

THE LEADING LEARNING PROGRAMME

SUMMATIVE EVALUATION OF YR7

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NATIONAL
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BACKGROUND

This report provides a summative account of the seventh year of the National Leisure and Culture Forum's Leading Learning Programme (LLP). LLP aims to develop the leadership skills of senior managers of cultural services within local government across the UK (England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland). It is the first of its kind to specifically target this group of cultural leaders.

LLP is managed by a Programme Director on behalf of the National Leisure and Culture Forum. Over the last six years, aspects of the programme have been delivered by other organisations initially (Action Learning Associates and City University) before being taken in-house by the Director, once the programme had passed beyond its pilot phase. Currently, other partners in delivery are Business in the Arts North West who manage the mentoring aspects, RM services who administer the online 360° assessment questionnaires and Quarry Communications who administer and update the website.

METHODOLOGY

The evaluation for the Leading Learning Programme has three aims:

- To assess the LLP model
- To assess the impact of LLP on participants
- To review the operational management of LLP

The methodology comprises two surveys, documentation provided by the course Director (equalities data, residency schedules), correspondence and a review of a short report on the mentoring programme. The surveys are sent via Survey Monkey and were circulated to the Yr7 cohort at the end of their course and the second survey was sent to all the alumni (Yr1 to Yr6). The number of responses was as follows:

Questionnaire	Number of responses
Final survey (Yr7)	9 (out of 13)
Alumni survey	25 of 111 contacts (Yrs1-6)

FIGURE 1: EVALUATION SURVEY RETURN RATES

The mentoring and action learning elements of the programme were completed by Spring 2016. The reports and evaluations of these discrete elements of the programme were managed by Business in the Arts: North West (mentoring) and the Programme Director (Action Learning). The mentoring report was received in July 2016 and a verbal report was given of the Action Learning.

THE LLP MODEL

The programme comprises five core elements, each offering different approaches to aid participants' leadership journeys.

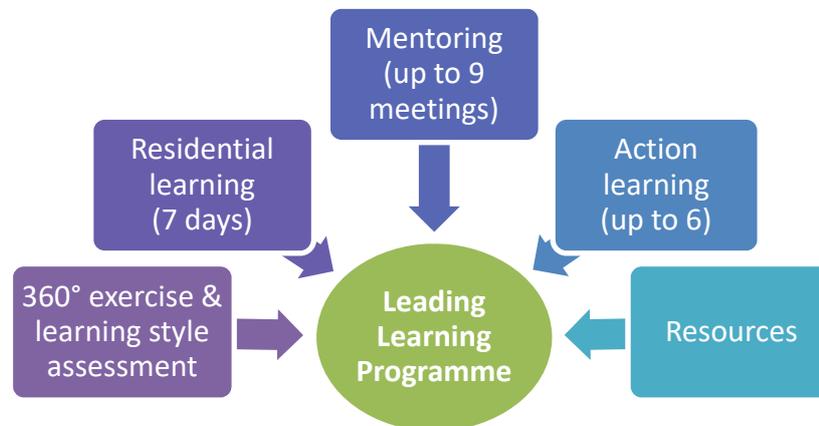


FIGURE 2: LEADING LEARNING PROGRAMME ELEMENTS

The pre-programme work (which includes the 360° exercise and learning style assessment) prepares the participants for the programme and provides the Programme Director with vital insights into participants' learning styles and leadership development interests. These two elements culminate in the creation of a Personal Development Plan ahead of a first meeting with mentors.

The residential component of the programme continued with a similar model to the last three years, looking at leadership, the political environment and scenario planning. The content in Yr6 comprised:

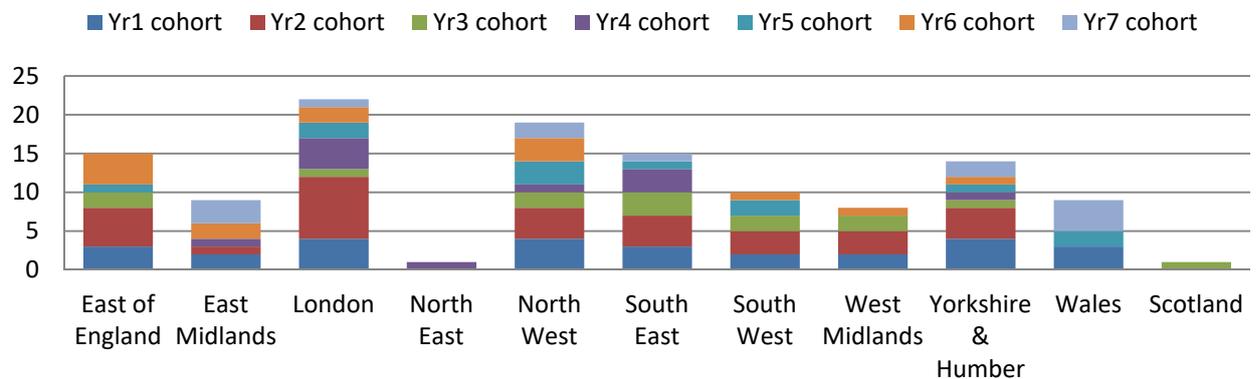
1st residency (3.5 days)	2nd residency (2 days)	3rd residency (1.5 days)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intros • Shifting landscapes • Reflective Leadership • Resilience • Strategic Leadership • Change & Collaborative Leadership • 3 guest speakers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Managing in a political environment • 2 guest speakers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reflections • Scenario planning • 2 guest speakers (current issues)

FIGURE 3: LEADING LEARNING PROGRAMME YR7 RESIDENTIAL MODULES

Each topic within the residencies is presented by a tutor with a significant track record in both training and in local government. The guest speakers are drawn from local government (chief executives, elected members and academia), with extensive experience of leading in local government.

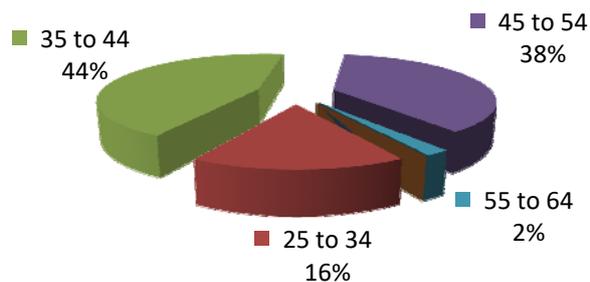
WHO HAS THE PROGRAMME REACHED SO FAR?

REGIONS WHERE THEY WORK

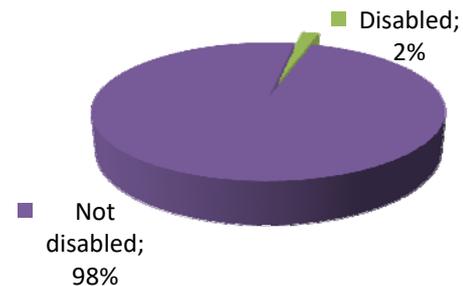


DEMOGRAPHY

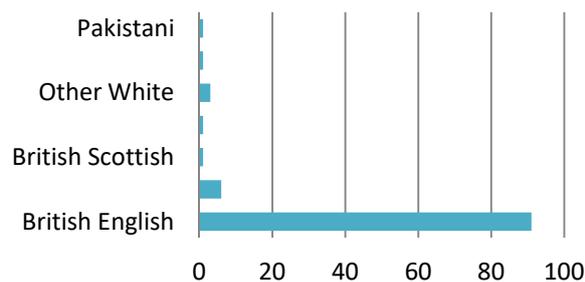
AGE



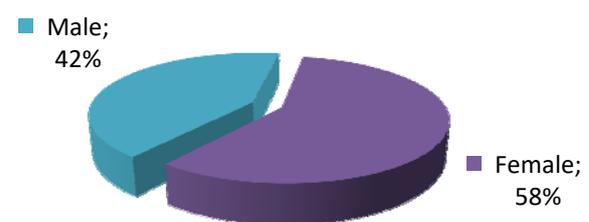
DISABILITY



ETHNICITY



GENDER



LLP has yet to make inroads into the North East of the country, with only one person attending from that region to date (despite efforts on the part of the Director). The majority of participants have been white, aged between 35 and 54 and not disabled. The balance between the genders favours women over men, with just over two fifths of participants being male and three fifths female.

QUALITY OF THE PROGRAMME

Since the start of the programme, participants have given consistently high ratings for the different elements of the programme. The seventh year of the programme was no different in this respect as the following comment illustrates:

“This was one of the most inspirational courses I have ever signed up to. The time and energy commitment 'for me' personally was high but the investment 'in me' and the benefit to my employer was immeasurable. The quality of speakers was exceptional and the content and facilitation well thought-out and professional. Given the challenging times facing senior managers working in local authorities at the moment, it is reassuring to know that there is a programme such as this available and people on-hand to help you steer through both changes and (sometimes) conflict. The relationships I have formed through the course will be invaluable in supporting me through the next phase of my development and career in the arts. What I have gained from participating in the LLP programme will stay with me always.”

(Survey respondent – Yr7 participant)

At the end of each programme, participants rate each element of the programme, using the following scale: 4=Very good, 3=Good, 2=Poor, 1=Very Poor. The average ratings are presented in the following figure:

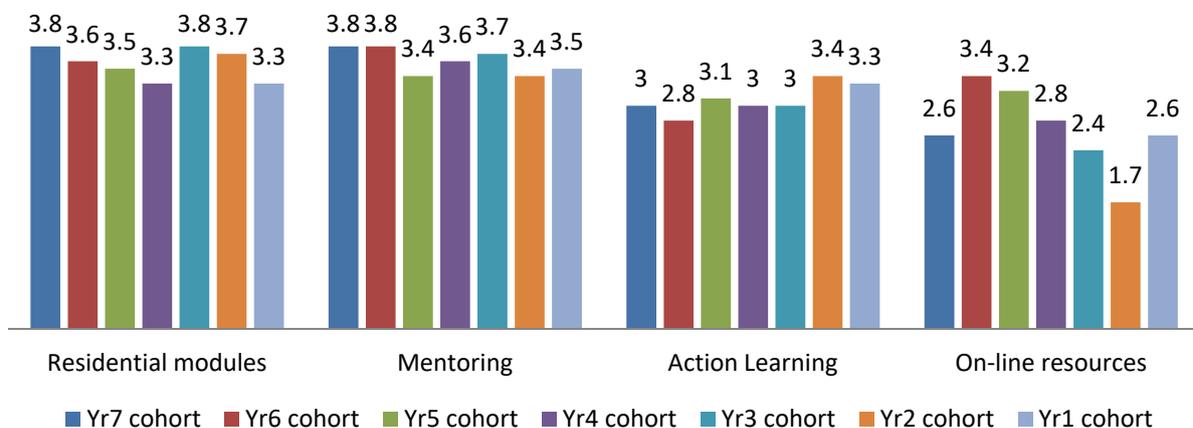


FIGURE 4: QUALITY OF EACH ELEMENT OF LLP

Mentoring and residential learning continue to be the most highly rated elements of the Leading Learning Programme. Action Learning achieves slightly less high average ratings in part because the style of learning is not uniformly popular with participants. This year the average rating for on-line resources dropped after a period of five years where cohorts gave increasingly high ratings.

The Yr7 cohort were particularly positive about the residential and mentoring aspects of the programme, with both ratings achieving an average of 3.8. None of the participants gave

feedback that explained lower ratings for the action learning and only one person gave a comment on the on-line learning resources, noting that they had been unaware of such resources during their course.

The quality of the LLP programme continues to be high, with each cohort successively giving high average rankings for each element. However, participant ratings for the on-line resources this year suggests that these either need to be sign posted or developed.

RESIDENTIAL MODULES

The residential learning has, as detailed above, maintained high ratings in successive years. This part of the programme offers participants insights into executive and political leaders' perspectives of local government, as well as the opportunity to network with peers. Comments provided by participants this year included:

"It was great to hear from such a wide range of Chief Executives."

(Survey respondent – Yr7 participant)

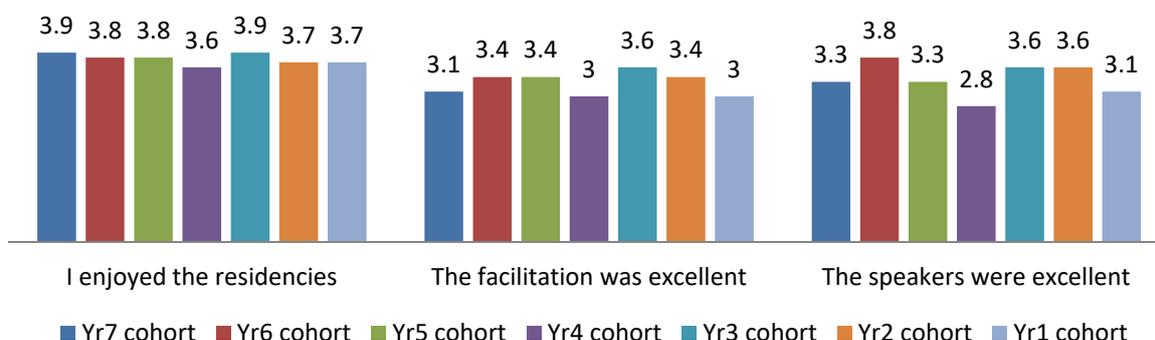
"I enjoyed the programme - meeting with other managers from the same sector going through similar situations was very useful. My mentor was great and he really helped me to get a sense of my current position within the authority and my future direction."

(Survey respondent – Yr7 participant)

"I learnt so much from all the speakers, and although not all the content was completely relevant I think it would be difficult to create such a varied and rich programme to suit everyone's needs and learning styles."

(Survey respondent – Yr7 participant)

Using a similar scale to the previous question (4=Very good, 3=Good, 2=Poor, 1=Very Poor), participants returned high average ratings across the six statements put to them in the survey in relation to the residencies. This year participants were particularly pleased with the residency speakers, returning the highest average rating to date.



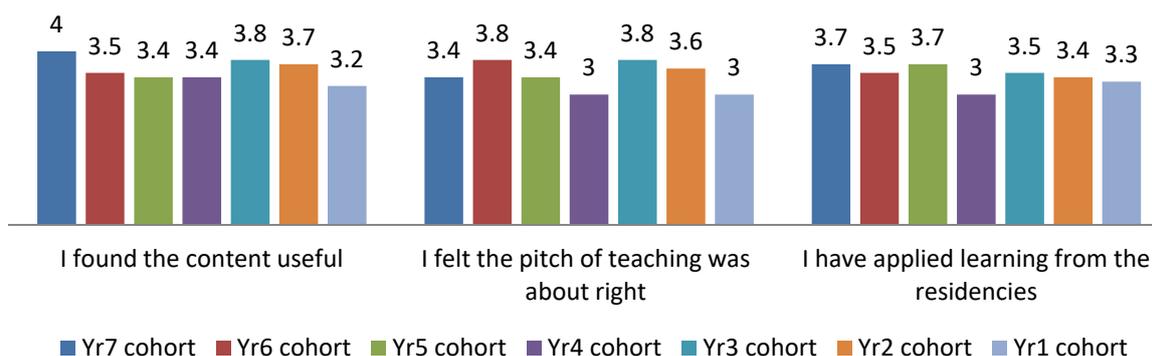


FIGURE 5: AVERAGE RATINGS FOR THE QUALITY OF THE RESIDENCIES, YRS 1-7

MENTORING

The mentoring element of the Leading Learning Programme is greatly valued by participants. Ratings in the final survey are high and it is notable that many of the relationships have continued beyond the lifespan of the courses. In response to previous cohorts' feedback, new mentors were recruited and inducted in Year 7 to ensure that travel was not a barrier to arranging regular mentoring sessions.

Business in the Arts North West carry out two separate evaluative exercises to capture feedback at the midpoint of each year and once the mentoring relationships are completed. Three indicators collected at the end of the mentoring relationships are the value that participants put on the mentoring relationships, the benefits to personal development and benefits to career development. Participants were given a scale where 1 is of no value or benefit and 6 is extremely valuable or beneficial, average ratings against these indicators from Yr4 onwards have been 3.9 and above.

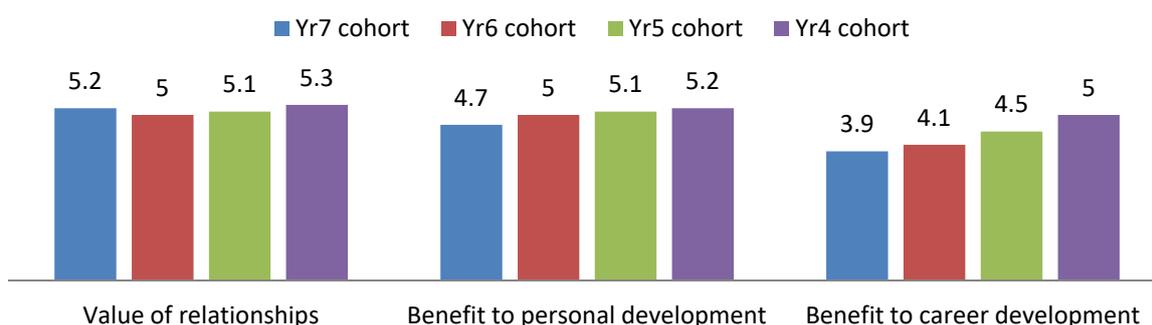


FIGURE 6: PARTICIPANT RATINGS FOR VALUE AND BENEFIT OF MENTORING

While participants valued the relationships highly in Yr7, there were lower ratings compared to the previous three years in terms of the benefits to personal and career development. While it is not entirely clear why there has been a drop in these benefits (and it is worth factoring in the diminishing job market here), participants' feedback suggests that availability

of mentors may have played a part here. Four participants reflected on the lack of availability of their mentors and comments included:

“He was really just too busy.”

“I did feel that there were some big gaps between sessions which I felt resulted in me losing focus and momentum.”

“As may be expected, other priorities and demands on the mentor's time meant that meeting times and days had to be changed at very short notice. I wouldn't necessarily describe this as a difficulty in the relationship, I understand that things come out of the blue and arrangements have to be changed. I think it's something that mentees should be aware of so that they remain flexible and understanding. When (mentor) gave her time she gave her full attention to the mentoring role.”

As with previous years, participants were more likely to give the personal benefits of their mentoring relationships a higher rating as opposed to noting benefits to their career development. Comments this year noted the impact the relationships had had on self confidence as well as noting the usefulness of seeing how things worked in a different part of the country.

“(Mentor) has boosted my confidence both in my terms of my work and for future career development. His advice was very welcome and has helped me to view my work strategically. Of particular benefit was developing my change and overall leadership skills.”

(Mentoring feedback – Yr7 participant)

“Engaging in conversations about (mentor's) plans and ambitions for arts and culture in her district. It's been beneficial to travel to another district and hear about different ideas and approaches being taken in another place.”

(Mentoring feedback – Yr7 participant)

“I firmly believe the relationship has given me confidence and belief at a very important part of my life. I now have a much wider perspective that will help me both personally and professionally for the remainder of my years.”

(Mentoring feedback – Yr7 participant)

Mentors, both newly recruited and those that have been with the programme for some years, continue to be supportive of the project aims. Their feedback included references to their enjoyment of the relationships with mentees and endorsements of the programme:

“Think it is an excellent programme and hope that it continues in spite of the local authority financial cuts.”

(Mentor feedback, Yr7)

“I have found learning about the particular environment in which (mentee) is working - managing shared services across two boroughs - very interesting while the general move to market testing and outsourcing such services inevitably throws up further challenges and issues. I believe that (mentee) and I developed a very positive relationship and he was able to make constructive use of both this and the general course opportunities to benefit and grow in desired professional skills and personal confidence in utilising these. I continue to feel strongly that the Leading Learning Programme is a very valuable and worthwhile one and am pleased to be able to make a contribution.”

(Mentor feedback, Yr7)

“As in previous years, I enjoy doing this and get a lot of satisfaction in seeing the mentee develop over the 9 months that we interact and meet.”

(Mentor feedback, Yr7)

ACTION LEARNING

The benefits of the action learning element of the programme continue to be experienced on two levels. The first is their usefulness in tackling professional issues, reflecting on issues with peers and enjoying a high level of trust between participants in a set. The second is learning and applying the skills of action learning, such as questioning technique and listening.

Again, as in previous years, action learning is not for everyone, leading to comments that acknowledged its usefulness if only to exclude it from their future learning paths. One alumni noted the continued usefulness of the principles of action learning alongside other elements of LLP:

“The Action Learning Set principles have been useful, as has the notion of 'responsible gossip' - which I find helpful, and indeed members of my team have also adopted.”

(Alumni survey – Yr6 participant)

INVESTMENT IN LEARNING

As cutbacks create ever greater pressures on training budgets, a question was included in the survey that asked participants to indicate their personal investment in their professional development in the preceding 12 months (as opposed to investment from their authorities). Of the seven respondents, three had invested in their professional development and documented just over £2,050 of investment ranging from just £150 to £1,500. We will continue to track this figure in order to ascertain the levels of investment participants are prepared to make to meet their learning needs.

WHAT DIFFERENCE HAS LEADING LEARNING MADE?

MEETING PARTICIPANTS' LEARNING NEEDS

Much of the programme focuses on the individual professional development needs, which are identified by participants at the outset of the programme. Participants are invited to create Personal Development Plans that form the basis of their conversations with mentors, and they are encouraged to revisit their plans throughout the programme.

At the end of their LLP experience, each cohort is asked to indicate what percentage of these learning needs the programme had met. Taking all seven years together, just under three quarters (or 74%) of participants said that the programme had met 80% or more of their individual learning needs.

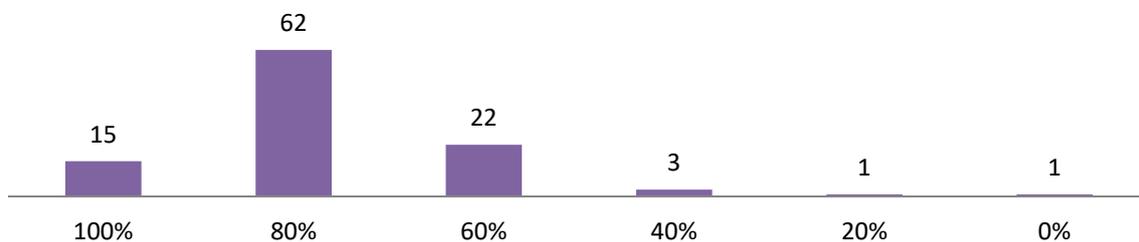


FIGURE 7: PERCENTAGE OF LEARNING NEEDS MET BY THE PROGRAMME (BASE: 104)

None of the Yr7 cohort suggested a percentage lower than 80%. Only one participant had a comment and that was a reflection that they had identified emotional resilience as learning need and that they were working to improve this skill.

TIME PARTICIPANTS INVEST

Participants are released from their host authorities to attend contact days (residencies, mentoring meetings and action learning sets) and also invest considerable personal time in their LLP experience.

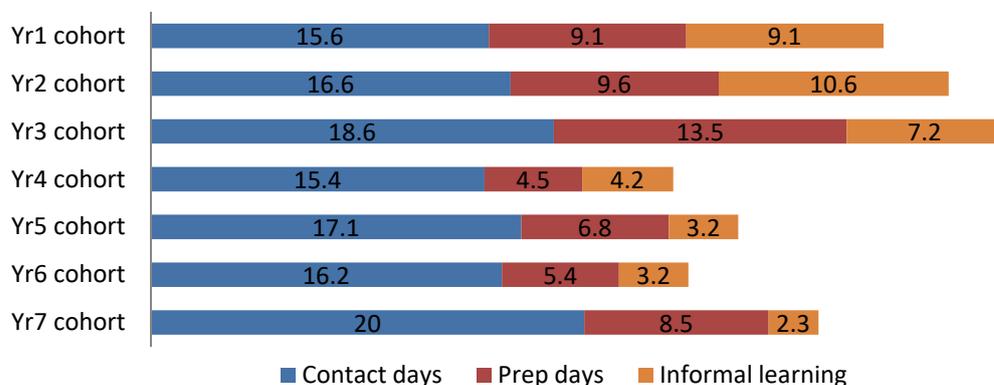


FIGURE 8: AVERAGE NUMBER OF DAYS EACH COHORT INVESTED IN LEADING LEARNING

Overall, participants have committed between 24 and 39 days towards their LLP experience, with the Yr3 cohort investing the most time to date. Interestingly, as cuts to local government have taken hold, the average number of hours cohorts have invested in the programme outside of the contact days has diminished. However, the seventh year of the programme shows that it might be becoming easier to invest in professional development.

IMPACT ON CAREER PATHS

At the end of the programme the evaluation asks participants to indicate their agreement with statements in respect of LLP's impact on their career progression. Participants agreed that the programme had a role to play in enabling them to reach their target roles with some also agreeing that the programme had already had an impact on their career.

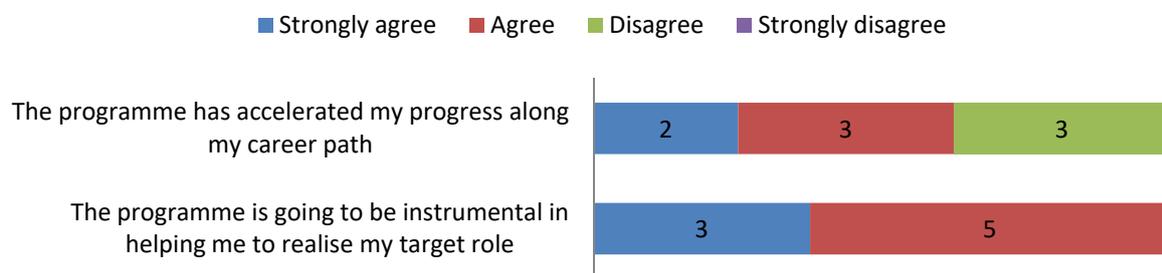


FIGURE 9: YR7 COHORT'S AGREEMENT WITH STATEMENTS ABOUT CAREER IMPACT (BASE: 8)

One participant noted the profound effect that it had had in relation to their career choices and ambition:

"Thoroughly enjoyed the course. It has given me to confidence and direction that will drive and shape my career, for the better, long into the future."

(Survey respondent – Yr7 participant)

By the end of the year, six of the eight respondents documented activities they had undertaken linked to formal or informal learning. The range of opportunities taken up by the Yr7 cohort does not cluster as neatly as previous years, with each person describing a different set of activities. Examples include:

"Started to attend the Senior leadership team meetings and extended departmental team meetings. Completed a further 360 degree exercise."

(Survey respondent – Yr7 participant)

"Shadowing senior officers; Closer interaction with 'Members'; Self-directed research; Positioning in leadership roles at regional level."

(Survey respondent – Yr7 participant)

One person had become a mentor, another had joined their Council's coaching scheme and a further participant had followed the action plan agreed with their mentor.

Lastly, one person described the impact of the course in relation to their confidence to lead an initiative

“The course gave me the confidence to lead the 6 authorities in my region to create a new Arts and Education Network funded by the Arts Council. I would probably have doubted my ability to bring everyone together previously but the techniques I learnt on the course made it possible.”

(Survey respondent – Yr7 participant)

Turning to the alumni, an impact story has emerged that describes both the immediate usefulness of the programme in relation to participant’s careers as well as the longevity of aspects of the programme.

There were fewer examples of how roles had been extended in the responses to this year’s survey. Those that talked about existing roles described how affirming the programme had been or how their profile had been raised. Only one person talked about significant change in role:

“Helped me to move to a role with wider responsibility - additional responsibility for sport and leisure. My role is now more strategic than previously.”

(Alumni survey – Yr2 participant)

Those alumni that had secured new jobs as a result of LLP wrote about how it had prepared them for more senior roles, whether that was in relation to confidence, enhanced leadership skills or the ability to take a strategic overview. Examples include:

“I have just been offered a Library Manager post in another authority.”

(Alumni survey – Yr5 participant)

“In the past 12 months, as Head of Arts service within a local authority in Wales, I have been given responsibility for the Heritage service. ... I have increased access to the Chief Executive and to the Leader of my local authority and to the Chief Executive of the Arts Council of Wales.”

(Alumni survey – Yr1 participant)

“Now Head of Archive Service - senior management team.”

(Alumni survey – Yr2 participant)

“I am now a Director of my Leisure Trust.”

(Alumni survey – Yr6 participant)

“It took a while but finally last March I was able to gain a promotion and became a Head of Service, one of my authority’s senior managers. The Leading Learning Programme meant I was well prepared to take on this role and was able to hit the ground running rather than taking a lot of time to develop in the role.”

(Alumni survey – Yr1 participant)

“It’s been a slow burn, but I am now in a senior management position.”

(Alumni survey – Yr2 participant)

Two of the alumni talked about how the programme had helped them to step out of their authority and take on leadership roles in Charities:

“I no longer work for my organisation, but instead I am now leading my own. The Programme has also inspired me to launch a Charitable Incorporated Organisation; specialising in working with vulnerable young people. I am currently leading the development of the charity in a voluntary role of Chair of Trustees. I have secured £50K to launch the charity and I am working with fundraising consultants to attract significant investment which will allow me to facilitate a paid CEO position within the next 12-18 months.”

(Alumni survey – Yr6 participant)

“Was able to secure a Director’s position when transferring service from Local Authority control into Charitable Trust.”

(Alumni survey – Yr6 participant)

LLP has been a significant factor in the professional lives of its alumni and over both the short and medium term elements of the programme have borne fruit. At a time when opportunities for advancement in the cultural sector have become less frequent, these successes are testament to the quality of the teaching and breadth of learning opportunities within the programme and to the caliber of participant that LLP attracts.

Each year, the Alumni are also asked to document how strongly they agree with statements about LLP’s impact on their careers and achieving their target roles.

Like the current Yr7 cohort, the Alumni in the majority of instances concurred with the statement about realizing target roles and over half of respondents agreed that it had accelerated them along their career paths.

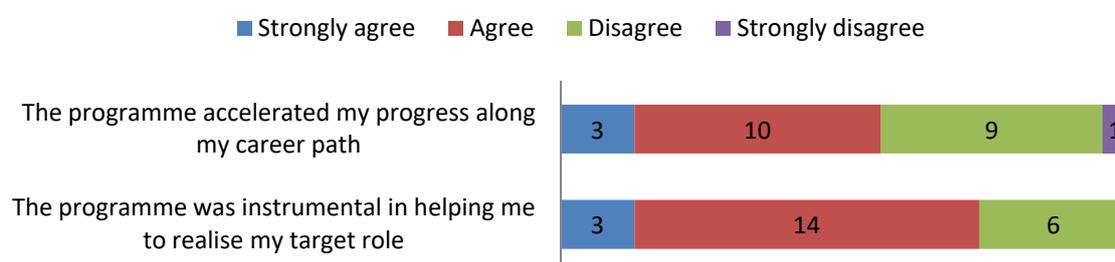


FIGURE 10: ALUMNI AGREEMENT WITH STATEMENTS LINKED TO LLP (BASE: 24)

One respondent observed that participating in the programme had helped in their deliberations of whether or not to look outside of local government for new challenges:

“I was in the first cohort and so waited a number of years for an opportunity to progress to senior management level. The programme helped me to realise that I did want to progress in a local authority role when at the time I was thinking of leaving the profession. It also helped me to mature as a leader and manager of people.”
(Alumni survey – Yr1 participant)

APPLICABILITY OF LLP

LLP has delivered a consistent programme of topics over the past seven years with changes most likely to be made to the time given for a subject during residencies. Each year the alumni are asked to indicate which elements of the programme they have found to have ongoing usefulness and this year the two topics that emerged as the most useful were: Leading change and Managing in a political environment.

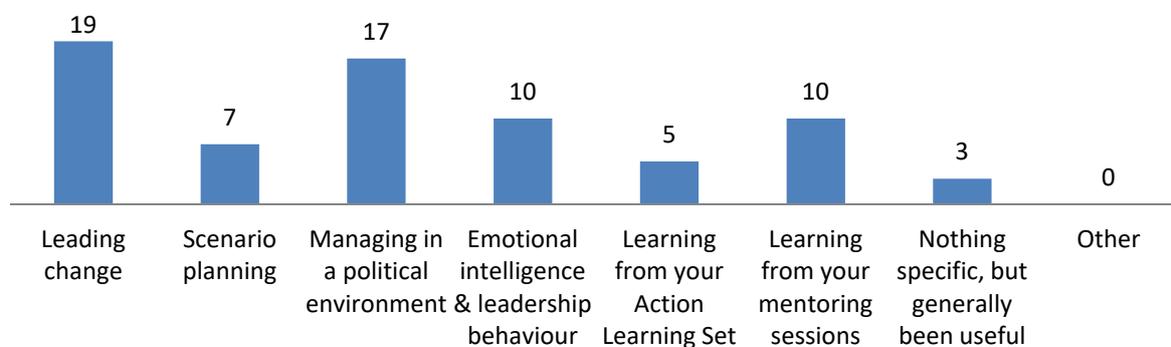


FIGURE 11: ONGOING USEFULNESS OF LLP FOR ALUMNI (BASE: 23)

The practical application of these skills in the 12 months preceding the survey echo the categories in the figure (above) and examples given by the alumni included:

“As lead responsibility for Business Planning I have drawn heavily on the 'Scenario Planning' and 'Change Management' training and have utilised the tools and devices with my Business associates and the my Board of Trustees. I have also utilised the 'Learning Styles' tools to identify a skills and personality audit for the Board of Trustees; thereby identifying our strengths and current needs.”
(Alumni Survey – Yr6 participant)

“Have been planning changes to grant funding and enabling cultural organisations to cope with these changes. Have put several initiatives into place that empower organisations to be able to transform their work.”
(Alumni Survey – Yr2 participant)

“Leading change, managing in a political environment, and emotional intelligence and leadership behaviour. Some of the practical points from my mentoring sessions have also been helpful - my working style, developing my network/working constructively with colleagues.”

(Alumni Survey – Yr4 participant)

“The modules about managing change have been extremely useful whilst I have been leading a transformation programme. The work I did with my mentor around controlling emotions and focusing on outcomes has been extremely useful at a time of great change and needing to influence/lead staff.”

(Alumni Survey – Yr1 participant)

In addition, the alumni are asked to describe how, in the last 12 months, LLP had impacted on their leadership behaviour. Examples included:

“The knowledge I gained about myself and thinking about what motivates others has been invaluable. Making challenging changes to the Library Service was helped by the knowledge gained about managing change and working in a political environment.”

(Alumni Survey – Yr4 participant)

“More reflective, think more about impact on Cllrs, senior managers as well as frontline staff.”

(Alumni Survey – Yr5 participant)

“Completing more reflection time, doing less direct managing prioritising strategic thinking and planning, empowering other members of the team, rewarding other team members.”

(Alumni Survey – Yr6 participant)

“I’m trying to be more collaborative and reduce my inclination to go in and sort things out.....and the former method is actually easier and less stressful!”

(Alumni Survey – Yr2 participant)

“... By putting into practice the learning about managing change especially around communication and engaging staff has helped me to change the management culture within the service. The work around controlling emotions and how I am perceived has enabled me to gain the confidence and respect of the staff which means that they follow rather than resist. They are able to focus on the bigger picture and creating something better rather than just focusing on cutting services.”

(Alumni Survey – Yr1 participant)

These quotations are illustrative of the breadth of learning that the programme covers and most importantly, how alumni have been able to adapt the learning to their specific professional circumstances.

One person commented that in the time elapsed since they had taken part in the course, local government had changed significantly and therefore the course content in their view had become outdated. They were interested in a course that would refresh their knowledge and use contemporary examples.

WORKING BETTER WITH POLITICIANS

The residential sessions on political awareness invite participants to think about the importance of politics and specifically politics within a public sector context. The sessions are supported by presentations from senior politicians and unique film footage.

When asked whether they agreed that the programme had helped them to feel better equipped to work with key politicians, over 90% of all cohorts of participants have either agreed or partly agreed with the statement.

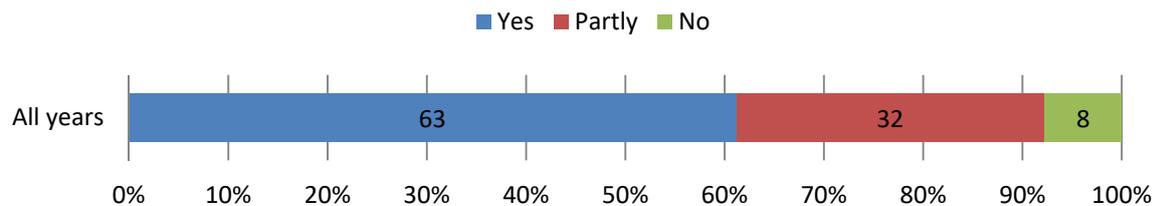


FIGURE 12: AGREEMENT LLP MADE PARTICIPANTS BETTER EQUIPPED TO WORK WITH POLITICIANS (BASE: 103)

Over the past seven years participants have referenced changes to their working relationships with elected members as a direct result of the programme. The Yr7 cohort added to this endorsement of this aspect of LLP.

DELIVERING FOR COMMUNITIES

The Alumni survey includes a question asking respondents how far they agree that LLP helped them to find new ways to deliver services for their communities. As the following figure shows, the majority of respondents felt that what they learnt during the programme had helped.

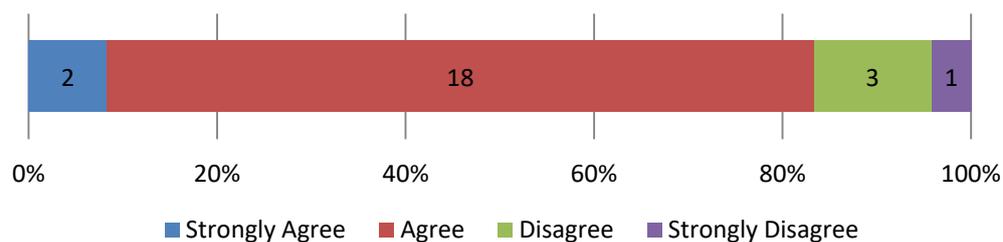


FIGURE 13: ALUMNI AGREEMENT LLP HELPED FIND NEW WAYS TO DELIVER FOR COMMUNITIES (BASE: 24)

Comments made in support of their agreement show that participants had learnt how to become more creative and receptive to new ideas, as well as offering them practical tools to approach new initiatives such as Community Asset Transfer:

“It has made me more open to change and finding new ways to deliver services.”

(Alumni survey – Yr1 participant)

“Encouraged me to look for creative approaches to service delivery particularly the commissioning of the library service.”

(Alumni survey – Yr4 participant)

“Seeking sustainable partnerships with the right match - working with Orbit social housing providers to tackle digital exclusion using Our Warwickshire community history website; Exploring with public health support for dementia sufferers.”

(Alumni survey – Yr2 participant)

“I might have struggled with Community Asset Transfer if I had not been on the LLP.”

(Alumni survey – Yr1 participant)

CONFIDENCE & RESILIENCE

In a period of austerity and changes to the political landscape of the UK and across the world, it is not surprising that participants commented on the benefits of the programme in relation to leading in challenging circumstances. Aside from the development of skills and knowledge, the programme provides participants with mechanisms of support (action learning and mentoring). Confidence was once again an important outcome that was documented by participants, as one person noted:

“Participating in the Leading Learning Programme for Culture and Leisure has not only reaffirmed my knowledge of leadership within the sector but has also given me many new skills and much knowledge about how to lead, especially in these challenging times. Before starting the course I felt as if my career was at a stand-still, which in turn caused doubts about my ability to lead at the most senior level. Since taking part in, and completing the course, I have developed a new sense of enthusiasm and urgency for the Arts within Wales and now see what seemed like challenges as exciting opportunities. The biggest difference is my ability to now sit back and consider situations before reacting, so rather than having a 'lets do this now and everyone should do it with me' response to challenges and opportunities I am more considered in my approach. I have also developed a confidence and calmness when considering and discussing high level strategic issues where as previously I would have doubted myself. ... Previously I would have turned to senior managers for reassurance whilst doing this work but I now have the confidence to present them with ideas and concepts which are well thought through and researched. This has resulted in us going down the path to a solution much quicker than expected and I'm also trusted to make it happen without too much guidance from our Chief Officer team.”

(Survey respondent – Yr7 participant)

This same participant addressed the point that although they may have already been on track to take on additional responsibility, LLP prepared them for their enhanced role and responsibilities:

“Although I may well have taken on this role before the course it would have been a much more terrifying prospect and I would have been incredibly stressed about it all. Personally the benefits have been immense. Rather than giving things a go and hoping for the best I now have trust in my ability to lead. I have developed my skill for listening and supporting other people's ideas whilst enabling them to develop their own knowledge base and abilities. Self doubt was always a big issue for me but I am now aware that being able to bring people together to work towards a united goal is one of my strengths[.]”

(Survey respondent – Yr7 participant)

Other participants noted the impact that LLP has had on their leadership behaviour and confidence to lead:

“The programme has definitely impacted on my leadership behaviour, and has given me the opportunity to develop my strategic and political awareness.”

(Survey respondent – Yr7 participant)

“I have become more aware of having to adapt my leadership style to different scenarios and situations. I now react or behave differently according to the situation I find myself facing.”

(Survey respondent – Yr7 participant)

“It's given me more confidence to put myself forward and the skills to communicate more effectively at a higher level.”

(Survey respondent – Yr7 participant)

“Crucially it taught me the difference between being a leader from being a manager. Having learnt this on the course I make a conscious effort to engage and lead my staff as opposed to managing them on a purely operational level. I think this has made me a better manager. It also reinforced the importance of having a strategic view especially in a period of rapid change.”

(Survey respondent – Yr7 participant)

Turning to resilience, participants and alumni were invited to rank how successfully eight characteristics of resilient leadership (according to an article by A&DC) had been addressed by LLP. The following figure shows how the Yr7 cohort compared with the Yr4 cohort in terms of how well they felt the programme had supported their development in relation to the eight characteristics of resilience on a scale where 1 = least successful and 8 = most successful.

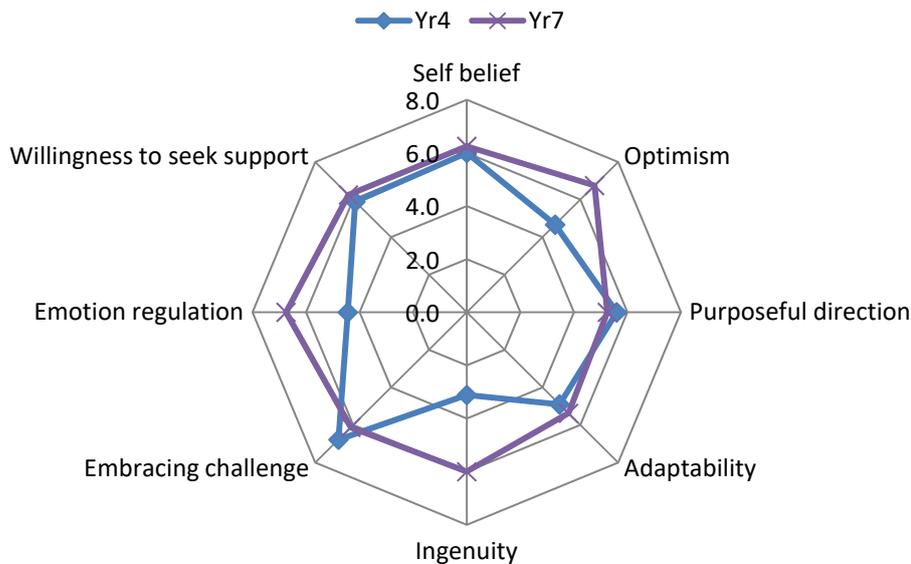


FIGURE 14: LLP'S SUCCESS IN SUPPORTING RESILIENCE, AVERAGE RANKINGS, YR4 AND YR7

The figure shows how the most recent cohort (in purple) felt the course was stronger in relation to all eight areas of resilience compared to their Yr4 counterparts. The difference between the three years, particularly in terms of “Optimism”, may be a reflection of the time that has elapsed since the first austerity measures filtered through local government. However, it could also be evidence that LLP has adapted over the years to better meet participants needs to become more resilient.

In addition to this question each year’s cohort of participants and the alumni are asked to document whether they agree that LLP has bolstered their resilience in order to ‘survive and thrive’ in tough times.

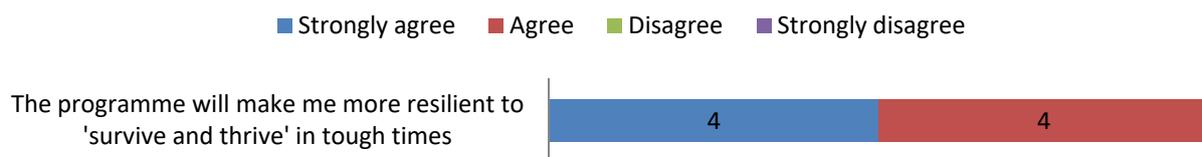


FIGURE 15: YR7 COHORT AGREEMENT THAT LLP WILL MAKE THEM MORE RESILIENT

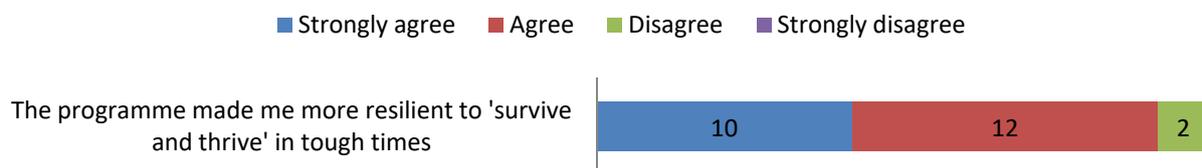


FIGURE 16: ALUMNI AGREEMENT THAT LLP MADE THEM MORE RESILIENT

Both the Yr7 cohort and the Alumni reported high levels of agreement with this statement. Turning to the Alumni first, they supported this rating question with examples of how their resilience had been positively affected by LLP, illustrating the lasting impact of the skills and insights they gained:

“I had been acting as Head of service and was then appointed to HoS; I would have been less visible as an officer, within my local authority, and less confident without being on the LLP and therefore my career progress would have been slower without it; although I have been more resilient as a result of the LLP I also feel that I have buckled at times in my leadership of the service during the closure/community asset transfer of one of our 3 theatres in late 2014.”

(Alumni survey – Yr1 participant)

“Resilience has been a key strength thanks to Leading Learning and I've learnt how to couch my arguments and take advantage of opportunities to develop new services.”

(Alumni survey – Yr2 participant)

Offering strategies for greater resilience continues to be a strength of the Leading Learning Programme as both the comments and ratings attest.

LAST WORDS

In their closing statements, participants in the seventh year of LLP summarised their course experiences. These three comments illustrate how the programme can have a profound and positive impact on people:

“My LLP experience has been hugely beneficial to me. It was a training opportunity that came at the right time in my career, having just returned following maternity leave. It has given me the confidence and self-esteem to believe in myself, and honed my skills, knowledge and awareness to develop my career within the public sector.”

(Survey respondent – Yr7 participant)

“Life changing, thank you.”

(Survey respondent – Yr7 participant)

“This was one of the most inspirational courses I have ever signed up to. The time and energy commitment 'for me' personally was high but the investment 'in me' and the benefit to my employer was immeasurable. The quality of speakers was exceptional and the content and facilitation well thought-out and professional. Given the challenging times facing senior managers working in local authorities at the moment, it is reassuring to know that there is a programme such as this available and people on-hand to help you steer through both changes and (sometimes) conflict. The relationships I have formed through the course will be invaluable in supporting me through the next phase of my development and career in the arts. What I have gained from participating in the LLP programme will stay with me always.”

(Survey respondent – Yr7 participant)

This year the Alumni of LLP were also asked what they would say to a colleague thinking about applying for a place on the course and they concurred with the view that the programme, provides space and time to reflect, learn and develop. Here are examples taken from participants from the first to the sixth year of the programme:

“The Leading Learning Programme offers the opportunity to step out of the everyday, to raise one's head up and see what might be. It encourages thinking about different ways of doing things, and about looking ahead of the harsh factors of budgetary reductions to consider new pathways forward. It provides a crucible for the intensive learning, and testing, of new skills and ideas, and offers insights into the perspectives of others.”

(Alumni survey – Yr6 participant)

“It's worth spending the time on this programme because the lessons you learn and the support you receive stay with you for the rest of your career. The input from councillors, CEOs and senior officers, as well as your cohort, is candid, direct, challenging and of a very high quality. The programme allows you to lift your head up from day to day desk work and think about more than just the next thing to solve.”

(Alumni survey – Yr2 participant)

“Participating in the LLP was the most valuable CPD that I have undertaken during my career. I would highly recommend the LLP to participants and authorities as now, given the scale of change local authorities are going through, these leadership qualities and skills are more vital than ever to ensure communities are at the heart of services going forward.”

(Alumni survey – Yr2 participant)

“Do it! You have nothing to lose, so why not back yourself. Maybe surprise yourself. Besides which, you owe it to others that already see you as a supportive peer or perhaps you are even an unwitting role model.”

(Alumni survey – Yr1 participant)

“If you are serious about personal development and want the 'top job' either within an organisation or leading your own then this programme is invaluable.”

(Alumni survey – Yr6 participant)

“The mentoring aspect of the Programme was absolutely fantastic and the most powerful coaching/learning I have been involved with.”

(Alumni survey – Yr5 participant)

CONCLUSION

The seventh year of the Leading Learning Programme confirmed that the structure and content of the course has maintained its quality and relevance. Feedback suggests that the programme adapts well to each succeeding cohort of participants and that skills and knowledge gained through the programme continue to resonate long into the future.

The model of individual learning and group learning, through a variety of methods and learning styles provides participants with tools that they can adapt and apply to their respective professional environments.

The impact of LLP on participants continues to affect personal development (such as enhanced confidence, emotional intelligence and skills associated with resilience) and professional development, whether this was the realisation of a career ambition or tackling a particular challenge back at work.

Last year there was a concern about geography proving a barrier in relation to Action Learning. This issue did not resurface and participants did not make any comments about their sets in their feedback this year. Alumni continue to show an interest in joining sets in the future and some are willing to pay for the administration and facilitation of these sets. This is an opportunity for LLP to realise modest income in support of the programme.

The mentoring element of the programme was popular with participants and the recruitment of new mentors to meet the geographic needs of the Yr7 cohort mitigated a concern that travel might prove a barrier for these meetings. In reality, it was not geography but availability that proved the greatest barrier for some of the mentoring relationships. The matching of mentor and mentee was successful and those participants that met regularly with their mentor derived the most benefit from those relationships.

Looking forwards there is an ongoing challenge for LLP to recruit participants from regions less well represented in the participant profile. The other challenges include how to establish an offer (whether ongoing learning or networking) for the growing alumni of LLP and in developing the digital resources for the programme. As the evaluation has shown, there is a loyal group of people that have come through the programme and that have secured senior posts or expanded roles in local government. This group continues to provide evidence that speaks to the quality of LLP, its lasting legacy and importance for the sector.

The underlying sense of energy and optimism of each successive cohort of participants is palpable in the feedback of respondents. This is an exciting and affirming legacy of the programme and one that is repeatedly captured through the evaluation.

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