

Evaluation of the SEND Reforms Leadership Programme



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Executive Summary

The SEND Reform Leadership Programme is delivered by the National Development Team for Inclusion (NDTi) as part of the over-arching Delivering Better Outcomes Together (DBOT) support programme. The Leadership Programme was delivered with a second cohort of 40 participants in 2016-17 as a series of five two-day modules between July 2016 and March 2017.

This evaluation report considers the impact of the programme on those leading the implementation of the SEND reforms. It reflects on the effectiveness and advantages of the programme from participant's perspectives. Examples of impacts on the delivery of services and broader organisational change are highlighted.

The Leadership Programme

The Children and Families Act 2014 expects significant changes in the way that SEND services and support are delivered and the outcomes that are achieved. This requires effective local leadership that not only understands the reforms and their aspirations, but is also able to demonstrate effective, solution-focused leadership that leads to real change. To support with this challenge, the broad objectives of the programme (as detailed in the original programme specification) are to:

- a) Strengthen the leadership skills and knowledge of participants; and
- b) Increase their ability and capacity to deliver the SEND reforms, including generating new ideas and making change happen.

Key Findings

Context and expectations

- There is a balance in the cohort between leaders who are primarily seeking to enhance or broaden their knowledge of the SEND reforms, and those who are seeking opportunities to develop as leaders. The SEND reforms leadership programme is recognised as a unique offer, because it places that leadership development within the context of the SEND reforms.
- Participants cited several challenges in the delivery of the reforms including tensions between process and quality, the scale and pace of change, work pressures, issues with capacity, and reduced resources. The programme is seen by attendees and their managers as an opportunity to confront these challenges.

Overall experience and rating of the programme

- The programme has exceeded its KPI targets, receiving ratings of at least 85% on five aspects of participant experience, including content, relevance and quality of presentation and facilitation (against the agreed target of 70%) across all five modules.
- Motivation and inspiration, the knowledge and expertise of the course leaders, and networking opportunities are key themes in participant's satisfaction with the programme.

Programme Impacts

- Data from the surveys of managers and participants indicate that all participants have experienced some improvement in their knowledge, skills and ideas, and that the programme has contributed to these developments.
- Additional insights from the survey and telephone interviews demonstrate examples of active and conscious application of the learning and tools from the programme, and examples of changes to behaviour and practice.
- The learning has been cascaded through a range of mechanisms (formal and informal). There were examples where the learning has been incorporated directly into staff training, shared across teams, and filtered upwards to Senior Management Teams and SEND Reform Boards.

Personal Projects

- The Personal Project is a highly valued aspect of the programme, and was consistently cited by participants as the most impactful aspect of the programme.
- There were several examples of significant developments and changes in delivery arising from the personal projects, and some with early impacts:
 - A reduction in school-exclusions for children with complex needs and behaviour that challenges, and implementation of home-based support packages for children excluded from specialist provision;
 - 3 new providers to deliver supported internships;
 - Delivery of good practice sessions around personalisation of study programmes;
 - Progress towards joining up health, education and social care budgets for children and adults;
 - Development of a framework to improve compliance, including a pilot of a 'My Support Plan' approach.
- Participants' ability to progress their project (and the pace of implementation) is dependent on a number of factors, including buy-in and influence across the Local Authority, the scale of the project, time and capacity to deliver, and the continued involvement of their programme partner.

Programme effectiveness

- The benefits of the programme fall under five key components, which can be considered as pre-requisites or enablers for change:
 - Facilitating greater linkages across different parts of the system

- Ongoing mutual support
- Access to evidence-based practice
- Time to reflect
- Promoting person-centred thinking and affirming priorities
- Some of these advantages flow directly from the particulars of the programme design, namely the paired attendance model and two-day modules. Given these advantages, participants consider their investment in the programme to represent a good return for their organisation.

Potential developments

- There were very few issues raised in relation to the delivery of the programme, and these were primarily related to issues of travel and time commitments, issues which participants report are offset by the benefits of attending the programme.
- Participants suggested that greater balance in the education, health and care split of the cohort, and opportunities to attend as a triad of colleagues would strengthen the programme offer.
- There is a strong commitment to continuing the exchange through the online forum and through future alumni events. Participants anticipate that the strengths will grow as future cohorts join the network.



1. Introduction

The SEND Reform Leadership Programme is delivered by the National Development Team for Inclusion (NDTi) as part of the over-arching Delivering Better Outcomes Together (DBOT) support programme. Commissioned by the Department for Education (DfE), the DBOT programme provides specialist advice, training and support to DfE, managers, professionals and practitioners through the SEND regional structure to support them in implementing the SEND reforms. The Leadership Programme was first commissioned in 2015-16, and was delivered with a second cohort of 40 participants in 2016-17 on the basis of highly positive feedback from the first cohort of participants.

The programme has been delivered as a series of five two-day modules between July 2016 and March 2017 and has been evaluated throughout. This evaluation report draws together the findings from various data sources to consider the ways in which the programme impacts upon those leading the implementation of the SEND reforms. In particular, the report reflects on the effectiveness and advantages of the programme from participant's perspectives, and identifies the aspects of programme that are most valued by participants insofar as these support participants in their leadership roles. The impact of the programme on participants' knowledge and leadership skills is explored, and examples of impacts on the delivery of services and broader organisational change are highlighted.

This report has been prepared by NDTi's Research and Evaluation team, who provide a specialist research function that is removed from the delivery of programmes. All evaluation fieldwork (surveys and interviews) and analysis required for the preparation of this report have been undertaken by that team.

1.1 Programme Aims

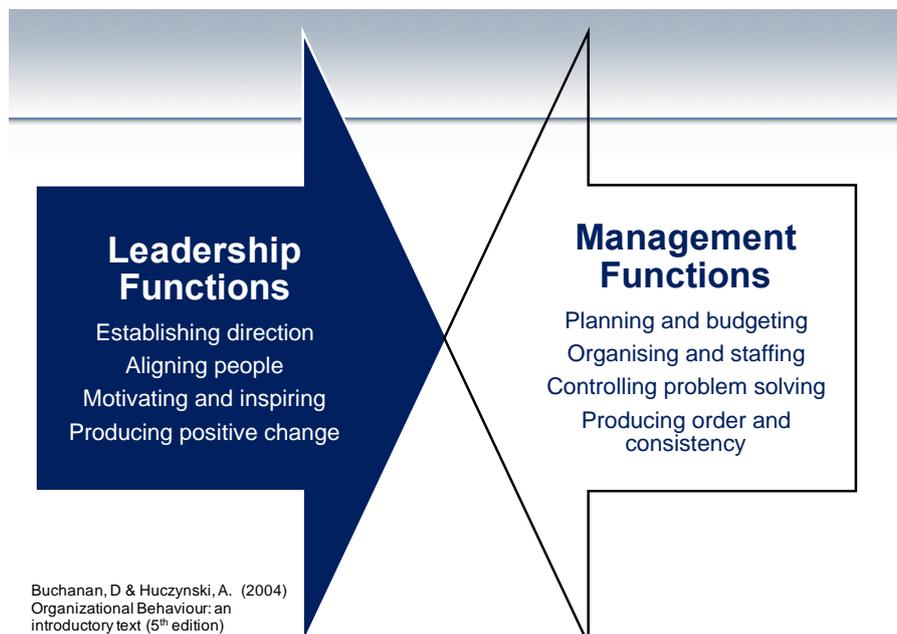
The Children and Families Act 2014 expects significant changes in the way that SEND services and support are delivered and the outcomes that are achieved. This requires effective local leadership that not only understands the reforms and their aspirations, but is also able to demonstrate effective, solution-focused leadership that leads to real change. To support with this challenge, the broad objectives of the programme (as detailed in the original programme specification) are to:

- a) Strengthen the leadership skills and knowledge of participants; and
- b) Increase their ability and capacity to deliver the SEND reforms, including generating new ideas and making change happen.

1.2 The SEND Reform Leadership Programme

The programme is based on the principle that leadership and management are different, but related concepts, as summarised in Figure 1. Participants in the programme reported that the pressures and dynamics they experience in delivering the reforms push them towards applying their time and work-style to the latter of these two functions, with a strong focus on delivering a specification to target. By changing the way that people think of the reforms, their role as leaders, and the way they see their organisation, and through equipping them with the necessary tools and understanding, the programme seeks to drive the behavioural and cultural change that is required for the successful implementation of the SEND reforms.

Figure 1: Leadership vs Management Functions



Programme design

There are four interrelated strands to the programme:

- Leadership and change

The prime focus of these sessions is about participants reflecting on themselves as leaders, to consider their style, tools, and repertoire of techniques. These sessions cover personal resilience, working in and leading teams, influencing others, organisational culture, and leading in challenging times. The reforms are Local Authority-led but by definition they require a multi-agency approach, which requires officials to engage colleagues in health or education with whom they have no authority, and all of the leadership training tools are delivered within this context.

- Fundamental challenges in the SEND reforms

Building on the leadership learning and tools, participants consider and plan how they will lead change around two fundamental areas: (a) co-production and participation, and (b)

joint-commissioning and integrated working. Each leadership session comprises both a theoretical and a practical element, so participants will apply the learning to a live challenge that they are currently faced with and plan their next steps.

- Leading-edge practice

These sessions provide participants with practical knowledge of creative practice in the areas of: personalisation and personal budgets, approaches to quality improvement and review, EHC plans and outcomes, employment and PfA, supporting people with complex needs, and school inclusion. Participants are able to attend two of these in-depth sessions.

- Personal Project

Each participant selects a task or challenge that they are faced with their role, and this is developed throughout the programme through 'action learning' methodology to apply and test what they have learned. In each session, the participant will present the problem to a small group, who then discuss and reflect on the issue. Each participant will then respond to the points discussed and propose their next steps. This process is then repeated at the following session, where participants will report back on what they have done and the issues they have encountered.

The 2016-17 programme was delivered as a series of five two-day modules between July 2016 and March 2017, as shown in Figure 2. This is a significant change to the way that the programme is delivered, and has been implemented in order to provide extended networking opportunities and help promote full attendance.¹ The facilitation of networking and mutual support has been a strong consideration in the programme design, and the ongoing exchange of ideas and information is supported by an online platform (Basecamp) where participants can post questions to the group, or signpost each other to additional tools and resources. The two-day model also provides an opportunity for participants to consider issues in the SEND reforms from external but related perspectives, through the 'pre-dinner speakers'. These have included families, young leaders who have been through the SEND system and a representative from a human rights organisation.

¹ The 2015-16 programme was delivered as a series of one-day and two-day modules. This was changed as a direct response to feedback from participants, who commented that two-day modules gave them an opportunity to be completely removed from their day to day work and facilitated time to attend.

Figure 2: SEND Reforms Leadership Programme agenda

Modules 1, 3 & 5: Leadership, Change and Personal Skills

- Issues of organisational change, leadership, team-working and personal management style
- Policy framework; history of SEN as a concept
- Personal Projects

Modules 2 & 4: Leading-edge practice

- Co-production and participation
- Preparing for Adulthood / Employment
- School inclusion
- Personalisation and Personal Budgets
- Joint-commissioning and integration
- Designing Support for People with Complex Needs
- EHC plans and outcomes
- Approaches to quality improvement and review

Applicant criteria

All applicants must have a significant role in delivering the SEND reforms, whether that role is strategic or focussed on delivery. The original intention was that the programme would engage those tasked with overall responsibility for SEND. However, and partly because not all Local Authorities have such a role, the majority of participants are officers who are responsible for leading an element of the SEND reforms. The programme intends to have a broad reach across the Local Authorities within the country. Preference is therefore given to attendees from areas that have not previously been represented on the programme, with the intention that elements of the training are then cascaded throughout their organisation.

Participants are invited to apply as a pair of colleagues from each Local Authority area though individual applications are also accepted. Attending as a pair increases the chances of successful implementation of the learning by supporting the development of strong working relationships with another person who has experienced the same learning process, a relationship that is taken back into the operational environment. As the SEND reforms involves strong partnership working between Local Authorities, the NHS and education, joint applications from different agencies are encouraged.² In the 2016-17 programme, there were 6 attendees from outside of Local Authorities, although there remains a heavy weighting towards education, with fewer partners from social care, and fewer still from health. However, in recognition that there will be some potential candidates who are unable

² The criteria were changed for the second programme. The first cohort of attendees was entirely Local Authority officers.

to attend with another colleague, the programme also accepts a smaller number of applications from individual applicants.

In the 2016-17 cohort comprised 40 participants from 23 different Local Authority areas. Of these:

- 34 were local pairings
- 4 were paired with a neighbouring authority
- 2 were individual applicants

A further 34 applicants from 19 areas were unsuccessful. In some cases, this was because representatives from their authority had attended the course the previous year, but in most cases this was due to quality of applications, or because other applicants were in more appropriate roles for the programme, or a combination of these reasons.

1.3 The Evaluation

This evaluation is tasked with providing an assessment of the impact of the programme in relation to its stated objectives (see above). More specifically, the evaluation explores the following areas:

- Participants' motivation for enrolling, the current context and expectations;
- The overall experience of participants attending the programme;
- The effectiveness and appropriateness of the programme design and content;
- Impact on participant's knowledge, skills, and development of ideas;
- Impact on behaviour change and service delivery;
- Suggested areas for development or improvement.

1.4 Methodological Approach

In order to report on the areas outlined above, data has been gathered through a suite of methods, including:

- Course evaluation forms

Participants were asked to complete evaluation forms at the end of each module. The forms include two Likert-style rating questions that relate to impact on participants' knowledge and ideas:

- Did the module increase your knowledge and understanding about the subject of the module?
- Did the module give you ideas on what you can do as a leader to deliver the SEND reforms?
- Surveys with programme participants

Participants were asked to rate their leadership skills and ability to deliver the SEND reforms at both the start and end of the programme. Baseline surveys were completed by all

participants.³ The end of programme survey received responses from 29 out of the 34 participants who completed the course (response rate of 85%).⁴

- Surveys with participants' managers

Managers of the participants were invited to complete a survey about the impact of the programme on their team member at both the mid-point and end of the programme. There were 17 responses to the interim survey and 13 responses to the final survey.

- Telephone interviews with a sample of participants

Following completion of the programme, telephone interviews were conducted with 11 participants. Participants were selected at random. Interviews lasted between 30 minutes and one hour.

- Personal Project evaluation forms

During the final module, participants were asked to complete an evaluation form summarising progress with their Personal Project. Examples of projects that have achieved early successes are highlighted, and the factors that have enabled or hindered progress with personal projects, as reported by participants, are considered. A summary of all Personal Projects is presented in Appendix 1, to demonstrate the range of areas where the programme has directly helped participants to implement steps towards change.

³ One participant did not begin the course due to long-term sickness

⁴ Four participants started but did not complete the programme due to long-term sickness. One was withdrawn by their employer because of work pressures arising from restructuring.



2. Context and expectations

Section Summary

This section considers the questions of who applies to the Leadership Programme, their motivations for doing so, and what they expect to gain from attending. These questions are important for understanding demand for the programme, its appeal, and the challenges that managers and leaders are experiencing in relation to the implementation of the reforms.

2.1 Who applies for the Leadership Programme?

The broad appeal of the programme is evident in the range of people who attend. This is significant because the programme must be far-reaching in order to be effective - there are managers and leaders at various levels within their organisational structures with responsibility for delivering the different parts of the SEND reform agenda.

The telephone interviews with participants generated some detailed insights into how the programme appeals across these different dimensions. Firstly, there are people leading on the implementation of the reforms who are new in post. These staff can often be learning about the reform agenda as they are delivering. For them, the programme can offer an opportunity to focus on understanding the SEND reform agenda:

“I was still trying to understand what the SEND reforms were all about. The suggestion actually came from the Senior Manager for Inclusion, working at the very top of SEND - at the time she was also new to her role. We thought it would be a good opportunity to find out more about the SEND agenda nationally ... getting that knowledge of what it was about was the key thing for us.”

“I was relatively new in post at the time, the Local Authority had brought me in because of some of the specialist knowledge that I had around PFA and education. But in terms of understanding the wider SEND reforms and how they were impacting on local authorities I was really training on the job.”

Secondly, there are staff who emphasised the difficulty in influencing others, either within or outside of their organisation:

“I wanted to know about how to get shared agreement amongst partners who have been in their positions for a long time and can be very resistant to change.”

“It’s such a hierarchical place to work in a Local Authority that you can sort of feel restricted by whichever pay grade you’re in.”

This comments speak directly to one of the rationales for the leadership programme, the challenge of influencing others, and to the need to empower and equip people with the

tools they need to effect change. Equally, there are officers with significant leadership and management experience in positions of seniority who are seeking to refresh or renew their ideas and practice:

“I was aware that we had major changes ahead so thought it would be a good time to refresh. I’ve been qualified nearly 35 years, so in terms of course materials, I’m up to speed. I was looking more at the context, and the people who were doing it.”

Overall, these comments demonstrate a balance in the cohort between leaders who are primarily seeking to enhance or broaden their knowledge of the SEND reforms, and those who are seeking opportunities to develop as leaders. There is a strong sense that the SEND reforms leadership programme is recognised as a unique offer, because it places that leadership development within the context of the SEND reforms:

“My main motivator was to extend my understanding of leadership, to gain skills and strategies to use in my work. But this was not generic, it was rooted in SEND. We have other management courses locally to here.”

“It’s the only specific leadership course that I’ve ever seen that was specific to SEND.”

In addition, the model for the programme has strong appeal - attending as a pair of colleagues presents an opportunity to tackle issues around partnership working, or join up parts of the system, while the two-day modules present opportunities to focus on learning:

“Two of us could go from different parts of the system that were previously siloed, and by going together on the course we could come back and influence the changes that were happening so that people’s experience of the system was more joined up.”

“NDTi would welcome applications from hybrid pairs working in different contexts. The authority were keen for us to attend together. One the college’s strategic ambitions was to improve the relationship with our commissioning authorities.”

“I liked the idea of going on the courses with another colleague...that looked like a good way forward.”

“It’s a much broader and more in-depth programme. It’s all 2 day modules so it’s a real opportunity to go away and focus and learn through networking with others.”

2.2 Challenges in the delivery of the reforms

Process and quality

A key overall challenge for delivering the reforms is the risk of a tension between the process for delivery and the quality of outcomes, and this is contrary to what SEND leaders know and believe will work to deliver the best outcomes for young people and their families. Some participants highlighted this challenge when describing their motivation for attending the programme:

“In terms of trying to make reforms successful, I have a sense of frustration in that I feel the code of practice is very poorly written. I’ve had conversations with people at CDC and DfE about how to make things work when some of our core materials are

poor, particularly in terms of how the code of practice is not particularly helpful in getting the best outcomes around social care.”

“This [the SEND reforms] has the potential to be transformational, but it won’t be if we don’t work at it, the law itself is not going to change things. The way that the government itself deals with it is very process-driven, so we as leaders have to think about how we are going to use it to be transformational.”

The scale and pace of change

Some participants discussed the scale of the task, and the challenging nature of the reforms:

“It was about realising that there were lots of people that I had to make contact with, SEND links into lots of different worlds. It was just the enormity of the task.”

“The SEND reforms can be very challenging; you feel like you’re just ploughing through.”

“The actual pace of change around EHC plans... It was a case of “here you are, here’s the new legislation” and just starting with no time to plan. Everything was done reactively and on the fly.”

There were references to increased work pressures, reduced resources, and the changing role of Local Authorities:

“People are very worn down because of immense work pressures. Despite everybody’s best intentions things were skimped. It’s about keeping up everyone’s morale in difficult times as well.”

“Local Authorities used to be the parent to schools, and now it’s more of a critical friend.”

“It’s never been as challenging as it is now, in terms of implementing a challenging reform programme, and in terms of the shifting sands of local authorities, their changing role, and in the context of reduction in our budget.”

Sustaining achievement

One participant described how, having recently achieved outstanding status in an Ofsted inspection, their main challenge as a leader was how to sustain that level and continue to make improvements:

“How we would maintain focus, and take to next level? We had so much impetus around change management and maintenance to get us there, we had a very clear vision. My fear was that we would relax.”

A learning opportunity

Bringing together representatives of different areas, with a view to exchanging knowledge and ideas in relation to their different strengths and weaknesses is a key intention of the programme. Participants described that in the context of the challenges, the programme presented them with an opportunity to learn directly from their peers:

“It was definitely seen that there was a need. We’re ahead of the curve of some things, and well behind the curve on other things. It was seen as a priority to get two people on this course to reinforce and consolidate where we were going, what we were doing, and use it as a benchmarking opportunity, to meet with other colleagues.”

“The understanding was there that, like many, we’re in the middle of a SEND review of how we support children across the city, so within that context my manager identified people to go on behalf of the whole service.”

“We wanted to know whether others were having the same problems. We knew our situation was not unique for Local Authorities, so we wanted to know were the challenges similar or dissimilar? What were they doing about it? and what we could learn from them?”

In sum, participants described a host of challenges in delivering the reforms that reinforce the general rationale for the programme. Issues of staffing capacity and reduced budgets and resources in the context of rising demand and expectation often create additional pressures around delivering a challenging programme. It is possible that these pressures are seen by some authorities as a reason not to nominate leaders for the programme. For others however, these pressures justify their attendance on the programme because it is seen as an opportunity to confront these issues. Within the context of these challenges, participants join the programme with an expectation that they will learn from others areas. It is seen as a unique opportunity to broaden understanding of the reforms while developing their leadership skills, offering time away from their day job, and an opportunity to develop working relationships across different parts of the system.



3. Overall experience and rating of the programme

Section Summary

This section explores participants' overall satisfaction with the programme. Overall, the programme has been extremely positively received by participants. The programme has far exceeded its target KPI scores, receiving ratings of *at least* 85% on five aspects of participant experience, including content, relevance and quality of presentation and facilitation (against the agreed target of 70%) across all five modules. Motivation and inspiration, the knowledge and expertise of the course leaders, and networking opportunities are key themes in participant's satisfaction with the programme.

3.1 Programme KPI's

Based on feedback gathered through the module evaluation forms, overall levels of participant satisfaction with the course are extremely high. Completed at the end of each module, the forms ask participants to rate their experience on five aspects:

1. Did this event increase your knowledge and understanding of the topic discussed?
2. Was the level of session okay, too simple or too complex? Were you able to engage effectively?
3. Did the module give you ideas on what you can do as a leader to deliver the SEND reforms?
4. Was the event well planned and structured?
5. Did the facilitator present the information and lead the discussion in a way that was helpful?

In line with the agreed KPIs for the programme, at least 70% of participant ratings should fall into the top two bandings of a 6 point Likert-type scale for satisfaction with content, relevance and quality of presentation and facilitation. The ratings for each question are shown in Figure 3 below, demonstrating that the programme has far exceeded these target scores in relation to all aspects of participant satisfaction, and across all 5 modules.

Figure 3: Evaluation Form Ratings – % of responses falling into top 2 bandings

Question no.	Module 1	Module 2	Module 3	Module 4	Module 5	Overall (%)
1	94%	81%	81%	79%	90%	85%
2	91%	88%	89%	94%	97%	92%
3	100%	95%	93%	79%	90%	94%
4	100%	90%	96%	91%	93%	94%
5	100%	90%	96%	93%	93%	95%
Overall (%)	97%	89%	91%	87%	92%	-

In the end of course survey, more than two-thirds (20 out of 29) of responding participants indicated that they would recommend the programme to colleagues or team members in the future. No respondent said they would not recommend the programme, and the remaining nine respondents did not answer the question. This represents a particularly strong endorsement of the programme offer given the time investment that is required to participate and complete the course. Some respondents referenced the time investment in their written feedback to the survey:

“Probably the best investment of 10 days of my working life with far reaching benefits for myself, the services and staff that I manage and ultimately the children and families that we work with.”

“It’s really difficult to take that much time out. I’m really glad that I did - it was a challenge to get to every session, but I did.”

Although the response to the managers’ survey was limited, this message is reinforced in feedback from those who did respond. Of the 13 managers who responded, 10 reported that they would recommend the programme, 2 were undecided and the remaining responding manager did not answer the question.

3.2 Key themes in participant satisfaction

Participant experience was explored further in both the surveys and telephone interviews, in order to understand why the course has proved to be so popular. Motivation and inspiration, the knowledge and expertise of the course leaders, networking opportunities, and mutual support emerged as key themes in these responses:

“It makes you really aspirational to see what you can achieve for your local area. It gets you fired up to think about how you can change it locally.”

“It’s good for keeping your motivation, keeping it at the forefront, what it’s about. It’s not about process, it’s not about education policy, it’s about improving outcomes.”

“It has given me a fantastic network of people to keep in touch with. I was able to ask really basic questions in a very supportive environment.”

“All of the NDTi staff are all very credible individuals, they know what they’re talking about in relation to SEND. They’re receptive and sensitive to the audiences. You got a sense of them understanding the pressures that we’re under, empathising with us, and making suggestions to us from their lengthy experience in the sector.”

“Rob was just a wealth of knowledge, they were all, they’ve all got really clear skills sets. You could look at it as a Venn diagram, all have a passion for inclusion, their skills really different but over-lapping skills. That co-delivery of activities was one of the best things about the programme.”

“I have very much valued the opportunity to participate in this programme and firmly believe that the children and young people of [place name] will benefit from the input of the knowledge and skills of the course leaders, the inspiration of the exceptional speakers and the sharing of experiences/resources that were the result of networking with SEND leaders from across the country.”

To summarise, the highly positive response seen in the overall programme ratings is related to the quality and clarity of information, networks established and sense of mutual support, motivation and inspiration. It is implicit in the responses that these things make a positive difference to participants and the services they deliver. The following chapters consider the impacts, firstly on participants’ themselves, and secondly upon the delivery of the SEND reforms, in greater detail.



4. Programme Impacts

Section Summary

This section considers the immediate impact of the programme on participants' knowledge and skills, as reported by the participants and their managers. Data from the surveys of managers and participants indicate that participants have improved their knowledge, skills and ideas, and that the programme has contributed to these developments. Additional insights from the survey and telephone interviews demonstrate examples of active and conscious application of the learning and tools from the programme, and examples of changes to behaviour and practice. The wider dissemination of the training is achieved through a variety of formal and informal mechanisms, and at various levels throughout the organisation.

4.1 Developing knowledge and skills

Participants were asked to rate their leadership knowledge and skills both before the programme and on completion of the final module. As shown in Figure 4 below, the average scores for all 4 self-rating questions had increased by the end of the programme.

Figure 4: Participants self-rated knowledge and skills – average scores



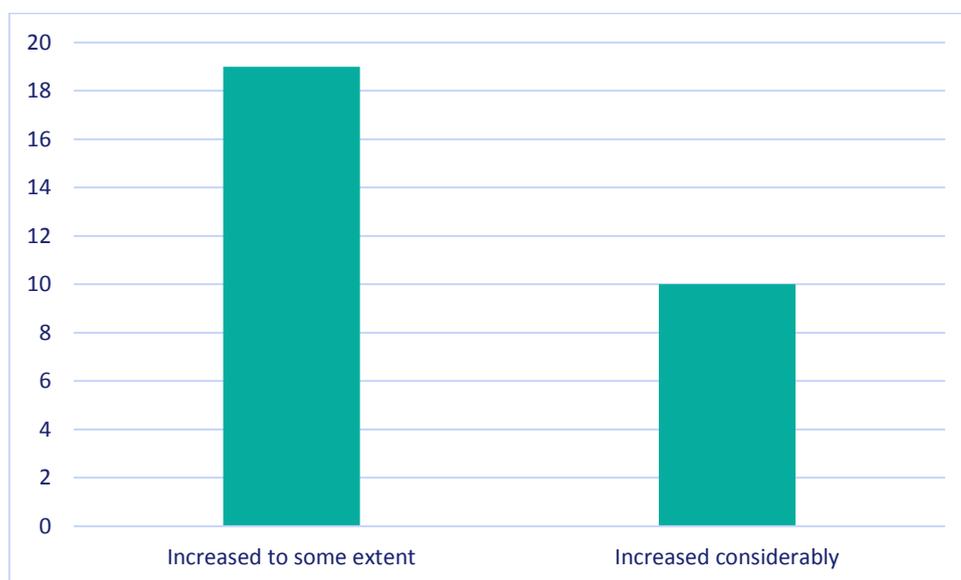
Baseline: all respondents (n=29)

4.2 Understanding leadership

The first aspect of the leadership programme is to change the way participants see themselves in their role as leaders within the context of their organisation, and demonstrate how change occurs. Changes in understanding is the foundation for changes in behaviour and practice, which in turn impacts upon delivery and results. This is where the most immediate impacts of training interventions will occur.

As shown in Figure 4 above, the average self-rating of participants' knowledge of what makes a good leader had increased by the end of the programme. Participants were also asked about the extent to which their knowledge had changed as a result of the programme (Figure 5). All participants reported some change in their knowledge of what makes a good leader, including those who scored themselves highly on this at baseline. More than one-third (10/29) of respondents said their knowledge of what makes a good leader had increased *considerably* as a result of the programme.

Figure 5: Knowledge of what makes a good leader



Base: all respondents (n=29)

The insights from telephone interviews provide further detail into how participants have changed their understanding and knowledge of leadership, and some highlighted this as one of the most significant elements of their learning:

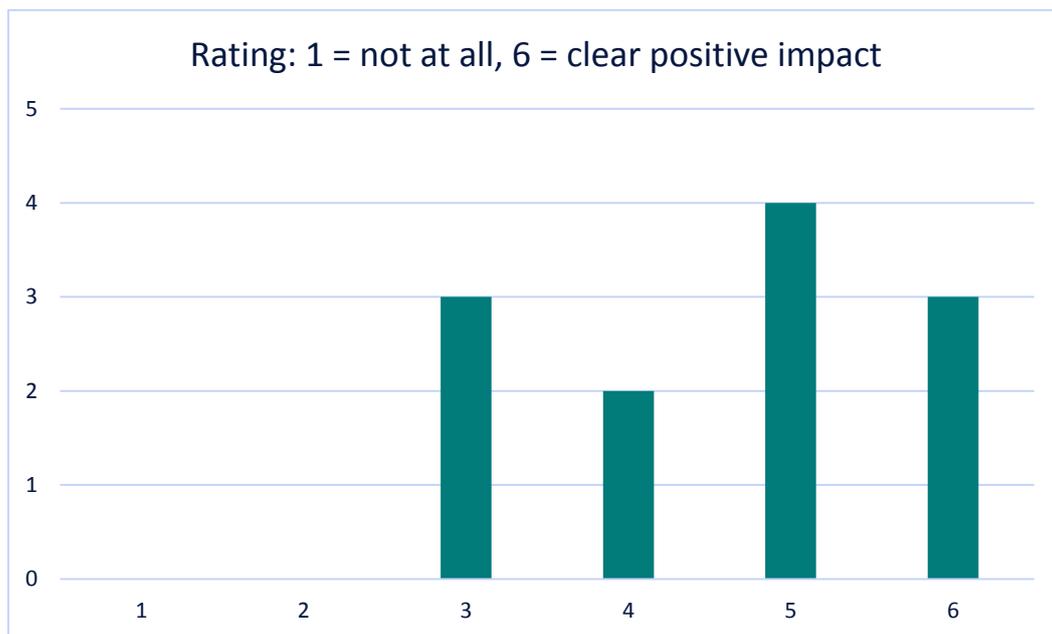
“Starting within the Local Authority, there are key colleagues outside of my service that we need vital buy-in from, and the ways that will happen is through building the relationship with them. Perhaps we’ve been lazy and gone down the “this is statutory, it needs to happen and we won’t be responsible if your service area doesn’t come up well” but perhaps there are better ways of influencing than that.”

“I’m much clearer about the difference between being an operational manager and a leader, making a conscious effort to build in leadership reflection space into my time, and not to get caught up in tornado of day to day work that doesn’t allow you to keep

moving things along. People I manage need to become leaders and I have to give them the opportunity to do that.”

Participants’ managers were asked to rate the extent to which the programme had strengthened their team member’s leadership skills and potential. All of the 13 responding managers indicated that the programme had some impact on their team members’ skills, with around half (7/13) giving a rating of 5 or 6. The distribution of responses is shown in Figure 6 below.

Figure 6: Manager ratings of programme impact on leadership skills and potential

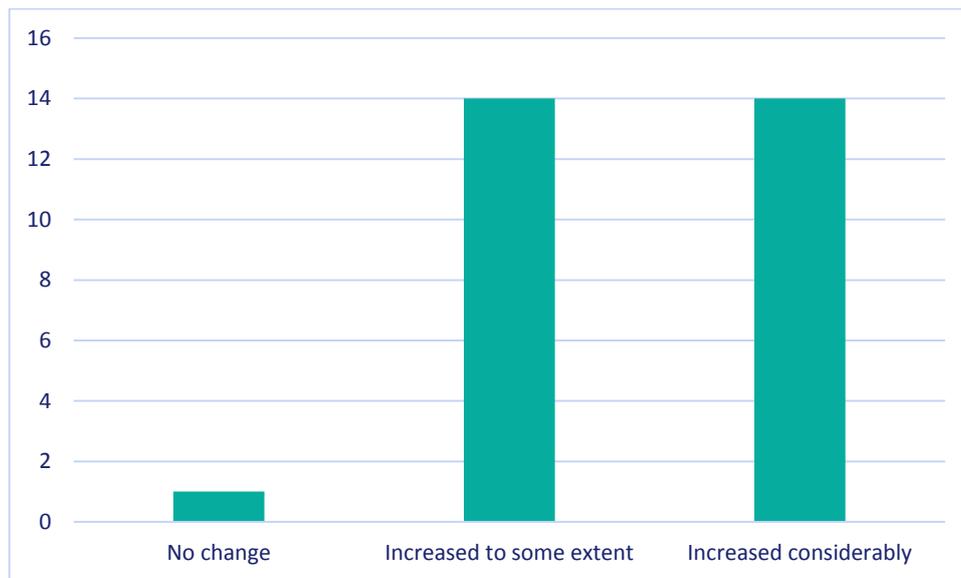


Base: all responding managers (n=13)

4.3 Leadership skills and confidence

Strengthening the leadership skills of participants is a primary objective of the Leadership Programme. In order to assess whether the programme is supporting this objective, participants were asked to reflect on the extent to which their confidence in their skills had increased as a result of the programme. As shown in Figure 7 below, half (14/29) of participants said their confidence in their leadership skills had increased *to some extent*, and the same number again (14/29) said their confidence had increased *considerably*. One participant reported that their confidence in their leadership skills had not increased, although it is worth noting that this participant started the programme with the highest possible self-rated score for confidence in their leadership skills.

Figure 7: Confidence in leadership skills



Base: all responding participants (n=29)

In the telephone interviews, participants were asked to reflect on how the programme had helped to develop their skills, and to comment on the tools that they had found most useful. Influencing people with whom you have no authority is a particular challenge for those implementing the SEND reforms, because it requires a multi-agency approach in order to deliver the best outcomes. It follows that the tools around influencing others were widely cited. This was also an example of where participants had made immediate changes to their practice:

“Looking at the structure you realise you’re in a command and control organisation, so unless you use other levers and driver you won’t be able to make any changes. Theoretically I knew that, but it really opened my eyes to it, to the way that circles can help you, that really drove me, I thought “this is what I need to do, I need to find other people who are drivers and use their influence to make changes”.”

“Circles of influence is a tool that I’ve come away with and applied pretty quickly. Being a leader from within, influencing upwards.”

“One of the sessions was on spheres of influence and this has reinforced that I need to alter who I spend time with to make the reforms happen. I have now made more of an effort in spending time with my equivalent in our Early Intervention team, who previously I would never have other than in meetings.”

“Circles of influence - as we go to the next stage of re-shaping the services, that’s proving to be a very useful tool. There are several people that I don’t normally do much business with and I’m trying to make a point of building a relationship with them. It’s because of the programme that we’re doing that.”

Participants also discussed how the programme had led to changes in their confidence, and what this meant for their day to day practice:

“It definitely gives you confidence because you are learning about policy, where things have come from, the reforms, learning from other people about what they’ve done.”

“I have been able to more confidently challenge my peers and more senior leaders if I feel we’ve got a reason to get people to think differently about something.”

“I’ve put together large funding bids with creative ideas, I wouldn’t have had the confidence to do that before.”

“I’m speaking with real reason behind what I’m saying, and challenging more to say “why don’t we go further?”. Before, I’ve tended to assume that other people might know best, but other people don’t always know best and I have something to add from a different perspective. I keep pushing and keep challenging unless someone says to stop, that’s not your job, or you’ve gone too far.”

These responses also demonstrate that, as a result of increased confidence, they are better able to challenge others, which is another significant precursor for change and a critical element of effective leadership. In addition, there was evidence of conscious reflection on one’s own approaches and heightened awareness in interactions with others:

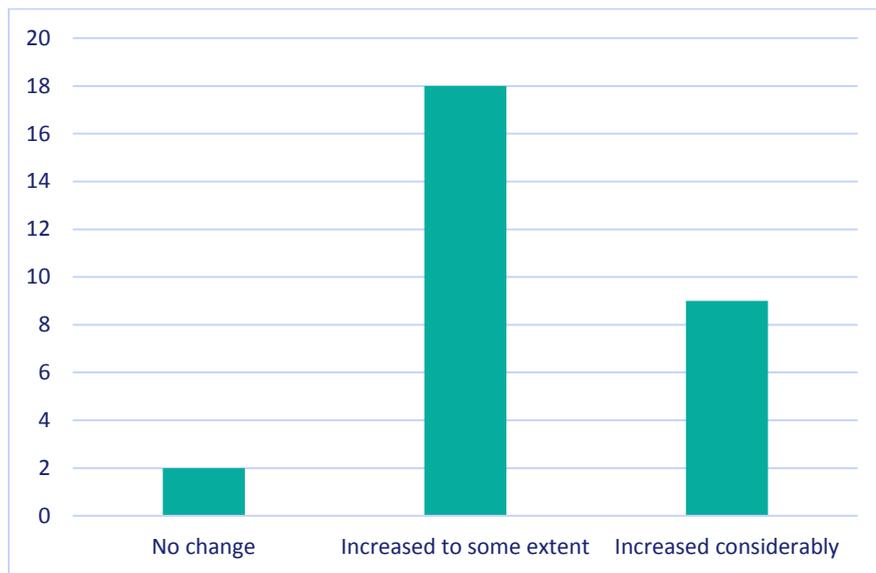
“I’ve seen a real shift in the way I approach partners. I’m much more aware before I enter into any discussion, I’m much more aware of myself and what I’m bringing to that, what my pre-conceived ideas are, more open to what the other person has got to say, and I’m coming to things with a much broader understanding.”

“The things I wanted to learn was to influence others and change management. I’ve used those tools every day since, in the way I prepare for meetings, when I’m preparing to speak to someone, with groups, with individuals. In every context I use that and I’m still learning.”

4.4 Capacity and ability to deliver the SEND reforms

Improving participant’s capacity and ability to deliver the SEND reforms is the second key objective of the leadership programme. The survey response indicates that the majority of participants (26/29) have increased their confidence in their ability to make change happen (Figure 8).

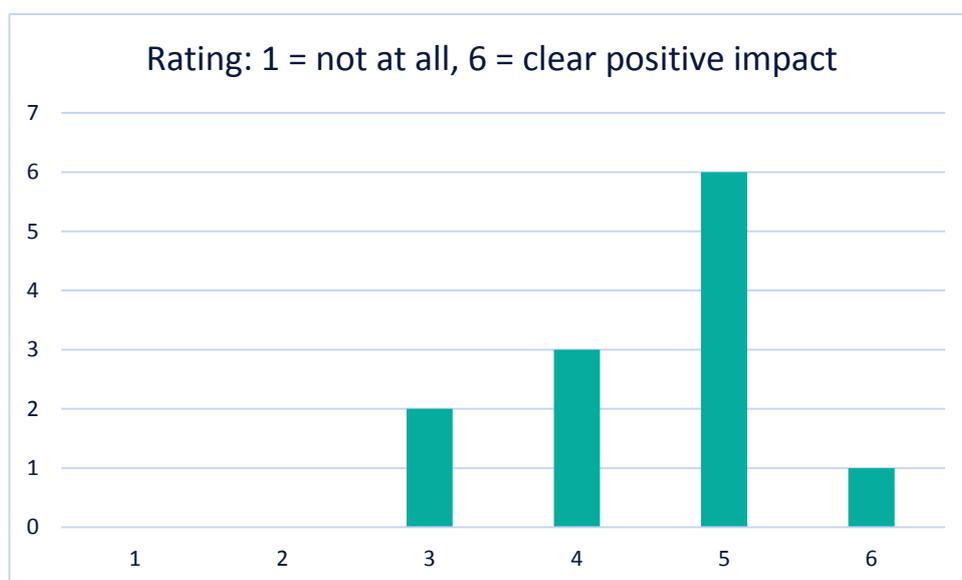
Figure 8: Confidence in ability to make change happen



Base: all responding participants (n=29)

In addition to equipping leaders with the skills and tools that they need to affect change, the programme is designed to support leaders in the generation of innovative, creative ideas and new actions that they can undertake in relation to the delivery of the reforms. The vast majority of participants indicated in the evaluation forms that the programme had given them ideas on what they could do as a leader to deliver the reforms – 94% gave a rating of 5 or 6 on this aspect across all five modules. Managers who completed the survey also indicated that the programme had impacted positively on their team members with regard to generating new or different ideas about how their Local Authority can deliver the SEND reforms. More than half (8 / 13) of the responding managers gave a rating of 5 or 6 on this question (Figure 9).

Figure 9: Manager ratings of programme impact on ideas



Base: all responding managers (n=13)

Additional themes that related to leaders' capacity and ability to deliver the reforms emerged from the telephone interviews. Together, these wider contextual factors are significant protective factors for the successful implementation of the SEND reforms.

- Self-management and resilience

This was a particularly pertinent issue amongst this cohort, its importance heightened by the knowledge that several colleagues from the group were on long-term sick leave arising from the pressures of their role. Building resilience through self-care and self-management strategies is therefore a significant element of supporting the sector to deliver the SEND reforms, and this was cited as an important skill that participants had learned from the programme:

"My management of myself, approach the task that I'm set and the kind of mission. It can be a little bit overwhelming, we're trying to manage change and you can set yourself very exacting targets that you can't always meet."

"There was a lot on personal well-being, that's an area of weakness for me and it's something I've taken on board and trying to do something about."

"I hadn't expected it, but I have gained resilience. It really helped me in my role to be resilient as a leader, which has helped me to encourage others to develop their resilience. It's enabled me to cope with some extremely challenging and pressures."

- Cultural change

One participant described how using reflection as a tool had allowed them to focus their attention on how they can lead on cultural change:

"We are focussing a lot on culture. We are really focusing on workforce development, we need to do some more in-depth training... We want to get away from people saying "it's not my business, it's their business", we want to get to active listening about the problem, and trying to solve it together. It's about trying to help people to slow down, to say we could do this and do it differently."

Another described that they were better equipped to challenge thinking at leadership level:

"It's helped me to tackle some problems that we've got with our leadership within this authority. I tend to avoid that kind of conflict, but it's helped me to think that sometimes I can't do that. I just need to be calm and reasoned in my response, and I have to say it. I can say that I don't agree and that there is a different way and a better way."

- Raising the profile of the reforms

Some participants specifically mentioned that, as a result of the programme, they were better equipped to engage the appropriate people within their organisation to try and raise the profile of the SEND reforms and PfA agendas across the Local Authority:

“It’s about doing what is right and not what is easy, about trying to engage very senior leaders in this process, and trying to raise the profile of SEND across the authority.”

“I don’t sit on the PFA Board, but I visited it twice over the last year, with things that I brought back. It’s very high on the agenda now, but at the beginning it wasn’t.”

If leaders are able to focus their attention on these aspects and use the tools they have learned to affect change in relation to these, then they can create the foundation for sustainable change over the longer term.

4.5 Changing behaviour and practice

Since attending the course, what steps have participants taken as leaders to implement the ideas that they have developed? And what difference has this made to the delivery of the reforms? These questions were explored in both the telephone interviews and wider surveys of participants and their managers. The responses highlighted a host of examples where participants had put their learning into practice. These are summarised under three main areas:

1) Strategic focus

Participants described the way that they had used the time for reflection, and the new tools and skills that they had developed, to re-focus their efforts on vision and strategy:

“Provided skills to more systemically analyse challenges and put in place solutions. For example, investment in where I can influence change, using strategies to circumvent blockers to reforms by using social capital effectively.”

“I have been able to take a broader view in terms of designing a SEND strategy.”

“It helped me to become much more reflective about how you lead and how you get things done. I am by nature a strong leader, I do a lot of strategy, but I’m also quite detailed. It helped me to pull back from the detail and look more at the cultural change.”

One respondent to the survey of managers suggested that it is the use of theory in particular that has enabled their team manager to adopt a more strategic approach:

“For one team member in particular, I think the programme has resulted in a real confidence around planning for change in services as the staff member has used theoretical frameworks to inform their work.”

2.1) Engagement

Engaging others is a key requirement, and a highly challenging aspect, of the reforms. There is evidence that the programme has supported participants to progress with engagement on several different levels - with colleagues in different sectors, departments or teams, with senior leaders, and with young people, parents and carers - and with an underlying recognition that the development of a shared understanding is critical in shaping the direction of change:

“The increasing number of partners that we have to engage, including families, and how you influence others to get to a shared understanding. I’m doing a lot of that at the moment. It takes a long time, but I genuinely can see that if you don’t use that time to do that you can create something that nobody has bought into, and it will not succeed. It’s investing that time, at every level, a person, a group, a whole service, to get a future return. You can apply that to everything, you apply that to get to a shared understanding so that you can move the reforms on.”

Others described how the programme had given them awareness of where they needed to address their own engagement, to ensure that they were involved in the parts of the reforms that they needed to assume responsibility for, in order to join up the different sectors:

“I’m on board and involved now with projects and different pieces of work, like developing paperwork, and health never had an input into that before.”

“I heard a lot of people saying “our Social Care colleague or Health colleagues are not involved in the agenda”. I made sure that I was involved, that I was taking responsibility for elements. And where I wasn’t involved I got involved.”

Where improvement of relationships with families and carers was of prime concern, participants had applied specific engagement techniques learned from the course, and have been able to access appropriate support and draw-down additional funding to support with the task:

“We just ran a workshop with young people and parent carers, using one of the World Café ideas that came from the course, looking at what the EHC plans looks like, what would it need to look like to be meaningful for a young person, and to be used by schools as a live document. Having done that world café workshop with parents and schools, we’ll be in a position that new plans issued will be done using methods put forward by that group.”

“There were some real thorny issues around the parents and carers forum. We’re picking that up to try and improve relationships with parents locally in a solution-focussed way. That came from conversations with colleagues on the course, our learning about how to take things forward. Contact a Family have the national agenda for supporting parent and carer forums locally, there’s government funding for those and they’re responsible for distributing it locally. Colleagues from the course made aware us of how they could help us.”

2.2) Co-production

Co-production with young people, their families, and carers, is critical to SEND culture change and to ensuring that change and solutions are sustainable. There were numerous examples of participants who reported that they were undertaking more co-production following their participation in the programme:

“The first part was about process and legislation, now it’s about how work can be done differently given the overwhelming demand everywhere, and it’s given me the confidence to do more and more co-production.”

“We’ve formed a shared group with eight parents to do some proper co-production. Not consultation, but co-production. That’s linked to delivering the reforms and how we shape the services, what tone do we want to give, how do we work with people, how will we evidence that it’s been embedded in the way we work.”

“I’ve made much closer links with local Parent Carer Forum to get to grips with co-production, making sure we’re on the right lines with what they want for their children.”

3) Team / workforce development

There were clear examples of the application of the learning in relation to the way that participants managed their teams, with an emphasis on supporting others to lead and manage change, and empowering them in that process:

“Highlighted for me the need to provide support to team/s in managing change- many of the tools I have experienced I have introduced to the teams-introduced well-being as part of supervision content-utilised psychology input in a range of arenas/meetings.”

“The people I manage need to become leaders and I have to give them the opportunity to do that. Otherwise things just stand still, they don’t move on, and I don’t think you’re going to effect change if you keep doing the same old things. I’m working on getting people to cut through barriers and bureaucracy to get better outcomes for children and young people, and coming up with more creative ideas about how we could do that.”

The areas of changed practice outlined above have broad applications, and underpin all aspects of the delivery of the reforms. In these comments, there are indications of cultural change, which is central to the delivery of the SEND reforms agenda. The specific aspects of delivery where learning has been applied are explored in the next chapter, which details participants’ Personal Projects. The remainder of this chapter explores the ways in which learning from the programme has been cascaded through organisations.

4.6 Dissemination and support

The use of and cascading of the training and tools from the leadership programme across the participating organisations is an essential part of the process for change. It ensures that the learning reaches beyond the limited number of participants in the cohort, thereby enhancing the impact of the programme. It is important to recognise that this is an intentional and conditional aspect of attendance for some participants:

“It was also to see what I could take back to the other managers. We all work very closely together, in the same context.”

Participants described a variety of ways in which they had been able to share and cascade information and learning throughout their organisation. There were examples of dissemination in different directions throughout the organisation, and a range of mechanisms (formal and informal) were described. These examples are summarised under the three main routes below.

i) Staff development and training

There were several examples of leaders who were directly incorporating the activities and strategies into their own work with their teams:

“Organisational culture and looking at the culture that we work in for me, was really useful. I’m cascading the activity into staff development planning in my teams.”

“It’s given me different strategies around managing myself, that’s cascading into my teams. There are colleagues who are more challenged by the volume of work, using those techniques and strategies for taking care of yourself.”

Others were using the content and concepts to develop or refresh staff knowledge, through events and training:

“We’re organising an Early Years’ update event, using the learning around staff resilience. It’s also about the inclusion jet-lag messages, and SEND law – refreshing memories on the law, the code, what the reforms are saying.”

ii) Dissemination across teams and organisations

Delivering presentations to other teams appeared to be an effective means of raising awareness of the materials and resources available, and providing an ongoing link between the programme and other parts of the organisation:

“There have been lots of opportunities to share. I’ve presented to other teams, and externally. People have then asked me for information and resources, and asked me about the website. We’ve got an organisation who regularly come back to me to find more information.”

One participant described how they had created a standing agenda item to increase colleagues’ focus on issues in leadership development:

“After the first residential I put an item on the management meeting agenda for a leadership development programme activity, which I lead. It can be around anything pertinent, but not operational, developing the team of managers, or the SEND system and how we’re reacting to it. Margaret’s activities are used in those sessions.”

In some organisations, dissemination is achieved efficiently through a formal mechanism for cascading training:

“We have an in house training cascade model, so that’s worked really well from a resource efficiency point of view.”

iii) Influencing and filtering upwards

There were instances where ideas had circulated to Senior Management Teams, to achieve full buy-in to new ideas and approaches:

“A number of options papers and management reports have gone up to Director of Children’s Services and Senior Management Team around these ideas. It’s filtering up ideas to get full corporate sign-off on these projects that we’re running.”

In another example, the SEND Reform Board was a key mechanism for effectively sharing the information:

“I’ve taken a lot of the learning to the SEN Reform Board and shown them this is what others are doing, this is what’s working, this is what’s not successful. It’s coming from a range of places, not just the South, so that gives weight to it. We’re continually referencing it as it we look at frontline practice and it’s influencing things in that way.”

Some participants reported that they would regularly debrief their managers following the programme modules, and this is an effective first step in disseminating and cascading information both across and upwards throughout the organisation, as their involvement can be critical in directing the flow of information:

“I would have regular debrief sessions with my manager following each visit, so I’d share it with her and she would direct me to share it with others, or present it at a group. I share emails and other resources with her around those debriefs, or otherwise I direct it straight to other teams, or I’d send it to her if I felt it was something she needed to escalate or make a decision around.”

Sharing the learning also depends on having the time to do so:

“At times it has been hard to implement/use the new learning and share it with others due to conflicting pressures, but in a way the course gave tools for that, I am still ‘dipping into’ the learning and finding opportunities to share it.”

In sum, there is evidence of changed thinking and skills which are the first steps in the process of change. There are numerous examples of that demonstrate the application of tools, techniques and ideas – evidence that change in delivery is occurring. Furthermore, there is evidence that the training is cascaded through the organisation, and in a variety of ways, which suggests that participants are able to take steps towards embedding the learning within their organisation.



5. Personal Projects

Section Summary

The Personal Project provides participants with an opportunity to sustain and consolidate their learning and skill development through the application to a particular project. This is a highly valued aspect of the programme, and there are several examples of significant changes in delivery arising from the Personal Projects, some with early impacts. Participants' ability to progress their project (and the pace of implementation) is dependent on a number of factors, including buy-in and influence across the Local Authority, the scale of the project, time and capacity to deliver, and the continued involvement of their programme partner.

As part of the programme participants undertook a 'Personal Project'. This involves participants taking a real work challenge around the SEND reforms and using structured peer learning opportunities ('action learning' or 'solution circles') within the programme to make progress towards resolving it. A summary of the issues addressed in Personal Projects is presented in Appendix 1.

The telephone discussions and personal project evaluation forms demonstrate that this opportunity is a highly valued element of the programme. Participants consistently cited the personal project as the main way in which the programme had impacted on delivery of the SEND reforms in their Local Authority. They valued the opportunity for input from other participants:

"You had the opportunity to air it, have people ask constructive questions and challenge your ideas. People were interested in it. People were saying that they had problems in that area too, so that creates good linkages."

"It was an opportunity to genuinely get fresh ideas, new perspectives and new ways of delivering, learning what they did, what they found, and how they overcame those problems."

Some participants also described how the input from course tutors in between modules had been useful in supporting them to continue to develop their ideas:

"There was a phone conversation with [name], that helped to shaped my thoughts on what I could do on my own as an individual to something I could achieve by myself. Having that in between module one and two was really helpful."

Participants were generally positive about the process around personal projects, and none suggested improvements. All indicated in their evaluations that they had progressed with

their project in some way. Their ability to progress with personal projects were dependent on the following:

- Engaging the appropriate colleagues;
- Support or buy-in from across the local authority;
- Scale of the project;
- Time and capacity to dedicate to the project;
- Continued involvement of programme partner.

In relation to the last point, there were projects that were not progressed as far as they might have as project partners became absent from work. In other cases, participants were able to adapt the project to something that they could deliver in their own.

With the exception of the final two points, the programme can contribute effectively to these success factors. Several participants reported that they had found the influencing techniques useful in taking forward the implementation of their project. In terms of project scale, there were examples where the programme had helped to identify a starting point from which to tackle a much larger issue:

“Our proposal was too big, so I pared it right back to the first steps, what do people mean by transition, and what is happening. There’s so many different aspects to transition, so I used it as a learning experience to find out what was actually happening. It made me realise that this was where we needed to start. I realised how big it was and this helped to find the starting point.”

There were several examples of significant developments and changes in delivery arising from the personal projects, and some with early impacts:

- A reduction in school-exclusions for children with complex needs and behaviour that challenges, and implementation of home-based support packages for children excluded from specialist provision;
- Expansion of supported internships, with 3 new providers to deliver internships;
- Delivery of good practice sessions around personalisation of study programmes;
- Creation of a single personal budget team across health, education and social care, with the first holistic budget agreed;
- Development of a framework to improve compliance, including a pilot of a ‘My Support Plan’ approach.

When considering the impact of the personal projects, this needs to take into account the time that is needed to bring about results. As an example, impact in the shorter-term may be seen in improvement to process, which then supports greater compliance rates, and then improved outcomes for young people will be seen in the longer term. A number of participants from the cohort of the previous year attended the final module of the recent programme, and reported back on the impacts that they have seen as a result of their Personal Projects. These include:

- In Leeds, the development of inter-agency support for a supported internship programme, using the leadership elements and policy delivery content from the programme. As a result, there are currently 37 supported internships in progress, with 12 staff members from across post-16 providers being trained as Job Coaches. A third sector partner is developing and rolling out the corporate group supported internships.
- In Lincolnshire, the programme had equipped participants with the personal tools to manage and lead complex inter-organisational dynamics, and understanding of partner's behaviour and priorities that are crucial to the reforms. This has led to improvements in relationships and consequently in capacity to deliver change.

Overall, participant feedback indicates that the Personal Project is a highly effective aspect of the programme. Participants welcome the opportunity for structured exchanged with colleagues who bring insights from other areas, and access to NDTi expertise to help them to reflect on and shape their ideas. Furthermore, there are very clear examples where participants have affected real changes in local service delivery through their personal projects. The results of these changes may not be felt immediately, but there is evidence that participants are taking significant steps towards implementing the ideas that can be expected to yield positive results in the future. In order to assess impact, the outputs and outcomes of these projects will need to be explored at a later date.



6. What makes the programme effective?

Section Summary

This section draws on participant's feedback to demonstrate what it is about the programme that makes it effective, why participants believe it is beneficial to attend, and whether participants believe it is a good return on investment.

The chapters above have demonstrated that, in line with its objectives, the programme has impacted positively on participant's leadership knowledge and skills, leading to positive changes in behaviours and practice, and supported changes to the delivery of the SEND reforms – change that is evidenced with examples of practical application of the learning and the development of new activities. But what is it about the programme, including its delivery and design, that enables these changes? This chapter addresses this question through exploring the main advantages and strengths of the programme, from the perspective of participants.

1. Facilitating greater linkages across different parts of the system

Attending the programme together with a colleague provides an opportunity for participants to make direct links with others in their organisation, and begin to develop strong working relationships:

"We've been able to think together from going on the programme, up until then you've only ever spent time in meetings."

"The SEN agenda is about approaching things in a different way. That gives you that challenge amongst yourselves. It enabled us to think about things from each other's perspectives, in a more neutral environment. You take that relationship back with you that you've developed on the course."

"Having another person there was useful to me, a colleague who is in a more operational role based outside of my locality. That brought a different perspective, in terms of what would be possible to implement. To have us reflecting together, there's someone I could pick up the phone to and mull over whether or how that would work in [place name], and think about how we bring it back to the council. Having different priorities, we picked up on different things so you get a wider breath from our different perspectives."

In addition, the programme allows individuals to have conversations with people from different roles, of a nature that they may not have within the context of the day-to-day delivery in their own Local Authority. Participants described how this creates better

understanding, or empathy between across perspectives, and equips them with language which can otherwise act as a barrier to cross-agency working:

“It gives you increased fluency in other people’s language, having a greater level of empathy for why they’re not playing ball.”

“I’m using more of their language now. I’ve got more knowledge about how they work. It’s changing the interaction.”

2. Ongoing mutual support

For several participants, the ability to establish connections with peers from across the country was an essential aspect of the programme. Bringing leaders and managers together in this way not only enables them to draw on one another’s professional expertise, but also creates a sense of community for individuals who may otherwise feel a sense of isolation in their day to day role, which is an important source of support:

“It gives you a sense of a community of interest across many local authorities, which you wouldn’t get.”

“It has provided a very powerful network of professional and also emotional support for a group of leaders who are at the coalface in implementing change and leading through uncertainty at a time when funding has never been more tight and expectation has never been higher. Sharing with others and knowing you are not completely alone in facing these challenges is a tremendous relief.”

“When you work in special services you can be very isolated, because there’s not many of you, particularly in the children’s world, so that opportunity to be able to network, and beyond your regional peers.”

The level of trust established within the group is an important aspect of this support, developed over the course of the programme:

“Particularly where there’s an awful lot of change and churn, having a space that was very positive and safe was very important.”

“You were able to develop a deeper dialogue with colleagues, you’d investment time in them, and they’d invested in you. There’s a degree of trust, a trusting a safe environment to have a discussion. When you dip in and out of regional events you haven’t the time to establish those relationships.”

3. Access to evidence-based practice

Participants described how networking with others on the programme not only gave them new ideas, but it gave them live examples with the weight of evidence behind them, and from beyond their own region, which they were able to promote within their Local Authority with confidence:

“My organisation is undergoing significant structural change. Having an awareness of what is happening across the country has enabled me to be more authoritative in putting forward best practice approaches.”

“You were able to share stories and evidence of what’s working well and what isn’t. It’s a unique opportunity to get all those people together from across the country.”

“I have been able to name the authorities, and say this is what has been effective, adding to the evidence base. Not all the same, but strategies that have strong evidence base and I’ve been able to cite those authorities.”

There is a risk with any training that the learning is not sustained beyond the life of the programme, as people return to the pressures of their work. Participants therefore cited the ongoing contact through the online platform and the planned alumni events as a key benefit of the programme, together with the anticipated growth of the network:

“The fact that we can continue to touch base through basecamp where you can send in your questions, and that we’ll meet every six months, that will give us opportunities to share and keep refreshing the learning.”

“To be able to network across the whole of the country is an amazing opportunity, and that will grow as you have more courses.”

4. Time to reflect

Participants consistently reported that the programme had given them a rare opportunity for ‘headspace’ and time for reflection, giving them space from the day to day operations of their role:

“Because it’s sustained over long time, and allows for intensive reflection, it would prompt me to make sure that we were constantly reviewing what we needed to do next.”

“It’s really important to have the opportunity and time to reflect on what’s happening, you have so little of that within a Local Authority context.”

“It gives people the headspace and people haven’t really got that at the moment in Local Authorities, if we’re going to bring about change then we need that.”

“I feel very positive that we’ve now got a much better grasp and we’re starting to be able to find the time to not just keep on with the day job of getting transfers completed. Through some of this learning we’ve been able to take a step back and think “let’s change the way we do this”, and to build that in while meeting requirements and delivering.”

“The good thing was it actually gave you headspace and time to reflect, everybody agreed with that when we first met.”

5. Promotes person-centred thinking and re-affirms priorities

The programme supports participants to re-focus the emphasis and priority of their work on the young person, and on achieving good quality outcomes for the young person. This is essential in the midst of the pressures to deliver and the arising emphasis on process, as described by participants:

“There’s not a day when I don’t learn something new, helped to re-centre the child and family at the heart of the process. You become so systems ingrained, so around compliance and process, it’s about making sure we don’t lose sight of the child at the centre of the process.”

“Everything we do has to be around that framework, if you’re not focussed on getting a life for young people, the technical stuff will just be the mechanics that may not deliver very strong outcomes.”

“I have a strong commitment to personalisation and that’s been re-confirmed that it’s the right way forward, that it’s the centre of everything that we do.”

“Most organisations are set up around the themes of the different disabilities, autism, deafness, and the programme gave me an opportunity to think outside of that, and really see the families and the individuals, and to see them as people rather than children who have got x, y or z. It has allowed me to completely move away from that,”

The comments and reflections presented in the section above reinforce that the programme is highly valued by participants. There is a strong consensus throughout that the strengths of the programme will continue as new cohorts of leaders join the network, and there is a strong commitment to continue networking through the online platform and alumni events to sustain that momentum.

It is perhaps for all of these reasons that the participants consider the programme to be a good return on investment:

“It’s very good value. It’s expensive and you have to put a lot of time into it, but it’s incredibly good value. I just learnt an enormous amount and I am confident that unlike any one day course it is going to keep on informing what I do, and from the fact that we are going to continue contact and meet up regularly it definitely will continue to do that.”

“It has been a huge commitment, but I absolutely feel on reflection that it’s been an investment that we couldn’t afford not to take part in.”

To summarise, participant feedback demonstrates that there are a number of significant benefits to the programme, and these can be considered as pre-requisites for change. The programme brokers connections and brings together leaders from different parts of the system, offering opportunities to develop strong partnerships that are taken back into the operating environment, while fostering a wider community of mutual support and knowledge exchange for leaders implementing a challenging reform agenda. Furthermore, it

gives leaders time away from day to day operations to reflect on what needs to change and how, and offers renewed focus on person-centred thinking and priorities. Some of these benefits flow directly from the particulars of the programme design, namely paired attendance and two-day modules. Given these advantages, participants consider their investment in the programme to represent a good return for their organisation. The next chapter explores how the effectiveness of the programme could be improved, based on suggestions from participants.



7. Potential developments

Section Summary

This section explores participants' own suggestions for ways that the programme might be improved. There were very few issues raised in relation to the delivery of the programme, and these were primarily related to issues of travel and time commitments. The main suggestions were around the education – health – care split of the programme cohort, which several participants suggested would improve the impact of the programme.

Throughout the evaluation, participants were invited to suggest ways in which they thought the programme could be improved. Given that the programme is so highly valued by participants, it is important to consider what, if anything, might help to increase the programme's effectiveness, and to consider this from the perspective of those whom the course is designed to benefit.

7.1 Time and distance

Overall, there were very few issues reported. The main problems that people faced were around the time commitment and the distance that they had to travel:

"It's difficult to get the time to go away, but I made it clear to myself that I was going to prioritise it."

"The distance, we're so far from everywhere. That has the additional cost in order to travel. Everybody will have these issues I know. It's just how you organise your work and prioritise it, and once you've got your head around that then you just do it."

"The biggest barrier was the distance, the practicalities of getting there. It's a bit of a challenge to fit it all in."

While respondents mentioned issues of time and travel, it is important to recognise that they did not suggest any changes to course delivery – these are seen as inherent issues in attending training programmes. There is broad consensus throughout that the programme would not deliver the same benefits if delivered differently (see section 7.2 'Residential Modules' below), and that because of these benefits the time investment represents a good return on investment (see chapter 6 'What makes the programme effective?').

7.2 Content and delivery

Interestingly, no participants suggested that any of the programme content should be removed, and none indicated that their expectations had not been met. Although people will ultimately have a preference for elements that relate more directly to their roles and interests, there is a strong appreciation for the 'cumulative' design of the content. There were several participants who reported that they have used, or plan to use, all of the content, and none felt that any of it was irrelevant or too great a quantity.

There were some interesting insights into how some of the content could be developed:

"More focus on 'wicked issues' and collaborative problem solving."

"Within the first session, or on the first day, session around the history of SEND, when we came to it was only a history of SEN. Coming from a social care background I was aware of historical developments, and it would have been interesting to have heard about social care and health, that would have reinforced that in terms of SEND we're talking about all 3 elements of it here."

"There was little linking with the early years and early help agendas."

One participant with an FE background reported that they would have benefited from a summary of language and terminology, to aid in understanding the language of Local Authorities:

"I could have used a guide to Local Authority acronyms. They're talking Local Authority language and I'm not hearing what they're saying. That was a steep learning curve for me."

As demonstrated in the previous chapters, satisfaction with the quality of the presentations and expertise of course leaders delivering the programme is extremely high. However, one participant suggested that the programme could strengthen one of its own objectives by encouraging participants to challenge the ideas presented in the sessions:

"The programme is structured to support participants to be more challenging within their work. I believe that there is scope for some of the presentations to be delivered in a way that promotes this by supporting participants to challenge what is being delivered."

7.3 Residential Modules

To deliver the programme as a series of two-day residential modules is a major change on the first year programme, where participants consistently reported that these had been more effective insofar as they allowed more time for reflection. This change appears to have been effective, and allows extended networking opportunities:

"Having 2 days together worked very well. That was great, there's actually time to sit down and talk to colleagues over those 2 days. It was an absolutely fantastic idea."

"2 days out each time is tricky, but would have been difficult as separate days, takes you the time that you're there you really be in the right zone, or to be effective in

hearing. Turning up for a day wouldn't have been anywhere near as powerful or useful."

"It's really important that it is the 2 days together in blocks. You got a deeper relational level of support because you were spending more time with those leaders from other Local Authorities."

"It's a series of intense experiences. You went away and did things in between that related to what you had just learned."

7.4 Cohort background and mix

In both the surveys and the telephone interviews, participants consistently referenced the mix of representatives from health, social care and education as a way that the programme could be improved:

"There were fewer of us from social care. Would be better if there was a bit more of a range. We had some health people, but it felt like it wasn't even handed. The groups were strongly educational so that inevitably skewed it slightly."

"Good to get a balance of leaders across SEN, Care and Health - more health and social care reps would be useful."

"It would be nice to see a more even split, proportionally there were more education than social care, and even less health."

One participant suggested that the programme could be applied to school leaders, in order to promote engagement from the education sector:

"Do this for schools - it gets the expectations set and embedded in the school. There's a lots around PfA and preparation for employment, as much as I try to get schools involved they don't. They need to be really involved in this agenda if we're ever going to make a change."

7.5 Participating in pairs

This arrangement was thought by participants to add value to the programme. There were participants who had not completed the programme as a pair, and felt they had gained less from it as a result:

"Unfortunately my Local Authority partner was unable to continue attending after the first session due to personal reasons. With hindsight it would have been good to bring another person on board at that point."

"I believe that I would have benefitted from sharing the experiences of this course by attending with a colleague."

Some participants suggested that attending as a set of three colleagues would enhance the impact of the programme, by fostering relationships and partnerships that are translated back into operating environment:

“Would be even better if you could attend as a triad, to go with a health and social care representative, because that’s what you’re going to take back to work when you go back into the operational world.”

“If I was going to change anything, it would be that ideally that there’s 3 from each authority – health, education, and care. Different people are accepting the send reforms at different paces, so its’ making sure that everybody can see that the impact can be seen in all of those roles, and of the reforms is around removing that need to do things 4-5 times. Brokering of those relationships, there’s strengths in that.”

“If there’s a local area that could support 3 people attending, I think they would get an even better return, particularly the benefit of having health there. That was the issue, relationships with health was one of the most challenging areas that was raised on the course, so having DoH commitment to it would be good.”

In sum, participants raised few issues with their experience of the programme. The content resonates with participants, although there is potential to consider the accessibility of the programme content to colleagues from different backgrounds (i.e. outside of Local Authorities). This could be supported quite simply, through the provision of a supplementary glossary of relevant terminology prior to attending the course. There is a strong appreciation for the two-day module delivery, whereby the benefits of space for reflection and extended networking opportunities offset the time commitment, demonstrating that this change has been a successful improvement on the programme design from the first year of delivery. There is consensus from across the cohort that pairing with a colleague is highly beneficial, as is diversity within the group. There were explicit suggestions that a greater balance of leaders from education, health and care, and opportunities to attend as a triad from across these areas would add strength to the programme.



8. Conclusions

Delivering the SEND reforms is challenging, and participants at different levels of managerial and leadership structures are seeking support with these challenges. The programme is recognised as a unique offer that can support them to develop their knowledge and skills as leaders within the context of delivering SEND, with particular application to resolving the challenges that they face.

Not only is the programme extremely well received by participants, as reflected in the overall ratings for the programme, but there is also evidence of impact. Firstly, there is evidence of changed thinking and developments in skills, which are the first steps in the process of change. Secondly, leaders are more confident in their ability to make change happen, and this is supported by effective self-management and improved resilience in addition to the suite of practical tools with which leaders are equipped. Third, there are examples of changed behaviour and practice, including a heightened strategic focus, different approaches to engaging colleagues and partners, and changes in approaches to team management and workforce development. Furthermore, participants are actively cascading their learning, widening the reach of the programme beyond the cohort of attendees and, in some cases, raising the profile of the reforms and initiating cultural change across their organisation.

While the tools and techniques that participants gain from the programme have very broad potential applications, the Personal Project supports leaders to channel their knowledge and ideas into a specific problem, and through these projects, significant changes to service delivery has been implemented. The effects may not be realised immediately, but if leaders are equipped with evidence-based practice examples and the tools to influence and engage the right people within their Local Authority area, they are more likely to be successful, and there are signs that they are implementing changes that can be expected to bring about positive results.

Leaders are tasked with delivering a challenging change agenda, in often difficult circumstances, and the programme can support them to meet many of those challenges. The programme brokers connections and brings together leaders from different parts of the system. This is a major challenge for implementing the reforms, as it requires those who have never worked together to do so, and across several boundaries. It is for this reason that leaders value the paired attendance model and opportunity for discussion with peers from other backgrounds. From the perspective of participants, greater balance in the cohort between education, health and care and opportunities to attend as a triad of colleagues in this respect would strengthen the programme offer.

The programme creates a wider community of mutual support and knowledge exchange for leaders, and participants are committed to continuing that exchange through the online platform and alumni events, recognising that these are critical elements for sustaining momentum over the longer term. Participants anticipate that this community of interest will become stronger as future cohorts join the network.



Appendix

Summary of Personal Projects

- PfA and employment – developing process, pathways, and action plans (3 projects)
- Permanent exclusions (2 projects)
- Behaviour that challenges and high risk behaviour – assessment, placement and support (1 project)
- My Support Plans – development and piloting, graduated response (3 projects)
- Inclusion development (1 project)
- EHC compliance (1 project)
- Personal budgets – single, integrated budget (1 project)
- Transitions – capturing young people and family experiences (2 project)
- Integrated working - embedding collaboration in 0 – 25 service (1 project)
- Scoping exercises to identify key actors and influencers (2 projects)
- Person-centred planning – in school settings (2 projects)
- Supported internships – expanding provision (1 project)
- Parent-Carer Forum – resolving conflict and poor relationships (1 project)
- Improving information for families (1 project)