SEND Leadership Programme

Evaluating the longer-term impact

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1. Introduction

The SEND Leadership Programme, funded by the Department for Education (DfE) and delivered by NDTi as part of the Delivering Better Outcomes Together contract, is now in the 7th year of delivery. Past evaluations conducted at the time of delivery have consistently found evidence of an extremely positive response to the Programme and indications of clear intentions to change practice. However, to date the longer-term impact for both the people who participate in the Programme and their local areas has not been explored. In order to address this gap, the NDTi Research and Evaluation team have conducted a mixed methods evaluation to explore the longer-term impact of the Programme. This report presents the findings of the evaluation.

Overview and purpose of the Programme

The SEND Leadership Programme has been delivered by NDTi every year since 2015-16. The Programme is aimed at Senior Local Authority SEND Managers and Leaders of Education or Social Care or Health with significant strategic responsibilities for delivering support and services around SEND. Participants are encouraged to apply with a colleague from a different part of their local SEND reform 'system'. The aim of pairing people up is to increase the potential to implement learning in the workplace and build links between different parts of the local SEND system. Around 345 people have participated in the Programme since it started.

The aim of the programme is to develop new or existing skills and apply them in work to deliver support and services, specifically for children and young people with SEND and their families in the local area.

While the exact content of the Programme has varied over the years in response to feedback and evaluations, key modules cover leadership, organisational theory and practice, effective practice in service delivery, and understanding communities and coproduction. Until 2020-21 the Programme was run as a mix of two-day residentials and one day in-person sessions. In 2020-21 the Programme was delivered online to two separate cohorts in response to COVID-19 restrictions for a total of 75 participants.

Findings from earlier evaluations

The delivery team collect feedback from participants for each module they complete. In addition the NDTi Research and Evaluation team have conducted more in-depth evaluations involving pre- and post-surveys and semi-structured interviews for four of the years.

Overall, the evaluations have consistently found evidence of:
- An increase in knowledge about what makes a good leader
- An increase in confidence in own leadership skills
- An increase in knowledge, skills and confidence needed to deliver SEND services and support in local area
- Examples of the start of changes or intention to make changes in delivery of local SEND services and support

These findings are reported in the evaluation reports here:

2015/16:
https://www.ndti.org.uk/assets/files/NDTi_SEND_Reform_Leadership_Programme_Evaluation_final.pdf

2016/17:
https://www.ndti.org.uk/assets/files/NDTi_SEND_Reform_Leadership_Programme_Evaluation_30.03.2017.pdf

2019/20:
https://www.ndti.org.uk/assets/files/SEND-Leadership-Evaluation2019_2020.pdf

2020/21:
https://www.ndti.org.uk/assets/files/21-Evaluation-Report.pdf

Evaluation questions

Past evaluations have collected data immediately after participation in the Programme. This evaluation explores whether the early impact reported by participants is sustained over the longer-term.

The evaluation addresses the following questions:

1) What impact has participation in the SEND Leadership Programme had on individuals in terms of their own leadership and development?
2) What impact has the SEND Leadership Programme on the delivery of the SEND reforms in the local areas that participants work in?
3) Where the Programme has had a positive impact on an individual or local area, what are the key factors or conditions that have enabled this to happen?
4) Where the Programme has not had the impact anticipated, what have been the key challenges or barriers to change?

Methods

The evaluation used the following methods:

Online survey

A short anonymous online survey was sent to past participants of the Programme through:

- An email link to people who have participated in the Programme over the last three years[1]
- A link posted on the SEND Leadership Programme Alumni Basecamp (an optional forum for past participants to join to share learning and reflections)

The survey included self-rating scales and open text questions.

There were 26 respondents to the survey with a range of job roles including Head of SEND, Lead for SEND, SEND Manager, DCO and Commissioning Officer.

At the end of the survey respondents were asked if they would be happy to be contacted about taking part in an interview.

Semi-structured interviews

The initial plan was to purposively sample six people who reported positive longer-term impact of the Programme and six people who reported no impact or very limited impact to ensure a range of experiences were captured.

Those reporting a positive experience were sampled through a mixed approach:

- Survey respondents reporting positive impact who agreed to be contacted
- Individuals identified by the Programme delivery team

From the list of potential interviewees, participants were sampled with the aim of covering a wide geographical base with not more than one person from each region. Unfortunately, one interview that was arranged did not take place due to their extended leave.

As very few survey respondents reported no impact or limited impact in both areas of leadership skills and impact on SEND delivery, we invited the respondents who had indicated mixed or limited impact in one or both areas who had agreed to be contacted about being interviewed.

A total of nine interviews were conducted. These can be summarised as:

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[1] Due to GDPR contact details for participants of earlier years are no longer held

- 5 who reported an overall positive experience and lasting impact
- 2 who reported a mixed experience describing some impact but limitations
- 2 who reported minimal impact

Participants from 2015/16 to 2020/21 were included.

Ethical approval

The evaluation was approved by NDTi's internal ethics process. NDTi's Research and Evaluation team operate separately to the Programme delivery team and no-one involved in the delivery of the Programme was involved in collecting data for the evaluation. Participants were given information sheets about the evaluation before agreeing to participate, these emphasised that information shared would be confidential within the Research and Evaluation team and would not be shared with the Programme delivery team or the DfE.

Limitations

We were not anticipating a large response rate to the survey given that we were asking for feedback on a Programme people had participated in up to 7 years ago and the people contacted are in demanding job roles. However, it must be acknowledged that 26 responses is a small proportion of the 345 people who have participated in the Programme since the start. As such the survey responses cannot be considered representative of all participants over the years.

Structure of the report

In this report we look at the longer-term impact of the Programme in these areas:
- Leadership skills
- Delivery of SEND support and services in the local area
- Wider impact

The report then considers 'what works?' to enable this long-term impact and identifies some key elements or aspects of the Programme that participants have identified as key.

We then look at the reasons that some people found the Programme had limited impact for them or for making change in their area, and the challenges and barriers to further impact.

The report ends by considering the suggestions that participants have made for the Programme and making recommendations for the Programme delivery team to consider in future delivery.
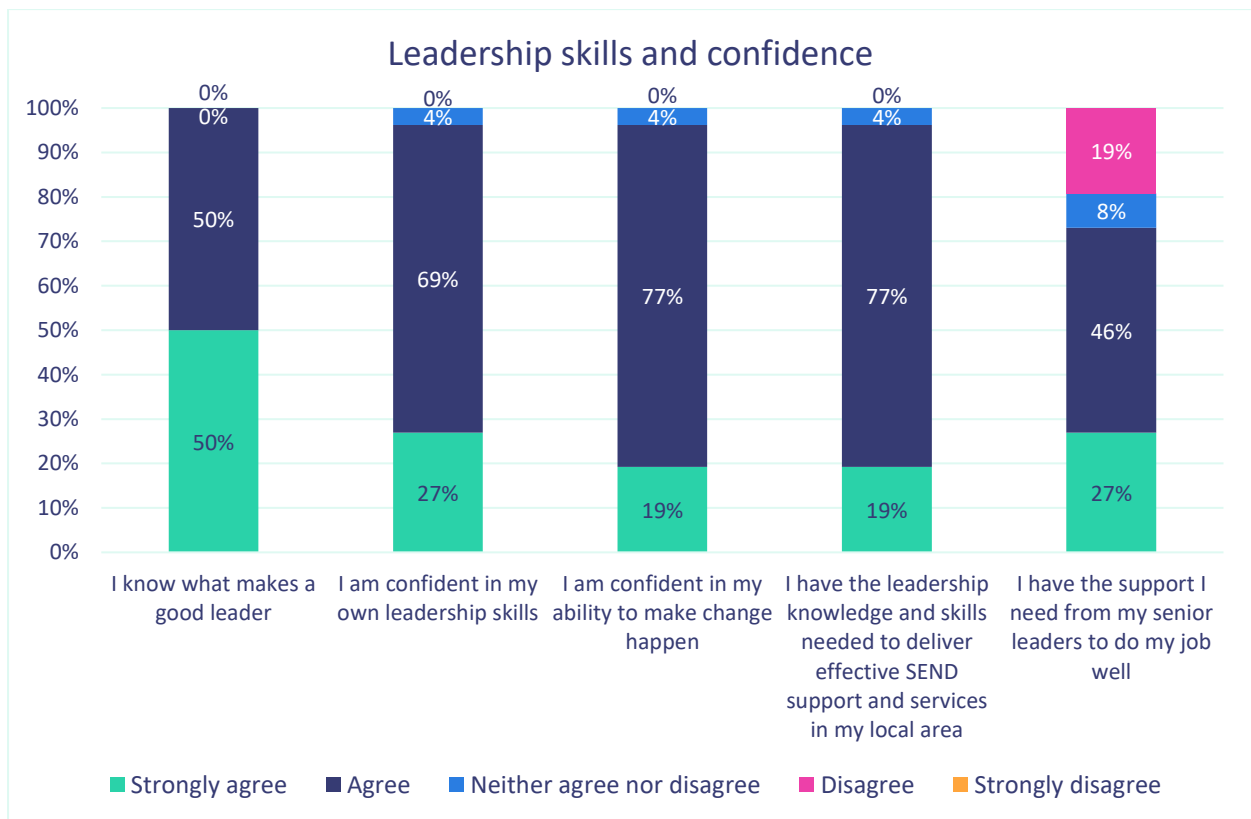
2. Long-term impact on leadership skills

As part of the online survey people were asked to self-rate their leadership skills and confidence. Chart 1 shows that over 95 per cent of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the following statements:

- I know what makes a good leader
- I am confident in my own leadership skills
- I am confident in my ability to make change happen
- I have the leadership knowledge and skills needed to deliver effective SEND support and services in my local area

This indicates very high levels of confidence in their own leadership knowledge and skills as well as ability to use these to deliver effective SEND support and services. A slightly lower proportion, 73 per cent, agree or strongly agreed that they had the support they need from senior leaders to do their job well indicating that this is a barrier for some (see later section).
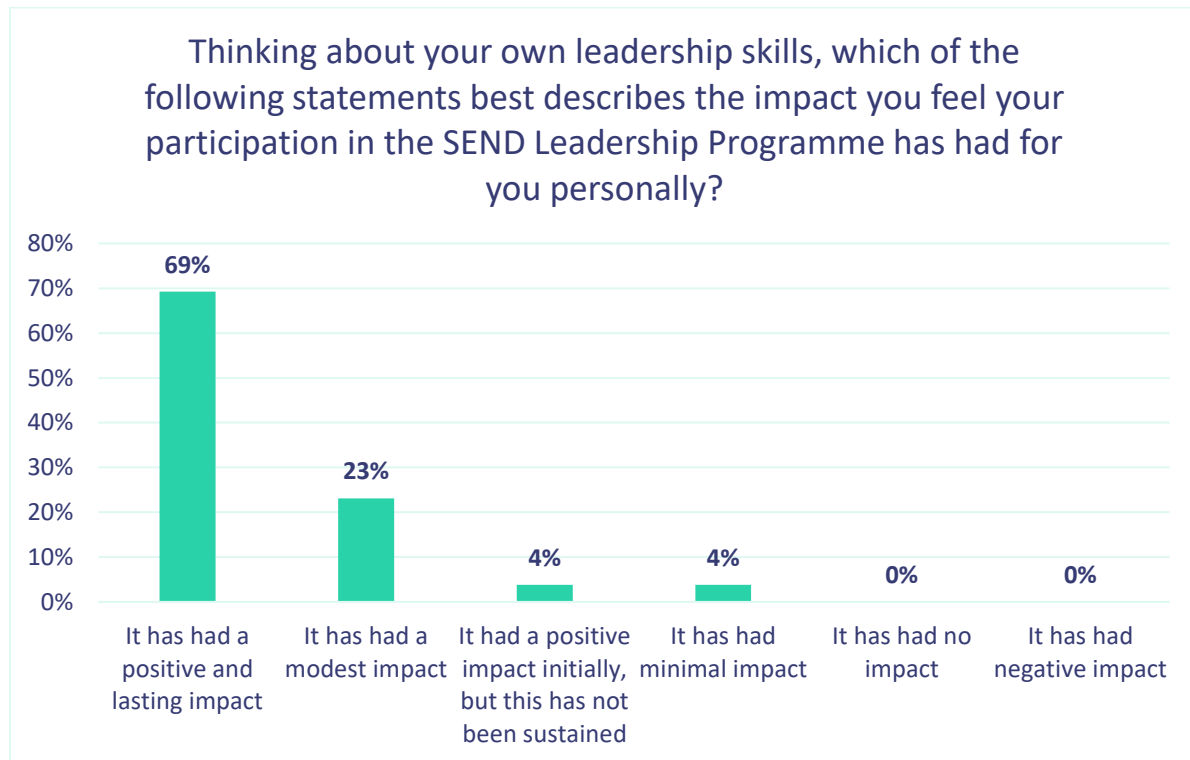
Chart 1: Self-rated leadership skills and confidence

Leadership skills and confidence

Legend: Strongly agree, Agree, Neither agree nor disagree, Disagree, Strongly disagree

Almost all respondents agreed that the programme has had a positive impact on their leaderships skills with 69% reporting a positive and lasting impact and 23% reporting a modest impact (chart 2). Just one respondent said it had minimal impact and no-one reported that it had no impact.

Chart 2: Impact of Programme on leadership skills

Thinking about your own leadership skills, which of the following statements best describes the impact you feel your participation in the SEND Leadership Programme has had for you personally?

Category	Percentage
It has had a positive and lasting impact	69%
It has had a modest impact	23%
It had a positive impact initially, but this has not been sustained	4%
It has had minimal impact	4%
It has had no impact	0%
It has had negative impact	0%

Interviews with past participants explored the impact of the Programme on leadership skills in more depth. Some of the changes people talked about were quite subtle and attributing them directly to the Programme was not straightforward:

> *"Some things will have sunk in without realising - how I'm talking in meetings is now normal practice, I don't necessarily realise I'm doing it."*
> Interview participant

However, analysis of the qualitative responses from the survey and interviews has identified three main ways in which people reported that the Programme had a longer-term impact on their leadership skills.

Impact on leadership style

Some people could clearly recognise the impact on their leadership style, some in quite a fundamental way, others in more general ways.

> *"I came back influenced by humble leadership, compassionate leadership… I was determined to come away doing something different.*

> *I say to my team now "I want you to be courageous" - this came from the Programme."* Interview participant

> *"I think it's actually fundamentally changed my career... it enabled me to become a reflective practitioner."* Interview participant

> *"I am a more reflective leader."* Survey respondent

> *"One session stood out as challenging and new – how we present ourselves as leaders, how we use body language. Those are things I had never considered – I have used these and taken them on."* Interview participant

Other people reported that the Programme consolidated their leadership style, but in the SEND context. This was particularly the case for some people who were new in post, were confident in their leadership skills in general but benefited from applying them in a different context or sector.

> *"It consolidated the leadership skills I had, but for the SEND context... I had grown up in a provider organisation.... then suddenly I was in a new role, in a new organisation, not understanding how the organisation works... I knew about different leadership styles, but it made me think at different levels."* Interview participant

> *"I think it gave me a different perspective of leadership, from an education perspective. It enabled me to reflect, have that space to reflect on my leadership style and adapt.... I had been on leadership training before... but that was leadership working in my area of social care. The value of this is it's working with people from other disciplines."* Interview participant

Increased confidence and confidence to challenge

Some people referred to increased confidence in their leadership that they gained from the Programme.

> *"Prior to the course I did not see myself necessarily as a leader but through the course recognised that I did have and do have the skills."* Survey respondent

> *"I think the course helped me to have confidence in my own abilities."* Survey respondent

In addition, people talked particularly about their increased confidence in being able to challenge and have difficult conversations.

> *"I am more equipped to challenge where needed."* Survey respondent

"The influence from the content of the course was strong, I refer back to learning and it has given me more confidence to challenge and make changes." Survey respondent

"Able to speak up more and challenge view points in a respectful way to make sure positive change occurs." Survey respondent

"How I frame conversations has changed, how I frame meetings, absolutely I've taken that on, the language I use, that's had a positive impact." Interview participant

Improved strategic partnerships

Finally, several of the participants talked about the influence of the Programme in terms of improving partnership at strategic level.

"The relationships with the CCG is really strong, we have done a number of joint programmes since then. We have put in joint bids, they're involved in lots of different processes... I think that has strengthened, partly as a result of the Programme... The course did reinforce you don't always need expensive solutions, it can be jointly working together, problem solving." Interview participant
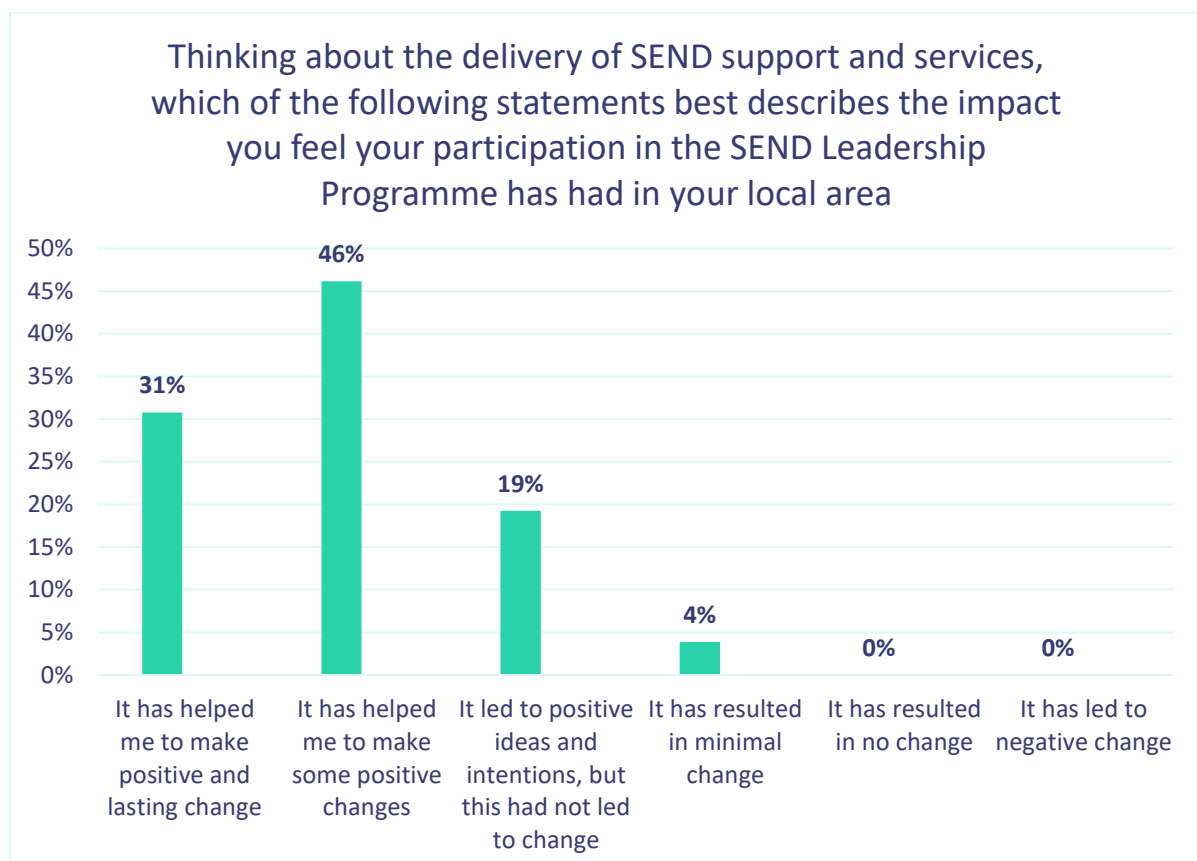
"I've definitely got much better open and honest, supportive and transparent networks... I've forged really productive, very challenging but compassionate relationships with other leaders." Interview participant

3. Long-term impact on delivery of SEND support and services in local areas

In the online survey 77% of respondents reported that participation in the Programme has led to positive changes to the delivery of SEND support and services in their local area. A further 19% reported that it led to positive ideas and intentions, but it had not led to change, emphasising the importance of understanding barriers to implementing change. No-one reported that it had not led to any change.

Chart 3: Impact on delivery of SEND support and services

Thinking about the delivery of SEND support and services, which of the following statements best describes the impact you feel your participation in the SEND Leadership Programme has had in your local area

Statement	Percentage
It has helped me to make positive and lasting change	31%
It has helped me to make some positive changes	46%
It led to positive ideas and intentions, but this had not led to change	19%
It has resulted in minimal change	4%
It has resulted in no change	0%
It has led to negative change	0%

Qualitative responses to the survey and interviews identified three main ways that participants felt the Programme had had an impact in terms of the delivery of SEND support and services in their local area.

Improved participation and voice of children and young people and parents/carers

The improved participation of children and young people and/or parent/carers is an area where a number of participants reported an identifiable and attributable impact - creating new forums, improving existing ones or ensuring participation, engagement and co-production.

> *"Engagement with parent carers definitely... We're doing some really great work with parent carers, influenced by the Programme.... there wasn't even a forum so we developed a forum. They have a really strong presence now, across the different work streams. We consult them on everything... I remember people spoke about co-production and the importance of involving parents – that planted the seed... Engagement now is not tick box, it's values based, we value their opinion."* Interview participant

> *"We have changed the way we lead meetings and the focus to ensure that the child/young person's voice is central and meetings are much more person centred."* Survey respondent

> *"It has had influence on our work with parent carer forums... they're part of the partnership board, and task and finish groups. The seed of this came from the Programme... we always had a good relationship with parents but now it's embedded."* Interview participant

> *"We always tried to have a relationship with the parent carer forum but the Programme probably reinforced that work, to work harder with that. I meet with them every fortnight – I'm not letting that slip. That aspect, it has made me make sure to prioritise that – there are always got competing priorities."* Interview participant

> *"Co-production has improved and is established. Participation and engagement strategies have improved."* Survey respondent

Improved partnership work

As well as leading to improved partnership working at a more strategic level, participants also identified an impact on improved partnerships on a more operational or service level.

> *"Working with providers to 'fill in the gaps' in service delivery models to enable CYP with SEND to access the services they need."* Survey respondent

"We have a much more proactive approach to working in partnership with all agencies, CYP and parent/carers." Survey respondent

"I have worked really closely with my team and community.... I feel we have now got more partnerships with our communities and improving our working relationships is helping to achieve the right goals for our C/YP.... Getting out into settings, supporting one another has improved outcomes for our C/YP." Survey respondent

"The introduction of a collaborative meeting focusing on the SEND agenda where CCG LA and lead managers of services meet to discuss issues arising." Survey respondent

One thing we did as a result of the course, we held a joint session with partners and wider partners about what we want for outcomes for children with SEND, that's where we're able to build on what happened on the course. Interview participant

Strategy input or system redesign

Some people referred to specific systems they have introduced to support the delivery of SEND support and services in their area and others referred to tangible influence on particular strategies in their area.

"When I joined [the organisation] they were formulating the strategy and one of the things that happened, that I was really keen on was that the first word of the strategy was 'inclusion'... what the training did for me, what the leadership work did for me was it enabled me to bring it and make it real and alive in the [organisation]. So the timing for me was really superb." Interview participant

"One thing we've done is a system service design – some of this was as a result of Programme." Interview participant

"Influencing the development of a dynamic support register and a system response to escalating concerns... SEND training assurance framework - a regional project to improve the training of the health workforce. Influencing strategic leaders to have this as a priority across the region was pivotal." Survey respondent

"Development of a joint funding protocol for complex cases." Survey respondent

"Currently in the process of changing the way in which all mainstream top-up funding is allocated to schools." Survey respondent

4. Other long-term impact

In addition to impact in the areas explicitly intended – leaderships skills and delivery of SEND services and support - there was also evidence of the Programme having wider impact, sometimes in unanticipated ways.

Cascading learning

Firstly, there is evidence that the learning, skills or approaches are being cascaded to teams, colleagues, organisations and even wider.

> *"That commitment to develop around leadership skills, I have brought back to share with leads - I've done a cool thing, how are we going to do this as a group ourselves?"* Interview participant

> *"The ripples are immediate in the organisation. The secondary ripple is outside our organisation with local authority. The third one is the national work as a result of this... we've supported quite a lot of local authorities."* Interview participant

The Programme has also contributed to delivery of training in some areas.

> *"I have delivered a lot of training and developed toolkits for practitioners linked to Annual reviews."* Survey respondent

> *"Last week we did some training and development work for the [organisation] SEN team, for the SEN officers for them to understand the study programmes and what that can look like from an inclusion point of view... So there's been some big parts of the work [of the Programme] that have an ongoing impact."* Interview participant

> *"Training programme was developed and is being run."* Survey respondent

Culture change

Other changes people referred to were around culture change, in particular about the profile of SEND in their area:

> *"I felt my confidence at promoting inclusion with settings and professionals has really grown from attending the course, making SEND the business of all professionals and raising the profile across our*

own children's services and into the community. We are slowly changing the culture and hearing the great outcomes as a result is fantastic." Survey respondent

"Raised the profile of the SEND agenda within primary networks." Survey respondent

"The 'SEND is everybody's business' message is starting to reach senior managers which is enabling conversations to focus on wider, cross provider issues, such as transition and gaps and inequalities in services across the ICS." Survey respondent

Improved resilience and retention

A wider change - not an explicit aim of the Programme - has emerged in terms of how the Programme supports the wellbeing and resilience of people within their job roles. As one person described *"It's quite a lonely post being responsible for SEND".*

"It is at times a really really hard job... I think the pressures of working across organisations, across cultures where there is no money, and where the government has issued a code of practice and given no resources and inadequate funding – it's a bit of a poisoned chalice at times. The resilience around that, to keep on going, has been very helpful... Self-reflection, managing emotions, identifying how I wanted to be in the workplace, increasing resilience – I still think about some of those now." Interview participant

"A good thing is they focused in on personal wellbeing – I think is a demanding role... I think that was important.... there is a gap in support for people, particularly in senior levels." Interview participant

Several people said they felt that this helped to retain people in their very challenging and demanding roles.

"So that's why having those general leadership skills, that resilience, that stuff that we did learn there must have played a part, otherwise I wouldn't be doing it now. So it must have helped kind of focus in on what was important and what was doable." Interview participant

"There is a lot of shift and change in jobs, there is danger with how things are going, a lack of support, there is a danger we will lose valuable people... I think people come back really enthusiastic, feel that wider support, it helps retain people in jobs, they acknowledge there is pressure elsewhere, they are reassured they are doing things right." Interview participant

5. What works for longer-term impact?

The survey and interview questions asked participants to reflect on what it was about the Programme that had contributed to the longer-term impacts that they identified. This section summarises the main elements or aspects of the Programme that have been key to the longer-term impact.

General and practical use of content

Some people talked about the broad content and practical tools, techniques and examples from the Programme that they still use in their day to day working lives.

"I learnt tools, techniques, different ways of conceptualising frameworks…. I still call on the tools and techniques… Very practical things about time management, how to make sure is time made for effective leadership, planning for meetings." Interview participant

"The whole course content had some impact - it covered many areas very well." Survey respondent

"I feel the course as a whole contributed. I would not like to single out one particular thing." Survey respondent

"I am always referring back to either examples from the courses of real life situations or the literature." Survey respondent

Networking/peer learning

For others it was more about the people they met and links that they made on the Programme that contributed to the ongoing impact. This was either because of the peer learning during the Programme that had a lasting impact, or because they continued to draw on the peer support, networks and links that they made through the Programme.

"Meeting people from different local authorities, there are people I will still email now. That peer support element and sharing of good practice… relationships, networking, that was key. If you didn't have that you'd lose some of this. You get it a bit in the regions but learning across the country is critical." Interview participant

"I'm still in touch with several people, people I trust, from all different part of country." Interview participant

"An absolutely crucial part was meeting colleagues either new or experienced, finding challenges in common, to latch on to, a few I keep in touch with, we share information, and having that thing after [Alumni Basecamp], that was really good." Interview participant

"That bit you can't quantify, when you're sat, having glass of wine. Sitting and talking to somebody - they've solved the issue you're struggling with. Networking was one of the best things, the peer support network…. I'm still in touch with about four people, we tend to be critical friends." Interview participant

Protected time and space

In all of the evaluations to date, participants have identified the importance of having protected time and space away from their organisation, area and day to day job. From the interviews conducted for this evaluation it seems clear that this protected time and space wasn't only important at the time of participation, but that the thinking and reflecting time also contributes to longer-term change.

"Your nose is against the grindstone every time, the good thing is you could go to protected space, where you couldn't be got at. Time off the treadmill, to stop, reflect, learn, grow and develop." Interview participant

"Not so much the content of what they say but the space it creates to have those conversations, about our beliefs about what's right and what we're trying to do from different perspectives for children and young people." Interview participant

"I think what you don't often get in roles like ours is protected time. Always firefighting, everything comes at speed. The Programme gives the ability to step away, look and analyse." Interview participant

Attending with a partner from the area

Several respondents emphasised the importance of coming to the Programme with a colleague from education, health or social care from the local area and the unique opportunity that provided.

"Going with my health colleague was beneficial… I hadn't known my health DCO, we built a good relationship, driving together, working together… It would have been even better with my colleague with

social care as well – it's taken three years to get there with social care." Interview participant

"To be able to have time to reflect, time on values and beliefs as part of the course together, with two different people from the local area I think is a great benefit of the course." Interview participant

Personal project

The views about the opportunity to work on a personal project were mixed. Several interviewees said that they did not progress their project as they'd hoped either during the Programme or after it, or that in hindsight they felt they had not chosen the right focus for it. When it did work people talked about it being a welcome opportunity to get started on a piece of sustainable work.

"We're still working through it but it's going through, the Programme helped – my colleague in health is part of this, we've put in a joint bid to transforming care." Interview participant

"I think it's important to choose the right project, whether you can get sign off for it. I went to my directors and said you're paying for this, we need a project you will approve and sign off and enable us to deliver… Things are much better, it's been sustained, we've built on it." Interview participant

Reflections from the participants suggest that getting both the right project and getting sign off for it at appropriate level are important.

6. Limitations, challenges and barriers

Limitations to the longer-term impact

As described earlier, there were very few survey respondents who reported no, or minimal impact. However there were individuals who reported a more mixed experience. In the interviews five people reported a very positive experience and impact, two reported a mixed experience (some impact but also limitations) and two described minimal impact.

With the exception of two survey respondents who reported limitations as a result of the Programme being delivered online[2], among those who described mixed or limited impact the main factor was their expectations of the Programme. These were primarily people who were very experienced in one area and were specifically seeking learning in the other area, i.e. those who were experienced and knowledgeable about SEND but had been seeking more around leadership, or those who had received previous high quality leadership training and were seeking more around applying this in the SEND context. These people tended to feel that they learnt little in the area they were already experienced in, and did not gain as much as they'd hoped in the other are

Interestingly, all of the interviewees who reported a more limited impact would still recommend the Programme to the right person.

> *"No matter what I've said, I have encouraged DCOs to do the course – it's right for them. It's not that I don't think the course is good, it's about who it is aimed at."* Interview participant

Challenges and barriers

In the survey 19% of respondents indicated that the Programme had led to positive ideas and intentions but this had not led to change. This suggests that there are some participants who feel inspired by the Programme but face challenges and barriers to putting what they have learned into practice. People who reported a positive impact and those who reported a more limited impact were asked to identify any barriers or challenges to greater impact to the

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[2] In 2020-21 when delivery was affected by COVID restrictions

delivery of SEND support and services in their area. Some common themes emerged though both the survey responses and interview responses.

Organisational and staff changes

Respondents referred to the constant change happening - either organisational change and restructuring, or staff changes – getting in the way of change.

> *"The local authority are going through organisational change, cuts, redundancies, it feels like they're becoming less system focused and more individual ... The rate of change and disruption at a local level is like nothing I've seen - CCG changing to ICS, local authorities changing, cuts."* Interview participant

> *"As a partnership we have a clear vision but changes in personnel in social care have definitely got in the way.... with personnel changing, we're constantly having to start again."* Interview participant

> *"Subsequent service changes and new manager have eroded my skills."* Survey respondent

Limited resources

A lack of resources, or funding cuts were identified by several as getting in the way of facilitating further change.

> *"Some of the changes require resources."* Interview participant

> *"Challenges due to demand outstripping resource available."* Survey respondent

> *"Increase in EHCPs steadily year by year locally and nationally - haven't increased services in line with demand."* Interview participant

> *"Resources. Demand has got in the way."* Interview participant

Not having the authority to make change happen

Some participants felt that although they knew what needed to be done, they do not have the authority at their level to implement the changes needed.

> *"A lot of things need director level change, need resources. We can raise this, write a business paper, bring it up at every board, put it to the powers that be, the cabinet in the local authority or CCG execs. But I am one small voice among others, there are a whole host of priorities for them."* Interview participant

"Disappointed that the authority leadership at the time didn't value the learning from the course and were not open to change." Survey respondent

"There is a lack of senior leader commitment to enable this to be sustained." Survey respondent

Need for cultural change

Linked to the point above, respondents identified that a cultural shift is needed in order to effect greater change.

"Yes, we have written business cases, but has it facilitated change? No. Inclusion in mainstream sector is a big cultural shift, it needs a lot of people." Interview participant

"Decisions for a cultural change in SEND are led by more senior managers which has meant it is hard to influence change. Remote working hasn't helped as well." Survey respondent

National policy direction

A few participants felt that national policy or direction is not currently prioritising inclusion or the SEND agenda and this is challenging further progress in this area.

"Nationally I'm really concerned we're getting less inclusive, and some is driven by government policy... Tribunals seem to preference separate education, it's hard to work in partnership in the current climate." Interview participant

"With the change from CCG to ICS – we're working on how to get SEND on the agenda – it's not helped by NHS England focusing on learning disability and autism rather than SEND. Nationally it's not aligning. It's these top-down things." Interview participant

7. Suggestions for future delivery

All respondents, both those who reported significant impact and those for whom the impact was more limited, gave a number of suggestions to improve the impact of the Programme. Some suggestions were about the content or delivery of the Programme itself, others around who the Programme is aimed at and the support after the Programme.

Greater focus on practical application

A common suggestion was for the Programme to provide a greater emphasis on practical application of the subjects covered; people wanted more concrete examples or support around how to make specific real life changes in their local area.

> *"For me to have been more beneficial, more emphasis was needed on preparing for inspections, sharing people's experience of inspection, things that they've done well…. What worked, what didn't work, I wanted to hear this. For example there wasn't anything on the local offer, I didn't have insight about what made a good local offer, how to get it right."* Interview participant

> *"I think group scenarios, working together, real life situations – I think that opportunity, to problem solve would be beneficial."* Interview participant

> *"There was a good talk on inclusion with a parent and child - however it didn't show a complete system change – it was one child, one parent, one school, it didn't follow through… This was right once but it needs to happen 100 times, 1000 times - how to take that learning and enable other families, and schools to do this?"* Interview participant

Using people's experience and skills

It was recognised by some people that there was a huge amount of knowledge, experience and skills among the participants. As described above while some people may not have both the leadership and the SEND knowledge, some were very experienced in leadership and some had extensive knowledge of the SEND context. It was suggested that this could be used more constructively as part of the design of the Programme.

"People had more to offer, it could be not just receiving, they could contribute... They could use people's skills and experience more, find out beforehand people's skills and experiences, help model how leadership can empower and include." Interview participant

"I think perhaps some structured peer support group sessions may help participants to engage with leadership issues from within their own local authorities." Survey respondent

"People with SEND experience could benefit those with leadership experience, those with leadership experience could benefit those with SEND experience." Interview participant

Similar feedback has been received in previous years and in response the 2021-22 Programme has incorporated a session led by participants sharing what's working in their areas and what the challenges are.

Clarity at who the Programme is aimed at

The people who got less out of the Programme were by and large those whose expectations of the Programme had not been fully met. This suggests that there needs to be greater clarity about who the Programme is aimed at or what a potential participant could gain from it.

"There needs to be real clarity about whether it's operational or strategic - if both, there needs to be some sort of divide – operational or strategic are very different. Clarity over which, or if both, also need to have ability to have different types of groups within the programme." Interview participant

People had very different views about the who the Programme is best suited to. Rather than position or level of seniority most people felt it was more to do with how new the person is to either the SEND context or to leadership.

"It would be great for new DCOS – for the SEND knowledge, the system knowledge. Interview participant

Two people suggested that there could be different groups or streams within the Programme depending on background and experience with a SEND focus for some participants and a leadership focus for others.

More follow up

Although there has been an opportunity for participants to continue to connect through the SEND Leadership Programme Alumni Basecamp forum, some participants did not seem aware of this or felt more opportunities to continue

linking up would help ensure the impact of the Programme is maintained longer-term.

> *"There could be a forum, Facebook group, a check in every 6/12 months, keeping it alive – that would consolidate learning."* Interview participant

> *"I think the follow up after has been a bit hit and miss. I think there could have been more to sustain the leadership network."* Interview participant

> *"There's some benefit to be potentially looked at around weaving together a network, a wider network of experts, or of people who've been through the Programme, so almost to develop a self-sustaining community of practice. Where those people get together and help the sector solve the problems."* Interview participant

8. Conclusions and recommendations

"I honestly can't advocate for it enough, in the long-term, the short-term. It's unique, there's nothing else like it out there." Interview participant

Overall, the data and evidence collected for this evaluation indicates that for many people who have participated in the SEND Leadership Programme over the last six years:

- There is a long-term impact on their leadership skills, particularly around: leadership style; general confidence and confidence to challenge; and improved strategic partnerships.
- The Programme has led to change in the delivery of SEND support and services in their local areas, particularly in terms of: improved participation and voice of children and young people and parents/carers; improved partnership work; and around strategy input or system redesign.
- There was wider change as result of: cascading learning; culture change; and improved resilience and retention.

The evidence gathered has largely found consistency with earlier evaluations conducted during or immediately after participation, with similar themes emerging about what worked particularly well for participants in affecting change. People particularly value: having practical tools and techniques to draw on; the opportunity for networking and peer support; having protected time and space; and attending the Programme with a partner.

Where the impact was either mixed or more limited, the primary reason seems to be about people's expectations based on their past experience either of leadership or of the SEND context. It should be noted that all those interviewed who felt the Programme had led to limited impact for them, could identify people it would be right for and would recommend it to the right people. This suggests it is more about getting the right people in the first place than significantly amending the content.

The survey identified that 19% of respondents said that the Programme led to positive ideas and intentions in the area of SEND delivery but this did not lead to change. Survey and interview responses around barriers and challenges provide us with an insight into the reasons for this. The main barriers and

challenges identified were around: organisational and staff changes; limited resources; not having authority to make changes; the need for cultural change; and national policy direction.

Recommendations

Reflecting on the data collected and the suggestions made by the participants, we would make the following recommendations or suggestions to be considered in the delivery of future SEND Leadership Programmes.

There are clearly some key **elements of the Programme that should remain**:

- Attending with a partner in education, health or social care.
- Retaining the residential, or at least significant face to face elements to ensure the provision of the protected time and space AND to facilitate the networking and peer learning.

There are some **elements of the Programme that we recommend that the delivery team review or consider**:

- Clearer guidance at the application stage around what would make a good personal project, what is achievable and what needs to be in place to maximise the opportunity (e.g. support or sign off from senior colleagues).
- A greater focus within the Programme on more practical, applied examples and more clear direction on how to deliver change at system level.

There are additional **suggestions that the delivery team may wish to reflect on:**

- Ensure that the people who will benefit the most attend the Programme – for example by including a more detailed overview of what the Programme covers with respect to both SEND and leadership, so that people can make a more informed decision about whether it is the appropriate Programme for them.
- Consider delivering two strands of the Programme, one for those who are confident around their leaderships skills but wish to focus on the SEND knowledge and context, and one for those experienced in the SEND world who wish to focus on the leadership element.
- Linked to the above point, provide more of a formal opportunity for participants to contribute in the area they are experienced in (leadership or SEND) to facilitate even greater learning for participants.
- Seek a way to fund the facilitation of ongoing peer learning and support for past participants.