Evaluation of the National Leadership Centre

Year 2 report
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1 Executive summary

Ipsos, in partnership with the Institute for Employment Studies, was appointed by the Cabinet Office to deliver a process, impact and economic evaluation of the **National Leadership Centre (NLC).** The NLC was set up in 2018 to support the development of senior public sector leaders. Its three strands of activity were delivering a leadership development programme, facilitating a public sector leader network, and building the evidence base on public sector leadership and its impact on productivity.

This second and final report from the evaluation focuses on the NLC leadership development programmes – the Public Leaders Programme (PLP) and the Deputy CEO programme (formerly known as Accelerate and Catalyst) – delivered between January 2021 and November 2022[i]. It has assessed the impact of these programmes in terms of outcomes for individual participants and outcomes for their organisations, as well as a process evaluation about the effectiveness of the programmes' delivery. Findings are presented below against each of the key evaluation questions and outcomes.

1.1 Findings of process evaluation

Research question	Finding
How effective were the processes for identifying, engaging and recruiting senior leaders to the programmes? What were the enablers / barriers? What was the profile of those who do not engage? What were the reasons for non-engagement?	**The engagement and recruitment of public sector leaders through sector representative bodies worked well**. Positive recommendations and endorsements from alumni of the programmes or from sectoral organisations were a key enabler to recruitment. Delegates found the application process easy. The delivery teams experienced some challenges in recruiting participants to the Deputy CEO programme due to lack of data on who would be eligible and some gaps in communication.
What is the profile of those engaged and recruited to the programmes? What are leaders' motivations for engagement?	The PLP and Deputy CEO programmes attracted a diverse mix of leaders from across the UK public sector. The focus on **systems leadership and cross-sector collaboration**, the opportunity to **connect with peers** from other regions and sectors, and to further **personal development** were the main motivating factors for delegates' engagement. The personal development needs articulated by leaders at registration to the programme were varied, highlighting the individual and context-specific nature of development needs at that level.
How relevant was the content of each module and element of the programmes? How far do these align to the aims and objectives of the programmes? Which elements are well / less well received?	Most PLP and Deputy CEO delegates thought the programme was **relevant to their role as a public sector leade**r and would help them in the future. However, having a cohort of leaders from different sectors and with different needs meant that **not all sessions were equally relevant to all delegates.** The systems improvement projects were consistently the least well received element of the programme. This was due to project

	groups struggling to find a topic that would be relevant to all and the requirement for delegates to work on the project in their own time (to an extent which was beyond what delegates had expected and considered appropriate), both of which led to disengagement among some project group members.
How appropriate is the delivery length, format, venue and mechanisms for each module?	**The overall frequency, length and intensity of engagement required for the PLP was generally considered appropriate by delegates**. They considered the programme to have been well-structured and appreciated the residentials as "anchor points". There was mixed feedback on the optimal length of the residentials: some delegates said they found it difficult to take a full week out of their day job to attend, whilst others welcomed the opportunity to take this amount of time out to focus on their development. A consistent theme in the feedback from both Year 1 and Year 2 of the evaluation was that senior leaders do not like having to travel on a Sunday to attend residentials. Perceptions of these aspects of the Deputy CEO programme were more mixed: some considered the programme too long and highlighted that the long gaps between programme elements meant it **lost momentum as time went on.** **Delivery length, format, venue and mechanisms** of individual modules were generally considered appropriate and delegates praised the delivery team for managing the programme well. Delivery was affected by COVID-19 and this impacted attendance. Attendance and engagement at both the PLP and the Deputy CEO programme declined over the course of the programme and some delegates noted that this negatively impacted on their experience.
What were participants' expectations of the programmes and individual modules? To what extent were these met?	Delegates expressed **high satisfaction with the programmes** overall and individual modules. Feedback indicated that some thought the programmes, and/or certain elements of the programmes, were **pitched at too low a level**. This sentiment was expressed more strongly amongst Deputy CEO delegates.
What was the profile of those who responded well / less well to the Programmes? What are the recommendations for improvement?	The evaluation did not establish any clear differences in the profile of those who responded well / less well to the programmes compared to their more positive counterparts. Recommendations for improvements included: 1) setting clear and accurate **expectations of the time required** for the programme overall and individual elements, 2) plan events **as far in advance as possible** and communicate these ahead of time, and 3) continue with **hybrid delivery**, taking care to maintain a

| | balance between efficiency and accessibility in delivery and providing sufficient face-to-face networking opportunities. |

1.2   Findings about individual outcomes

Outcome	Finding
Increased knowledge and understanding of other sectors / approaches to leadership	There is strong evidence that delegates gained **increased knowledge and understanding of other sectors** from participating in the programmes, in particular through spending time with people they would not normally encounter in their role. Delegates valued the opportunity to build relationships and influence other sectors which this provided. Delegates from both programmes reported that listening to other delegates and invited speakers made them **more aware of the challenges facing other parts of the public sector**, and the potential unintended consequences for other sectors of their organisation's actions. This increased understanding appears to be the **most valued outcome** from both the leadership development programmes.
Improved leadership skills (such as strategic thinking, delegation, communication)	Many PLP delegates thought their leadership skills were already well-developed before participating in the programme, which is to be expected given their level of experience. However, survey and qualitative evidence suggests that taking part in the programmes, alongside other contributing factors, **had a positive effect on the skills of most participants**. Leaders gave a wide range of examples, suggesting that the ways in which skills were developed were very specific to individual participants and depended on the individual leader's role, context and background and the relevance of programme sessions to these.
Improved understanding of systems leadership approaches	As with skills, many delegates (particularly PLP delegates) believed they had a good understanding of systems leadership approaches before taking part in the programme and were already motivated to work in this way. However, delegates found the programme helpful in **reinforcing or accelerating their approach to systems leadership and identifying opportunities for cross-system working**. The majority of delegates on both the PLP and Deputy CEO programmes reported having learned more about systems leadership and some felt they had learned a considerable amount.
Increased interactions with peers in other organisations and sectors	PLP delegates **met and worked with peers in other sectors more often after taking part in the programme** as a result of connections made through the programme, increased confidence

	in working with other sectors, and reinforcement of the value of cross-sector connections (both through explicit examples and experience of connections during the programme).
Expanded peer support network	PLP delegates reported **meeting with peers in other organisations more often** following participation in the programme, and delegates from both programmes said that the programme had helped them to develop a **good network of peers**. However, some delegates felt there was a missed opportunity to make more regional connections.
Implementation of systems leadership approaches	The programmes had led some delegates to make changes to **move further towards a systems leadership approach**. Although opportunities to do this varied by role, there were similar themes relating to increased soliciting of input from other sectors; sharing responsibility with other sectors for initiatives; and considering or taking on new roles within other sectors.
Personal development outcomes	**Self-awareness and confidence** appear to be common outcomes from the PLP and Deputy CEO programmes, resulting from coaching and sponsorship, hearing about how other leaders have faced challenges, and a greater awareness of different leadership styles. Improved wellbeing was identified as an additional, albeit less common, outcome from the programmes.

1.3 Findings about wider outcomes

Outcome	Finding
More efficient & effective leadership & management approaches	There was some evidence of senior leaders implementing **changes to their management practices** as a result of participation in the PLP and Deputy CEO programmes. Examples include providing senior teams with greater responsibility and autonomy, establishing new cross-organisational teams to address complex issues and creating more opportunities for senior colleagues to think and reflect.
Improved workforce engagement, welfare and retention	Delegates were found to have implemented changes aimed at **developing their workforce** based on learning from the programmes. These included measures to improve succession planning, capacity and capability building of their senior leadership team, sharing learning and resources from the programme and initiatives aimed at improving resilience and wellbeing.
Improved efficiency and effectiveness of public services Increased innovation and / or adoption of best practice approaches	There were limited examples of participation in the PLP or Deputy CEO programmes **directly resulting in improvements to service delivery within delegate organisations**. There were examples of new interventions and collaborations that could potentially lead to improvements in future service delivery, but no examples that could be robustly evidenced within the evaluation timescales.

Increased collaboration within and between regions Increased cross-system collaboration between public sector organisations	There is some evidence that the programmes have contributed to **increased cross-sector collaboration** between public sector leaders. Whilst most delegates were collaborating with external partners prior to participation in the programme, several described the programmes as having facilitated a renewed focus and impetus for this work. Through engagement with peers on the programmes, delegates **gained insights into the key issues and challenges facing other sectors** and used these to inform their work with local partners. There were also examples of where topics and themes raised on the programmes had led delegates to investigate how issues were being addressed locally and to take forward collaborative actions with partners to address them. Some PLP delegates had drawn directly on **guidance and support from their peers on the programme**. However, others commented that the cross-sector nature of the programme combined with the geographical distribution of participants meant that there were limited opportunities for impactful collaborations between delegates.

2 Introduction

Ipsos, in partnership with the Institute for Employment Studies, was appointed by the Cabinet Office to deliver a process, impact and economic evaluation of the **National Leadership Centre (NLC).** The NLC was set up in 2018 to support the development of senior public sector leaders. It closed in March 2022 and its activities were moved into the newly formed **Leadership College for Government (LCG).**

The evaluation was commissioned in September 2019 and the findings from the first year of NLC delivery were reported in February 2021 (Evaluation of the National Leadership Centre: Year 1 Report). This second and final report from the evaluation covers activities delivered between January 2021 and November 2022[ii]. It focuses on capturing transferable learning from the NLC on how to develop senior public sector leaders to inform future interventions delivered by the LCG.

2.1 The National Leadership Centre

In March 2018, the Public Services Leadership Taskforce was established to advise the Government on the role of leadership development in improving productivity and outcomes across public services. The Taskforce found that some public service leaders felt isolated, that networks between public sectors were underdeveloped, that more effective collaboration between public services would be valuable in solving complex and cross-cutting problems and that there was a lack of diversity at the top of public services[iii].

The NLC was established in response to the Taskforce's recommendations, which identified the need for a new **cross-sector programme and professional network aimed at senior leaders (and emerging top leaders) of public services, and action to address a lack of diversity.** The NLC aimed to support the development of these leaders, connect them with each other to create a community, and enhance the effectiveness of their collaborative leadership. Its three strands of activity were delivering a leadership development programme, facilitating a public sector leader network, and building the evidence base on public sector leadership and its impact on productivity.

The NLC was originally established as a business unit within the Cabinet Office and was moved in 2020 into the Government Skills and Curriculum Unit (GSCU). When the NLC closed in March 2022, its work transferred into the LCG, which was established in April 2022 (within the GSCU). Government funding for the NLC was reduced in 2020, and reduced again when the NLC was moved into the GSCU.

2.2 Evaluation Scope and Objectives

The original plan for the evaluation incorporated impact, economic, and process evaluation elements. This section explains the extent to which these elements could be incorporated into the final evaluation.

The overall aim of the evaluation was to assess the impact of the NLC in terms of:

- **Individual outcomes** – how far the NLC has improved the knowledge, skills, capabilities and work relationships of the public sector leaders who engaged with programme and/or network activities.

- **Organisational outcomes** – the degree to which improvements in individual leaders' knowledge, skills and capabilities have translated into changes within the public sector organisations they lead

(e.g. increases in efficiency or workforce wellbeing), increased collaboration between public sector organisations, and improvements in the services they deliver.

- ▪ **Systemic outcomes** – the degree that the NLC's activities led to improved productivity and quality of public services. It was beyond the scope of the evaluation to directly measure the contribution of the NLC to these systemic outcomes.

The impact evaluation proceeded as planned, taking a theory-based approach, and did not take an experimental or quasi-experimental approach (see section 3.1 for details).

The evaluation was originally intended to incorporate an **economic evaluation** of the extent to which the NLC achieved value for money. It was decided in Autumn 2022 not to proceed with this strand of the evaluation due to there being insufficient case study evidence on individual and organisational outcomes.

The Year 2 evaluation focussed on gathering evidence on the delivery, outcomes and impact of the NLC leadership development programmes – the Public Leaders Programme (PLP) and the Deputy CEO programme (formerly known as Accelerate and Catalyst). It did not cover the activities of the NLC Public Sector Leader Network in detail, although feedback from programme delegates on their engagement with these activities has been included where relevant. These leadership development programmes are described below:

Public Leaders Programme (PLP)

This leadership development programme was intended to be delivered to approximately **100 CEO-level public sector leaders** in Year 2. The Programme consisted of a launch event, diagnostics assessment, two residential modules (delivered to three cohorts of delegates), a webinar series, a systems improvement project and a close event.

Accelerate Programme

Accelerate was a leadership Programme for Deputy-CEO level leaders from across the public sector. It was specifically aimed at high-performing leaders from ethnic minority backgrounds who were looking to become a CEO in the next 3-5 years. The programme incorporated a two-day residential module (originally intended to last three days), as well as a diagnostics assessment and access to professional coaching. It involved participants working in groups of five over a period of six months to address real-life challenges. Accelerate was delivered to 20 leaders during 2020/21 and was scheduled to be delivered again to a similar sized cohort during 2021/ 22.

Catalyst Programme

Catalyst was a new element of the NLC offer introduced for 2021/22. It was a leadership development programme targeted at Deputy-CEO level leaders from across the public sector who had a disability or long-term condition. The offer was similar to Accelerate and included a two-day residential module, a diagnostics assessment and access to professional coaching. The aim was to recruit approximately 20 leaders to the programme during 2021/ 22. However, the programme team found it challenging to recruit sufficient numbers of delegates. T**his resulted in the Accelerate and Catalyst programmes being merged into a single Deputy CEO programme with a combined total of 22 delegates.** Throughout the rest of this report, we therefore refer to the Deputy CEO programme rather than the Accelerate/Catalyst programmes.

As the NLC has now closed and its activities brought into the LCG, the focus for this final evaluation report has been on capturing transferable learning to inform future public sector leadership development programmes.

2.3   Report Structure

The rest of this document is structured as follows:

- **Chapter 3** provides an overview of the evaluation methodology.

- **Chapter 4** presents the process evaluation findings.

- **Chapter 5** assesses the extent to which the programmes made a difference to senior leaders.

- **Chapter 6** assesses the extent to which the programmes resulted in changes within delegates' organisations, or to the public sector more widely.

- **Chapter 7** presents conclusions and recommendations for future programmes.

- **Annex A** contains the Theory of Change for the NLC.

- **Annex B** provides an overview of Year 2 programme delivery.

- **Annex C** details the evaluation methodology and approach.

- **Annex D** contains findings on personal development outcomes for programme participants, which were not a key focus of the evaluation.

3 Methodology

This chapter provides an overview of the Year 2 evaluation methodology. It details the primary data collection that was undertaken, which forms the evidence sources used in this report. Full details of the methodology are included in Annex C.

3.1 Approach

The evaluation was based on a **non-experimental (theory-based) approach**. This involved collecting quantitative and qualitative data on anticipated individual and organisational outcomes identified in the Theory of Change for the NLC through surveys, interviews and case studies with senior leaders who had participated in the leadership development programmes.

The evaluation also explored the **effectiveness** of implementation of NLC programmes and the underlying mechanisms through which these intended outcomes may have been achieved for individuals and organisations. It explored the **wider context** within which the programmes were being delivered and leaders were operating, in order to understand the enablers/barriers to achieving outcomes.

An **exploratory approach** was taken to collecting qualitative data, using interviews and case studies to identify alternative explanations that could have had an influence on observed outcomes. Research tools included open questions and probes to explore additional factors which may have contributed to individual and organisational outcomes and the relative influence of these compared to the NLC (see Annex D).

Table 3.1 provides an overview of the **quantitative and qualitative data and evidence** that was drawn on to inform the Year 2 evaluation.

Table 3.1: Year 2 data collection

Data collection tool	Sample	Number completed	Date of data collection
Primary data collection (quantitative)			
Baseline survey	PLP delegates	90 (100% of all PLP delegates)	Jun-July 2021
Residential 1 feedback survey	PLP delegates	68 (97% of all PLP delegates attending the residential)	Oct 2021
Residential 2 feedback survey	PLP delegates	50 (100% of all PLP delegates attending the residential)	March 2022
Endline survey	PLP delegates	40 (61% of all PLP delegates who completed the programme)[iv]	July 2022
Baseline survey	Deputy CEO delegates	22 (100% of all DCEO delegates)	Oct 2021
Endline survey	Deputy CEO delegates	11 (50% of all DCEO delegates who completed the programme)	Nov 2022
Primary data collection (qualitative)			
Focus groups / depth interviews	NLC delivery teams	Two one-hour focus groups and one one-hour interview	Aug 2022 and Dec 2022
Depth interviews	PLP delegates	16 1-hour interviews (18% of all PLP delegates)	Aug-Sept 2022

Data collection tool	Sample	Number completed	Date of data collection
Depth interviews	Deputy CEO delegates	10 1-hour interviews (45% of all DCEO delegates)	Nov 2022 – Feb 2023
Case studies	PLP delegates	7 initial 1-hour interviews, of which 1 was taken forward as a case study involving further interviews and desk research	Nov 2022 – Feb 2023
Secondary data analysis			
PLP diagnostics survey	PLP delegates	88 (98% of PLP delegates)	June-July 2021
Accelerate and Catalyst diagnostics survey	Deputy CEO delegates	22 (100% of DCEO delegates)	Oct 2021

Each dataset was analysed using appropriate quantitative / qualitative methods. Data was triangulated via a detailed examination of findings, themes and patterns across multiple data sources to answer the key research questions and to assess the underpinning assumptions of the Theory of Change.

3.2   Strengths and limitations

A key strength of the evaluation approach was that it was underpinned by a **Theory of Change (ToC)**, which provided a consistent framework to guide the data collection, analysis, synthesis and reporting. The ToC was reviewed and updated based on evidence collected through the Year 1 evaluation and wider literature on expected outcomes from leadership development programmes.

A further strength was the **mixed-method approach to data collection**, which enabled both a breadth and depth of perspectives to be captured. There were high levels of engagement and participation in the evaluation surveys, most of which were administered by NLC delivery staff rather than online (based on learning from Year 1 of the evaluation). A careful sampling approach ensured a mix of senior leaders from different regions, sectors, and lengths of time in role.

The two main limitations of the evaluation approach were that engagement was based on **self-selection** and measurement of progress towards outcomes was **self-reported** by delegates, both of which are likely to have resulted in a level of positive bias.

Further details on the key strengths and limitations of the evaluation approach are provided in Annex C.

4 Programme delivery

4.1 Introduction

This chapter reports the findings from the process evaluation of the NLC alongside an assessment of progress towards intended outputs for Year 2 of the NLC programmes. It is structured around the questions the process evaluation was seeking to address.

The evidence presented is based on diagnostics assessments (two in-depth questionnaires which asked delegates to report their competencies, experiences, traits and drivers) administered to participants prior to participating in the programmes, post-module feedback surveys, endline surveys and interviews with programme delegates.

4.2 How far has the NLC reached the intended audience of senior public sector leaders?

4.2.1 What was the profile of those engaged / not engaged? Were there any regions, sectors or groups of individuals over or under-represented amongst NLC beneficiaries?

Public Leaders Programme

In total, 90 public sector leaders signed up to the PLP 2021/22, of which 65 completed the programme. The remainder dropped out before the end of the programme for various reasons, such as a lack of time available to commit or changes in their job roles.

This could also have been partly due to the programme having been delayed by a year, which meant that some delegates were no longer in the same position or situation (regarding time availability) as when they initially signed up.

Delegates were from a wide range of sectors, as shown in Figure 4.1. The aim had been to ensure appropriate representation from across the public sector within the programme and NLC delivery staff were confident that this had been achieved. One in every five programme participants (21%) were from local government, followed by health care and the civil service (accounting for 13% and 11% respectively).

Almost one in every four delegates (24%) were from education (further / higher education or schools). The main target audience for the programme was public sector leaders. The NLC also sought to reach leaders from third sector organisations that were delivering public services (or closely linked to the delivery of public services). These delegates were specifically targeted and invited to join the programme. Four delegates from the charity sector also joined the programme.

Figure 4.1: Year 2 PLP delegates, by sector
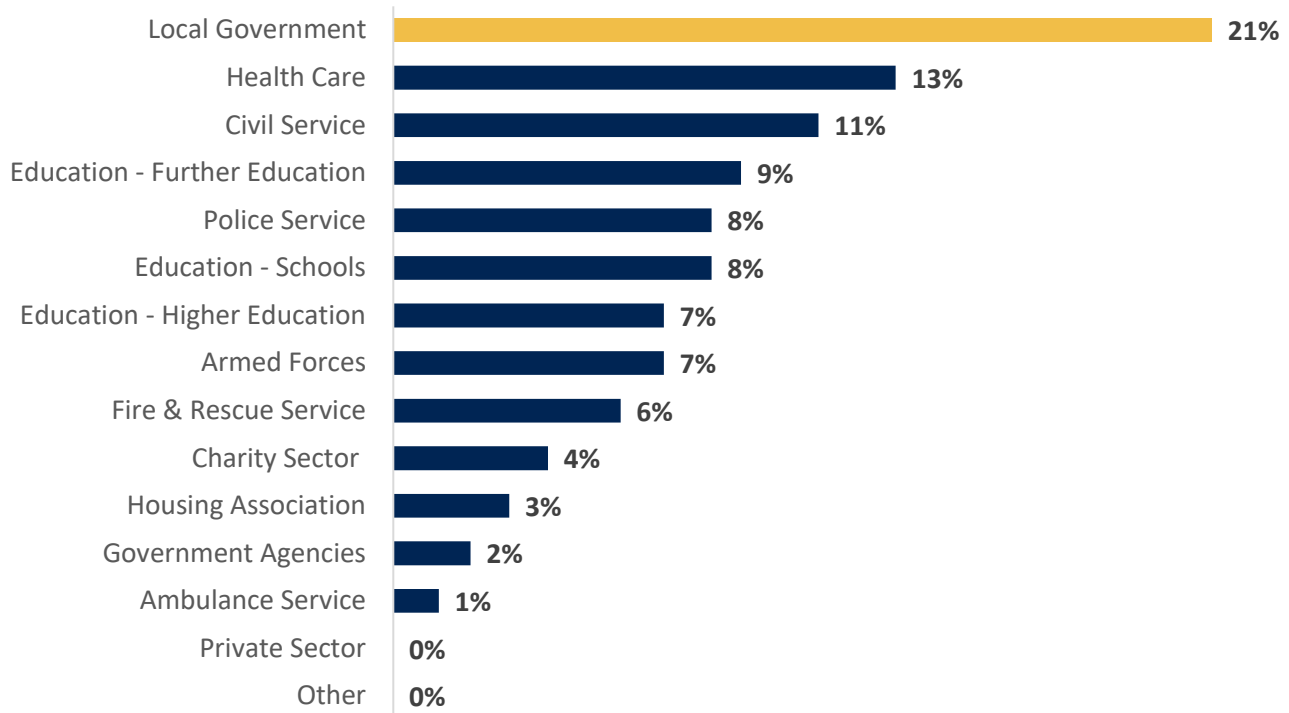
Base: 90 PLP delegates completing the baseline survey. Q11. Which of the following best describes the sector that you currently work in?

The PLP attracted senior leaders from organisations serving individual regions across England, as well as organisations serving all of England and the whole of the UK. A fifth (20%) of delegates were from UK-wide organisations, around one in ten (11%) worked for organisations that served all of England and one had a global remit (Figure 4.2).

Two delegates headed up organisations that served Scotland only, and none specifically served Wales. Two thirds of PLP delegates worked for organisations which served specific regions of England. The North West and South West regions accounted for the highest proportion of PLP delegates, whilst West Midlands and Yorkshire and Humber accounted for the lowest.

Figure 4.2: Year 2 PLP delegates, by region served

Region	Percentage
UK-wide	20%
South West	11%
North West	11%
England	10%
South East	9%
North East	8%
London	8%
East of England	8%
East Midlands	7%
Yorkshire & Humber	4%
Scotland	2%
Global	1%
West Midlands	1%
Wales	0%
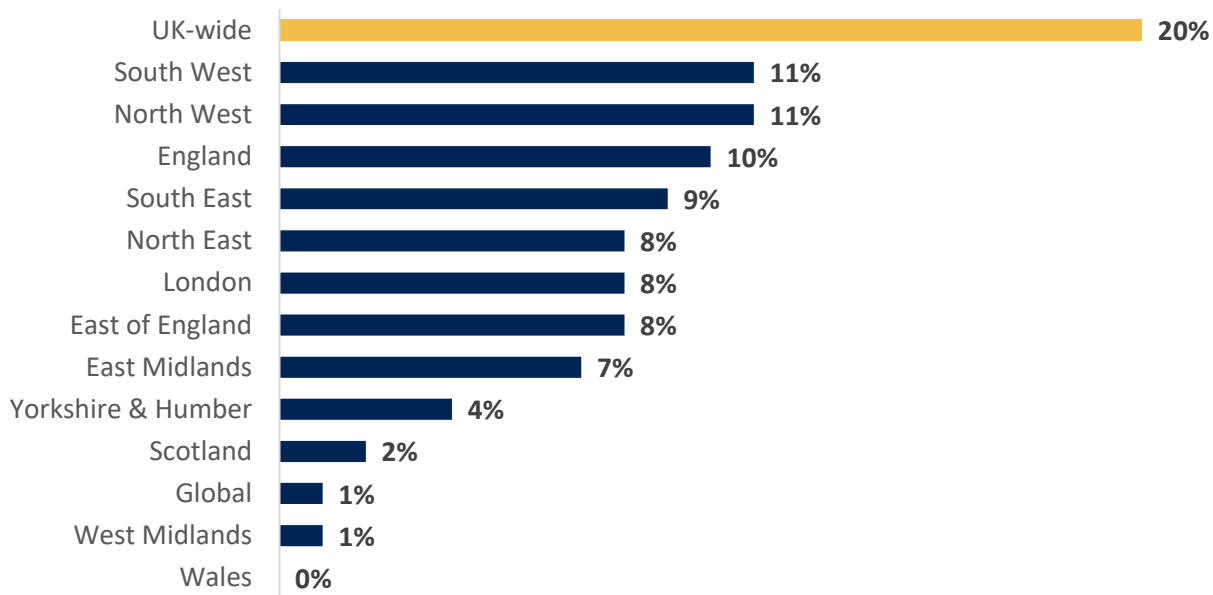
Base: 90 PLP delegates completing the baseline survey. Q13. Which region(s) does your organisation serve?

Deputy CEO Programme

The Accelerate and Catalyst programmes each had 20 places available. However, only 16 delegates were recruited for Year 2 of the Accelerate programme and six for the Catalyst programme. The merger of the two programmes resulted in one cohort of 22 delegates on the Deputy CEO programme.

Given the numbers recruited for the Catalyst programme, some delegates thought that the programme had not been effective in reaching public leaders with disabilities or long-term health conditions.

One delegate perceived that there were no participants with visible physical disabilities represented on the programme, and although venues were chosen after delegates had been recruited, the same delegate commented that some of the course facilities (including venues) could have been more conducive to engaging them. Another delegate felt that programmes such as Catalyst always reach out to the same cohort of leaders with a disability.

> There's a group of disabled senior leaders in varying degrees of difficulty, be it mobility, blind, etc. who seem to be on the same things over and over again. Now, that may very well be that... it is such a small cohort of people... that we tend to get hit up in the same things. But also, maybe that the ones that end up on this stuff are perhaps the more vocal ones. There are definitely more senior leaders [with invisible disabilities] who frankly just don't talk about it, to which I perfectly understand their reasons for that.
> **Deputy CEO delegate**

The Deputy CEO programme had **broad representation from across the public sector**, with delegates representing nine separate sectors. Health care and the civil service combined accounted for half of all delegates (27% and 23% respectively) and just over a quarter were from education (9% each from the further education, higher education and school sectors). The remainder were from local government, armed forces, fire and rescue and police services.

4.2.2 How and in what ways were senior public sector leaders engaged in NLC activities? What worked well/less well in terms of engagement?

The main mechanism by which the NLC sought to recruit delegates (for all programmes) was **to engage sector bodies to support on recruitment and endorse participants**. A number of delegates reported having been recommended to the programme by their sector bodies. Sector bodies varied in how they advertised the programme, with some sharing information on it widely to members and others specifically targeting and approaching individuals.

In a few cases, **delegates had found out about the NLC from other sources** (such as through a colleague or peer who had participated in a previous programme delivered by the NLC). A few delegates heard about the programme and were invited to apply through direct connections with the NLC, for example by knowing someone who was involved with the NLC or who had previously participated in the programme. Specifically for Year 2 of the Accelerate programme, the NLC also used podcasts with former Year 1 delegates to promote the programme across networks beyond leadership academies.

In a small number of cases, delegates reported having been put forward by their organisation for the programme without their knowledge; some were initially surprised by this and unsure if the invitation was genuine, while others remarked that this way of working was common in their sector.

NLC delivery staff thought that engaging and recruiting delegates through sector bodies (mainly) **worked well** in reaching the target audience, in particular for PLP delegates. This is confirmed by feedback from delegates who heard about the programme through their sector bodies and said this had made them receptive due to a high level of trust in these organisations.

The evaluation was unable to assess whether one approach to recruitment worked better than another given that data collection was limited to those public leaders successfully recruited. However, some delegates expressed surprise that the opportunity had not been shared widely across their organisation and that as a result **they felt not all eligible candidates had been made aware of the programme**.

> I think I was just surprised that my organisation at the time didn't tell me about it, because it was aimed at black and ethnic minority groups and, you know, I didn't hear anything from my organisation.
> **Deputy CEO delegate**

Delegates reported that **word-of-mouth** had contributed to them having a positive impression of the NLC and being open to engaging with the programme. Several delegates had spoken to people in their network who had previously completed Year 1 of the programme and had found it useful, which positively influenced their decision to sign up.

The NLC struggled to engage and recruit sufficient numbers of delegates to the Catalyst programme and the second year of Accelerate. The NLC delivery team and delegates themselves identified several challenges in recruiting the target audience for these programmes:

- there was a limited pool of potential applicants. Feedback from some sectoral organisations indicates that a large share of eligible candidates had completed the programme in Year 1 (which was oversubscribed), leaving fewer candidates for Year 2.

- a further challenge was a lack of data on potential eligible candidates, particularly for Catalyst, as senior leaders with non-visible health conditions or disabilities may not share this information widely to avoid stigmatisation. As a result, recruitment for Catalyst relied largely on nominations from senior leaders and NLC alumni.

- members of the NLC delivery teams pointed out that it was difficult to recruit speakers representing this target audience, creating further barriers to engagement as this impacted the perceived relevance of the programme.

'Improved performance as a leader' was the most common outcome delegates hoped to gain from the programme. Other common reasons delegates gave for joining the programme were the focus on **systems leadership and cross-sector collaboration**, the opportunity to **connect with peers** from other regions and sectors, and to further their **personal development**. These were all intended outcomes from participation in the programme, suggesting that messaging to potential delegates about the benefits of participation were effective.

As well as these common reasons, the development needs which delegates reported they hoped to address through the programme were varied and personal: the diagnostics survey identified personal development needs relating to patience, tolerance, assertiveness, confidence and people skills across programme delegates. This highlights the individual and context-specific nature of development needs at this level.

Conversations with programme alumni had also shaped some delegates' expectations of the programme. One delegate, for example, specifically mentioned wanting to *"hear from great speakers"* as this was an element a colleague had praised about the programme.

The application process for the programme was consistently described by both PLP and Deputy CEO delegates as 'straightforward' and 'easy'. Delegates were required to submit a statement outlining their reasons for wanting to join the programme, their expectations and their current levels of knowledge, skills and experience, and this was not considered overly burdensome.

4.3   How responsive and engaged were participants in NLC programmes?

The NLC delivery team reported high levels of initial engagement in the PLP and Deputy CEO programmes. However, **attendance and engagement in both programmes declined over the course of delivery.** For example, of the initial group of 90 PLP delegates who signed up, 70 attended Residential 1 and 50 attended Residential 2. Participation in the in-person close event was lower still (28 attending), with the timing of this over the summer holiday period contributing to this.

The following factors were identified by delegates and NLC delivery staff as having affected engagement:

- **delivery of Year 2 of the NLC was still affected by COVID-19, which impacted attendance in three ways**. Firstly, some delegates did not feel comfortable going back to face-to-face events (such as the residentials) at that time. Additionally, some delegates were unable to attend the residentials due to having COVID-19 themselves. Finally, the rapidly changing pandemic restrictions meant the NLC delivery team planned the residentials with less advance notice to reduce the risk of cancellationH; however, the resulting shorter timelines for notification and organisation meant that some delegates were unable to attend due to scheduling conflicts and insufficient notice to plan their attendance.

- a few delegates mentioned **issues with the venues themselves, highlighting a lack of accessibility or consideration of COVID-19 safety**. In light of some Catalyst delegates' long-term conditions, the choice of a small venue for a face-to-face meeting in one instance was not considered appropriate due to the risk of infection, despite the venue complying with

government guidance on social distancing. One delegate mentioned that they had difficulties reaching some venues due to the travel time required.

- ▪ **engagement in the systems improvement project was patchy**, with some delegates frustrated at a lack of contribution from other members of their group or struggling to contribute themselves, particularly after the residential finished. This resulted in delegates feeling a lack of momentum as the close event approached. The same barriers to more engagement (time commitment outside of work, reliance on self-discipline, lack of structure) as outlined in section 4.4 applied here as well.

Some delegates **changed roles** either during the programme or shortly before its start, which meant the programme was either less relevant or they were no longer able to prioritise it, leading them to engage less or drop out altogether.

Some delegates noted that the drop in attendance and engagement towards the end of the programme (particularly at Residential 2 and the close event) negatively impacted their experience as the networking and peer-to-peer learning opportunities became more limited. Delegates thought that more could have been done both at the application stage (when selecting participants) as well as throughout to frame participation as mandatory and ensure delegates understood the importance of attending all elements.

4.3.1 What was the frequency, length and intensity of engagement of Programme and Network participants in NLC activities? Was this appropriate / sufficient for achieving intended outcomes?

Overall, PLP delegates considered the frequency, length and intensity of engagement with the programme to be appropriate, while feedback from Deputy CEO delegates was more mixed. Deputy CEO delegates referenced delays caused by COVID-19 resulting in them feeling that momentum was lost due to the long gaps between programme elements.

PLP delegates considered the **structure of the programme to align with the programme's objectives**. They particularly highlighted the residentials, which were perceived to be good 'anchor-points' of the programme and delegates appreciated the opportunity to come together in person with their cohort.

The time between the residentials (six months between the first residential in September/October 2021 and the second in March 2022) was also thought to be about right to give enough time to process the learnings and be able to re-engage again. The Deputy CEO programme only included one two-day residential module and delegates said they would have liked more opportunities to come together in person to network and connect with each other in an unstructured way.

The time required to participate in some programme events was consistently highlighted by delegates as a reason for low attendance, particularly for shorter events. One PLP delegate explained that travelling to London for an event which lasted two hours would have required five hours of travel in each direction and an overnight stay, with the cost being prohibitive as well.

While most delegates considered the one-week residentials to be an appropriate length, some felt that **they could be condensed without losing any of the quality or what some delegates would consider to be key content.** Data from the residential feedback survey shows differing views amongst delegates as to which elements were considered most or least useful. However, after dinner presentations, the session entitled 'The psychology of dealing with intense scrutiny during a crisis' in

Residential 1, the session on the systems improvement project and the session entitled 'Power, Politics and Persuasion' in Residential 2 were rated the least useful. A shorter residential would prevent delegates from having to travel on a Sunday and take a full week out of work, which is particularly challenging for CEO-level leaders.

One delegate even suggested that three three-day residentials would have worked better, as this would have enabled them to catch up on work on the other two days, although this contrasts with the majority of delegates who considered the length of the residential appropriate.

Overall, there were lower levels of engagement for those elements of the programme that required **high time commitment and were perceived to have minimal benefit**. While the residentials required delegates to travel and spend one week away from work and home, most considered this worth it, highlighting the quality of speakers and sessions and especially the chance to connect with other public sector leaders as key benefits to these elements of the programme. In contrast, some delegates reported not attending the close event as it was only a half-day (preceded by a networking dinner) and the location was deemed too far to justify this.

The face-to-face elements of delivery, particularly of the residentials, were well received. However, **some delegates also highlighted the potential benefits of a hybrid programme to circumvent some of the barriers to participation discussed above**. The webinars were positively received, and delegates appreciated that they were 'low-effort' to engage with.

They would have welcomed additional webinars to increase learning from the programme as these could more easily be fitted into their diaries. One delegate said that receiving recordings of sessions afterwards would have **improved the flexibility of the programme**.

> You didn't need to put an awful lot of effort in because they were online sessions.
> **– Year 2 PLP delegate**

> The webinars, during the lockdowns, were great because you could have a busy day, jumping from one meeting to another meeting to another meeting, and then you'd get into this webinar and they were just really interesting.
> **– Year 2 PLP delegate**

Future programmes should consider the trade-off between time required and benefit gained, and consider where online delivery might be more appropriate than other delivery approaches, especially as online meetings and events have become more common since the COVID-19 pandemic. To ensure high attendance and engagement at in-person events, these need to be perceived as 'worth it' for delegates by providing sufficient content as well as networking opportunities. Shorter events or individual knowledge sessions could potentially be moved online.

## 4.4   Programme delivery: What are the lessons?

Programme delivery was **perceived positively by delegates**, with high overall levels of satisfaction amongst both PLP and Deputy CEO delegates. Most programme elements were well received, with the notable exception of the systems improvement projects, where the time commitment was deemed disproportionate to the learnings gained.

4.4.1 Was the quality of delivery in line with expectations?

The **majority of PLP delegates were satisfied with the programme overall**, with 95% of those completing the endline survey reporting they were either fairly or very satisfied. Delegates generally found the programme relevant and highlighted the chance to get together with a diverse mix of public sector leaders from other sectors as a key benefit. The vast majority of delegates reported that their expectations of what they would gain from participating in the programme were met.

They also praised the delivery team for managing the programme well. A high proportion (92%) further stated that they would be **likely to recommend a programme similar to the PLP to others**.

Figure 4.4: Programme satisfaction
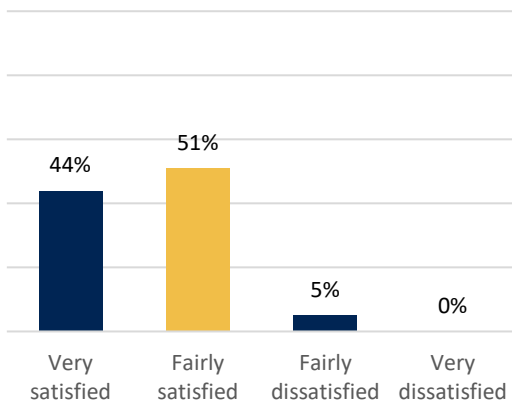
Base: 39 PLP delegates completing the endline survey. Q16: Overall, how satisfied were you with the Public Leaders Programme?

Figure 4.5: Likelihood to recommend programme
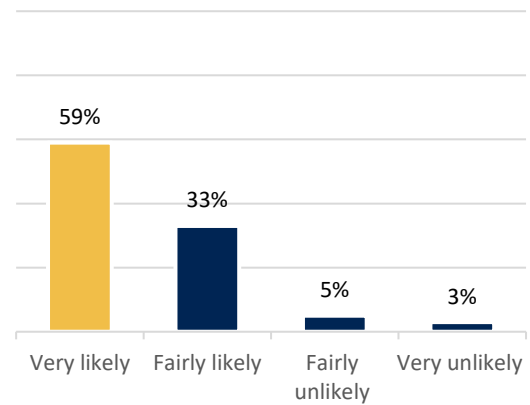
Base: 39 PLP delegates completing the endline survey. Q18: How likely would you be to recommend a programme similar to the Public Leaders Programme to others?

Of the 11 Deputy CEO delegates who completed the endline survey, four were very satisfied and five were fairly satisfied. One delegate was fairly dissatisfied, and one was very dissatisfied. In the qualitative evidence, common reasons for feeling dissatisfied were the different structure of the programmes (discussed in the previous section) and the different levels at which the programmes were targeted.

Additionally, some Deputy CEO delegates **did not feel that the speakers were sufficiently diverse**, which was a view shared by the NLC delivery team who faced challenges trying to find and recruit representative speakers. In relation to this concern, two delegates described a speaker at an event making remarks which they perceived as dismissive of diversity and inclusion issues.

4.4.2 What worked well and less well in delivery and why?

**Most PLP delegates thought the programme was relevant to their role as a public sector leader**. As shown in Figures 4.6 and 4.7, most thought that the programme had helped them with changes they had to make in their organisations, and most were confident that participation in the programme would help them in the future. In interviews, delegates recounted specific skills and learnings they were able to take from the programme and could apply to their day-to-day work.

Figure 4.6: To what extent has your participation in the Public Leaders Programme helped with any changes you have had to make?

Figure 4.7: To what extent do you think your participation in the Public Leaders Programme will help you in the future?
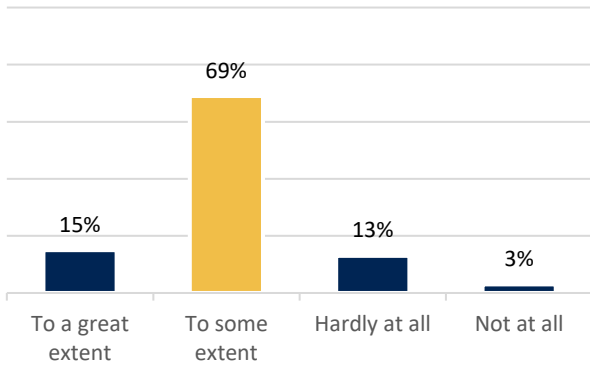
Base: 39 PLP delegates completing the endline survey. Q13: Over the past year, many organisations have had to make major changes to the way they operate. To what extent has your participation in the Public Leaders Programme helped with any changes you have had to make?
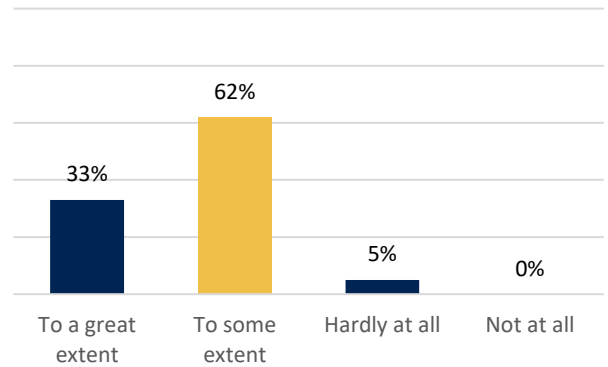
Base: 39 PLP delegates completing the endline survey. Q14: To what extent do you think your participation in the Public Leaders Programme will help you in the future?

Most (9 out of 11) delegates completing the Deputy CEO endline survey reported that the programme had helped them with **changes they had to make in their organisations**, and almost all (10 out of 11) said that the programme would help them to at least 'some extent' in the future.

However, a number of PLP and Deputy CEO delegates who participated in qualitative interviews thought the programmes were not aimed at the right level:

- some PLP delegates mentioned that the programme was **too basic for the senior audience** it targeted and too focused on individual development rather than systems thinking.

- a few Deputy CEO delegates echoed similar thoughts, expressing that they felt the programme was **not aimed at the right level and pitched too low**, and that as aspiring CEOs they did not feel challenged by the course content. Some considered only certain elements (specific sessions for example, as well as the networking opportunities) to be relevant while other programme elements, such as the systems improvement project, were considered to be less relevant.

Having a diverse cohort of leaders from different sectors in some cases also meant that not all sessions were equally relevant to all delegates. One Deputy CEO programme delegate specifically stated they considered the programme content too geared towards the civil service (and those sectors working directly with it).

While delegates consistently valued the opportunity to connect and network with peers from other sectors and to hear a wide range of views, there was also some appetite for opportunities to discuss specific challenges with leaders from the same or an adjacent sector (perhaps because some sectors are very large or less well-connected).

This indicates that there may be a trade-off between having a diverse cohort to foster cross-sector networking and collaboration and facilitating specific learnings that delegates can apply in their own job or sector.

There were variations in perceptions of the quality of content and delivery of individual programme elements amongst both PLP and Deputy CEO delegates. Seventy-nine percent of PLP delegates reported that their expectations of Residential 1 were met or exceeded (out of 70 attendees), a figure rising to 92% for Residential 2 (which had 50 attendees). It could be that some of those whose expectations of Residential 1 were not met decided not to attend Residential 2.

In residential feedback surveys, networking and peer-to-peer learning, and the quality of speakers and sessions, were highlighted as the most useful aspects. However, perceptions of the relevance and usefulness of the different sessions (which were different for each cohort) varied.

Reasons why some sessions were less relevant included them not being pitched at the right level, being too broad and lacking depth, the topic not being of relevance to their role or organisation, or them not relaying anything they didn't already know. Delegates also reported that some content could have been more tailored to a public sector context.

For example, the session on innovation was focused on generating ideas for new initiatives, whereas many leaders are having to cut back and prioritise, so a session on innovating to deal with these challenges would have been more appropriate.

Coaching

The coaching element was unique to the Deputy CEO programme in Year 2[v]. Delegates were matched with a coach after their initial diagnostics assessment and had access to three sessions with them.

Some delegates considered the coaching to be very beneficial, while others only attended some of the sessions available but did not engage further. The matching of the coach to the delegate as well as the quality of the coach itself were key factors impacting how delegates perceived this element of the programme. Delegates found it beneficial if the coach was either from the same sector or a sector they worked with often, as this allowed them to discuss specific challenges. Some Deputy CEO delegates had also valued the opportunity to discuss experiences relating to their protected characteristics with their coach.

"The targeted mentoring and support was relevant because obviously, I can steer that. I would say to my coach or mentor or whatever, 'I want to talk about X'" – Deputy CEO delegate

The systems improvement projects were consistently regarded as the least relevant and useful elements of the programmes by both PLP and Deputy CEO delegates[vi]. Most delegates completing the endline survey considered the **systems improvement project to be one of the least useful aspects of the programme and not worth the time input required.**

These points were reiterated in the qualitative interviews with programme delegates following completion of the programme: delegates explained that the topic of their project, and/or the roles of the other people in their group, were not relevant enough to their role for them to gain useful learning or successfully tackle the issue. While a few examples of successful projects were identified (detailed in Chapter 7), the majority agreed that whilst the concept was good, there were issues with the implementation.

Delegates considered the framing of the project to be too open-ended, resulting in considerable time being spent finding a consensus on which problem to address, and often leading to 'pie in the sky' thinking. Delegates would have preferred more guidance in the initial stages and a project with direct ties to something they could influence. **The lack of such a tangible benefit resulted in delegates caring less about the outcome of the project and thus putting in less effort**.

> We had two-thirds of our group that didn't [care] about the concept that was eventually [chosen], because everyone put their ideas forward. At some point, you've got to, within a limited amount of time, get that down to a manageable number. Your [idea] disappears, you don't become very interested, plus your sphere of influence over the topic was nothing. So, actually, for me, you had brilliant people who do care about wider systems leadership, trying to solve problems that they didn't really care about and on the whole, had very little influence over.
>
> **Year 2 PLP delegate**
>
> It may be more useful to choose real problems that have been identified as priorities by government and build projects for delegates around them. This approach is more likely to lead to tangible outcome / benefit.
> **Year 2 PLP delegate**

It was difficult for groups of delegates from **different sectors and regions** to collaborate meaningfully through their systems leadership projects. One delegate became aware at the close event that delegates in another cohort from the same region had come up with a similar project. They are now taking forward

a regional collaboration, which they are hopeful will result in tangible change. However, before this discovery, there were no plans to take the original project forward.

The projects required delegates to engage on a continuous basis outside of their day-to-day work, which proved challenging for most. Several delegates said that only a small number of their project team had actively contributed.

Rather than having to put in additional hours outside of work, delegates would have preferred more time at the residential to work on this as that was when momentum and engagement were highest.

One delegate also suggested that instead of having two week-long residentials, the content could be divided into three shorter ones, which would also allow for additional touchpoints for the project groups to come together in a structured setting.

The framing of the project (and by extension, of the wider programme) in regard to the time input required of delegates resulted in false expectations: delegates said they had not expected to spend a significant amount of time outside of the scheduled events on the programme and had not been made aware that they would be asked to do this. Some delegates said this had contributed to their frustration with the systems improvement project.

Delegates also fed back that **the facilitation of the project, provided by an external contractor, did not add value**. The external contractors were said to have acted as administrators (organising meetings, taking minutes), rather than facilitating the sessions and supporting delegates by providing guidance and clarity on the task, or challenging their ideas. One delegate however noted that without the facilitators booking meetings, their groups would likely not have met at all.

4.5   To what extent were NLC activities delivered as intended? What (if any) adaptations were made during implementation of NLC activities and why?

The PLP and Deputy CEO programmes were not delivered as initially intended. As explained earlier in this chapter, the Deputy CEO programme was initially intended to be two separate programmes (Accelerate and Catalyst) and was later combined into one due to challenges recruiting the target numbers of participants (particularly for the Catalyst programme).

The key elements of the Deputy CEO programme were as originally intended, but the format of delivery changed with some elements moving to online rather than in-person. Namely, the residential, which was originally intended as a three-day event, was re-structured as a series of monthly online workshops due to stay-at-home guidance at the time.

The NLC also delivered additional activities online as part of the programme, which were not part of the original plan, and also re-scheduled the residential in-person with newly designed content.

Both programmes were also subject to delays. The start of the PLP was delayed by almost a year, while several elements of the Deputy CEO programme (such as the close event) were delayed during delivery.

4.5.1 What were the reasons for any differences?

The changes in NLC delivery timelines (namely the delayed start to the PLP, and delays and short notice changes to the delivery of the residentials), and the move to online delivery for certain elements were due to the **ongoing impact of COVID-19**. Restrictions on in-person gatherings, as well as uncertainty

over future restrictions, resulted in the NLC having to postpone events or wait until shortly before to confirm and book venues.

Furthermore, many delegates were having to deal with COVID-19-related crises in their day-to-day roles. As a result, the NLC decided to move and amend some events (for example, the planned three-day residential becoming a series of monthly online workshops in early 2022).

Changes to the **strategic and operational context** for the NLC (outlined in Chapter 1) resulted in a reduced overall budget for delivering planned activities. NLC staff also highlighted that changes to delivery teams as a result of these organisational changes created some challenges in delivery.

4.5.2 What difference did this make to delivery and outcomes achieved? Of those adaptations made, what worked well, less well and why?

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, scheduling events or moving events at relatively short notice **negatively impacted delegates' ability to attend some events**, limiting the learning and benefit they gained from the programme.

The move towards online delivery meant that there **were fewer opportunities for informal networking** between delegates on the programme. Nevertheless, some elements of online delivery **were well received by delegates** as they were more accessible (as they did not require travel) and highlighted the potential benefits of a hybrid programme.

5 Individual outcomes

5.1   Introduction

This chapter assesses how far the Public Leaders Programme (PLP) and Deputy CEO (Accelerate/Catalyst) programme have produced their intended effects on public sector leaders; and the extent and in what ways programme activities have contributed to these changes.

This chapter is based on interviews with PLP and Deputy CEO programme delegates, as well as results from the survey of PLP delegates conducted before and after their participation, feedback surveys from each of the PLP residential events, and a survey of 11 Deputy CEO delegates at the close event.

Around two in five delegates completing the PLP, and half of Deputy CEO delegates, did not complete their respective end-of-programme survey and therefore it is not possible to accurately judge levels of self-reported improvement across all participants.

Nonetheless, there is a substantial body of evidence from 23 interviews with PLP participants and 10 with Deputy CEO participants about the range of outcomes the programmes have had for delegates and the causes of these outcomes.

5.2   Skills, knowledge and understanding

5.2.1 Improved leadership skills (such as strategic thinking, delegation, communication)

The programme aimed to improve delegates' leadership skills, such as communication, decision making and strategic thinking, through access to expert speakers and simulations of complex leadership challenges.

Personal development outcomes such as increased confidence and becoming more aware of strengths and potential areas for development were also expected to contribute to improved leadership skills.

Many delegates thought their leadership skills were already well-developed before participating in the programme. However, survey and qualitative evidence suggests that taking part in the programme had a positive effect on the skills of most participants, alongside other contributing factors.

The ways in which skills were developed were very specific to individual participants and depended on the individual leader's role, context and background, and the relevance of programme sessions to these: examples are given below.

Delegates generally already thought their leadership skills were well-developed before taking part in the programme: for example, at the outset of the programme 75% of PLP delegates thought they had strong communication skills and 72% thought they had strong decision-making skills[vii]. Most delegates had participated in other leadership programmes and/or received coaching or mentoring support in the past; and reported that they had been continually developing their leadership skills over the course of their career and in response to the roles they have had.

Post-survey data suggests that the majority of participants believed the programme had supported their development. Eight of 11 Deputy CEO delegates surveyed said that the programme had helped their professional growth and development, although only five thought it had led to improved performance.

85% of PLP delegates (n=39) thought the programme had helped them to address the key challenges they faced in their job and the same proportion (85%) thought it would help them prepare to meet the challenges of the next ten years. Figure 5.2 below shows delegates' perceptions of the extent to which participating in PLP had helped develop their skills, knowledge and understanding.

Figure 5.1: Delegates' self-reported perception of impact of PLP participation on skills, knowledge and understanding (2021/22)

Q9 - To what extent has participating in the Public Leaders Programme helped you to...

|	To a great extent	To some extent	Hardly at all	Not at all	Don't know
Develop the skills necessary to lead beyond your organisation	26%	69%		3%	3%
Understand the challenges facing the majority of public services in the local area	26%	69%		5%	
Develop a good network of peers at your level from across the public sector	38%	56%		3%	3%
Develop a sustainable peer / wider support group	38%	56%		3%	3%
Work effectively beyond the boundaries of your organisations	31%	59%	10%		
Gain a comprehensive understanding of other public services in the local area	15%	72%	10%	3%	
Address or tackle the key challenges currently faced in your job / organisation	8%	77%	8%	8%	
Improve self-awareness, confidence and resilience	31%	54%	13%	3%	
Improve joint working across local organisations	26%	59%	10%	5%	
Prepare to meet the changes to public services expected in the next ten years	10%	74%	13%	3%	
Deliver a good standard of public services	10%	64%	15%	10%	
Improve well-being	5%	59%	23%	10%	3%
Input into or influence central government decision-making	10%	44%	31%	13%	3%

Base: PLP 21/22 delegates completing the endline survey (39)

Skill levels improved to a statistically significant level over the course of the programme according to participants: for example, the proportion of delegates assessing their communication skills as "very strong" increased by 36 percentage points from pre to post assessments.

Similar statistically significant changes were seen for decision-making and strategic thinking, which were identified in a review of the evidence as key outcomes that can be expected from public sector leadership development programmes[viii]. Comparing self-reported skills pre-and-post participation in the programme provides a more robust assessment of how these have changed than merely asking delegates to judge this at the end point.

Figure 5.2: PLP 2021/22 delegates' self-assessed skills
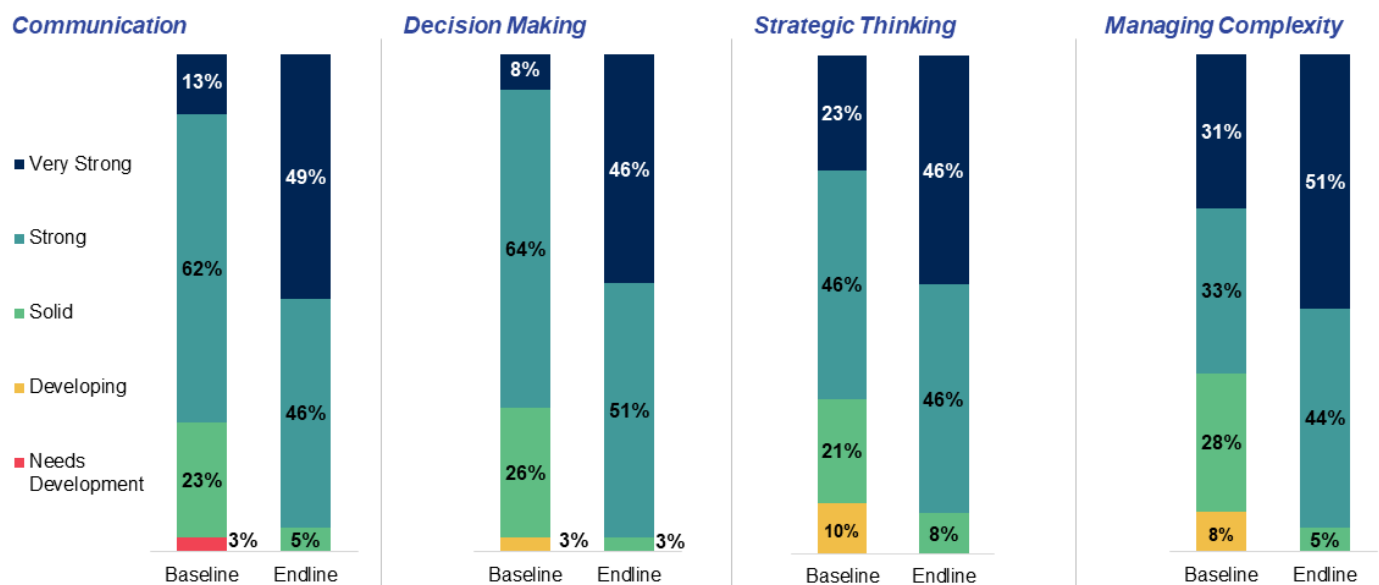
Base: PLP 2021/22 programme delegates completing both baseline and endline surveys (39). Changes in the proportion of those saying very strong and strong between baseline and endline are significant at the 5% level for each skill.

In interviews, delegates identified examples of **improved leadership skills and behaviours** resulting from participation in the programme: for example, improved understanding of influencing techniques and how to position and align their key messages for both internal and external communications. The skills which leaders reported developing varied depending on their role, context and background, as did the ways in which skills development took place. These included:

- residential sessions focused on specific skills such as media training, which provided them with resources and contained practical exercises that helped to reinforce learning.

- residential talks from invited speakers, which had made participants more motivated to make relevant changes at their organisation (such as encouraging innovation or diversity of views).

- hearing from the experience of others (for example about how they had solved problems) and considering different perspectives: for example, delegates commented that hearing from speakers who work in safety-critical roles had led them to reconsider their approach to risk.

- coaching; for example, around how to empower teams and give them more autonomy.

- the experience of having time to reflect, prompting them to create similar opportunities for their team.

Delegates reflected in interviews that the NLC programme was **one contributing factor** to their skills development over the time they took part, alongside (for example) developing new skills as a result of dealing with the impact of COVID-19 and a frequently changing political environment.

The programme had helped to complement this by exposing delegates to the experience of leaders in other sectors over the same period (both in terms of invited speakers and informal discussions with other delegates) and providing coaching which allowed them to reflect on their experiences and challenges in a confidential space.

Some delegates **did not feel that taking part in the programme had improved their leadership skills**, or at least – as they explained in interviews – not in any specific way beyond reaffirming and refocusing their existing behaviour.

In some cases, interviewees believed that since they had been in their role for some time, or because they had already received extensive leadership training within their own sector, the potential to develop their skills further was limited.

These interviewees had not expected to develop their skills through the programme and had been motivated to participate by other factors (such as the opportunity to expand their network). This may reflect that the programme was designed to achieve a range of outcomes and that skills development was not explicitly stated as a key objective.

5.2.2 Improved understanding of systems leadership approaches

As a result of participation in the programmes, leaders were expected to improve their understanding of systems leadership approaches through exposure to sector experts and case-study examples of effective practice.

As with skills, many delegates believed they had a good understanding of systems leadership approaches before taking part in the programme. However, delegates found the programme helpful in reinforcing their approach to systems leadership, identifying opportunities for cross-system working, and prompting them to make progress on actions relating to this more quickly. Some felt they had learned a considerable amount.

Three-quarters of PLP delegates (74% of 39) and six of 11 Deputy CEO delegates said that they had gained a better understanding of systems leadership approaches from taking part in the programme. All PLP delegates surveyed agreed at the end of the programme that they were effective at working beyond the boundaries of their own organisation, although the proportion of these delegates saying this at the start was also high (87%)[ix].

Around nine in every ten PLP delegates who completed the endline survey (n=39) said the programme had helped them to work effectively beyond the boundaries of their own organisation and to improve joint working across local organisations (90% and 85% respectively). Interviews with delegates confirmed that an interest in systems leadership approaches was a common motivation for taking part in a cross-sector programme, in order to identify further opportunities to pursue this way of working.

Some delegates said they had learned a considerable amount about systems leadership: that the programme had given them more of a sense of the scale of the "ecosystem" they were working in and the interdependency of issues, and led them to reflect on the extent of silo working in the public sector.

Delegates noted that the programme led them to realise that systems leadership is not just for the most senior roles; those working in their teams also work within a system and need to take this approach. The programme also led some delegates to appreciate that insight from their sector would be valuable to others.

Increased understanding of the interdependency of issues arose both from the talks given as part of the residentials and from meeting peers from other sectors. For example, one person working in health reflected on the fact that healthy people are their "constituents" as well as people needing healthcare,

and that the programme gave them an opportunity to talk to other sectors about the wider determinants of health such as access to services, housing and education.

The members of one systems improvement project group took it in turns to host a visit for the rest of the group as part of their project: the purpose of these visits was to hear from front-line practitioners in different areas of the country, and participants commented that being able to hear stories from practitioners and service users face-to-face provided a clear illustration of problems caused by a lack of joined-up working.

Delegates who believed their understanding of system leadership was already strong reported that the programme was nevertheless helpful in this area: accelerating learning which they had planned to do anyway; reminding them of the importance of systems leadership and investing in relationships; or reinforcing that the approaches they were already taking were the right thing to do.

For example, one delegate reported that although she had already spent a lot of time learning about systems leadership in her career, the session focussed on leading in complex systems provided her with a framework to structure her thinking on this topic and explain it to others. She therefore felt more confident passing on learning to others about how to lead in complex systems, and used this in a presentation to senior leaders within her organisation.

An increased appreciation of the need for systems leadership had led delegates to take an interest in making connections and becoming more of a systems leader. For example, some leaders reported applying for roles in other parts of the public sector to contribute to the transfer of learning and insight from one domain to another.

One delegate said that the programme had led them to reconsider their organisation's role within the system and whether they should expand or reduce their activity in certain areas rather than just continuing with "business as usual".

5.2.3 Increased knowledge and understanding of other sectors and approaches to leadership

Delegates were expected to increase their knowledge and understanding of other sectors or other approaches to leadership through learning from others within their cohort, hearing expert speakers, taking part in workshops and discussions, and hearing examples of good practice from across the public sector.

There is strong evidence that delegates gained increased knowledge and understanding of other sectors from participating in the programme, in particular through spending time with people they would not normally encounter in their role. Delegates valued the opportunity to build relationships and influence other sectors which this provided.

More than four in five PLP delegates (82% of 39) said they had gained a better understanding of the wider public sector from participation in the programme, second only to "time to think/reflect" as the most commonly reported outcome. Ten of 11 Deputy CEO delegates surveyed reported that they had learned from other participants on the programme, and nine identified new insights and learning as something they had gained, although only six identified better understanding of other sectors specifically as something they had got from the programme.

Over the course of the programme, the proportion of PLP delegates agreeing that they had a comprehensive understanding of other public services in their local area increased significantly from

33% to 74%, and the proportion agreeing that they understood the challenges facing the majority of local services increased by a similar degree and also significantly, from 51% to 82% (n=39). The opportunity to network with and learn from peers in other sectors was identified as the most useful aspect of the PLP by delegates completing the post-programme survey.

Qualitative feedback highlighted several ways in which peer learning positively affected programme participants. Delegates reported they were more aware of the challenges facing other parts of the public sector and therefore more sympathetic towards these: sometimes because they recognised the nature of challenges others faced in terms of working within a complex system.

The programme had also helped delegates identify opportunities to influence other sectors and increased their ability to do so, through a greater understanding of other organisations' priorities and how these differed from their own. Some delegates had met peers in other sectors who could give them a different perspective on an initiative or service they were both involved with, leading them to reflect on their role. Delegates were more aware of how their organisation's actions can affect other organisations or parts of the public sector, and felt better able to identify unintended consequences.

This improved understanding of other sectors resulted from spending time with leaders in other parts of the public sector, both invited speakers and other delegates, and listening to them talk about their priorities and problems. Engaging with people they would not normally come across helped to broaden delegates' perspective and outlook.

Civil servants in particular commented that while they had often done cross-departmental work, it was relatively rare for them to work with leaders in other parts of the public sector, and that hearing about different types of leadership and types of leadership challenges from other sectors encouraged them to reflect on their own situations in a different way. The sessions on strategic communication and influencing Special Advisers were also said to have reinforced this learning about influencing and different perspectives.

Other ways in which the programme had encouraged a greater understanding of other sectors were through the sponsorship element of the Deputy CEO programme; sponsors provided delegates with guidance and "inside information" on how to work with particular sectors and put delegates in touch with others who could provide further advice.

The programme also gave delegates an opportunity to hear about projects/case studies/best practice examples going on in other parts of the country, such as Glasgow's public health approach to violence reduction. Sometimes these examples were provided as part of programme content, but they also arose from informal discussions with other delegates on the programme.

Some delegates reported that, for them, this increased understanding of other parts of the public sector had not yet resulted in tangible changes in behaviour and ways of working, although many delegates did experience these changes. Some said that through the programme they were able to display a greater level of understanding and empathy when working with other organisations, for example a more nuanced understanding of the factors that might be a barrier to partnership working, with this helping to build relationships and open doors. Increased understanding also allowed delegates to use a common language and describe shared goals when working with other organisations, and to tailor their approach to the needs of different parts of the public sector. Some also said that knowing more about other sectors meant they could construct more compelling business cases to central government.

"I am able to articulate myself in an evolved way and ask more pertinent questions to get to their key priorities than I was able to before. Because I've spent time with them, listened to what their problems are, what they're struggling with, what their main priorities are and that opens your eyes and opens your mind which wasn't there beforehand. I'd been relatively closed because I'd been in [sector] for so long." – PLP delegate

Delegates also reported improved understanding of particular topics that were relevant to their role but not a fundamental part of it. This came about through the speaker sessions (such as the talk on artificial intelligence), participating in systems improvement projects on topics that were relatively unfamiliar, and speaking to other leaders about the front line issues facing their part of the public sector.

For example, one delegate explained how a conversation with a delegate working in higher education had led them to appreciate the challenges faced by disadvantaged students studying at home during lockdown. Delegates said that they had also begun to make more links between issues: for example, that their plans to use more local suppliers in order to meet net zero commitments would also boost the local economy. This increased knowledge meant that delegates were more confident about contributing to a wider range of discussions and challenging misconceptions or inaccurate narratives.

However, some felt that sessions were not of practical use to them in their role – albeit intellectually interesting – because they were of limited relevance to their area of responsibility (see findings on relevance in the previous chapter).

Increased knowledge and understanding of other sectors appears to be the strongest outcome from the leadership development programmes: it is one of the most commonly reported outcomes in the post-programme surveys, was considered the most useful outcome of the programme by surveyed PLP delegates, and delegates provided many examples in qualitative interviews of how the programme had contributed to this this outcome.

5.3   Networks and collaboration

The programme was expected to expand delegates' peer support network and increase their interactions with peers from other organisations and sectors. This was expected to happen through participation in the programme itself and from being encouraged to seek out further opportunities for cross-sector and cross-regional collaboration.

Delegates met and worked with peers in other sectors more often after taking part in the programme. As a result of connections made through the programme, delegates had increased confidence in working with other sectors, and had the value of cross-sector connections reinforced.

5.3.1 Increased interactions with peers in other organisations or sectors

PLP delegates reported meeting with peers in other organisations more often following participation in the programme. Almost all (97%) met with peers in other sectors at least monthly, a statistically significant increase from 82% before the programme. There was also a statistically significant increase in the share of participants taking decisions with peers in other sectors at least monthly, with three-quarters of PLP participants (75%) reporting this at the end of the programme compared to 43% before it (see Figure 6.1 in next chapter)[x]. The proportion of PLP delegates agreeing that "my local network of public service leaders is effective at working as a system across public services" increased from 39% before the programme to 72% afterwards (see Figure 5.3 below), although as with.

The majority (94%) of PLP delegates who completed the endline survey (n=39) said the programme had helped them to develop a good network of peers across the public sector and to develop a sustainable peer / wider support group. This was discussed in interviews with delegates who said that the programme gave them more confidence and ability to contact leaders in different sectors; for example to discuss how a new policy or initiative might affect them. This was generally described in relation to improved networks: a contact they had met on the programme or who had taken part in it in a different cohort.

Having a connection with another leader due to both being alumni of the programme was seen as helpful for starting conversations. However, there were also other factors: leaders also reported that the understanding of other sectors and motivation to make connections which they had gained on the programme encouraged them to contact other leaders in their local area regardless of a connection to the programme.

> **"It has given me some really good challenge and really good confidence to be able to pick up the phone, talk to people from different bits of the public sector, and talk to them about, 'look, we're coming up with this really great idea that's going to cause you all sorts of headaches. How is that going to play out for you guys?'"** – Deputy CEO programme participant

PLP delegates valued the opportunity to spend time with other chief executives who shared their level of responsibility and brought a wealth of experience to share. One of the key benefits of the programme was hearing other leaders candidly describe how they had dealt with difficult situations.

The programme was also viewed as creating a valuable and unusual opportunity for local public sector chief executives to interact with central government. Some would have liked more opportunities to do this through the programme, for example facilitated interactions between sector representatives and the relevant director-general.

With many public sector organisations under budget pressures and other challenges, leaders identified a temptation to move away from collaboration and focus narrowly on their area of accountability. In this context, the programme acted as a reminder of the importance of collaboration and collective problem solving – both by explicitly providing examples of this in the sessions and through all the insights gained through informal cross-sector interaction during the programme.

5.3.2 Expanded peer support network

The programmes have helped senior leaders to expand their peer support network, although this did not always take the form of ongoing communication with peers. Nearly all PLP delegates (94%) reported that as a result of the programme they had developed a good network of peers at their level from across the public sector, and that they had developed a sustainable peer/wider support group, to at least some extent (see figure 5.1).

It is important to note that delegates were already relatively well connected: as shown in Figure 5.3, 72% and 90% of PLP delegates also reported having a network of peers and a support group (respectively) in place at the outset of the programme[xi]. Nine of 11 Deputy CEO delegates surveyed said that they had expanded their network as a result of the programme.

Figure 5.3: PLP delegates' peer networks before and after participating
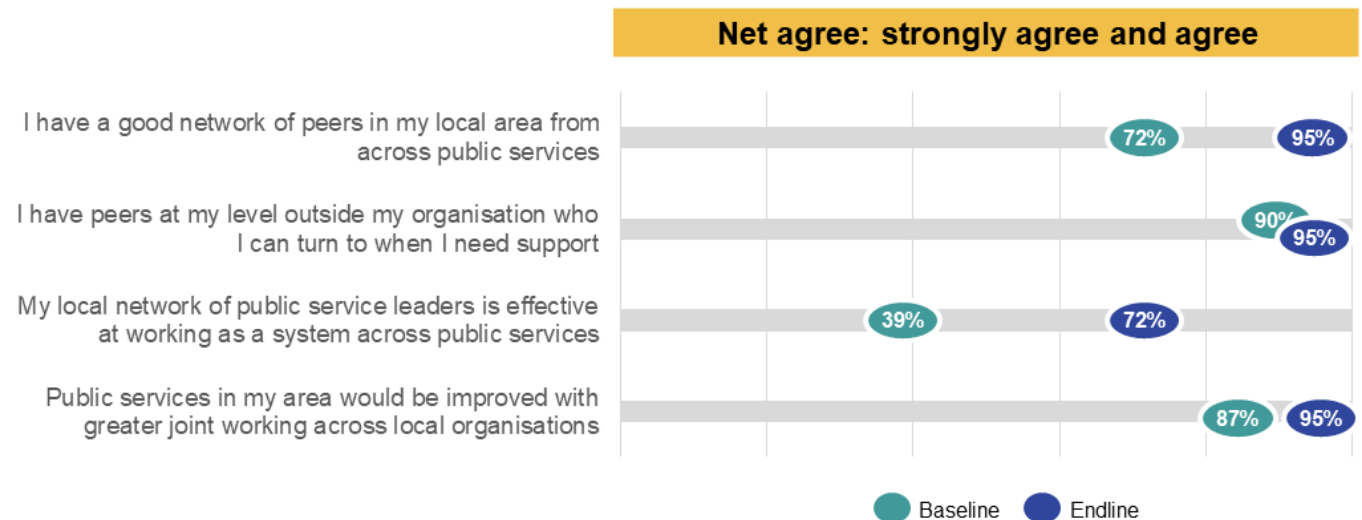
Base: PLP 2021/22 programme delegates completing both baseline and endline surveys (39). Differences are significant at the 5% level.

Some PLP delegates had stayed in touch with a group of people they met on the programme, such as their project team, often through WhatsApp group chats. They found that this group provided them with support and validation, as well as more opportunities to discuss how others were approaching common challenges relating to budgets, recruitment or staffing issues.

Some delegates had visited others they met through the programme and spent a day at their organisation to see how they approached a particular issue that was relevant to both parties, for example creating partnerships between service providers. Deputy CEO delegates also described visiting their sponsor's organisation; in some cases, the sponsor had designed a programme for their visit and introduced them to a carefully selected group of people.

However, only a minority of Deputy CEO delegates surveyed (five of 11) said that they had gained access to new opportunities through their sponsor. Deputy CEOs were introduced to their sponsor by the NLC, and left to develop ways of working together. This did not always happen, meaning some participants potentially missed out on further support.

In one of the PLP systems improvement project teams the participants were, by chance, largely from the same area, which meant there seemed much more of an opportunity to continue the project: delegates involved with this project had set up a joint WhatsApp group and explained that they were exploring opportunities to take the project forward beyond the programme.

> **"We were going in the [area] with a little bit of momentum, there was a group that had come up with a sort of covenant idea for employers on children and young people. I suppose this is one of those sort of serendipity moments, I then bumped into the chief exec of the local acute hospital trust here, just round the corner from me in [town], that was also interested in that work. We're trying to keep some life behind that project and to do something locally in [area] on that work." – PLP delegate**

Delegates said that having an expanded network meant they were able to contact others from the programme and ask for advice, test ideas or gain other perspectives; or would be able to do so in future. For example, one delegate who was looking to build relationships with local schools contacted the head

of a multi-academy trust (one of their peers from the programme) to get advice on how to "push the right buttons" and get schools to engage.

Delegates commented that otherwise they tended to ask for advice from people within their own sector or in a similar role and that getting a different perspective on their ideas was useful. However, to date, there is relatively little evidence of this having solved specific problems or led to the creation of new initiatives.

Having an expanded network of contacts also meant that delegates had an increased ability to connect people to each other, therefore benefiting others around the leader as well as the leader themselves.

> **"Part of who I am as a leader is to connect lots of people. So where I've met great people, I've connected them to other great people I know."** – PLP delegate

5.3.3 Implementation of systems leadership approaches

Participation in the programmes was expected to contribute to increased implementation of systems leadership approaches amongst senior leaders, through leaders implementing the learning about systems leadership that they gain from the programme and via the systems improvement projects. For the purposes of this evaluation, systems leadership approaches are understood to involve working across organisational and sectoral boundaries to achieve shared objectives.

The increased understanding of systems leadership approaches and of other sectors, described above, had led some delegates to move further towards a systems leadership approach. Nine in ten PLP delegates (90%) said that participating in the programme had helped them to work effectively beyond the boundaries of their organisation, and nearly as many (85%) said that it had helped them improve joint working across local organisations.

Although PLP and Deputy CEO delegates may have different degrees of control over the approach adopted by their organisation, there were similar themes relating to increased soliciting of input from other sectors; sharing responsibility with other sectors for initiatives; and considering or taking on new roles within other sectors. Leaders described the following examples:

- The programme inspired them to bring in **different voices and stakeholders** at an earlier stage in decision-making, for example through informal engagement to develop thinking around a new initiative. This was inspired by hearing the different perspectives shared in both informal conversations with peers on the programme and the formal discussion sessions.

- The programme had encouraged them to **spend more time working with other sectors**, although for some this had simply reinforced an approach they were already taking. Following completion of the programme, nearly nine in ten PLP delegates (87% of 39) said they had increased the amount of time they spent collaborating with people outside their sector or industry. However, when comparing the self-reported proportion of time delegates spent on this before and after the programme, this did not change significantly, nor did delegates' frequency of collaboration with any one sector.

- Survey data shows a significant difference in how often PLP delegates shared resources with other sectors, with the proportion doing this at least "sometimes" going from 67% to 79%. While the frequency of jointly delivering services did not change significantly, there were some examples in the qualitative data of delegates sharing responsibility for projects more with other

organisations and sectors: for example, a local authority Deputy CEO delegate reported sharing responsibility for a "family hubs" project rather than leading it.

> **"Normally would have feel of it as something that we're providing as the Council, but I'm going at it as it's something that needs to be owned by partners… It's a resource for the community, for partners, for health, for police, and how do we bring them together so that they take ownership of it and it is sustained beyond its initial three-year project plan."** – Deputy CEO delegate

- Delegates had **applied for roles in other sectors**, such as non-executive director and trustee roles, where they could contribute insight from their sector. The programme had encouraged them to do this through hearing from others on the programme about how enriching these roles could be, and facilitated the process of applying since people they connected with on the programme could guide them through the application process. Deputy CEO programme participants commented that this outcome helps increase diversity within those roles.

However, some delegates from central government felt their ability to do this was limited because the remit of their organisation did not lend itself to systems working, for example because they worked for a department or executive agency that they felt did not have a direct role in delivering public services. They therefore believed that they had not benefited from the systems leadership elements of the course.

5.4 Personal development outcomes

The evaluation also explored personal development outcomes for delegates including self-awareness, confidence, resilience and wellbeing.

The programmes were expected to result in improvements in these outcomes through delegates engaging in activities aimed at better understanding their strengths and potential areas for development, having a space for reflection and the opportunity to step away from their day-to-day obligations, an expanded network of peer support and professional advice on health, wellbeing and resilience.

Evidence relating to these outcomes is presented further in Annex D. In summary, self-awareness and confidence appear to be common outcomes from the PLP and Deputy CEO programmes, with 85% of PLP delegates reporting that the programme had helped with this.

These have resulted from coaching and sponsorship, hearing about how other leaders have faced challenges, and a greater awareness of different leadership styles. Improved wellbeing was a less commonly identified outcome from the programmes, with only one-third of PLP delegates (33%) specifically identifying improved wellbeing when asked what they had gained from participating.

6 Wider outcomes

6.1 Introduction

Senior leaders participating in NLC programmes were expected to take what they had learned or gained from the programme and use this to inform changes within their organisation and the wider system within which they operate.

This chapter assesses how far programme participants have implemented changes aimed at improving internal processes, increasing collaboration, and ultimately improving the quality of public service delivery.

This chapter is based on interviews with PLP and Deputy CEO programme delegates, the survey of 39 PLP delegates conducted before and after their participation in the programme and a survey of 11 Deputy CEO delegates at the close event.

6.2 Internal processes

6.2.1 Management practices

There was some evidence of senior leaders changing their management practices as a result of participation in the programmes, although this was not the case for all delegates. Some PLP delegates said it had not helped them at all in relation to this and one Deputy CEO delegate said they did not view this as an intended outcome of the programme.

> **I think that programme felt more about my improvement and less about the improvement of my department.** – Deputy CEO delegate

Examples of changes to management practices included providing senior teams with greater responsibility and autonomy, including to create their own external networks and collaborations. One PLP delegate introduced a new requirement for members of their leadership team to have a regional or national engagement role which would be assessed as part of their annual appraisal cycle.

Another had made changes to their senior team based on learning from the programme on the importance of authenticity. In this example, bringing in new senior leaders had provided an opportunity to reset expectations in relation to behaviours and values.

One PLP delegate established **new cross-disciplinary teams** within their organisation based on learning from the programme about the importance of ensuring a diverse range of perspectives when working to address complex issues. These teams had been tasked with developing solutions to some of the most challenging issues facing the organisation.

The coaching was found to have helped Deputy CEO leaders in thinking about empowering their teams through effective delegation, which they recognised would be critical in helping them progress to the next level in their careers.

> **Whereas previously I would have just got stuck in with the practical operational work, I'm more conscious that I have to allow others to do what they need to do. My role is to enable them. My role is to help people develop and outcomes that are achieved are their success as well as mine, but I facilitated that.** – Deputy CEO delegate

Programme delegates described being more proactive in creating opportunities for their senior teams to **think and reflect** on key issues and challenges they were facing. This included cutting down on meetings, streamlining agendas and organising reflection days or residentials. The time out to participate in the programme had made them realise the value and importance of creating such opportunities.

Workforce development

Programme delegates were found to have implemented changes aimed at developing their workforce, including initiatives to support effective **succession planning.** After a long period of stability in their senior leadership team, one PLP delegate was facing the retirement of several key personnel.

Participation in the programme provided assurances that this type of change can be positive if managed well and contributed to them feeling more reassured and confident in their approach to doing this. Another PLP delegate had made two significant senior level hires following participation in the programme and another was putting more time into developing potential successors for their role.

One PLP delegate arranged training for colleagues to **develop their confidence in numeracy**. Confidence in numeracy had been the theme of their systems leadership project, which highlighted how widespread low confidence in numeracy was amongst adults and how debilitating this could be, particularly for mental health.

The training had the dual benefit of developing colleagues' confidence in raising issues relating to their own numeracy and being more mindful of maths anxiety as a potential issue facing service users. In this example, the theme of the project was **directly relevant to a key issue facing their organisation** which is why it became an effective catalyst for change.

Other delegates discussed how they were using or planning to use learning from the programme to develop colleagues' capacity to **deal with complexity**. One PLP delegate was using learning to refresh their leadership development programme, drawing on lessons from the programme on having a growth mindset and being comfortable with ambiguity. Another was drawing on learning from the programme in planning a session with their whole leadership team on leading in complexity.

Some delegates had **directly shared learning and resources** from the programme with colleagues, which had then been adopted as organisational practice. One had shared details of a communications tool they had learned about on the programme with their Head of Communications, who began using it to inform media engagements.

Another ran a workshop with over 200 colleagues aimed at generating new ideas and solutions to entrenched problems. The design of the workshop was informed by learning from the programme on how to develop new thinking and innovative approaches to problem solving.

Some delegates were using learning from the programme to inform initiatives aimed at **improving the resilience and wellbeing of colleagues**, including their capacity to manage stress. A couple of PLP delegates thought that whilst the sessions covering these topics were less relevant to them personally (as they already had well-developed approaches to managing their own stress), they were useful for informing their approaches to supporting others in their organisation.

We had a session around mental health in a leadership role. I'm pretty resilient, but it did make me wonder about some of the other people in my organisation who perhaps don't have that personal resilience when it comes to dealing with crisis. And so we've taken some of that back around how we support other senior officers within the organisation [to] deal with stress and work pressure. – PLP delegate

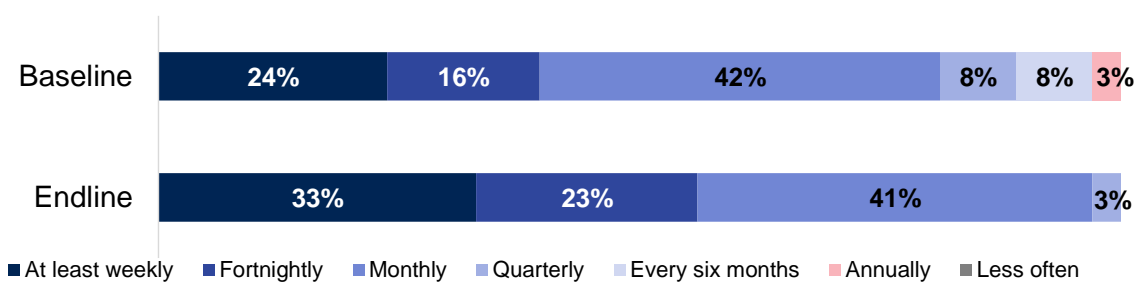## 6.3   Collaboration

There is good evidence that the programmes contributed to **increased cross-sector collaboration** between public sector leaders. Of those PLP delegates who completed the endline survey, 87% said the programme had resulted in an increase in the amount of time they spend collaborating with people outside of their sector or industry. Of the 11 Deputy CEO delegates who completed the endline survey, nine said that participation in the programme had contributed to this.
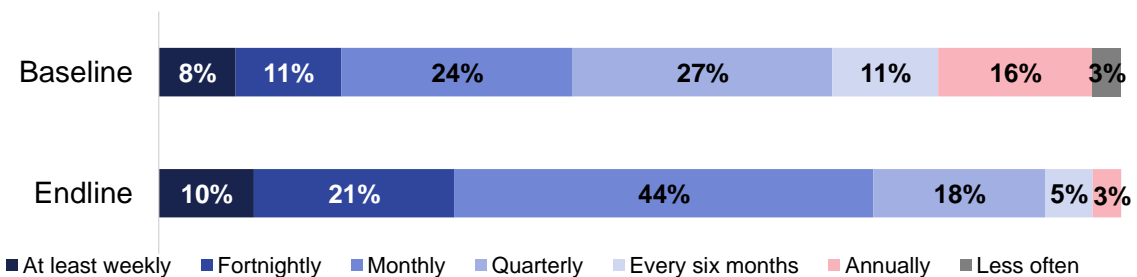
There were statistically significant increases in the frequency with which PLP delegates **met and took decisions with peers in other sectors** before and after participation in the programme (Figure 6.1). The proportion of PLP delegates who met contemporaries in other sectors at least monthly increased significantly from 82% to 97% pre and post participation in the programme, whilst the proportion taking decisions with peers in other sectors at least monthly increased from 43% to 74% (also significantly).

Figure 6.1: Changes in self-reported frequency with which PLP delegates met and took decisions with peers in other sectors pre and post participation in the programme

How often do you personally meet with peers at your level in other sectors?

	At least weekly	Fortnightly	Monthly	Quarterly	Every six months	Annually	Less often
Baseline	24%	16%	42%	8%	8%	3%	
Endline	33%	23%	41%	3%			

■ At least weekly   ■ Fortnightly   ■ Monthly   ■ Quarterly   ■ Every six months   ■ Annually   ■ Less often

How often do you personally take decisions with peers at your level in other sectors?

	At least weekly	Fortnightly	Monthly	Quarterly	Every six months	Annually	Less often
Baseline	8%	11%	24%	27%	11%	16%	3%
Endline	10%	21%	44%	18%	5%	3%	

■ At least weekly   ■ Fortnightly   ■ Monthly   ■ Quarterly   ■ Every six months   ■ Annually   ■ Less often

Base: PLP 2021/22 programme delegates completing both baseline and endline surveys (39).
Difference between the baseline and endline are statistically significant at the 5% level.

Delegates said the programme gave them **new language and insights** into the benefits of systems leadership and cross-sector collaboration, which they have been able to use with colleagues and partners. The programmes also reminded delegates about the benefits of **investing in relationships with local partners**.

Whilst most delegates were collaborating with external partners prior to participation in the programme, several described the programme as having supported a **renewed focus and impetus for this work**. One PLP delegate described taking a more proactive approach to driving forward a collaboration with local partners that had been in the pipeline for some time.

Their participation in the programme made them realise the importance of such collaborations and inspired them to drive it forward at pace resulting in it being implemented earlier and more comprehensively than it otherwise would have been.

Through engagement with peers on the programme, delegates **gained insights into the key issues and challenges facing other sectors**, which informed their engagements with those sectors.

For example, one PLP delegate discussed having gained a much better understanding of the strategic priorities and funding landscape within the higher education sector from one of their peers on the programme. They were using these insights to secure the engagement and buy-in of local university partners in driving evidence-based policy and practice improvements within their sector.

There were examples of where topics and themes raised on the programme led delegates to **investigate how issues were being addressed locally** and take forward collaborative actions with partners to address them.

One PLP delegate described how their systems leadership project on care leavers led them to look at the nature of local support for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and how they could work better with local partners to improve this. The project provided the impetus for them to implement changes to their ways of working including appointing an internal manager to take the lead on engaging local authorities and community partners, making better use of existing data and evidence, challenging decision-making, accessing additional funding and establishing a national voice on this issue.

Again, the mechanism for change in this example was that the group project was on a topic that was **directly relevant to a key issue facing their organisation**.

There were a small number of examples of where delegates drew on guidance and support from their peers on the programme to support organisational initiatives. However, delegates commented that the cross-sector nature of the programme combined with the geographical distribution of participants meant that there were **limited opportunities for impactful collaborations between delegates themselves**.

6.4   Service delivery

The evaluation identified some actions taken by senior leaders following participation in the PLP or Deputy CEO programme which **may eventually lead to improvements to service delivery** within their organisations, but these could not be evidenced within the timescales of the evaluation. These related to actions taken based on new insights, learning or connections made through programme.

One Deputy CEO delegate discussed the benefits of **having a sponsor who was an expert in one of the biggest challenges their organisation was facing** (gangs and knife crime). Having a sponsor allowed them to discuss with a sector expert the issues and challenges they were facing and to receive their advice and guidance. The sponsor also introduced them to a local partner who gave them additional guidance and information, which may eventually improve service design and delivery.

One PLP delegate was inspired by a session on **artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning** attended as part of the programme. They subsequently created a new role in their organisation for a Chief Information and Technology Officer whose role is to look at how AI and other types of machine learning could be used to improve their management systems and processes. They hope that this investment will ultimately result in improved efficiency and effectiveness in service delivery.

Another delegate committed to developing **equality impact assessments** at the outset of all new policy developments within their organisation. This was based on learning from their systems improvement project, which focussed on the impact of net zero policies on disadvantaged groups. They hope that this will result in future policy development and delivery taking greater account of the needs of all service users, including those from less advantaged groups.

6.5   Systemic outcomes

Collectively, the organisational outcomes described above were expected to contribute to change at the system level in terms of improved productivity of public services, improved quality of public services and improved outcomes for citizens. It was beyond the scope of the evaluation to directly measure outcomes at the system level and the strength of evidence available on organisational outcomes is not sufficient to make any contribution claims about these.

7 Conclusions and recommendations

7.1 Programme design

The **cross-sector** nature of the programmes was a major attraction for senior leaders, and something which differentiated them from other leadership development opportunities available to leaders within their individual sectors. Leaders were motivated to participate in the programme to **collaborate and connect** with peers from other organisations and sectors. Their participation reinforced their views on the benefits of this: for example, gaining insight about how to deal with challenges, or avoiding unintended consequences of their actions for other sectors.

The opportunities for **networking and peer-to-peer learning** were where the personal development needs articulated by individual leaders and the benefits from the programme were most clearly aligned (and delivered). The programme successfully achieved its object of improving delegates' understanding of other sectors. Given that the opportunity to connect with other sectors was many delegates' primary motivation for taking part. This was strongly valued by delegates and a major factor in the high levels of satisfaction with the programme.

Future programmes should **retain a focus on cross-sector collaboration** to complement the leadership development opportunities available within individual sectors. This should be clearly communicated to potential delegates as a distinguishing feature of the programme relative to other opportunities.

Many of the benefits of participation identified by delegates, in particular a greater understanding of other sectors, arose from simply having the opportunity to meet and interact with peers from other sectors. This suggests that future programmes should allow delegates **plenty of space and time for informal interaction, reflection and discussion**, rather than having a full schedule of speakers or facilitated sessions.

While cross-sector networking was a common theme, delegates' expectations about what else they could expect to gain from participating in the programmes were varied, and not always aligned with what programmes were intended to deliver. Once future programmes are designed, it will be important to be **very clear in communications about their objectives.**

For example, whether a programme is more focused on developing networks or on skills development (and if so, which skills); and whether it is intended to drive organisational change or is primarily focused on personal development. Whilst the outcomes delegates get from a programme will always vary to some extent due to their individual backgrounds and experience, this will allow potential participants to judge what they and their organisation can expect to gain from the programme and whether it is relevant to their needs.

Providing greater clarity to participants on **expected types of outcomes** would mean that participants go into the programme with greater clarity and focus on the changes they might be expected to make (if any) at their organisation following participation. For leaders who have been in their role for a long time, programmes could be focused on ensuring they have a skillset which is up to date and appropriate for the changing demands of their role.

Some Deputy CEO programme delegates expressed disappointment that the programme did not focus more on the specific experiences they have faced as a result of their protected characteristics. There

was an expectation that there would be opportunities to discuss these and for some that was a motivating factor for opting to take part in the programme rather than other leadership development opportunities. **If future leadership programmes are targeted at specific groups, it will be important to build in opportunities for delegates to discuss their experiences of the characteristics they share.**

Deputy CEO delegates valued the coaching they received, and some saw this as the most useful aspect of the programme. It provided them with one-to-one support to reflect on what they were learning and what this might mean for them in their individual role, as well as to support their ongoing development.

Future programmes delivered to groups of leaders with a wide range of roles and development needs should consider incorporating **coaching alongside main programme content** to embed learning and help delegates apply it to their own context. This may be more appropriate for programmes at the Deputy CEO level, since leaders at this level may be less likely than CEOs to have coaching in place already.

Delegates found the systems improvement projects challenging as the diversity within project groups (in terms of roles, sectors and regions) made it difficult to select a topic that would be of interest and relevance to all group members. This sometimes resulted in project topics that were overly broad, leading to a lack of engagement. Project groups were deliberately chosen to be geographically dispersed based on initial testing work carried out by NLC, in which delegates commented that being grouped with people who they had existing professional relationships with might inhibit them from putting forward new and experimental ideas.

The make-up of teams, and whether this has a regional, sectoral or thematic focus, should be informed by the overall objective of the project: whether this is more focused on trying new ways of working and generating ideas, versus maximising opportunities for impact and taking the project forward after the end of the programme.

Several delegates suggested that, alternatively, groups could be allocated real-life, current problems to address rather than having to choose these themselves. Alternatively, groups could receive more guidance and support through the process of choosing a topic, since this process required balancing competing interests within the group and was time-consuming.

The findings of this evaluation demonstrate that it takes time for leadership development interventions to translate into **measurable improvements** to service delivery. This should be considered in the design, delivery and timescales for evaluations of future programmes.

Much has changed in the context within which public sector organisations operate since July 2018. Consideration should be given to conducting a **development needs analysis with senior public sector leaders** to give the Leadership College for Government an up-to-date picture of the level and type of current needs amongst this group. Future leadership development programmes can then be designed accordingly, potentially with a core programme and optional sessions or modules on key themes.

7.2 Programme delivery

Delegates thought that some of the invited speakers could have done more to **adapt their messages to the challenges currently facing the public sector** (for example, taking account of the challenges faced in developing new initiatives). Future programmes with invited speakers should request that they tailor their content to ensure it is as relevant as possible for the audience and make this relevance clear.

A hybrid delivery model works well and should be continued: information-sharing sessions can be delivered effectively online whilst in-person events are better for networking. Future programmes could also incorporate some additional online or hybrid elements or make recordings of some sessions available to further improve accessibility.

Face-to-face delivery was valued: however, some delegates found it difficult to commit to attending week-long residentials and taking this amount of time out of their day job. They suggested that a programme could be delivered in **three shorter sessions** rather than two week-long ones. However, the majority of delegates considered the length of the residential itself appropriate. A consistent theme (in both years of delivery) was that programmes should avoid asking delegates to travel to residentials on a Sunday.

Delegates expressed **high levels of satisfaction** with how the programmes were delivered overall. Delivery teams were praised by delegates for having managed the programmes well, particularly in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and the challenges this posed to delivery.

7.3   Lessons from the evaluation

The evaluation generated useful learning to inform future evaluations of public sector leadership development programmes. Administering a baseline survey as part of programme registration was found to be an effective way to collect pre-participation data on key outcomes of interest that the programmes were seeking to influence.

It can be challenging to achieve high response rates to online surveys of senior public sector leaders and so alternative options for collecting post-participation measures should be considered, particularly for designs that are dependent on achieving high response rates (as is often the case with experimental / quasi-experimental designs concerning a relatively small population).

Senior leaders respond well to qualitative interviews: they are used to being asked to share their views and opinions and experienced at sharing insights in a clear and articulate manner. For more intensive evaluation activities, such as case studies, setting an early expectation around what this will involve (including the time commitment) is helpful in securing engagement and participation.

# Annex A: NLC Theory of Change

Theory of Change

The vision for the NLC was to help the country's most senior public service leaders develop the skills, knowledge and networks required to address society's most complex strategic challenges.

The NLC's Theory of Change is shown on the next page. This is a description of how the NLC's activities were intended to achieve its desired results. It was developed from the original Theory of Change: these developments were based on evidence from the Year 1 evaluation and a review of available evidence on outcomes from public sector leadership programmes undertaken in summer 2020.

The main changes to the Theory of Change from the previous version were:

- outcomes relating to increased tenure in post and reduced turnover of public sector leaders were removed. The review of evidence found limited evidence to suggest that public sector leadership interventions were associated with increased tenure, and this was corroborated by the Year 1 evaluation findings.

- a new outcome was added relating to improved wellbeing, identified by the Year 1 evaluation and the evidence review.

- a new outcome was added relating to improved leadership skills, which was identified by the evidence review as a key outcome from leadership development interventions. In addition, the shift of the NLC into the GSCU resulted in an increased focus on skills and learning outcomes.

- outcomes relating to understanding of systems leadership approaches and implementation of these approaches were separated to reflect the finding from the year 1 evaluation that there may be organisational and systemic barriers to implementing such approaches even when there is good understanding of them.

- the theory of change for the NLC has not been updated to reflect the findings from Year 2 of the evaluation because the programmes are no longer being delivered. Instead, the evaluation findings are being taken forward into other theories of change being developed by the LCG with similar groups and/or aims .

Figure 7.1: Theory of Change for the NLC, 31 August 2021
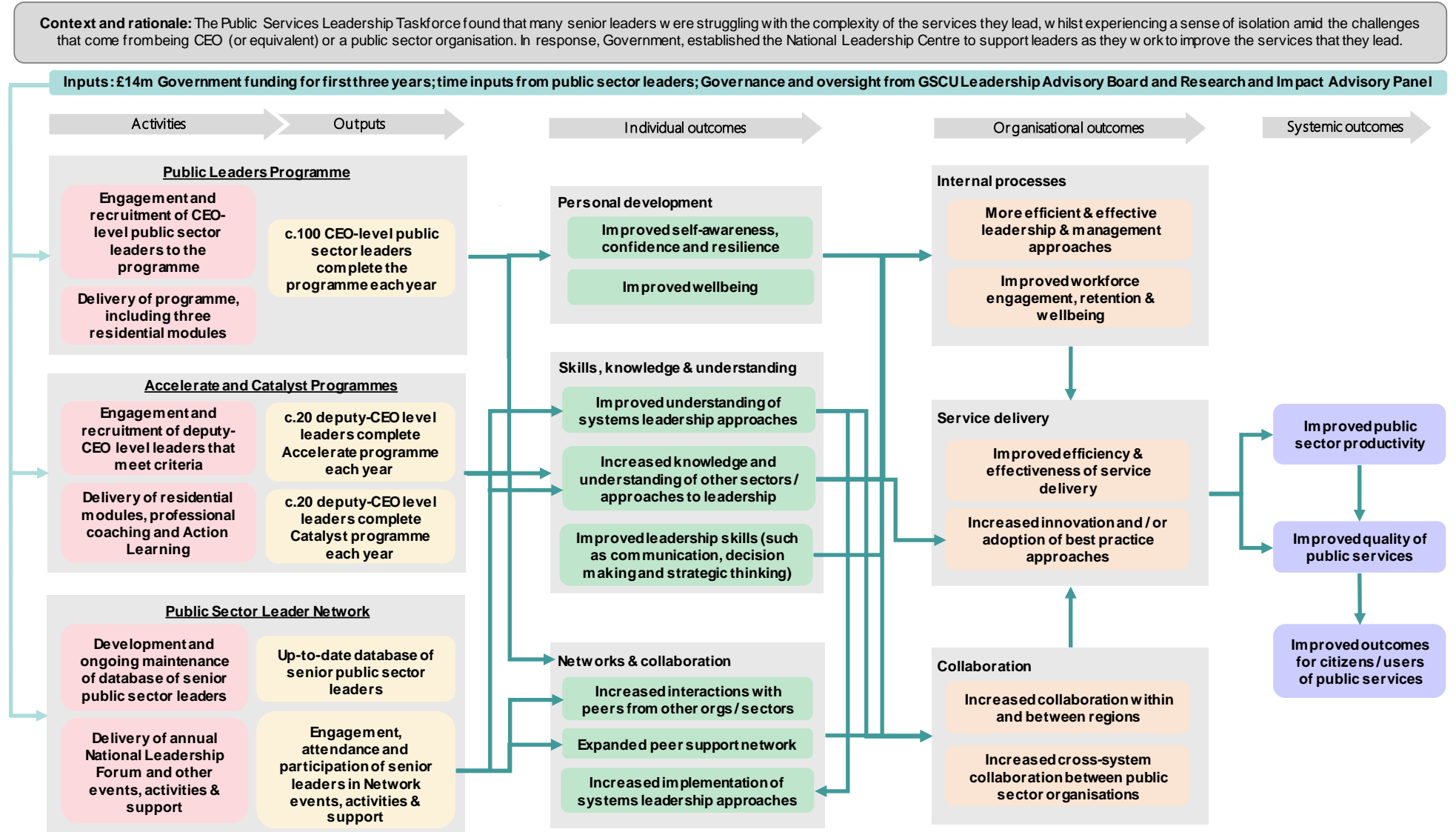
Annex B: Year 2 Delivery

The NLC delivered the following three core strands of activity in Year 2 (delivered between January 2021 and November 2022)[xii]:

- **Leadership Development Programmes:** for senior public service leaders. Originally there were three such programmes: Public Leaders Programme, Accelerate Programme and Catalyst Programme. This evaluation focuses on these programmes and more detail is provided on each of these below.

- **Public Sector Leader Network**: open to approximately 1,200 of the most senior public sector leaders in England (CEO or equivalent), the Network provides access to a range of regional and national events, online webinars and workshops, a shadowing programme and "Coffee Connect", in which leaders are matched for introduction meetings. Network activities were not a focus of the evaluation, although we have included evidence on these where available.

- **Research, Engagement and Communications**: to build the evidence base on public sector leadership through conducting and commissioning research and evaluation to support planning and delivery in NLC teams and to inform the public sector leader Network. These activities are not in scope of the evaluation.

7.4　Description of leadership development programmes

Public Leaders Programme

This leadership development programme was intended to be delivered to approximately **100 CEO-level public sector leaders** in Year 2. The Programme consisted of a launch event, diagnostics assessment, two residential modules (delivered to three cohorts of delegates), a webinar series, a system improvement project and a close event.

Accelerate Programme

Accelerate was a leadership Programme for Deputy-CEO level leaders from across the public sector. It is specifically aimed at high-performing leaders from ethnic minority backgrounds who are looking to become CEO in the next 3-5 years. It incorporated a two-day residential module (originally intended to last three days), as well as a diagnostics assessment and access to professional coaching.

It also included a systems improvement project, which involve participants working in groups of five over a period of six months to address real-life challenges. Accelerate was delivered to approximately 20 leaders during 2020/21 and was scheduled to be delivered again to a similar sized cohort during 2021/ 22.

Catalyst Programme

Catalyst was a new element of the NLC offer introduced for 2021/22. It was a leadership development programme targeted at deputy-CEO level leaders from across the public sector who have a disability or long-term condition. The offer was similar to Accelerate and included a two-day residential module, a diagnostics assessment and access to professional coaching. The aim was to recruit approximately 20 leaders to the programme during 2021/ 22. However, it was difficult to recruit sufficient numbers of delegates. **This resulted in the Accelerate and Catalyst programmes being merged into a single Deputy CEO programme with 22 delegates altogether.** Throughout the rest of this report we therefore refer to the Deputy CEO programme rather than the Accelerate/Catalyst programmes.

Annex C: Detailed Methodology

Introduction

This section outlines the methodological approach underpinning the evaluation. It provides an overview of the data collection approaches that were undertaken to inform the Year 2 evaluation, which provide the evidence sources used in this report. It includes an overview of our approach to analysis and triangulation of this evidence and discussion of some of the methodological limitations in the approach.

The Year 1 evaluation report[xiii] details the data collection activities that were undertaken in Year 1. The following sections focus on data collection carried out for Year 2.

Primary Data Collection – Quantitative

Feedback surveys

Paper-based feedback surveys were administered to PLP delegates by NLC staff immediately following completion of both Residential 1 and Residential 2. The focus of these surveys was on collecting data to inform the process evaluation, but they also included some questions designed to capture data on individual outcomes to enable tracking change on these over the course of the programme. Table 7.1 shows very high response rates to these surveys, with almost all PLP delegates completing both.

Table 7.1: Residential feedback surveys administered to PLP delegates

	Date(s) administered	Number of responses	% of all programme delegates attending the residential
Residential 1 feedback survey	October 2021	68	97%
Residential 2 feedback survey	March 2022	50	100%

Programme Baseline and Endline surveys

In advance of starting the programme, both PLP and Accelerate and Catalyst delegates were asked to complete an **online survey** designed to provide a **baseline** set of measures across a range of items aligned to the outcomes in the NLC Theory of Change. In some cases, outcomes were measured through single direct self-reported measures (such as time spent collaborating with organisations in other sectors) and in others proxy measures were used (such as ratings across a series of attitudinal statements).

For the PLP, an initial **baseline survey** was administered to senior leaders who had signed up to Year 2 of the programme in autumn 2020. However, the start of the programme was subsequently delayed until September 2021 due to ongoing restrictions associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. During this time, there was some attrition of senior leaders who had originally signed up to the programme and completed a baseline survey but were no longer intending to participate, as well as recruitment of others to take their place. The baseline survey was therefore re-administered in the summer of 2021 to the final cohort of senior leaders who would take part in the programme.

A version of the survey was re-administered to all programme participants following completion of the programme (**endline survey**) to measure change pre/post intervention. Responses were matched using a unique ID assigned to each participant.

As outlined in Table 7.2, the baseline survey was completed by all delegates who started the programme. A total of 40 delegates completed the endline survey, accounting for 61% of all those who completed the programme. Of these, 39 could be matched to the baseline.

Table 7.2: Baseline and endline data collection for PLP delegates

	Date(s) administered	Number of responses	% of all programme delegates*
Baseline survey	June-July 2021	90	100%
End line survey	December 2021	40	61%
Baseline and End line Surveys that could be matched	-	39	60%

There were 90 in total, of which 65 completed the programme

For the Accelerate and Catalyst programmes, the baseline survey was administered in October 2021 and completed by all delegates. The endline survey was administered in November 2022 immediately following the programme close event and was completed by half of all programme delegates. Due to the low number of responses to the endline survey, no matching between baseline and endline survey data was undertaken.

Table 7.3: Baseline and endline data collection for Deputy CEO delegates

	Date(s) administered	Number of responses	% of all programme delegates
Baseline survey	October 2021	22	100%
End line survey	November 2022	11	50%

Primary Data Collection – Qualitative

Focus groups / depth interviews with NLC staff

To inform the process evaluation, **two focus groups** were carried out with NLC staff responsible for delivery of the PLP and the Deputy CEO programme. These groups were conducted following completion of each programme in August 2022 (for PLP) and December 2022 (for the Deputy CEO programme).

An additional **depth interview** was carried out with a former Deputy Director of the NLC in August 2022. These discussions explored their views and perceptions of what had gone well, less well and why in programme delivery, including success factors and challenges faced in implementation and views on progress towards intended outcomes and impacts.

Interviews with PLP and Deputy CEO programme delegates

Qualitative interviews with delegates who had completed the PLP and Deputy CEO programme were conducted as part of the evaluation. The findings from these interviews informed both the process and impact evaluation.

- **16 interviews with Year 2 PLP delegates were conducted between August and September 2022.** A sampling approach was taken to the selection of programme delegates to participate in

case studies (detailed below) to ensure an appropriate mix by factors such as region and sector. All remaining delegates who were not included in the case study sample were invited to participate in an interview and all those who consented were included.

- **10 interviews with Deputy CEO delegates** were conducted between November 2022 and February 2023. All delegates who participated in the programme were invited to take part in an interview and all those who consented were included.

Interviews each lasted 45-60 minutes and focused on gathering feedback on delegates' views and experiences of participation in the PLP or Deputy CEO programme. They also explored whether engagement with the NLC had any impact on intended individual and / or organisational outcomes aligned to the Theory of Change, as well as any unintended outcomes that were not referenced in the Theory of Change.

Case studies with PLP delegates

To understand how leaders had responded to the programme and its effects on their organisation, service delivery and user experience, the evaluation plan included provision to conduct a series of **in-depth case studies** with PLP participants.

The aim of the case studies was to explore the pathways / causal mechanisms between individual and organisational outcomes, gather evidence to test the hypotheses set out in the Theory of Change, and explore alternative pathways and explanations for any observed outcomes. The case studies were intended to incorporate **both primary and secondary** data collection and analysis where available.

The approach to selection, recruitment and delivery of the case studies involved:

1. **Communication to delegates** – the NLC programme delivery team provided an introduction and overview of the evaluation to delegates during the first residential. As part of this, they were informed that they may be contacted by Ipsos and asked to participate in a case study.

2. **Initial selection** – the evaluation team reviewed the profile of delegates and selected a sample aimed at ensuring a cross-section by factors such as sector, region and length of time in role. 16 delegates were selected for initial contact and consent. Due to low response rates, this was later increased to 32.

3. **Initial contact and consent** – the next stage involved contacting the selected delegates and asking them if they would be willing to consent to be contacted at a later date to discuss the possibility of participating in a case study. They were provided with an information pack setting out what this would involve and given the opportunity to discuss any queries / concerns with a member of the evaluation team. A total of nine delegates consented to be re-contacted.

4. **Depth interviews with senior leaders** – towards the end of the programme, the Ipsos / IES evaluation team conducted depth interviews with each of the nine delegates who agreed to be re-contacted. These discussions explored their experiences of the programme and views on outcomes resulting from participation. They were also used to gauge their interest, willingness and suitability to be a case study.

5. **Follow up research** – the depth interviews identified limited evidence of organisational outcomes from participation in the programme. As a result, only two case studies were selected as suitable for further research with a wider group of stakeholders.

Secondary Data Collection and Analysis

Diagnostic Data

The NLC, in partnership with Korn Ferry, developed a tailored Chief Executive diagnostic assessment to deliver to programme delegates for Year 1 of the PLP. The assessment was based on four individual 'dimensions' – Competencies, Experiences, Traits and Drivers. Data was collected for around each of these dimensions using a range of methods using two surveys: a 'career history' survey and a 'competencies' survey.

The 'career history' and 'competencies' surveys were administered to both PLP and Deputy CEO delegates prior to their participation in the programme (alongside the baseline surveys). The findings were used to provide further detail on the profile of leaders who participated in the programmes.

Table 7.4: Diagnostics data collection for PLP and Deputy CEO delegates

	Date(s) administered	Number of responses	% of all programme delegates
PLP diagnostics survey	June-July 2021	88*	98%
Accelerate and Catalyst diagnostics survey	October 2021	22	100%

*Responses received for the baseline and diagnostics survey differ due to two delegates completing only the baseline survey.

Analysis of diagnostics data for the PLP in this report is based on 86 responses (96% of all PLP delegates). This is because two delegates submitted their responses past the deadline, and were therefore not included in the programme-level analysis.

Analysis and synthesis

Quantitative Analysis

Descriptive statistics have been used to describe the basic features of secondary data and quantitative survey data with headline summaries presented as percentages in tables, graphs or in text. Where appropriate, percentage change has been presented.

Low responses rates or small sample sizes, generally less than 30, should be treated as indicative only. Non-response rates to individual questions within the quantitative surveys (both paper-based and online) were low. Where responses were missing, data has been excluded from the analysis.

As the surveys included a number of Likert Scale response questions, data was ordinal and so non-parametric tests were used. Where pre-post programme survey responses were matched, a related-samples Wilcoxon signed rank test was used to make general inferences. Changes between baseline and endline when comparing continuous variables were done using a paired t-test. Significant differences[xiv] were determined as p value less than or equal to 0.05 ($p \leq .05$). Where significant differences are referred to in the reporting of the findings, this is the definition that has been used.

The low base sizes of the matched pre/post surveys meant that most differences identified were not significant. Where differences were significant, this has been noted in the reporting. It can be assumed that where differences are not described as significant then they were not.

Qualitative Analysis

The qualitative data collected through the evaluation was transcribed and transcripts were coded against an analytical framework set out in Excel. For outcomes and impacts this framework was aligned to the NLC Theory of Change and considered evidence for each outcome being realised, evidence of behaviour change as a result of that outcome, evidence of the effect of the programmes on that outcome and evidence about other barriers and enablers to achieving that outcome. The framework for the process evaluation questions was aligned to the key questions the process evaluation was seeking to address.

Triangulation and synthesis

Beyond using robust analytical methods across quantitative and qualitative data sources, our analytical approach was designed to allow for sufficient and effective triangulation of data sources. This involved a detailed examination of findings, themes and patterns across multiple data sources to answer our key research questions and to assess and test the underpinning assumptions of the Theory of Change.

Strengths and limitations

A key strength of the evaluation was that it was based on a **Theory of Change**, which provided a consistent framework to inform data collection, analysis, synthesis and reporting. A further strength was the **mixed-method approach** to data collection, which drew on both quantitative and qualitative data to enable a breadth and depth of perspectives.

There were high levels of engagement and participation in the evaluation from programme delegates, particularly the post-module surveys. Qualitative research was based on careful sampling to ensure a mix of participants from different regions, sectors and length of time in role.

A further strength of the evaluation was that the methods selected **could be flexed** in response to changes in the strategic and operational context for the NLC.

For example, some elements of data collection (such as the residential feedback surveys) were embedded within programme delivery and therefore not negatively impacted by changes to programme delivery dates. Other primary data collection (such as interviews and case studies) could be rescheduled in response to changes to the delivery dates for the programme.

This meant we were able to generate insightful findings despite the substantial delivery changes necessitated by COVID-19. The Theory of Change and evaluation design were updated throughout to reflect lessons learned, emerging evidence and in response to changing requirements. This supported the needs of the NLC team to optimise programme delivery for current participants.

As with any evaluation there were methodological limitations which should be noted, including:

- **Participant self-selection biases** – the self-selected nature of survey/interview participants meant that delegates who chose to take part may not be truly representative of the entire population.

- **Low response rate for the PLP endline survey** – mainly due to the fact that over one quarter of PLP participants did not complete the programme which limited the numbers of pre/post survey responses that could be matched, thereby reducing statistical power.

- **Measurement of progress towards outcomes** – most outcomes were self-reported rather than observed, which may have resulted in an element of bias or subjectivity in reporting. A further

limitation is that it has not been possible to measure some outcomes directly. To mitigate this, a range of proxy measures have been used (such as ratings on attitudinal statements).

- **Reliance on data collection from programme delegates** – the case studies were intended to explore wider organisational and systemic outcomes from senior leaders' participation in the PLP through interviews with wider stakeholders and analysis of relevant secondary data. However, it was clear from initial interviews with case study leads that there would be limited value in extending data collection beyond them as individuals.

- **Lack of control group** – the design of the programmes meant that it was not possible to establish a suitable control group of senior public sector leaders who did not participate. This meant that the evaluation had to rely on theory-based approaches to assessing causality rather than experimental or quasi-experimental designs.

Annex D: Personal development outcomes

On completion of the Programme, leaders were expected to have improved self-awareness, confidence and resilience, through engagement in activities aimed at better understanding their strengths and potential areas for development (such as the diagnostic assessment and opportunities for self-reflection).

It was also suggested that leaders might gain improved wellbeing from having a space for reflection and the opportunity to step away from their day-to-day obligations to focus on their leadership style and approach In addition to access to professional advice and guidance on health, wellbeing and resilience. An expanded personal Network of peer support in the form of their co-participants was also expected to contribute to increased resilience and wellbeing.

7.4.2 Improved self-awareness, confidence and resilience

Self-awareness and confidence appear to be common outcomes from the PLP and Deputy CEO programmes. The majority of PLP delegates (85%) thought that participating in the programme had helped increase their "confidence, self-awareness or resilience", with nearly a third (31%) reporting that the programme had helped with this to a great extent.

Delegates said that hearing about challenges faced by other leaders had helped them **feel more assured in their own role**; leadership roles can be isolating and there can be an expectation for leaders to appear confident to others. The programme highlighted to delegates that different parts of the public sector have lots in common in terms of the challenges they are facing, that no single organisation has the answers to some of these 'wicked' problems[xv], but that despite being unable to solve a given problem their organisation could have an important role to play.

> **"…it doesn't matter that it's not solving the whole problem. You just have to do your bit, because you can't solve the problem because it's difficult, too wicked and there's no point being overwhelmed by it, and you just have to make your little step here and hope that other people are making their little steps over there… it was deeply encouraging to be reminded of that."** – PLP delegate

Some delegates also commented that hearing speakers from the emergency services or the military helped them reflect on their approach to crisis and risk and put this into perspective. A session on mental health in a leadership role had encouraged delegates to reflect on their own resilience, and that of their team, in the context of a volatile and complex environment.

The programmes also led to greater **self-awareness** among delegates, and this was one of the benefits most commonly identified by Deputy CEO participants in the end-of-programme survey. Delegates reported that the programme prompted them to reflect on how others see them and how they are able to influence others; and encouraged them to be their authentic selves, enhancing the positive aspects of their personality and what they can bring to the role. This was because the programme exposed them to a range of leadership styles and allowed them to reflect on how these are shaped by background and personality. The RADA training on personal impact and posture was also reported to have contributed to delegates' understanding of how they are perceived.

> **"I think I now have a much more rounded and communicable leadership story because of the programme, and that I kind of understand how powerful that can be in getting people to do what you need them to do, and to establish your credibility. So that is definitely something that I have taken away. Also being around ethnic minority leaders and seeing that in practice has been a useful approach in challenging leadership assumptions."** – Deputy CEO delegate

Deputy CEO delegates said the programme had helped them to see that they were ready for CEO placements: this was due to both the affirmation they received from coaching and mentorship, and through being able to see ethnic minority leadership and different leadership styles in practice. Nine of 11 Deputy CEO delegates surveyed said that the programme had helped them to understand what it takes to operate at CEO level. PLP participants also benefited from coaching and mentoring: this provided them a sounding board to discuss problems and provided reinforcement of their resilience and ability to cope with challenge and change.

Increased confidence was reported to result in delegates having an increased ability and willingness to contribute to discussions and challenge others; to network; and to appear in the media representing their organisation. Delegates also reported increased motivation to apply for more senior roles, or to take on roles and projects outside their "comfort zone". This could be roles in different sectors, such as non-executive director roles, or leading initiatives outside their areas of expertise but still related to their remit.

7.4.3 Improved wellbeing

Wellbeing was identified as an outcome of participating in NLC programmes less often than the other outcomes discussed in this chapter, which may reflect that it was not initially intended to be an important outcome of the programme.

Two-thirds of PLP delegates (64%) thought the programme had helped improve their wellbeing to at least some extent, but this was a lower proportion than many other outcomes, with one in ten saying the programme had not improved their wellbeing at all and only 5% saying it had improved their wellbeing to a great extent.

One third of PLP delegates (33%) specifically identified improved wellbeing when asked what they had gained from participating in the PLP. In the context of an increasingly challenging environment, with many delegates in the endline survey reporting higher demand for their services and greater workforce shortages compared to the start of the programme, it may be that the programme could not be expected to make a notable impact on wellbeing.

There was also relatively little qualitative evidence of improved wellbeing, although some delegates mentioned improved confidence (discussed above) or the opportunities to reflect afforded by the programme as things which had contributed to improved wellbeing. **Time to think and reflect** was the most commonly identified gain from the PLP programme, with 85% of delegates saying they had gained this. Others found the energy and enthusiasm of other delegates on the programme inspiring and motivating – and noted that this highlights the importance of minimising disengagement and drop-outs.

However, the programme led some delegates to make changes that may improve their wellbeing in the longer-term. PLP delegates commented that they had made changes to their habits such as getting more exercise or sleep, or making more time to recharge. This was attributed to the session on physical health, which had led some delegates to appreciate the links between improved health and work

performance. However, others commented that they were already practising healthy habits and so had not gained much from this session.

Improved wellbeing was seen to lead to a more positive, composed attitude and better ability to make decisions. Better awareness of energy levels meant that delegates could identify the times of day when they performed best and make the most of these.

Our standards and accreditations

Ipsos' standards and accreditations provide our clients with the peace of mind that they can always depend on us to deliver reliable, sustainable findings. Our focus on quality and continuous improvement means we have embedded a "right first time" approach throughout our organisation.

ISO 20252

This is the international market research specific standard that supersedes BS 7911/MRQSA and incorporates IQCS (Interviewer Quality Control Scheme). It covers the five stages of a Market Research project. Ipsos was the first company in the world to gain this accreditation.

Market Research Society (MRS) Company Partnership

By being an MRS Company Partner, Ipsos endorses and supports the core MRS brand values of professionalism, research excellence and business effectiveness, and commits to comply with the MRS Code of Conduct throughout the organisation. We were the first company to sign up to the requirements and self-regulation of the MRS Code. More than 350 companies have followed our lead.

ISO 9001

This is the international general company standard with a focus on continual improvement through quality management systems. In 1994, we became one of the early adopters of the ISO 9001 business standard.

ISO 27001

This is the international standard for information security, designed to ensure the selection of adequate and proportionate security controls. Ipsos was the first research company in the UK to be awarded this in August 2008.

The UK General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the UK Data Protection Act (DPA) 2018

Ipsos is required to comply with the UK GDPR and the UK DPA. It covers the processing of personal data and the protection of privacy.

HMG Cyber Essentials

This is a government-backed scheme and a key deliverable of the UK's National Cyber Security Programme. Ipsos was assessment-validated for Cyber Essentials certification in 2016. Cyber Essentials defines a set of controls which, when properly implemented, provide organisations with basic protection from the most prevalent forms of threat coming from the internet.

Fair Data

Ipsos is signed up as a "Fair Data" company, agreeing to adhere to 10 core principles. The principles support and complement other standards such as ISOs, and the requirements of Data Protection legislation.

Endnotes

[i] Annex A presents the Theory of Change for this period of delivery

[ii] Annex A presents the Theory of Change for this period of delivery

[iii] Better Public Services: Report by the Public Services Leadership Taskforce (publishing.service.gov.uk)

[iv] Baseline and endline survey responses could be matched for 39 PLP delegates (60% of those completing the programme).

[v] Year 1 of the PLP also contained a coaching element. However, this was removed for Year 2 after feedback showed that the many PLP delegates already had coaches.

[vi] PLP and Deputy CEO delegates, as part of their respective programmes, were tasked with a systems improvement project. Delegates were put into groups and asked to choose a systemic challenge to address, and to jointly develop a solution.

[vii] These percentages refer to delegates who completed both baseline and endline surveys (n=39). Among the whole cohort completing the baseline survey (n=86) the overall pattern is very similar to that shown in Figure 5.2, with delegates reporting strong or very strong skills in communication (71%), decision-making (80%), strategic thinking (70%) and managing complexity (70%).

[viii] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/rapid-evidence-assessment

[ix] Of 39 delegates who also completed the endline survey. Of all those completing the baseline survey (n=86), 86% agreed they were effective at working beyond the boundaries of their own organisation.

[x] These figures are from the 39 PLP participants who completed both a baseline and endline survey. They are statistically significant at the 5% level.

[xi] These figures are from the 39 PLP participants who completed both a baseline and endline survey.

[xii] Year 1 of the NLC was delivered between autumn 2019 and autumn 2020. The Year 1 Evaluation report is available here: Evaluation of the National Leadership Centre: Year one report (2021).

[xiii] Evaluation of the National Leadership Centre: Year 1 Report (2021).

[xiv] Significant difference refers to change (in this case between pre- and post-surveys) that is unlikely to be random but instead likely to reflect a consistent change in the response of the sample. Where significant differences have been identified pre and post participation in the NLC programmes, this does not indicate causality.

[xv] A "wicked" problem is a social or cultural problem that is considered to be very difficult (or even impossible) to solve because of complexity or interdependencies.