

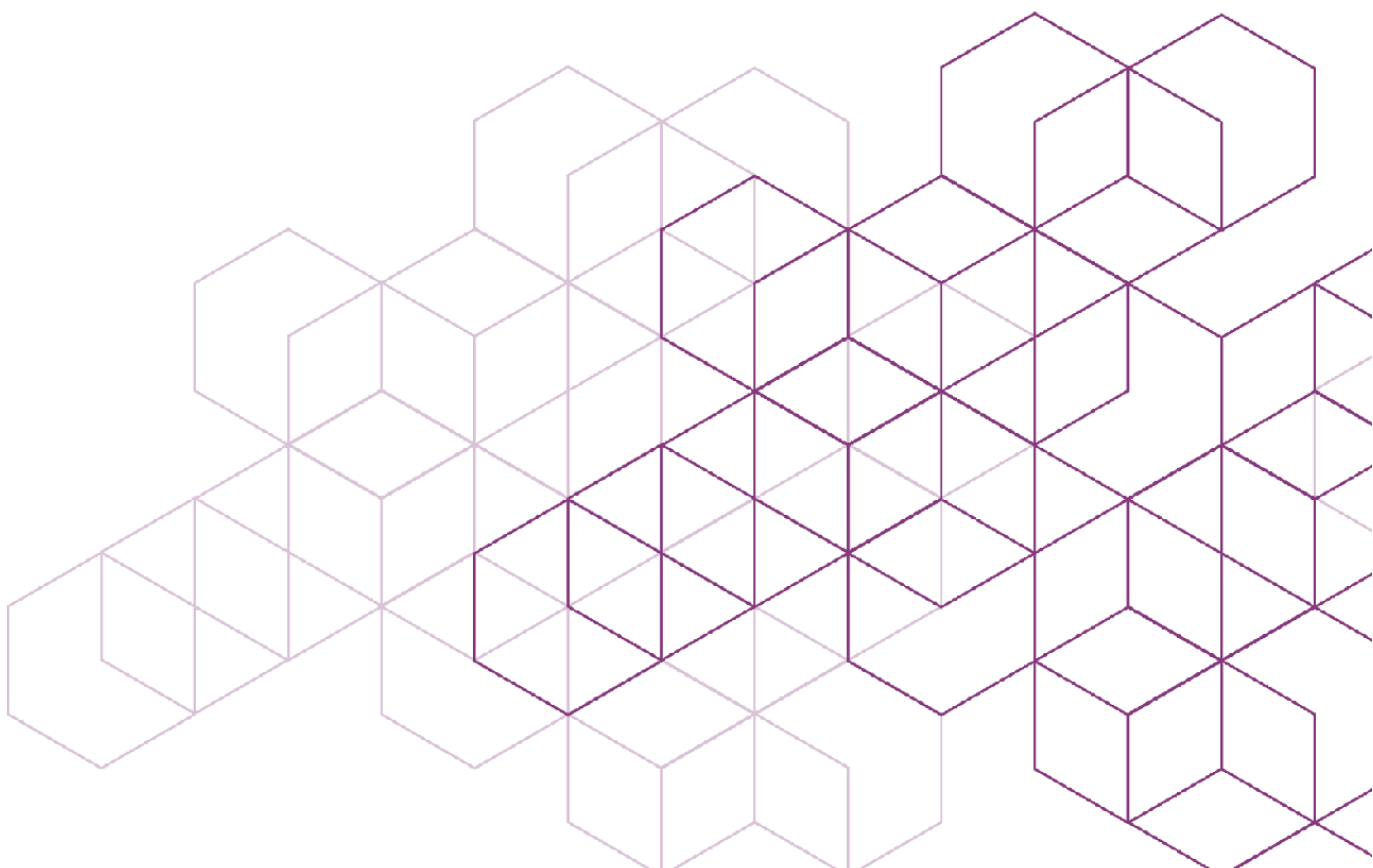


Government
Skills

Evaluating the Effectiveness of the Achieving your Potential Training Pilot in the Civil Service

Evidence from a randomised control trial

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Executive summary

Context and purpose

This report, commissioned by Government Skills, presents results from an evaluation of the Achieving Your Potential (AYP) pilot training programme. The AYP programme seeks to prepare civil servants who do not currently line manage staff for line management roles, with a focus on self-management and self-awareness. As such, it is the first of four training programmes — AYP, Foundation (F), Practitioner (P), and Senior Practitioner (SP) — in the Government Skills line management training suite. The latter three are evaluated in a separate report (Schuster, Steenmans and Woodhouse, 2026).

The AYP pilot was developed across a one-year period (2024 to 2025) and launched in June 2025. The programme runs over approximately four months, comprising four sequential online modules delivered via the online FutureLearn platform, supplemented by optional live webinars and problem-solving workshops. Unlike F, P, and SP that require attendance at scheduled workshop sessions, AYP's synchronous elements are voluntary, enabling greater flexibility but also creating different engagement patterns. This phase piloted both programme content and delivery logistics.

Evaluation approach

The evaluation combines data from a randomised controlled trial (RCT) with pre-post surveys of treatment and control group participants, interviews, focus groups, and training observations. The RCT approach provides robust, causal estimates of training effectiveness by randomly assigning civil servants to participate in training earlier (treatment group) or later (wait-listed control group), with measurement before the control group begins training. This design enables us to isolate the effect of training from other factors that might bias correlational approaches.

The evaluation was undertaken between May and November 2025, drawing on 849 participants responding to both pre-programme and post-programme surveys, 15 participant and trainer interviews, one focus group, and 7 training observations. Measures are based on a theory of change developed through detailed curriculum and learning material mapping.

Programme positioning and engagement

Pre-programme survey data show selection into AYP works as intended, with the programme addressing a gap in the F/P/SP suite by attracting non-line managers (96% of participants) in more junior grades. Participants come into the programme overwhelmingly wanting to take on line management roles within two years and feeling confident they would be effective managers.

The average training quality rating is 7.6 out of 10. This is above P (7.3) but below F (7.9) and SP (8.3), though this comparison should be interpreted cautiously given AYP's pilot



status. Engagement with the online learning platform is evaluated positively by most participants. However, attendance at the optional webinars and problem-solving workshops falls below F/P/SP levels, with only 22-29% of participants attending all sessions. This comparison should be interpreted cautiously: F/P/SP programmes include stronger expectations for attending scheduled activities, whereas AYP's synchronous sessions are explicitly optional. Qualitative evidence also indicates that meaningful engagement with programme materials requires more time than initial guidance suggested.

Programme effectiveness

How effective is AYP at enhancing managerial readiness, attitudes, and practices? Comparing treatment and control group participants before and after training, we find that AYP achieves its strongest effects in domains related to the 'self'. Participation leads to statistically significant knowledge gains about AYP concepts and greater self-assessed awareness of the Civil Service Line Management Standards (the cross-government framework defining expected line management practices), with substantively large effects. Participation also produces statistically significant and substantively large effects on self-assessed preparedness to take on a management role.

AYP also produces significant effects on attitudes related to self-awareness and authenticity. The evaluation finds significantly more frequent self-awareness and self-development practices among participants. Qualitative evidence helps explain the mechanisms: the most consistent outcome reported across interviews was enhanced confidence – participants described having their existing views on good management approaches validated, gaining new language to articulate their thinking, and beginning to see themselves as future managers.

We do not observe similar positive significant effects for domains beyond the 'self'. There are no significant effects on behaviour related to communication, psychological safety, change and innovation, or decision-making. Unlike F, P, and SP, we do not observe effects on peer networks. This finding is arguably by design, as AYP places less emphasis on peer learning. An unexpected finding was reduced intent to pursue management roles despite increased preparedness. Statistically, this effect is concentrated among participants with low pre-programme awareness of the Civil Service Line Management Standards. Qualitative evidence suggests this may reflect informed career decision-making following enhanced self-awareness and awareness of the Civil Service Line Management Standards.

Summary

In sum, AYP in its pilot stage has particular strengths in enhancing psychological readiness for line management roles, self-awareness, authenticity, and self-development practices. The programme's concentration of effects on 'self'-related domains reflects its design as pre-role psychological preparation rather than interpersonal skill development. Domains beyond the 'self', such as decision-making, change and innovation, and communication, may benefit from strengthening in the AYP rollout.



Beyond assessing AYP effectiveness, the evaluation demonstrates a credible approach to implementing RCTs of management and leadership training in the Civil Service. This approach moves beyond traditional feedback surveys and process evaluations to provide robust, causal evidence on training outcomes, and is scalable for replication across other programmes.

The following recommendations emerge from the evaluation findings and are presented in full in the Conclusions and Recommendations section; they are included here for ease of reference.

Key recommendations

#1: Expand and scale the AYP pilot Programme achieves meaningful outcomes in self-awareness and readiness at lower delivery cost.

#2: Strengthen content in less effective domains Content on change, innovation, and decision-making does not currently shift participant behaviour.

#3: Clarify programme positioning AYP builds psychological readiness, not operational skills or career progression—communicate this clearly.

#4: Provide realistic time guidance Participants need 4-5 hours weekly, not the stated 2 hours; managers need guidance on how to support.

#5: Rebalance content across modules First weeks are content-heavy; redistribute to reduce early overwhelm.

#6: Enable flexible content access Release all content at start so participants can work ahead during quieter periods.

#7: Support post-programme connection Enable opt-in contact sharing; signpost to existing communities of practice.

#8: Clarify long-term material access Participants want to keep materials; confirm access period and provide downloadable resources.

#9: Consider cohort structure Fixed cohorts could enable relationship formation alongside the valued cross-government exposure.

#10: Add lightweight practice assessment Scenario-based exercises would help participants gauge their developing capabilities.





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Motivation and evaluation scope

The quality of management and leadership in an organisation is a key predictor of organisational productivity (Bloom et al., 2013). An effective civil service thus requires effective management and leadership at all levels of hierarchy. In the Civil Service, there are over 100,000 line managers. How can Civil Service departments enhance the quality of management and leadership? Training programmes which prepare civil servants for line management roles are one important potential answer.

In this context, Government Skills has developed and implemented the Achieving Your Potential (AYP) training programme. A four-month programme, AYP is designed to enhance the readiness of participating civil servants to take on line management roles. AYP is part of a line management training suite comprising four programmes: AYP, Foundation (F), Practitioner (P), and Senior Practitioner (SP). Foundation, Practitioner, and Senior Practitioner target line managers with increasing levels of experience; a separate report details results of the evaluation of these programmes (Schuster, Steenmans and Woodhouse, 2026). AYP complements these programmes by serving civil servants not yet in line management roles, focusing on psychological readiness through self-awareness and self-management.

Evaluation objectives

How effective is the AYP pilot—implemented between May and October 2025—at achieving its aims? This evaluation report provides answers, addressing three sets of questions:

RCT evaluation:

- Who participates in AYP, and what are their profiles and motivations?
- How engaged are participants with the training?
- How effective is the training at fostering learning and peer networks?
- How effective is the training at enhancing attitudes and psychological readiness for line management roles?
- How effective is the training at enhancing line management practices?
- Do training effects vary by participant characteristics?

Process evaluation:

- What works within the programme's design and delivery? What does not work?
- Why does the programme achieve (or not achieve) its intended outcomes?
- In what contexts does the programme succeed or face challenges?



Methodological learning:

- Can a robust, replicable approach to management training evaluation using randomised controlled trials be implemented in the Civil Service?

Evaluation approach

The evaluation combines data from a randomised controlled trial (RCT) with pre-post surveys of treatment and control group participants, interviews, a focus group, and training observations. This mixed-methods design enables measurement not only of training satisfaction and engagement, but also of actual learning (through knowledge assessments), shifts in attitudes such as self-assessed readiness to take on line management roles, and changes in practices and behaviour.

The RCT approach provides robust, causal estimates of training effectiveness. Random assignment - with some civil servants participating in training earlier (treatment group) and others later (wait-listed control group) - enables us to isolate the effect of the training from other factors that might bias correlational approaches, such as the possibility that the most motivated civil servants are those who sign up for training. RCTs of training interventions remain scarce in the Civil Service, and the AYP evaluation offers a scalable approach for replication across other programmes.

RCT results are complemented by qualitative work (including training observations, a focus group, and interviews) to understand how and why the training achieves (or does not achieve) changes, and how programme design and implementation could be improved. Fieldwork was undertaken between May and October 2025. Schuster and Steenmans' (2026) how-to guide provides a detailed account of the methodological approach and guidance on replication in other management training evaluations.

Report structure

This report focuses on the AYP pilot evaluation. However, because AYP is designed as the first programme in a four-programme suite, references to Foundation (F), Practitioner (P), and Senior Practitioner (SP) appear throughout to position and contextualise AYP results relative to the other programmes for instance in comparative findings on engagement, satisfaction and learning. Full evaluation findings for F, P, and SP are presented in a companion report (Schuster, Steenmans and Woodhouse, 2026).

The report is structured as follows:

The next section provides a mapping of the training curriculum, followed by the development of a theory of change: which domains of knowledge, attitudes, and practices can the programme, in light of its content, theoretically shift?



The methodology section then presents the evaluation approach, covering the RCT design, survey implementation, and qualitative methods.

The results section presents empirical findings, leading with RCT evidence on learner profiles, training engagement and satisfaction, and training effectiveness on shifts in knowledge, attitudes, and practices. Qualitative evidence from interviews, focus groups, and observations is integrated throughout to contextualise and explain quantitative patterns, and to identify opportunities for improvement.

The methodological learning section presents AYP lessons on RCT feasibility, the value of multi-method integration, and implications for future evaluations. It provides guidance and makes the case that similar, rigorous RCTs and qualitative data collection can be implemented for other training programmes in the Civil Service.

The concluding section summarises conclusions and presents recommendations to strengthen the effectiveness of the AYP programme as it moves from pilot to rollout.



Programme mapping

This section provides an overview of the AYP programme structure, content, and delivery mechanisms. During this evaluation, AYP was in a pilot phase, testing both programme content and delivery logistics; this evaluation was part of that pilot process. Understanding how AYP is delivered is essential for interpreting the programme's effectiveness and for informing recommendations as the programme moves from pilot to wider rollout. This programme mapping exercise draws on systematic analysis of programme materials and interviews with programme designers and facilitators. Detailed module content and pedagogical approaches are presented in Appendix A.

Programme overview

Programme purpose

AYP is designed for aspiring line managers in the UK Civil Service who have no formal line management experience but are considering pursuing management roles. Unlike the F, P, and SP programmes which target individuals already in management positions, AYP operates distinctively as pre-role development, focusing on psychological readiness for management, rather than the more procedural competencies of line management.

Participants

AYP targets civil servants without current line management responsibilities who are considering pursuing management roles. Selection is based on management experience rather than grade; whilst participants typically range from AO to G6, the defining characteristic is absence of formal line management responsibility, not grade level.

This pre-role positioning represents a fundamentally different developmental intervention: preparing individuals psychologically for a role they may assume in future, rather than supporting individuals who are already navigating management responsibilities. Table 1 compares AYP's positioning with the other programmes in the management suite.

Table 1. Programme design specifications

	Achieving Your Potential	Foundation	Practitioner	Senior Practitioner
Programme positioning	Pre-role managerial readiness development	Entry-level for new managers	Experienced managers seeking strategic depth	Senior managers with strategic leadership roles



Intended audience (grades)	AO-G6	EO/HEO/SEO	G7 and above	G6 and above
Assumed experience level	No LM experience	0-2 years LM experience or none	2+ years substantial LM experience	5+ years with strategic responsibilities
Primary focus	Psychological readiness and self-awareness	Foundational management competencies	Complex management capability development	Systems thinking and senior leadership

Cohort composition and duration

Programme cohorts intentionally combine participants from multiple government departments rather than forming departmental cohorts. This structure exposes participants to diverse Civil Service contexts and challenges whilst building cross-government networks. Cohorts typically include over a hundred participants in total, with problem-solving workshops delivered to subsets of approximately thirty per workshop.

The programme runs multiple cohorts annually to accommodate Civil Service demand. Cohorts run at set times rather than on a continuous-access basis; participants begin together with Module 1 and progress through the programme on a fixed schedule. AYP unfolds over a four-month period, a duration intentionally designed to enable spaced learning with opportunities for workplace application and reflection between its four modules. Participants are informed that the programme requires approximately two hours per week of engagement.

Programme structure

The programme comprises four sequential modules delivered over four months, with access to each module released monthly. Module 1 (**Managing Yourself and Working with Others**) establishes foundational self-awareness; Module 2 (**Communicating Purposefully**) develops authentic communication skills; Module 3 (**Problem Solving and Decision Making**) builds analytical and systems thinking capabilities; and Module 4 (**Handling Change, Uncertainty and Overcoming Challenges**) addresses resilience and change navigation. Access to each module is released on a fixed schedule, but participants retain access to all materials for twelve months, enabling those who fall behind to catch up on missed content without losing access when subsequent modules are released. Further module content and learning outcomes are presented in Appendix A.



Each module combines asynchronous and synchronous elements. Asynchronous content is hosted on the FutureLearn platform, including **video** presentations, **reading** materials, and **interactive exercises**. The platform includes a comments function enabling participants to discuss content, ask questions, and respond to each other; facilitators actively engage with these discussions, providing clarification and challenge. Participants also receive structured **workbooks** with reflection prompts and exercises, plus a **learning journal** for open-ended personal reflection. Synchronous elements include one **webinar** per module (providing concept clarification and Q&A) and **problem-solving workshops** (interactive sessions with breakout activities and peer discussion). Webinars and workshops are optional, enabling flexibility but creating different engagement patterns compared to F/P/SP programmes where attendance expectations are stronger.

Programme features

The programme employs several pedagogical approaches aligned with its self-development philosophy. These include: reflective practice embedded throughout via journaling, end-of-section prompts, and workshop reflection activities; experiential learning through workshop activities, workbook exercises, and optional workplace challenges; peer learning through cross-departmental workshop discussions and collaborative problem-solving; and scaffolded development progressing from individual self-awareness through interpersonal communication to analytical capabilities and change navigation.

AYP does not employ formal summative assessment. Instead, participants engage in formative self-assessment, completion tracking through platform analytics, and personal action planning.

Support structures include experienced facilitators for problem-solving workshops, technical support for platform issues, cross-departmental peer networks, and active signposting to Civil Service resources and further development opportunities. Further details of these pedagogical approaches and support structures are provided in Appendix A.

Programme mapping summary

AYP's design reflects distinctive positioning within the Government Skills management training suite. Key characteristics include:

- pre-role focus targeting aspiring managers without formal line management experience
- four-month blended learning architecture combining asynchronous platform content (FutureLearn), synchronous webinars, and interactive online workshops
- fully digital delivery for cross-departmental cohorts and geographic accessibility
- spaced learning design with monthly module release, supporting reflection and workplace application between sessions



- formative, self-directed assessment rather than summative evaluation, with emphasis on reflective practice and personal development

This pre-role psychological readiness approach distinguishes AYP from traditional skills-based management training, addressing the question of whether individuals are ready for management rather than how to perform management tasks.



Theory of change

This section presents the theory of change for the AYP programme — the expected pathways through which the programme develops psychological readiness for line management among aspiring Civil Service managers.

The theory of change documents how the programme is expected to work based on evaluation team analysis of programme materials, designer intentions, and relevant academic literature, specifying testable propositions about mechanisms, outcomes, and causal relationships that subsequent sections in this report examine empirically. Detailed tables supporting this theory of change are presented in Appendix B.

AYP problem statement and foundational assumptions

AYP addresses a specific problem: without systematic pre-role psychological preparation, aspiring managers risk insufficient readiness for the emotional, relational, and identity challenges of management, potentially resulting in difficult transitions, suboptimal performance, and personal stress.

The AYP theory of change rests on four foundational assumptions summarised in Table 2 and further detailed in Appendix B.

Table 2. Foundational assumptions of AYP theory of change

Assumption	Description
Pre-role development works	Individuals can develop managerial competencies before formally assuming line management roles. Systematic pre-role development can reduce transition challenges and improve subsequent performance.
Readiness improves transitions	Greater psychological readiness facilitates smoother transitions into management roles and enhances subsequent effectiveness.
Non-technical challenges are critical	The most significant challenges facing new managers are often emotional, interpersonal, and identity-based, rather than procedural or technical.
Identity requires focus	Developing management identity and appropriate mindsets requires dedicated



attention through reflective practices, self-assessment, and identity-focused activities; they are not a guaranteed by-product of skills training.

How the programme works

The conceptual architecture unifying AYP's diverse content — such as emotional awareness activities, reflection exercises, systems thinking tools, communication practice — is Authentic Leadership (AL) theory (Walumbwa et al., 2008). The AL framework proposes four dimensions that manifest as psychological readiness for management:

- **self-awareness:** understanding one's strengths, weaknesses, values, emotions, and impact on others
- **relational transparency:** presenting one's authentic self, sharing genuine thoughts and feelings appropriately
- **internalised moral perspective:** self-regulation guided by internal values rather than external pressures
- **balanced processing:** objectively analysing information and actively soliciting challenging viewpoints

These dimensions, and their pre-role manifestations for aspiring managers, are detailed in Appendix B.

Change mechanisms and expected outcomes

The programme employs seven mechanisms to develop these AL dimensions, organised into self-focused and relational categories. Self-focused mechanisms include: emotional self-awareness development; manager identity formation; stress and emotional management; habitual reflection; and intentionality and goal-setting. Relational mechanisms include: peer interaction and network building; and systems thinking and perspective-taking. These mechanisms work interdependently, creating reinforcing developmental loops. Full mechanism descriptions are provided in Appendix B.

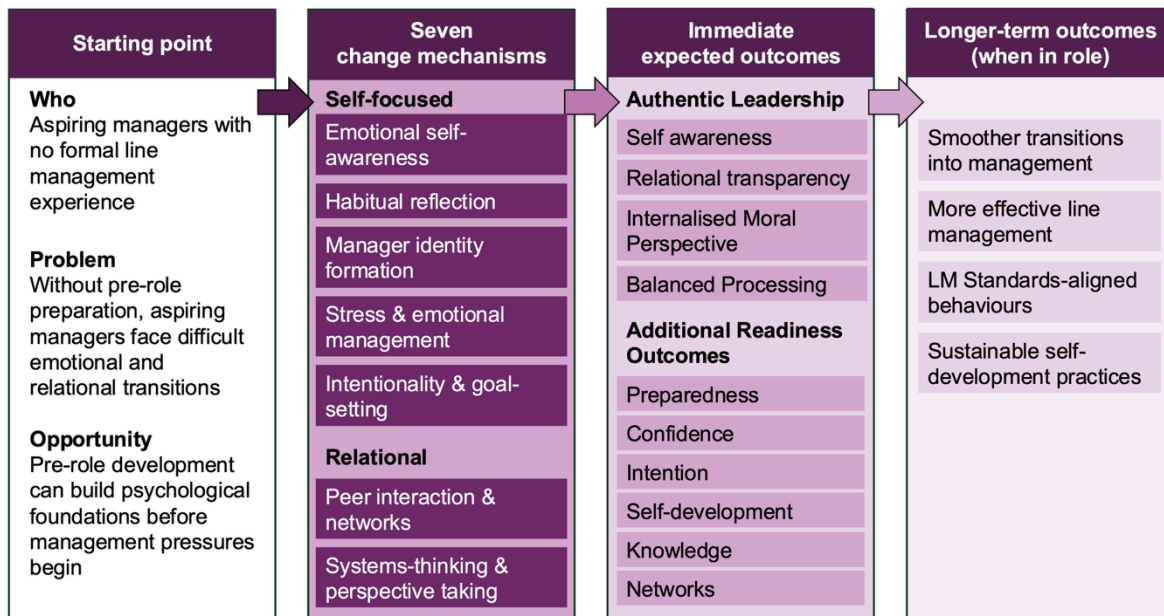
Expected outcomes

The theory of change proposes that these mechanisms develop the four AL dimensions, which participants experience as enhanced attitudes and practices. Additionally, the mechanisms develop specific managerial readiness components (preparedness, confidence, intention), self-development orientation, foundational knowledge, and peer support networks. This forms the programme's core causal logic:



Programme activities (mechanisms) → develop AL dimensions → experienced as enhanced attitudes and practices, plus other readiness components → enabling smoother management transitions

Figure 1. AYP theory of change



Expected longer-term outcomes include smoother transitions into management roles, more effective line management performance (particularly regarding interpersonal and emotional dimensions), and sustainable self-development practices supporting continued growth.

Key uncertainties

The theory of change operates within important uncertainties. Whether AL dimensions typically studied in existing leaders can be shown to actually meaningfully develop in pre-role contexts requires empirical validation. Contextual factors (such as workload intensity, manager support, and departmental culture) shape whether participants can engage meaningfully regardless of programme quality. Whether psychological readiness without procedural skills constitutes adequate preparation, and how long effects persist without role assumption, remain open questions.

Theory of change summary

AYP's theory of change posits that aspiring Civil Service line managers without formal management experience can develop psychological readiness for management through seven mechanisms organised into self-focused and relational categories. The theory assumes psychological readiness is necessary (though not alone sufficient) for effective management, and that authentic leadership capabilities can meaningfully develop before



formal management authority is assumed. Effectiveness depends partially on organisational context, workplace support, and opportunity structures enabling eventual role assumption.



Methodological approach

Randomised control trial (RCT)

AYP effectiveness was assessed using a wait-listed RCT. RCTs can enable rigorous testing of pilot programmes such as AYP prior to their expansion, to inform whether to roll out the pilot and how to strengthen it to ensure a scaled programme is effective.

All interested training participants were randomly assigned into either a treatment group starting the training in June 2025 or a wait-listed control group starting the training in November 2025. Random assignment enables the identification of causal effects of the programme on survey outcomes, by comparing the difference-in-difference between treatment and control group participants before and after the training. We estimate these effects using ANCOVA models that include the baseline value of each outcome as a covariate. This approach increases statistical precision and accounts for any residual baseline differences between groups.

Training effects were measured through pre-programme and post-treatment-group-programme surveys. An individual identifier at the end of each survey (an email address inserted by participants) enables the evaluation to link responses to the pre-survey from an individual with the same individual's post-programme survey response. Survey measures were developed based on the theory of change for AYP and programme mapping detailed in the previous sections, to ensure measures reflect plausible knowledge gains and attitudinal and behavioural changes given the training content. Alongside substantive questions to evaluate training effects, the questionnaires included questions about participant backgrounds, to understand who enrolls in the training and whether training effects vary for different participant groups. Surveys were programmed on SmartSurvey and pre-tested through a series of cognitive interviews with civil servants in relevant roles, to ensure survey measures were understood as intended.

Surveys were implemented in the same period for treatment and control group participants, with pre-programme surveys taking place in May 2025 and post-treatment-group programme surveys in October 2025. Participation in the surveys was incentivised by:

- **pre-programme:** survey completion was a condition for participating in the programme (prior to random assignment)
- **October survey (control group):** survey completion was a condition for access to FutureLearn to initiate the training, and to receive a personalized diagnostic to be discussed in the first training session
- **October survey (treatment group):** survey completion was required to obtain a personalised diagnostic which participants discussed in the final live training session

To aggregate survey items, we use: a normalised knowledge score of 0-1 for each survey item, which are then summed; exploratory factor analysis (EFA) to estimate latent factors (e.g. readiness to line manage); or a simple average where we only have two items for a



latent concept (and thus cannot undertake latent factor analysis) or where items do not load.

In total, 1,136 responses to the baseline survey were obtained. 553 of those respondents were randomly assigned to the treatment group and 583 to the control group. We thus have sufficient statistical power to detect even small training effects. In a balance test, we observe no significant differences between treatment and control group pre-programme in demographic characteristics, AYP knowledge, attitudes or practices, suggesting successful randomisation (Appendix C).

399 of the treatment group assignees responded to the endline (post-treatment-group) survey (72% response rate) alongside 450 control group assignees (77% response rate). Attrition (participants completing the pre-programme survey, but not the post-treatment-group-programme survey) is significantly more likely for line managers, male participants and ethnic minority participants, as well as for participants with poorer AYP knowledge to start with (Appendix D). While our balance tests suggest that attrition of participants with these characteristics does not disproportionately affect treatment or control groups (Appendix E) – and we thus have no evidence to suggest attrition biases our estimates – significantly greater attrition of some participant groups means that our findings are not necessarily representative for all participants.

At the same time, we observe significantly more endline survey responses in the control (C) group, due to greater response numbers in the final weeks of survey implementation. This raises uncertainty about whether differences in outcomes between Treatment (T) and C groups are due to AYP effects or differential response rates. We address this by (1) conducting balance tests on observable characteristics (Appendix E). We find no significant differences at baseline between treatment and control group respondents who complete the endline survey in demographic characteristics, AYP knowledge, attitudes or practices, suggesting the higher response rate in the final week in the treatment group does not bias findings. One exception is that control group participants have a higher likelihood of having completed prior training, though this is not robust in the balanced sample (with an earlier survey cut-off date).

We also re-ran as a robustness check all analyses with an earlier survey cut-off date (14 October 2025), on which there was no statistically significant difference between T and C response rates (298 responses in T and 296 responses in C).

Limitations

While our RCT allows us to assess causal training effects, it is not without limitations. Most importantly, our approach relies on comparing pre- and post-training responses of treatment and control group participants about their *own* attitudes and practices. Ideally, results would be triangulated by asking team members about their colleagues' practices (Fleener et al., 2010). Our evaluation does not extend to a team member survey, in part as we lacked incentives to ensure sufficiently high response rates of team members to a



pre-post training survey among treatment and control group participants. Moreover, our approach does not shed light on the effectiveness of AYP further down the theory of change – such as participants’ workforce performance or the productivity of their units or organisations. We explore elsewhere the feasibility of using workforce records in the Civil Service to be able to measure downstream impacts of training on workforce outcomes (Schuster, 2026).

Qualitative research

The qualitative evaluation component employed three data collection methods: semi-structured interviews, a focus group, and training observations. These methods were designed to complement the RCT by providing depth on participant experiences, contextual factors shaping programme engagement, and direct evidence of delivery realities.

Interviews

Fifteen semi-structured interviews were conducted in November 2025. Eleven interviews were with programme participants recruited from cohort one; two with participants from cohort two; and two interviews were with programme designers and facilitators.

The sample size was determined by thematic saturation. Table 3 summarises when key themes first emerged and when saturation was reached. Saturation is the point at which no new substantive insights on a theme emerged across subsequent interviews. Core themes relating to time commitment, manager support, and confidence-building emerged early and stabilised by interviews 6 to 8. Later interviews confirmed existing patterns whilst adding nuance, particularly regarding self-awareness gains and the value of peer interactions. The two trainer interviews provided complementary delivery perspectives.

Table 3. Thematic saturation in thirteen participant interviews

Theme	First Emergence (Interview #)	Saturation Reached (Interview #)	Description
Time commitment exceeding guidance	2	5	Consistent reports that 2 hours/week insufficient
Confidence through validation	3	7	Participants felt existing instincts confirmed
Manager support variability	1	7	Wide variation in line manager engagement
Content-experience (mis)match	1	5	Some found content too basic, others valued it
Module 1 front-loading	4	9	Week 1 of each module perceived as content-heavy



Networking value limited	4	10	Optional workshops reduced peer connection
Self-awareness gains	2	10	Enhanced understanding of personal work styles
Reduced management intent	5	11	Some reconsidered management aspirations

Note: Saturation defined as the point at which no new substantive insights on themes emerged across subsequent interviews. Trainer interviews (n=2) analysed separately for delivery perspectives.

Purposive sampling aimed to capture variation in organisational context and completion status (completers and non-completers). Participant interviewees were drawn from nine Civil Service organisations: HMRC, DHLUC, DWP, FSA, DVSA, Welsh Government, Social Security Scotland, EHRC, and UKHSA. Interviews explored: motivations for enrolment; experiences of programme content, structure, and pacing; engagement with different programme components (platform content, webinars, workshops, workbook); perceived learning outcomes; barriers to full participation; and suggestions for programme improvement. Interviews lasted 30-45 minutes and were conducted via video call. The interview protocol is provided in Appendix H.

Focus group

One focus group was conducted with six participants from the treatment cohort. The focus group format was selected to enable comparison of experiences across participants within a single session and to surface collective patterns that individual interviews might not reveal, such as shared structural barriers or divergent expectations. Participants represented multiple departments (MoD, Welsh Government, DWP, HMRC), and varied completion levels. The session lasted 60 minutes and was facilitated via video call. The focus group protocol is provided in Appendix I.

Training observations

Seven training observations were conducted across all webinar and problem-solving workshop sessions, with the exception of a networking webinar. A structured observation framework guided data collection, focusing on: facilitator practice and responsiveness; participant engagement and interaction patterns; content delivery and pacing; group dynamics in breakout activities; and platform functionality. Field notes were recorded during sessions and expanded immediately afterwards. The observation protocol is provided in Appendix J.

Analysis

Thematic analysis followed an iterative process. Initial coding identified patterns within each data source, applying a coding framework aligned with the programme's theory of change and AL dimensions. Interview and focus group transcripts were coded for: AL development (Self-Awareness, Relational Transparency, Internalised Moral Perspective, Balanced



Processing); psychological readiness mechanisms; programme design and delivery experiences; barriers to engagement; and contextual factors. Each coded insight was assigned an evidence strength rating (strong, moderate, or exploratory) based on specificity, corroboration, and internal consistency.

Following initial coding, findings were synthesised across participants to identify convergent patterns. Qualitative findings were then triangulated against survey free-text responses, observation data, and RCT results to assess concordance and identify complementary or divergent insights. Where sources converged, evidence strength assessments were elevated. Where sources diverged, explanatory mechanisms were examined, such as differences in interview volunteers and survey respondents' backgrounds and reactions.



Results: Evaluating the effectiveness of the AYP pilot

What are the key demographic and professional characteristics of AYP training participants? How satisfied and engaged are they with the training and its different components? How effective is the training at shifting their knowledge, networks, attitudes, and practices? This section addresses these questions, drawing on survey data, RCT findings, programme observations, a focus group and interviews.

Who participates? Learner profiles in Achieving your Potential

To understand who selects to participate in AYP, this section reviews pre-programme responses to survey questions about:

1. Demographics and professional background
2. Line management knowledge (quiz)
3. Attitudes towards line management
4. AYP practices

What is the demographic and professional background of AYP participants?

Complementing the line management training in F, P and SP, which target current line managers, AYP targets civil servants who do not yet have line management responsibilities. By implication, on average, we would expect the level of seniority of F, P and SP participants to exceed that of AYP participants.

Looking at the demographic and professional background of participants, we find a pattern consistent with this selection logic. AYP participants are, contrary to F, P and SP, overwhelmingly (96%) not line managers. They also have fewer years of service in the Civil Service and occupy lower grades (though, like, F, are overwhelmingly in EO/HEO/SEO grades) (Table 4). They also have on average less educational attainment (Table 5). This suggests that selection into AYP works on average as intended, with the programme complementing F, P and SP by attracting less senior participants without line management responsibilities.

Table 4. Professional background of participants

	Years of service in the CS	Not currently a line manager (% of total)	Average # of employees line managing	Grade (% of total)		
				AA/AO	EO/HEO/SEO	G7 or above



Achieving your Potential	5.96	96%	NA	17	74.9	5.5
Foundation	7	36%	2.5	3	74	22
Practitioner	10	17%	2.8	0	31	64
Senior Practitioner	15	9%	3.7	0	1	98

We also find differences in the diversity of AYP participants, compared to those in F, P, and SP. AYP participants are, on average, more likely to be female and more likely to have a disability compared to F, P, SP and the Civil Service average. They are also less likely to have postgraduate education compared to F, P and SP. Ethnic minority participation in AYP is similar to F, P and the Civil Service average, and age similar to F participants (Table 5).

Table 5. Demographic profile of participants

	Average age	Women (% of total)	Ethnic minority / not white (% of total)	Disability (% of total)	Postgraduate education (% of total)
Achieving your Potential	40	69%	18%	24%	28%
Foundation	39	62%	19%	13%	32%
Practitioner	42	58%	18%	15%	36%
Senior Practitioner	45	57%	14%	14%	39%
Civil service average (2024)	44 (median)	55%	17%	17%	NA

We also asked AYP participants whether this was their first line management or leadership training programme. Few AYP participants (14%) had prior training in management or



leadership, compared to 31% of F participants, 68% of P participants and 60% of SP participants.

How much AYP knowledge do participants have prior to the programme?

How knowledgeable are training participants about the training materials taught in AYP before entering the programme? To find out, we administered a knowledge quiz in the pre-programme survey. We also asked respondents to indicate whether they are aware of the Civil Service line management standards.

In the self-assessment, at baseline, most AYP participants (57%) indicate being aware of the Line Management Standards in the Civil Service – compared to 70% of P, 77% of SP and 52% of F participants.¹

In the knowledge quiz, the average AYP learner attains a score of 48% in the baseline knowledge quiz. This is comparable to F, P and SP, where the average score ranges between 46% (P) and 57% (SP) at baseline. Learners also come with similarly large differences in pre-programme knowledge into the programme, with bottom and top quartile scores of participants closely resembling the distribution in SP (Table 6).² Most participants are thus familiar with a subset of concepts taught in the AYP training programmes. At the same time, almost all participants join the programme with at least some knowledge gaps in the concepts taught, suggesting potential for learning. Appendix F disaggregates knowledge scores by question.

Table 6. Line management knowledge pre-programme

	Average points in knowledge quiz in survey	Bottom 25% of participants	Top 25% of participants
Achieving your Potential (Max score = 29)	14 (48%)	11 (38%)	18 (62%)
Foundation (Max score = 55)	22 (40%)	20 (36%)	24 (44%)
Practitioner (Max score = 45)	21 (47%)	19 (42%)	24 (53%)

¹ The AYP share may be higher as the AYP pre-programme survey was administered later in time than the F, P and SP dates relative to the launch date of the Civil Service Line Management Standards.

² Differences between programmes may reflect differences in the difficulty of quiz questions, rather than differences in the substantive knowledge at entry of training participants.

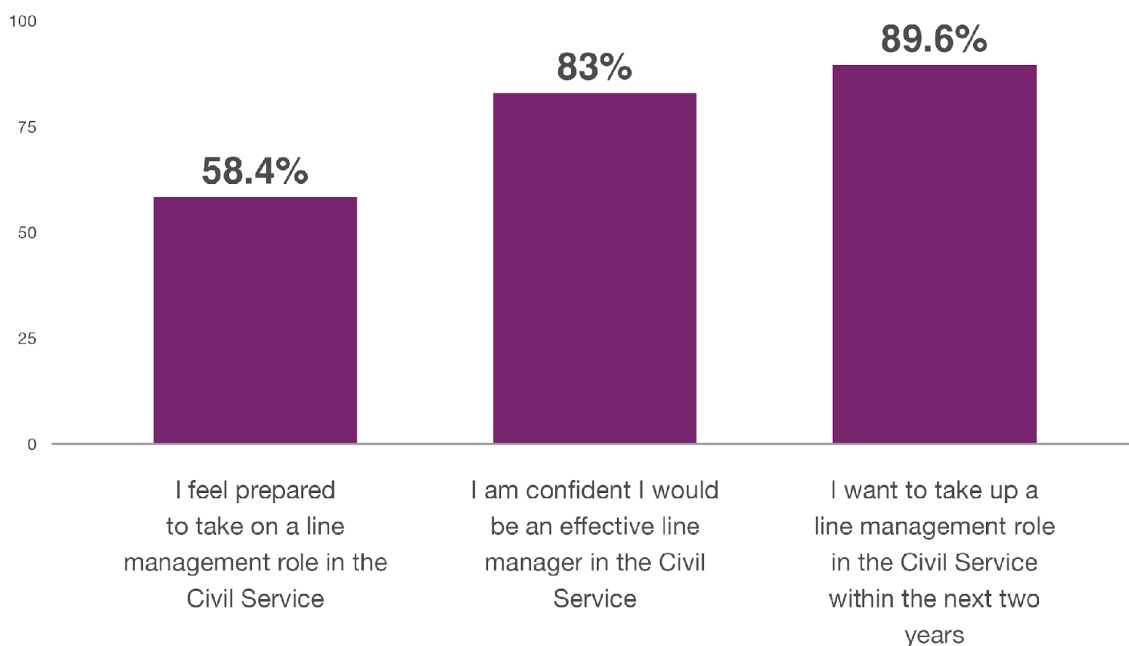


Senior Practitioner (Max score = 25)	14 (56%)	11 (44%)	17 (68%)
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Which AYP-related attitudes do participants hold prior to the programme?

Participants come into AYP intent on becoming line managers: nine out of ten want to take up a line management role in the civil service in the next two years (90%). Most (83%) are also confident they would be an effective line manager in the civil service. The majority already feels prepared to take on a line management role in the civil service prior to starting the programme (58%). This suggests that AYP attracts confident learners who – as the programme intends – want to move into line management roles.

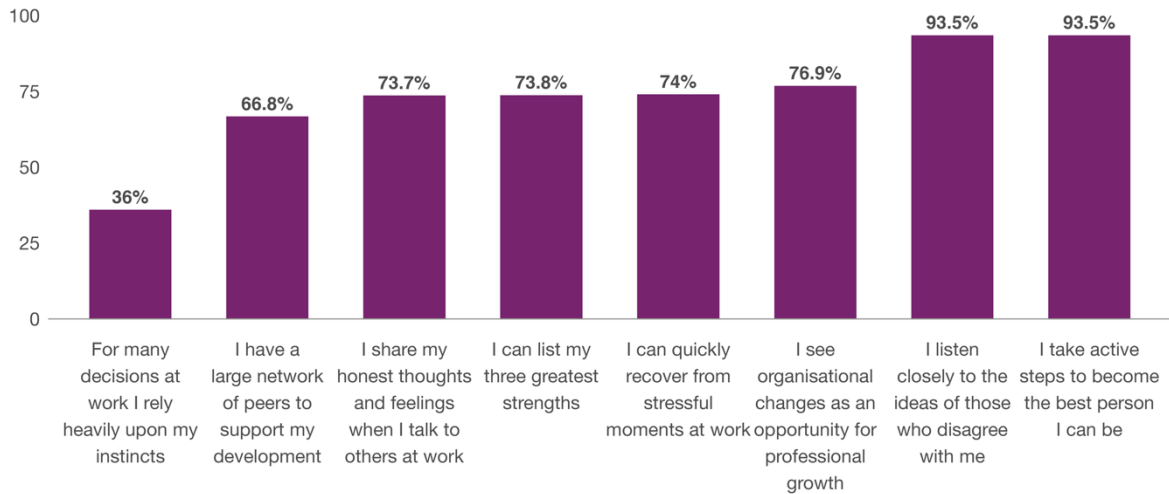
Figure 2. Self-assessed readiness to line manage pre-programme (% agreeing or strongly agreeing)



Pre-programme, declared attitudes of participants are positive for most attitudes the AYP programme seeks to shift. As an example, about three-quarters indicate sharing honest thoughts and feelings at work, can list their three greatest strengths and can recover quickly from stressful moments at work (all 74%). 77% see organisational changes as an opportunity for professional growth. 94% listen closely to the ideas of those they disagree with and take active steps to become the best person they can be. Only a minority (36%) relies heavily upon instincts for decisions at work – a negative attitude AYP seeks to address (Figure 3).



Figure 3. Select attitudes related to Achieving Your Potential training content (% agreeing or strongly agreeing)

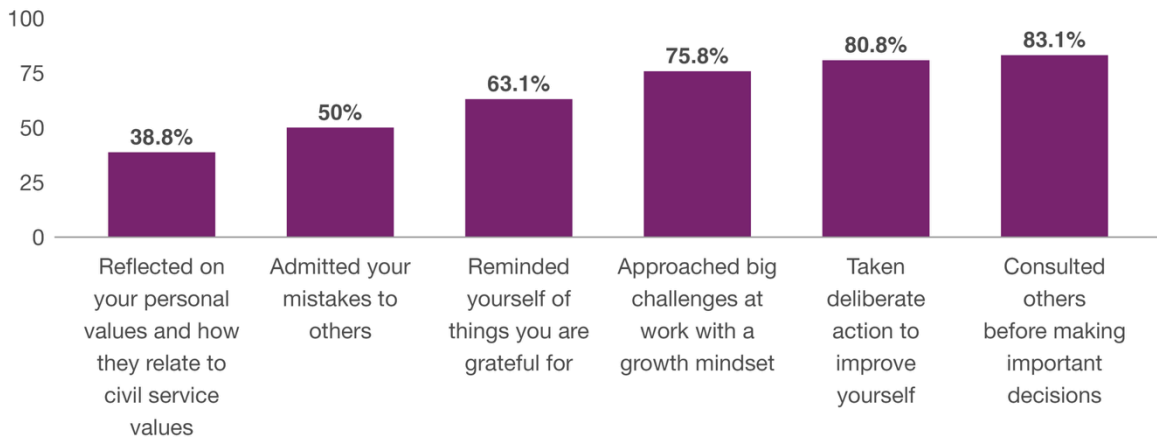


How frequently do participants engage in AYP practices prior to the programme?

Pre-programme, AYP participants vary in the frequency with which they engage in the practices the AYP training programme seeks to increase. By way of examples, some – such as reflecting on your personal values and how they relate to the Civil Service values – happen relatively less frequently, while others – such as taking deliberate action to improve oneself and consulting others before making important decisions – are undertaken by most (between 80% and 83% of participants) at least weekly (Figure 4). This suggests that AYP participants are, pre-programme, not unfamiliar with attitudes and practices covered in the AYP programme. At the same time, there is pre-programme scope to improve AYP practices of participants.



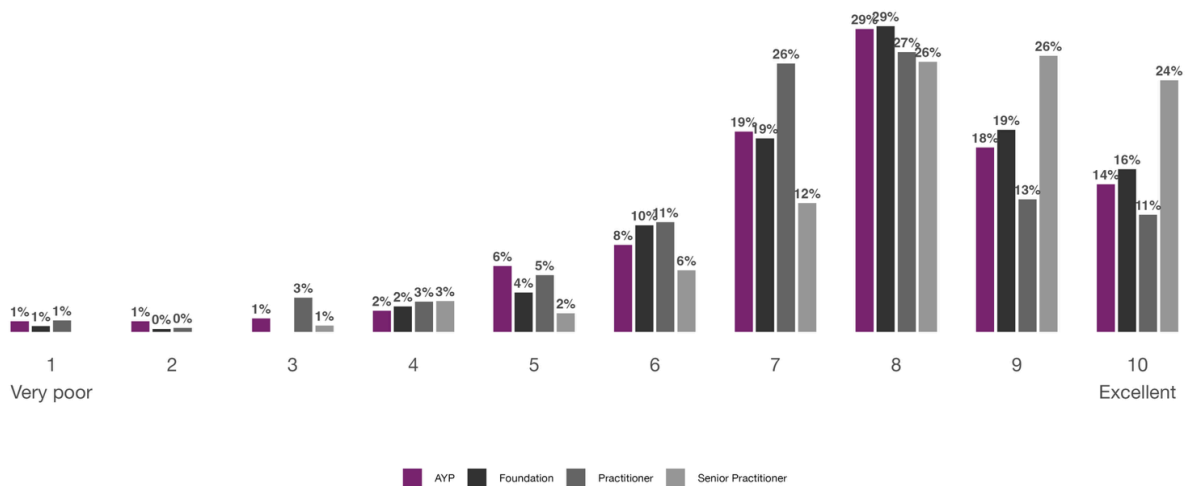
Figure 4. Frequency of select Achieving Your Potential practices (% indicating they undertook the practice at least once a week in the last month)



How satisfied are participants with the training?

61% of participants are highly satisfied, rating the AYP training at 8 or above on a 1-10 scale. This is higher than the share in P (51%), but below F (64%) and SP (76%) (Figure 5). At the same time, it is below the 80% threshold for perceived training quality (rating at 8 or above on a 1-10 scale) set by the Cabinet Office for training provided through its learning framework.

Figure 5. Training satisfaction by programme

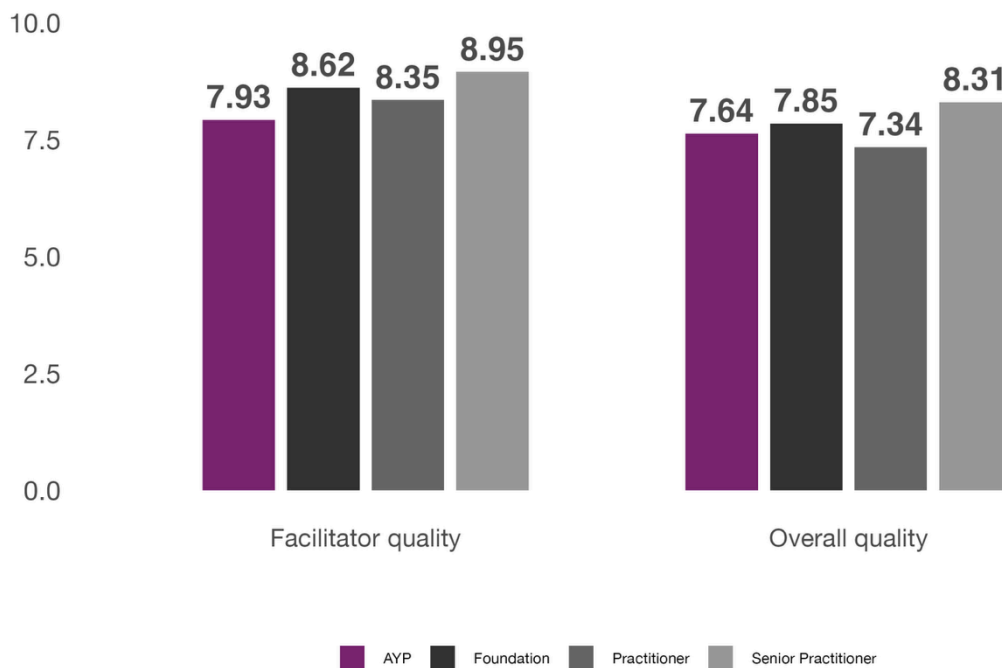


On average, participants rate the programme 7.64 out of 10. The overall quality rating of AYP is below F and SP, but above P. Given the likely lower in-house delivery costs of AYP and the pilot nature of AYP, this is arguably a positive result. Facilitator quality in AYP is slightly lower than in F, P and SP (again, potentially reflecting the pilot nature of AYP) (Figure



6). When it comes to self-assessed attainment of learning outcomes, the share of AYP participants indicating that the training met its learning outcomes (90%) is comparable to the shares in P (91%) and SP (92%), and slightly below F (95%).

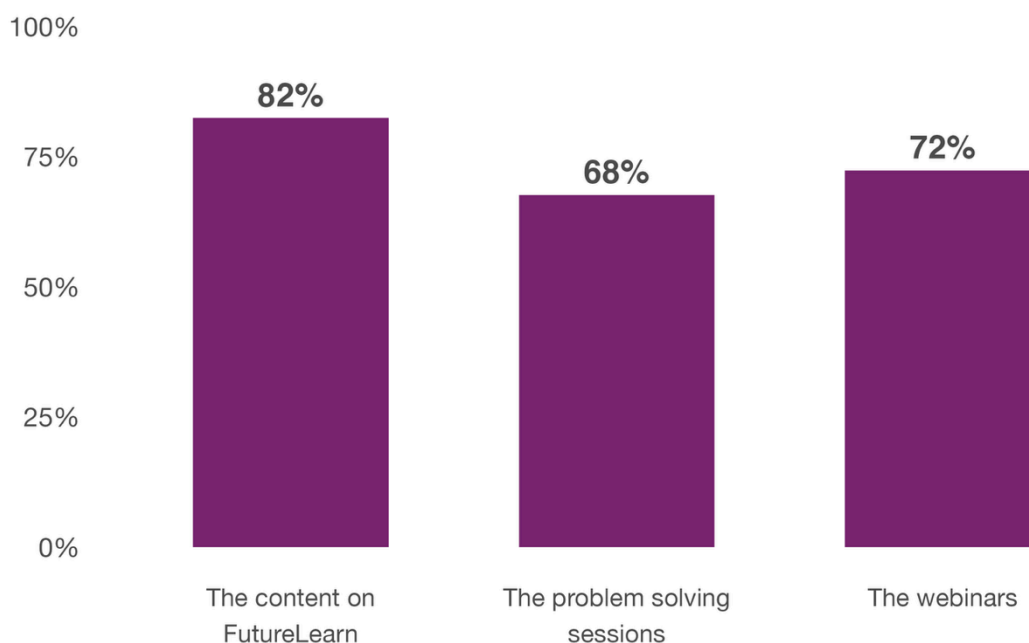
Figure 6. Training programme and facilitator satisfaction



Looking at individual AYP training components, the asynchronous component of learning – FutureLearn – was rated higher for learning (82%) than the synchronous webinars (72%) and problem-solving sessions (68%) (Figure 7). The lower self-reported learning in the synchronous components might have contributed to lower attendance in these sessions, as detailed below. This puts a premium on strengthening those aspects of training delivery in the roll-out of the pilot in particular.



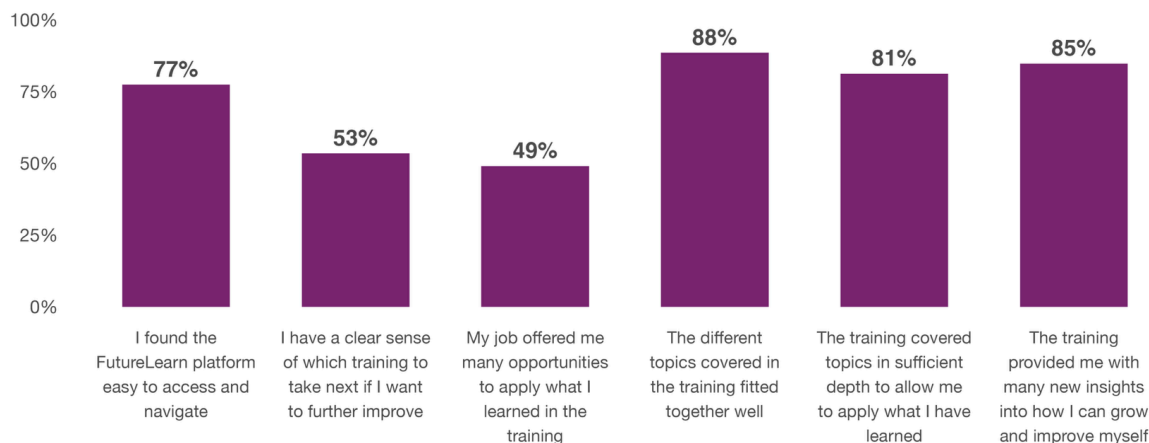
Figure 7. Attitudes towards training components (% agreeing or strongly agreeing that they learned a lot from a training component)



Learning in the online platform was aided by a positive evaluation of the platform used by most participants: 77% found the FutureLearn platform easy to navigate – a much higher share than for the LEAP platform in F, P and SP (between 41% and 57% across programmes). Further, at least four out of five AYP participants indicated that topics were covered in sufficient depth (81%), provided them with new insights (85%) and fitted together well (88%). At the same time, only about half of participants (53%) have a clear sense of what training to take next, suggesting opportunities to improve signposting of further training in the last AYP session. Only half (49%) see many opportunities to apply what they learn in their job, despite a course design focused on content which does not require line management responsibilities for on-the-job applications (Figure 8).



Figure 8. Attitudes towards training content (% agreeing or strongly agreeing)



Insights on: content quality and reusability

Across interviews and the focus group, participants consistently praised the quality and thoughtfulness of programme content, with particular appreciation for the curated external resources and additional reading. One participant noted that materials were “very well prepared and thought through... with a lot of resources, internal and external to the Civil Service.” No participant questioned the content's accuracy or theoretical grounding; where concerns arose, they related to relevance and difficulty calibration for particular audiences rather than quality itself.

A related theme concerns long-term usability and access. Participants expressed strong interest in retaining and revisiting materials beyond the programme period. Some were uncertain whether they would retain access to the FutureLearn platform after the programme year concluded, and several responded by copying content into personal documents for future reference. This behaviour signals genuine perceived value – participants want to return to materials as ongoing professional resources, not merely consume them during the course.

These behaviours suggest value in providing consolidated, permanent resources. A downloadable workbook combining key content, workshop discussion questions, and reflection prompts would address uncertainty about long-term access and support ongoing reflective practice. The programme already provides workbook materials; the enhancement would be clarifying that participants can retain these permanently and consolidating additional platform content into downloadable form.

Insights on: blended, flexible course format

The programme’s blended format combining asynchronous FutureLearn content with synchronous workshops was appreciated for the flexibility to engage with materials



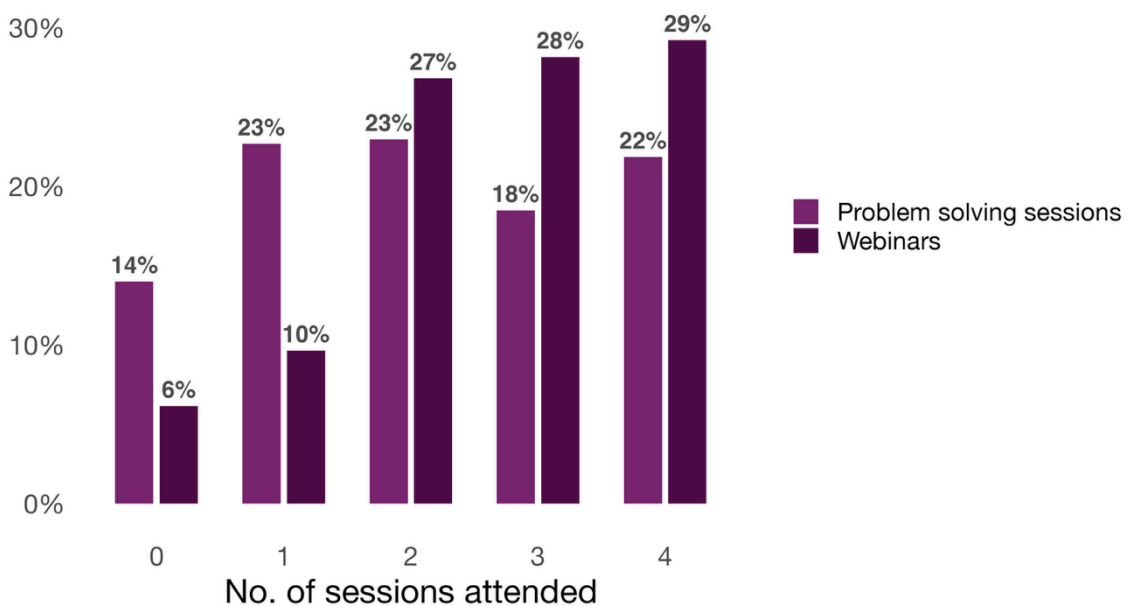
according to individual circumstances. One interviewee noted that AYP offers “valuable flexibility compared to other line management training programmes that are very constricting with the time windows within which you have to complete some programme activities” (such as F, P, and SP). The asynchronous component enabled several participants to pause during busy periods and resume when capacity allowed without penalty to their progress. For geographically dispersed participants or those with caring responsibilities or part-time working patterns, the format provides essential accessibility that fixed-schedule programmes cannot offer.

Participants also valued webinar and panel session recordings, which allowed those unable to attend live to access content asynchronously. However, some questioned whether all synchronous elements need to occur live, or whether some could be pre-recorded without losing significant value, particularly for elements like fireside chats and expert panels where interactive components may be less central than the content itself.

How engaged are participants with the training?

Looking at engagement with synchronous training components, AYP webinar attendance is more frequent than problem-solving session attendance: 57% attended at least 3 (of 4) webinars while 40% attended at least 3 of 4 problem-solving sessions (Figure 9). By comparison, workshop attendance in F, P and SP is higher (between 71% and 93% attend all workshops) than AYP webinar attendance. This likely reflects the more optional nature of webinar and problem-solving attendance in AYP.

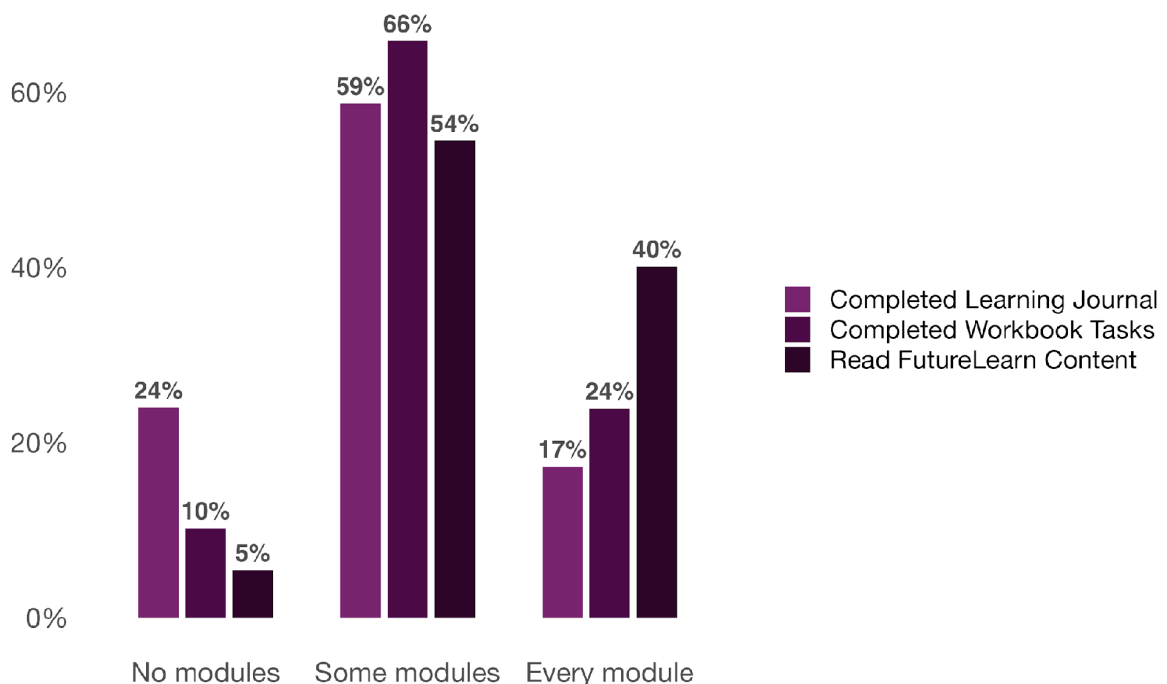
Figure 9. Engagement with synchronous training components





In terms of engagement with asynchronous training content, the majority of participants read the FutureLearn content (54%) and completed workbook tasks (66%) and the learning journal (59%) for some, but not all, modules (Figure 10). By comparison, engagement with pre-module content is relatively higher in F, P and SP (e.g. most participants read the workbook before each module rather than only some; 54-60% across F, P and SP). This puts a premium on approaches in AYP expansion to encourage greater engagement with training content prior to webinars and problem-solving sessions.

Figure 10. Engagement with asynchronous training components



Insights on: timing challenges to engagement

Across interviews and the focus group, time emerged as the dominant factor affecting programme engagement. Participants consistently reported that meaningful engagement required substantially more than the programme's stated time commitment. One participant summarised what many others said : “four to five hours a week is so much time... that's not a realistic thing for me to be able to do for a training course long-term at all.”

Workload fluctuations compounded this challenge. One interviewee described how returning to normal workload after a quieter period meant they “did hardly any of Module 4.” Another managed only by combining diary-protected time with personal hours: “every now and again I could log off when I was supposed to not be working and do a little bit then.” The first week of each module was consistently identified as particularly content-heavy, with several participants noting that module endings felt rushed by comparison, suggesting opportunities to rebalance content across the programme arc.



The programme's sequential content release created additional friction. During quieter work periods, participants with available capacity cannot progress ahead; when workload subsequently intensifies, they fall behind. Several expressed interest in having all content available from the outset, allowing them to adjust engagement to fluctuating availability. The current structure assumes a relatively steady workload, which is unlikely to hold for many participants in operational Civil Service roles.

One participant described a counterintuitive dynamic: the programme's early effectiveness created subsequent completion challenges. Module 1's confidence-building led them to seek a mentor, which generated networking opportunities and additional responsibilities. The programme “built up my confidence, which then created more work for me, so I had less time for working on the rest of the modules.” This suggests that when early modules successfully activate professional development behaviour, participants may struggle to sustain engagement with later content – not because of programme weakness, but because of programme success. If common, this pattern has implications for interpreting completion metrics: partial completion following genuine behavioural activation may represent meaningful impact.

Finally, participants reported feeling reluctant to attend workshops when they had not completed associated content. This “homework guilt” as described by one interviewee meant falling behind led to workshop avoidance, reducing peer learning opportunities and further diminishing engagement.

Insights on: manager support for engagement

Line manager support emerged as an important factor in successful programme engagement. The primary form of support participants identified was time allocation. When managers allocate training time based on official estimates that understate actual requirements, participants face difficult choices: engage in a rushed manner, complete work in personal time, or let elements fall away.

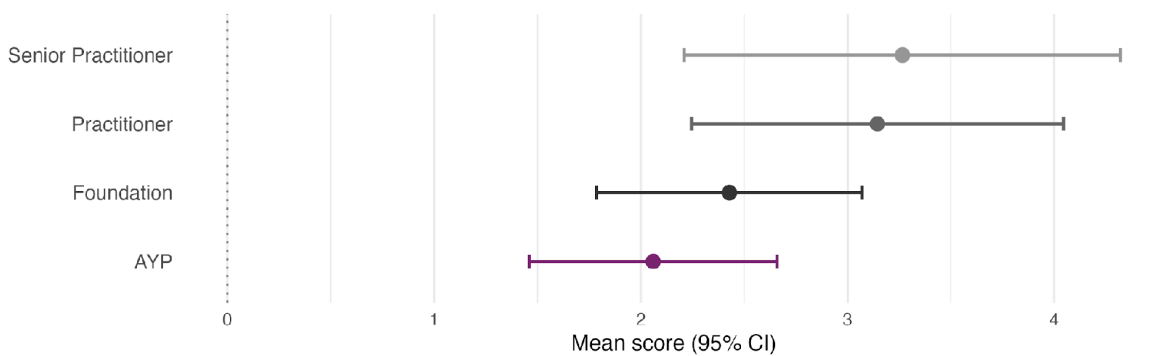
Beyond time allocation, participants also valued managers who showed interest in their development, asked about programme content, and discussed how learning might apply to current work.

Multiple interviewee experiences illustrate that when managers support participation, meaningful engagement becomes possible; when support is absent, participation becomes difficult regardless of individual commitment. These experiences suggest value in developing manager-facing communications explaining what the programme involves, approximately how much time meaningful engagement requires, and how managers can support participants through both time allocation and developmental encouragement. Such communications would not impose formal requirements but would help set realistic expectations.

How effective is the training at fostering learning and peer networks?

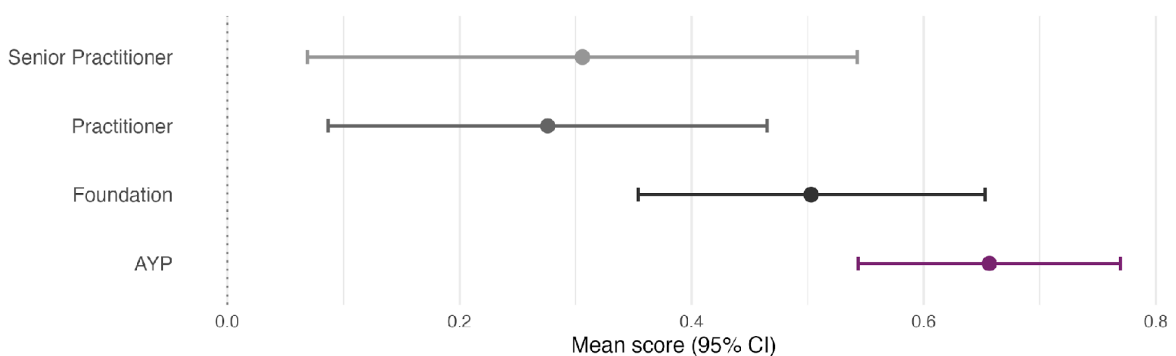
Our RCT results indicate that AYP participation leads to a statistically significant, but substantively modest increase in AYP knowledge (Figure 11). The increase in the knowledge score in AYP (around 2) is below the knowledge score increase in F, P and SP (between 2.4 and 3.3) – though this difference might be a methodological relic (e.g. F, P and SP lack a control group comparison, F and P have more questions and thus opportunities to improve scores).³ Appendix G contains a list of most-improved knowledge questions in AYP.

Figure 11. Training effectiveness: knowledge gains



AYP also significantly enhances the self-assessed awareness of participants of the Civil Service Line Management standards (measured on a 1-5 agreement scale). Across the four line management training programmes, AYP has the largest observed effect on self-assessed awareness of Civil Service line management standards, potentially reflecting – contrary to F, P and SP – its inception after those standards were launched (Figure 12).

Figure 12. Self-assessed Line Management Standards awareness: estimated training effect

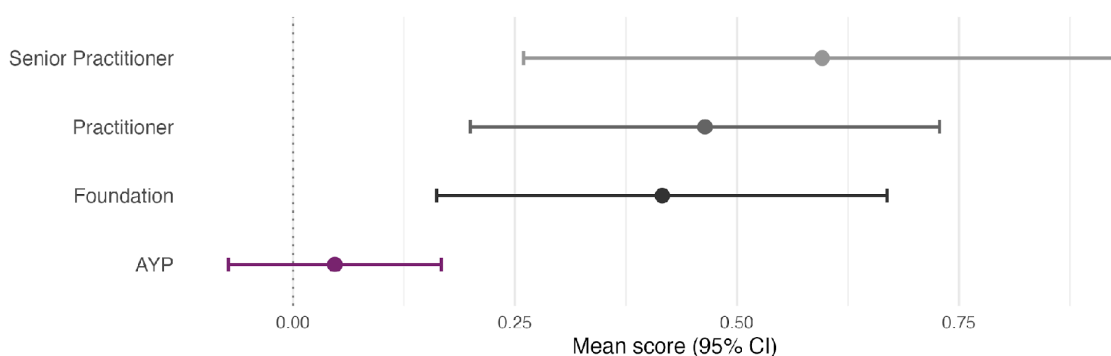


³ We observe substantively the same effects in a balanced treatment and control group sample (using a sample with the 13 October 2025 cut-off for data collection).



We also assessed whether AYP enhances peer networks. We do not find significant evidence that AYP participation shifts the perception of participants that they have a large network of peers to support their development (Figure 13). By contrast, F, P and SP do shift participants' perception that they have a strong network of peers to connect with to seek ideas to improve their line management. This might be due to defined cohorts (with fixed membership) for the duration of all workshops and peer learning sessions of F, P and SP, which enable greater peer connection.

Figure 13. Peer networks to support development: estimated training effect



Insights on: networking value via cross-government exposure

Qualitative evidence suggests that, despite this null effect, AYP has some networking value. Rather than generating durable professional relationships, interview participants described networking benefits manifesting as cross-government exposure, perspective-broadening, and identity reinforcement.

For many interviewed participants AYP provided their first opportunity to engage with colleagues from other departments. One interviewee found “hearing other people's perspectives of how they managed... bigger changes transformative” not because it created lasting connections, but because it normalised their experiences and validated their instincts. Seeing how colleagues from different departments approach shared challenges enhanced self-awareness and reinforced that participants' experiences were not unique to their contexts.

However, participants offered qualified assessments when measured against expectations of relationship formation. One observed that they have no “long lasting connections with any of those people because we were in different problem-solving sessions... it was just random people, different people every time.” Others noted that active FutureLearn commenters created organic connection desire by repeatedly engaging with each other's posts, but there was “no mechanism for swapping details” to sustain contact.

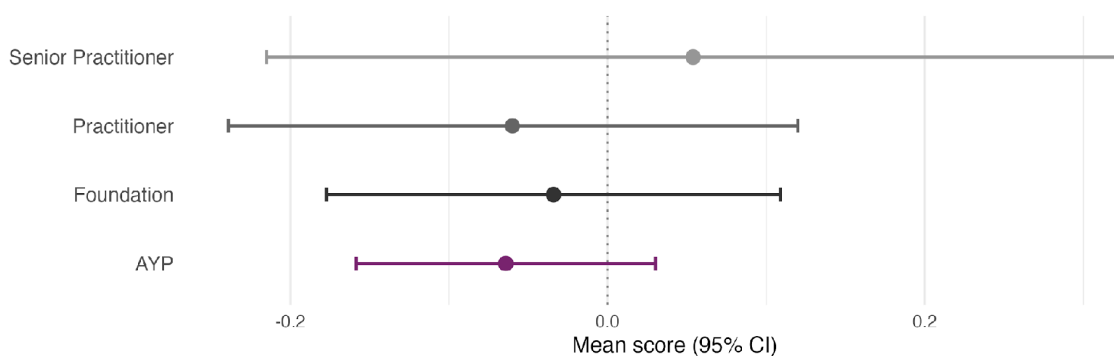
It is possible that fixed cohort membership could deliver both benefits: the visibility and normalisation that participants valued, alongside the relationship formation that rotating composition limits. Whether AYP's current rotating structure is essential for

cross-government exposure, or whether fixed cohorts could achieve equivalent perspective-broadening whilst also enabling relationship formation, merits consideration in programme development.

How effective is the training at enhancing AYP attitudes and psychological readiness for line management roles?

We assess attitudinal effects of AYP in three steps. We, first, analyse training effects on general job-related attitudes (job satisfaction, work engagement, and participant intent to remain in their organization). Like in F, P and SP, we do not find evidence for significant AYP effects on general job-related attitudes (Figure 14).

Figure 14. Job-related attitudes (such as satisfaction): estimated training effect



Second, we assess whether AYP enhances self-assessed readiness to manage. We measure psychological readiness to manage by asking participants whether they want to take up a line management role in the next two years, feel prepared to take on a line management role in the Civil Service, and are confident they would be an effective line manager in the Civil Service. We observe a positive effect of the training on a latent readiness to manage aggregated measure (“Summary of readiness to manage” in Figure 15), as well as participants’ sense that they are prepared to take on a line management role and confidence that they would be effective line managers (Figure 15).

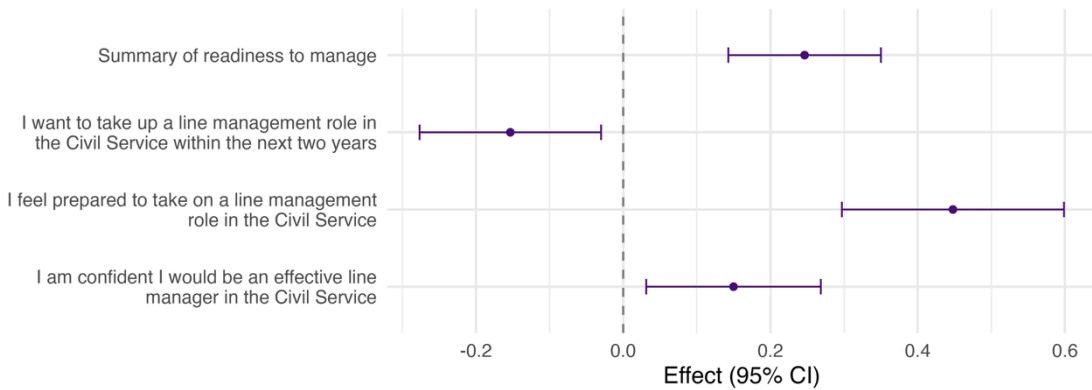
At the same time, we observe a negative effect on participants’ desire to take up a line management role in the Civil Service within the next two years.⁴ Further analysis shows that this effect is concentrated among participants with low pre-programme awareness of Civil Service Line Management Standards. For those least knowledgeable about line

⁴ Contrary to the positive effects on preparedness and confidence, this negative effect on willingness to take on a line management role, however, is not robust on average: in a balanced treatment and control group sample (using the survey sample subset to the 14 October 2025 cut-off date for endline data collection), the negative effect on wanting to take up a line management role is not significant at the 5% or 10% level (though it remains significant in the subset sample for training participants with low pre-programme awareness of Civil Service Line Management Standards).



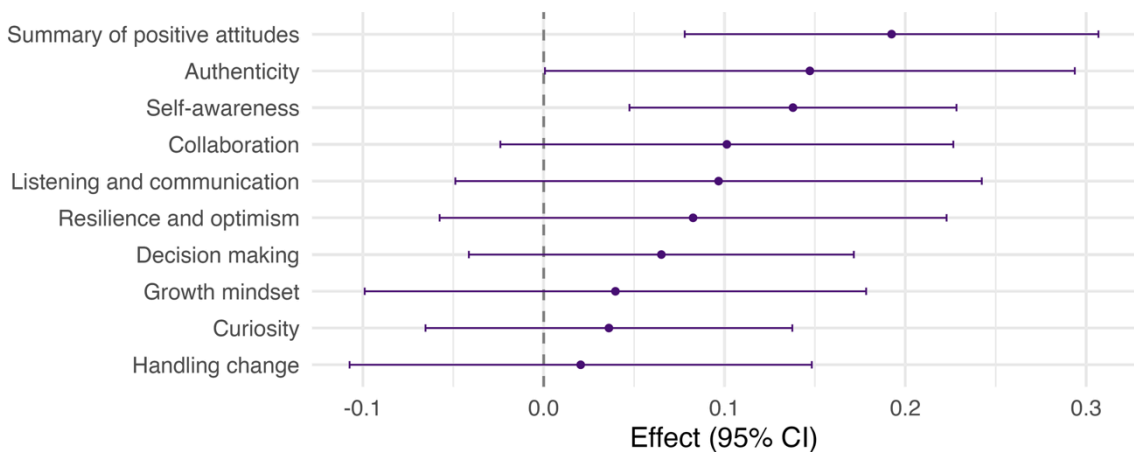
management in the Civil Service pre-programme, the training thus raises awareness of what is expected from line managers and reduces willingness to take on a line management role, albeit from a high baseline. As noted, on average, 90% of participants want to take on a line management role within the next two years.

Figure 15. Readiness to manage: estimated training effects



Third, we assess whether AYP participation shifts attitudes the AYP training seeks to instil, such as authenticity, self-awareness, resilience and optimism (Figure 15). We assess nine attitudes in total, and find significant aggregate effects on positive AYP attitudes (“Summary of positive attitudes” in Figure 16), and significant effects on authenticity and self-awareness in particular (though the effect on authenticity is not robust).⁵

Figure 16. AYP attitudes: estimated training effects



⁵ Some concepts are measured using averages (e.g. authenticity), others are measured using exploratory factor analysis (EFA). Substantive effect sizes may thus not be commensurable. The effect on authenticity does not hold in a balanced treatment and control group sample (14 October 2025 cut-off).



Assessing effects on individual attitudinal survey questions, we observe significant effects of the AYP training for 2 of 29 questions (Figure 7). Both relate to self-awareness: being able to clearly articulate one’s core personal values, and being able to list one’s three greatest strengths.⁶

Table 7. AYP attitudes (individual survey questions): significant training effects

Variable	Estimate	Significance
I can clearly articulate my core personal values	0.175	*
I can list my three greatest strengths	0.336	*

Note: *** = significant difference at the 0.1% level; ** = significant at the 1% level; * = significant at the 5% level. The table only shows survey items with significant effects (at the 5% level or above).

Insights on: confidence building with validation

The most consistent outcome reported across interviews was enhanced confidence. Participants frequently described gaining assurance that they already possessed relevant capabilities, with the programme functioning as validation and systematisation. One participant captured this precisely: the programme “reinforced that I probably understood a lot more than I realised I did and that I naturally did a lot of what would already be expected of me.” This pattern extended across participants with varied backgrounds, from those bringing private sector management experience to complete novices approaching their first potential leadership role.

This finding has important implications for how the programme's effectiveness can be understood. If AYP's primary mechanism is building confidence to apply existing capabilities, then covering content that participants already know is not a weakness but may be central to how the programme works. Validation requires encountering familiar concepts; vocabulary acquisition requires naming what participants already do. On this interpretation, content that experienced participants find "basic" may nonetheless serve its intended purpose if it builds confidence and provides conceptual frameworks for articulating existing competence.

The confidence-building mechanism operates through two distinct pathways. The first is emotional: addressing self-doubt that blocks career progression regardless of actual competence. One participant who enrolled explicitly due to struggles with “talking myself out of things and second-guessing” found the programme addressed deep-seated uncertainty about taking on management responsibilities. Another described how Module 1

⁶ We observe substantively the same AYP effects in a balanced treatment and control group sample (14 October 2025 cut-off).



“built up my confidence and made me push myself”, leading directly to seeking informal mentorship and expanded professional engagement. A third valued hearing from peers who had navigated major organisational changes because it normalised their own challenges and reinforced that their instincts were sound. For these participants, the primary barrier to management readiness was confidence deficit rather than skills deficit.

The second pathway operates through cognitive reframing and vocabulary acquisition. As one participant explained, the programme “gave name and definition and situations and the psychology of it to a lot of concepts that sometimes you use unconsciously.” Participants learned terminology and frameworks that allowed them to articulate capabilities they already exercised but could not previously explain - turning implicit, intuitive knowledge into explicit, structured understanding. Another interviewee's observation that learning about situational management helped them understand “why people do things and how people do things in a certain way” illustrates this pathway: the concept provided a lens through which existing observations suddenly made sense.

This distinction matters for programme positioning: AYP's value as intended in its design lies primarily in building psychological readiness (developing confidence, self-awareness, and conceptual frameworks) rather than teaching specific management procedures.

Insights on: self-awareness and identity formation

The programme's emphasis on self-awareness emerged as its most distinctive feature, differentiating it from traditional skills-based management training. Participants consistently described enhanced understanding of themselves – their values, communication patterns, emotional triggers, and professional identities – as the programme's primary contribution. One interviewee captured this shift: “I've never thought of that... I just kind of try to present myself in the best of ways, but I could be doing that, but others may not view me as what I think I am doing myself.” This movement from self-presentation focus to perspective-taking (understanding how one's behaviour appears to others) represents the cognitive reframing the programme's theory of change anticipates.

The self-awareness mechanism operates through structured reflection: diagnostic tools, journaling exercises, and peer comparison in workshops. One participant discovered through strengths mapping that they are “solution-focused and maybe less empathy-focused,” which allowed them to notice during exercises that they “always forgot about asking people how they felt.” This insight catalysed behavioural intention: they now planned to be mindful of this as a future manager. Another described placing reminder notes on their screen to “slow down, pause, give them space to answer”. This is concrete behavioural implementation stemming from self-awareness insights.

The programme also supports management identity formation. One participant who initially “didn't even see myself as a manager” described how the programme shifted their self-perception: “Now I definitely have the confidence to apply for a managerial role.” The process involves observing others critically, storing mental templates for future practice,



and gradually adopting a leadership identity, particularly valuable for participants earlier in their careers who have not previously considered management as part of their professional trajectory.

Notably, self-awareness outcomes extend beyond professional contexts. Several participants described applying programme insights, particularly listening techniques and perspective-taking, with partners, family, and friends. One summarised that the programme “helped me learn more about myself and the qualities that I would bring to not just line managing, but just supporting other colleagues in general.” This breadth validates the programme's premise that self-awareness capabilities are foundational and transferable, delivering value regardless of subsequent career path.

Insights on: reduced willingness to manage

Qualitative evidence suggests two explanations for the pattern of increased preparedness alongside marginally reduced intent to pursue management roles.

First, the programme may function as an effective preview of the demands of management. AYP content emphasises the emotional and interpersonal dimensions of line management – difficult conversations, responsibility for others' wellbeing, and emotional regulation. Participants who complete the programme develop a more accurate understanding of what management involves, enabling more informed decisions about whether to pursue it. One interviewee explicitly connected adjusted ambitions to not wanting “extra stress” near retirement. Another shifted from viewing managers as directive authorities to understanding management as “guiding people and getting the best out of everyone” – a reconceptualisation that, while more accurate, may reveal that management's actual practices do not appeal to all participants. On this interpretation, reduced willingness reflects informed choice rather than programme failure: AYP succeeds precisely by preventing inaccurate conceptualizations of management.

Second, the programme's emphasis on self-awareness may lead some participants to recognise that management does not align with their professional identity or values - even if they would be competent managers. One participant discovered through diagnostic exercises that their solution-focused orientation might not suit people leadership. Another described themselves primarily as a technical specialist, with management as an optional pathway rather than a core aspiration. The programme's focus on “Who am I?” rather than solely “What do I know?” may help technically-oriented participants recognise that their professional identity centres on expertise rather than people leadership.

The RCT evidence noted above is consistent with both of these mechanisms: the effect of AYP on lower willingness to take on line management roles is concentrated among participants with low pre-programme Civil Service Line Management Standards awareness, and thus lower awareness of what management roles involve or how compatible they are with one's own professional identity and values.



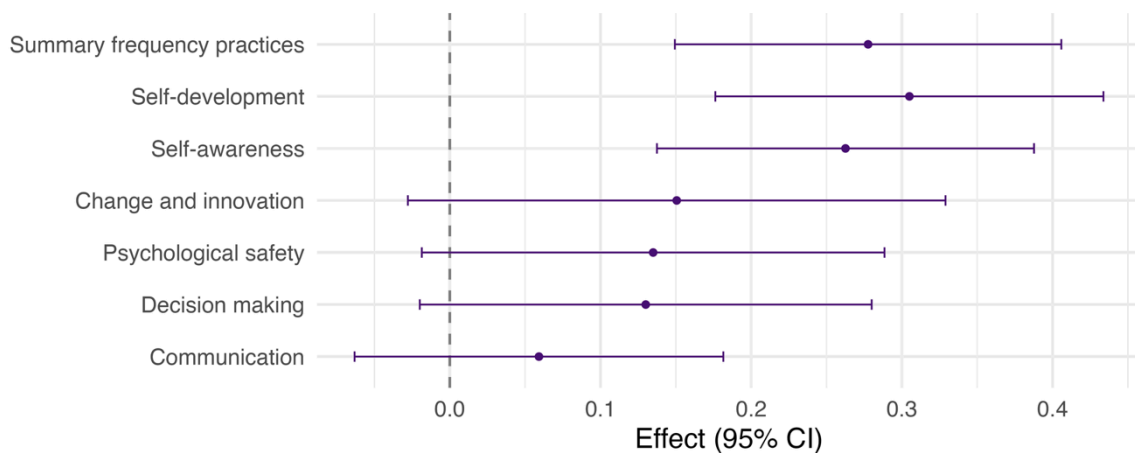
Rather than indicating programme weakness, reduced willingness among some participants may thus represent successful self-awareness leading to informed, values-aligned career decisions.

These explanations also suggest the programme's theory of change may benefit from adjustment: from assuming self-awareness leads linearly to increased management pursuit, toward recognising that enhanced self-awareness enables variable pathways based on individual values and professional identity.

How effective is the training at enhancing AYP practices?

To assess whether the training shifted AYP practice among participants, we compare the frequency with which treatment and control group participants engage in practices covered in the AYP training programme before and after the treatment group training. Aggregating all AYP practices measured in the survey, we find that the AYP training enhances the frequency of AYP practices on aggregate (see “Summary frequency practices” in Figure 17). Disaggregating different practice domains, significant effects are observed for self-development and self-awareness, but not the other four domains.⁷

Figure 17. Frequency of AYP Practice: Estimated Training Effects



We, next, estimate the effects of the AYP on individual practices (as captured by specific survey items). We find significant effects on the frequency of 5 of 19 practices – all of which relate to self-awareness and self-development.⁸ This is consistent with the effects on self-awareness observed in the attitudinal analysis. In sum, the effects analysis underscores that – at its pilot stage – AYP is effective at enhancing self-awareness and

⁷ We observe substantively the same AYP effects in a balanced treatment and control group sample (14 October 2025 cut-off date for data collection).

⁸ We observe AYP effects on the first four of these items in a balanced treatment and control group sample (14 October 2025 cut-off).



self-development, but is not attaining significant effects on the range of other attitudinal and practice domains the training covers.

Table 8. AYP practices (individual survey questions): significant training effects

Variable	Estimate	Significance
Reflected on your personal values and how they relate to civil service values*	0.29	*
Reminded yourself of things you are grateful for*	0.285	*
Set time aside for your development*	0.404	*
Set time aside to reflect on your strengths and areas for development*	0.248	*
Taken deliberate action to improve yourself	0.233	*

Note: *** = significant difference at the 0.1% level; ** = significant at the 1% level; * = significant at the 5% level. The table only shows survey items with significant effects (at the 5% level or above).

Do training effects vary by characteristics of training participants?

Do participant characteristics – such as training engagement or professional background – affect how much they learn from the training or how strongly the training influences their attitudes and practices?

Our analysis of heterogeneous training effects on learning underscores that line managers learn less on AYP: their knowledge gains from the programme are smaller. Vice versa, participants engaging with training content more – for instance, attending more webinars, problem-solving sessions and reading more of the FutureLearn content – learn more. Participants' training satisfaction (quality rating), prior training attendance or years of service in the Civil Service do not affect AYP treatment effects.

Table 9. AYP learning: heterogenous training effects

Heterogeneity factor	Estimate	Significance
Line manager	-5.582	*



Intensity of training participation (webinars, problem-solving sessions, FutureLearn, Workbook, Learning Journal)	6.632	*
Previous training attendance	-1.194	
Years of service in the Civil Service	-0.03	
Perceived training quality	0.273	

Note: *** = significant difference at the 0.1% level; ** = significant at the 1% level; * = significant at the 5% level.

At the same time, we do not observe heterogenous treatment effects on AYP practice: we do not observe greater or smaller attitude and practice changes of participants depending on their satisfaction with the training or facilitator, intensity of participation, line manager status, attendance of previous management or leadership training, AYP knowledge pre-programme or years of service (Table 10. AYP learning: heterogenous training effects).

Table 10. AYP learning: heterogenous training effects

Heterogeneity Factor	Attitudes		Practices	
	Estimate	Significance	Estimate	Significance
Intensity of training participation (webinars, problem-solving sessions, FutureLearn, Workbook, Learning Journal)	0.167		0.726	
Perceived training quality	0.009		0.086	
Perceived facilitator quality	0.009		0	
Years of service in the Civil Service	-0.003		-0.003	



AYP Knowledge pre-programme	-0.005		-0.052	
Previous training attendance	-0.011		-0.1	
Line manager	-0.108		-0.13	

Note: *** = significant difference at the 0.1% level; ** = significant at the 1% level; * = significant at the 5% level

Insights on: programme positioning and participant expectations

The interview data reinforced the quantitative finding that the training effects on learning are smaller for participants who are already line managers. These cases generally point to a communication opportunity rather than a programme design flaw. Some of these participants explicitly described being drawn to AYP by expectations of career progression support or practical management skills. Participation in the programme does not represent a direct pathway into managerial promotion. However, this was not always clear to prospective participants or their managers.

For participants with prior management experience outside the Civil Service, the programme may still offer genuine value for such participants, through validation of existing capabilities, introduction to Civil Service-specific contexts, or structured reflection on past practice.



Methodological learning

A final evaluation objective was to assess whether and how a robust, replicable RCT and qualitative data collection approach to management training evaluation could be implemented in the Civil Service. An accompanying how-to guide provides detailed guidance based on this learning and the learning from the F, P and SP evaluations to enable others to replicate the approach – including survey instruments, interview protocols, observation templates, and step-by-step implementation guidance (Schuster and Steenmans, 2026). A second report guides readers interested in extending evaluations to workforce outcomes using workforce records (Schuster, 2026). We complement these reports here with dedicated learning from AYP, in particular regarding the RCT and its triangulation with qualitative insights.

RCT

The core lesson from the AYP evaluation is that randomised controlled trials can be implemented within normal Civil Service training operational constraints, and are acceptable to both learners and departments. This complements other recent evidence to this end (Cabinet Office, 2025a; Cabinet Office 2025b).

The AYP evaluation also underscores the added value of RCTs at the pilot stage of new training programmes: RCTs can enable rigorous testing of pilot programmes, prior to their expansion, to inform whether and how to roll out the pilot. New programmes typically also offer greater flexibility in terms of participant selection and wait-listed randomisation can thus more easily be built into their design.

The AYP evaluation also provides several guideposts for feasible RCTs of training programmes going forward:

- **wait-listed control group:** the AYP evaluation’s wait-list design produced a valid comparison group while ensuring everyone eventually accessed the programme. This approach is easily replicable for interventions with phased intakes or when demand exceeds immediate capacity.
- **randomise after the baseline survey:** to avoid differential attrition, randomisation should occur only after participants complete the baseline survey. If participants are assigned to an early (treatment) or late (control) cohort before completing the baseline survey, incentives to respond may differ and bias the sample (for example, higher baseline completion among those assigned to treatment).
- **incentivise endline survey completion symmetrically:** RCTs require comparable, representative endline response rates across arms (treatment and control). Use equivalent, arm-appropriate incentives: for the treatment arm, offer personalised diagnostics based on endline responses to be discussed in the final session (benchmarks against peers); for the control arm, offer the same personalised



diagnostics to be discussed in their first session and condition access to the online learning platform on survey completion. Because these tactics can create stronger incentives for one arm (as observed in the AYP evaluation), proactively balance follow-up intensity and communication strategies across groups to achieve similar response rates and avoid differential non-response bias.

Value of multi-method integration

The evaluation demonstrated the complementary value of combining RCT evidence with qualitative methods. Quantitative findings identified training effects on average and for different groups of participants; qualitative evidence explained why these patterns emerged and how programme design could be strengthened. For instance, the RCT identified null effects on networking outcomes, while interviews and focus groups revealed that participants valued informal peer connections but found structured networking elements less relevant to their pre-managerial role status. Similarly, quantitative evidence of increased preparedness alongside reduced management intent presented a puzzle that qualitative data helped generate alternative explanations for, suggesting it may be likely that some participants are better supported to make informed decisions that management is not their preferred professional development path.

This integration proved essential for generating actionable recommendations. Quantitative evidence alone would have identified domains requiring strengthening without indicating how to strengthen them; qualitative evidence alone would have been unable to identify average training effects (or the lack thereof).

Implications for future evaluations

This evaluation demonstrates that rigorous, multi-method training evaluation is both feasible and valuable in Civil Service settings. It provides a proof of concept and template for high-quality training evaluations that is practical, scalable, and replicable in other programme settings.

Why does this matter? Without pre-post measurement, it is not possible to know whether participants actually learn or change their attitudes and practices in ways the programme intends. Reaction surveys alone, while useful for gauging satisfaction, cannot establish whether training is effective at achieving its goals. This evaluation demonstrated that richer approaches are achievable, and highlighted the added value of multi-outcome, multi-source evidence.



Conclusions and recommendations

This report presents findings from an evaluation of the Achieving Your Potential (AYP) programme, combining a randomised controlled trial with qualitative evidence from interviews, focus groups, and training observations.

Effective participant selection

Selection into AYP works as intended. The programme addresses a gap in the Foundation (F), Practitioner (P), and Senior Practitioner (SP) suite by attracting participants who are not yet line managers (96%) and who occupy more junior grades. Pre-programme survey data shows that participants come into AYP overwhelmingly wanting to take on line management roles within two years and feeling confident they would be effective managers.

High programme quality but workload issues

The average quality rating of the AYP pilot is above P but below F and SP, though this comparison should be interpreted cautiously given AYP's pilot status. Engagement with the online learning platform is evaluated positively by most participants. However, attendance at webinars and problem-solving workshops, which are optional, falls below F, P, and SP standards. Participants consistently reported that meaningful engagement requires more time than initial guidance suggested, and that the first week of each module is particularly content-heavy.

Effectiveness: self-awareness, readiness, and confidence

AYP achieves its strongest effects in domains related to the 'self' as intended in its design. Participation leads to statistically significant knowledge gains about AYP concepts, greater self-assessed awareness of Civil Service Line Management Standards (with substantively large effects), and significantly increased feelings of preparedness to take on a management role. Participants also report more frequent self-awareness and self-development practices following the programme.

Qualitative evidence illuminates the mechanisms behind these effects. The most consistent outcome reported across interviews was enhanced confidence, through validation that participants already possessed relevant capabilities and through gaining vocabulary to articulate what they previously understood only intuitively. The programme supports management identity formation: participants who initially did not see themselves as potential managers described shifting self-perceptions and increased willingness to pursue managerial roles. Self-awareness outcomes extend beyond professional contexts, with several participants describing applying insights to personal relationships.

Effectiveness: interpersonal and organisational domains

Effects are weaker for domains beyond the 'self'. The evaluation does not observe significant changes in behaviour related to communication, psychological safety, change



and innovation, or decision-making. AYP's core value added is thus pre-role psychological preparation through self-awareness and identity formation, not interpersonal skill development. Further, unlike F, P, and SP, AYP does not produce effects on peer networks. This finding is arguably intended by design, as AYP places less emphasis on peer learning.

Reduced intent to pursue management

An unexpected finding was the reduced intent to pursue management roles despite increased preparedness. Statistically, this effect is concentrated among participants with low pre-programme awareness of Civil Service Line Management Standards. Qualitative evidence suggests two explanations. First, the programme may function as an effective preview, revealing the emotional and interpersonal demands of management and enabling informed decisions about whether to pursue it. Second, enhanced self-awareness may lead some participants with lower pre-programme awareness to recognise that management does not align with their professional identity or values. Rather than indicating programme weakness, this pattern may represent successful self-awareness leading to informed career decisions.

Contextual factors

Programme effectiveness interacts with organisational context. Line manager support – primarily through allocating sufficient time for participant engagement with the programme, but also through showing interest in participants' development – contributes to meaningful participation. When such support is present, meaningful engagement becomes possible; when support is absent, participation becomes difficult regardless of individual motivation. Some participants with substantial prior management experience found content calibration did not match their expectations, pointing to a communication opportunity: while 96% of participants are not currently Civil Service line managers, we lack evidence on the proportion with management experience outside the Civil Service.

Key recommendations

#1: Expand and scale the AYP pilot

AYP addresses a genuine gap in the current curriculum, effectively serving civil servants preparing for line management roles. The programme achieves meaningful attitudinal and practice changes in self-awareness, self-development, and readiness to manage, achieved through in-house delivery which may result in significantly lower cost than F, P, and SP programmes (which are currently not delivered in-house).

#2: Strengthen content in less effective domains



AYP is effective at enhancing pre-role psychological readiness through self-awareness and authenticity, but not at shifting behaviour in other domains such as change and innovation or decision-making. Consider strengthening the justification for including these domains – for instance, through more explicit use of an authentic leadership framework – and enhancing the content itself.

#3: Clarify programme positioning in communications

Develop clear, consistent materials for prospective participants and their managers explaining that AYP focuses on psychological readiness and self-awareness, not practical management procedures, operational skills, or career progression pathways. Help prospective participants understand that those seeking procedural skills may find F more aligned with their needs, and that those with extensive prior management experience may find some content familiar. Consider whether the programme name clearly signals the line management preparation focus.

#4: Provide realistic guidance on time commitment and manager support

Update participant and manager communications to reflect the time required for meaningful engagement, which participants consistently described as exceeding initial estimates. Consider developing manager-facing communications explaining what the programme involves, approximately how much time meaningful engagement requires, and how managers can support participants through both time allocation and developmental encouragement. Clear guidance helps managers allocate appropriate time and helps participants plan their engagement. Consider whether the formal programme window could be extended for participants whose circumstances require longer completion periods.

#5: Rebalance content across the programme arc

Review content distribution across modules, particularly the first week of each module which participants consistently identified as content-heavy. Consider redistributing essential content across subsequent weeks, with optional materials for participants with additional capacity. Review whether four problem-solving workshops are necessary, or whether fewer sessions could achieve equivalent learning outcomes whilst reducing overall time burden.

#6: Enable flexible content access and pacing



Consider releasing all module content at programme start rather than sequentially, whilst maintaining recommended pacing guidance. This would enable participants to work ahead during quieter periods and accommodate workload fluctuations. Explore whether participants who fall significantly behind could rejoin subsequent cohorts, providing a pathway for those whose circumstances change mid-programme.

#7: Support ongoing connection after programme completion

Consider implementing an opt-in system for participants wishing to share contact details and remain connected. Explore how AYP might signpost participants toward existing or emerging communities of practice focused on line management development, positioning the programme as one element of a broader developmental ecosystem rather than creating parallel networking infrastructure.

#8: Clarify long-term access to programme materials

Participants expressed strong interest in retaining and revisiting materials beyond the programme period, with some copying content into personal documents due to uncertainty about long-term platform access. Consider clarifying that participants retain access to materials for twelve months and providing consolidated, downloadable resources (combining key content, workshop discussion questions, and reflection prompts) that participants can keep permanently as ongoing professional development tools.

#9: Consider cohort structure and networking expectations

AYP's current rotating workshop composition – where participants interact with different peers across sessions – limits relationship formation but enables cross-government exposure. Participants valued the perspective-broadening benefits of interacting with colleagues from different departments, even where lasting connections did not form. Consider whether fixed cohort membership could deliver both benefits: the visibility and normalisation that participants valued, alongside the relationship formation that rotating composition limits. Programme communications could usefully clarify what networking benefits participants should expect, distinguishing cross-government exposure and perspective-broadening from sustained professional relationships.

#10: Consider lightweight practice assessment opportunities

Some participants expressed interest in scenario-based exercises that would help them assess their application of learning to realistic management situations, and in skills



verification that could support job applications. Whilst extensive competency testing may not align with AYP's focus on psychological readiness, lightweight situational exercises could help participants gauge their developing capabilities and identify areas for continued reflection.



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Appendices

Appendix A: Detailed programme mapping

This appendix provides detailed information on AYP module content, learning outcomes, pedagogical approaches, and support structures, supplementing the overview provided in the Programme Mapping section.

Structural components

AYP employs a blended learning architecture integrating four distinct but interconnected components:

- 1. Digital platform content:** Asynchronous learning materials hosted on the FutureLearn platform, including video presentations, reading materials, and interactive exercises. Platform content provides foundational conceptual knowledge and self-paced engagement opportunities, enabling participants to progress through theoretical frameworks and models independently.
- 2. Workbook and learning journal:** Structured workbook exercises guide participants through applied activities, reflection prompts, and skills practice aligned with platform content. A separate learning journal provides space for open-ended reflection, supporting the programme's self-development pedagogy. The workbook aims to scaffold learning from platform content toward behavioural application, whilst the journal seeks to encourage autonomous self-awareness practices.
- 3. Webinars:** Synchronous online sessions provide structured presentations, demonstrations, and participant Q&A opportunities. The webinars aim to offer clarification of concepts, modelling of approaches, and collective learning experiences within the overall cohorts. One webinar is scheduled for each module.
- 4. Problem-solving workshops:** Interactive, collaborative sessions delivered online feature breakout room activities, peer discussion, case-based problem-solving, and facilitated group learning. Workshops represent the programme's most intensive social learning component, aiming to enable peer interaction, perspective-sharing, and collaborative skill development. Multiple workshop dates are offered for each module and participants self-register.

This multi-modal approach provides diverse entry points for engagement, accommodating different learning preferences whilst reinforcing concepts through multiple exposures across learning and development modalities.

Module structure and sequence

Module 1: managing yourself and working with others



Module 1 establishes foundational self-awareness to inform all subsequent AYP managerial readiness development (see the Theory of Change section for more on the mechanisms through which the modules link). Participants are invited to examine their values, identify their strengths, understand their emotional patterns, and recognise their characteristic responses to stress and challenge. Table A1 below summarises core curriculum areas and learning outcomes for the module.

Table A1. AYP module 1 curriculum and learning outcomes

M1 core curriculum areas	M1 learning outcomes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Values and self-awareness (personal and Civil Service values alignment) ● Emotional intelligence and self-management ● Growth mindset versus fixed mindset orientations ● Stress recognition and stress management techniques ● Building trusting collaborative relationships ● Using feedback in development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Understand how values influence decision-making and behaviours ● Pursue opportunities to use personal strengths in current and future roles ● Recognise how mindset (growth/fixed) impacts behaviour in challenging situations ● Practice techniques of self-care to cope with stress (breathing exercises, self-soothing, vagal toning) ● Develop awareness of personal emotional intelligence strengths and weaknesses ● Recognise strategies for enabling constructive feedback

Module 2: communicating purposefully

Module 2 develops communication skill-building and emphasises authentic communication by being genuinely present, listening deeply, and communicating in ways congruent with one’s own values and intentions. Table A2 below summarises core curriculum areas and learning outcomes for the module.

Table A2. AYP module 2 curriculum and learning outcomes

M2 core curriculum areas	M2 learning outcomes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Active listening principles and practices ● Non-verbal communication awareness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Monitor and actively mitigate distractions affecting capacity for being present with colleagues



<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Communication styles and preferences ● Tailoring messages to audience ● Assertive communication approaches ● Influence without authority ● Reflection on communication strengths and development areas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Use paraphrasing in conversations to check understanding and demonstrate active listening ● Intentionally add silence into conversations creating space for thinking and problem-solving ● Appreciate different types of powerful questions supporting effective communication ● Discuss communication preferences with colleagues, approaching challenges with curiosity rather than judgement ● Engage in reflective practice on personal communication strengths and development opportunities
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Module 3: problem solving and decision making

Module 3 focuses on participants’ capacity to analyse objectively, consider multiple perspectives, and make informed decisions. A systems thinking emphasis encourages participants to view workplace challenges holistically rather than linearly, developing cognitive sophistication appropriate for management complexity. Table A3 below summarises core curriculum areas and learning outcomes for the module.

Table A3. AYP module 3 curriculum and learning outcomes

M3 core curriculum areas	M3 learning outcomes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Root cause analysis (5 Whys technique) ● Cognitive biases in decision-making ● Systems thinking and systems mapping ● Creative problem-solving approaches ● Prioritisation frameworks and risk analysis ● Structured self-reflection practices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Apply the 5 Whys technique to surface root causes of problems ● Recognise different types of cognitive biases challenging objective decision-making ● Create systems maps to understand the complex nature of problems ● Use multiple creative techniques for generating ideas and solutions ● Appreciate that decision-making under pressure requires prioritisation and risk analysis



- Value regular structured time for self-reflection

Module 4: handling change, uncertainty and overcoming challenges

Module 4 addresses change management from psychological rather than procedural perspectives. Rather than teaching change implementation techniques, the module focuses on emotional resilience, perspective-taking, and self-regulation during change, capabilities relevant for aspiring managers who may encounter substantial change when transitioning into management roles. Table A4 below summarises core curriculum areas and learning outcomes for the module.

Table A4. AYP module 4 curriculum and learning outcomes

M4 core curriculum areas	M4 Learning outcomes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding personal responses to change • Emotional journey of change (change curve) • Perspective-taking during organisational change • Spheres of Influence model for change navigation • Techniques for developing optimistic mindsets • Resilience practices and stress management during change • Change communication approaches 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop greater awareness of how change impacts oneself and characteristic responses • Understand that emotional reactions to change vary over time with different speeds for different people • Consider change from multiple points of view by assuming different perspectives • Apply a Spheres of Influence model to direct energy effectively when navigating change • Draw on various techniques to develop an optimistic mindset (reflection journals, wins documentation, support groups, reframing techniques)

Learning materials and resources

Participants receive multiple resources supporting their developmental journey:

- **Workbook:** A structured .docx document containing module-specific exercises, reflection prompts, and activity guides. The workbook is designed to be completed progressively alongside platform content, with exercises directly aligned to module themes. Participants download a module-specific workbook at module commencement.
- **Learning journal:** A separate .docx document providing open-ended space for personal reflection, distinct from the structured workbook exercises. The journal is



designed to support autonomous reflection practices, enabling participants to document insights, emotional responses, and developmental observations in their own words without prescribed formats.

- **Platform content:** Digital materials hosted on the FutureLearn platform include video presentations (typically 3-10 minutes each), written content, interactive exercises, and concept demonstrations. Content is divided into numbered sections within each module, designed for self-paced progression.
- **Additional resources:** Participants receive signposting to relevant Civil Service resources, and optional reading materials for those wishing to deepen engagement with specific topics.

Pedagogical approaches

The programme employs several distinctive pedagogical strategies aligned with its self-development philosophy:

- **Self-paced elements with synchronous anchors:** Platform content enables self-paced progression accommodating diverse schedules and learning speeds. Webinars and workshops provide synchronous anchors creating cohort cohesion and shared experience. This hybrid structure aims to balance flexibility with community-building.
- **Reflective practice:** Structured reflection is embedded throughout the programme, with end-of-section prompts, post-workshop reflection activities, and journal exercises encouraging participants to examine their experiences, beliefs, and behaviours systematically. This approach reflects Schön's (1983) reflective practitioner model, positioning reflection as a developable professional capability rather than an optional add-on.
- **Experiential learning:** Workshop activities and workbook exercises emphasise learning-by-doing rather than passive knowledge acquisition. Participants engage in self-assessment exercises, practice communication techniques, create systems maps, and apply frameworks to their own workplace contexts with optional end-of-module 'Workplace Challenge' formative activities, enabling concrete experience and active experimentation.
- **Peer learning:** The programme intentionally creates opportunities for social learning through workshop breakout discussions, the FutureLearn comments function (where participants can discuss content, ask questions, and respond to each other), and informal networking. Participants are intended to learn from each other's diverse Civil Service contexts, challenges, and approaches, exposing them to multiple perspectives and normalising the varied experiences of aspiring managers across government.



- **Scaffolded development:** The programme structures learning progressively, beginning with individual self-awareness (Module 1), advancing to interpersonal communication (Module 2), building cognitive capabilities for analysis and decision-making (Module 3), and culminating in change navigation requiring integration of all prior dimensions (Module 4).

Assessment and completion requirements

AYP does not employ formal summative assessment (examinations or graded assignments). Instead, the programme uses formative self-assessment approaches aligned with its self-development ethos:

- **Self-assessment exercises:** Each module includes structured self-assessment activities where participants evaluate their own strengths, development areas, values alignment, communication preferences, and stress responses. These assessments are private to the participant, supporting reflective self-awareness rather than external evaluation.
- **Completion tracking:** Participants are required to complete platform content sections, attend webinars and problem-solving workshops, and engage with workbook exercises to receive programme completion certification. Completion can be tracked through platform analytics (content viewed).
- **Action planning:** Modules include 'workplace challenge' action planning exercises where participants identify specific workplace applications and developmental commitments arising from programme content. These plans remain personal development tools rather than assessed deliverables.
- **No formal grading:** The absence of grades or pass/fail thresholds reflects the programme's assumption that psychological readiness development is individual and non-competitive, with participants developing at different rates and in different dimensions according to their starting points and contexts.

Support structures

Several support mechanisms are built into programme delivery:

- **Facilitation team:** Problem-solving workshops are delivered by experienced facilitators with expertise in adult learning, group dynamics, and Civil Service context. Facilitators provide in-session guidance, respond to questions, and create psychologically safe learning environments. Facilitators also actively engage with the FutureLearn platform, responding to participant comments, answering questions, and providing clarification and challenge.
- **Technical support:** Participants can access AYP team support for platform navigation issues, access problems, or resource downloads.



- **Peer networks:** The programme intentionally creates non-fixed, cross-departmental cohorts. Workshop breakout rooms are structured to maximise interaction with different participants across sessions.
- **Resource signposting:** Programme materials actively signpost to relevant Civil Service resources and further development opportunities, to position AYP within the broader learning ecosystem.



Appendix B: AYP theory of change supporting materials

This section provides detailed tables supporting the theory of change presented in the main body.

Foundational Assumptions

Table B1 summarises the four foundational assumptions underpinning the AYP theory of change.

Table B1. Foundational assumptions of AYP theory of change

Assumption	Statement	Supporting evidence
Pre-role development works	Individuals can develop managerial competencies before formally assuming line management roles. Systematic pre-role development can reduce transition challenges and improve subsequent performance.	Bandura's (1977) self-efficacy theory claims that developmental experiences increase leadership self-efficacy and that managerial capabilities can be strengthened before formal appointment.
Readiness improves transitions	Greater psychological readiness facilitates smoother transitions into management roles and enhances subsequent effectiveness.	Paglis and Green's (2002) empirical findings that leadership self-efficacy predicts manager motivation to lead change.
Non-technical challenges are critical	The most significant challenges facing new managers are often emotional, interpersonal, and identity-based, rather than procedural or technical.	Gentry et al. (2014) observed first-time managers find relational demands of managing people considerably more challenging than procedural tasks such as budgeting or scheduling.
Identity requires focus	Developing management identity and appropriate mindsets requires dedicated attention through reflective practices, self-assessment, and identity-focused activities; they are not a guaranteed by-product of skills training.	Individuals' leadership identity development forms through iterative identity (reflection, experimentation and sense-making) rather than automatically following skills training or formal promotion into a



management role (Bolander et al., 2019).

Authentic Leadership Dimensions

Table B2 details the four Authentic Leadership dimensions and their pre-role manifestations for aspiring managers.

Table B2. Authentic Leadership dimensions and pre-role manifestations

AL Dimension	Definition	Pre-role manifestation for potential managers
Self-Awareness (SA)	Understanding one's strengths, weaknesses, values, emotions, and impact on others.	Understanding personal work styles, recognising impact on team dynamics, actively seeking feedback, reflecting systematically on strengths and development areas.
Relational Transparency (RT)	Presenting one's authentic self to others, sharing appropriate information and genuine thoughts and feelings.	Authentic communication with colleagues, honest feedback to peers and supervisors, building genuine workplace relationships grounded in authenticity rather than impression management.
Internalised Moral Perspective (IMP)	Self-regulation guided by internal moral standards and values rather than external pressures, consistency between values and actions.	Ethical behaviour in current roles, maintaining consistency between stated values and daily actions, demonstrating integrity in decision-making even absent formal authority.
Balanced Processing (BP)	Objectively analysing relevant information before decisions, actively soliciting views that challenge deeply held positions.	Seeking diverse perspectives, considering alternatives before deciding, approaching problems objectively, demonstrating openness to feedback challenging current thinking.

Seven Key Change Mechanisms



Table B3 details the seven mechanisms through which AYP develops psychological readiness for management.

Table B3. Seven key AYP change mechanisms

Category	Mechanism	How It works on AYP	Primary AL dimension(s)
Self-focused	Emotional self-awareness	Structured activities and reflection exercises develop understanding of emotional responses, triggers, and patterns. Activities include identifying values, strengths, recognising triggers, practising behaviours.	SA
	Manager identity formation	Exercises and experiences through which participants begin perceiving themselves as line managers rather than solely individual contributors, shifting self-perception and strengthening managerial identity pre-role.	SA
	Stress and emotional management	Integration of stress self-management and personal resilience into management learning. Introduces regulation techniques including breathing practices, vagal toning, physical self-comfort strategies for managing emotional responses.	SA, IMP
	Habitual reflection	Reflective practices scaffolded through journaling, module recaps, and workshop reflection activities. Establishes reflection as habitual practice for sustained growth and self-development capacity.	SA, IMP
	Intentionality and goal-setting	Programme enrolment signals intentionality, reinforced through goal-setting activities and action planning. This aligns with on Boyatzis's intentional change theory: explicitly setting management as developmental goal increases likelihood of pursuing	SA, IMP



		opportunities when self-efficacy and ideal self-concept are also developed.	
Relational	Peer interaction and network building	Cross-government collaborative learning enables participants to identify common challenges, benchmark experiences, build support networks. Drawing on Bandura's (1977) social learning principles.	RT
	Systems thinking and perspective-taking	Tools such as systems mapping and stakeholder analysis (Modules 3-4) encourage viewing issues from multiple perspectives, cultivating empathetic understanding and cognitive flexibility.	BP

Expected immediate outcomes

Table B4 specifies the expected immediate outcomes from the programme, explaining why each outcome is anticipated and which mechanisms contribute to its development.

Table B4. Expected immediate outcomes and contributing mechanisms

Expected Outcome	Why we expect this outcome	Contributing mechanisms
Self-awareness (attitudes + practices)	Four self-focused mechanisms explicitly develop understanding of strengths, weaknesses, values, and emotional responses through reflection exercises, values identification activities, feedback-seeking practices, and stress awareness. Measured through attitudes about knowing oneself and frequency of reflective practices.	Emotional self-awareness, Habitual reflection, Manager identity formation, Stress and emotional management
Relational transparency (attitudes + practices)	Peer interaction mechanism creates opportunities for authentic communication, sharing honest thoughts with colleagues, admitting mistakes, and building genuine relationships with colleagues. Measured through attitudes about authenticity at work and frequency of transparent relationship-building practices.	Peer interaction and network building



<p>Internalised moral perspective (attitudes + practices)</p>	<p>Habitual reflection mechanism encourages examining personal values and their alignment with Civil Service values, whilst intentionality mechanism reinforces acting consistently with stated values when setting management goals. Measured through attitudes about values clarity and frequency of values-based reflection.</p>	<p>Habitual reflection, Intentionality and goal-setting</p>
<p>Balanced processing (attitudes + practices)</p>	<p>Systems thinking and perspective-taking mechanism explicitly trains considering multiple viewpoints, seeking diverse perspectives, and objectively analysing information before decisions—core elements of balanced processing. Measured through attitudes about objective decision-making and frequency of perspective-seeking practices.</p>	<p>Systems thinking and perspective-taking</p>
<p>Preparedness</p>	<p>Combination of self-awareness development (understanding own capabilities), perspective-taking (recognising management complexity), and knowledge acquisition (understanding management frameworks) together build perceived readiness to assume management responsibilities. Measured as perceived capability to take on line management role.</p>	<p>Emotional self-awareness, Systems thinking and perspective-taking, plus foundational knowledge from all modules</p>
<p>Confidence</p>	<p>Multiple mechanisms build self-efficacy for management: emotional self-awareness reduces fear of emotional challenges; peer interaction provides social validation and role models; intentionality reinforces belief in capability through goal commitment. Measured as confidence in being an effective manager. Grounded in Bandura's (1977) self-efficacy theory.</p>	<p>Emotional self-awareness, Stress and emotional management, Peer interaction and network building, Intentionality and goal-setting</p>
<p>Intention</p>	<p>Intentionality mechanism explicitly encourages setting management as a developmental goal. Strengthened by peer interaction (social encouragement), identity formation (seeing self as</p>	<p>Intentionality and goal-setting, Manager identity formation, Peer</p>



	future manager), and confidence development (belief in capability). Measured as motivation to pursue management roles within two years. Supported by Boyatzis's (2006) intentional change theory.	interaction and network building
Self-development orientation	Habitual reflection mechanism cultivates an ongoing self-development mindset; identity formation mechanism encourages becoming “more my true self” at work; intentionality mechanism reinforces taking active steps toward improvement. Together these develop sustainable orientation toward continuous growth. Measured through attitudes about self-improvement and frequency of development activities.	Habitual reflection, Manager identity formation, Intentionality and goal-setting
Foundational knowledge	All four modules provide conceptual frameworks and management knowledge, including Civil Service values, feedback approaches, listening techniques, understanding resilience components, decision-making tools, change psychology. Expected because didactic content supplements experiential learning throughout the programme. Measured through knowledge assessment items.	All mechanisms contribute through module content delivery
Expanded peer support networks	Peer interaction mechanism deliberately creates cross-departmental cohorts, workshop breakout discussions, and collaborative problem-solving opportunities. Expected because structured interaction with diverse Civil Service colleagues enables relationship formation extending beyond formal programme. Measured through qualitative data on network development.	Peer interaction and network building

Key uncertainties and contextual dependencies (extended)

Whilst the theory of change specifies expected causal pathways, several uncertainties and contextual factors may moderate programme effectiveness:

Pre-role development of AL dimensions: Whether AL dimensions that are typically studied in

- individuals already occupying leadership roles can meaningfully develop in pre-management contexts remains uncertain. The theory assumes that AL



dimensions manifest differently but authentically in pre-role contexts, representing genuine dimension development that will translate to management contexts when roles are assumed. This foundational assumption requires empirical validation.

- **Departmental and operational context variability:** AYP participants come from diverse Civil Service departments with varying cultures and support systems. Operational realities differ substantially: participants face varying workload intensities across roles, or during different points in the programme timelines, and differing levels of manager support for participation. These contextual factors outside programme control shape whether even effective programme content can be meaningfully engaged with by all intended participants.
- **Translation to actual management practice:** The extent to which psychological readiness and AL attitudes/practices developed in training contexts transfer to actual management behaviour remains uncertain. Pre-role readiness development occurs without the pressures and constraints of real management, such as expectations of immediate performance, competing urgent demands, and interpersonal conflicts with real consequences. Whether capabilities developed through reflection, simulation, and anticipatory practice translate to behaviour under authentic management pressure requires empirical validation.
- **Necessity and sufficiency:** Whether psychological readiness without extensive procedural skills is sufficient preparation for management effectiveness is theoretically unclear. The programme assumes psychological readiness is necessary and that procedural skills can be acquired more readily once psychological foundation exists, but this requires empirical validation. An alternative hypothesis is that confidence without procedural competence could create novice managers who feel ready but lack essential skills – and have a negative impact on institutional performance.
- **Organisational opportunities:** Intention to pursue management and readiness to manage are insufficient if organisational opportunities do not materialise. Participants may become demotivated if readiness development is not followed by actual advancement opportunities within reasonable timeframes. This creates contextual dependency: programme effectiveness partially depends on departmental workforce planning, promotion systems, and manager turnover creating vacancies accessible to prepared aspiring managers.
- **Longevity of effects:** How long programme effects persist is uncertain, particularly for participants who do not assume management roles promptly after completion. Psychological readiness may require regular reinforcement through ongoing development activities, workplace application opportunities, or peer network maintenance.



- **Resource constraints and scalability:** Delivery currently depends on volunteer facilitators balancing programme work with substantive roles without dedicated programme budget for certain components. Resource-intensive recommendations may not be feasible at current scale, and programme sustainability depends on continued facilitation contributions.



Appendix C: Balance test: treatment vs. control group participants pre-programme

Variable	Mean treatment	Mean control	Estimate	Significance
(Key outcome) Frequency of AYP practices	0.156	0.081	0.075	
(Key outcome) Knowledge score at baseline	14.212	14.518	-0.306	
(Key outcome) Positive AYP attitudes	0.031	0.026	0.005	
(Key outcome) Readiness to manage	0.04	0.005	0.035	
Age (mean)	39.579	39.654	-0.075	
Disability (% of all respondents)	0.244	0.228	0.016	
Line manager (% of all respondents)	0.058	0.066	-0.008	
Male (% of all respondents)	0.321	0.348	-0.028	
Previous management or leadership training (% of all respondents)	0.115	0.155	-0.04	



Above average grade	0.054	0.056	-0.002	
Undergraduate degree or less (% of all respondents)	0.736	0.717	0.019	
White (% of all respondents)	0.774	0.801	-0.027	
Years of service in the Civil Service	5.951	6.176	-0.225	

Note: *** = significant difference at the 0.1% level; ** = significant at the 1% level; * = significant at the 5% level



Appendix D: survey representativeness

	Mean baseline (answered only baseline)	Mean baseline (answered baseline & endline)	Estimate	Significance
(Key outcome) Frequency of AYP practices	13.728	14.585	-0.857	*
(Key outcome) Knowledge score at baseline	0.16	0.102	0.058	
(Key outcome) Positive AYP attitudes	-0.02	0.045	-0.065	
(Key outcome) Readiness to manage	0.071	0.008	0.063	
Age (mean)	38.657	39.941	-1.283	
Disability (% of all respondents)	0.236	0.236	0	
Line manager (% of all respondents)	0.128	0.04	0.088	***
Male (% of all respondents)	0.401	0.312	0.089	**
Previous management or leadership training (% of all respondents)	0.138	0.135	0.003	
Above average grade	0.058	0.055	0.003	
Undergraduate degree or less (% of all respondents)	0.318	0.259	0.059	
White (% of all respondents)	0.742	0.721	0.021	



Years of service in the Civil Service	0.7	0.817	-0.117	***
(Key outcome) Frequency of AYP practices	6.367	5.964	0.403	

Note: *** = significant difference at the 0.1% level; ** = significant at the 1% level; * = significant at the 5% level



Appendix E: Balance tests: treatment vs. control post-programme

Variable	Mean treatment	Mean control	Estimate	Significance
(Key outcome) Frequency of AYP practices	14.381	14.767	-0.386	
(Key outcome) Knowledge score at baseline	0.146	0.063	0.083	
(Key outcome) Positive AYP attitudes	0.026	0.063	-0.036	
(Key outcome) Readiness to manage	-0.009	0.022	-0.031	
Age (mean)	39.975	39.911	0.064	
Disability (% of all respondents)	0.226	0.245	-0.019	
Line manager (% of all respondents)	0.038	0.042	-0.005	
Male (% of all respondents)	0.283	0.339	-0.056	
Previous management or leadership training (% of all respondents)	0.108	0.158	-0.05	*
Above average grade	0.622	0.617	0.004	
Undergraduate degree or less (% of all respondents)	0.059	0.05	0.009	
White (% of all respondents)	0.266	0.253	0.014	
Years of service in the Civil Service	0.729	0.713	0.016	
(Key outcome) Frequency of AYP practices	0.808	0.824	-0.016	
(Key outcome) Frequency of AYP practices	5.877	6.043	-0.166	

Note: *** = significant difference at the 0.1% level; ** = significant at the 1% level; * = significant at the 5% level



Appendix F: Pre-programme knowledge by question

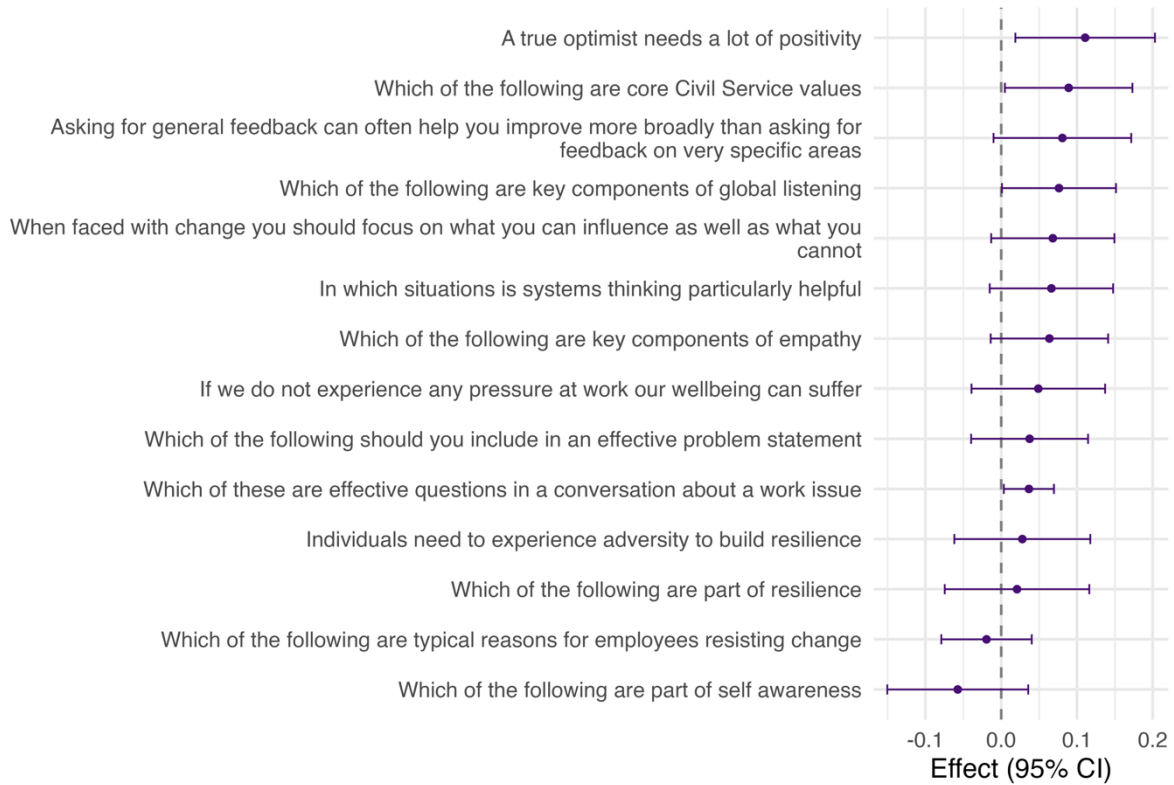
	% respondents answering completely correctly
In which situations is systems thinking particularly helpful?	16%
Is the following statement true or false a true optimist needs a lot of positivity?	49%
Is the following statement true or false asking for general feedback can often help you improve more broadly than asking for feedback on very specific areas?	33%
Is the following statement true or false if we do not experience any pressure at work our wellbeing can suffer?	29%
Is the following statement true or false individuals need to experience adversity to build resilience?	33%
Is the following statement true or false when faced with change you should focus on what you can influence as well as what you cannot?	20%
Which of the following are core civil service values?	54%
Which of the following are key components of empathy?	15%
Which of the following are key components of global listening?	9%
Which of the following are part of resilience?	58%



Which of the following are part of self awareness?	53%
Which of the following are typical reasons for employees resisting change?	11%
Which of the following should you include in an effective problem statement?	14%
Which of these are effective questions in a conversation about a work issue?	1%

Note: the percentage score by question varies depending on the format of the question. Differences in scores between questions should thus only be interpreted with caution, particularly as multiple choice questions require more correct response choices to achieve an overall correct response.

Appendix G: AYP knowledge gain by quiz question



Note: in a balanced treatment and control group sample (with the survey sample subset to responses completed by the 14 October 2025 cut-off), we observe statistically significant (5% level) knowledge gains for the items: "A true optimist needs a lot of positivity" and "When faced with change you should focus on what you can influence as well as what you cannot."



Appendix H: Interview protocols

The interview protocol was designed to balance standardisation with flexibility, enabling systematic comparison across participants whilst allowing exploration of emergent themes. Questions were derived from programme theory of change and informed by preliminary content analysis, observations, and emerging survey findings ensuring interviews built toward useful evidence for explanatory contributions.

Participant interview guide

Duration: 30 to 45 minutes

Format: Individual, video-recorded (with consent)

Sampling: Maximum variation (departments, primarily pilot cohort 1)

Opening

- Introduction to evaluation purpose and scope
- Consent confirmation and recording permission
- Confidentiality assurances
- Participant questions about the process

Programme experience

Core questions:

1. What motivated you to enrol in AYP?
2. How would you describe your overall experience of the programme?
3. What has been the most significant aspect of your participation?

Probes:

- Expectations versus reality
- Most/least valuable components
- Facilitator effectiveness
- Peer learning dynamics
- Platform and materials usability

Learning and application

Core questions:

4. What specific skills or knowledge have you gained from the programme?



5. Can you give me an example of when you've applied learning from the programme in your work?
6. What has enabled or challenged your application of the learning?

Probes:

- Workplace context factors (manager support, team needs, time)
- Confidence changes
- Behavioural changes (specific examples)
- Content relevance to role

Programme design and improvement

Core questions:

7. How well did the content match your needs and experience level?
8. What aspects of the programme design worked particularly well or poorly?
9. If you were redesigning the programme, what would you change?

Probes:

- Content appropriateness (too basic/advanced)
- Duration and pacing
- Module sequencing
- Civil Service context integration

Contextual factors

Core questions:

10. What support (if any) did you receive from your manager or department for participating?

Probes:

- Previous training
- Departmental culture
- Resources and constraints

Closing

- Any additional reflections or recommendations
- Questions for the evaluation team, thanks and next steps



Trainer interview guide

Duration: 30 to 45 minutes

Format: Individual, video-recorded (with consent)

Sampling: Purposive (experience across multiple programmes, delivery modalities)

Opening

- Introduction and consent
- Facilitator background and experience

Programme delivery

Core questions:

1. How would you describe your approach to facilitating AYP?
2. What aspects of the curriculum work particularly well in practice?
3. What challenges do you encounter in delivering the programme as designed?

Probes:

- Participant engagement patterns
- Content gaps or redundancies
- Time allocation issues
- Cohort dynamics

Participant characteristics and needs

Core questions:

4. How would you characterise the typical participants?
5. How well does the targeting work in practice?
6. What variation do you observe in participant readiness and experience?

Probes:

- Experience level appropriateness
- Cross-programme comparisons
- Participant expectations
- Learning needs variation

Learning outcomes and effectiveness

Core questions:



7. What evidence do you observe of participant learning during the programme?
8. What aspects of the pedagogy work particularly well for adult learners?
9. Where do you see participants struggling to translate learning to practice?

Probes:

- Confidence building
- Peer learning effectiveness
- Application barriers
- Long-term behaviour change likelihood

Programme design recommendations

Core questions:

10. If you could redesign any aspect of the programme(s), what would you prioritise?

Probes:

- Content gaps
- Duplication concerns
- Progression logic
- Resource needs
- Platform improvements

Closing

- Additional insights



Appendix I: Focus group protocol

A single focus group session (n=6 AYP participants) was conducted to triangulate and interpret contradictions emerging from quantitative survey results and individual interviews (participants; trainers). The focus group employed a puzzle-based facilitation approach, presenting participants with six specific contradictions in the existing data and inviting collective sense-making to understand underlying mechanisms.

Participant selection

Participants were randomly sampled from programme survey completion lists. All participants had completed post-programme surveys and had engaged with at least two programme modules.

Facilitation approach

The session utilised a structured puzzle-presentation methodology. At the start of the discussion, participants received six evidence-based puzzles via Teams chat:

1. **“Readiness” meaning?** If someone asked you now what AYP prepares you for, what would you say? What does “ready to line manage” actually mean to you?
2. **Keeping up and engaged?** Some get really deep into Module 1 and 2, but then less so. Do you recognise this?
3. **Too basic or too deep?** Some wanted practical skills (giving feedback), some valued reflection/mindset. What's the right mix?
4. **2-Hours in practice?** Many said it took 4-5 hours/week. Time problem or engagement feature?
5. **Networking effects?** Networking is a key targeted benefit. What happened (or didn't)
6. **Who is this for?** Participation ranges from AA to SEO, some with management experience. Does it work for all, or need different pathways?

Each puzzle was grounded in specific contradictions from interview transcripts and survey free-text responses, enabling participants to position their experiences relative to documented patterns.

Data collection and analysis

The 60-minute session was audio-recorded and transcribed. Analysis focused on: (a) collective interpretations of contradictions, (b) proposed mechanisms explaining quantitative patterns, (c) design recommendations emerging from shared understanding, and (d) meta-insights about programme positioning. The focus group functioned as a member-checking exercise whilst generating novel explanatory frameworks not accessible through individual interviews.



Appendix J: Observation protocol

Observations employed a structured framework derived from programme theory of change and content analysis, directing attention to theoretically salient features of delivery whilst remaining open to emergent patterns. The protocol organised observations thematically rather than as checklists. Observations focused on programme implementation rather than individual performance assessment, maintaining ethical boundaries appropriate for developmental evaluation.

Format: Passive observation (non-participant)

Recording: Field notes during session, expanded immediately post-observation

Duration: Full workshop sessions (typically 1.5 hours)

Ethical approach: Observer introduced at session start, voluntary participation emphasised, no individual identifiers recorded

Theme 1: facilitator approach

- Opening and framing: How session purpose and structure introduced
- Facilitation style: Directive versus collaborative, energy and engagement
- Content delivery: Balance of presentation versus discussion versus activities
- Responsiveness: Adaptation to participant needs, time management, flexibility

Theme 2: participant engagement

- Attention and focus: Cameras on/off, active listening, distraction patterns
- Participation patterns: Who speaks, silence/dominance, group dynamics
- Questions: Clarification versus application versus critical engagement
- Peer interaction: Supportive, competitive, collaborative
- Emotional tone: Enthusiasm, frustration, confidence, vulnerability

Theme 3: Content

- Examples and scenarios: Resonance with participant realities
- Civil Service specificity: Generic versus context-embedded
- Module connections: Coherence across programme elements

Theme 4: Pedagogy

- Activity design: Engagement, learning value, time allocation
- Discussion: Depth, breadth, inclusion
- Skill practice opportunities: Realism, safety, feedback quality



- Theory-practice bridges: How frameworks connected to application
- Resource integration: Resources used, nature of engagement

Theme 5: Set up

- Platform functionality: Technical issues, user experience, workarounds
- Time management: Pacing, breaks, session flow
- Virtual dynamics: Specific advantages or challenges
- Cohort composition: Open versus closed, departmental mix

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