



Leading Learning Programme:

A leadership programme for senior and middle managers working in the culture and sport sector



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The Leading Learning Programme

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

The programme has now been running for five years and 100 participants have been through the programme with many going on to develop their careers in senior positions in local government, trusts and other organisations.

The programme comprises five elements: -

1. **A 360-degree review** including an individual debriefing and support to understand different learning styles and formulate personal development plans.
2. **Seven days of residential tuition** over three sessions with experienced tutors covering topics such as strategic leadership, managing change and managing at the political interface. Tutors include George Levvy and Atul Patel of Cass Business School and Simon Baddeley of Inlogov, University of Birmingham. Throughout the residential programme there are a wide range of speakers with extensive experience of local government and the wider culture and sport sector.
3. **One to one mentoring** sessions for a period of a year with chief executives and senior managers from across local government and other organisations.
4. Facilitated **action learning sets** with ILM qualified facilitators.
5. A **website** which contains all the information pertaining to the taught elements, news and opportunity items, forums for participants, course lecturers and mentors – www.ncfleadinglearning.co.uk.

For more information on enrolment, programme details, fees, etc. please contact the Director, Sue Isherwood, Email leadinglearning@artsdevelopmentuk.org Tel 01749 871110 Mobile 07919 540803

In the following pages some of the participants tell their personal stories about the impact of the programme and some of our visiting speakers comment on the value of it.



“This series of courses have been characterised by their intellectual rigour, relevant contemporary content and active engagement with participants, however it is the positive constructive feedback, political awareness and practical realism about the context in which participants are obliged to operate that makes these courses exemplary – they should be compulsory for our sector’s leaders and aspiring future leaders”

Peter Murphy, International Centre for Public Services Management, Nottingham Business School.

“Sport and culture create so many personal and community benefits, not least of which is the power to bring communities together. It takes very little effort to design programmes on a cross-community basis but the impact on community cohesion can be extraordinary. This leadership programme encourages us all to explore the wider community benefits and to keep up with leading edge thinking”

Ted Cante CBE, Chair the iCoCo.

George Candler, Director of Commissioning, Shropshire Council.

(Assistant Director Culture and Leisure at Shropshire when he attended the programme.)

I joined the programme for a number of reasons, firstly for professional development as I felt there is always room for improvement, particularly on political leadership, which was a perceived weakness in my portfolio of skills. I also wanted to back up some of my own vocational learning in the leadership of change with the academic theory provided by the NCF Programme.

Secondly, for my personal development; I am very driven and keen to succeed in any field I work within and at present my career goal is to reach the top of local government as a Chief Executive or Managing Director and I felt that this would provide a fantastic opportunity to accelerate that pathway, which looking back has proven correct.

Finally, to be inspired by others; whether that was the tutors, the guest speakers or my peers on the course. I learn most by watching, listening and talking to other people, making this was a wonderful journey of learning for me over the nine plus months.

What I found most rewarding was the insight that we were given, whether that was

through the academic sessions, what we witnessed via video clips or listening to those people who were living and doing leadership, change management and political management in high pressure situations such as Derek Anderson, CEX at Lambeth and Cllr Chris White, at the time Chair of the LGA Culture, Tourism and Sport Board. Listening to their insights and reflecting on them was invaluable.

This learning has since enabled me to develop my relationship management and political skills with elected members, which in-turn led to a promotion in April 2011 when I was offered the post of Area Director in Shropshire Council, working with elected members in their specific areas.

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.

I have also maintained close links with my original mentor, Martin Reeves, Chief Executive of Coventry City Council which has helped further develop my leadership skills on an informal basis.



I have nothing but praise for the NCF Leading Learning Programme. It was a wonderful experience and had a significant impact in accelerating my career in the public sector.

Local government has and is continuing to experience the most challenging of times and never has it been more important that we have strong, resilient leaders to take us through this period of unprecedented change. The Leading Learning Programme has already helped to develop new leaders over the last five years and it is important that we continue to support those that will be both challenged and inspired and take our sector onto the next level.

“Drawing on the wisdoms of those who have ‘been there and done that’ is a great way to bring the theory and academic positioning in relation to leisure management to life. The programme has done this very well indeed”.

Derrick Anderson, Chief Executive, London Borough of Lambeth.



George Candler

Liz Blyth, Director of Culture and Neighbourhoods, Leicester City Council.

(Cultural Strategy Manager at Leicester City Council when she attended the programme.)

I was part of the first intake of the Leading Learning Programme and it was really important in helping me to increase my skills and ability in order to take up the Director position at Leicester City Council where I had worked as a head of service in cultural services for a number of years.

The programme provided me with an opportunity to further develop my leadership skills and an opportunity to network with and learn from my national peers in local government cultural services and from leaders across the public sector.

I enjoyed the group sessions on the residential and the structured input from academics and key thinkers/ senior influencers in the field of culture and sport as well as the informal networking opportunities with colleagues from across the country – many sharing the same challenges I faced in continuing to champion culture and sport in these difficult economic times.

I also gained a great deal of confidence (and probably competence!) from the Chief Executive I was paired up with to provide formal mentoring over the period of a year.

The sessions with him were challenging, supportive and thought provoking.

The mentor relationship was a particularly valuable experience and I know was instrumental in my professional development and I followed it up by finding another senior mentor in the field on a more informal basis that was equally valuable.

As a result I developed a better understanding of the challenges and opportunities facing cultural services and improved skills to deal with these effectively. This helped me become a more effective leader during a time of significant change.

The programme also helped me progress my career when the post of Divisional Director became vacant. I was initially appointed as Interim Director for a period of eighteen months before being appointed as Director of Culture and Neighbourhoods.

Overall, I would highly recommend Leading Learning, it was a positive, high quality learning experience and well timed for me in terms of my professional development. Please make the case for it in your local authority because continuous professional development and strong national networks are really crucial for effective leadership.



“If culture and sport are to successfully contribute to the challenges of places over the next decade they will need innovative leaders of change. Leading Learning provides not only a sound grounding in leadership skills but also opportunity to think differently.”

Martin Reeves, Chief Executive, Coventry City Council.



Liz Blyth

Carol Stump, Chief Librarian, Kirklees MBC.

At the time I attended the programme I was in a new post and had just had quite a leap in terms of promotion and I wanted to enhance my cultural knowledge and skills at a higher level through learning and networking.

I learnt that the issues and challenges facing my part of the cultural world were the same as others. It was a good opportunity to listen to people in the field at a higher level including chief executives from other councils. The action learning sessions allowed me to run problems by others and learn from this by getting me to focus and come up with my own solutions.

As a result I have grown considerably in confidence, less fazed by the difficulties I face and knowing there is a support network should I need it.

These experiences have all helped me lead my services through change and I have received positive feedback from my line manager about my new confidence in my own abilities and about my leadership skills. The service has benefited from my enhanced leadership skills as I lead my service through change to establish a library service for the future.

I would strongly advise others to take the opportunity it offers. It is a great investment in your future and you will learn and grow from the experience. You will meet others facing similar issues and the networking opportunities are great.

“Whilst Carol had worked in libraries management for some time she was new to the role of Chief Librarian. It was important for me that Carol had greater involvement in the strategic side of service development. This programme has enabled Carol to grow as a leader and I can see that in her interactions with me and the respect she has from her colleagues and staff within the libraries service.”

Dave Thompson, Head of Customer Services, Kirklees MBC.



Carol Stump

Steve McCue, Sport & Physical Activity Manager, North West Leicestershire District Council.

I joined the programme because I see myself as a future leader within Local Government and I am committed to my professional development. I wanted to ensure I was in a strong place to be able to apply for and be successful in achieving a position at senior management/leadership level and I believed the Leading Learning Programme helped me achieve these aims.

The programme structure and content provides the learner with theoretical approaches to leadership that can easily be put into practice within your own organisation. I found that there were plenty of opportunities for discussions amongst other learners that I found to be a positive learning experience. You will be challenged, but be prepared to challenge others. Get to know the other learners and learn from them. I still meet up with many of them to this day, sharing ideas, best practice and as a sounding board. Engage fully with your mentor, my experience has been extremely positive and his advice and guidance have improved my leadership skills.

I learnt a great deal from the programme but most significantly: -

- Personal Resilience – In a public sector experiencing budget constraints and cuts

like never before, this programme has helped me understand and develop my personal resilience. Remaining optimistic in a changing landscape, having confidence in one's ability and being able to adapt and learn from the challenges that lay ahead are all skills that I have developed since attending this programme.

- Leadership v Management – By understanding the differences between the two and assessing my skills as a leader it quickly became apparent that I was definitely doing all the things that a good manager might do: planning, budgeting, organising, controlling and problem solving, i.e. doing things right. Having developed my understanding of good leadership, I have been able to develop my strategic thinking, setting direction within my service, motivating and inspiring my team, i.e. doing the right things.
- Scenario Planning – By understanding the difference between anticipating and predicting the future I have been able to apply the skills I have learned within my organisation and service area. Instead of predicting (guessing) what may happen in the future, I have been able to use factual data, intelligence, trends and influences to anticipate the future demands/needs/ challenges of my service area and incorporate this into my service strategy and action plans.
- 360-degree feedback – My report provided me with invaluable information allowing me to develop a personal development plan to build upon my existing skills set.



As a result of the programme I believe I have become a better leader. I have been able to apply the skills I have learned and make an impact within my service. I am delegating more and empowering others, which has resulted in increased levels of motivation amongst team members having an impact on the overall performance of my service. By applying the skills of a good leader, I have been able lead change in challenging times by successfully engaging partners to come together and pool resources allowing for greater efficiency and the achievement of shared objectives and outcomes. This has helped raise the profile of Culture & Sport and position Culture & Sport as a key partner in most community development programmes.

Being involved in this programme has elevated my profile within my organisation. Immediately after completing the programme, I was asked by my Chief Executive to lead on a corporate project addressing improved customer experience. This opportunity took me out of my comfort zone within Culture & Sport and exposed me to several other services within the council, communicating regularly with senior officers and members of the Corporate Leadership Team resulting in a substantial allocation of funding being allocated to the 'Improving the Customer Experience' project.

During a recent review of services, an opportunity for promotion has arisen and I have been shortlisted for interview for the position of Customer Team Manager.

I believe this is largely due to the skills I have developed from being involved in the 'Improving the Customer Experience' project that only became possible due to my involvement in the Leading Learning Programme.

“Steve has fully engaged in this learning experience resulting in benefits to both him and the Council. I have seen him apply the skills he has learned during the programme with positive outcomes in terms of staff morale, motivation and team performance. This has not gone unnoticed at a corporate level, which has provided Steve with an opportunity to work closely with the Chief Executive and the Corporate Leadership Team. Whilst this has provided him with a challenge outside of his usual area of expertise, it is evident that his leadership skills and qualities lend themselves to multiple service areas within the Council. These transferable skills are going to be vital for the future leaders of local Authorities”.

Jason Knight, Leisure Services Team Manager, North West Leicestershire District Council.



Mike Lyons, Director of Leisure Facilities (BH Live Bournemouth)

(Commercial Manager, Wigan Leisure & Culture Trust when he attended the programme.)

I joined the programme because I wanted to develop my career further and gain a greater insight into organisational strategy, culture and performance and also learn more about managing the political interface within local government.

I learned a great deal about corporate strategy, leadership and change management, which helped me when making key decisions within the workplace. It gave me new perspectives on organisational change that allowed me to lead more effectively and implement a variety of key strategies for the organisation. It has also encouraged me to plan more strategically and consider changes taking place within the leisure and culture sector.

The programme has allowed me to think more strategically and enabled me to progress towards becoming a Director in August 2013. The reading and subjects covered within the programme gave me a greater insight to the key requirements of the director role and the mentoring element has particularly been and continues to be very important to me as a leader.

I would highly recommend the programme to any leisure and culture professional looking to develop their career. It allows an individual to gain new perspectives on organisations and how they develop strategically.

The reading material, guest speakers and internal discussions not only challenge but also allow managers to learn and apply new management principles to their role within the organisation.

“Investing in developing the talents of up and coming local government people is an essential activity in these times of rapidly changing public services. This programme gives an ideal opportunity for talented leisure and culture professionals to broaden their horizons.”

Paul Lankester, Chief Executive,
Stratford-on-Avon District Council.





Vicky Martin, CEO Heartlands Trust.

(General Manager, Wollaton Hall, Nottingham City Council when she attended the programme.)

I had a tourism background before managing museums and so saw the programme as an opportunity to develop my leadership skills and help progress my career in the cultural sector.

The programme helped broaden my knowledge and understanding of leadership theory and best practice. It introduced me to 360-degree appraisals, which gave me a better understanding of my strengths and areas for growth and also action learning sets, which taught me how to approach problems in a totally different way to what I was used to. Inspirational speakers and exemplar projects taught me about the power of culture to totally transform lives and gave an economic argument for investing in culture rather than prisons.

The programme has helped me grow as a leader and develop my leadership abilities. It helped me develop my career by enabling me to move from local authority into the third sector. Before completing the programme I had progressed to a Director role and more recently I have become a Chief Executive of a charity.

Leading Learning helped fast track my career in the cultural sector. Although there is a significant time commitment required, consider it an investment in your future!

“The Leading Learning Programme offers a great opportunity for aspiring leaders to build networks across local government, and to develop the skills and inspiration needed to lead culture, sports and arts services through challenging times, making a difference for communities across the country”.

Ian Fytche, Chief Executive
North Kesteven, District Council



Vicky Martin

Strinda Imogen Davies, Head of Cultural Services, Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council.

(Acting Head of Cultural Services at the time she attended the programme.)

I joined the programme because of a desire to develop in my role in the cultural services senior officer team and to be ready for the challenge of potentially establishing a shared arts service in South Wales.

The programme enabled me to recognise the extent and scope of my responsibilities both in an operational and in a strategic context; to have the confidence in my informed decisions and in leading a team of experienced and knowledgeable arts officers and to see the benefits and challenges of potentially creating a shared arts service in South Wales. As a result I changed my leadership and management style by delegating more, recognising the strengths of others, improving my listening and being more open to giving and receiving feedback. I realised that managing change is key to progressing and that empowering others pays dividends. It helped me acknowledge that my role within the local government arts sector in Wales is a valuable one that is worthy of recognition and made me more confident in my decision-making and leadership style.

The impact that this has all had in the council and the cultural sector locally is to make me more visible, decisive, prepared to make and receive challenge, to work confidently and assertively with officers more senior than I and to make the case for the more efficient and collaborative delivery of arts services. I have now secured permanent membership of the association of Chief Culture and Leisure Officers in Wales (CLOW) and work alongside more senior officers across Wales including with the Welsh Local Government Association, Arts Council Wales, Wales Data Unit and Welsh Government civil servants from the Arts Policy Branch. I am involved in Arts Benchmarking in Wales, supporting arts officers in the South, West and North Wales to engage in the process and to seek opportunities for collaboration.

It has also meant that I was accepted onto the ASPIRE professional development course offered within my council intended for senior officers with the potential for development in their local government careers.

The Leading Learning programme has helped me to secure my position as Head of Cultural Services and to be recognised as the lead officer within ArtsConnect, reporting directly to the Leadership Group. It has inspired me in my professional development and I have recently been awarded my Senior Fellowship by Arts Development UK.

To others considering attending the programme I would say this is an excellent opportunity for professional development so seldom available in the cultural sector. It will



not only benefit you but benefit arts in Wales, as the local government cultural sector needs leaders just like you.

“Leading Learning challenges the individual to look ‘outside the box’, it builds confidence and keeps alive the appreciation of what ‘Leadership’ can bring. It draws support from others by sharing experiences and developing new leadership skills, whilst working with others from different cultural organisations. It encourages different behaviour styles, promotes positive thinking and introduces new perspectives on learning practices. The ability to think strategically yet deliver in difficult financial times makes this a most productive experience and one which anyone with a mind for career development shouldn’t hesitate to take up!”

George Jones, Group Director,
Environmental Services,
Rhondda Cynon Taff
County Borough
Council



Strinda Imogen Davies

Lorna Lee, Head of Culture and Community Services, London Borough of Waltham Forest. (Responsible for The William Morris Gallery, Museum of the Year 2013)

(Head of Libraries and Museums when she attended the programme.)

I joined the programme just after moving from a role at the British Museum and was now facing a very different set of challenges – a politically important role with a lot of changes coming up. Support from the MLA was encouraging and meant that the lead organisation for my sector valued my role and thought I could make a difference. It is easy to feel isolated in a large organisation when there are few people with the same area of experience and expertise and the programme offered the prospect of both external and peer support. I also knew that I would benefit from taking time out from a hectic schedule and give myself the opportunity to reflect and increase my self-awareness.

Most importantly it was about understanding the political context. I was in my first job for a local authority and was a bit naïve about working with politicians. The programme helped me understand much more about politicians, their agenda and what motivates them. It made clearer my role as an officer

and how I could establish respectful relationships.

The programme also helped me understand the wider landscape through sharing learning and best practice with peers. I had done an MA in museums management about five years before, but the programme reinforced some of the principles I had taken on board then and augmented them with new learning and wider experience. I also now have a group of colleagues from across the culture and leisure sector with whom I can share ideas and try out new thoughts. These valuable contacts were established particularly through our action learning set and I still use these contacts today. Finally it reinforced the importance of taking time out to reflect and I now actively encourage my staff to do the same.

The impact of the programme has been extensive particularly in relation to managing my relationships with political leaders. I now better understand the risks and possibilities. The programme was a confidence builder. It helped me see that I was doing many of the right things but also to have confidence in choosing the best options for the future. It reduced my sense of isolation and now I use my contacts and networks more actively. There's a wider group of people available to me and as a result I am a stronger leader of culture.

I now have a wider brief within the authority and although the programme was not the only thing that helped it played an important part. The contacts and networks I am now



part of help me see what's going on 'out there' and allow me to be the best I can be at the moment.

I have also used the practical help and wider context that came from the external speakers to better prepare for the challenging future. For example I better understood the background to commissioning and could engage early in the process.

My mentor has also helped me change how I operate on a day-to-day basis. Although our original contract finished with the programme we are still in regular contact and I know I can call on her advice and support when difficult decisions need making.

I would definitely recommend the Programme, it's worth the time out and you will get more from it than you could imagine. I met a great range of people and it broadened my mind on what's possible and who can help and it also made me more thoughtful and reflective. In the present financial climate you can't just keep on trimming back but you do need to get back to first principles and think innovatively.

“Participation in the ‘Leading Learning’ programme enhanced Lorna’s approach to strategic planning. Along with Lorna’s other work experiences and skills the experience of the course has assisted Lorna to negotiate her personal development path and strengthen her services in a time of flux and continuing pressure.”

Clive Morton, Head of Health Integration and Strategic Commissioner, London Borough of Waltham Forest.



Lorna Lee



“I really did think it was excellent – exactly what I was looking for in a course”

Rebecca Peppiette, Culture Division Scottish Government, (Arts Strategy and Funding Manager, Edinburgh Council when she attended the programme.)



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