



July 2025 Better World Funding Report - Women@Manchester Network Speaking Club

This report is to record the first ten months of the Women@Manchester Network Speaking Club; its aims, and if we have achieved them, the events that took place, including how many members attended, and the Network's future plans regarding the Club.

If you have any questions, please contact womensnetwork@manchester.ac.uk

Aims of the Speaking Club

The Network created the Speaking Club following a query from a member regarding if there were any such clubs available at The University of Manchester. As there were no staff organisations or clubs that focused on building confidence in, and practicing public speaking skills, co-Chairs Emma Shiels and Lin Ma created the Speaking Club for use by Women@Manchester Network members, and staff across the University.

Women@Manchester is a network open to all colleagues who are women from across all parts of The University of Manchester, and in all roles. We are committed to non-binary and trans inclusion across the University and within the Women@Manchester Staff Network. We welcome the contribution of all women from across our University and will continue to make strides to ensure it is a safe and inclusive environment where everyone can work together.

The Network grew exponentially in 2024, ending the year with 720 members and a Committee of nine volunteers. Following a successful application for a FSE Better World Funding grant, the inaugural session of the Women@Manchester Network Speaking Club took place on Thursday, 3 October 2024.

To date, we have held one Speaking Club per month, and with an average attendance of 16.

Our aim was to create a safe space where attendees could:

- **improve their public speaking confidence;**
- **gain leadership skills;**
- **make new connections.**

Feedback from our attendees has been positive:

Session Usefulness and Effectiveness: A majority of participants (71%) find the sessions 'Very Useful', and 57% rate them as 'Effective'. This indicates a positive reception overall.

Skills Improvement: The most frequently improved skills are 'Public Speaking', 'Confidence', and 'Listening skills'. These align with the core objectives of the Speaking Club.

"There's a really nice open atmosphere and everyone is very encouraging. No one is forced to speak if they don't feel ready, and this makes it a lot easier to join in as there's no pressure. The organisers have put on a range of activities which has also been really helpful, and I hope the sessions keep going!"



Events

The Network has organised and facilitated 11 Speaking Club meetings; one per month, taking place over a lunchtime and led by Women@Manchester Committee members, University staff or external speakers.

Our first sessions focused on practice and creating a safe space. Members were asked to give a short talk on a subject, prepared or in the moment; the other attendees would then give constructive feedback.



The Network had initially hoped to offer training from staff in Staff Learning and Organisational Development (L&OD) as part of the Speaking Club remit, but circumstances did not allow this. Instead, we have been able to offer expertise from colleagues in the Teaching, Learning and Students (TLS) Team of the Library, Professor Rachel Cowen (University Academic Lead for Gender Equality and Senior Sponsor of the Women@Manchester Network), and Colette Fagan (Vice-President for Research), who led a session with our external speaker, Olive Mugenda (Former Chair of Board KUTRRH, and Founder of CLiG).

Kathryn Miller and Charlotte Evans of the Library TLS Team ran a session 'Practical Ways to Enhance your public speaking skills', examining what engaging public speaking looks and feels like. This was our most attended session of the Speaking Club so far, and offered best practice tips and strategies to effectively plan and communicate your ideas to different audiences.

As part of a collaboration with the Manchester/Kenya Senior Women Leader's Programme, a workshop was ran entitled 'Sharing Global Perspectives and Celebrating Women In Senior Leadership' where attendees heard from women leaders from Kenya and Manchester; Prof Olive Mugenda (Director of Centre for Innovative Leadership (CLiG) and Former Vice Chancellor/Chair of Board, Kenyatta Teaching Referral and Research Hospital) and Prof Colette Fagan (Vice President for Research, University of Manchester). The opportunity was given to ask questions and share experiences with them.

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Practical ways to enhance your public speaking skills

Kathryn Miller and Charlotte Evans (from the Teaching, Learning and Students Team at the Library) look forward to welcoming you to an hour-long interactive workshop focusing on practical ways to enhance your public speaking skills.

Thursday, 10 April - in-person
12pm - 1pm
Booth Street East Lifelong Learning suite, Room 1.01

Together we will:

- Examine what engaging public speaking looks and feels like.
- Share best practice tips and strategies.
- Help you to effectively plan and communicate your ideas with different audiences.
- Recognise your own strengths and set achievable goals to develop your skills

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SHARING GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES AND CELEBRATING WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP

Join the Women@Manchester Network for a seminar with **Olive Mugenda** (Former Chair of Board KUTRRH, and Founder of CLiG), and **Colette Fagan** (Vice-President for Research, The University of Manchester) for global reflections on senior women in leadership.

KENYATTA UNIVERSITY TEACHING, REFERRAL & RESEARCH HOSPITAL (KUTRRH)
CLiG Centre for Innovative Leadership & Governance
Innovative Leaders for Excellence

Friday, 21 March
10am - 11am
Online!

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If you wish to reach out to us, please email womensnetwork@manchester.ac.uk

Owning Your Expertise- Power and Voice as a Senior Leader (1 Hour Webinar)

In this special edition of the Speaking Club, we invited keynote speakers: Professor Margaret Kobia, the Kenya Cabinet Secretary for Public Service, Youth and Gender affairs, and Banji Adewumi OBE, the Director of EDI at the University of Greenwich. Themes explored in this 1 hour webinar were cultivating authentic and inclusive leadership, challenging gendered leadership stereotypes, and strengthening communication and influence.



Banji Adewumi OBE



**Professor
Margaret Kobia**

Women@Manchester May Speaking Club - Storytelling Relay

A very successful edition of the Speaking Club - taking place online, we provided attendees with a prompt (a genre, a theme, a character), attendees were invited to tell the story for a few sentences, and then pass it on to the next person to continue.

Women@Manchester presents: Ted Talks Challenge

We invited our attendees to watch a 'Ted Talks' on breaking habits, then we analysed the speakers techniques - including their outfits, styles of speech, use of humour etc.

A vertical poster for the 'Storytelling Relay' event. At the top, it says 'Storytelling Relay' in a stylized font, with a woman pointing at floating letters. Below this is a text box explaining that storytelling is an important skill for public speaking. Further down, a speech bubble icon contains the text 'Online (link sent by email)' and 'Tuesday, 13 May 12pm - 1pm'. To the right, another text box explains the relay format: 'Provided with a prompt, (a genre, theme, or character), you will tell a story for a few sentences, before passing it on to the next person to continue.' The bottom of the poster features the 'WOMEN @ MANCHESTER' logo with a bee icon, and a footer with the contact email 'womensnetwork@manchester.ac.uk'.

Storytelling Relay

Storytelling is an important skill for public speaking, helping you engage your audience, convey your message, and create an emotional connection. This session will help us practice the skills to tell a coherent, interesting, and entertaining story.

Online (link sent by email)
Tuesday, 13 May
12pm - 1pm

Provided with a prompt, (a genre, theme, or character), you will tell a story for a few sentences, before passing it on to the next person to continue.

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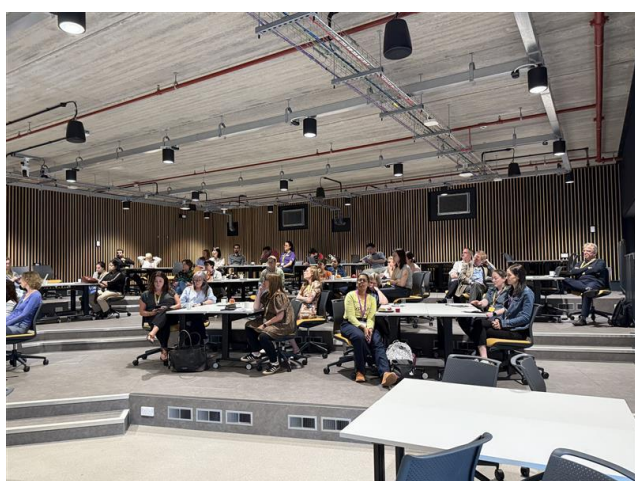
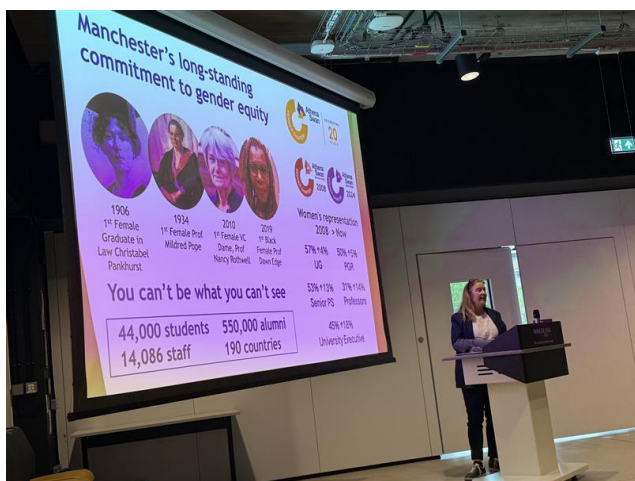
Academic Women in STEM (FSE)

The first session was held on 9th July 2025 and attracted around 70 attendees across all career stages. The event featured three talks: Professor Lynne Bianchi provided an overview of the current status of academic women in FSE; Professor Rachel Cowen discussed the University's Athena Swan Award and related progress; and Dr Lin Ma presented the resources and support available across the University.

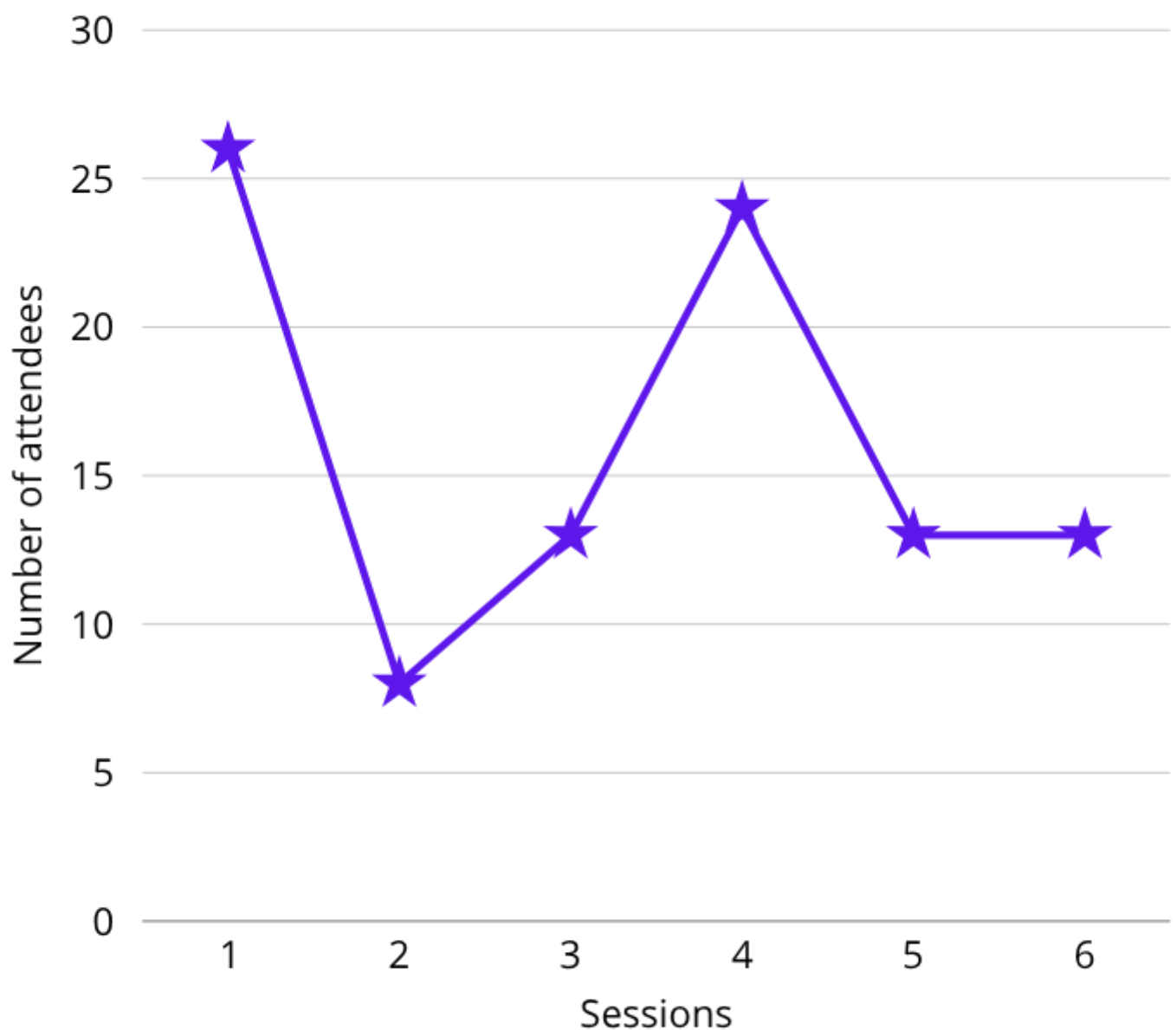
Professor Peter Green (Interim Dean) delivered the opening remarks, and Professor Chris Hardacre (Head of the School of Natural Sciences) actively participated in the open discussions and offering thoughtful reflections at the closing remarks.

The event received excellent feedback, with 100% of participants rating it positively (~75% rated it 'excellent' and ~25% 'good'). Attendees felt encouraged by the discussions and appreciated the support shown by the leadership team.

Based on attendees' suggestions, future events will focus on themes such as career progression, peer support, and focused sessions on maternity and motherhood, to be delivered in the next academic year.



Attendance



Future Plans

Feedback has been positive and we received a commended entry into the Making a Difference Awards, largely due to the tangible results from our Speaking Club. We have identified a gap in professional development. Our future plans are to continue with the club and take on-board comments and feedback from the members. Members have expressed want for sessions that include facilitators, professional coaching, and to receive critical feedback to highlight areas for improvement. We want to continue the momentum into the next academic year.