

# **The Leading Learning Programme**

## **Review of the first five years**

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August 2014



NATIONAL  
**LEISURE &  
CULTURE  
FORUM**

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## BACKGROUND

### WHERE IS THE NEXT GENERATION OF LOCAL AUTHORITY CHIEF EXECUTIVES FROM A CULTURE AND SPORTS BACKGROUND?

This question was at the heart of the original Leading Learning Programme (LLP) concept. The programme designers (Sue Isherwood and Martyn Allison) argued that it was imperative to equip senior managers from the culture and sports sectors with the necessary skills to enable them to transition from top operational roles into future Corporate Directors and Chief Executives. At the same time, the National Culture Forum, now National Leisure and Culture Forum (NLCF), was keen to support the Leading Learning Programme as a way of shoring up leadership for the sector in the future. Both the programme designers and NLCF felt that failure to act on the development needs of senior managers of sport and culture would deprive local government of a body of leaders with a unique range of skills and experience.

The original Programme was supported by the Treasury funded Cultural Leadership Programme which was run by ACE (Arts Council England) on behalf of the sector. This generous support allowed development of the pilot programme, heavy subsidy of the first year's participants and some further subsidy of year 2 participants. In the second year, the MLA (Museum, Libraries and Archives Council) and IDeA (improvement and Development Agency of local government) also supported participant bursaries. From Year 3 there have been a small number of bursaries provided by IDeA (for Year 3) and member bodies of the NLCF, but the majority of participants have been fully supported by their employers with some element of self funding. In Year 6 Sport England has agreed to support two full places on the Programme, in recognition of the importance of local authority partners in the delivery of their aims. There is hope now to extend this to support for further hers and for other NDPBs to join in.

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 of LLP a total of 100 people have taken part from every region of England and from Scotland and Wales – 86 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. 14 organisations have sent staff in more than one year and one local authority has sent a member of staff annually.

### THE SHIFTING TERRAIN

Once the 2010 Comprehensive Spending Review and linked settlements for local government were announced in 2010 and 2012, the focus for LLP needed to adapt urgently. As authorities stripped out tiers of senior managers in order to realize their target cuts, those remaining in the cultural and sports sectors were given broader portfolios of work and needed to fill the

shoes of their predecessors without the benefit of much strategic experience or succession planning.

LLP needed therefore to change its focus from senior managers poised to take on Corporate Director roles to those at the next tier down and to adapt to include modules on surviving and thriving in austerity. This continues to be the focus for the programme.

## MODEL

The Leading Learning Programme is managed by a Programme Director on behalf of the National Leisure and Culture Forum. Over the five 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 TLS Comms who administer and update the website.

A common thread across LLP is a desire to provide high quality personal support, whether from the Programme Director, visiting tutors, mentors or peers. There is evidence across the various evaluation mechanisms of a willingness in those delivering the programme to go the extra mile, to be both responsive to participants' direct requests for support and to initiate dialogue where a participant is less engaged than their peers.

## THE FIVE ELEMENTS

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

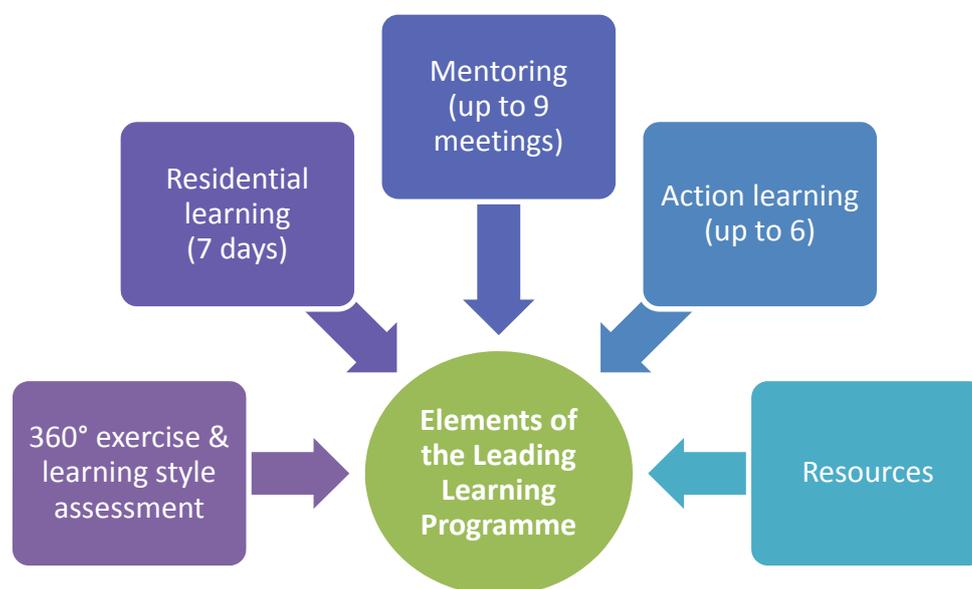


FIGURE 1: LEADING LEARNING PROGRAMME ELEMENTS

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

The residential component of the programme includes three separate residencies, whose content currently comprises:



FIGURE 2: LEADING LEARNING PROGRAMME RESIDENTIAL MODULES

Each topic is presented by a tutor with a significant track record in both teaching 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.

The mentoring programme has adapted over the five years to allow the time necessary to find a good match for mentors and mentees. As a consequence, the programme now operates over a longer period of time, with an overlap between each year while the mentoring element completes. Moreover, there are examples of mentoring relationships continuing beyond the programme and the mentors that were interviewed reported that the majority of mentees stayed in touch with them to update them on their professional progress.

The action learning element of the programme has had to be responsive to the geographic spread and number of participants in any one year. Facilitation is now delivered in house by the Programme Director, whereas in the past other facilitators were contracted to deliver the sets. Year 6 of the programme will pilot virtual action learning to test whether this is a preferable approach to set facilitation.

## LEADING LEARNING CALENDAR

Initially the formal part of the programme ran over a twelve month period, but has now extended to an 18 month timeline.

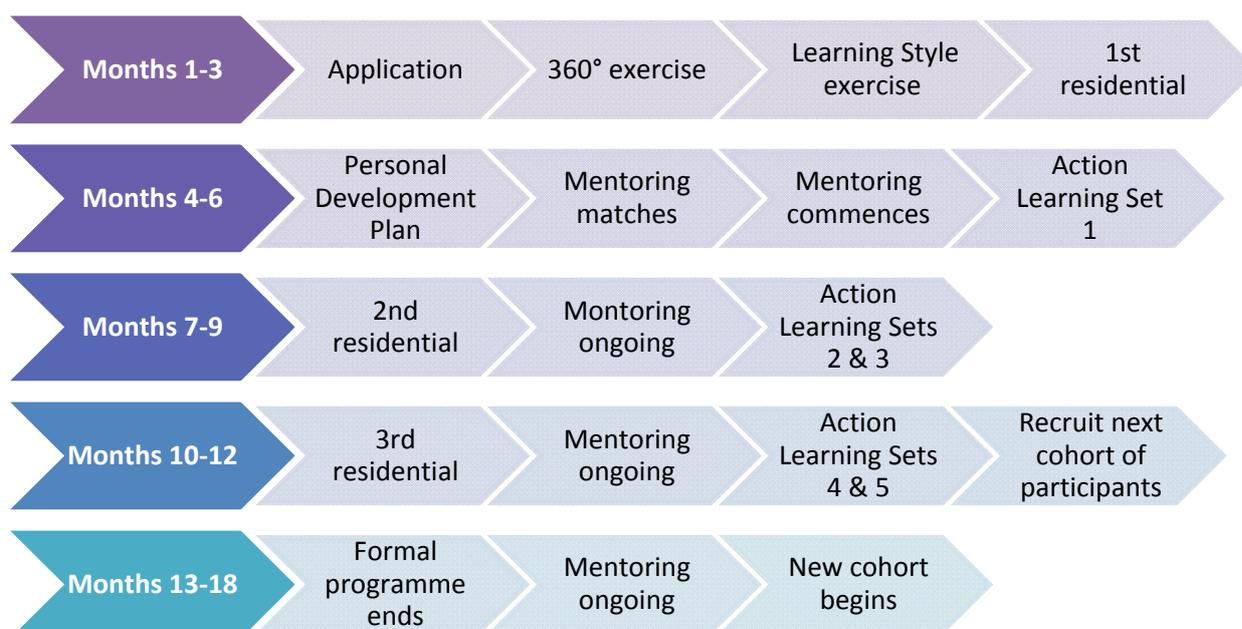


FIGURE 3: LEADING LEARNING PROGRAMME TIMELINE

The benefits of this extension are predominately associated with the mentoring. It allows mentees time to apply their learning and to realize and reflect upon the targets they included in their Personal Development Plans.

#### 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 Leading Learning experience.

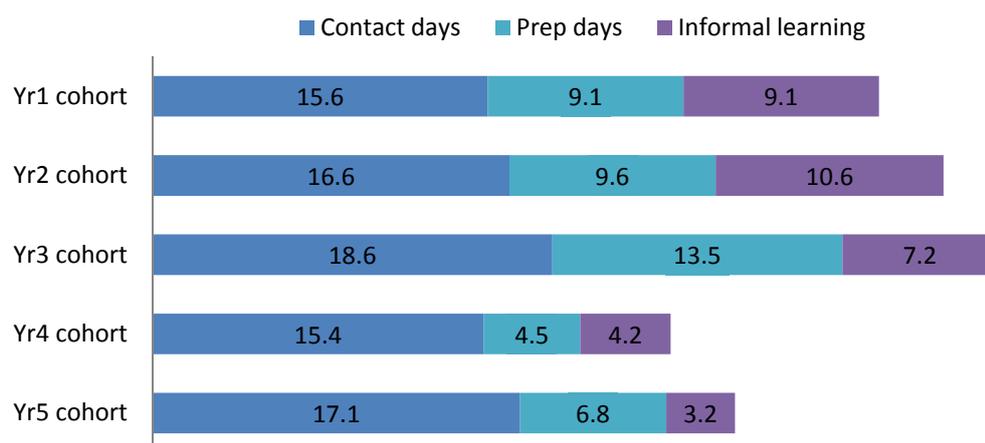


FIGURE 4: AVERAGE NUMBER OF DAYS EACH COHORT INVESTED IN LEADING LEARNING

Overall, participants have committed between 24 and 39 days towards their LLP experience, with the Yr3 cohort investing the most time to date.

## MASTERCLASSES

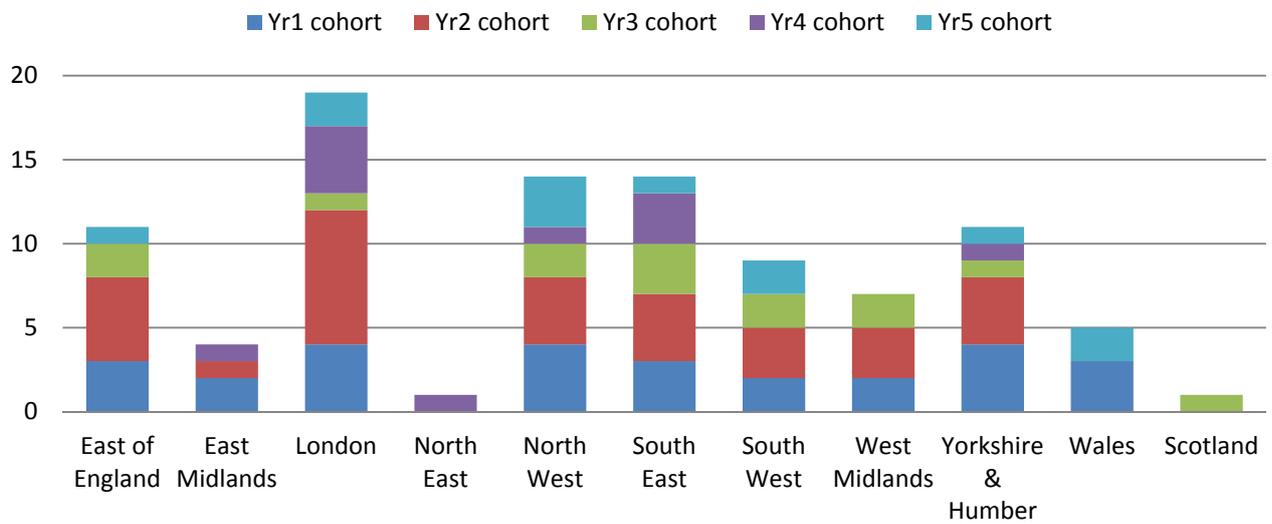
In 2010, following feedback from participants, a series of Masterclasses were introduced. The purpose was to provide a learning experience of a similar style to a single residency day that could act as a continuation of learning for alumni and as a taster day for potential participants. The Masterclasses were also open to a broader range of people, including freelance consultants. The following Masterclasses have been run to date:

- Leading at the Edge of Chaos (December 2010 & May 2011)
- Coaching teams (November 2011)
- Advocacy and Influencing (September 2012, April 2013 and October 2013)

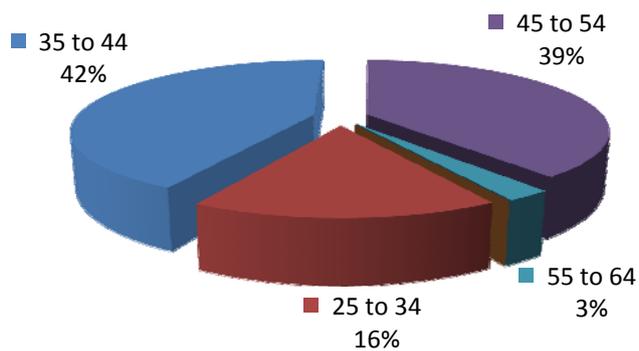
Given the economic climate, it is unsurprising that the alumni and current cohort of participants remain interested in topics linked to leading through change, whether that is personal resilience, managing people in tough times or making the case for the culture and sports sectors in the face of further cuts.

## WHO HAS THE PROGRAMME REACHED SO FAR?

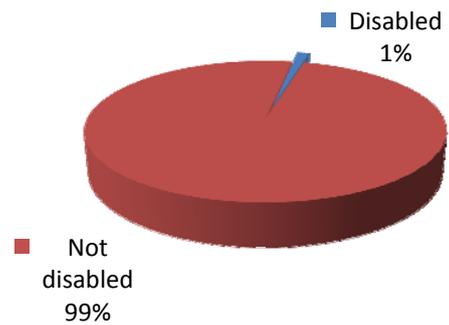
### REGIONS WHERE THEY WORK



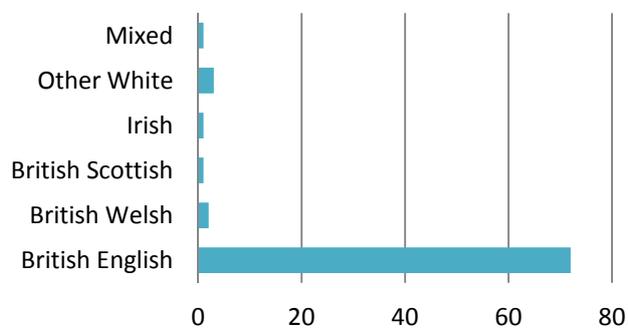
### AGE



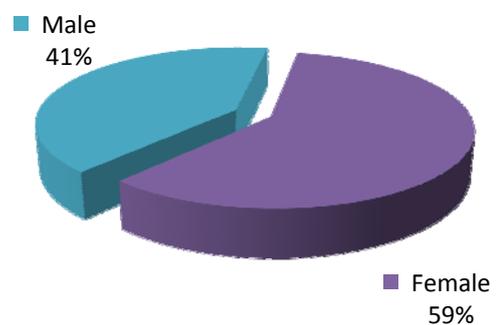
### DISABILITY



### ETHNICITY



### GENDER



## QUALITY OF THE PROGRAMME

### OVERVIEW

The Leading Learning Programme consistently receives high ratings from participants in relation to overall management and individual learning modules. Formative evaluation mechanisms are built into the programme so that the Director and course leaders can respond to participants' learning preferences and make any necessary changes to the programme structure. Examples of changes made during the first two years include building in more variations to the style of teaching (including outdoor sessions) and reviewing how participants were grouped in order to balance seniority and breadth of experience across cohorts.

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. Apart from the on-line resources, all elements of the programme have achieved an average rating of at least a 3.0, with the mentoring and residential learning scoring more highly than the other elements.

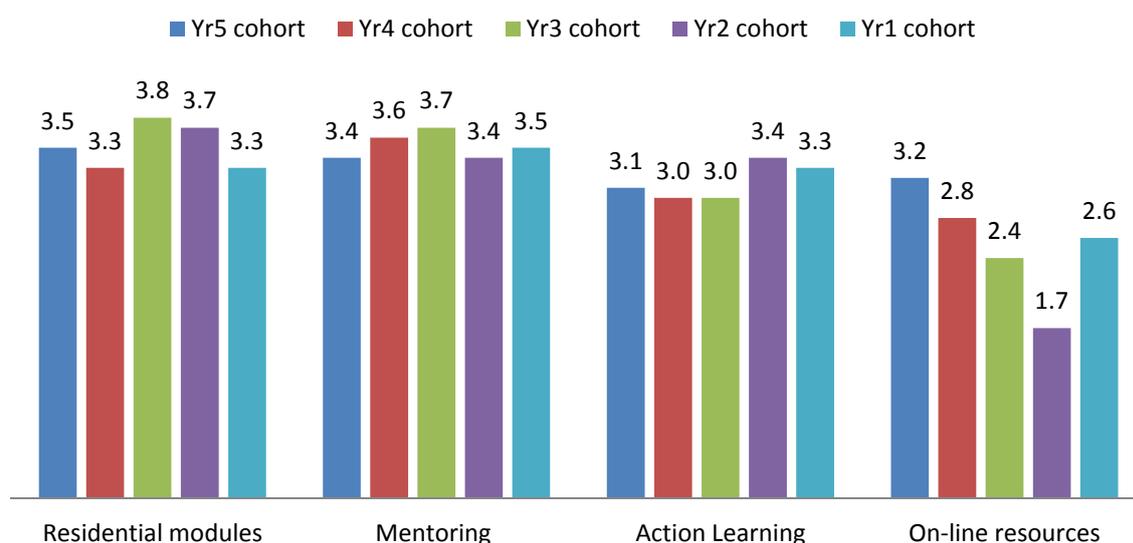


FIGURE 5: QUALITY OF EACH ELEMENT OF LLP

The initial intention was to create digital resources that would be hosted in a private space on the Leading Learning Programme website. However, it was not possible to secure adequate funds to invest in this element of the programme and although it remains an aspiration to develop digital resources, the Director has chosen instead to prioritise the other elements of the programme, particularly the residential modules and signpost participants to existing on-line resources.

## RESIDENTIAL MODULES

The quality of the residential learning has, as detailed above, remained a highly successful part of the programme, offering participants unique insights into executive and political leaders' perspectives.

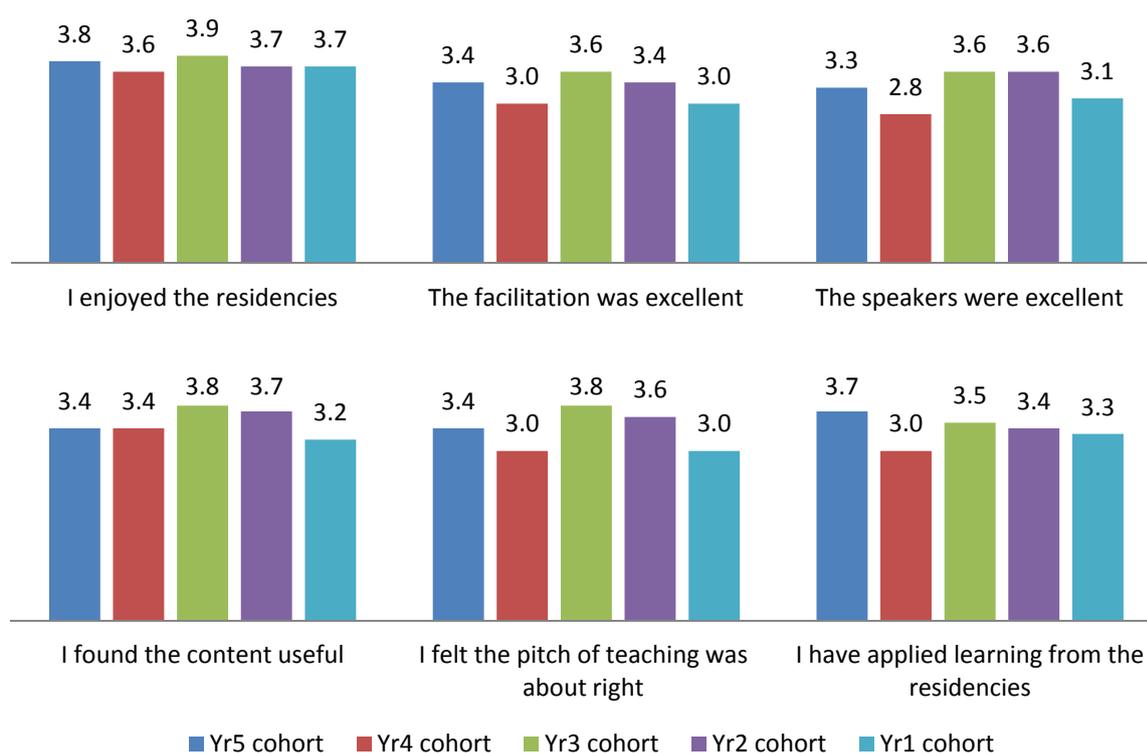
“The Chief Executive speakers were extremely interesting and it was a great opportunity to ask them questions and hear the answers.”

(Survey respondent – Yr5 participant)

“The session has highlighted the importance of understanding my political environment. ... I hadn't realised the complex nature of the relationship between the Chief Executive and Leader.”

(Survey respondent – Yr5 participant)

Using a similar scale to the previous question, participants have given ratings of over 3 in all but one instance to the six statements we put to them at the end of each year.



The immediacy of what participants learn during the residential elements of the programme is apparent in the ratings and this usefulness and practicality is echoed years later by the alumni. The fifth year participants made reference to the direct applicability of the course in their residency feedback:

“It will make a big difference to how I work with colleagues back in my organisation.”

(Survey respondent – Yr5 participant)

“[I will i]ncrease my awareness of the political dimension by paying attention to it in a more informed way. I only come into member contact occasionally, but will use these opportunities differently from now on.”

(Survey respondent – Yr5 participant)

Further, there are examples of where the LLP course leaders have been contracted to deliver training back at participants’ authorities, further illustrating the quality of teaching on the course.

## MENTORING

The mentoring element of the programme is also highly valued by participants, with many participants taking the opportunity to invest considerable time into these relationships. Over the five years of the programme, the length of the relationships has grown from an average of 8.5 months to over 10 months (peaking in Yr4 at 11.5 months). Overall, more than 80% of mentors and mentees agreed that the mentoring had met the desired gains that they had discussed and agreed at the start of their relationships.

When asked to express the value and benefits of the mentoring, where 1 is of no value or benefit and 6 is extremely valuable, average ratings from Yr4 and Yr5 cohorts were 4.5 and above.

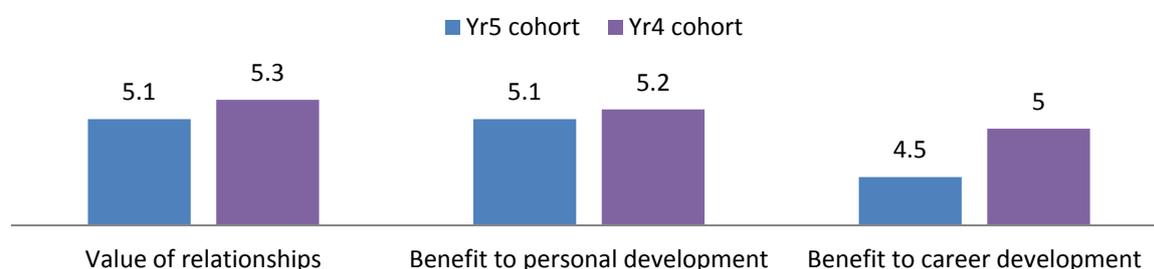


FIGURE 6: PARTICIPANT RATINGS FOR VALUE AND BENEFIT OF MENTORING

From the feedback from both mentees and mentors it is clear that the benefits of the matches is mutual. Mentees regularly comment on the value of being matched to a senior figure and refer to leadership behaviours or resources recommended by a mentor, alongside their support as being particularly useful.

“Having a Chief Executive as a mentor helped me to appreciate the need to take a helicopter view of situations. I have made time to think about the service from this perspective and encouraged my managers to do this as well. ...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.”

(Alumni survey - Yr2 participant)

“Positive experience. 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[.]”

(Mentoring feedback – Yr3 participant)

The mentors express the value of the relationships in terms of the reward of being part of a mentees professional development as well as contributing to the future of local government.

“[T]he buzz from seeing [mentee] grow as an individual and professionally. She has clearly identified targets and set about meeting them to the best of her considerable ability. It has been a pleasure to see!”

(Mentoring feedback – Mentor)

Over the five years of the Leading Learning Programme, the delivery team has recruited mentors based on their seniority and connections to local government. Each mentor is inducted into the programme and provided with mentoring guidelines and great care is taken to match mentors with mentees.

“I had originally thought that someone more "suited and booted" would be better for me because that is different from my character and I thought they would help me develop that side of me. But now I realise that you don't have to be like that to succeed and the mentor was much more suited to me and understood me more.”

(Mentoring feedback – Yr4 participant)

The success of these matches is evidenced by examples of relationships exceeding the parameters of the Leading Learning Programme. Alumni and mentors have referenced on-going relationships from simply keeping in touch to continuing to meet as mentor and mentee.

## ACTION LEARNING

The benefits of the action learning element of the programme operate on two different levels. First, participants find the set meetings extremely useful for tackling professional issues and reflecting on these with their peers, often commenting on the high level of trust that exists in the sets:

“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.”

(Action Learning feedback – Yr4 participant)

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“I have found having such a ‘safe’ environment to discuss concerns and issues I have had extremely valuable. It has provided me with an outlet for issues that I could not discuss in the office and an audience who have the knowledge and experiences to guide me.”

(Action Learning feedback – Yr5 participant)

Secondly, it is the practical application of Action Learning techniques in professional and sometimes personal contexts that is often cited as an equally important aspect of the sets. The value of learning how to ask open questions and creating space to listen to answers is frequently referenced by each cohort of participants:

“I have increased my own use of open questions in work and home contexts since starting action learning.”

(Action Learning feedback – Yr3 participant)

“My organisation has benefitted because I now use the skills learnt both in my own planning and with my staff, making my decision making process more thoughtful and robust.”

(Action Learning feedback – Yr5 participant)

Of all the elements of the Leading Learning Programme, the Action Learning has not met everyone’s preferred style of learning. As one person commented:

“... I’ve struggled with it – its too touchy-feely for me.”

(Action Learning feedback – Yr4 participant)

“I found action learning taught me a lot about myself though as a learning style I’m not sure it is the most effective for me. Having said that I gained a lot from the experience and would be keen to join a future set to see if in time the techniques come easier to me and therefore feel less rigid.”

(Action Learning feedback – Yr2 participant)

However, where criticism has occurred, as the preceding quotations show, the participant has acknowledged the benefits of this element of the Programme and individuals have sought to continue sets or join new sets after the programme has completed.

## 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. They are invited to create Personal Development Plans that form the basis of their conversations with mentors, and participants 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 five years together, just under three quarters of participants said that the programme had met 80% or more of their individual learning needs.

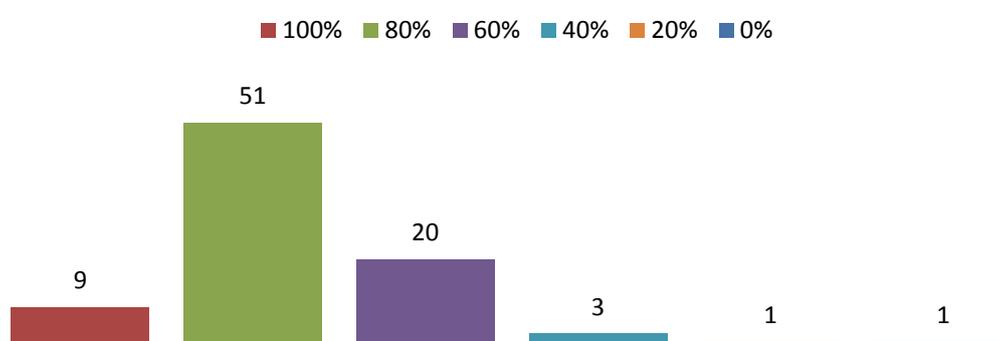


FIGURE 7: PERCENTAGE OF LEARNING NEEDS MET BY THE PROGRAMME (BASE: 85)

The lower percentages are qualified by comments that acknowledge personal responsibility in not meeting their learning needs rather than “anything wrong with the programme” (Yr4 survey respondent). Others have felt that they could only comment on what they had been able to test to date. For example:

“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. A number of areas will not become very strong over night but I know where I want to get to and how to get there – will need practice.”

(Survey respondent – Yr4 participant)

Other comments referenced on-going issues to be tackled with mentors, illustrating the complementarity of the different elements of the programme.

## UNDERSTANDING LEADERSHIP

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. This thinking has positively affected how these individuals operate within their authorities and has led many to notice how their working relationships have improved.

Some examples of the thinking that the programme has provoked include:

“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.”

(Survey respondent – Yr2 participant)

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

(Survey respondent – Yr3 participant)

“It has given me more confidence in my portrayal as leader. I have made a conscious effort to be more of a role model as a leader[:] at meetings, at work, when talking to Councillors.”

(Survey respondent – Yr4 participant)

“I have become more reflective and calm as a result of the programme. It has also enabled me to better understand and appreciate my collaborative style and not try and be different to fit with other people’s approaches.”

(Survey respondent – Yr5 participant)

From the preceding quotations it is possible to see the breadth of change that LLP enables and that these changes are different for each participant.

## WORKING BETTER WITH POLITICIANS

The sessions on political awareness invite participants to think about the importance of politics and particularly politics within a public sector context. They address how to read political behaviour and how to maintain professional integrity within a political environment. 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 participants have either agreed or partly agreed with the statement.

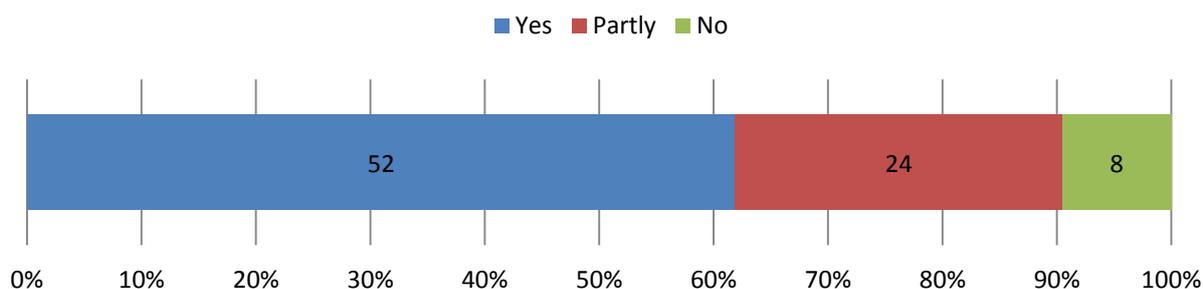


FIGURE 8: AGREEMENT WITH STATEMENT - LLP LED TO FEELING BETTER EQUIPPED TO WORK WITH POLITICIANS (BASE 84)

Over the five years participants have referenced changes to their working relationships with elected members as a direct result of the programme:

“Given me greater confidence to understand and manage the political relationship through a better understanding of the political environment.”

(Survey respondent – Yr3 participant)

“The working in a political environment session was invaluable and has made me much more aware of the context in which we work in local government. I have raised this as an area for development with my line manager who has given me more exposure to elected members.”

(Survey respondent – Yr4 participant)

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

(Survey respondent – Yr5 participant)

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. The most recent alumni survey includes references to the continued importance of the political awareness sessions (see below).

## CONFIDENCE & RESILIENCE

In a period of austerity, it is not surprising that participants commented on the benefits of the programme in relation to leadership in challenging circumstances. Aside from the development of skills and knowledge, the programme provides participants with mechanisms of support (action learning and mentoring). Confidence is a word that is often repeated by participants as a result of the programme, often used to describe increases confidence in their knowledge and ability to lead.

Examples include:

“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.”

(Survey respondent – Yr2 participant)

“There will be some very significant challenges in local government in the next few years. I will need to be able to switch from one challenge to another quickly and maintain my self belief and confidence in myself to enable me to see challenges as an opportunity rather than threats and worries.”

(Survey respondent – Yr4 participant)

“I believe my organisation has gained from an increase in my confidence and a reduction in the ‘reactionary’ decisions I may have made without the thought processes produced by being part of the set.”

(Action Learning feedback – Yr4 participant)

“The programme made me feel more confident. An example of this in practice is speaking up during meetings and having the confidence to question and give my opinion.”

(Survey respondent – Yr5 participant)

The mentors echo the impact of the course in terms of enhancing mentees’ personal confidence:

“Considerable progress has been made and [mentee] is both more confident and clearer about how to take forward future development issues.”

(Mentoring feedback - Mentor)

The importance of personal confidence and resilience at a time of considerable flux led to the development of the module called “surviving and thriving” in austerity from the fourth year of the programme onwards. This aspect of the programme sought to equip participants with skills and strategies to build their resilience and effectiveness.

As part of the evaluation of the programme, participants and alumni were asked to rank how successfully eight characteristics of resilient leadership (according to an article by A&DC) had been fostered in them by the programme.

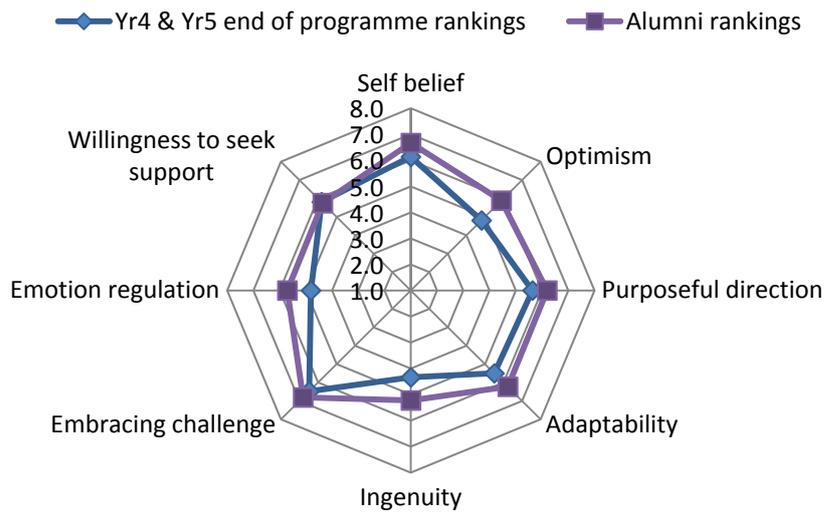


FIGURE 9: LLP'S SUCCESS IN SUPPORTING RESILIENCE, AVERAGE RANKINGS

The results show that participants were most likely to identify “Embracing challenge” and “Self belief” as characteristics most strongly supported by the programme. Moreover, the ongoing benefits of the programme across these areas of resilience were also evidence in the alumni feedback. As this is a ranked question, it is notable that all characteristics were given average rankings of over 3.0, illustrating that respondents had taken away different pieces of learning allied to different characteristics as appropriate to their needs.

## ON-GOING BENEFITS

From the outset of the programme, the annual alumni survey tracked how learning was used in the workplace and the difference the programme had made to alumni careers. Roughly a third of the alumni complete the survey every year and there is considerable evidence that the programme has helped individuals to weather the current storm in local government.

## INDIVIDUAL OUTCOMES

The message that each cohort offer to their successors is that the time and energy invested in the programme reaps benefits: the more you invest, the greater the return. The programme Director goes further to say that those people that are willing to look at their personal leadership behaviour and are interested in self improvement in addition to understanding the strategic elements of learning that the programme offers, benefit more than those that find this more difficult.

The alumni survey presents three statements about personal and professional development as a direct result of the programme. In the most recent survey, the majority of respondents felt that the programme had been instrumental in helping them to realise their target roles and that it had made them more resilient to “survive and thrive” in tough times.

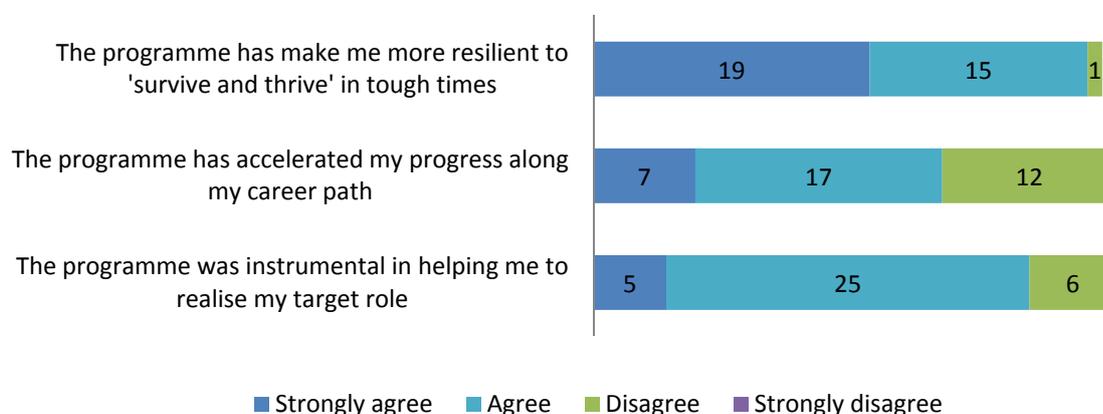


FIGURE 10: ALUMNI AGREEMENT WITH STATEMENTS LINKED TO LLP (BASE: 36)

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. Anecdotally, there are several stories of how people have used their experience on the programme to shape their journeys towards their target roles and eight of these have been recorded in the LLP Testimonial document.

“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.”

*(Testimonial document - George Candler, Yr2 participant)*

Moreover, the programme is making modest appearance in good news stories linked to the alumni. For example, Christine Parsloe has cited the programme in an article following being voted the Guardian public servant of the year:

“I am proud to be one of the alumni of the National Culture Forum’s Leading Learning Programme’s cultural leadership courses but I was funded part by bursary and the rest from my employer, the London Borough of Merton. I was given the time, opportunity and support to complete the course.”

*(The Leisure Review, 7:10 – Christine Parsloe, Yr1 participant)*

## PUBLIC SECTOR OUTCOMES

Asked to reflect on the impact of the Leading Learning Programme on their leadership behaviour in the year preceding the survey, comments reference the development of new strategies to engage communities in cultural and sporting activities and renewed awareness of their role as leaders of people.

“I have started to plan more long term instead of being reactive/short term planning. This is obviously difficult in the current climate as the landscape changes frequently.”  
(Alumni survey – Yr2 participant)

“2012 was the busiest and most stressful year ever for my small staff team. ... I would take a deal of credit for us all having come out the other side having delivered well on every front and significantly better resourced than when we started. Key to this was convincing people that it could be done, giving them the delegated responsibility with appropriate support so that overall we could up the game in a way that we had never operated before. Being there for staff when it very nearly all became too much by maintaining a healthy perspective on what seemed like impossible challenges.”  
(Alumni survey – Yr4 participant)

“[I] developed with another alumni a different approach to strategic planning for culture and sport creating an outcomes framework based on local place strategic outcomes - through this my leadership ability has been used to change the minds of politicians and strategic thinkers.”  
(Alumni survey – Yr1 participant)

“[LLP] enabled me to resolve some issues through action learning and working with my mentor which have put me in a strong position for taking on a wholesale review of Leisure Services and the production of a 3 year business change plan. I have a clear vision for the Plan and the changes required and the programme has given me the confidence to lead my team through it.”

(Alumni survey – Yr3 participant)

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

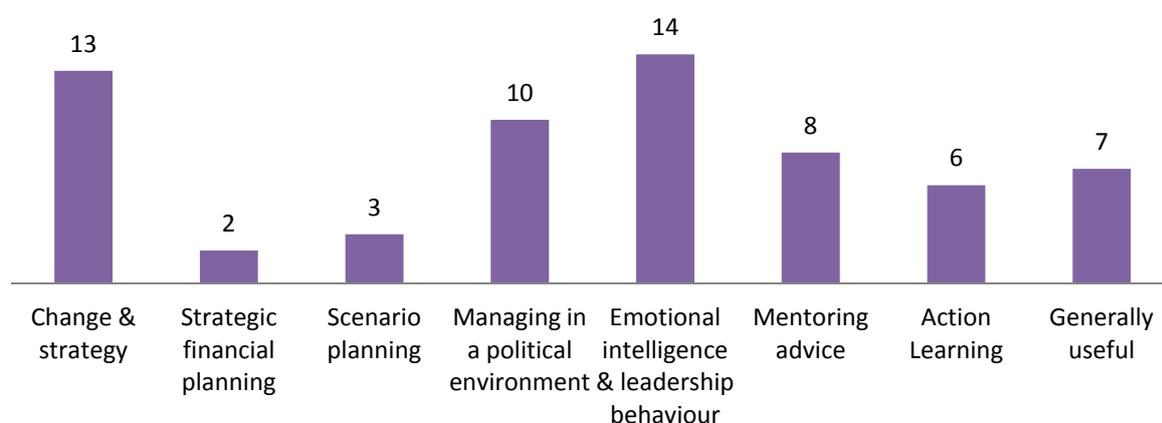


FIGURE 11: ELEMENTS OF LEARNING APPLIED BY ALUMNI (BASE: 35)

In the accompanying comments, the language used draws on words linked to pace and responsiveness. For example:

“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. I have tried to use this in my own work and ensure at the same time that I make this known to senior officers and members.”

(Alumni survey – Yr3 participant)

“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 its helped me to be a better leader and, even when I don't have time to put learning into practice on all occasions I am aware that I'm not and try to improve this the next time.”

(Alumni survey – Yr4 participant)

The people that take part in the programme need to adapt quickly to their professional environments, both to ensure that they realise their strategic targets but also to be the leaders that they aspire to be.

## OUTCOMES FOR COMMUNITIES

The desire to be more effective in terms of delivering for communities is evident also in the feedback, whether that feedback referred to partnership making, broadening knowledge of the strategic landscape or reporting on new ways of working with communities.

The alumni and participants are regularly asked whether they agree that the programme has helped them to find new ways to deliver for their communities, particularly through commissioning. This year, one participant noted that they had applied their LLP learning to a new post in central government and another commented:

“[LLP] has helped me to clarify vision for a changed service.”  
(Survey respondent – Yr5 participant)

In the most recent alumni survey, there was strong agreement from the alumni with the statement:

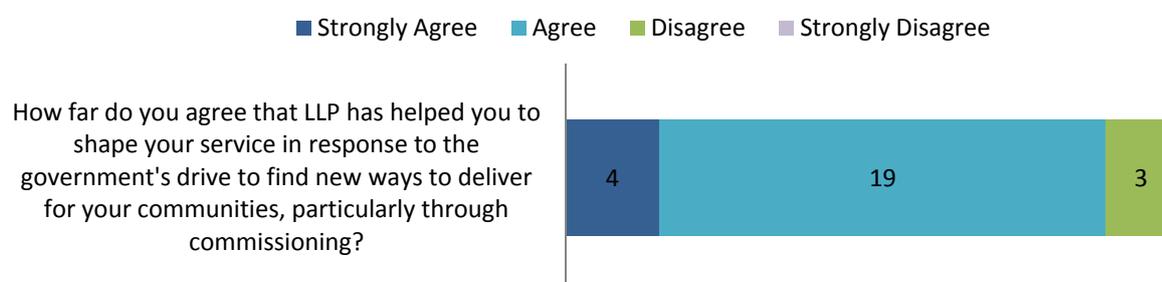


FIGURE 12: HELPING ALUMNI TO FIND NEW WAYS TO DELIVER FOR COMMUNITIES (BASE: 26)

Examples of how the alumni have delivered for their communities include:

“I have managed to 'open up' discussions with senior officers and Members regarding alternative delivery models.”  
(Alumni survey – Yr3 participant)

“We now have a much closer relationship with service commissioners and are beginning to see social care commissioning money being spent on bespoke arts programmes, which is exciting. The LLP course certainly helped to raise my awareness with regard to changes in government thinking around this issue.”  
(Alumni survey – Yr2 participant)

The importance of finding new delivery models in relation to how people in the public sector will have to do business in the coming years was also noted by the interviewees approached as part of this review. There is consensus that in the forthcoming period of austerity, it is imperative that those leading cultural and sports portfolios will need to employ ever greater innovation to realize their strategic visions.

Moreover, the interviewees each challenged the Director to rethink who the Leading Learning Programme is for in view of the fact that the cultural and sports leaders will be working increasingly beyond these sectors. To ensure the future sustainability of the programme, the beneficiaries may need to change, both to reflect the new delivery models adopted by the alumni and to encourage professionals to adapt their strategic visions to include the cultural and sporting portfolios.

## COST BENEFIT<sup>1</sup>

### 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 to **prepare and equip the next generation** of cultural leaders in local government to take us through austerity and beyond
- 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 need leaders that are aware of their **leadership behaviour and style** and who are willing to apply that knowledge
- We encourage leaders to forge relationships across departments and with elected members, helping **councils project consensus** and to deliver **improved outcomes for communities**
- Our leaders learn to **manage risk with greater confidence**
- **Other courses are prohibitively expensive** in comparison to LLP and offer fewer elements and days (see overleaf)

### WHAT HAPPENS IF WE DO NOTHING?

- Cultural and sports **professionals will leave local government** as posts become less attractive
- **Careers are damaged** as the potential of officers not realised
- 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
- **Reputational costs** to public sector organisations that projects indecision, argument and lack of direction

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<sup>1</sup> I am grateful to Simon Baddely for sharing a presentation he gave in relation to political management relationships.

## COMPARATIVE COURSES

The following table presents a sketch of the content and costs that other high quality, established leadership programmes offer.

<b>Title</b>	<b>Pre-course: 360° / psychometrics</b>	<b>Residential learning</b>	<b>Mentoring / Coaching</b>	<b>Action Learning</b>	<b>Digital resources</b>	<b>Alumni network</b>	<b>Cost in £s</b>
<b>SOLACE: Aspiring Future Public Sector Leaders</b>		8 days non residential		3 sessions	Not known	Not known	£2,760 + VAT
<b>NCLF: Leading Learning Programme</b>	360° profile Learning Style exercise	7 days	10 x mentoring sessions	5 sessions	Yes (public)	Yes	£4,000 + VAT*
<b>Ashridge: Real Life Leadership</b>		3 days	2 x coaching sessions		Yes (closed & time limited)	Yes	£4,000 + VAT
<b>KBA Solutions &amp; LGA: Strategic Leadership in Modern Local Government</b>	MBTI 360° profile	9 days (non residential)		5 sessions	Yes	Not known	£4,250 + VAT*
<b>Clore short courses</b>		12 day residential			Not known	Yes	£4,500 + VAT*
<b>Henley Business School: The Henley Leadership Programme</b>	360° profile & Henley psychometric profile	5 days + 1 follow up day	Up to 2 x coaching sessions		Not known	Yes	£6,000 + VAT

Title	Pre-course: 360° / psychometrics	Residential learning	Mentoring / Coaching	Action Learning	Digital resources	Alumni network	Cost in £s
<b>Henley Business School: The Henley Advanced Personal Leadership Programme</b>	360° profile (repeated after 6 months)	5.5 days + 1 follow up day	Up to 2 x coaching sessions		Not known	Yes	£6,500 + VAT
<b>Ashridge: Leadership Process</b>	360° profile, FIRO B, Leadership CV review, Learning Partner Survey, coaching call	5 days	4 x coaching sessions		Yes (closed + time limited)	Yes	£6,700 + VAT
<b>Cranfield: Personal Transformation for Leaders</b>		5 days + 2 days follow up			Yes (closed)	Yes	£7,725 + VAT
<b>Cranfield: High Performance Leadership</b>		5 days + 3 days + 2 days			Yes (closed)	Yes	£11,175 + VAT
<b>Clore Fellowship programme</b>	360° profile	2 x 12 days 2 x full day workshops	Unspecified number of mentoring and coaching sessions		Not known	Yes	£15,000 + VAT* plus £5,000 for extension activities

\*Also offer discounts or bursaries

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## THE FUTURE

### THE VISION

The commitment to the cultural and sports sectors is at the heart of the Leading Learning Programme, but the vision is greater: To change and improve the public sector as a whole through developing culture and sports professionals in the field.

As part of the research for this report, interviewees were asked to present their thoughts about the future scope of the programme. There was general agreement that the purpose of the programme remains “to change and improve local government through the lens of the culture and sports sectors”. However, the point has been made that it is the cultural and sports *profession* that was important and not necessarily the focus on the *professionals*. The argument for including people from other departments such as health & wellbeing, communities or environmental services as well as support services such as legal, procurement, ICT or accountancy was put forward by the mentors and course tutors that were interviewed. Their points were that there could be mutual benefit from exploring relationships between these departments through an immersive leadership experience. Moreover, including a wider spectrum of local authority officer would lead to a unique opportunity to pool knowledge, raise the profile of cultural and sports leaders and finally, increase the market for the programme.

***Recommendation 1: Undertake short vision exercise with programme stakeholders to review the vision for the programme and clarify the beneficiaries.***

### THE ELEMENTS

As the comparator table illustrates, the Leading Learning Programme is unique in terms of the course length and the learning elements (range and number of sessions or days) in comparison to other leadership programmes. From the feedback of the last five years of participants and facilitators, the inclusion of such a range of learning elements (pre-course exercises, residential learning, mentoring and action learning) as a single course offer has not been questioned.

Where LLP differs significantly from the other programmes is in its delivery of social networking, networking and digital learning offer. Individuals are connecting within each cohort and all participants are signposted to learning material on-line, but the programme has not yet taken advantage of social media networking activities to bring alumni together or a bespoke digital learning environment. While it has not been possible to investigate the nature of on-line learning within the comparator programmes or social media networking,

the literature accompanying courses creates an impression that these other courses offer bespoke material and the benefits that global networks offer.

Moreover, there is interest from mentors to come together either digitally or at a face-to-face event, in order to update skills, connect with one another and with their mentees and to learn.

**Recommendation 2: Invest time and resources into making the existing LinkedIn group more engaging for participants, alumni and mentors.**

**Recommendation 3: Develop a specification for a private learning space to accompany participants' learning and to offer alumni on-going access to material**

### MAINTAINING MOMENTUM

The Leading Learning Programme has a unique stakeholder group made up of the people that deliver the programme (tutors and guest speakers), support the programme (mentors & facilitators), participants and a growing number of alumni. The programme has yet to realise the benefits of bringing all these parties together to learn together, connect and re-connect with one another or to celebrate the programme's achievements.

Currently different parts of the programme operate independent of one another so that the coherency of the offer is experienced mainly at the level of the individual participant. The different stakeholders rarely meet unless an alumni is asked to speak on a current course or two mentors happen to take part on the same residency.

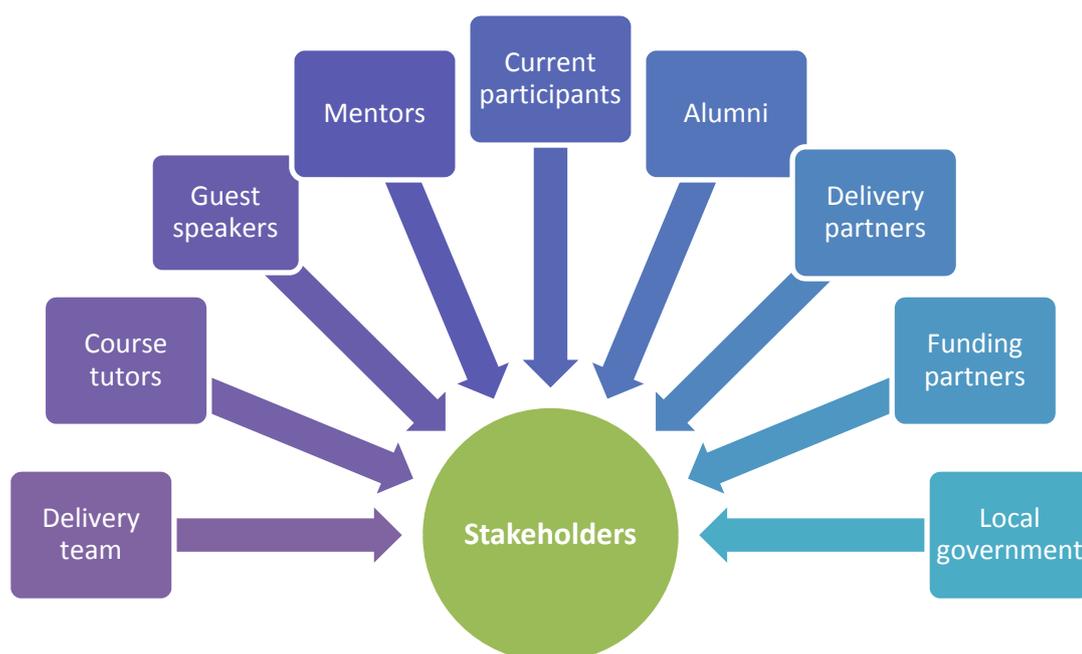


FIGURE 13: LEADING LEARNING PROGRAMME STAKEHOLDERS

Both participants and mentors have expressed an interest in a one day event, that combines a headline speaker, learning opportunities and networking between stakeholders.

***Recommendation 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.***

In addition, the mentors interviewed as part of this review have expressed an interest in accessing feedback from mentees so that they can develop their skills and ensure that their knowledge remains relevant to the programme. Although feedback is provided to the mentors verbally, the mentors' desire for direct feedback from mentees is not currently being met.

***Recommendation 5: Review how mentors receive feedback from their mentees.***

## GETTING TRACTION

The Leading Learning team continue to offer a high quality learning experience, that takes a great deal of care, through regular contact and ongoing evaluative measures, to ensure that each participant gets as much out of the programme as possible. Year on year there have been adjustments in response to the wider political context and in response to each cohort's particular profile. The Director in particular takes time to build high levels of trust with individuals so that they can come to her with issues and feel encouraged to report their progress and achievements. It is testament to the strength of the relationships that five years on people still respond to surveys, correspond with the Programme Director and provide information when requested. However, as one interviewee has observed, despite this positive picture, the programme remains one of the 'best kept secrets' in the sector.

The challenge moving forwards is less about convincing people of the quality of the programme and more about raising its profile. The name "Leading Learning" simply doesn't have the same resonance as other leadership courses do. Furthermore, with notable exceptions, participants are not referencing their participation on the course in the same way that a graduate or Fellow from another leadership course might. There isn't an obvious and pithy way to do this other than to say:

"I took part in the National Leisure and Culture Forum's Leading Learning Programme, which is a leadership programme for senior leaders with a cultural or sporting portfolio working in local government."

While this review hasn't focused on the profile of the programme to any great extent, it is worth noting that the issues of its brand and profile have been raised in feedback. A very

brief piece of research shows that the digital presence of the programme is limited, for example the obvious search terms (“leadership training + culture, sport or local government”) do not connect to the Leading Learning Programme. Moreover, bodies like the Local Government Association for example, do not regularly signpost local government professionals to the programme in their professional development material.

***Recommendation 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***

### ACCREDITING LEARNING

The issue of accreditation has been tackled in two ways to date. In the first two years, there was an option for participants to convert their residential learning into 45 points towards an MA in Cultural Leadership. To earn the points, participants were required to attend all the residential learning days and write two, 3,000 word papers on work related topics. Eight of the seventeen participants that started the process completed the necessary work and at the time of writing this report, none went on to complete the MA.

The second way that accreditation has been addressed is through a more bespoke and responsive approach. The Programme Director has opted to see how the programme can provide evidence in support of qualifications - participants are already undertaking or would like to undertake, for example, an MBA. Many participants already have postgraduate qualifications and there is little appetite to collect another university style degree.

However, through the interviews for this review, there is a view that it would be sensible to accredit the course in its own right, allying it to a recognized body with an established accreditation system (such as the Institute of Leadership and Management or the Institute of Directors), so that once completed each participant has a qualification that has meaning beyond academia. Competitor programmes include endorsements from ILM or similar and an analogous approach might further enhance the profile of the Leading Learning Programme.

***Recommendation 7: Meet with ILM, IoD or similar to look at viability of accrediting Leading Learning, offering retrospective accreditation to alumni.***

## THE PEOPLE

What is perhaps unsurprising, but important to note, is that the Leading Learning programme attracts people that are positive in the face of increasing challenges within their professional environments. As one interviewee reflected, the course tutors could be teaching a room full of people that feel extremely bitter and pessimistic. Instead the participants are alert to the realities of the context within which they work, but maintain an upbeat temperament and belief that culture and sport can contribute positively in society.

Leading in austere times, as an alumni from the first year of the programme sums up, requires the ability to:

“... change, change, change ... but it is also the opportunity to refocus, realign and, most importantly, share resources, ideas, workloads and to build relationships to achieve our shared vision, desired goals and outcomes. Leadership at its best creates realistic and achievable visions and then takes people with them through the changes, finding the solutions, towards a common and shared set of outcomes and goals.”

*(The Leisure Review, 8:4 – Christine Parsloe, Yr1 participant)*

These comments echo the optimism that the course leaders have observed in participants and the words are resonant of the spirit that pervades the Leading Learning Programme.

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