

LEADERSHIP  
JOURNEYS:  
TRACKING THE  
CHALLENGE AND  
IMPACT OF THE  
TOP MANAGEMENT  
PROGRAMME

When the Leadership Foundation tendered for the longitudinal study Leadership Journeys: tracking the challenge and impact of the Top Management Programme in 2016, we could not have foreseen the seismic change in policy and public opinion that has shaken all aspects of higher education in varying forms across the UK. The focus on challenge and impact, however, was no accident; while the precise detail of change to come was unknown, it was clear that higher education would be changing, posing significant challenges – and opportunities – for leaders at all levels, including the sector's most senior teams.

Higher Education Institutions and individual participants invest significant time and money in TMP, and anecdotally the programme was perceived as a significant contributor to developing senior leaders – in performing current roles and/or climbing the career ladder. Yet to date there had been little research into the impact of leadership development (Dopson et al. 2016). This longitudinal study closes that gap.

This Leadership Insight summarises the first phase of the research, an extensive retrospective study of perceptions of TMP alumni and their sponsors on the impact of the programme. The study reveals the unexpected emotional and psychological stretch that the programme brings, the often isolated nature of senior leadership roles and the value of a supportive but also challenging network of sector peers. 90% of those participating in the study attributed positive impact of varying degrees to the programme.

We continue to develop and refine our programmes to ensure that they remain relevant and of value; our commitment to TMP is no exception. This study provides some important insights for future participants and their sponsors to gain the most from the programme. It also helps us understand how we can best enhance it to help participants continue to lead through the after-shocks of change in years to come. The second phase of the research is already underway and I look forward to hearing interim findings later this year.

**Alison Johns**  
Chief Executive, Advance HE

## Introduction

Leadership – and the need for leadership development – is essential given the increasingly dynamic environment organisations face, which includes rising competition from globalised market conditions and rapid technological innovation. These challenges for leadership are mirrored in higher education institutions. Their leaders need to adapt and become more outwardly focused, collaborate with different institutional partners, respond to changing funding mechanisms and generate economic impact, all within highly politicised public sector organisations (Dopson et al, 2016). Ensuring that senior leaders are equipped with the right knowledge, skills and abilities to steer their institutions is vital.

The Leadership Foundation's Top Management Programme (TMP) has been running for more than 15 years and is its flagship programme. Cohorts normally consist of around 21 participants and each group is numbered consecutively (TMP 1, TMP 2, etc). TMP 41 commenced in October 2017. Typically, the Leadership Foundation runs two TMP groups each academic year, starting in autumn and spring, although in some years three groups are scheduled in response to demand. With over 800 alumni, almost 70 of the current UK vice-chancellors/principals are TMP alumni, with many of the other past participants of TMP holding some of the most senior posts in higher education. TMP is intended to be challenging and aims to broaden the perspectives of those attending, to give them the skills and tools with which to shape institutional strategy, position and culture and to provide excellent networking opportunities. The Leadership Foundation anticipates that TMP alumni will act as a force for change at institutional, personal and professional levels and provide long-term benefits to diverse institutions across the sector.

'Leadership journeys: tracking the challenge and impact of the Top Management Programme' ('Leadership Journeys') is one of the first studies in the UK to focus on senior leadership development and its effectiveness across university settings. Led by a team at Ulster University Business School in partnership with the Leadership Foundation, this research began in 2016 and is taking place over four years. Over the course of the study the team will track the outcomes and impacts of TMP as well as acquire an insight into the factors which influence career choice, progression and promotion over time among this group of senior leaders in higher education. This Leadership Insights paper presents findings from the first stage of the study.

## The retrospective study: methodology and data collection

Leadership Journeys consists of two stages: a retrospective study examining the impact of the programme to date and a longitudinal study tracking participants through the programme across a four-year period. The retrospective study focuses on cohorts up to and including TMP 37, which concluded in late 2015. This report presents the findings from the retrospective study, data for which has been collected in several ways:

### Focus group with the programme directors and facilitation team

To understand better the programme design and philosophy, a focus group with four of the team involved in the delivery of TMP was conducted in January 2017.

### Interviews with TMP alumni

50 alumni were interviewed between November 2016 and February 2017. These in-depth interviews sought to examine participants' reflection on their TMP experience considering: individual gains from the programme; application of programme content; and, where possible, institutional impacts.

As the programme underwent significant structural and content redesign in 2013, with the changes taking effect from TMP 32 onwards, efforts were made to ensure a balance of more recent alumni was achieved while the views of those from earlier TMP designs were also captured. Thus, of the 50 alumni interviewed, 46% were participants from TMP32 or onwards. Fifty six percent of the alumni were male and 80% described themselves as white.

In terms of current job role: 12% were vice-chancellors, principals or chief executives; 44% were deputy vice-chancellors, pro-vice-chancellors or deputy principals; 14% were directors, chief financial officers or heads of various corporate functions; and 22% were deans or heads of school within faculties.

Participants were from institutions from across the UK. 72% currently worked in institutions based in England with Greater London being the most represented region (comprising 32% of the sample). Twenty percent were from Scotland. None of the interviewees were from Wales or Northern Ireland. Four percent of the sample were from international institutions.

Participants were currently working in a wide variety of institutions. The most represented institutions were MillionPlus universities (24%); pre-1992 institutions (22%); and institutions belonging to the University Alliance (also 22%). Six percent of institutions were members of the Russell Group.

The sample was statistically consistent for each of the variables described above to the TMP alumni population.

### Interviews with organisational sponsors (vice-chancellors, HR directors, university secretaries)

Interviews were secured with a total of 12 vice-chancellors who had sponsored members of their team to attend TMP. Subsequently, due to the unavailability of four of these vice-chancellors, HR directors who deputised for them were interviewed. These HR directors were chosen because they had been directly involved in the sponsoring process from the universities concerned.

These interviews were designed to gain sponsors' perspective on the challenge and impact of TMP and to explore in more depth some of the information gained from the alumni interviews. These interviews were conducted between March and April 2017.

### Alumni survey

A survey was designed and distributed to alumni who had not participated in the interviews. The survey allowed the career trajectories of the wider TMP alumni to be mapped and to understand better the extent to which the alumni interview findings could be generalised to alumni as a whole. The survey was open from February to March 2017 and 95 usable surveys were returned, a response rate of 19%.

Of the 95 survey respondents, 23% were participants from TMP 32 onwards. 52% were male and 96% described themselves as white. Seventy three percent of respondents currently worked in institutions based in England, 13% in Scotland and 11% in Wales. Only 1% were from international institutions. Three percent of the survey respondents, upon commencing TMP, were chief executives; 42% were deputy vice-chancellors, pro-vice-chancellors or deputy principals; 16% were directors, chief financial officers or heads of various corporate functions; and 27% were deans or heads of school within faculties.

The most represented institution type upon commencing TMP was Russell Group at 28%, followed by University Alliance (18%), post-1992 (15%) and MillionPlus (15%).

Although the response rate for this survey was low, the sample was statistically consistent for cohort, gender, ethnicity and location to the TMP alumni population.

## Eleven key findings

### Key finding 1 – decision to participate

For many of the participants, their vice-chancellor as well as other key colleagues in their institution and beyond appeared to play a key role in terms of initiating their interest in and desire to participate in TMP. The survey confirmed the importance of others in the decision to participate, with 56% of respondents confirming that attending TMP had been suggested to them by their line manager and only 36% recalling this as initially being their idea.

Several alumni spoke about new vice-chancellors coming into their institutions with a clear ambition to ensure that senior leaders were developed, leading to their nomination onto TMP. A key aspect linked to this was that vice-chancellors appeared to view TMP as a way to ensure that their senior teams could become more outward looking and better informed about the sector. Interviewees also reported participation in TMP being used by their organisation as a way of retaining senior employees, and in some cases TMP appeared to be viewed as a 'reward' for service to the university. Use of TMP as a 'reward' was also evident in the interviews with sponsoring organisations.

In addition, a significant number of alumni came from institutions where TMP had appeared to become embedded in the culture and was now viewed as the accepted means of leadership development. Seventy two percent of survey respondents came from institutions with a history of supporting TMP and 55% reported that colleagues had been sponsored after their own attendance.

### Actions going forward

- **For institutions/sponsors** - senior leadership development is embedded in the culture of some institutions and a priority for some vice-chancellors but less so in many others. Questions that institutions/sponsors may wish to ask include: how can a programme such as TMP help move individual leaders and the institution as a whole forward? Does leadership development feature highly enough in terms of a talent and retention strategy for senior level leaders, ie are the right kind of conversations held with senior leaders about development options and routes?
- **For potential applicants** - if senior leadership development is not embedded within the institution, potential applicants may need to be proactive in putting their development needs forward.

### Key finding 2 – TMP participants' goals

A significant finding which emerged in the research is that although career progression was an important goal for many interviewees and survey participants, and even though there was an awareness that TMP alumni often progressed into vice-chancellor or other similar roles, career advancement did not appear to be the primary driver for many alumni. Instead, a diverse range of goals for attending TMP surfaced during interviews. Three key themes emerged in the interviews with alumni:

1. Goals linked to garnering specific new skills and knowledge around leadership.
2. The opportunity to get out of their institutions and meet new colleagues, become exposed to fresh thinking and ideas and generally to network with other leaders who were either like-minded, or indeed had different ideas to themselves.

3. Some interviewees entered the programme without any 'open' learning goals, simply wanting to attend a prestigious development programme to test themselves or to generally develop further as senior leaders.

As can be appreciated from Table 1, skills development and knowledge building was the most popular reason given for participation. It should also be noted that participants from TMP 32 onwards appeared to approach the programme with more focus upon specific skills or knowledge building and networking development.

### Actions going forward

- **For potential applicants** - a key implication here is that potential applicants need to consider in depth what exactly they want to get out of a development programme such as TMP. They need to reflect upon their experiences of development to date and note their key priorities in terms of skills development and networking as well as the social capital that they will need to build in order to enhance their current and future roles.

**Table 1: Content analysis of interviewees' goals for attending TMP overall and by TMP design**

	Across all interviews (n=50)	TMP31 or before (n=27)	TMP 32 onwards (n=23)
Skills development and knowledge building goals	16 (32%)	8 (30%)	8 (35%)
Networking and social capital building goals	10 (20%)	5 (19%)	5 (22%)
'Open' learning goals	10 (20%)	7 (26%)	3 (13%)

### Key finding 3 – preparation for TMP

Although alumni were required to complete the pre-programme questionnaire, which explored their aims and aspirations for undertaking TMP, participants appeared to enter the programme without undertaking very much detailed preparation, certainly with respect to academic material linked to leadership development. Many interviewees did realise that undertaking such a prestigious programme

would be challenging and therefore several spoke about their mental preparation and how they 'psyched' themselves up for the various challenges TMP would present.

Ultimately a key reason for the lack of preparation was linked to a perceived absence of detailed information relating to the programme activities. However, it should be noted that very few alumni commented upon this aspect in a negative way, although some did feel that if more up-front information had been provided then they could have explored in more detail some specific issues at their workplaces and more fully realise the benefits of the experiences presented during the programme.

Meanwhile, others suggested that it was beneficial to approach the programme with an open frame of reference which allowed them to engage with the programme stakeholders (fellow participants and facilitators) in a way which enhanced co-creation in the learning experience. This allowed participants to ensure that the programme was not overly prescriptive and allowed for adaptation and tailoring of activities and material which could fully meet the group's needs.

### Key finding 3 implication:

- **For institutions/sponsors and potential applicants** - engaging in conversations with key sponsors surrounding aspirations for the programme, as well as thinking about how the experience could enhance future roles, skills and knowledge, could be beneficial for all key stakeholders.

### Key finding 4 – TMP and work commitments

Clearly, given the level of seniority of TMP participants, time to participate in development activities was a precious commodity. However, a measure of the value that was placed on TMP by participants was that, despite having busy roles and work commitments, making time to ensure that they fully benefited from the learning experience presented in TMP was viewed as fundamental. Therefore, many spoke about how they took conscious decisions to 'switch off' from work activities while attending to programme activities.

In a similar vein, there was a consensus among the respondents in both the survey and interviews that employers and sponsors understood the need to give TMP

participants time and space to ensure they gained fully from the programme. Relatedly, few spoke of any perceived or real barriers originating from their employers in relation to participation in TMP activities.

### Actions going forward

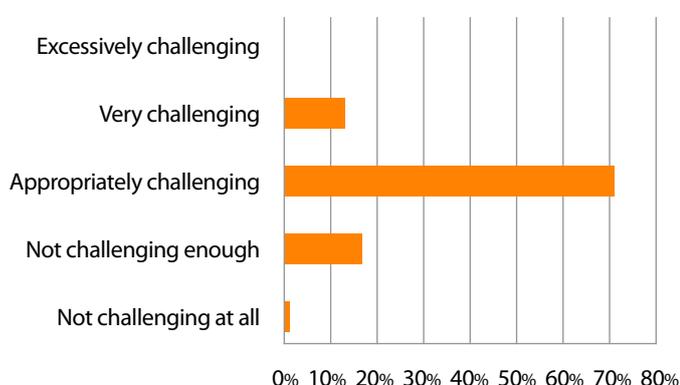
- **For institutions/sponsors and potential applicants** - TMP is an intensive senior leadership programme which requires serious commitment from key stakeholders. To realise the true value of the programme, applicants and sponsors must be prepared to make significant space for TMP, not only in terms of the time to participate, but also in creating space after the actual learning events to ensure that reflection / introspection and, ultimately, transfer back to the workplace occurs.

### Key finding 5 – TMP challenge

In the main the alumni in the study felt TMP offered them the appropriate amount of challenge. The key finding here is that the TMP experience was viewed as being more emotionally than academically or intellectually challenging in nature. For a small number the fact that TMP offered more of an emotional as opposed to intellectual challenge was noted with an element of surprise.

However, it would be wrong to suggest this was an overt criticism of TMP. The clear majority of participants described the challenge level of TMP “appropriate”, as shown in Figure 1.

**Figure 1: How challenging did you find the programme?**



Further reinforcing these findings was the fact that, in the interviews, alumni described in some detail how they were personally taken out of their comfort zones when participating in unfamiliar activities with an unfamiliar group of individuals. Indicative of the culture fostered in TMP, several also spoke about how a supportive group reassured them, enhanced their confidence and ultimately inspired them to fully engage in innovative and challenging learning activities.

### Actions going forward

- **For potential applicants** - applicants should understand that TMP is challenging, but that this challenge may arise from the need for them to take an introspective look at their skills and competencies in an authentic and honest way. In addition, to receive the full benefits of the programme, potential TMP participants need to be prepared to confront their inhibitions and participate in the programme activities with an open mind and be prepared to be challenged in a way that, perhaps, they have not experienced previously.

### Key finding 6 – TMP and the value of networking

Almost every participant interviewed discussed the network they developed through TMP and many commented that this was perhaps their most significant gain from participation in the programme. The networking and facilitated discussions with other participants, as well as visits to other institutions and guest speakers, in turn helped develop participants’ knowledge of the higher education sector in the UK and further afield. When discussing the benefits of the network gained through TMP, many of the participants referenced the diversity of the TMP cohort in terms of the backgrounds of the participants, their roles and their institutions.

Inextricably linked to the networking issue, many interviewees discussed how they used the sector knowledge gained within their institution subsequently. Indeed, in the survey, when specifically asked about the networking issue, more than 92% of respondents agreed that TMP had helped them “build a knowledge of what other institutions are doing.” Meanwhile, other interviewees discussed how they used the sector knowledge gained through TMP to challenge others and

resistance to change within their own institution constructively. For example, one interviewee noted how she now felt better equipped to “move forward an agenda” given her knowledge of what her TMP peers had done in their institutions.

Among the interviews with sponsors and representatives from the sponsoring institutions it was also clear that helping to build a network and developing sector knowledge was viewed as one of the key perceived benefits of TMP, particularly in comparison to other competitor programmes.

#### Actions going forward

- **For institutions/sponsors** - there are a variety of senior leadership programmes in the market. In considering which to choose, an honest assessment needs to be made about the perceived importance of developing a network with higher education leaders and building sector knowledge.
- **For potential applicants** - applicants need to understand that network building is a key benefit of TMP and, if sponsored to attend, should try to use such networking opportunities fully to enhance social capital development.

#### Key finding 7 – the impact of TMP

Research shows that the impact of leadership development is often deeper than other types of development and involves more personal insights. This finding also emerged for TMP. Participants discussed the impact of the programme in terms of developing their self-awareness; their identity as leaders and learning about leadership; confidence gains; and an opportunity to reflect.

Participants discussed how a key benefit of TMP was its ability to promote and develop their self-awareness, particularly the 360-degree feedback. They highlighted that their self-awareness and confidence were also developed by the opportunity provided to compare themselves against the other participants or, as some termed it, ‘to benchmark’. Finally, one of the key benefits was the opportunity to reflect deeply on their role, practice, and the higher education sector landscape. Simply having the space and time away from the workplace for an extended period was something that participants valued and it appeared for some this provided an opportunity to ‘recharge’ or ‘refocus’. Often it was shown that

these participants were at what might be termed ‘career forks’ or ‘turning points’ so having space to reflect and associate with others who were also experiencing or had experienced similar issues was deeply appreciated.

#### Actions going forward

- **For potential applicants** - potential applicants need to understand that there are many senior leadership programmes available and should complete some personal research to investigate different options to enable them to make the right choice. By interacting with alumni from TMP and other programmes they will be able to consider the benefits that previous participants have gained. For TMP, benefits are clearly accrued in terms of opportunities to network, enhanced higher education sector knowledge, alongside greater self-awareness, identity as senior leaders, leadership skills, confidence and an opportunity to reflect.
- **For institutions/sponsors** - a key benefit of TMP for individuals is the opportunity to be removed from the institution for a short time. Institutions should ensure that resources in terms of space and time are allocated to participants to allow them to benefit fully from the learning opportunities that TMP offers.

#### Key finding 8 – institutional support for TMP

After initial sponsorship to attend TMP, participants were often left to pursue the programme without significant involvement from their institutions. During the interviews only 34% of alumni reported experiencing what could be characterised as positive support, ranging from informal discussion on occasion through to experiencing clear interest and dialogue. Many alumni felt that their sponsors or line managers could have taken more interest in the TMP activities they were working on. Some went further and stated that there seemed to be a measured strategy from some sponsors to not broach the subject of TMP activities. Those who did receive support reported this as an opportunity to discuss leadership, their role in the institution and institution direction with their line manager.

Representatives from sponsoring organisations accepted that they could have been more involved in the programme and welcomed the opportunity to be so in future, under

the guidance of the programme team. This is important as support before, during and after leadership development, even at senior levels, may be a critical component in ensuring institutions truly receive the full benefits of TMP when senior leaders participate.

### Actions going forward

- **For institutions/sponsors** - institutions and sponsors should enter into an honest dialogue with colleagues to ascertain motivation for undertaking an external leadership development programme and the kind of support that could be given. Questions should be asked about the sponsor role and if it extends beyond sponsoring someone to undertake the programme, ie whether a more formal coaching / mentoring role should emerge to ensure that the full benefits of TMP are realised. Could additional developmental impact be achieved if more active engagement with the participant is undertaken during the programme?
- **For potential applicants** - potential applicants need to reflect on what exactly they want from a sponsor in terms of support and consider if building a more robust professional relationship while undertaking a programme such as TMP can enhance learning and potential transfer.

### Key finding 9 – the value of the impact groups

In discussing the value of the guest speakers on TMP, one interviewee mentioned a vice-chancellor's candid comment that in "... your first 100 days when you become a vice-chancellor, nobody talks to you properly anymore." A clear issue that emerged in this research was linked to the isolation senior leaders sometimes feel in their roles. Such isolation, while an accepted part of senior leadership roles, can compromise decision-making and leadership effectiveness. Intensive calendars, evening commitments etc leave little time for reflection. To break through this isolation, leaders need to escape periodically.

A significant theme emerging was the importance of the continuation of the impact groups post programme, some for many years. Impact groups are the participant-driven element of TMP. A cornerstone of the programme is for participants to bring to their cohorts significant change

projects or plans to bring change to their institution. It was interesting to note that alumni valued this aspect of the programme so much that they continued to meet regularly to discuss the issues, particularly difficulties that they are facing, and then test in action the ideas arising from that discussion.

Seventy percent of interviewees noted that their impact group continued after the programme had finished. Representatives from sponsoring organisations were also aware of impact groups continuing and the benefits to their institution from that. For participants, these groups operate as: a support on professional and personal levels; an opportunity for time out and reflection; continued exposure to practice in other institutions; and a safe and confidential space for discussion. The survey also showed that impact groups continued to meet regularly for 25% of respondents while 43% noted that their group had continued for some time but this was no longer the case.

Considering the benefits of the impact groups, there were no statistically significant differences between the views of those in the earlier cohorts and colleagues in TMP 32 onwards. However, it is worth highlighting that 'an opportunity to take time out from my current role' was seen by those participants from TMP 32 onwards to be of greater benefit than those who participated in TMP 31 or before. This difference was approaching statistical significance and the result may be linked to the value more recent participants gain from taking time away from the increasingly fast paced, technology-dependent environment that is currently a feature of senior higher education roles.

### Actions going forward

- **For potential applicants** - as progress is made in one's leadership journey, it is likely that executive isolation will be experienced to some extent. Senior leaders in this sector need to be aware of the value of having a support network in place beyond their institution or subject/ professional discipline. The TMP offers such a facility, where those facing similar challenges can meet, and this was a highly valued aspect of the programme. All those who have ambitions for senior leadership roles should therefore think about how they can cultivate an effective support network.

### Key finding 10 – TMP and institutional impact

A leadership development programme such as TMP will be only one part of the leadership journey for participants. Leadership development reflects a confluence of influences and many alumni raised this point during the interviews.

Even with this in mind, half of the alumni interviewed were able to provide specific examples of projects or activities they had undertaken within their institution evidencing behaviour change or application of knowledge gained from TMP. Examples included: leading change programmes; implementing strategy; restructurings; and responding to crises or external events. Often changes in behaviour were linked by participants to the individual gains from the programme discussed previously (eg self-awareness, confidence, reflection etc). Similarly, 57% of survey respondents felt that development from TMP helped them achieve outcomes within their institutions.

In the research, several examples were gathered from vice-chancellors during the sponsor interviews which indicated that they did notice changes in the alumni's leadership style and / or how they related to others within the institution.

Another illustration of TMP institutional impact was that just under 20% of interview participants could provide actions or initiatives within the institution that were specifically generated through their participation in TMP. These were often linked to networking and sector knowledge developed through the programme. However, it should also be noted that 16% of interview participants did not feel able to give specific applications of gains from TMP within their institution and 10% of survey respondents felt TMP had contributed a little or not at all to their leadership role.

#### Actions going forward

- **For institutions/sponsors** - change through a leadership development programme should be continuous, self-generating and emergent over time. Sponsors and other senior managers should realise that any leadership programme is only one part of a leadership journey for the participants, but change and impact from completion of a well-designed programme should be evident. This research indicated that institutional impact had occurred from TMP

but, as noted elsewhere in this insights report, participants need to be given time and space to ensure that the full benefits can truly materialise from such an investment.

### Key finding 11 – career implications

A number of interesting findings emerged when participants were asked about the impact of TMP on their careers. It was clear that some were more instrumental than others and had an acute awareness of the value of TMP in terms of future career success and hence taking part was viewed as a central part of their overall career plan. Others, largely from earlier TMP cohorts, appeared to have a less well-developed view on the impact of TMP participation on/for their careers, and their motivation seemed to be linked to becoming more effective in their roles.

In essence, while there was clearly a high degree of motivation to participate and learn from the programme, it would be fair to say that, even for those who viewed TMP as a central part of their career 'plan', it was acknowledged that career success was influenced by a complex set of factors. Although participation in TMP could be viewed as contributing positively to one's skills and knowledge portfolio, it may not be pivotal to further career progression in the sector. However, many survey respondents (45%) did feel that TMP played a key role in preparing them for new responsibilities. This point was reinforced by several of the vice-chancellors or other sponsors who spoke about the clear progression which had accrued for several of those they had directly sponsored through the programme.

#### Actions going forward

- **For institutions/sponsors and potential applicants** - TMP was viewed as an extremely valuable experience with clear potential for networking with other senior leaders in the sector. To fully realise the benefits and enhance one's career, all key stakeholders must fully engage in the programme while also realising that TMP is a contributory factor among the multiplicity of variables which can determine career progression.

## The project team

### **Dr Martin McCracken**

Research director, Ulster University Business School

Martin has extensive experience in undertaking commissioned research for organisations such as the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development; British Academy; Department for Education and Employment; Sector Skills Development Agency and Leonardo Da Vinci (EU). Martin is the lead researcher, Leadership Journeys: Tracking the Challenge and Impact of the Top Management Programme and Research Director, Ulster University Business School

### **Mark McCrory**

Lecturer in management, Ulster University Business School

Before taking up his lecturing role at Ulster University, Mark was a senior consultant for International Training Services (ITS) Ltd, a consultancy specialising in management and leadership development to drive organisational change.

### **Professor Heather Farley**

Professor of management development and associate dean (education), Ulster University.

Heather is a principal fellow of the Higher Education Academy, and has taught a range of undergraduate and postgraduate courses, in addition to the supervision of PhD students. Recent collaborative research has included developing an engagement model for management education, and on effectively incorporating learning technologies to enhance assessment and feedback practice.

### **Professor Marie McHugh**

Professor of organisational behaviour, Ulster University Business School.

Over many years, Marie has been actively involved with the British Academy of Management, serving on its council and executive in various roles including chair and president, with responsibility for capacity building within the academic community of UK business schools.

## TMP Leadership Journey

**Dr Paul Gentle**, former director of programmes at the Leadership Foundation

Having the opportunity to be one of a team of programme directors on TMP over ten cohorts, spanning the period from 2013 to 2018, has been the greatest professional privilege of my career in higher education.

Our refreshed vision for the programme from TMP32 onwards was inspired by a transformative personal leadership development experience which supported my own transition into a senior management role at the Leadership Foundation. The vision translated into practice, and was constantly refined, over a long incubation period which was as challenging as the programme we intended to design.

We set out to create a learning experience which would require and enable participants to be overt about how they behave as leaders, and how they are perceived by their peers, their own managers, and those they lead. Our vision drew on two principles which we believe are core to effective leadership practice:

Stimulating a learning orientation in individuals is core to effective leadership practice

Nurturing an organisational climate for development through high-intensity learning experiences

Transferring these principles into practice was as important for us as facilitators as it was for TMP participants themselves. We wanted the principles to serve both as tenets for the design of TMP, and as capabilities which alumni could take back into their institutions.

We made these work through ensuring that we created reflective spaces in which small groups (usually of seven participants) can explore the leadership issues and dilemmas they face, in an environment which is both supportive and challenging. We were determined that they use this space to focus not so much on their personal career

ambitions as on making a difference to the senior team on which they serve; for this reason, we called them impact groups. These groups have become not only a vehicle for intensive discussion processes based on action learning, but have also established strong team cultures in which giving and receiving feedback on actions and behaviours is the norm.

Getting this to work requires courage on the part of participants, many of whom report that there are few similar feedback opportunities in their own institutions. Feedback-rich learning experiences provide the opportunity for people to engage together in meaningful collaborative activity. This is at the opposite end of the executive education spectrum from analysing case studies and theoretical models of leadership. We set up opportunities for TMP participants to make videos on institutional strategy, to run a simulated university in real time at a point of governance crisis, and to work together to gather and feed back views on higher education systems in other countries through a four-day international assignment. To see groups seizing these opportunities for learning is a programme director's most profound and humbling reward.

This report makes encouraging reading, as it provides evidence that suggests the vast majority of TMP participants find that the programme offers an appropriate challenge which enables them to plan successfully to act as a force for change.

I would like to acknowledge the work of the Ulster University Business School team in implementing its ambitious longitudinal study, and my gratitude for the infinite support and challenge from my colleagues Louisa Hardman, Rosemary Stamp and Vijaya Nath, now leading TMP towards the next chapter in its history. None of this could have happened without backing and encouragement from all the chief executives at the Leadership Foundation, and from the dedicated and superb marketing & communications team.

Thank you, and may all prosper in Advance HE.

**Dr Paul Gentle**