

THE LEADING LEARNING PROGRAMME

SUMMATIVE EVALUATION OF YR6

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NATIONAL
LEISURE &
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BACKGROUND

This report provides a summative account of the sixth 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 TLS Comms 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 reports. The two surveys included a survey sent via surveymonkey to the Yr6 cohort at the end of their course and another survey sent to all alumni. The number of responses was as follows:

Questionnaire	Number of responses
Final survey (Yr6)	12 (out of 14)
Alumni survey	
Yr1 alumni (10 of 29)	10 (out of 27)
Yr2 alumni (8 of 32)	08 (out of 32)
Yr3 alumni (5 of 11)	05 (out of 14)
Yr4 alumni (6 of 12)	06 (out of 11)
Yr5 alumni (7 of 14)	07 (out of 12)

FIGURE 1: EVALUATION SURVEY RETURN RATES

The mentoring and action learning elements of the programme were completed by the middle of 2015. 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 2015 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.

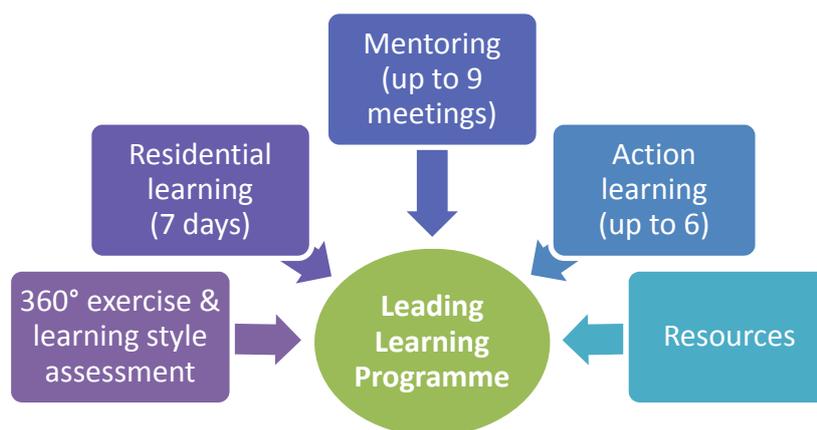


FIGURE 2: LEADING LEARNING PROGRAMME ELEMENTS

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:

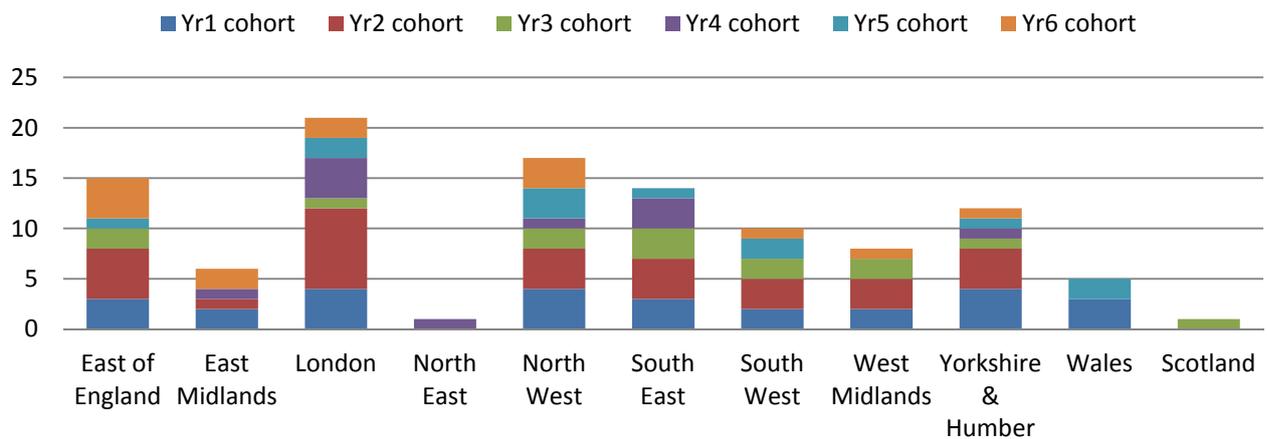
1st residency (3.5 days)	2nd residency (2 days)	3rd residency (1.5 days)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intros • Shifting landscapes • Reflective Leadership • Resilience • Strategic Leadership • Change & Collaborative Leadership • 3 guest speakers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Managing 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 YR6 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.

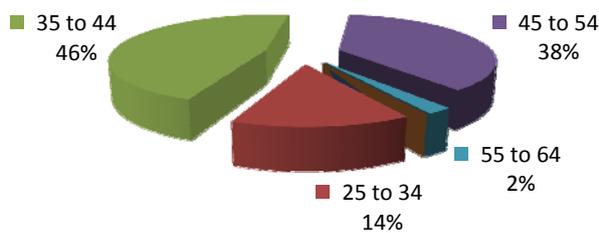
WHO HAS THE PROGRAMME REACHED SO FAR?

REGIONS WHERE THEY WORK

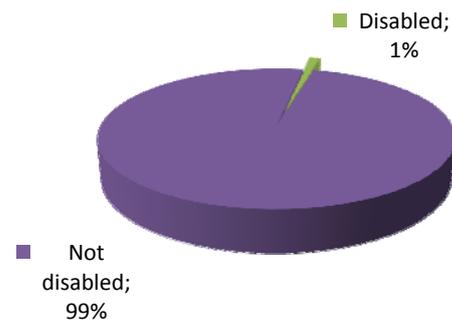


DEMOGRAPHY

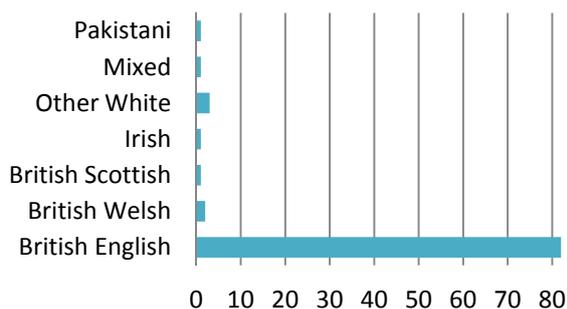
AGE



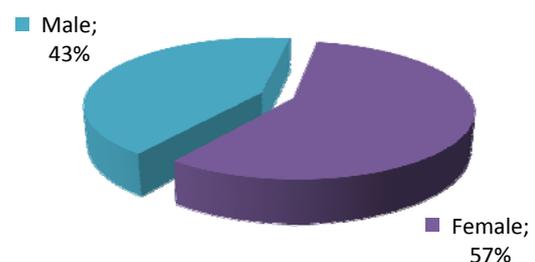
DISABILITY



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 slightly favours women over men, with just over two fifths of participants being male and three fifths female.

QUALITY OF THE PROGRAMME

Over the past five years, the Leading Learning Programme has received consistently high ratings from participants in relation to overall management and the individual learning modules. The sixth year of the programme was no different in this respect as the following comments from participants illustrate:

“I found the programme informative, challenging, thought-provoking, enlightening, engaging, encouraging and powerful. I learnt a lot about my own learning styles, and I can see how it continues to influence me - and indeed how I am still learning from it as new opportunities and challenges present themselves to me. Thank you for the opportunity and for such a well-run and empowering course.”

(Survey respondent – Yr6 participant)

“I found the Leading Learning experience helpful in understanding the future direction and what will be expected from me and how I can achieve this. The year did make me reflect on myself and how I work and what I need to do to both improve and ensure that I am equipped for the future.”

(Survey respondent – Yr6 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.

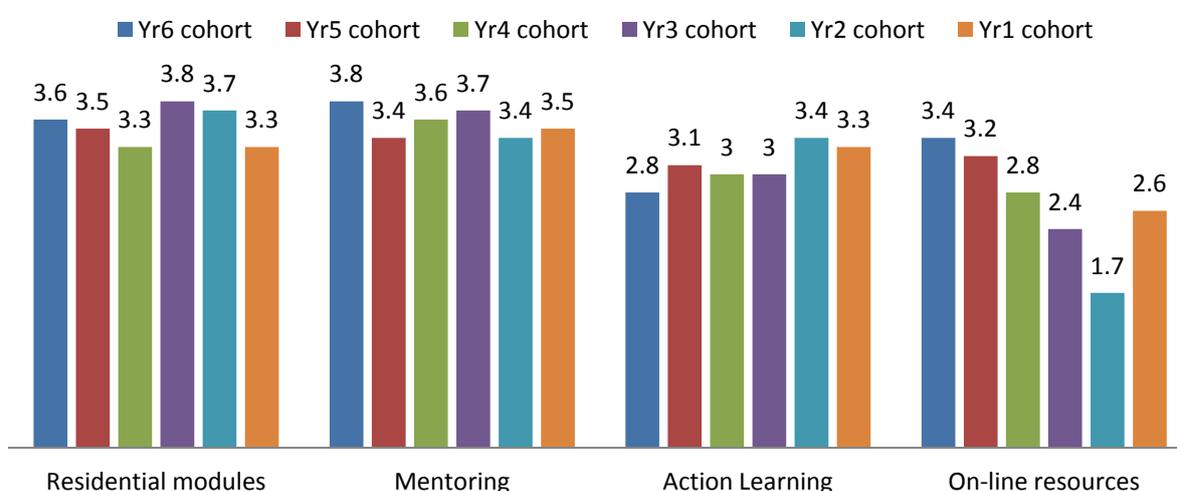


FIGURE 4: QUALITY OF EACH ELEMENT OF LLP

Mentoring and residential learning are consistently the most highly rated elements of the programme compared with on-line resources and action learning.

The Yr6 cohort were particularly positive about the mentoring, giving it the highest average rating of any year. However, while action learning is usually rated at 3.0 or above by each cohort, this year it dipped down to 2.8. The feedback from participants was that it was commitment to one of the sets that was a particular issue owing to distances required for travel.

“I was unable to attend all the action learning sets. I attended a few, but did not find them that valuable and did not get much out of them. I would not rate as good, nor poor - somewhere in between. I did not meet with my mentor many times, but on the times I did I found them valuable. Online resources were good. I used these prior to attending and it got my thinking in the right place before attending the course.”
(Survey respondent – Yr6 participant)

Over the past six years, the Director has planned the programme with a more or less consistent group of speakers and facilitators because of their breadth of experience and ability to engage learners. In order to test whether this choice of personnel was still relevant to the work of participants, the following question was included in the end of programme seminar: “How successful were our speakers/facilitators in presenting their ideas and topics in a way that felt contemporary and relevant to your work?” The response from participants was extremely positive:

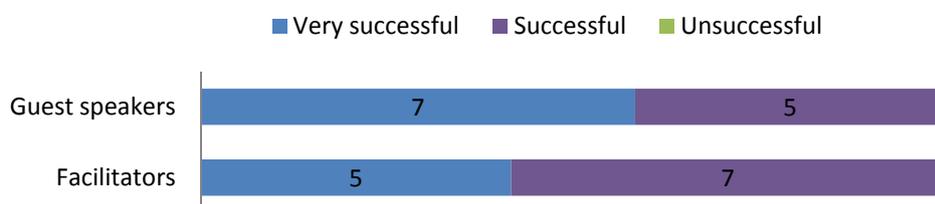


FIGURE 5: RELEVANCE OF YR6 FACILITATION AND GUEST SPEAKERS (BASE: 12)

One participant commented:

“I found the Guest speakers to be an excellent addition to the programme and it is clear to see that the programme is highly respected within the industry given the status of the guest speakers who are willing to give their time. I thought each speaker presented a relevant and knowledgeable view of their area and presented their thoughts in an entertaining and engaging manner.”
(Survey respondent – Yr6 participant)

The quality of the LLP programme continues to be high, with each cohort successively giving high average rankings for each element. However, the fact that geography seems to have had an influence on how the Yr6 cohort experienced action learning suggests that a decision needs to be made about how to deliver the next phase of action learning in Yr7 and beyond.

Having already ascertained alumni interest and willingness to pay for action learning, it makes sense to extend the number of sets on offer, both face to face and virtual is the way forward.

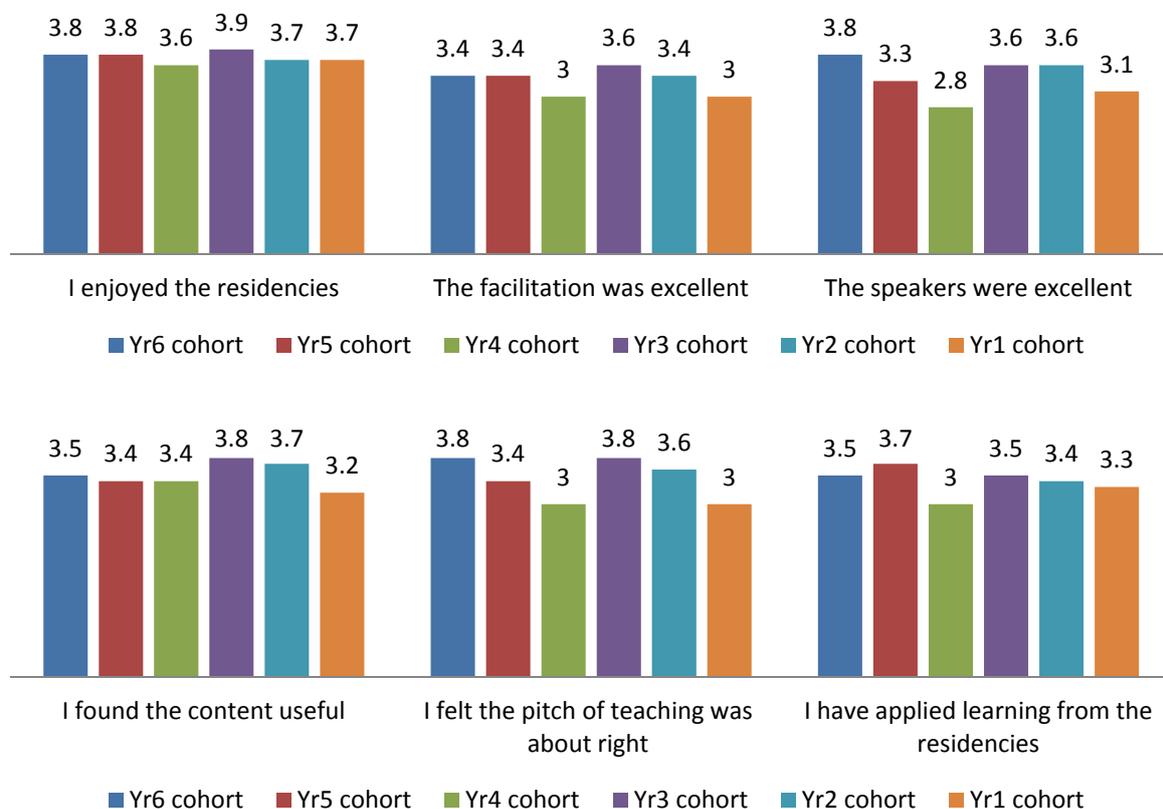
RESIDENTIAL MODULES

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. Indeed, one person commented on how applicable the information was to their work, despite not working directly for local government:

“All of the facilitators were extremely experienced in the field of Leadership and brought to bear a significant amount of personal learning on which we could all draw. I found their ideas were relevant to the majority of the people in the room and even though I did not work within local government I found that the majority of their topics and approaches were transferable to working within the 3rd sector.”

(Survey respondent – Yr6 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.



The immediacy of what participants learn during the residential elements of the programme is apparent in the ratings and this usefulness as one person commented:

“I found the NCF Leading Learning Programme to be instrumental in enabling me to take control of and re-direct my career path. The residential and mentoring elements of the programme were amazing and I genuinely looked forward to attending each event. I found the facilitators to be founts of knowledge; willing to share their significant experience and were committed to empowering and enabling the programme participants. ... The course has made a significant impact on my professional life and I am so pleased to have been able to access this wonderful opportunity and I would wholeheartedly recommend the NCF Leading Learning Programme to anyone who is eager to take that step into Leadership - it has certainly been a trans-formative experience.”

(Survey respondent – Yr6 participant)

MENTORING

The mentoring element of the programme is greatly valued by participants, returning high ratings and many relationships flexing to extend beyond the span of the LLP year. This year was no exception. 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 onwards were 4.0 and above. The relationships this year seem to have had the most benefit in terms of personal development as opposed to career development.

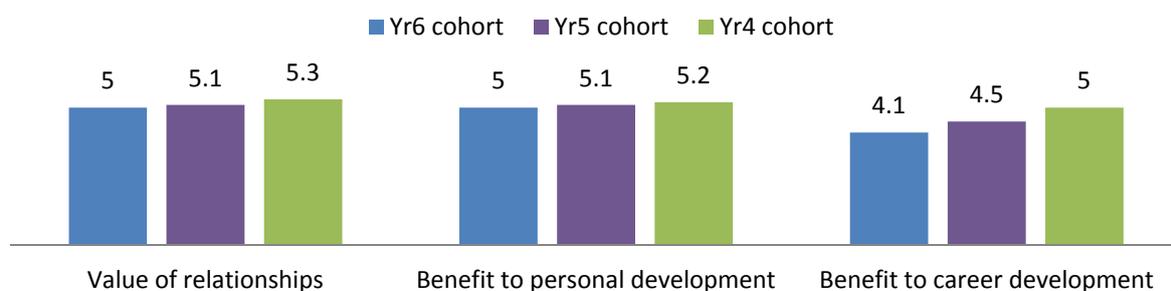


FIGURE 6: PARTICIPANT RATINGS FOR VALUE AND BENEFIT OF MENTORING

Comments this year were more generalized than in previous years where comments referenced specific issues tackled. However, this year both mentors and mentees commented on the appropriateness of their match and their enjoyment of the relationship.

“I think you paired me up well with (mentor). We have a good rapport and she has been very supportive through some challenging moments at work.”

(Mentoring feedback – Yr6 participant)

“Extremely useful for my personal development and development awareness of my skill set and CV. [Mentor] was a very supportive and insightful mentor and I look forward to making the most of the advice and support he has given me in the future.”
(Mentoring feedback – Yr6 participant)

“(Mentee) is a pleasure to work with and I have seen a palpable change in his confidence and attitude during the few months I have known him.”
(Mentoring feedback – Mentor)

“I have enjoyed the process. [Mentee] has been an extremely pleasant person to work with.”
(Mentoring feedback – Mentor)

For some relationships, however, pressure of work proved an obstacle, whether from the organisations of the mentor or mentees.

“I believe the mentee has achieved most of the desired specific gains but as mentioned, work has been overwhelming and he was not able to progress all the objectives set out at the start.”
(Mentoring feedback – Mentor)

Moreover, as the pool of mentors has contracted in recent years, the ability to match people in close geographic proximity has proved difficult.

As a consequence there were more comments about this issue in the final feedback from the mentoring, for example:

“It was difficult for both [mentor] and I to find a mutually convenient date/time to meet due to all our other work commitments.”
(Mentoring feedback – Mentor)

“My Mentoring programme lost a bit of momentum due to not booking in the next meeting date, at a particular point. I was also off point for a few months working on [Project name] which took me away from the objectives I was looking to achieve through mentoring, which didn’t help. [...] The only issue I have faced is the fairly lengthy travel time to attend meetings - but this has proven to be time well spent and of great value to me. Thanks very much to everyone involved in setting this up.”
(Mentoring feedback – Yr6 participant)

These comments should not detract from the positive comments and high ratings for each element of the mentoring. Moreover, LLP alumni continue to reference the impact of their mentors and in some instances ongoing relationships.

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.

The major challenge this year was the geography of participants and their ability to fully commit to the action learning. This was mentioned in participants' final surveys and in their feedback to the final residential.

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 11 respondents, 8 had invested in their professional development and documented just over £6,000 of investment ranging from just £50 to £5,000. 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 six years together, just under three quarters (or 71%) of participants said that the programme had met 80% or more of their individual learning needs.

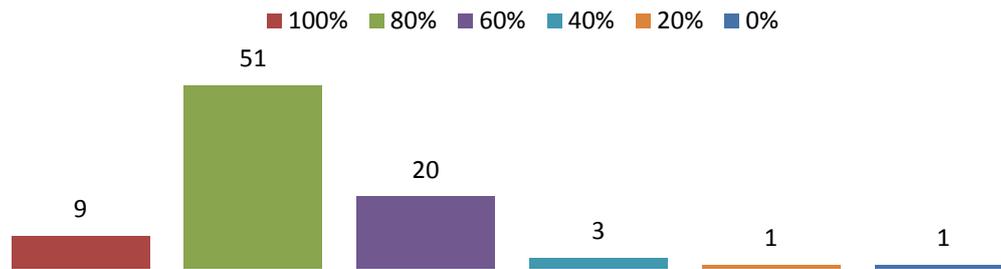


FIGURE 7: PERCENTAGE OF LEARNING NEEDS MET BY THE PROGRAMME (BASE: 85)

None of the Yr6 cohort suggested a percentage lower than 60% and the qualifying comment given by one of the people that said 60% was a positive one:

“Colleagues have noticed a change in me and I am more confident in my approach.”
(Survey respondent – Yr6 participant)

The only other comment made by participants was in relation to achieving goals and ongoing usefulness of the programme.

“The course greatly assisted me in being able to meet the needs outlined in my plan. I am more politically astute as a direct result of the course, something which is proving useful in my work.”
(Survey respondent – Yr6 participant)

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.

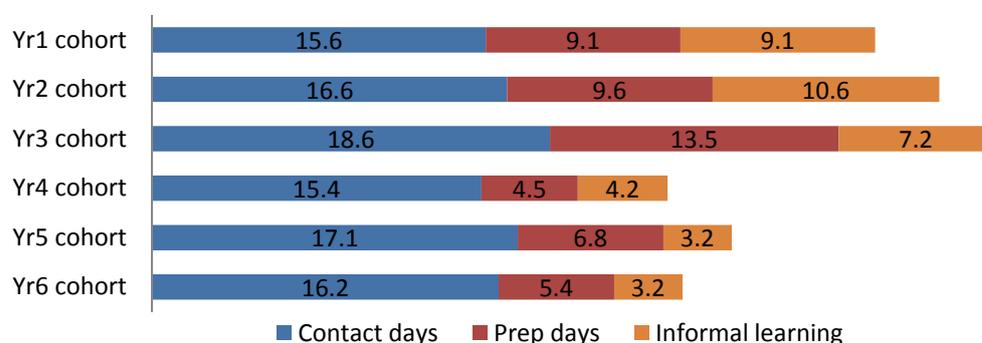


FIGURE 8: AVERAGE NUMBER OF DAYS EACH COHORT INVESTED IN LEADING LEARNING

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.

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.

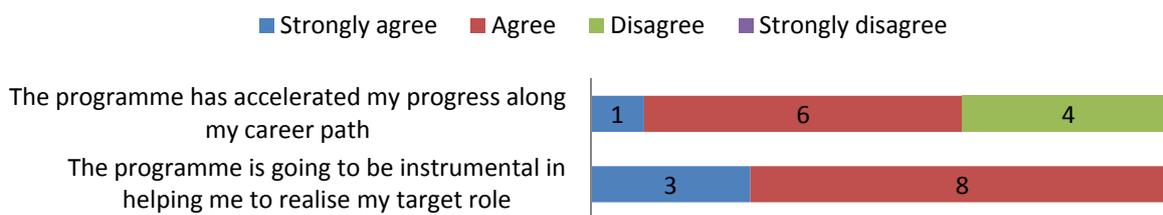


FIGURE 9: YR6 COHORT'S AGREEMENT WITH STATEMENTS ABOUT CAREER IMPACT (BASE: 11)

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

“The programme has inspired me to radically alter my career path and accelerate my journey to become a CEO of a VCF organisation. I am now taking the tentative steps on that journey which is largely thanks to the confidence and skills I have gained from working with the facilitators and through engagement with my peers in the action learning sets.”

(Survey respondent - Yr6 participant)

By the end of the year, the majority of participants had sought opportunities for informal and formal learning. Three of this year's cohort seem to have viewed shadowing and observation as particularly useful tools in their quests to progress along their career paths. For example:

“Following the completion of the course I met with my Director to discuss learning opportunities and spent a few days shadowing the new CEO focusing particularly on stakeholder relationship management. I then had a significant change in career [...]; whilst training I met with the CEO and have requested the opportunity to shadow him during a typical day.”

(Survey respondent - Yr6 participant)

The other participants from Yr6 attended courses and carried out independent research both within their organisations and more broadly.

The alumni also documented how the programme had led to growth in their roles:

“No direct change within role but I have gained senior opportunities (Interviews) within other organisations though none of these I have gained or accepted to date.”
(Alumni survey – Yr5 participant)

“I have now have a strategic role managing a social enterprise that has doubled in size and provides strategic advice to a number of public sector commissioners.”
(Alumni survey – Yr1 participant)

“I am in the same job, however the job in itself has changed as a result of improved strategic thinking and forward planning, which are a result of the Leading Learning programme.”
(Alumni survey – Yr2 participant)

Those alumni that had secured new jobs as a result of LLP documented 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:

“In the last review three years ago, I was upgraded and took on another team, the VCS Link Team. This was an area of work in which I have previously not been involved. Due to LLP, I felt well prepared to take on the new team and have managed to significantly improve their performance. Having proved myself as a leader with this team, my Director asked me to lead the Cultural Offer Transformation Programme.”
(Alumni survey – Yr1 participant)

“It helped me get on the Future Leaders Network which opened up the senior management to me on a very personal basis. This has meant that I have been able to make my service more central to the council's priorities and have managed to gain growth in the service both people and money. I have also been offered a leadership role in a large business with a £25k pay increase, which I declined partly due to a better understanding of what I want to do and my priorities for my career and self worth (ie. it's not all about money).”
(Alumni survey – Yr4 participant)

“Leading Learning helped give me the confidence and experience to apply for the Director role, now nearly four years ago.”
(Alumni survey – Yr1 participant)

“While participating in the programme I applied and was successful in securing a new role. Mentoring support was critical to this success.”
(Alumni survey – Yr3 participant)

“My role has changed in that the Head of Service post I occupy has, since January 2014, been recognised as being a Chief Officer post. This has meant that since mid-November (following a Council restructure) the arts service is now part of the Chief

Executive's section of the Council, giving me direct access to the Leader of the Council. I would say that my participation in the Leading Learning programme has given me the personal confidence, leadership skills and strategic overview to work in such a way - prior and up to 2014 - that has incrementally led to these changes. (Alumni survey – Yr1 participant)”

I am positioned ready for a management position and have changed my view of myself and what I can achieve. I am on the Senior Management Team now and have been included in some important business development work. (Alumni survey – Yr5 participant)

What is notable about these examples is that individuals that took part in the first year of the programme still identify LLP as a factor in their successful leadership journeys. While there are examples of how some individuals had successful promotions during their LLP experiences, the majority of role changes and new roles have been realized over a number of years.

APPLICABILITY OF LLP

LLP has delivered a consistent programme of topics over the past six 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 three topics that emerged as the most useful were: Leading Change, Managing in a political environment and Emotional Intelligence and Leadership Behaviour.

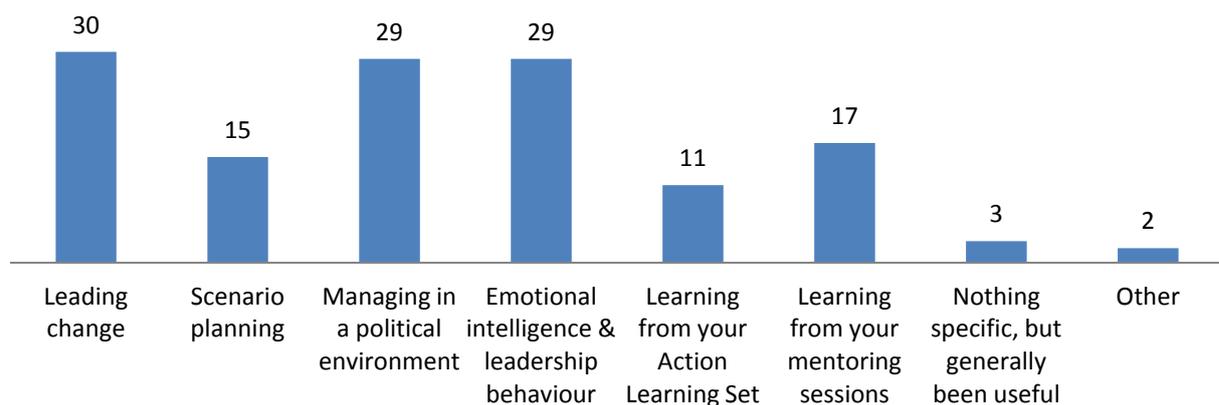


FIGURE 10: ONGOING USEFULNESS OF LLP FOR ALUMNI (BASE: 36)

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 cohort, the Alumni in the majority of instances concurred with the statements, evidencing the ongoing value of the programme to their work.

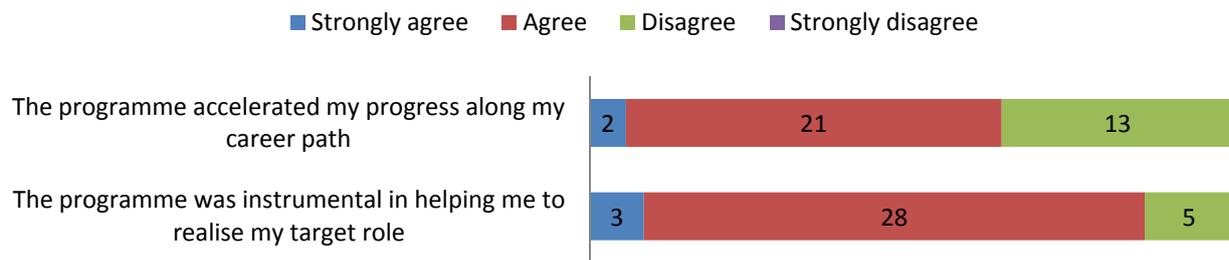


FIGURE 11: ALUMNI AGREEMENT WITH STATEMENTS LINKED TO LLP (BASE: 36)

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:

“The last 12 months have brought a major service change for us: closure of a theatre and reduction in number of staff employed across the service. I have implemented an open door policy for staff to talk about the impact whilst at the same time maintaining my own well-being by seeking support from colleagues and friends. I have been more decisive in leading the change and decision making and have been aware of, and explained for others, the political context and sensitivities. I have addressed my circle of influence and used my networks and contacts for my own benefit to lead the service.”

(Alumni Survey – Yr1 participant)

“I use some of the learning on a daily or at least weekly basis especially managing in a political environment, leading change and emotional intelligence and leadership behaviour. In the case of the latter, I have shared this learning with two of my senior managers in order to assist their own development.”

(Alumni Survey – Yr2 participant)

“Leading change - currently looking at 'spinning out' services and this has proved very useful. Managing in a political environment has been particularly useful when dealing with a recent contract termination and retendering exercise for a service located in an opposition party ward.”

(Alumni Survey – Yr2 participant)

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

“I am coping with the significant change which is taking place within the authority and my team seems very well prepared and able to cope. I feel this is because of LLP and especially the advice I received from my mentor. I am much more able to control my

emotions and lead by example. I learnt a lot about communicating with politicians and so I have been ensuring that I communicate not just with the administration but with all political parties to ensure they support our services and the changes we have to implement.”

(Alumni Survey – Yr1 participant)

“I have taken a reflective approach to my leadership style. I had an incidence with a colleague who was acting aggressively and I talked to them after the incident the following day in a calm and measured way after reflecting on it - and they responded positively.”

(Alumni Survey – Yr5 participant)

“I have had three line Managers in the last 2 years and the LLP provided me with tools to successfully manage upwards during significant periods of change.”

(Alumni Survey – Yr2 participant)

“Leading Learning helped me develop increased confidence. This has benefited me in terms of my new career and the training required, but also helped me in my additional role as a school governor (and a parish councillor). I am able to participate in high level discussions and make my points articulately and succinctly. I am able to give and receive criticism constructively and see the broader picture.”

(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.

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.

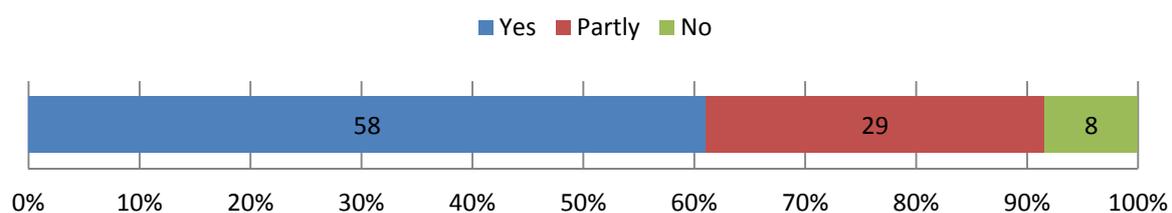


FIGURE 12: AGREEMENT WITH STATEMENT - LLP LED TO FEELING BETTER EQUIPPED TO WORK WITH POLITICIANS (BASE: 95)

Over the past six years participants have referenced changes to their working relationships with elected members as a direct result of the programme. Year six was no different:

“I have a more developed understanding of the complex relationship between CEO and elected leader/members. I found the online video resource extremely interesting in terms of recognizing key aspects and traits of strong working relationships and those which were faltering.”

(Survey respondent – Yr6 participant)

“I have now begun to forge links with some key politicians and the course has helped me to better understand their role. Most recently, at two events, I was looking after the Mayor, and took the time to follow up the visits with a thank you note - her acknowledgement proved it was a very welcome way of extending my thanks.”

(Survey respondent – Yr6 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 continues to be a clear legacy of LLP.

CONFIDENCE & RESILIENCE

In a period of austerity, 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:

“[LLP] has helped with my confidence knowing that the skills and behaviours I need to develop and display.”

(Survey respondent – Yr6 participant)

Other participants noted the current context in which they were operating and how LLP was offering them tools to build on their strengths and feel more able to tackle the challenges they were facing:

“Due to current economic climate affecting local authorities, my current career path is somewhat out of step with my local authority's ability to deliver on its ambitions. This has left me both more uncertain in my current employment but more resilient in my skills base and what I have to offer.”

(Survey respondent - Yr6 participant)

“It is liberating in the current economic climate to be able to feel optimistic about what may lie ahead. This is not misplaced optimism either, but rather optimism brought about by having a 'big picture' canvas. This change is not something that can

be avoided (and ultimately may bring personal challenges), but the course has left me so much better prepared for thinking about such things. Being open to the need for change and understanding the need to adapt is powerful: as a natural ideas person, I feel this additional 'personal strength' was previously a missing link. That said, resistance to change amongst some other colleagues remains frustrating!"

(Survey respondent – Yr6 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. This year, the question did not impose forced ranking and this meant that participants had the option of giving more than one characteristic the same rank.

The following figure shows how successfully the Yr6 cohort and alumni felt the programme had met each of the eight characteristics of resilience on a scale where 1 = least successful and 8 = most successful.

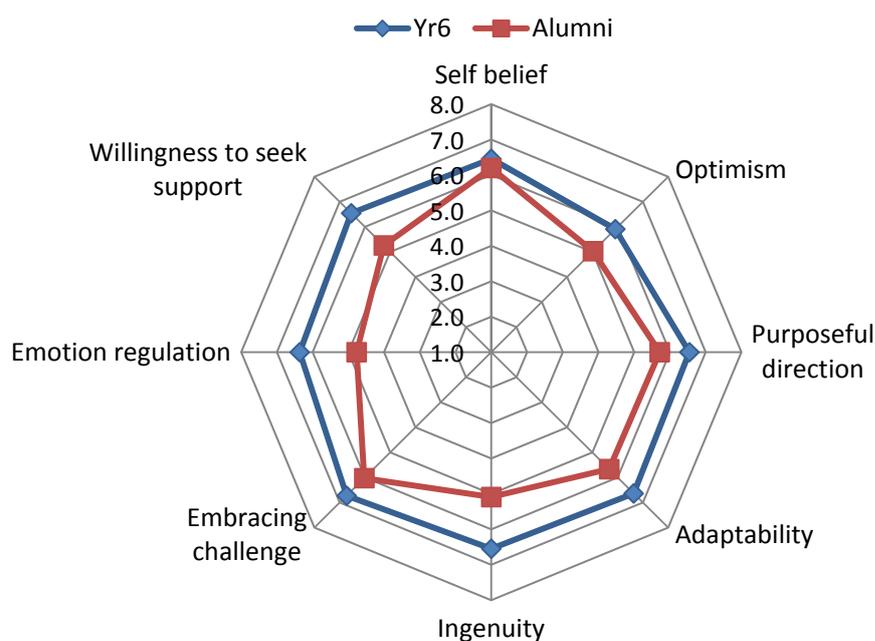


FIGURE 13: LLP'S SUCCESS IN SUPPORTING RESILIENCE, AVERAGE RANKINGS (BASE: 11)

The results show that the Yr6 cohort were most likely to identify “Embracing challenge” and “Adaptability” as characteristics most strongly supported by the programme, whereas the alumni were most likely to identify “Self belief” and “Embracing challenge”.

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

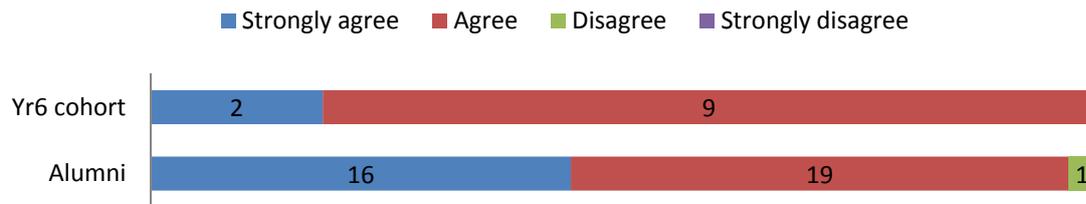


FIGURE 14: YR6 COHORT & ALUMNI AGREEMENT WITH RESILIENCE STATEMENT

Offering strategies for greater resilience is where the programme has really begun to deliver for participants and the fact that only one person disagreed with the statement is illustrative of the usefulness of the course in this regard.

CONCLUSION

The sixth year of the Leading Learning Programme confirmed that the structure and content of the course has maintained its quality and relevance. It has successfully delivered learning that is both individualised and specific to professionals working in local government. What comes through the comments from participants loud and clear is the extent of change that they are in the throes of navigating, whether those changes are to do with outsourcing and restructuring services, staff turnover, political upheaval and budgetary restraints.

The impact of LLP on their professional lives is a story of two parts, one about personal development (enhanced confidence and developing resilience) and the other about taking skills or perspectives learnt during the programme into their work. Each year the LLP cohorts document an expectation that the programme will enable them to realize their career ambitions (specifically achieve a target role) and the alumni document that the expectation was realized.

The less successful aspect of the programme this year was the Action Learning, not because of participants' preference for learning mechanisms, but because geography proved an inhibitor to regular attendance. This was also a pressure on the mentoring. Given the interest of the alumni in joining Action Learning sets (both face to face and virtual) it will be worth expanding membership to mitigate geographic pressures in future years.

Despite concern from Business in the Arts: NW that the mentoring pool has contracted, this aspect of the programme was extremely successful. Plans need to be in place to make sure that the pool of mentors is refreshed for succeeding cohorts of participants and it may be that the alumni event in the autumn will provide an opportunity to expand and induct new mentors.

Looking forwards an ongoing challenge for LLP is the recruitment of participants from regions less well represented in the participant profile. The other challenge is linked to establishing an offer for the growing alumni of LLP. 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 has provided evidence that speaks to the quality of LLP and its importance for the sector. Beyond the forthcoming event in the autumn 2015, their stories and successes could be better woven into the fabric of the programme and a structure could be devised to ensure that the alumni in turn benefit from their collective wisdom, skills and expertise. Moreover, as the programme continues to adapt to respond to challenges faced by local government, new information could be shared with alumni in return for their ongoing support.

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