

# News

## Alumnae debate the role of women at the top

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Five high flying Oxford Brookes alumnae returned to the University on Wednesday 01 April to debate the role of successful women at work.

Introducing the panel, David Langford, Dean of the Business School, said what they all shared was a "passion for getting the most out of their working lives and sharing their enthusiasm and experience with others".



The panel was chaired by executive coach **Peninah Thomson '79**, a partner in the international executive coaching company Praesta, who graduated with a first in French and English in 1979.

She pointed out that the rate of change at the top remained 'glacial'. In 2000, 5% of company executive directors were women, rising to just 11% last year, while at Parliament, only 19% of MPs were female.

Liberal Democrat MP **Lynne Featherstone '74** told the audience that her career in politics stemmed from getting involved in student campaigns at Oxford Polytechnic in the late 1970s. She praised her course in communications and design, which enabled her to launch her own design company.



"Mrs Thatcher was on the throne then, but I just couldn't bear the world she was creating. I wanted to do something about it - I never could keep my mouth shut. Memories of Oxford Poly came back to me, so I joined a political party."

Visiting Fellow **Lou Willcock '84** said it was the support of her tutors when she was an undergraduate that enabled her to make a success of her business career, going on to become an entrepreneur and setting up new companies in the hospitality sector.

**Christine Kirby '07**, Manager of Human Resources and Resourcing at Thames Valley Police, and **Ulrike Rowbottom '99, '00, '03**, Director for the transport and supply chain giant UTi Worldwide, agreed that studying at Brookes gave them the opportunity to change direction and succeed. Both had to juggle the conflicting demands of family and work.



Summing up, Peninah Thomson referred to the "pink collar ghetto" of HR and communications into which women were too easily drawn. What were the challenges facing those women who wanted to work at "coalface", in operations or on company boards, for example?

The panel members offered their audience some suggestions. These included: "getting a support network", "having self belief", "being passionate about what you do", "valuing your own skills", and "being able to ask for help".