

LEADing from the Front

How the Leadership Foundation can help

What happens when the academic staff development team, all leave together?

Ann Kimbley, Staff Development LEAD, University of Wolverhampton, talks about LEADing from the front.

For three years from 2002 to 2005 a dedicated academic development unit provided opportunities for staff at the University of Wolverhampton but then the team dissolved due to the members progressing to alternative roles. Fortunately, they left behind a legacy of successful initiatives, in particular, leadership development for Principal Lecturers (PL).

The Principal Lecturer Development Programme had been delivered entirely in-house and was well received, although in some cases less than well attended, due to the demands on staff time.

Then came the news that, not only the initiative, but this aspect of academic staff development programmes were to be placed in the hands of a non-academic! When the furore settled, a new innovative department was established, Leadership and Development (LEAD).

The new broom didn't sweep clean, but reviewed and externally evaluated the programmes accessed by the former unit, the Leadership Foundation provision in particular.

The need to continue to invest in the **leadership and management training for prospective future leaders was essential** and as sector specific courses, programmes, resources and research had excited all participants in the scheme so far, the logical step was to pursue partnership working.

The Leadership Foundation were delighted that we wished to talk about entire cohorts of 20 staff buying into programmes on an annual basis and

provided us with a **practical yet challenging programme** suited to our perceived needs.

The whole initiative was buoyed by a relatively new Vice-Chancellor whose own positive experience of the **Top Management Programme** confirmed the commitment of this University to providing progression for all staff.

Vital elements of the programme included:

- Organisational ownership, essential support from the Vice-Chancellor
- Sponsorship of the programme and individuals by the Senior Team
- A tailored and localised, rather than generic, 360° feedback
- Feedback process, included briefing of all participants and their sponsors, and a detailed action plan as outcome.
- Support in the form of sponsors, buddy partners, Action Learning Sets and Workshops.
- Real projects to work on, which ran concurrently to the programme, but with a six months extension for research. This approach sparked real interest and debate in each of the four cohorts to date. Their hands-on practice of new leadership skills has been seriously challenged in this respect.

Senior staff were asked to nominate aspiring leaders, or talented staff from within their areas. There were no set criteria for the nominations, but indicators of likely levels of responsibility were provided. The more onerous task was to ensure that each nomination had a suitably engaged and committed sponsor, as the programme relied upon more than a sign off on an application form. Sponsors would be involved, have to meet and support their nominee, and provide resources.

The nominations arrived, sponsored by Service Heads, Deans, Directors, and the mix was a welcome spread across the University, both academic and non-academic. The oversubscription demonstrated the support for the programme. Multiple nominations from same areas were assessed based on operational need and reassurance that they would be top of the queue for subsequent programmes.

The cost of the programme was borne by LEAD, but each sponsor had to provide a 10% contribution, up-front, and once places had been

confirmed any non-attendance would be charged a hefty daily penalty fee. Still the nominations rolled in.

The programme has enjoyed its fourth iteration; the staff that complete the programme (and celebrate in style at a local restaurant!) are unanimous in their **appreciation for this personal and professional development opportunity.**

And what of the positive benefits that accrue both for the individual and for the University?

Well we could list the first ten promotions, continuing Action Learning Sets and buddying. We could emphasise how the behaviour of the participants is reflected by their Myers Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) and feedback, and that personal confidence and improved work/life harmony is **positively impacting on their levels of engagement.** We could share the impact of the positive results that project research has created, or the influence and changes to our processes as a result of each cohort. We could tell you about the pride instilled in our participants as they become formally recognised as LEAD Alumni with their new profiles being recognised at institutional level and being asked to contribute actively to the strategic direction of the University. We could provide accolades with feedback stating the programme was passionate, stimulating, relevant, memorable, fun, inspirational, and provoking.

Many of the participants now appreciate and respect colleagues who undertake differing and sometimes hidden or backroom functions within our University. It is this sharing and partnership amongst colleagues that embodies the **values of both the Leadership Foundation and this University.**



This article is part of a series on **How the Leadership Foundation can help** with in-house programmes, coaching or consultancy. Visit:

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