

The Leadership Foundation for HE
2016 Small Development Projects (SDP) scheme

Project Title

*Development of a Good Practice Guide for Facilitating and Evaluating
Cross Institutional Action Learning*

Prepared by:

Tracy Ellis
January 2016

Project Leader

Tracy Ellis
Organisational Development Advisor
University of Liverpool
tellis@liverpool.ac.uk
0151 795 5556

Project's administrative 'home' HEI

University of Liverpool, Mount Pleasant, Liverpool, L69 3BX.

This is, however, a collaborative partnership between 7 North West of England HEIs and Huddersfield University which is also a member of the North West Staff Developers Regional Network. The project leads from each university are listed below:

Tracy Ellis, University of Liverpool
Meriel Box, Liverpool John Moores University
Gemma Edwards, Chester University
Nikki Lambourne, University of Central Lancashire
Denise Fieldhouse, Manchester University
Annette Robinson, Lancaster University
Karen Chubb, Cumbria University
Martin Plant, Huddersfield University

Project strand and key theme

This project will contribute to the "Productivity agenda and capacity building" key theme. Due to the nature of the project, and the breadth of the roles of those involved, the expectation is that it will develop capacity to bring about instrumental change in participants' respective institutions with the intention that longer term outcomes will impact on all themes to some extent.

Background

Member institutions of the North West Staff Developers Network have participated in the Aurora programme delivered by the Leadership Foundation. The added value that this programme has brought was considered at a network meeting in March 2015 and all reported that participants had found the **action learning** component of the Aurora programme invaluable in terms of; developing relationships, building leadership capability and networking with those from other institutions; broadening knowledge and changing practice through exploring differing perspectives; having the opportunity to engage in non-judgemental, confidential conversations with peers across the sector.

Although network member institutions do 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. Additionally, the collaborative nature of the initiative will serve to strengthen the

relationship of the North West regional network and other participating networks, and their respective organisations; offer continued support initiated by the Leadership Foundation via Aurora; and enable the network to grow and learn together by developing and disseminating an innovative way of supporting the development of female leaders and mixed gender groups to enhance capability and capacity - supporting Athena Swan initially and Gender Equality Mark in due course.

Aims

To develop a methodology to enable a group of universities to deliver sustainable cross-institutional action learning to “enhance our networks and communities of practice to enable greater peer support and challenge which also create development opportunities that are bespoke for specific communities of learners”.

Objectives

To develop an approach to support a cross-institutional group of universities to:

- set up a cross-institutional action learning initiative supporting women and men
- adopt a project management approach to maximise the likelihood of embedding and sustainability
- evaluate the project to be able to demonstrate impact

Research methodology/approach

A project team consisting of experienced action learning set facilitators from each participating institution already exists. An experienced project manager has been appointed and a project plan is in place for the pilot, Phase 1.

Phase 2 of the project (for which funding is sought) will enable the learning from Phase 1 to be analysed and shared via a useful guide for HE colleagues across the UK and Ireland who want to deploy a similar initiative to supplement existing LF or regional development interventions. The current website (<http://actionlearn.weebly.com>) will continue to be utilised. This will create greater sustainability of the work already undertaken during Phase 1.

Outputs and outcomes

The outputs will be:

- a summary of reflection from the facilitators’ perspective
- a report on the initial feedback from phase 1 of the initiative;
- a journal paper: an article giving an account of our experiences submitted to the Action Learning Research and Practice Journal (<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/calr20#.VjyY7rfhDIU>)
- a good practice guide for use by cross-institutional groups incorporating sections on: project managing; facilitating; evaluating and disseminating cross institutional action learning;

- presentations to other regional group to disseminate the outputs and outcomes associated with the project;
- presentations at the SDF November 2016 Conference, UHR Conference and Aurora Champions Conference
- West Yorkshire Staff Development Network to shadow the learning and contribute to evaluation
- an independent evaluative report to include: linkage from phase 1 evaluation; reflections from the action learning set members; impact of the action learning on individuals and practice; impact of the good practice guide and a case study.
- final project report to the Leadership Foundation

The proposed outcomes will be:

- The growth of cross-institutional action learning as a method of supporting internal and external leadership development activities;
- A good practice approach for organisational/staff development groups, and the Leadership Foundation, to promote and build a sustainable method of professional peer support;
- The development of individual leadership capability, via sector peer groups, leading to capacity building within own organisations.
- Development of the initiative to support male colleagues in the future.

Project Metrics

The success of the project will be measured in the following ways:

Metrics

- Presentations to other regions to disseminate the work of the project
- Number of visits to the project web site
- Number of reflective accounts from facilitators submitted
- Delivery of presentations at SDF and Aurora Conference
- Take up of similar initiatives in other regions as a result of awareness of this project
- Number of set members who engage in the evaluation exercise
- Number of set members who complete the programme

Impact (Value and ROI)

- Reported greater collaboration between staff development professionals
- Reported productivity and capacity building in institutions as a result of participant involvement in action learning

Anticipated start/end dates

The Phase 1 pilot, which started in June 2015, is already underway and is due to end in June 2016. Phase 2 (for which funding is sought) would start on 1st March 2016 and conclude by end of February 2017.

Milestones (quarterly) within the relevant time frame outlined above.

By end July 2016

- Data collection of initial reactions from Phase 1 of the project for the evaluative report

By end August 2016

- Submission of reflective accounts by facilitators
- Facilitators story told through submission of reflective accounts and blog
- Evaluative report on initial reactions of set members for phase 1 of the project
- Summary report of facilitators' reflections for phase 1 of the project

By end November 2016

- Completion of good practice guide

By end February 2017

- Dissemination of experience and good practice guide to at least 2 other regions in the UK
- Presentation at least two conferences

By end of March 2017

- Final project report including initial feedback collected during phase 1, overview of the approach to producing and eventual content of the good practice guide, phase 2 evaluation including: focus group feedback; telephone interview feedback; case study; and initial reactions to good practice guide from other regions and conference participants.