



## External Evaluation Report

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*"We have all the knowledge and resources inside us to solve our own problems; it just requires someone to ask those questions to help unearth these resources from within us."*

*Reg Revans*

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Beverley Agard Owen  
Action Learning Academy

14<sup>th</sup> October 2016

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## 1.0 Introduction

Firstly, I would like to thank the North West Cross Institutional Action Learning project team for the opportunity to conduct the external evaluation of their pilot programme.

Action learning as an approach to solving real problems that involves taking action and reflecting upon the results is something that I can keen to seem implemented in Higher Education and across all other sectors and disciplines.



Despite its beginnings back in the 1950's,  
pioneered by the academic professor,  
administrator and management consultant,

**Reginald "Reg" William Revans**

it still remains current and innovative today.

### ***Background***

Member institutions of the North West Staff Developers Network who had participated in the Aurora programme delivered by the Leadership Foundation, found the action learning component of the Aurora programme invaluable and although network member institutions offer action learning to support leadership development, there was agreement that the value of a "cross-institutional" opportunity would allow continuation of the benefits for Aurora alumni and open up the opportunity to others who have not participated in Aurora.

The project team requested that the learning from the pilot programme was externally evaluated and analysed and then it could be shared via a Best Practice guide for HE colleagues across the UK and Ireland who would like to deploy a similar initiative to supplement existing Leadership Foundation or regional development interventions.

The external evaluation carefully considered participant and facilitator feedback and reported its findings and recommendations to the project team on 28<sup>th</sup> & 29<sup>th</sup> September 2016 at which time design and content of the Best Practice Guide were reviewed.

- The cohort initially comprised 42 female members of staff, both academic and professional services who registered to join the programme, drawn from seven Universities in the North West namely: Chester, Cumbria, Huddersfield, Liverpool, Liverpool John Moores, Manchester and University of Central Lancashire [UCLAN]
- The ALS met on a four occasions between 14<sup>th</sup> October 2015 and 2<sup>nd</sup> June 2016.
- At each session, set members were able to raise and discuss challenges, problems and issues they were currently facing.
- The set worked together to question and coach their colleagues to determine their own options for resolving the challenge, problem or issue. Actions taken were to be made by personal decision based upon “questioning and learning” from their peers. There was no prescribed subject matter, so set members could bring any issue to the set as long as it is work-related.

### **Method**

Appropriate meeting rooms where ALS could be held were arranged at University of Liverpool, University of Cumbria (Lancaster campus), Uclan and Liverpool John Moores. The venues were selected to enable set members to visit and observe other HE institutions. The survey revealed some issues relating to venue locations. *See Appendix 1 – Participants Survey Q17.*

There is a range of formats for facilitation of Action Learning and the structure for this pilot programme was agreed in that the facilitators would rotate between sets. *See Appendix 1 - Participants Survey Q14.*

## 2.0 Method used for Evaluation - Participants

On 2nd June 2017 a face-to-face Evaluation session was conducted with the set members following the final action learning set of the programme. The participants were asked to express their opinions on the various elements of the programme and in addition, to share their “learning journey” visually and verbally. 21 members of the cohort were willing to stand and explain their learning journey to those in attendance. *See Appendix 3 – Participant Learning Journeys & Appendix 4– Participant Post Its Feedback.*

On 15th July 2016 an on-line survey was sent to the 42 original participants (academic and professional services staff).

Taking into account annual summer holidays the response deadline was extended to 16th September 2016, yielding **17 participant responses = 42%**. This figure for participant responses is lower than the initial survey responses as was anticipate due to the number of participants who did not complete the programme. It was felt that programme timings were not consistent with parenting and school breaks.

In addition, during a 2-week period in September 2016, a total of 15 telephone interviews were conducted.

*Please refer to **Appendix 1** for the complete anonymised survey results provided by the Action Learning Set members.*

*The survey was specifically designed to capture quantitative and qualitative data so as to fully allow analysis of the impact of the programme and the feasibility of its introduction across the HE sector.*

### 3. Survey Questions

Q1 & 2: relate the participants' reasons for joining the programme and whether their expectations in respect of the programme were met.

Q3: identifies common themes that were discussed



Q4 - 6: relate to personal development and increase in level of confidence pre-and post- taking part in action learning.

Q7 - 10: considers how the programme has influenced the subsequent actions and/or behavior of the participants.

Q11: indicates that 86.7% (13) of the participants' agreed that action learning should be included in staff training and development and to whom specifically within their Institutions.

Q12: Participants “one word” to describe the programme



Q13 - 15 Participants views in respect of facilitators and facilitation methods.

Q16 - 18 Participants suggestions and recommendations for improvement of programme.

Q19 52.9% provided brief testimonials.

Q20: Case studies provided. *See Appendix 5 – Participants Case Studies*

## 4.0 Method used for Evaluation – Facilitators

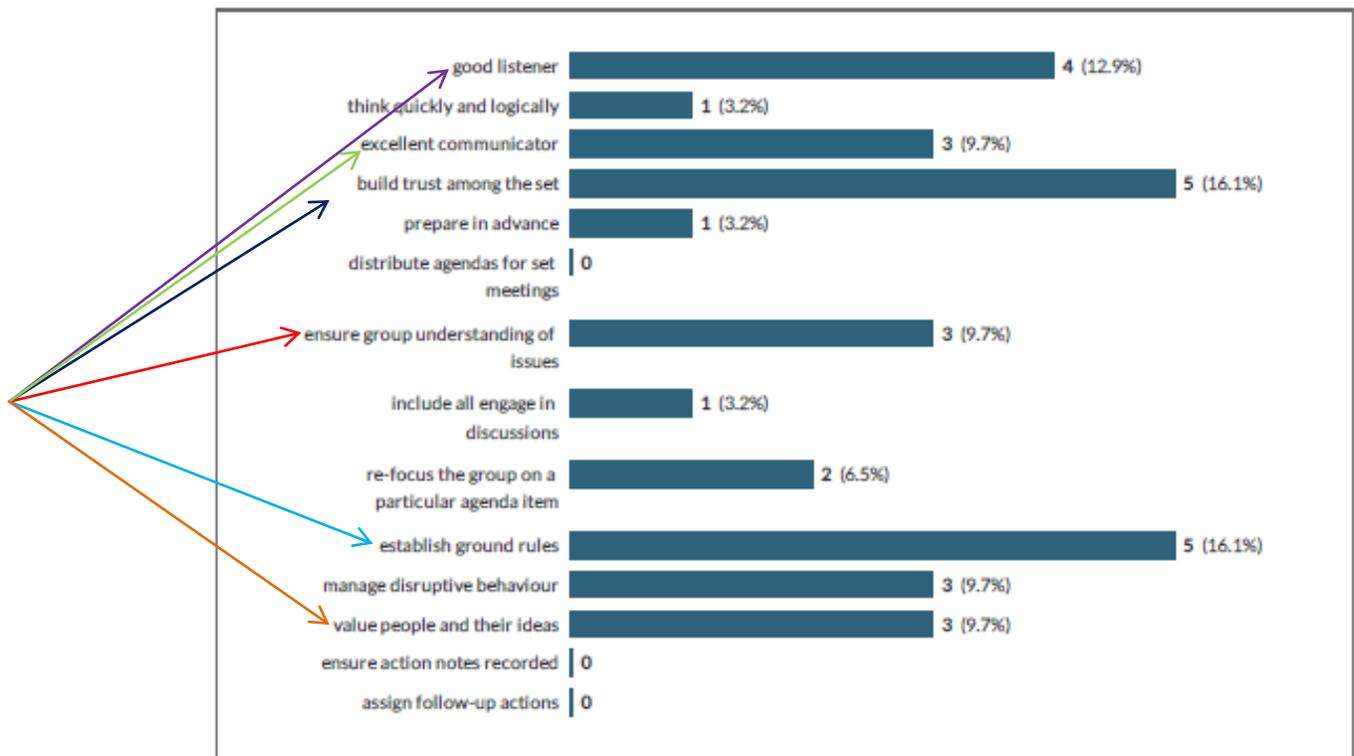
On 15th July 2016 an on-line survey was sent to the nine facilitators of whom seven responded = 77%. Telephone interviews were not conducted.

Please refer to **Appendix 2** for the complete anonymised survey results provided by the facilitation team.

## 5.0 Facilitators Survey Questions

Q1: relate the facilitators motivation for enrolling as a facilitator of the programme

Q2: Top 6 essential qualities required for facilitation:



- Q3 & 4: One thing the facilitators felt they did well during the process and one thing they could do to improve.
- Q5 - 10: A review of the facilitation methods used and recommendations.
- Q11: Facilitators views on posit-t methods and interchange of facilitators amongst the sets. As with the participants' feedback, there are mixed views on whether rotation of facilitators between sets has any specific impact, either negative or positive.
- Q12 & 13: Facilitators suggestions for improvement and recommendations.
- Q14: Reflective journal contribution – 42.9% Yes / 57.1%No
- Q15 **Facilitators** “one word” to describe their part in the programme:

Collaborative  
Rewarding  
Enlightening Proud  
Interesting  
enriching





# Appendix 1

Action Learning Programme

**Participants Survey**



# North West Cross Institutional Action Learning Programme \_ Evaluation

Showing 17 of 17 responses

Showing **all** responses

Showing **all** questions

Response rate: 42%

**1** What motivated you to enrol on the the action learning pilot programme?

Showing all 17 responses	
Invited	<a href="#">210605-210598-15547224</a>
not participated in this type of programme before and interested to see it in practice.	<a href="#">210605-210598-15559210</a>
Previous good experience of Action Learning on the Aurora programme	<a href="#">210605-210598-15551148</a>
I enjoyed the experience during my Aurora programme and recognised the array of personal development benefits.	<a href="#">210605-210598-15560965</a>
Felt it would be a good opportunity to network with other colleagues from other Universities, share experiences and gain different perspectives	<a href="#">210605-210598-15561530</a>
I have completed the Aurora programme where I found the action learning session really useful so wanted to gain more experience of this.	<a href="#">210605-210598-15561698</a>
It was offered to me by our staff development team at the University. They IDd me as someone who might benefit from cross University networking and I'd done action learning before.	<a href="#">210605-210598-15566118</a>
Useful Aurora Action learning which I took part the year before.	<a href="#">210605-210598-15568508</a>
I was looking for some further management training despite teaching management myself.	<a href="#">210605-210598-15569983</a>
The opportunity to meet other female academics	<a href="#">210605-210598-15588928</a>
Women only and something different	<a href="#">210605-210598-15650690</a>
I have done AL in the past and welcomed the opportunity to embrace it again, especially with people from the HE sector	<a href="#">210605-210598-15730188</a>
I was interested in the concept of action learning as a method to help resolve issues through empowerment. I also liked the idea of networking with women from different backgrounds.	<a href="#">210605-210598-15732381</a>
there wasn;t a suitable ALS for me to join in my HEI	<a href="#">210605-210598-15746156</a>
Found action learning set during Aurora programme very useful	<a href="#">210605-210598-15832861</a>
opportunity to engage with others in similar roles at other institutions	<a href="#">210605-210598-15849115</a>
personal/professional skill development and an opportunity to meet women at other HEIs in other roles	<a href="#">210605-210598-15849053</a>

## 2 What were your expectations of the programme?

Showing all 17 responses	
See action learning in action	210605-210598-15547224
To build a supportive network of colleagues at different levels and from different background.	210605-210598-15559210
Working through my indecisions about the direction of my career with others	210605-210598-15551148
I hoped it would be a similar experience to the aurora action learning sets.	210605-210598-15560965
To build new relationships and contacts and gain other perspectives from outside of my current workplace	210605-210598-15561530
To meet a group of people from other institutions for action learning sessions.	210605-210598-15561698
Chance to meet with others, do some action learning with people outside with no knowledge of what I did or knew, an independent view.	210605-210598-15566118
To help me to find the best way to solve my work issues	210605-210598-15568508
Unsure	210605-210598-15569983
Fun, enthusiasm, motivation	210605-210598-15588928
I was open minded and unsure what to expect, hoped that I would learn something and form a new network	210605-210598-15650690
to be able to address some real life issues and support wider HE colleagues	210605-210598-15730188
I didn't really know what to expect. As the organisation of the pre- information was good I expected that it would have a good structure. I was a bit apprehensive as to how involved I would have to be.	210605-210598-15732381
to meet people of a similar level to me in other HEIs who could help me to see my work issues objectively	210605-210598-15746156
Time out of office to think about problems/issues. Thought provoking questions from the group to help work through issues	210605-210598-15832861
improve my skills as a manager in higher education	210605-210598-15849115
be involved in discussion with women at other HEIs in other roles	210605-210598-15849053

2.a Were those expectations met? [please explain]

Showing all 17 responses	
Yes, I attended 2 sessions and took part in the process	210605-210598-15547224
Yes.	210605-210598-15559210
Certainly the group helped me clarify what I actually value in my career and how I really feel about certain parts of it.	210605-210598-15551148
Yes very much so!	210605-210598-15560965
Yes - was fortunate to be with a great group	210605-210598-15561530
Yes, this certainly happened and I was on one of the groups that had great attendance so we completed all planned sessions.	210605-210598-15561698
Yes it was great. For some of the academic staff there, it was life changing as they dealt with person and management issues (management by others of them) for me I gained some fantastic contacts which I've followed up outside this programme	210605-210598-15566118
Yes. This time I didn't have any major issue but the sessions helped me to see things clearly and to find the potential solutions.	210605-210598-15568508
Yes, when you realise other people are grappling with what could be considered minor issues too your confidence grows	210605-210598-15569983
It was, yes, particularly the motivation side	210605-210598-15588928
yes, met a fabulous group of women who were very experienced, supportive and helpful	210605-210598-15650690
Yes	210605-210598-15730188
The sessions were very well structured as expected. I felt very comfortable with the process and enjoyed the sessions.	210605-210598-15732381
Yes	210605-210598-15746156
I was only able to attend the first and last session (due to serious unforeseen family illness) and so was unable to discuss any issues of my own	210605-210598-15832861
not really, I was one of the most experienced in the group and I struggled to present challenges that were useful for discussion	210605-210598-15849115
mostly, though in my group of 9 there were three people from my own institution.	210605-210598-15849053

2.b Was there anything that exceeded your expectations?

Showing all 16 responses	
The support was extremely valyable	<a href="#">210605-210598-15547224</a>
The actual process was far more effective than I anticipated.	<a href="#">210605-210598-15559210</a>
Yes I feel the model we followed was very clear and the group I participated in committed to the all the sessions which enhances the quality of process and level of relationship and network building that takes place.	<a href="#">210605-210598-15560965</a>
Mainly due to the group I was with - we all gelled well and I felt that their were some useful thoughts to issues and some real successes	<a href="#">210605-210598-15561530</a>
The commitment of the group meant a real bond has developed between us. I have felt real benefit from the sessions and gained real insight, whether I presented a problem or not.	<a href="#">210605-210598-15561698</a>
As a result of this, I identified another University doing a practice that was better than ours and followed it up - not considered seriously before but is now.	<a href="#">210605-210598-15566118</a>
N/A	<a href="#">210605-210598-15568508</a>
Building of personal confidence	<a href="#">210605-210598-15569983</a>
The joint support amongst the group	<a href="#">210605-210598-15588928</a>
yes, that action learning is a very powerful and effective tool!	<a href="#">210605-210598-15650690</a>
How lovely everyone was!	<a href="#">210605-210598-15730188</a>
The outcome of the process exceeded my expectations. I was very impressed with how well the group worked together and how the process of asking questions helped direct you.	<a href="#">210605-210598-15732381</a>
that we have chosen to continue alone	<a href="#">210605-210598-15746156</a>
The group on the last day all gel very well indeed and feels and all felt that they would like to continue	<a href="#">210605-210598-15832861</a>
the commitment of those involved in the process	<a href="#">210605-210598-15849115</a>
people within my groups engagement and motivation	<a href="#">210605-210598-15849053</a>

**3** Whilst maintaining confidentiality, can you please identify any common themes in the matters that were discussed.

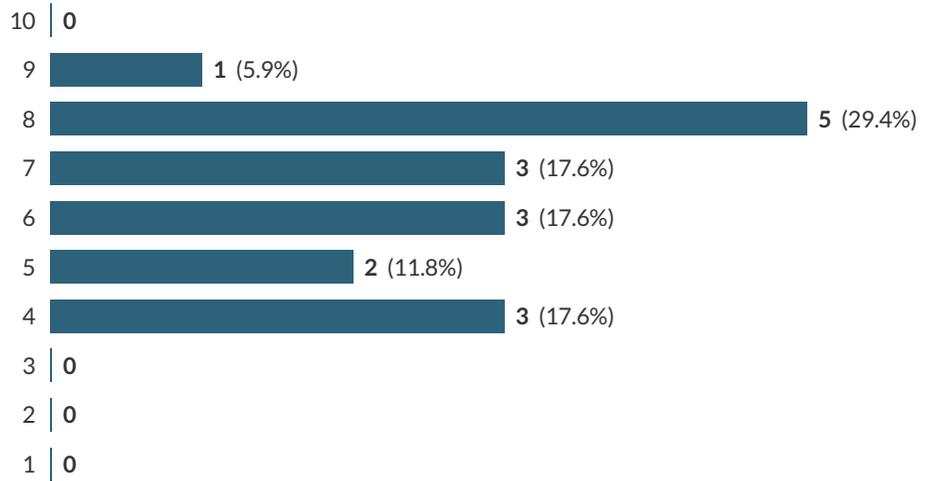
<b>Showing all 17 responses</b>	
Diversity and personal issues with work	<a href="#">210605-210598-15547224</a>
Relationships at work, staff management, dealing with perceived sexism in the workplace.	<a href="#">210605-210598-15559210</a>
Dealing with difficult managers and reorganisation of departments	<a href="#">210605-210598-15551148</a>
Communication/Guidance issues Team Relationships Managing Difficult Situations Barriers to career development	<a href="#">210605-210598-15560965</a>
Line management issues. Career/job. Staffing issues in general.	<a href="#">210605-210598-15561530</a>
Work-life balance and personal development.	<a href="#">210605-210598-15561698</a>
I think the most interesting thing was that a common theme in this (and in Aurora which I also did this year) was the fact that some academic staff seemed to be trying to deal with some very poor management practices. Seemed to me that there are issues for the University's HR not really for action learning - though it certainly helped them.	<a href="#">210605-210598-15566118</a>
Career promotion	<a href="#">210605-210598-15568508</a>
Staff management Career Management	<a href="#">210605-210598-15569983</a>
Workplaces stresses	<a href="#">210605-210598-15588928</a>
line management career progression relationships with others at work how to plan your own work	<a href="#">210605-210598-15650690</a>
Huge change across all institutions affecting us all in different ways	<a href="#">210605-210598-15730188</a>
Managing staff. Progression. Conditions of employment Role definition Dealing with confrontation	<a href="#">210605-210598-15732381</a>
workload change in structure and new responsibilities or new line management clarity of roles	<a href="#">210605-210598-15746156</a>
Achieving work-life balance Resolving on-going issues around career progression	<a href="#">210605-210598-15832861</a>
managing difficult situations making personal choices	<a href="#">210605-210598-15849115</a>
balance of work ambition or workload vs need to quality home life. Managing difficult people. at a career divergence point and how to make the right choice. how much say do we have in our work and workload.	<a href="#">210605-210598-15849053</a>

4 Please detail any ways in which the programme has enabled you to improve or develop? Where appropriate, please be as specific as possible.

Showing all 17 responses	
I am not alone in my concerns and by taking a multi perspective view helps to rationalise the issues and develop action plans	<a href="#">210605-210598-15547224</a>
Enables you to think through problems in a logical and supportive way.	<a href="#">210605-210598-15559210</a>
Encouragement to clarify my ideas on development to my superiors	<a href="#">210605-210598-15551148</a>
Listening skills, problem solving skills, developing prompting questions, learning from others their different questioning techniques to facilitate resolution strategies and approaches in others.	<a href="#">210605-210598-15560965</a>
Increased my self confidence in my own worth. Made me think differently about scenarios or issues - to try to think of other non immediate solutions	<a href="#">210605-210598-15561530</a>
I am relatively new to management and certainly suffer from imposter syndrome! Most of the issues I brought to the group were personnel management related and I gained a lot of insight and useful tools from the sessions.	<a href="#">210605-210598-15561698</a>
I didn't realise how much I knew or had experienced as a manager which could be of help. It has helped me set up a network of people I can go to with other issues and to seek out best practice at other universities.	<a href="#">210605-210598-15566118</a>
I am in contact with my group and we aim to meet regularly which makes me more confident to solve possible future issues at work.	<a href="#">210605-210598-15568508</a>
I am taking time to think though management strategies now	<a href="#">210605-210598-15569983</a>
I am more likely to seek out others to assist with issues, rather than struggle on myself.	<a href="#">210605-210598-15588928</a>
When starting the programme I was on a secondment which wasn't working out too well and as a direct result of action learning I had the courage to do something about it and returned to my substantive post.	<a href="#">210605-210598-15650690</a>
I managed to identify some specific actions that I am still working on	<a href="#">210605-210598-15730188</a>
The programme has helped me re think how I go forward within my career. It has also helped me to improve my listening skills and become a more reflective practitioner.	<a href="#">210605-210598-15732381</a>
Helped me to question my assumptions and to see my situation from a more sympathetic point of view rather than taking on too much	<a href="#">210605-210598-15746156</a>
Questions raised to other members of the group could be applied to own circumstances - so development of self-reflection skills. Questioning techniques learned can be used/modified slightly for use when coaching other staff.	<a href="#">210605-210598-15832861</a>
not sure that it really has - although I offer advice less readily!	<a href="#">210605-210598-15849115</a>
Helped me see my HEI in the context of others it is often difficult to not feel like your HEI is odd or worse off than others but actually commonalities were there with all other HEIs.	<a href="#">210605-210598-15849053</a>

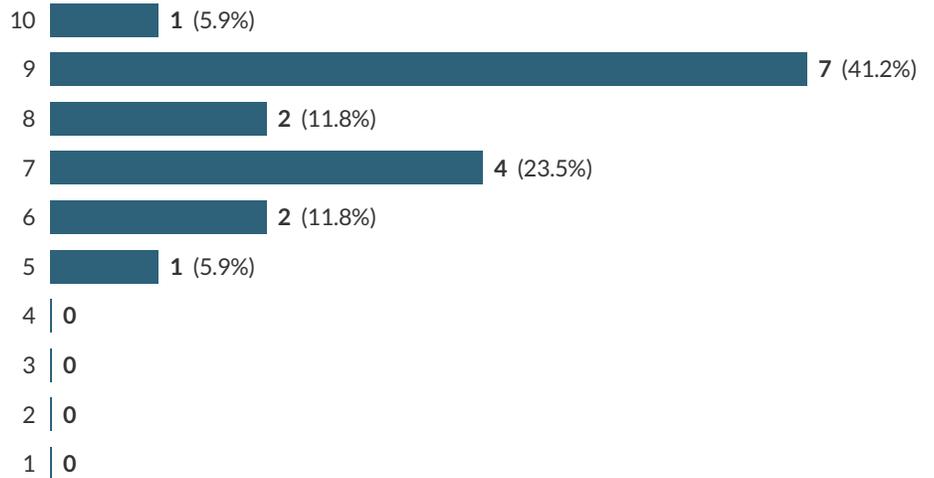
## 5 Work related: In your opinion, how confident were you before participating in the action learning sets?

5.1 Very Confident [10] vs Less Confident [1]



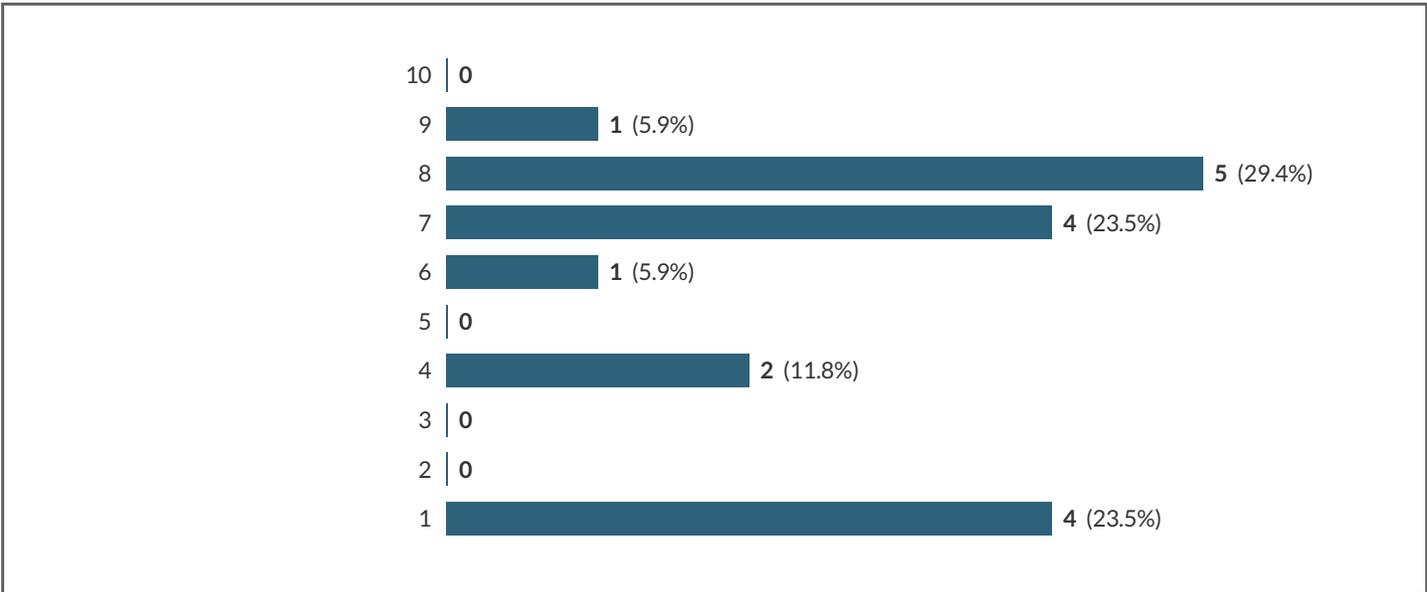
5.a Work related: In your opinion, how confident were you after participating in the action learning sets?

5.a.1 Very Confident [10] vs Less Confident [1]



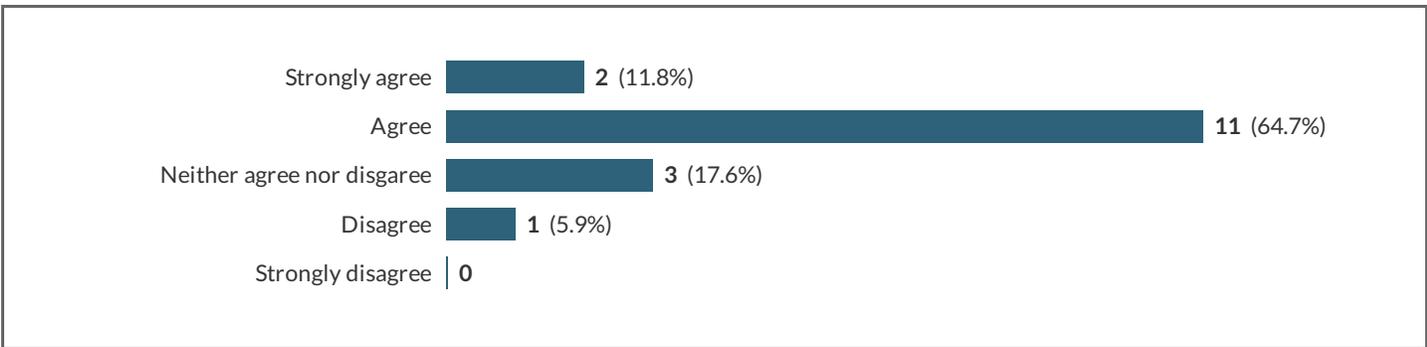
5.b On a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being low and 10 being high) in the context of your work/role, to what extent has your level of confidence increased?

5.b.1 High Confidence [10] vs Low Confidence [1]



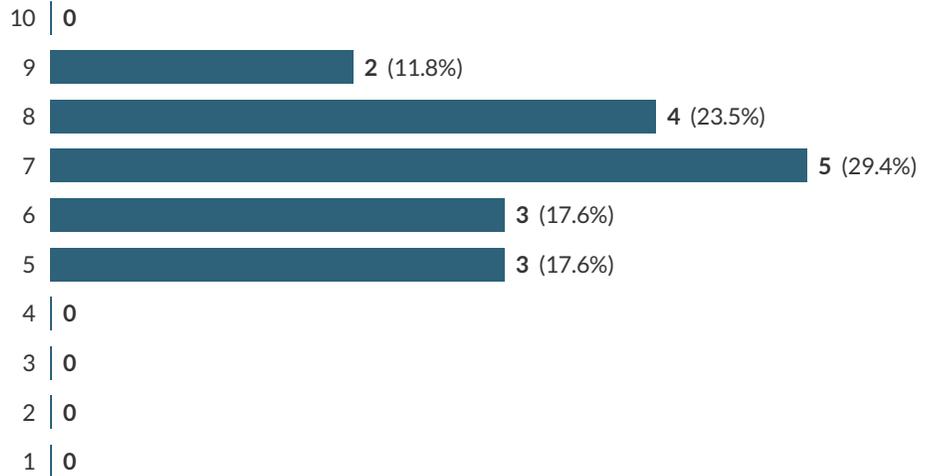
5.c To what extent do you agree that this change is as a result of taking part in the action learning pilot programme?

5.c.1 Strongly Agree vs Strongly Disagree



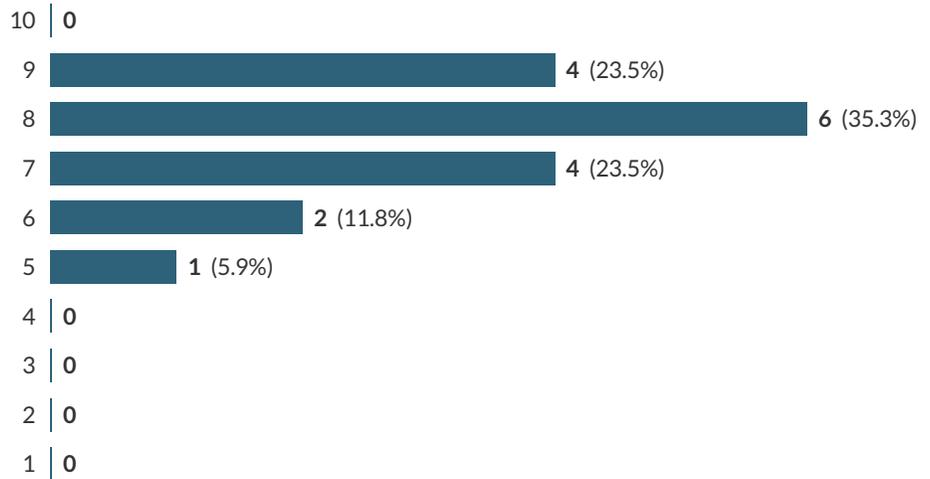
6 On a personal level: In your opinion, how confident were you before participating in the action learning sets?

6.1 Very Confident[5] vs Less Confident [1]



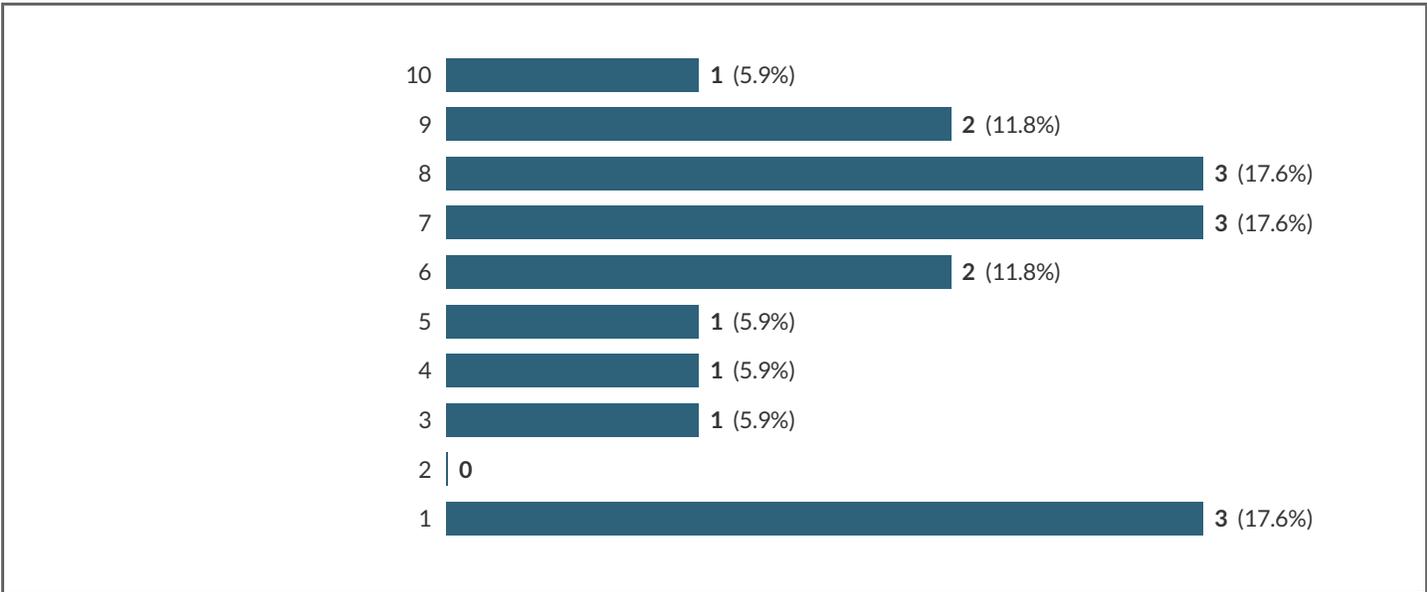
6.a On a personal level: In your opinion, how confident were you after participating in the action learning sets?

6.a.1 Very Confident [5] vs Less Confident [1]



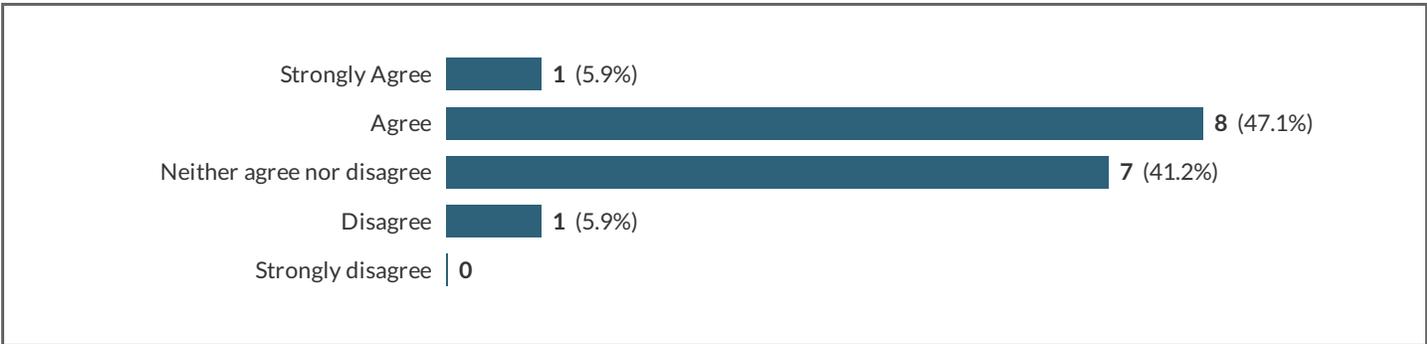
6.b On a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being low and 10 being high) on a personal level, to what extent has your confidence increased?

6.b.1 Very Confident [10] vs Less Confident [1]



6.c To what extent do you agree that this change is as a result of the action learning sets:

6.c.1 Strongly Agree vs Strongly Disagree



7 Please describe how the programme has influenced the way you see things / the way you act and/or your behaviour.

Showing all 17 responses	
It gives you a wider perspective and takes you out of the confines of your own personal work space	<a href="#">210605-210598-15547224</a>
Dealing with problems in a logical way and seeing problems from someone else's perspective.	<a href="#">210605-210598-15559210</a>
I have realised that most people have similar problems!	<a href="#">210605-210598-15551148</a>
I think you take comfort that lots of the situations you face in the workplace are not totally unique to you, and on a generic level issues around managing staff, conflict barriers to progression are recurrent themes. Observing how others are forming strategies from this approach is very revealing and examples of practical steps to addressing issues.	<a href="#">210605-210598-15560965</a>
Reassured me that others and other HEI's have similar issues. Has also reassured me that I the way I have approached issues in the past is effective	<a href="#">210605-210598-15561530</a>
It has made me more aware of my own skill set.	<a href="#">210605-210598-15561698</a>
Made me think about planning change better and more consideration of communication.	<a href="#">210605-210598-15566118</a>
It has made me more confident.	<a href="#">210605-210598-15568508</a>
I am very task focussed and now try to be more people focussed	<a href="#">210605-210598-15569983</a>
A better approach to problem solving, which reduces stress	<a href="#">210605-210598-15588928</a>
Has encouraged me to try and take an objective view of a situation, not to rush in with a rash decision and quick response, but to try ask myself a range of questions and see things from a different view.	<a href="#">210605-210598-15650690</a>
I am more aware the higher education in general is in flux so it isn't institution specific so I see things in a wider context	<a href="#">210605-210598-15730188</a>
It has improved my listening and questioning skills. I am also more reflective.	<a href="#">210605-210598-15732381</a>
helped me step outside of myself	<a href="#">210605-210598-15746156</a>
Try to step back and take a broader view around problems	<a href="#">210605-210598-15832861</a>
I am less likely to give advice and use the techniques of action learning to support others	<a href="#">210605-210598-15849115</a>
it has made me look at when I work with others and to help them find their own solutions rather than rush to offer them solutions to their issues.	<a href="#">210605-210598-15849053</a>

**8** Please provide an example of how you have, or will in the future, apply some of the learning in practice, back in your workplace?

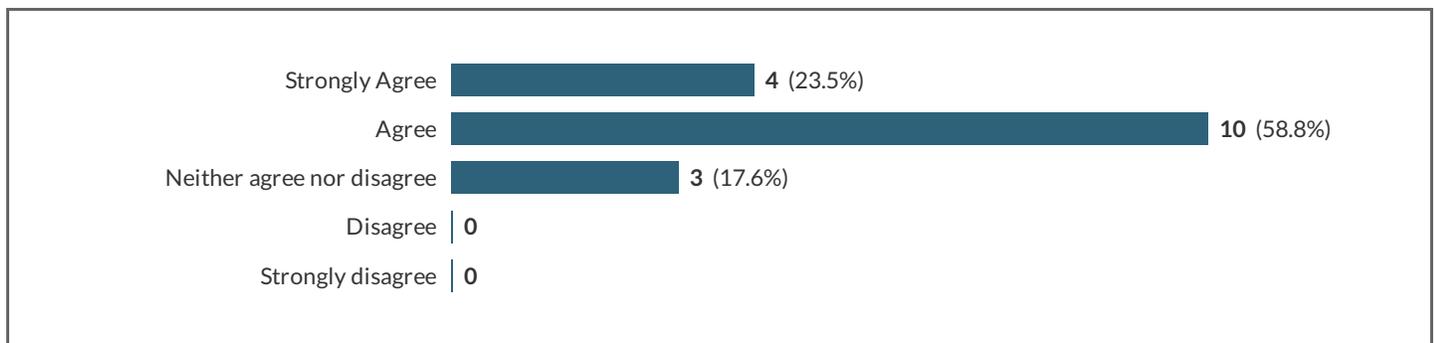
Showing all 17 responses	
Use questions rather the providing opinions to make the participant " think"	<a href="#">210605-210598-15547224</a>
Personal approach to problem solving.	<a href="#">210605-210598-15559210</a>
I will arrange regular meetings with my line manager and be clearer on my future goals	<a href="#">210605-210598-15551148</a>
The reflective aspect of action learning is really useful, so in your own workplace almost using the prompting style questions to yourself, even with tactile post it notes can start to help form approach and aspects of further consideration as you develop your own strategies for the different issues you have.	<a href="#">210605-210598-15560965</a>
Not be as hard on myself and tell myself that the way I deal with issues is effective	<a href="#">210605-210598-15561530</a>
I have already done this by making changes to my management style.	<a href="#">210605-210598-15561698</a>
As a result I have asked and got feedback for, and produced a comms plan for my staff.	<a href="#">210605-210598-15566118</a>
I can put things in perspective and look for the best solution.	<a href="#">210605-210598-15568508</a>
Asking questions to get the other person to admit where they are in the issue	<a href="#">210605-210598-15569983</a>
When faced with a problem, take a step back and review the options, rather than knee-jerk reaction	<a href="#">210605-210598-15588928</a>
definitely think of how others might see the same situation differently.	<a href="#">210605-210598-15650690</a>
I have set up a series of specific meetings, a steering group for my centre and have identified key people and groups I need to go and meet	<a href="#">210605-210598-15730188</a>
I will use the technique myself if a problem needs solving. I have used the questions to help move towards a resolution to my problem.	<a href="#">210605-210598-15732381</a>
I am more strict with others about my time and resource	<a href="#">210605-210598-15746156</a>
Will use question technique in coaching situations	<a href="#">210605-210598-15832861</a>
see above	<a href="#">210605-210598-15849115</a>
I have a new team and I plan to use ALS when working with my senior team both at peer level and the one I manage to help everyone feel more involved and more self motivated	<a href="#">210605-210598-15849053</a>

9 Have any changes you have made, been commented upon by your colleagues/peers etc? Please explain.

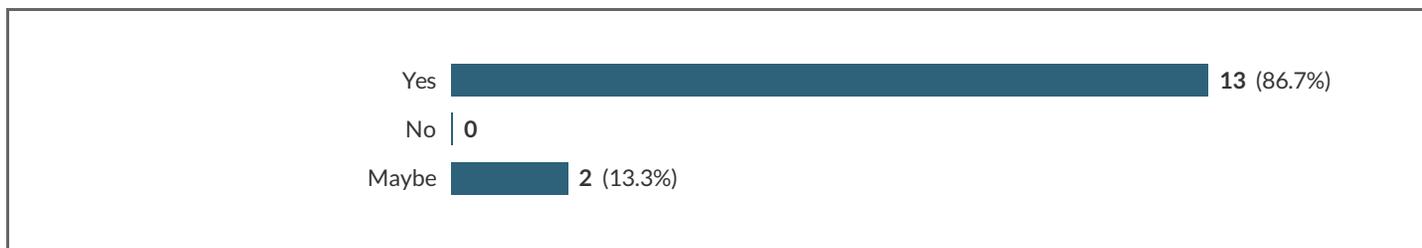
Showing all 17 responses	
my confidence makes a significant difference to my work role	210605-210598-15547224
N/A	210605-210598-15559210
no	210605-210598-15551148
Yes, by my line manager in a departmental management meeting.	210605-210598-15560965
No	210605-210598-15561530
I feel that my relationship with some of my staff has improved and they have been slightly more open to sharing issues and ideas. Slow but steady progress!	210605-210598-15561698
My line manager and my peers have noted how much more I can identify best practice here and elsewhere and have a better perspective on things. I am also managing my frustration at not getting things done/changed as a result.	210605-210598-15566118
I was promoted recently.	210605-210598-15568508
No	210605-210598-15569983
No	210605-210598-15588928
Yes, I returned to my substantive post, without giving details to colleagues some understand that I have made the right decision for me.	210605-210598-15650690
I have openly discussed my plans with colleagues and have explained that I Have been exploring these within AL	210605-210598-15730188
Not really, but then an appropriate situation has not arisen yet, where I could use my new skills.	210605-210598-15732381
no	210605-210598-15746156
Probably slight difference only and therefore no comments from colleagues	210605-210598-15832861
no	210605-210598-15849115
No	210605-210598-15849053

**10** In your work context, please rate how strongly you agree or disagree that participation in this programme has enabled you to effect positive change.

### 10.1 Strongly Agree vs Strongly Disagree



**11** Should this programme be offered as part of a general programme of staff training and development?



**11.a** If yes, to whom specifically, and what do you believe would be the benefit to the individual and the Institution?

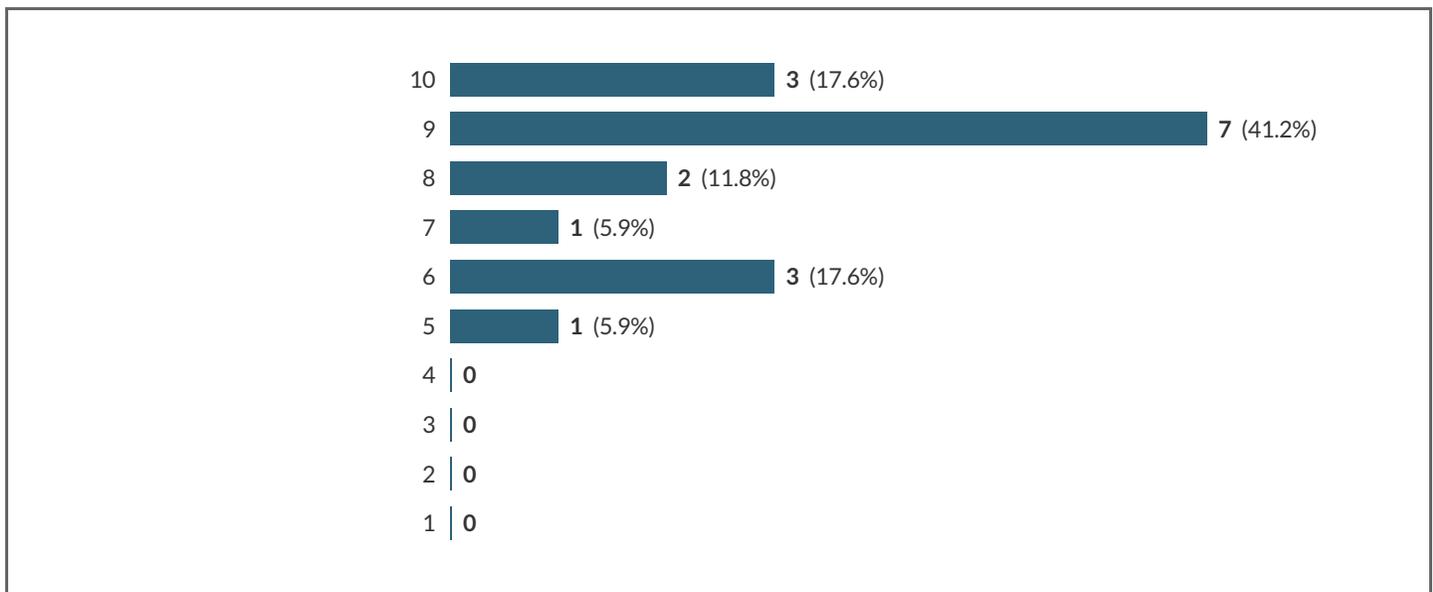
Showing all 15 responses	
Anyone who's performance is affected by confidence and conflict	<a href="#">210605-210598-15547224</a>
Managers/Supervisors	<a href="#">210605-210598-15559210</a>
Both continued professional development of the individual can only enhance their output and quality of work on behalf of the institution.	<a href="#">210605-210598-15560965</a>
Should be open to all staff, cross institutionally. Benefits are that it's not role specific so get a whole range of individuals with different roles/skills/perspectives. Opportunity to discuss issues confidentially outside of own workplace. Will encourage more self confidence and self awareness.	<a href="#">210605-210598-15561530</a>
I think anyone could benefit from action learning, as long as they were willing to engage with the process fully.	<a href="#">210605-210598-15561698</a>
Academic staff, support staff managers/supervisors	<a href="#">210605-210598-15566118</a>
Female staff	<a href="#">210605-210598-15568508</a>
New managers	<a href="#">210605-210598-15569983</a>
I think there is advantage to single-gender groups - the atmosphere was different and more supportive. The institution benefits with increased creativity and reduced stress.	<a href="#">210605-210598-15588928</a>
mall staff would benefit from this type of activity	<a href="#">210605-210598-15650690</a>
not feeling alone in your challenges. Having techniques to work though them. Working with people from outside your institution who don't know the details and don't get caught up with the detail	<a href="#">210605-210598-15730188</a>
I think anyone could benefit	<a href="#">210605-210598-15732381</a>
anyone	<a href="#">210605-210598-15746156</a>
individual	<a href="#">210605-210598-15849115</a>
Managers and team leaders, I think this is an underdeveloped and underestimated role and training like ALS would help make staff more effective in working with others in their teams.	<a href="#">210605-210598-15849053</a>

**12** Please sum up your experience and the programme in one word?

Showing all 17 responses	
Transformational	210605-210598-15547224
Excellent	210605-210598-15559210
Useful	210605-210598-15551148
Stimulating	210605-210598-15560965
Reassuring	210605-210598-15561530
Insightful	210605-210598-15561698
fantastic	210605-210598-15566118
very useful	210605-210598-15568508
enjoyable	210605-210598-15569983
Enjoyable	210605-210598-15588928
positive	210605-210598-15650690
Postive	210605-210598-15730188
Supportive	210605-210598-15732381
invigorating	210605-210598-15746156
Positive	210605-210598-15832861
satisfying	210605-210598-15849115
absorbing	210605-210598-15849053

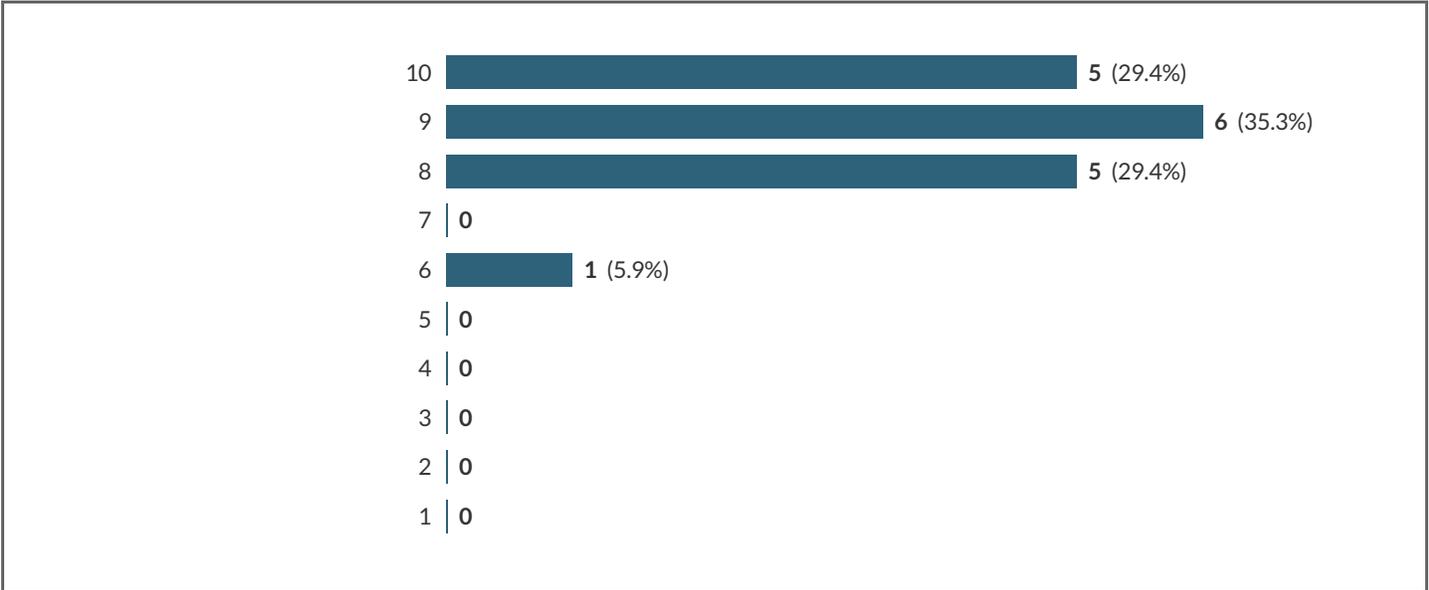
**13** The facilitator(s) planned and prepared for the sessions effectively.

**13.1** Strongly Agree vs Strongly Disagree



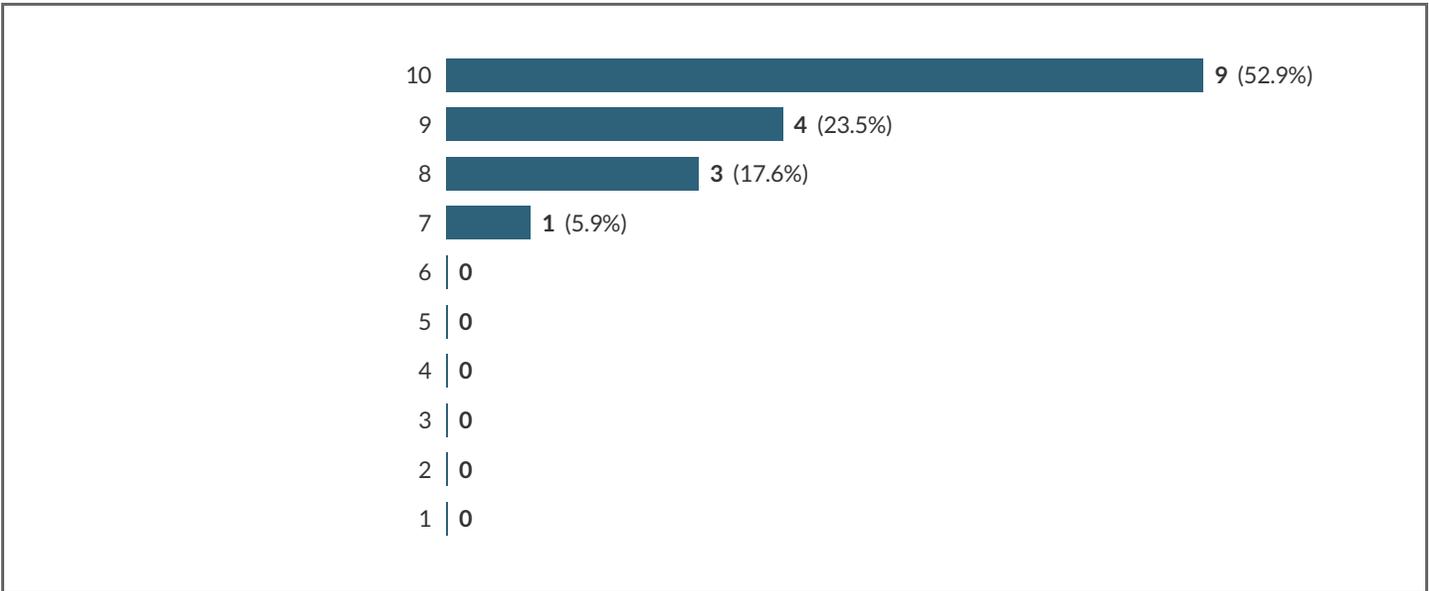
13.a The facilitator(s) developed the ground rules on how the set would work together.

13.a.1 Strongly Agree vs Strongly Disagree



13.b The facilitator(s) created and maintained a safe environment for set members to speak openly.

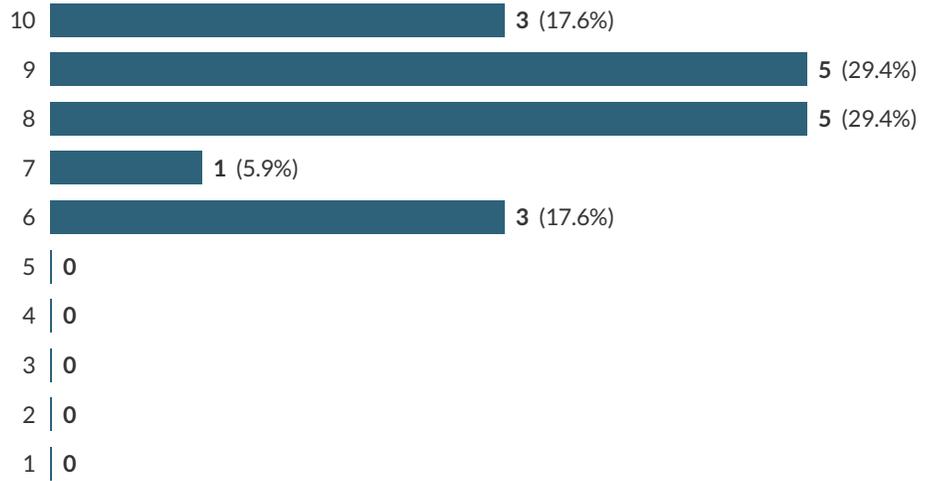
13.b.1 Strongly Agree vs Strongly Disagree



13.c The facilitator(s) developed the set members questioning, listening and reflection skills.

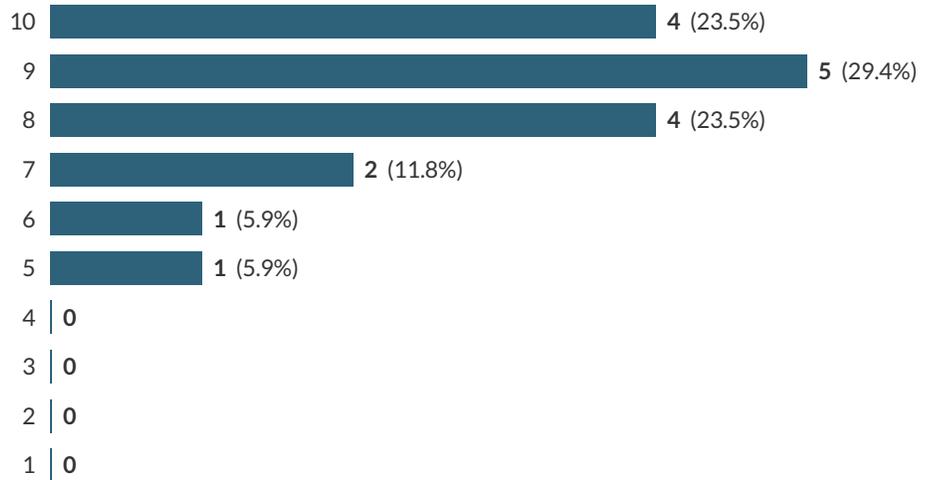
13.c.1 Strongly Agree vs Strongly Disagree





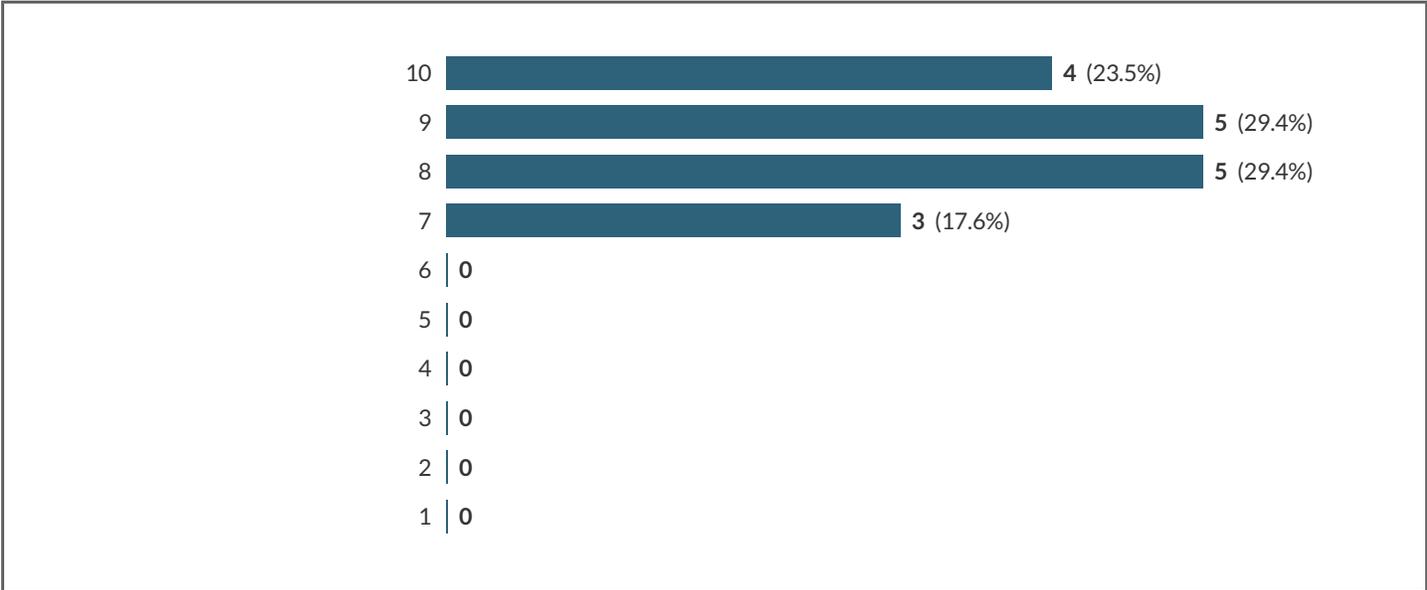
13.d The facilitator(s) ensured that the process, timings, principles of action learning and ground rules were adhered to.

13.d.1 Strongly Agree vs Strongly Disagree



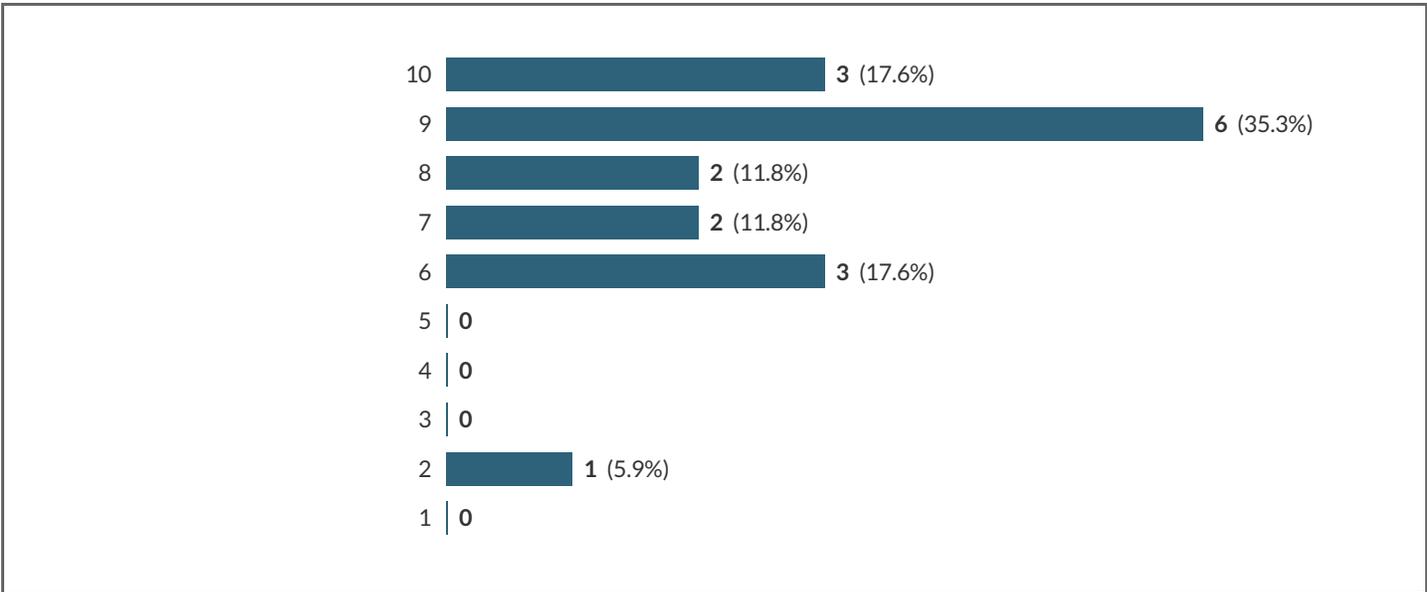
13.d.i The facilitator(s) maintained an appropriate pace during the sessions.

13.d.i.1 Strongly Agree vs Strongly Disagree



13.e The facilitator(s) encouraged the set to reflect on the solutions developed by the group.

13.e.1 Strongly Agree vs Strongly Disagree



14 Please add any others comments or recommendations relating to the method of facilitation on this programme. For example your opinion of the recommended question technique, the interchange of facilitators for sessions, etc.

Showing all 13 responses	
Safe environment for discussion and analysis	<a href="#">210605-210598-15547224</a>
All excellent	<a href="#">210605-210598-15560965</a>
May be an issue for some (not for me) having facilitators from their own institution, particularly when linked to HR	<a href="#">210605-210598-15561530</a>
Sometimes the facilitators didn't stop people from suggesting solutions rather than asking questions which weren't loaded. We didn't really, either get much chance to feed back to the next session what we had done. We should have ID 3 actions and then fed back next time to complete the loop.	<a href="#">210605-210598-15566118</a>
Questions asked were different with Aurora action learning. We were asking more specific questions which we were not allowed in Aurora.	<a href="#">210605-210598-15568508</a>
Not everyone got a chance to share their problems. The groups kept changing	<a href="#">210605-210598-15569983</a>
Having a structure was good and ground rules reinforced the 'safety' of the environment.	<a href="#">210605-210598-15588928</a>
Some facilitators were better than other. the question technique whilst very gentle using the post it method was a very powerful tool which my set found very useful and effective.	<a href="#">210605-210598-15650690</a>
Having done AL before I did not really like the post it note approach and I would have liked to have been able to have a dialogue through voicing the questions. However, the post it note approach was useful and did work	<a href="#">210605-210598-15730188</a>
It would be quite helpful to keep the same facilitator for the whole process.	<a href="#">210605-210598-15732381</a>
we liked it when they allowed us to be flexible at the end i.e. allowed us to offer suggestions after the ALS had finished or link people with colleagues	<a href="#">210605-210598-15746156</a>
We didn't have facilitators for all sessions, but this wasn't detrimental. Important to have facilitator for the first session	<a href="#">210605-210598-15832861</a>
Found the interchange difficult as we ended up showing them how we did things rather than developing skills with them as we went. They all also had very different styles..	<a href="#">210605-210598-15849053</a>

15 What skills and/or qualities do you believe are required for action learning set facilitators to be more effective?

Showing all 17 responses	
Encouraging quieter participants to contribute,	<a href="#">210605-210598-15547224</a>
They were all excellent.	<a href="#">210605-210598-15559210</a>
Show their experience and give examples of best practice	<a href="#">210605-210598-15551148</a>
I felt that our facilitators were very skilled and obviously possessed all of the relevant attributes and skills to make these sessions both positive and effective.	<a href="#">210605-210598-15560965</a>
Fully understand the concept	<a href="#">210605-210598-15561530</a>
Good understanding of process and being able to pick up the subtleties of some questioning that is not quite action learning.	<a href="#">210605-210598-15561698</a>
Challenge the way we ask questions. Get feedback from event to event.	<a href="#">210605-210598-15566118</a>
They should give more details about how questions should be.	<a href="#">210605-210598-15568508</a>
Listening and posing questions	<a href="#">210605-210598-15569983</a>
Assertiveness, flexibility, compassion	<a href="#">210605-210598-15588928</a>
Not to be afraid to make the set adhere to the rules! It is easy to allow strong personalities to start giving advice rather than question. Also experience of having been part of set themselves.	<a href="#">210605-210598-15650690</a>
understanding and thinking about what question(s) would really help the issue holder and not the ones you necessarily want to ask	<a href="#">210605-210598-15730188</a>
All the ones we had were good. They all directed the sessions but also engaged themselves with the process if they felt it was helpful.	<a href="#">210605-210598-15732381</a>
questioning and challenging plus timekeeping	<a href="#">210605-210598-15746156</a>
Effective communication skills, encouraging non-judgmental attitude	<a href="#">210605-210598-15832861</a>
understanding of where the group had been before - often spent 10 mins explaining what we had done in the past and how this had worked.	<a href="#">210605-210598-15849115</a>
not sure as new to ALS	<a href="#">210605-210598-15849053</a>

**16** Are there any other action learning questioning techniques or methods with which you are familiar and are willing to share?

Showing all 10 responses	
Reverse brainstorming	<a href="#">210605-210598-15547224</a>
Not aware of any other models - Aurora was very similar but you didn't have a facilitator from outside of the group, you actually took that role on in turns, so that was also an opportunity for personal development.	<a href="#">210605-210598-15560965</a>
No	<a href="#">210605-210598-15561530</a>
No, the method we used was the one set up by our staff development head and I love it!	<a href="#">210605-210598-15566118</a>
Aurora	<a href="#">210605-210598-15568508</a>
not experienced any others.	<a href="#">210605-210598-15650690</a>
as above, a dialogue of questions and the facilitator checking the pace and how the questions are 'landing'	<a href="#">210605-210598-15730188</a>
No sorry	<a href="#">210605-210598-15732381</a>
None	<a href="#">210605-210598-15832861</a>
no	<a href="#">210605-210598-15849053</a>

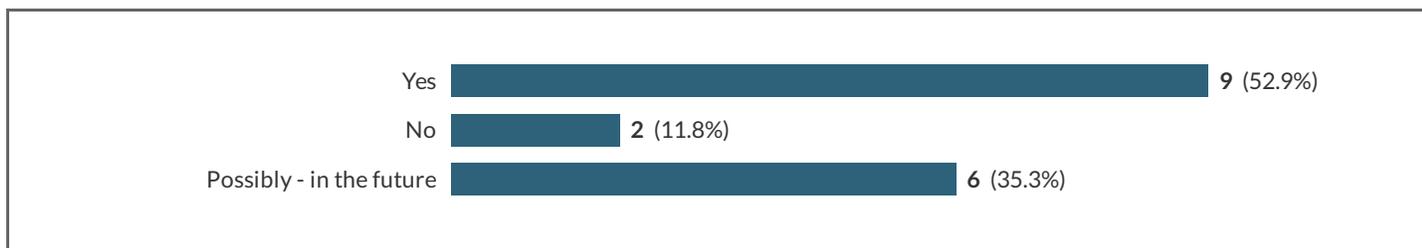
- 
- 17** Please include any comments or recommendations with regard to location, venues, catering etc where action learning set meetings were held.

Showing all 17 responses	
Timings were not consistent with parenting and school breaks	210605-210598-15547224
All the venues were good - although a few were a little far flung, near a central train station would be good, Manchester/Liverpool etc.	210605-210598-15559210
All venues reasonably easy to get to.	210605-210598-15551148
Location, venues and catering were all very good no negative comments.	210605-210598-15560965
All fine	210605-210598-15561530
Venues suited me but I know some people had to travel quite a way so perhaps they could be more geared to individual group member location.	210605-210598-15561698
All fine. Lovely to visit other Universities.	210605-210598-15566118
They all were good except one venue which was far away from the train station.	210605-210598-15568508
all fine	210605-210598-15569983
Plenty tea and biscuits helps the atmosphere. Venues were fine, university settings/city centre is ok.	210605-210598-15588928
sometimes quite difficult to get to so early as coming from a number of different HEs. Venues varied in suitability - but each set needs their own room for privacy.	210605-210598-15650690
Whilst it was interesting to go around the institutions I might have preferred it to be in one location	210605-210598-15730188
Ideally venues should have parking facilities on site.	210605-210598-15732381
none	210605-210598-15746156
Locations and hospitality provided were good. Moving forward I think that the individual groups will decide locations independently	210605-210598-15832861
venues were a bit mixed - some were less private than others and privacy was important	210605-210598-15849115
Would have been good to be able to spend a little time seeing the different HEIs rather than just having the meeting then leaving. Having the sessions moving around had no benefit as a result and just meant fairly long journeys for most concerned to use a room which could have been anywhere. clearer timings would have helped re organizing any get together for lunch within the groups, uncertain end times meant many had trains to catch.	210605-210598-15849053

18 Please provide any suggestions or improvements you feel would be beneficial for future programmes.

Showing all 11 responses	
I was very impressed with the whole aspect so would find it difficult to think of any improvements!	210605-210598-15560965
Ensure that have full sign up prior to sessions. A lot of groups had low attendance	210605-210598-15561530
See comment ref facilitator. Please keep it going, its brilliant	210605-210598-15566118
keep the groups small	210605-210598-15569983
Be clear about the future - what happens when the sessions finish? Is there an end point? How can we take this forward?	210605-210598-15588928
make clear re: refreshments and cater for special dietary requirements. Also ensure separate rooms are provided for each set otherwise too noisy.	210605-210598-15650690
none	210605-210598-15730188
None	210605-210598-15732381
none	210605-210598-15746156
Arrange meetings outside of school holidays.	210605-210598-15832861
clear timings and perhaps half an hour at the beginning or the end for staff to chat and share a bit more.  Locations linked to who is member of the group travel wise. try not to mix people from same HEI in same group.	210605-210598-15849053

19 Would you be willing to endorse the programme? If so, please complete the section below (18a) with a brief testimonial.



19.a Testimonial:

Showing all 8 responses	
It is an objective environment that concentrates on adding value with a non judgemental focus, it takes away the politics, and enables a clear view of a situation	<a href="#">210605-210598-15547224</a>
An insightful and inspiring programme.	<a href="#">210605-210598-15561698</a>
I joined the action learning sets with some experience of action learning, so I knew how useful it could be. The set of events meant that I was able to use action learning to consider some issues, get valuable independent feedback, visit some other organisations, meet other people and develop some fantastic contacts which has provided development outside the programme. I'd wholeheartedly recommend this programme. We loved it so much we've asked to set up some more meetings.	<a href="#">210605-210598-15566118</a>
My participation in the action learning set has given me problem-solving skills that have reduced the stress of the workplace. It was also a lot of fun meeting like-minded women.	<a href="#">210605-210598-15588928</a>
Action Learning proved to be a gentle but very powerful tool which helped me in both my personal and professional development and through which I made new strong friendships.	<a href="#">210605-210598-15650690</a>
This was a much welcomed and positive experience. My set are planning to continue which I think is a sign of success of the initiative	<a href="#">210605-210598-15730188</a>
Excellent programme, very supportive , a good opportunity to network and empower women to make changes.	<a href="#">210605-210598-15732381</a>
I found working with a set of people who had never met me before helped me to be entirely honest with my issues as they had no prior knowledge of me. This meant that I was able to come to better solutions than if I had worked with a set in my own institution.	<a href="#">210605-210598-15746156</a>

**20** If you have indicated your willingness to provide a case study, could you please complete the word document template attached to the survey invitation.

Showing all 17 responses	
Yes	210605-210598-15547224
N/A	210605-210598-15559210
No case study	210605-210598-15551148
Will forward in due course.	210605-210598-15560965
N/A	210605-210598-15561530
I had agreed to do a case study bnut, having read teh template, feel slightly uneasy as the issues I raised were all confidential.I woudl tehrefore like to remove my offer of completing this, I hope this is ok.	210605-210598-15561698
Not sure what is required. Jacqui Mellor	210605-210598-15566118
It was not anything attached!	210605-210598-15568508
yes	210605-210598-15569983
ok	210605-210598-15588928
Yes	210605-210598-15650690
I can't see the template	210605-210598-15730188
Yes	210605-210598-15732381
n/a	210605-210598-15746156
I wasn't able to present a problem myself and hence do not have a case study to share	210605-210598-15832861
n/a	210605-210598-15849115
Not at this time	210605-210598-15849053



## Appendix 2

Action Learning Programme

**Facilitators Survey**



# North West Cross Institutional Action Learning Programme \_ Facilitators Evaluation

Showing 6 of 6 responses

Showing **all** responses

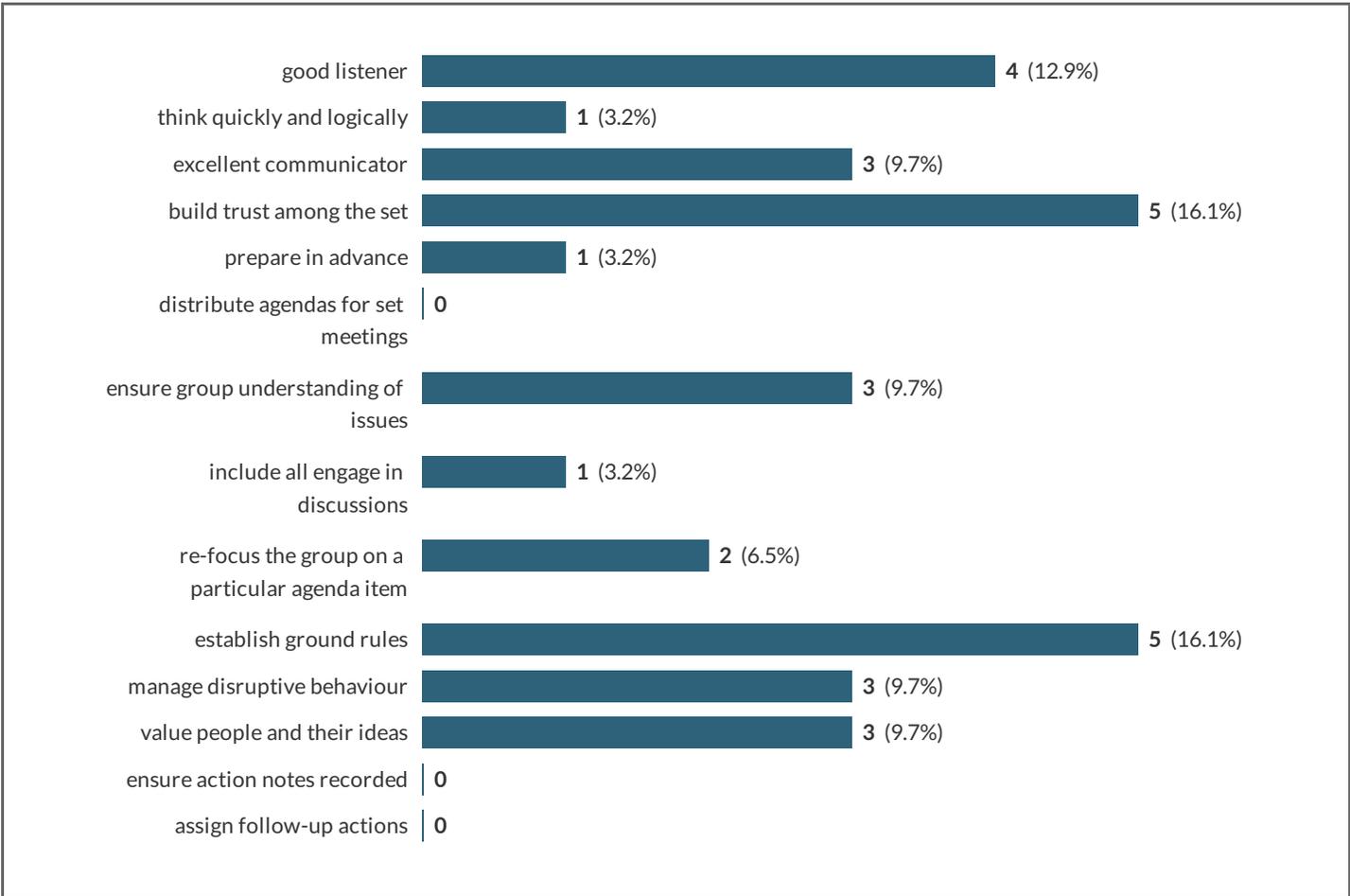
Showing **all** questions

Response rate: 66%

## 1 What motivated you to enrol as a facilitator for this action learning pilot programme?

Showing all 6 responses	
I believed that the initiative offered a unique opportunity for women in the region to network and learn together and was keen to support it as a facilitator to share the load with colleagues across other universities.	<a href="#">211098-211091-15592361</a>
Interest in Action learning	<a href="#">211098-211091-15593239</a>
To assist in the development of others in our region and to have a positive influence in sharing that development with others.	<a href="#">211098-211091-15636667</a>
I currently facilitate a number of ALS and I am the co-ordinator for Aurora so it made sense to become involved.	<a href="#">211098-211091-15743644</a>
Knowing the benefits of coaching and interested to see how this worked in a group setting - supportive questioning	<a href="#">211098-211091-15845248</a>
Needed a follow on development initiative for Aurora Participants. Feedback from Aurora cohorts was that they valued an external perspective.	<a href="#">211098-211091-15862678</a>

## 2 What would you list as the top 6 essential qualities or behaviours that a facilitator needs?



**3** During your facilitation, what one thing do you feel you did, extremely well?

Showing all 6 responses	
getting the groups to stay true to the process, i.e. open questions - not offering advice.	<a href="#">211098-211091-15592361</a>
Keep the group focused on the issue	<a href="#">211098-211091-15593239</a>
I pulled together the sets and quickly established trust. I reminded others of the agreed ground rules and set the scene for the groups well.	<a href="#">211098-211091-15636667</a>
Provided a safe space for sensitive discussions.	<a href="#">211098-211091-15743644</a>
Managed an emotional situation	<a href="#">211098-211091-15845248</a>
Managed the timing to provide opportunity for all those who wanted to bring a challenge to the group.	<a href="#">211098-211091-15862678</a>

**3.a** What one thing do you feel you should work to improve?

Showing all 6 responses	
getting the groups to explore/question the issue in more depth, so as to raise the awareness of the 'problem holder. Rather than focusing on more solution-focused questions.	<a href="#">211098-211091-15592361</a>
Being more assertive when they start to give advice rather than ask questions	<a href="#">211098-211091-15593239</a>
To be more engaged in the administration of the sets because I felt that there were opportunities to re-establish the value of the set to discourage some of the set members dropping out.	<a href="#">211098-211091-15636667</a>
Observing behaviours without evaluating.	<a href="#">211098-211091-15743644</a>
Managing disruptive members	<a href="#">211098-211091-15845248</a>
Setting ground rules to build trust and shared understanding.	<a href="#">211098-211091-15862678</a>

**4** I listened carefully. I made sure to check the group's understanding of the problem, challenge or issue.

**4.1** Almost always vs Never

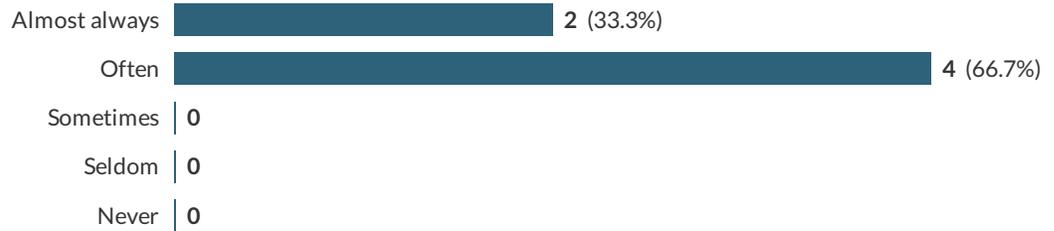


**4.a** Comments:

Showing 1 response	
I think this is integral to being a good facilitator or else what is the value in having a set, you also need to be listening at a deeper level to explore options for the individuals more effectively.	<a href="#">211098-211091-15636667</a>

**5** I ensured that open-ended questions were used to encourage discussion.

**5.1** Almost always vs Never

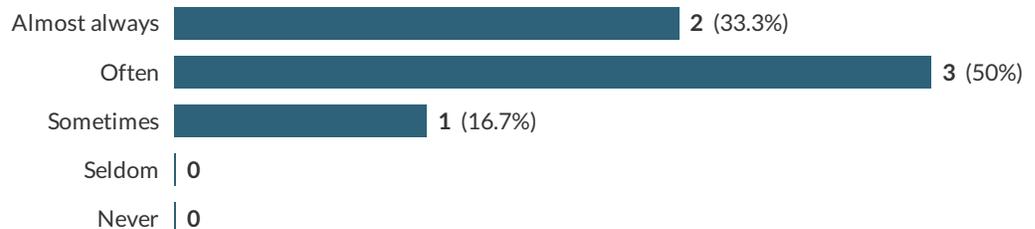


5.a Comments:

Showing all 2 responses	
It is not true action learning if we do not use the appropriate types of questions and often human nature means we revert to fact finding or advice giving. There is little individual value in this to the issue bringer. However, I do have to state that I made it clear to the group that if someone had a link, piece of advice or a contact that could positively impact on the issue bringer then they could ask permission to share that after the set had ended with the individual concerned.	<a href="#">211098-211091-15636667</a>
Group members tended to use a hybrid approach to their use of questions.	<a href="#">211098-211091-15743644</a>

6 I rewarded set members for participating by verbally acknowledging their input.

6.1 Almost always vs Never

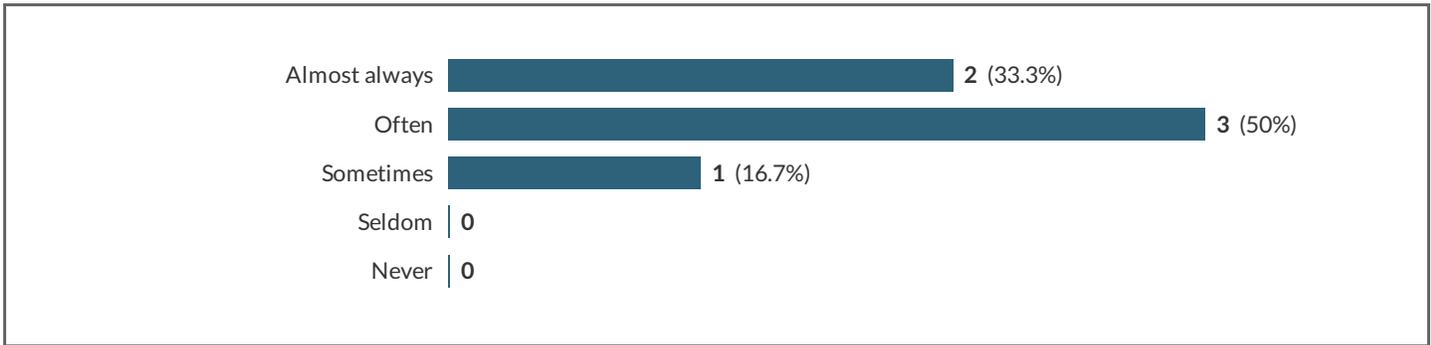


6.a Comments:

Showing all 2 responses	
This is really important and acknowledgement of the effort involved by all participants is integral	<a href="#">211098-211091-15636667</a>
could have done this more	<a href="#">211098-211091-15845248</a>

7 I re-directed the attention of the group to the presenter's problem, issue or challenge as needed, by re-stating the objectives or clarifying the purpose.

7.1 Almost always vs Never

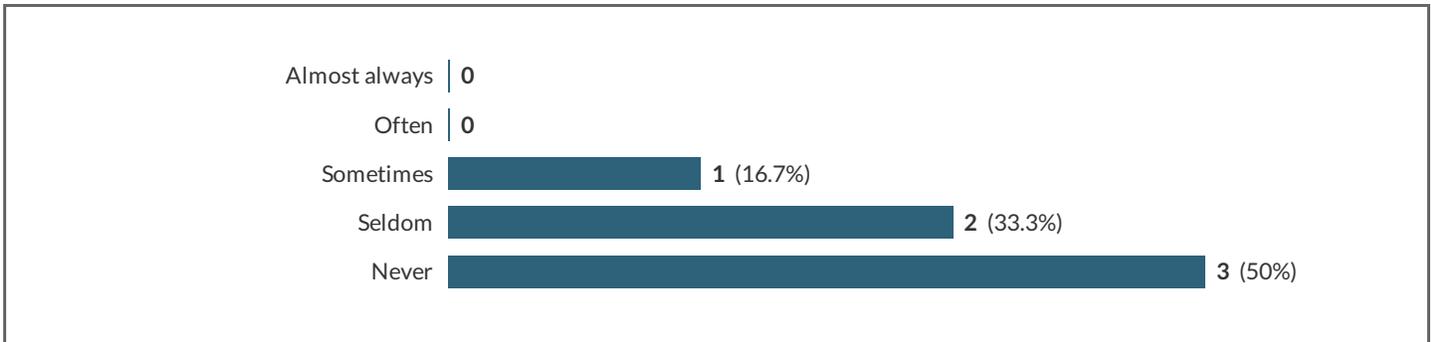


7.a Comments:

No responses

8 I had the group physically move around to maintain or heighten energy levels.

8.1 Almost always vs Never



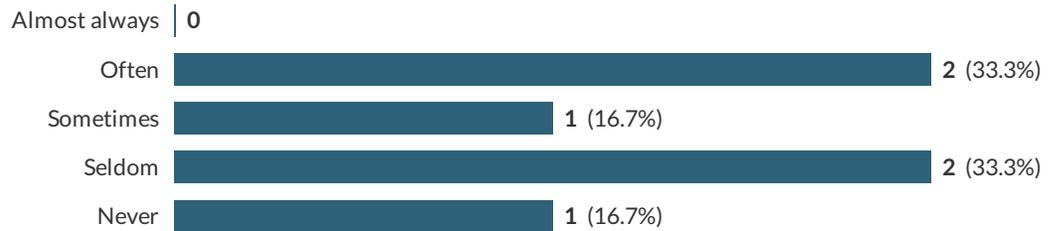
8.a Comments:

**Showing 1 response**

This has to be done when the facilitator thinks its appropriate - needs professional judgement.	<a href="#">211098-211091-15636667</a>
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9 If the group appeared tired or lethargic, I called for a break (even if one was not scheduled.)

9.1 Almost always vs Never



9.a Comments:

Showing all 2 responses	
I think this is very relevant but wasn't required in the sets that I facilitated	<a href="#">211098-211091-15592361</a>
I didn't have to do this with the Aurora group.	<a href="#">211098-211091-15743644</a>

10 Please describe the facilitation techniques that you used and details of other methods you would recommend.

Showing all 5 responses	
post-it method	<a href="#">211098-211091-15592361</a>
The post it note way of providing questions to the issue bringer was invaluable to ensure that they could go home and reflect between sessions, even if the questions weren't answered in the set, and do further work on their issue.	<a href="#">211098-211091-15636667</a>
Listening, reflecting, reframing, challenging, clarifying, summarising.	<a href="#">211098-211091-15743644</a>
very informal	<a href="#">211098-211091-15845248</a>
Used the post-it method. The set decided to ask questions as they arose. I prefer a more structured approach to enable all to become involved but am led by the set.	<a href="#">211098-211091-15862678</a>

11 Please add any others comments or recommendations relating to the method of facilitation on this programme. For example: the recommended questioning technique, the interchange of facilitators for sessions, etc.

Showing all 4 responses	
I think the post-it method worked well - it kept the sessions focused & was easy for members to understand and follow quickly.	<a href="#">211098-211091-15592361</a>
Im not sure how the change of facilitator impacted on the sets, I would be interested to see their feedback.	<a href="#">211098-211091-15743644</a>
I don't think the interchange of facilitators 'harmed' the group, if anything it meant they had to build the trust amongst themselves more. The post-it method was useful and I think once the first post-it questions were asked an opportunity for another round was useful so as to dig further into the issue	<a href="#">211098-211091-15845248</a>
Think more time could be spent on developing questioning skills of participants, or more time developing a shared understanding and agreement of the technique.	<a href="#">211098-211091-15862678</a>

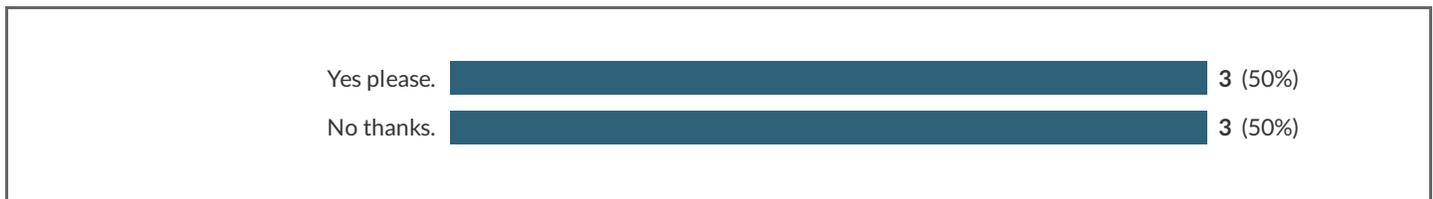
- 12 Please include any comments or recommendations with regard to location, venues, catering etc where action learning set meetings were held.

Showing all 6 responses	
I think it would have been better for 1 venue to host all sets for each meeting (i.e. not all meetings). Although, it was logistically easier for the sets to go to different venues, on occasion insufficient people turned up to enable the set to run.	<a href="#">211098-211091-15592361</a>
I did feel that it would be a benefit if all sets were held at the same location then if people failed to turn up we could re-arrange sets if needed.	<a href="#">211098-211091-15593239</a>
venues need to be carefully selected and rooms in particular need to enhance the Action Learning set ethos. Agreed times for starting the sessions are also important because of travelling and organising your diary. Its a commitment as a set member to attend each session, there was a little apathy from some set members at times.	<a href="#">211098-211091-15636667</a>
Some of my delegates would have preferred the sets to be located locally, however others enjoyed the trip out.	<a href="#">211098-211091-15743644</a>
catering is needed as people are travelling a long way in a lot of cases.	<a href="#">211098-211091-15845248</a>
Suggest hold all sets at the same venue so that non attendance does not become too much of an issue.	<a href="#">211098-211091-15862678</a>

- 13 Please provide any suggestions or improvements you feel would be beneficial for future programmes.

Showing all 4 responses	
All sets to be mixed (academic and Professional services) and the 1 location for each meeting.	<a href="#">211098-211091-15592361</a>
Clear contracting at the start of the programme to outline the commitment to learning as an individual but participating in the wider group enhances the development of others and is equally as important.	<a href="#">211098-211091-15636667</a>
Perhaps meeting more regularly so the momentum isn't lost.	<a href="#">211098-211091-15743644</a>
Do not hold action learning meetings on known holiday dates. Could consider facilitator staying with the same set throughout.	<a href="#">211098-211091-15862678</a>

**14** If you are willing to contribute a reflective journal on your experience as a facilitator on this programme please indicate below. If yes, you will be contacted in due course.



**15** Please sum up your experience of the programme in one word?

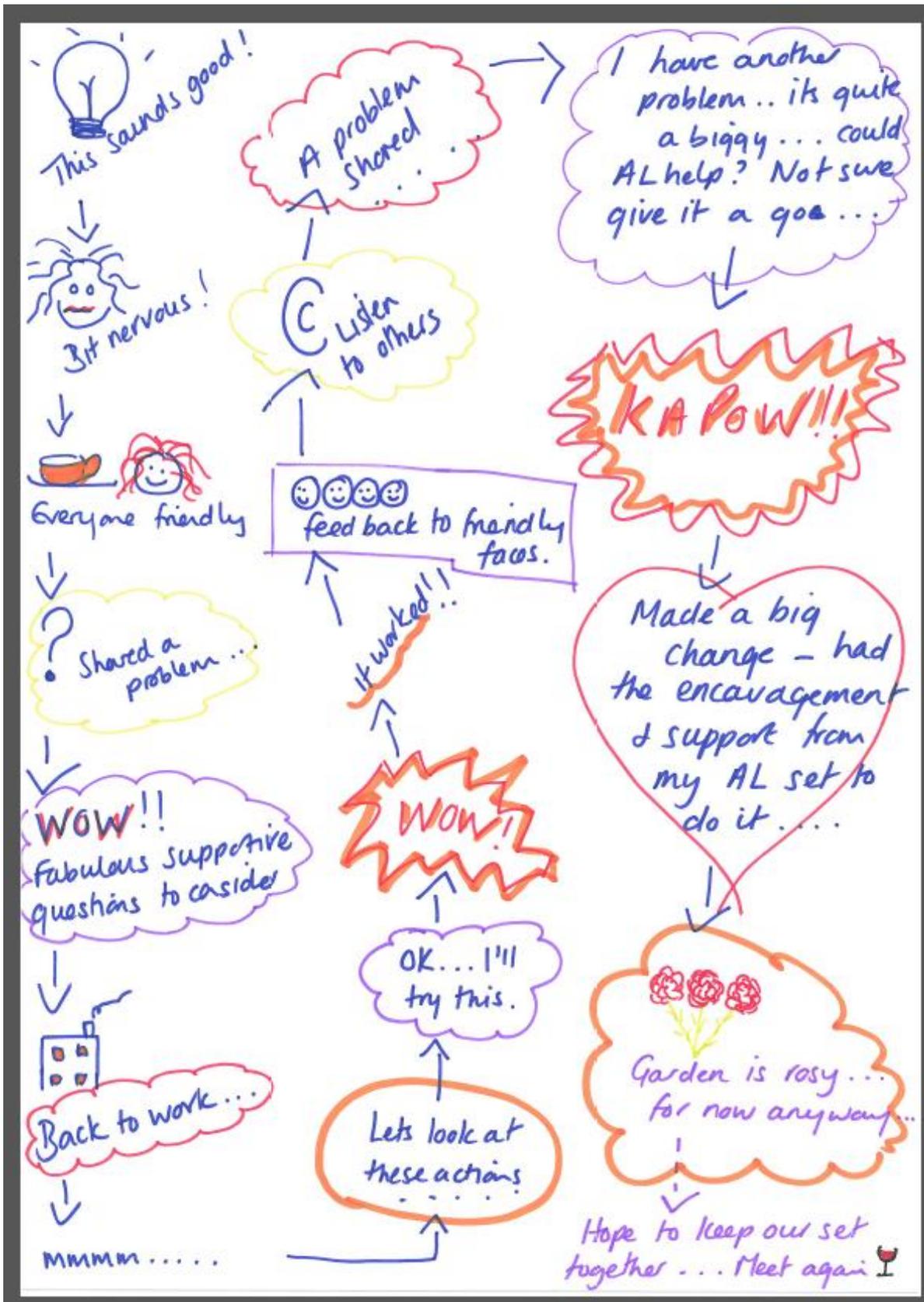
Showing all 6 responses	
Rewarding	<a href="#">211098-211091-15592361</a>
Enlightening	<a href="#">211098-211091-15593239</a>
Proud	<a href="#">211098-211091-15636667</a>
Interesting.	<a href="#">211098-211091-15743644</a>
enriching	<a href="#">211098-211091-15845248</a>
Collaborative	<a href="#">211098-211091-15862678</a>



## Appendix 3

### Action Learning Programme Survey **Participants Learning Journeys**





①

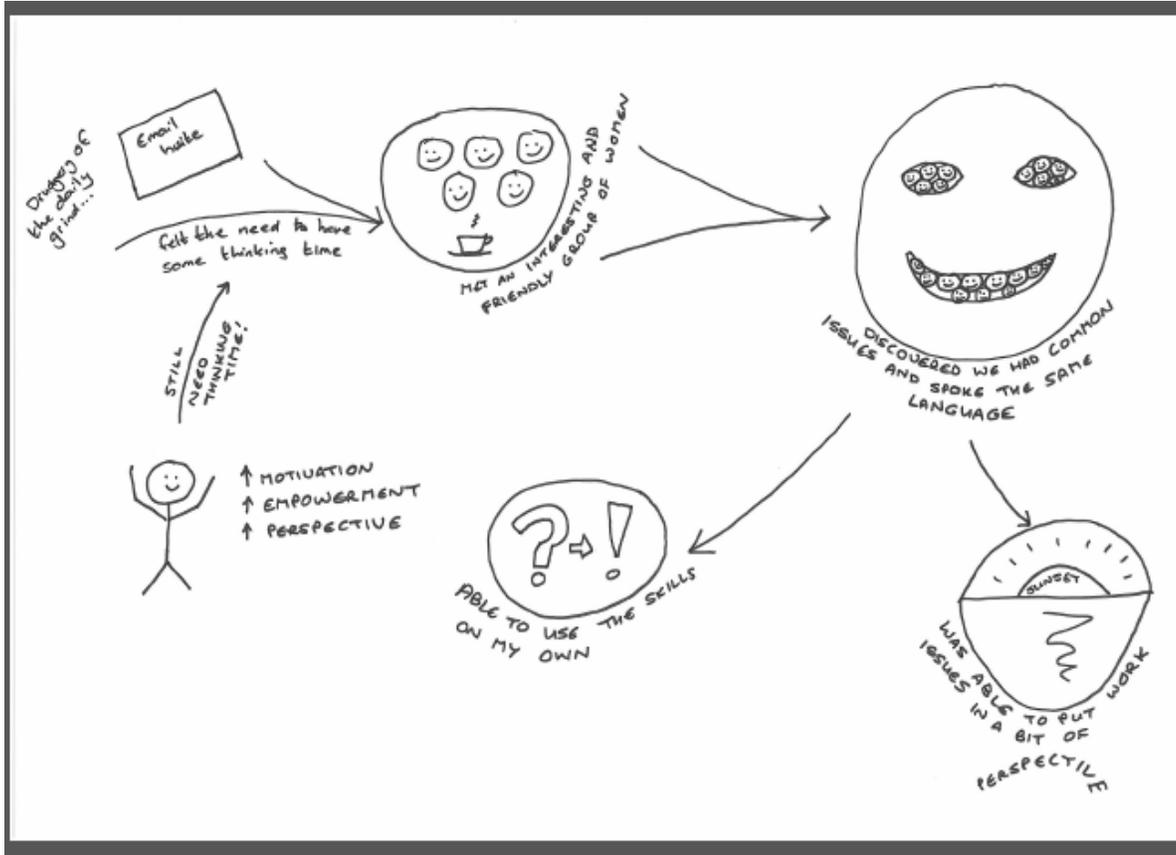
Done Action Learning in the past so knew what to expect.

Was a little nervous that my issues may seem minor and unimportant to the other members of the MS, so was pleasantly surprised when the opposite proved to be true.

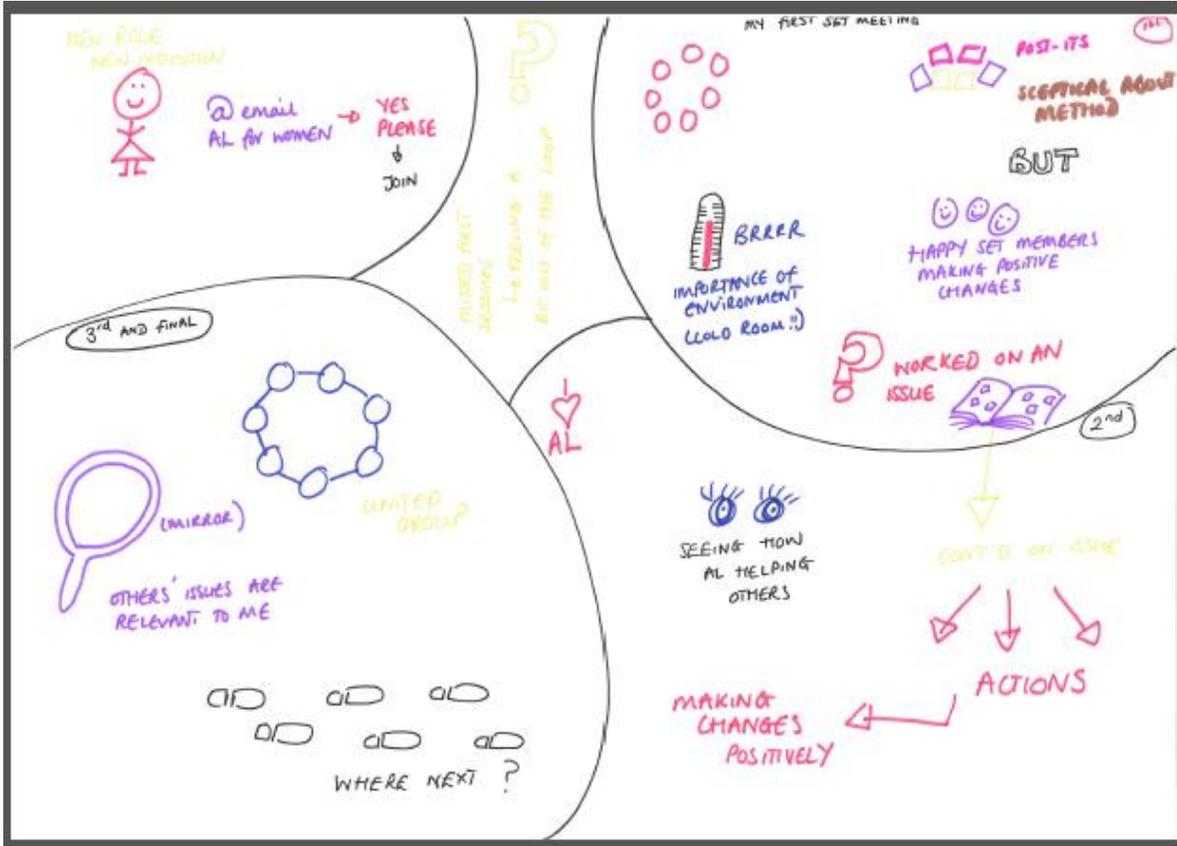
Setting the ground rules was particularly important which resulted in the group knowing that they could be listened to and that everything said was confidential - particularly important when there are a number of people from the same H&I in the same group.

Five The sessions have helped me address some problems I was experiencing, but five also learned to trust my own judgement more. It became apparent that I already knew what I needed to do just needed some re-assurance.

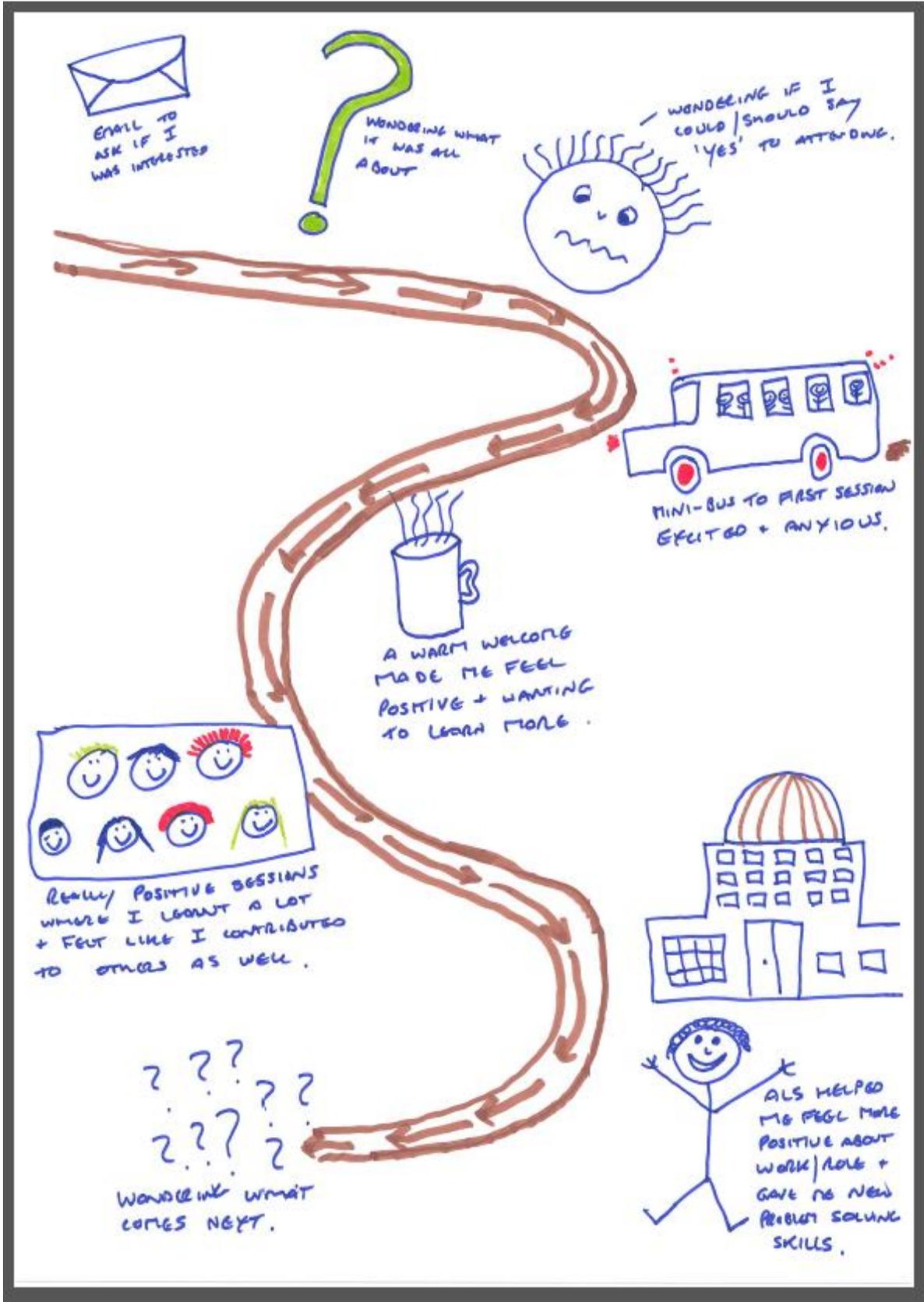
Great to meet new people and visit different H&Is. Would have liked a few more sessions. Enjoyed helping others with their issues. Non-staff developed in questioning rather than offering an opinion.



1 <b>START</b> Came to the first session looking forward to ALS-as I'd done it in my institution & found it useful, but I didn't fit into a group that existed & wanted that appear.	2	3 First ALS concerned at # participants & time available to discuss issues	4 Left meeting with some clarity over my work. It's fantastic that really helped me
5 ... time passed...	6	7 Tik	8 Tok
9 Tik	10 Tok	11	12 Next 2 meetings went well, we all got on & great to hear people's updates & how they'd moved forward
13 Email came to confirm last meeting - sad it's coming to an end	14 I had an issue which people have helped me to work through so I have something to go away with.	15 we've discussed possibly meeting again so I'm on a high.	16 Our group have worked really well together & all committed so we were lucky <b>FINISH</b>



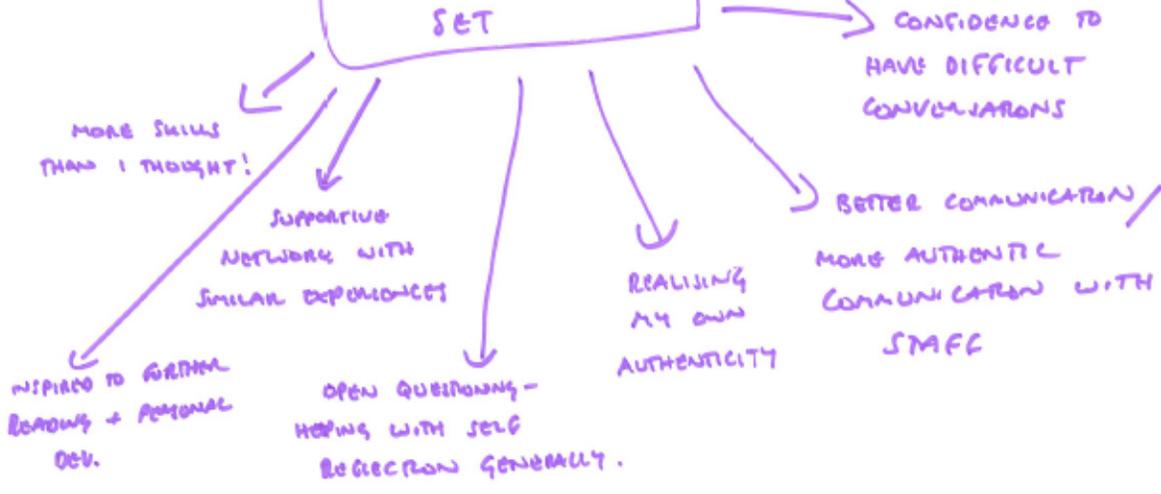
- Had done action learning on Aurora & was interested to pursue this further.
- Nervous at the start. Worried that others in same institute might impact on confidentiality. Soon learned to trust all.
- Mixed sets - found useful to get v. different perspectives on problems = v. positive
- Facilitator helped us to focus on "asking qs" & to refrain from giving advice & solutions. I have a tendency to give advice so this helped me to re-focus & to use these techniques in the work place.
- Learning-oh to "ask for help"
- Giving self permission to step back from any given "schizoid" or problem & to take time
- Made me think more carefully about how others in work place might be feeling. Tend to think "what might be behind" as a particular behaviour i.e. do others have problems that should/could be addressed by e.g. coaching approach to line management.
- Feeling empowerment. Support. Empathy.
- What do we do now without the support of an action learning set.



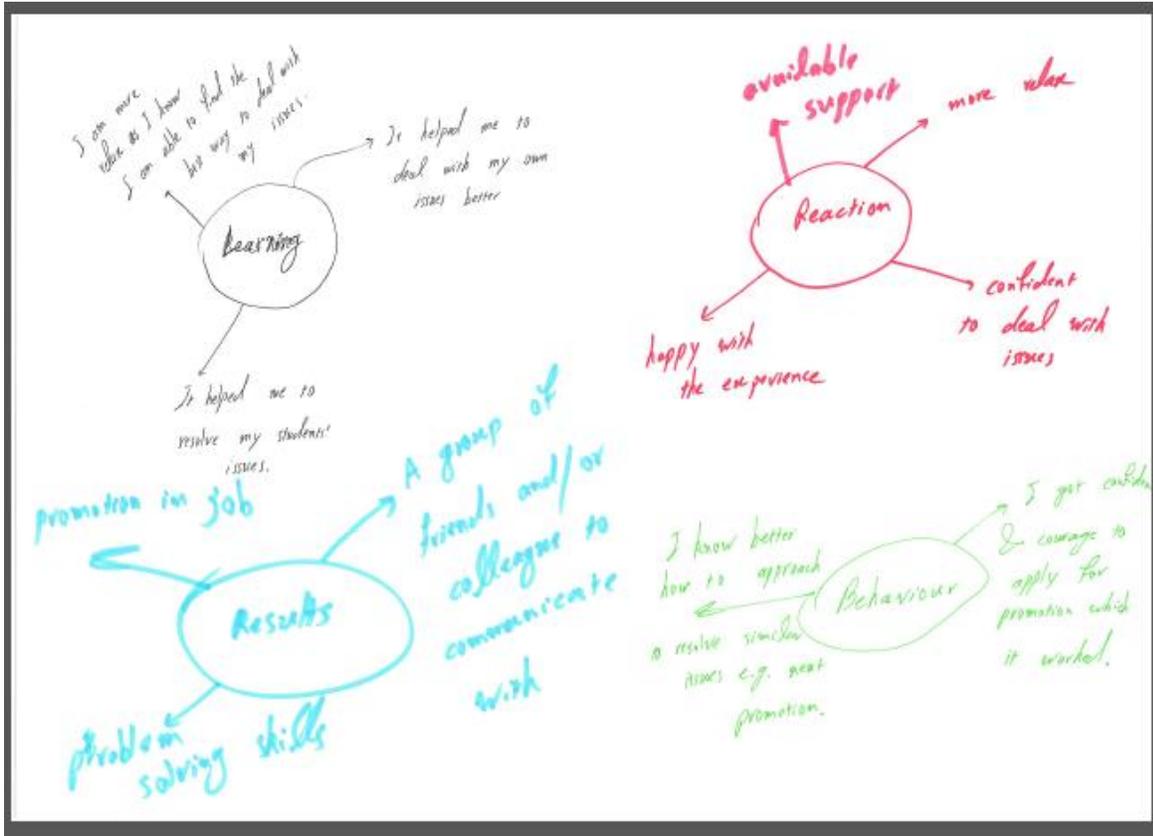
MANAGEMENT POSITION → 'IMPOSTER SYNDROME'  
 → LACKING SKILLS TO BE A MANAGER  
 → TITLE BUT NO TRAWING!



**ACTION LEARNING SET**



NOW → STILL SUFFER FROM IMPOSTER SYNDROME BUT NOW I AM NOT ALONE + IT DOES NOT STOP ME DOING MY JOB  
 → MORE AWARE OF THE SKILLS I HAVE + WHAT MAKES ME A GOOD MANAGER  
 → BETTER RELATIONSHIPS WITH MY STAFF + ALSO MY MANAGERS  
 → MORE STRATEGIC VIEW ON MY CAREER.



IF I MUST  
DO IT

PRE SESSION

SIGNED UP BECAUSE ASKED BY  
MANAGER + WAS ABOUT TO APPLY  
FOR JOB SO THOUGHT MIGHT BE 'USEFUL'  
BENEFIT — FOR MY WORK

---

GIVE IT  
A GO

FIRST SESSION

WENT TO FIRST SESSION CYNICAL  
ABOUT THE WHOLE THING + NERVOUS  
LOOKED FOR EXCUSE NOT TO GO  
BENEFIT — FOR ~~THE~~ MY COLLEAGUES AS I HAD SIGNED  
UP DIDN'T WANT TO LET THEM DOWN

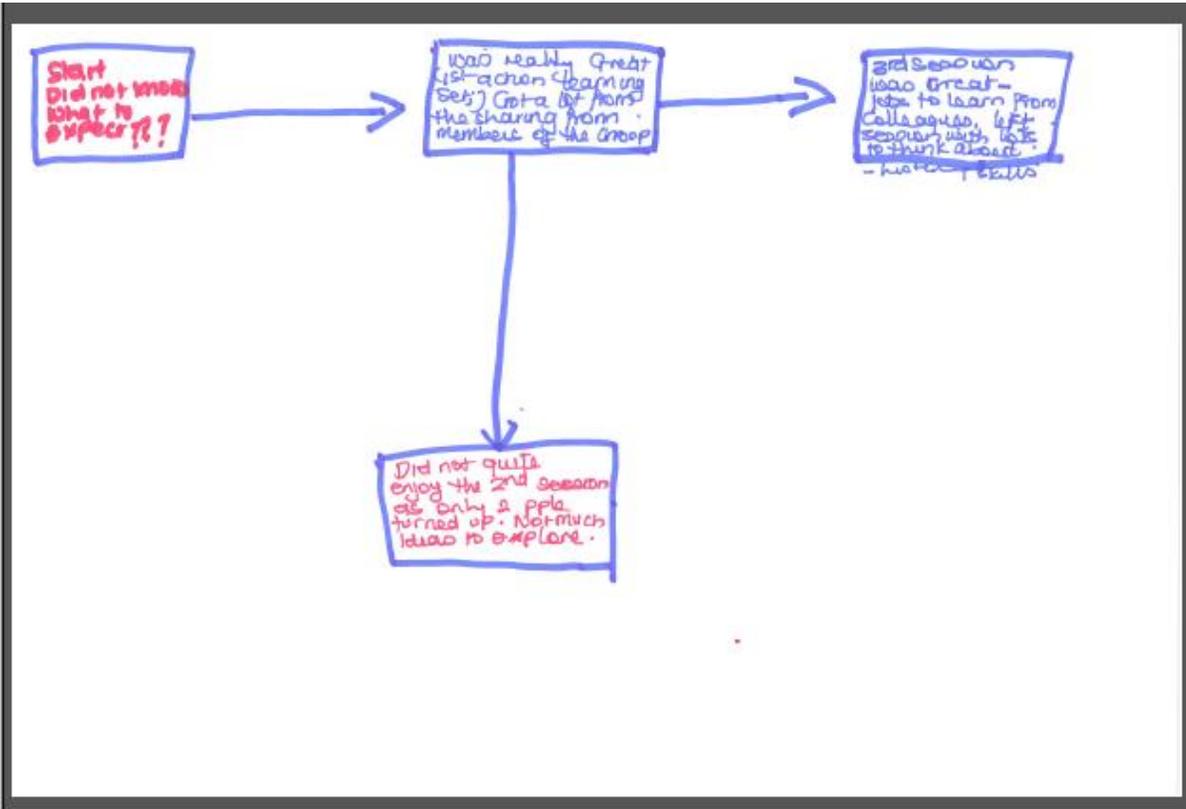
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2nd SESSION

FELT IMPORTANT TO ATTEND AND  
INTERESTED IN WHAT WAS

- Received email - initially thought - not meant for me - wouldn't be able to contribute or have anything others would wish to hear. 😞 would be for more senior people.
- Thought about the process + then thought - why not - I am wanting to attend. 😊
- Apprehensive about the process - not sure what to expect. 😞
- Little overwhelmed at first meeting until broke into smaller groups 😊
- Did not share at first meeting - happy to let back and let others 😊
- Found process difficult at first - not giving advice or suggestions 😞
- Great group - good mix and all bonded well - made such a difference 😊😊
- Shared issues at 2 meetings - very helpful - made me reflect. 😊
- learnt from other people's issues as well - ~~that~~ helped make me feel OK to be me, to do what I do and not to stress about things so much. 😊
- Came away feeling 'GO WITH THE FLOW'. 😊😊  
• Group keen to meet up again 😊😊😊

- Initially looking forward to participation
- A little concerned whether the inter-personal dynamics of the action set would work.
- Actively considered the need to adhere to the principles of the action learning set model.
- Really had not to provide answers to issues or personal experiences etc. Improved over time!
- Increased my <sup>active</sup> listening skills
- Enjoyed and developed my prompting-style questioning skills
- Enjoyed developing professional network/relationship with other colleagues
- Enjoyed visiting other institutions - was able to follow up other general areas of work with newly established professional colleagues
- Gained appreciation of issues/areas of concern that academic colleagues experience
- Enhanced confidence sharing ~~ideas~~ issues with other professionals in a supportive and non-judgemental manner/Environment
- Really interested in follow-up and hearing how colleagues have progressed with their issues, and to continue to provide support and encouragement - this is important as this demonstrates the practical and positive outputs resulting from this process and ongoing personal support
- You can learn a lot about yourself and approach/and essentially learn from others
- Have no negative experiences throughout the whole process!



- ☹️ NEEDED TO DO SOME DEVELOPMENT, THIS WAS THE MOST INTERESTING OFFER
- ☹️ 1ST MEETING - WORRIED ABOUT A NEW PROCESS, MEETING OTHERS.
- 😊 ENJOYED THE EXPERIENCE, LOVED APPROACHING ISSUES FROM A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE
- ☹️ 2ND MEETING FELT THE RESPONSES WERE POOR - PERHAPS THE ISSUES NOT RIGHT FOR THE GROUP.
- 😊 WAS ABLE TO HELP CONTACT MEET LHMU STAFF
- ☹️ MISSED MEETING DUE TO HOLIDAY TIME FOR THE DATE
- 😊 REALLY LOOKED FORWARD TO SEEING EVERYONE AGAIN
- 😊 REALISED I HAD A GOOD CONTRIBUTION TO MAKE
- 😊 LEARNT A NEW PROCESS!
- 😊 VALUED THE EXPERIENCE + LEARNING.

MANAGEMENT POSITION → 'IMPOSTER SYNDROME'  
 → LACKING SKILLS TO BE A MANAGER  
 → TITLE BUT NO TRAINING!



**ACTION LEARNING SET**

→ CONFIDENCE TO HAVE DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS

→ BETTER COMMUNICATION / MORE AUTHENTIC COMMUNICATION WITH STAFF

→ REALISING MY OWN AUTHENTICITY

→ OPEN QUESTIONING - HELPING WITH SELF REFLECTION GENERALLY.

→ SUPPORTIVE NETWORK WITH SIMILAR EXPERIENCES

→ MORE SKILLS THAN I THOUGHT!

→ INSPIRED TO FURTHER LEARNING + PERSONAL DEV.



NOW → STILL SUFFER FROM IMPOSTER SYNDROME BUT NOW I AM NOT ALONE + IT DOES NOT STOP ME DOING MY JOB

→ MORE AWARE OF THE SKILLS I HAVE + WHAT MAKES ME A GOOD MANAGER

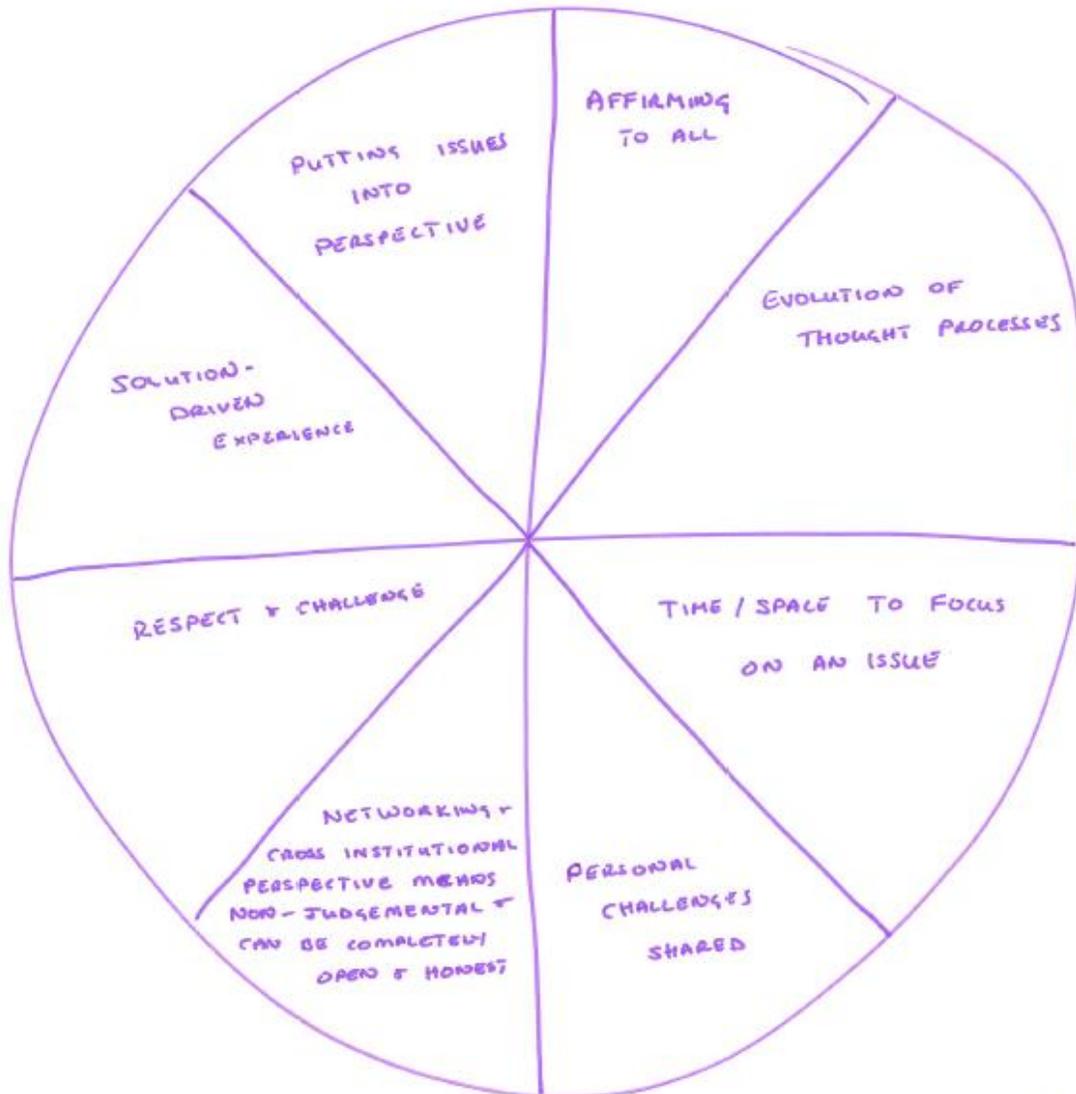
→ BETTER RELATIONSHIPS WITH MY STAFF + ALSO MY MANAGERS

→ MORE STRATEGIC VIEW ON MY CAREER.

## Action learning.

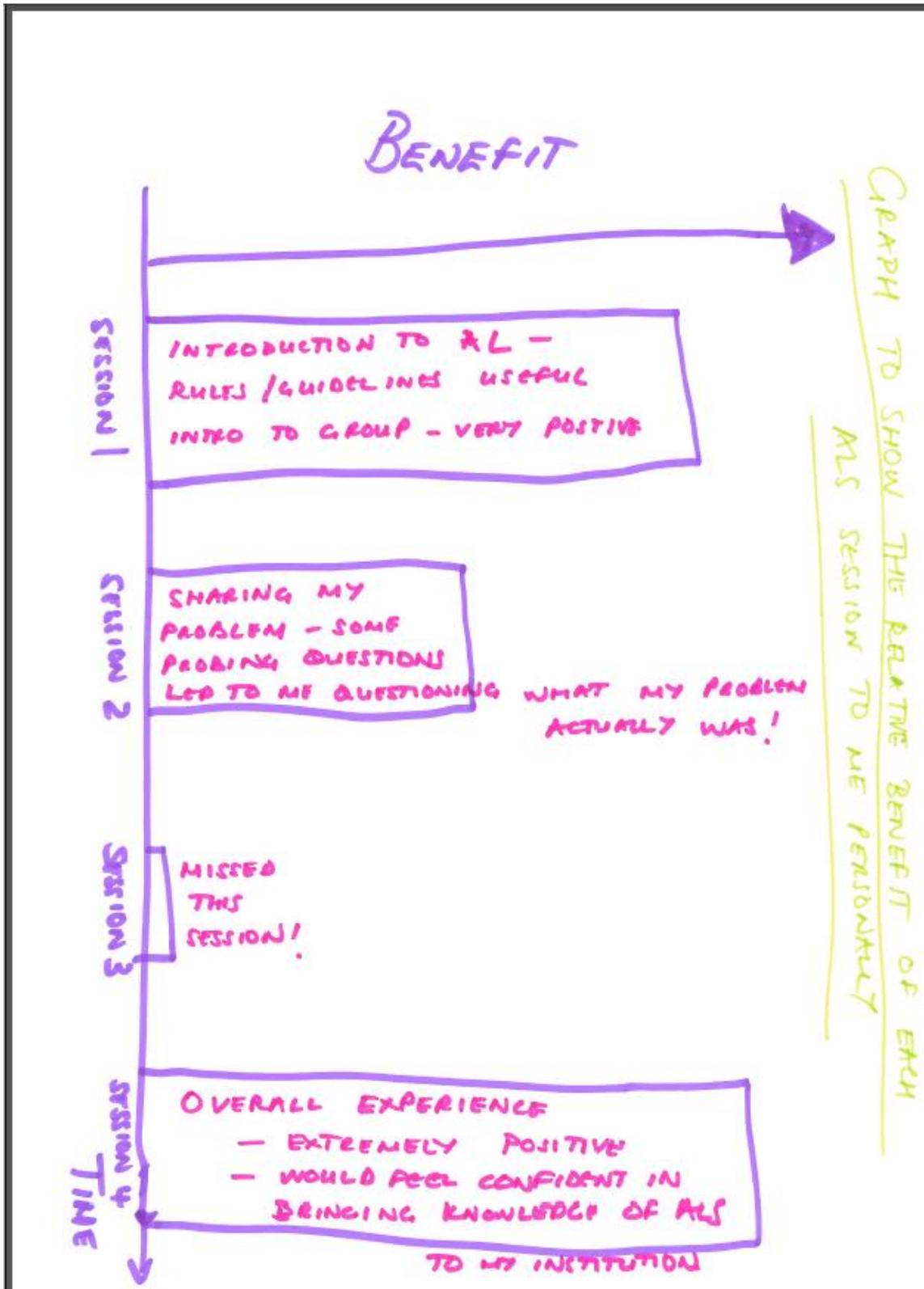
- ↳ Understanding the concept of action learning and seeing how it is put into practice.
- ↳ Being part of an action learning session where you bring a issue/problem, and the skills you develop to resolve.
- ↳ Using the ethos of action learning with the team at work. further develop the skill of action learning whilst supporting the team members.
- ↳ Results from issue/problem raised being positively resolved + shared with ALL.
- ↳ understanding that thinking, networking, discussing time away from office brings benefits.
- ↳ Team working

## A DAY IN THE LIFE OF MY ACTIVE LEARNING EXPERIENCE ...



New way of thinking to ask questions. Takes practice. How does this impact back at work?  
 Often it is hard to find time to take out of the office but value is enormous when you do.

11.69 x 16.54 in



😊 already done AL before so interested to see this work

😊 Excited to get out of own place, network, make new contacts.

😊 1st event good intro

😞 Not much time to get to know stuff about each other

😞 Need to network across everyone not just our 6

😊 Liked going to other places; interesting!

😞 Has to miss one Easter hols. Timing issue!

😊 Got some great ideas + have used them after 1st event - still being put into practice - in 1/2 way there.

😊 2nd event - great advice + followed through <sup>issue</sup> - now with others.

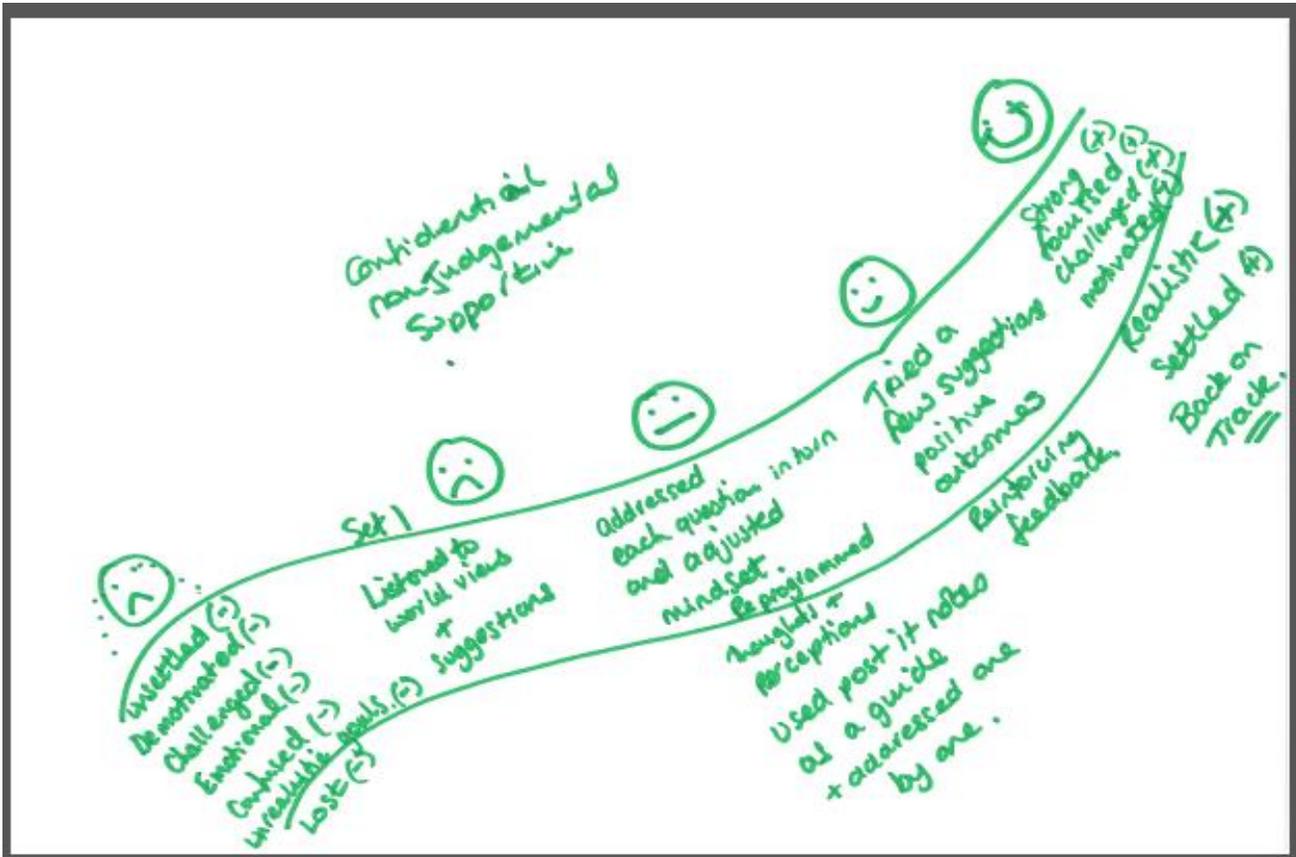
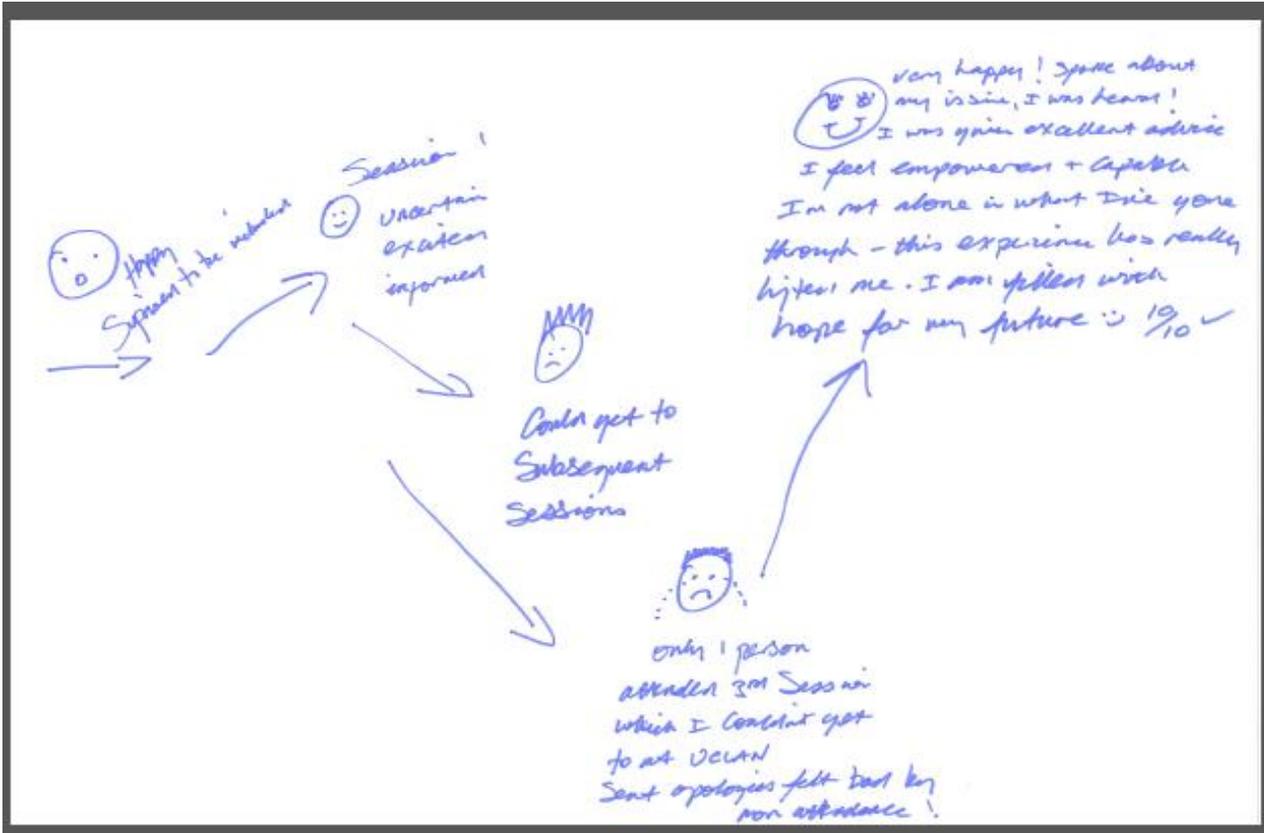
😊 Good to see everyone again

Sad not all are here. 😞

😞 Not feedback each time what done since last time

😞 Would like not to keep in touch; - what are our Staff Dev's going to do after - keep us informed!

😊 Love AL; loved it. Needed 1. time!







# Appendix 4

Action Learning Programme Survey

**Participants Post It Feedback**



# Action Learning

## *General overview; programme length*



- Mix of staff groups is very beneficial / offers different types of questions.
- Motivational aspects in supporting others to arrive at strategies / course of action.
- Action points arrived at provide practical source to address issues/progress further with issues.
- Peer support! Priceless.
- Allows you to speak/discuss helping/advising others. Can inform your issues and how to deal with them.
- Methodologies great.
- Confidence in confidentiality of issues brought to discussion.
- Supportive and encouraging learning environment – non-judgmental!
- Has helped me sort out practical issues too! New contacts (outside action learning).
- Benefit of increasing your professional networks.
- I really found the cross-institutional aspect to beneficial so questions could be without knowledge.
- Excellent format for networking and sharing experience.
- Action learning was a very positive and powerful experience which I have benefited from both personally and professionally.



- I personally would like at the end of the 'action learning' bit, it would be useful to be able to have some 'advice' time.
- Review time end of each session would be good.
- Each University hold event at end- review own staff group?
- Need to ensure what we will do at end each issued and feedback next time – makes you do something.
- Did not feel that excluding men was a benefit. Prefer gender parity would have liked male perspective.
- Mixed gender groups would be positive.
- Not sure it needs to be just women.
- I was skeptical of the post-it note process at first (compared to my experience of AL) – however, it has been useful (the technique) although I still feel that some dialogue 'through' the issue was missing (that's both 'smiley & sad'.
- Would have liked series of 6 meetings rather than 4.
- Only 4? Too few? Feel we haven't spent enough time together.
- Would have liked more meetings, possibly 6.

# Action Learning cont'd...

## *General overview; programme length*



- I have learnt a lot and now think differently about issues that arise at work and try to employ action learning techniques to those issues.
- Feels like a luxury to step out of work, to work on work issues. It's important.
- Questions on post-its. Very good technique. Useful to take away and reflect.
- Reinforced the need to ask questions rather than give advice.
- Thoroughly enjoyed the process – helped by being in such a good group.
- Positive experience. Valued the Cross Institutional approach.
- I found the group was very welcoming and affirming.
- I found using post-its useful issue raiser – have them to take away. Group helps you to remember you question.
- Working across institutions with different perspectives was brilliant.
- Good to have thinking space away from work.
- The discipline of facilitations is important.
- The process takes a degree of discipline at first but very valuable.
- Really good to get to know people from other universities and to find out we have similar issues and problems.
- I thought I was a self-solver but have been pleasantly surprised how much I have actually benefitted from it.
- Was good having attendance at nearly all sessions by all participants



# Facilitation



- It was good to have the facilitator especially at the beginning to keep within boundaries – avoid suggestions and answers and provide questions.
- Facilitator very important. Did Aurora and our action learning set didn't have facilitator and didn't get same out of it.
- Role of facilitator in helping he set frame questions, keep to time.
- Good to have different facilitator to each session.
- Really nice - not invasive but helpful in all cases.
- Facilitation definitely needed to avoid tendency to 'give advice' or share own experience.
- I think you do need facilitators to keep you on track. I doubt it would work without them – especially if not done it before.
- Facilitators were generally very good and good at keeping the group on track.
- Facilitators were great and really supportive certainly needed at the beginning.
- Facilitators very critical at outset to ensure flow/timelines of issue sharing.
- I think once we were experienced with the process, we didn't need the facilitator.
- Action Learning set well facilitated.



- Facilitator approaches varied – some significant guidance, others very little. Perhaps more guidance on their approach? Standardise?
- Would have liked to try different methods.
- Better to have facilitator for first session only rest- self facilitate.
- Would have liked consistency of facilitator.
- Not sure locations being where facilitator based always helpful.
- Approaches by facilitators varied.
- Not stopped from offering advice/should be just asking questions
- Facilitator and time keeping kept sessions from running away.
- Struggled with learning how to question rather than advice – the facilitator helped.
- Fear of being with people from our own institution – learned about confidentiality.
- Felt strange having a facilitator from my university that I know quite well so felt difficult to talk in front of.
- Whether we asked the right questions or not, I don't know. I would like the facilitator to give feedback on questions asked by the group members.

# Programme Administration

## *Location; timings; training facilities*



- Very good communication regarding emails, dates and locations.
- Enjoyed visiting different universities.
- Not institutionally based was key to avoid politics, keep anonymity and get to heart of the issues.
- Like both: Admin/Academic separate and both groups. Let us choose?
- Well organised, plenty of notice. Haven't used the blog but sounds like a good idea to share outside of meeting.
- The venues were very good. Close to everyone and easy to find.
- Liked moving around.
- Email communication content and frequency was about right.
- My institution supported by attendance.
- Enjoyed meeting people from other HEIs.
- Admin: Excellent, informative and clear.
- Build both: In-Uni and cross-Uni both useful.
- Very well organised. Good clear structure. Good resources.
- Email communication was good.
- Prog Admin: Well organised; professional; clear aims and objectives set out.



- Comms: Not clear how and when info would come for each session.
- Programme length good for the work so far but what are the next steps.
- Would have been useful to have more detail prior to first session on AL – provided with some but not much.
- Timing and practicalities for members.
- Better not to arrange during half term [school] holidays.
- Sometimes felt there could have been more time allocated – notably the very first session.
- Travel distance sometimes tricky. Direction could be clearer.
- Action learning scheduled for half term will not work because of caring responsibilities.
- Timing of meetings and perhaps could carry on later 23pm
- Dates – could be better timed: one Easter/ one half term – school holidays.
- Directions and information to different locations could have been clearer (for some) and provided a bit more information.
- Better to have 4 different locations rather than 3 in one place.

# Programme Administration

## *Location; timings; training facilities*



- Received notifications in good time for all the sessions.
- Cross Institutional location was good but a bit challenging.
- Prog Admin: worked well – contact by email – fine.
- Half-day sessions work. (Depending on travel). Are much less of an issue that full day in terms of time out of the office.
- Range of venues was good – easy to access.
- Not always easy to make meetings due to workload. Look at academic timetable further?
- NWAL website was very useful.
- Communications for each session efficient.
- Good consideration of geographic locations of meetings.
- Travel to difference venues – fine for me – good to visit different locations – feel I cans peak more freely away from workplace.



- For this programme, I would have liked more sessions and a little more frequency. I feel the group is just starting to gel.
- Consider locations of the group members when setting meeting locations.
- Practical point: a calendar invitation would put this firmly in people's diaries.
-

# Learning

## *What did you learn; not learn; expect to learn...*



- Cross Institutions brings different perspectives
- Increased confidence in constructing prompting questions.
- I have learnt to listen and reflect on what is being said.
- That some many women encounter similar issues.
- I have found the group very supportive and helpful. It has helped give me direction.
- I felt I learnt a lot by listening to others views and witnessing how they would approach an issue and address it.
- List of questions rally useful (like Aurora).
- The neutrality allows critical discussion/prompting to take place in a positive manner. Doesn't feel personal.
- Gives you confidence in your experience and skills.
- I solved my problem during the course of the programme.
- I learned to be more flexible in my thinking and problem solving.
- I learned that I experience common issues – reduces isolation (i.e. we've all got the same problems!)



- Post-its method can restrict learning opportunities.
- Not important to learning that the group was all female. Should include males.

# Learning - cont'd...

## *What did you learn; not learn; expect to learn...*



- Able to apply action learning thinking on my own, back at work i.e. approach own problems better.
- I learned to be strong (again) and welcome realistic perspectives (world view).
- So helpful – provides an essential service – not until you discuss your issues do you realise how much help you need.
- I have made some new friends and caught up with some old ones
- Have learnt from others, approaches to issues that might happen in the future to me.
- Learnt not to be as hard on myself – am only human – ok to have doubts about things.
- Learnt to listen = to rephrase thoughts to get others to think about solutions.
- No issue is unique! We all share them.
- The type of questioning is a skill which is challenging. – Evaluation of how this skill is further employed back in the workplace. Impact?
- I have found that I want to suggest rather than question as a natural instinct. I have learnt to control the urge to suggest the 'answer' to the problem.



# Learning - cont'd...

*What did you learn; not learn; expect to learn...*



- Invaluable – what a great experience! Having discussed issues and obtaining helpful, practical advice – a huge weight has been lifted from me.
- I feel enlightened, empowered and informed by this experience.
- I've clarified what I need to do in my role.
- Really enjoyed hearing about other institution issues (reassuring that we are not unique in our problems).
- Learnt I have a lot to offer. I had not realised I was good at resolving problems.
- Learning from bringing up my issues and also when other people bring up their issues was really good.
- Action Learning: learnt so much about myself.
- Have tried to adopt this approach when facing other problems/issues.



# What could have been done differently?

---

## *For design of future programmes*

- People must commit to all meetings as it works so well when you meet up.
- You could combine action learning with '6 Thinking Hats' for rounded suggestions.
- Two meetings were in school holidays so I couldn't make the sessions.
- How to deal with those groups which don't function e.g. lacks of attendance e.g. integrate people into other groups?
- It was too short time between the sessions. It could work better if the sessions spread out more during the time period.
- Even though I enjoyed my time on the programme, but was wondering why I was selected to attend?



# Improvements

---

## *What could be done to improve the experience?*

- Venues should have parking facilities rather than having to park in public car-parks
- Would have liked a few more sessions.
- Want our Staff Development to set up Admin AL Support group(s). Now!
- Mixed gender groups.
- Participants need to commit to it.
- For it to work effectively – group needs to commit to all dates.
- Mix groups – so you meet new people.
- Use in-house Staff Development to develop action learning – in your in house management programmes.
- Admin staff don't know what AL is – academics more likely to know – how to sell it? Tie is a premium – always too busy.
- Integrate meetings more into academic timetables e.g. avoid exam / marking time.
- Set up email list we can ask for help not blog, more private).
- Need contact list at beginning including: name; email; title; phone; dept/service – for future contact.
- Set up Women's network using action learning so they are not just a chat room!
- Need time and space built in to get to know each other – ask to bring stuff to first session.
- Timing difficult for those with childcare commitments (Easter hols and half term).
- If sessions had continued for longer – could have done sessions without a facilitator.
- Would like a re-visit' or reunion session.
- Some sort of 'bonding' activity in the first session.





## Appendix 5

Action Learning Programme Survey

### **Participants Case Studies**



# North West Cross Institutional Action Learning Project

Name: Katie Greenwood

Partner Institution: University of Huddersfield

## Delegate Profile

*I am a Pharmacist with a full time role as a Senior Lecturer in Pharmacy Practice. I have held this position since September 2014. Previously I was a Lecturer in Pharmacy Practice at the University of Central Lancashire. I am also employed as a Specialist Advisor Pharmacist by the Care Quality Commission.*

## Problem / Challenge

*What was the problem, issue or concern?*

**My issue was that as part of my contract I have to undertake a PhD. Although I was aware of this commitment when I took the role I was hoping that as this is University requirement that there would be protected time within my working week in order to undertake the required study, in fact this was what I was led to believe at interview. Officially we are given one day a week as a 'research day' however in reality as my discipline is very teaching heavy I rarely get even a half day. This was discussed at my appraisal and it was decided that I should work from home one day a week to ensure that I received the time, however due to timetabling of classes this was not always possible.**

## Solution

*How did you/and the programme solve the problem?*

The programme provided me with several questions to help give me direction when trying to resolve my problem.

Had I thought about changing jobs?

Had I thought about going part time?

Had I thought choosing a different topic for my PhD?

Had I thought about discussing the issue with my line manager?

I reflected and considered all these questions and came up with a plan to try and move forward

## Results

*What was the outcome? Who benefited? What were the changes and benefits using qualitative and quantitative data?*

Firstly I spoke to my line manager at my appraisal and agreed to work from home on my research day to help me to try and move forward with the PhD. Although this is not always possible I do feel that I have some protected time in place.

I reflected on the topic I had chosen and decided after discussion with my supervisor to change to a topic that I felt more comfortable with and that I could collect data more easily.

I have started to undertake inspections for the Care Quality Commission which allows me to have an option for applying for a job in Regulation which may allow me to work part time at the university or change roles entirely in the future.

# North West Cross Institutional Action Learning Project

Name: Alison Astles

Partner Institution: University of Central Lancashire

## Delegate Profile

*Pharmacy lecturer, in post for two years, in practice for 25+ years. Relatively new to academia.*

## Problem / Challenge

*The problem related to how I had set up the assessment framework for a module, which created a lot of marking work for staff. Feedback to students was excellent, but staff were under great time pressure from the workload. I needed to resolve the situation short-term and also improve the module design for next year.*

## Solution

*The group members helped me explore different options for the short and longer term management of the issue. I was then able to discuss some of the ideas with a senior member of staff who helped adapt the ideas within our organisational constraints. The ideas involved utilising members of administrative staff to deal with some of the feedback processes and data collection. I also facilitated discussion with the module delivery team on how the process could be improved for the next year.*

## Results

We survived the 15-16 year and students received the feedback and results required. I have used this opportunity to put in minor changes to the module and have amended the number of assessments for 16-17. This should result in reduced workload for students and staff, without compromising achieving the learning outcomes.

The action learning set gave me protected time to think about a problem that was causing a lot of day to day stress. The non-judgmental presence of the group members helped me explore ideas and come up with a variety of options that I was able to discuss with others in my organisation. Simply acknowledging that there was a problem was in itself helpful and helped me cope with the situation.



# North West Cross Institutional Action Learning Project

Name: Deborah Pownall

Partner Institution: Liverpool John Moores University

## Delegate Profile

*I am Employer Engagement Manager leading a central team of 9 to deliver 400+ speakers plus many other employer led services across the University.*

## Challenge with a

*What was the problem, issue or concern?*

Dealing with a member of staff who is disillusioned with her job role and shows little creativity or independence in her work, but who wants a permanent post.

## Solution

*How did you/and the programme solve the problem?*

The questioning made me consider how the external issues were impacting on her work life and maybe the job was not really the issue. I had to explore those issues with her and make her aware how her behaviour was being perceived. The process made me realise I had to redirect my frustration into practical solutions and accept that motivation is different for everyone. I am used to dealing with self-starters who are enthusiastic whom I have recruited; I had gained this member of staff through an internal placement rather than recruitment.

## Results

*What was the outcome? Who benefited? What were the changes and benefits using qualitative and quantitative data?*

The outcome is the member of staff has settled into a permanent post. I give her much more guidance; she clearly did not like the work she was doing so I have moved her on to another role. I feel it is my response to her that has changed rather than her behaviour. I cannot change her feelings towards work but I can control her work and get the best from the team as a whole.

