

The Leading Learning Programme

Highlights from the first five years

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NATIONAL
LEISURE &
CULTURE
FORUM

BACKGROUND

The Leading Learning Programme is a leadership development programme designed specifically for aspiring leaders working in the culture and sport sector and sponsored by the National Leisure and Cultural Forum.

The inaugural Leading Learning Programme took place in 2008 and continues to run on an annual basis, currently attracting between 12 and 16 participants.

In the first five years, 100 people have taken part, representing organisations from every region in England as well as representation from Scotland and Wales. 86 participants have come from local authorities, 9 from outsourced trusts, 2 from national cultural bodies, 2 from independent cultural charities and 1 from the London Mayor's office.

The majority of participants have gone on to take more responsibilities with their original employers and a significant number have developed their careers by taking up new posts at an enhanced level.

MODEL

Over a 12 month period, Leading Learning offers five elements to aid participants' leadership journeys, comprising: 360° exercise & learning style assessment, residential learning (7 days), mentoring (up to 9 meetings), action learning (up to 6 sets) and resources to support learning.

Ongoing learning supported through Masterclasses which are open to current participants, alumni and external candidates.



"The course has helped a great deal regarding managing in the political environment, selling and presenting myself better, developing a network, my relationship with my line manager, overcoming the current challenges we face in local government and development my leadership as opposed to management skills."



"It has allowed me to develop a deeper understanding of what is meant by leadership and stimulated a more imaginative and mature approach to tackling strategic and operational problems in the workplace."



HOW HAVE THEY RATED THE EXPERIENCE?

- ✦ Just under three quarters of participants said that the programme had met 80% or more of their individual learning needs.
- ✦ For many participants the benefit of the programme has been the offer of new insights into leadership and in the development of a personal leadership style.
- ✦ Over 90% of participants agreed or partly agreed that the programme had helped them to feel better equipped to work with key politicians.
- ✦ In the most recent alumni survey, the majority agreed that LLP will be instrumental in helping them to realize their target roles and that it has made them more resilient to “survive and thrive” in tough times.

QUALITY OF LEARNING EXPERIENCE

- ✦ On a scale where the maximum is 4.0, each cohort consistently gives ratings over 3.0 for the residential learning, mentoring and action learning.
- ✦ On a similar scale, the most recent cohort rated their enjoyment of residencies at 3.8, the usefulness of the content at 3.4 and the applicability of what they had learnt at 3.7.
- ✦ Rating the value and benefit of the mentoring, where 1 is of no value or benefit and 6 is extremely valuable, the average ratings from Yr4 and Yr5 cohorts were 4.5 and above.
- ✦ Action learning had dual benefits: usefulness in helping tackle professional issues and applying Action Learning techniques in other areas of their lives.

★★★★★★★★★★

“The course has boosted my confidence, restored faith in my own abilities, given me new skills/tactics for approaching challenges and key relationships at work and broadened my understanding of local government. As a result my team is stronger, my senior team are more responsive to me ... and I also feel now that I can handle difficult staff and political issues with equal confidence.”

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“One lesson I picked up from my mentor was the risk of being seen to 'rest on laurels' - and that looking ahead a year or two for the next challenge or opportunity was important - anticipation where possible of the political and economic landscape.”

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WHAT DIFFERENCE HAS LEADING LEARNING MADE?

Only two people that have taken part in the programme since 2008 have been made compulsorily redundant, which considering the number of jobs that have been cut not just in local government, but in the cultural and sport sectors in particular, is a finding that the Director of the programme believes to indicate the relative success of the programme.

Participants identified benefits in relation to leadership in challenging circumstances, often describing increased confidence in their knowledge and ability to lead. Understanding the importance of working with politicians and creating opportunities to meet with elected Members and involve them in the cultural and sport agendas is a clear legacy of the programme.

In the alumni surveys, previous participants identify a range of topics and learning elements that they had been able to use in their workplaces in the preceding twelve months. The residential course topics are most frequently cited by the alumni as having practical applications, with individuals also making reference to their action learning and mentoring experiences.

COST BENEFIT

Compared with 10 similarly structured leadership programmes, LLP offers either a larger number of contact days and/ or a broader range of learning elements, at a more competitive rate. (See the full 5 Year Review for details).



“Since undertaking the Leadership Programme I have had two promotions, the first in April 2011 referred to above and the most recent in February 2013 when I became Director of Commissioning, now part of the senior management team reporting direct to the Chief Executive. I am also still the strategic lead for culture and leisure across the county. The programme has already helped shape my career progression to date.”



“Having a Chief Executive as a mentor helped me to appreciate the need to take a helicopter view of situations. ...Thinking at this high level has enabled us to make a significant contribution to the economic agenda which surprised businesses and some Council officials who now see that the service has something powerful to offer in relation to their objectives.”



WHY SHOULD LEADING LEARNING CONTINUE?

- ✦ There is a **gap in the market** for high quality leadership training with a focus on culture and sports in public sector contexts
- ✦ We need leaders that take both a **strategic and political** view, leading to better decision making, efficient use of resources and getting business done quicker
- ✦ We encourage leaders to forge relationships across departments and with elected members, helping **councils project consensus** and to deliver **improved outcomes for communities**
- ✦ We encourage leaders to **manage risk with greater confidence**

WHAT HAPPENS IF WE DO NOTHING?

- Cultural and sports **professionals will leave local government** as posts become less attractive
- Recruitment difficulties owing to **negative perceptions**: e.g. the public sector is a combative environment, rife with inefficiency and constantly 'fire fighting'
- Crisis management leads to **escalating costs** as more expensive consultants have to be brought in to tackle issues
- If politicians and officers do not communicate, increased risk of a **blame culture** and lack of team spirit; staff become less empowered and **'cannot do' culture** ensues

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"[Leading Learning] was both supportive and challenging in equal measure and made me think beyond the role in which I am currently. Also made me consider the implications of seeking to 'move up' and the commitment required which at present I don't think I could make. Drew important lessons from the sessions - about being constantly pro-active or 'ahead of the wave' and that it's important to be in a state of readiness to seize opportunities as much as it is wishing to take them."

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"I've gained a network of people I feel I can call upon to discuss a work problem who will be genuinely happy to help me and won't judge."

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RECOMMENDATIONS

The review presents seven recommendations for developing Leading Learning in the future:

1. Undertake short vision exercise with programme stakeholders to review the vision for the programme and clarify the beneficiaries.
2. Invest time and resources into making the existing LinkedIn group more engaging for participants, alumni and mentors.
3. Develop a specification for a private learning space to accompany participants' learning and to offer alumni on-going access to material
4. Devise a biennial one day event that will offer participants, alumni, mentors and other stakeholders an opportunity to meet, learn and re-connect with the programme.
5. Review how mentors receive feedback from their mentees.
6. Review the programme's brand and profile to ensure that participants, line managers or HR departments and others connect quickly and easily to programme information
7. Meet with ILM, IoD or similar to look at viability of accrediting Leading Learning, offering retrospective accreditation to alumni.



“The programme has made me much more aware of my own leadership style and behaviour and opened up new conversations with my senior managers.”



“I have more contact with politicians now than ever before and feel comfortable when speaking and dealing with them.”



“In many situations in our busy and fast changing world I draw on the tools and knowledge gained as part of the Leading Learning Programme. I believe it has helped me to be a better leader[.]”



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