders about intergenerational richness and gathering multi-generations of leaders</li> <li>• Focus on the spiritual side of Catholic leadership, not just the cognitive theological side</li> <li>• Support women in being assertive</li> <li>• Value the diverse skills and attributes women bring to leadership</li> </ul>
Transparency in recruitment practices	12%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In recruitment and appointment of all leadership roles</li> <li>• In pay and conditions, and expectations</li> <li>• In access to high-value (influential) networks, committees and professional development opportunities</li> <li>• In expectations and accountability regarding professional conduct</li> </ul>

**Figure 7: Key challenges to be addressed by MACS, as identified by participants in focus groups and interviews**



The commentary provided by the women in this study has strongly supported Heffernan's conclusion that 'an increase in female leaders who are supported to thrive in the role cannot happen without genuine commitment to cultural and organisational change' (unpub., p. 6).



## Benefits and limitations

As noted in the discussion of mentors and sponsors, several of the participants who were shoulder-tapped for leadership roles highlighted the value of being seen as having leadership potential or being a capable leader. However, the majority of research participants reported that leadership selection behaviour was discriminatory. Changing and challenging the diverse kinds of discrimination faced by women in the Catholic system, as summarised in the conclusion of the literature review (Heffernan, unpub., p. 19), would have a powerful impact on female leaders aspiring to thrive in Catholic education.

There was considerable concern that shoulder-tapping was advantageous for male leaders because there was no formal process in place within MACS to monitor gender equity principles in making these appointments. Some participants had been told that they would not be considered because they would not be able to manage their family responsibilities together with the demands of the role.

... there's a lot of shoulder-tapping ... and that tends to be a barrier to women's achievement. The education department was great about that. Every time a senior executive took more than two weeks leave ... you were not allowed to just tap someone in your team. For more than two weeks, there had to be an internal advertisement process which opened up opportunities to do different jobs ... specifically, more senior jobs (Interviewee B p. 14).

Thus, many called for greater transparency and formalised appointment procedures to provide women with:

... the opportunity to act in other roles. Specifically, some kind of advertisement process [is needed] for that (Interviewee B p. 14).

Unfortunately:

I've seen a man who's got lesser qualifications or less experience be tapped on the shoulder, and nurtured and mentored into senior leadership positions, and I feel as though I've really had to fight for that on my own (Interviewee K p. 62).

### Recommendation 7

That MACS invests in effective use of data, transparency and accountability to commit to achieving gender equality in all levels of leadership, and cultural diversity across all key decision-making bodies and committees.

## Key challenge B: Transparent leadership expectations and equitable processes

The need for greater transparency in the selection, appointment and leadership opportunities for women, and consistently applied processes (including panel training), dominated the recommendations for organisational change provided by participants in this research, and emphasised the challenges faced by women working across schools and system offices in the Archdiocese.

The structures and processes in recruitment need to change ... [They] need to be more in line with what the government sector does (Interviewee L p. 107).

A few years ago, I was involved in the appointment of a pretty important position ... We had three applicants: two women and one male. Both the women interviewed were so much better than the male. However, [they] wouldn't agree to a woman being given that position because 'the male has a career' (FG 4 p. 41).

I think transparency in recruitment is so important. I would hate to think that that's not actually happening. The tapping on the shoulder never works. The last thing you want is a leadership team that's all the same. You want a leadership team full of different views. You want them to come in at you from different places, different experiences et cetera (Interviewee N p. 123).



### **Recommendation 8**

That MACS creates and publicises clearly defined leadership pathways within a broader system-wide talent pipeline for the purpose of career and succession planning, acknowledgement and recognition of successful leaders, and employee retention.

### **Recommendation 9**

That MACS ensures the practice for acting leadership appointments is based on published Standard-referenced eligibility criteria and a transparent, equitable, inclusive appointment process is applied consistently across the system.

### **Recommendation 10**

That MACS initiates and publicises eligibility criteria referenced in the 'Victorian Catholic Professional Standard for Principals', and transparent, equitable, inclusive principal appointment processes and practices system-wide, enabling women to enter into leadership roles and to flourish.

## **Conclusion**

The WIL Research Project findings suggest that, while MACS needs leaders who are individually accountable, leadership increasingly resides in school and system leadership teams committed to achieving the strategic intent of the organisation.

The themes outlined in the MACS 2030 strategic plan consistently emphasise the pivotal role of leadership (MACS 2022). Theme 1 underscores the importance of being guided by faith, and emphasises the collective responsibility for nurturing faith leadership and development. Moreover, for teachers to deliver the highest quality teaching to enable learners to flourish, as outlined in theme 2, there must be leaders present who exemplify quality leadership traits. Theme 3 commits to carefully selecting, investing in and growing leaders to deliver excellence across the entire MACS system. The MACS office can facilitate the transformation of services to schools, when schools are positioned at the heart of their communities and the system, as identified in theme 4. School and system leadership have a critical role to play in delivering every aspect of the MACS 2030 strategic plan.

The WIL Research Project provides powerful evidence-based findings and recommendations to support the development of a MACS workforce strategy, as it is designed to:

- prepare, support and empower great staff to lead great schools
- develop and support current and future school leaders
- drive school and system improvement.

Equitable, supportive career pathways and professional development for women, aligned with an overhaul of a masculinised culture of meritocracy pervading the current MACS culture, have emerged as the key enablers of change to transform the traditional leadership models and practices.

The WIL Research Project findings have identified a sense of urgency that MACS needs to achieve gender equality in current and future leadership development to empower women to achieve greater presence and influence, so they can share the leadership of the improvement, innovation and change required to achieve the MACS 2030 aim:

... to develop a compelling and cohesive strategy that would define who we are, what we stand for and how we intend to achieve success across the entire organisation (MACS 2022, p. 3).





The challenges to achieving this goal are complex and multifaceted, but they provide the basis for ensuring inclusive, merit-based leadership recruitment and retention of women as exceptional Catholic leaders across MACS.

Strategic direction is essential to ensuring that all potential and current leaders are empowered to lead, thriving in exceptional schools and system teams to drive sustained system improvement. Resulting from data reported by the WGEA and the WIL Research Project findings, several recommendations have been identified, with those pertaining to the women in leadership research featuring in this report.

Developing high-performing, inclusive and diverse teams of leaders is critical to achieving and sustaining an agile, responsive leadership workforce. To ensure equitable access and participation by women at all levels of leadership across the system, resourcing and establishing a group of exceptional male and female change leaders are required.

Based on this project's intensive consultation with female leaders, the recommended changes will benefit all leaders, not just women. This will encourage and sustain greater diversity, and an abundance of high-quality leaders in Catholic education into the future. MACS is primed to respond and deliver on the recommendations, with the support and engagement of the workforce for the best outcomes. The adoption of recommendations will leave MACS well positioned to achieve its 2030 aim of becoming the employer of choice in Catholic education (MACS 2022).



# Recommendations

## Recommendation 1

That MACS establishes a cross-functional reference group, comprising key women and men from school and system to oversee the holistic implementation of the recommendations presented throughout this report.

## Recommendation 2

That ongoing leadership development across and throughout the career span is nurtured via MACS:

- continuing to support sponsored study
- providing further professional learning initiatives that enable women to undertake formal leadership development through postgraduate study, short courses and programs, study tours, pilgrimages and events.

## Recommendation 3

That MACS increases the visibility and representation of women in leadership via:

- expansion of informal coaching and mentoring initiatives and programs
- initiation of executive leadership coaching opportunities through on-the-job experiences for aspiring leaders.

## Recommendation 4

That MACS involves newly appointed principals in the selection of their mentor.

## Recommendation 5

That MACS establishes a women's leadership network to support women in addressing the barriers and challenges to achieving equitable access to opportunities supporting their development as impactful leaders across the system.

## Recommendation 6

That MACS investigates alternative models of principalship and streamlining of services provided to school leaders to make workloads more manageable, enhance the wellbeing of leaders and address the sustainability of principalship through more attractive working arrangements.

Factors to consider include:

- flexible working conditions to cater for leaders seeking to work part-time or job share
- open structures which encourage collaborative, networked leadership opportunities to foster teams of leaders, rather than simply leaders of teams.

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# Appendix

## Focus group study

### Questions

#### Question 1

Consider the enablers discussed in Dr Amanda Heffernan's literature review.

What do you see as the top three strategies in terms of their potential to be adapted or adopted at MACS and why?

#### Question 2

Consider the conclusions from Dr Amanda Heffernan's literature review.

Is there anything else that flows from these that could or should be tried?

## Interview study

### Questionnaire

#### Question 1: Formation

On a scale of 1–5, where 1 = least influential and 5 = most influential, please rank the degree of influence overall of the following leadership elements on your career development.

Items	Least influential					Most influential				
1.1 Undertaking postgraduate-level studies in leadership	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
1.2 Having high-quality role models and mentors	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
1.3 Having a professional network of other female leaders	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
1.4 Knowing how to leverage my leadership capabilities to further advance my career	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
1.5 Using the Australian Professional Standard for Principals to identify and develop my capabilities as a successful leader	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
1.6 Taking up diverse leadership roles to broaden my skills, knowledge and leadership profile	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

#### Question 2: Factors

On a scale of 1–5, where 1 = least impact and 5 = most impact, please rank the degree of impact that the following factors have had on your leadership aspirations.

Items	Least impact					Most impact				
2.1 Family or carer responsibilities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2.2 Workload demands of senior leadership roles	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



Items	Least impact					Most impact				
2.3 Career coaching	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2.4 Access to flexible leadership structures and models	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2.5 Leaders supporting my career aspirations	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2.6 Access to leadership development programs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2.7 Leadership opportunities that suit my skill set	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2.8 Being unsuccessful in being shortlisted for interviews	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2.9 Opportunities to undertake acting leadership roles	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

## Interview questions

### Question 3: Motivation

What is your primary motivation for undertaking a leadership role in a Catholic school?

Were there any challenges you faced in gaining your current position and what have been the rewards you have gained from your current role?

### Question 4: Support

In reflecting on current leadership roles and structures in Catholic schools, what opportunities and leadership actions do you think have the most impact in encouraging women to achieve inspiring and fulfilling roles as principals and senior leaders?

### Question 5: Opportunities

5.1 Describe the key opportunities that have had the greatest impact on your leadership development, especially within your Catholic education context.

5.2 What factors would enable you to take the next step towards achieving your leadership aspirations?

5.3 What opportunities and practices would increase the visibility of female leaders in Catholic education, and deliver practical leadership strategies to support the advancement of women's leadership goals and achievements?

5.4 Are there particular enablers that you would recommend?

### Question 6: Pathways

6.1 To what extent do you perceive being (or becoming) a principal as the pinnacle of your leadership in Catholic education?

6.2 What factors have had the greatest influence on your perceptions?

### Question 7: Recommendations

What recommendations would you give to MACS that would best support system-wide access to, and participation by, women in senior leadership in Catholic schools?

### Question 8: Final comments/reflections

Are there any final comments or observations you would like to add?



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