

National Evaluation Report of the Virtual Staff College

# Succession Planning Initiative for Children's Services 2010-2013

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# Introduction

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In 2008, the government gave the National College (NC) responsibility for the professional development of leadership in children's services. It worked with partners, including the Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS) and the Virtual Staff College (VSC) in designing programmes to develop the leadership of Directors of Children's Services (DCSs) and those aspiring to the role. Following the General Election in 2010, the National College's remit changed and it no longer had responsibility for such programmes. The VSC was initially appointed as 'caretaker' for the National College's Succession Planning Initiative and became the accountable body for this provision in April 2012.

The purpose of this report is to provide an evaluative analysis of the outcomes achieved through the implementation of the Succession Planning Initiative, which began in 2010 as set out in 'The National Succession Planning Framework for Children's Services' (NC, 2010a).

As will be seen, the scheme, which was funded from 2010 to 2013 through central government grant, evolved and developed during these three years. This was in part due to the changes in national and regional priorities for the delivery and commissioning of children's services driven by the significantly changing context within which local authorities were operating as well as in response to concerns relating to the performance of children's services across the country.

Section 1 provides a brief history of the development of succession planning, a range of programmes and initiatives to support leaders and aspiring leaders of children's services, including a specific programme that supported Black and Asian leaders. It records the establishment of a national framework for succession planning following the design of a leadership programme for directors and aspiring directors of children's services and research by McKinsey & Co (NC, 2010a). This section also sets out the initial national aims and objectives of the initiative and the arrangements for its implementation through the nine English regions.

The second section of this report sets out the national requirements for evaluating the initiative and the establishment of an evaluation process. It illustrates how the national guidance for evaluation evolved over time and how the regions responded to create an evaluation strategy that focused not just on providing quantitative data but recording qualitative information in order to meet the more challenging objective of evaluating impact. This section also introduces the concept of an

evaluation framework, a 'maturity model' that evolved during 2012 to support local authorities in analysing their professional development needs beyond the life of the nationally funded Succession Planning Initiative.

Section 3 sets out the changes in the context in which local authorities were working and the impact on the initial aims established by the regions for their Succession Planning Programmes with a brief commentary on any variances from those established by the National College in 2010. It also records the types of activities used to deliver the regional programmes and the evaluation processes used by the regions to record feedback and support the analysis of impact.

The fourth section provides an analysis of the regional evaluation reports on the delivery and impact of their Succession Planning Programmes. The analysis is based on the four questions that the National Support Team (NST) set out in its evaluation guidance, 2011 and 2012, to the regions.

Section 5 provides a reflection on the main findings from the evaluation of the regional programmes arising from the Succession Planning Initiative and recommendations for its successful sustainability.



# 1. Background

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## 1.1 Establishing the Succession Planning Initiative

The National College found, through research by McKinsey & Co, that whilst DCSs recognised the importance of their role in developing the next generation of senior leaders and that there were many local, informal development opportunities, there was very little formal succession planning in local authorities and *'no clearly identified pipeline of talented and prepared individuals'* (NC, 2010a, p7).

The National College asserted that a formal and effective strategy for leadership development would *'take succession planning away from the margins and make sure it gets the attention it deserves as an essential feature of any serious plan for workforce development'* (NC, 2010a, p7). The College, together with partners, created a National Succession Planning Framework for Children's Services (NC, 2010a) with the aim to improve the recruitment of first and second-tier officers. There were also five specific national objectives. These were to:

- increase the number and quality of candidates for DCS posts and for second-tier posts in children's services;
- create a more diverse talent pool, attracting potential senior leaders from a broader range of backgrounds (professional and personal);
- establish a more positive view of the senior leadership of children's services, changing public perceptions and professional aspirations;
- support the emergence of new models of leadership, better suited to partnership working, multi-agency provision and the introduction of integrated service teams;
- contribute towards more effective performance management in children's services' (NC, 2010a, p4).

During the early phase of the initiative, and against a backdrop of financial restraint, many Local Authorities (LAs) reported that there were significant changes taking place in the role of DCSs and also in the structure of LAs. Research, undertaken by the VSC and ADCS, *'The Changing Shape of Children's Services'*, concluded that the role of DCSs was becoming more corporate. Responsibility for resource functions, such as finance, was being transferred to the corporate centre; second-tier posts with a specific responsibility, for example for early intervention, were ceasing to exist, and there was an increasingly sharp distinction between commissioning and providing services.

Leadership research undertaken during 2010 and commissioned by the National College and others further highlighted the changing context in which LAs found themselves. *'A system in transition: ...'* (ADCS, 2011), a report, based on the results of a regional workforce survey and publications, such as *'Resourceful leadership...'* (NC et al, 2011a), and *'Leading for Learning Organisations...'* (NC, 2012) concluded that the emphasis of the Succession Planning programmes needed to alter. The first of the national aims of improving the number and quality of candidates for Director and Assistant Director roles was no longer seen as a primary focus because of the changing context of public services, both regionally and nationally.

As a result of austerity measures, LAs found themselves having to drastically reduce the number of senior officers and middle managers. It was therefore recognised that they had to increase leadership capacity within the remaining workforce. Second-tier post holders had to take on a more strategic role, work more corporately and with elected members, and have a greater focus on accountability. Less experienced middle managers were also given a greater level of responsibility. It was acknowledged that these changes were not without risk to the quality and range of services provided by the LAs. The conclusion from the work force surveys suggested that *'...if leaders, at all levels, are to cope successfully with the kind of demands that will be made of them in the future, they will need to develop their strategic capacity, personal impact and organisational competence'* (ADCS, 2011).

The National College and C4EO report, *'Resourceful leadership...'* (NC et al, 2011a), highlighted research into senior leadership in children's services in England. It set out the concept of the resourceful leader through endorsing a *'leadership qualities framework'* (NC, 2010b) and building on it by identifying eight core leadership behaviours and their underpinning skills, knowledge and attributes. The report suggested that these behaviours should *'be built into formal development programmes, peer learning and on-the-job coaching and direction'* (NC et al, 2011a).

*'Resourceful leadership...'* (NC et al, 2011a), as will be seen, had a significant impact on the Succession Planning offer developed across all nine regions. The NST and the regional leads ensured that the results of the research formed a fundamental platform for the regional Succession Planning programmes. A self-assessment process based on the eight core behaviours was introduced and a 360 appraisal tool was used as the starting point for the participants on the respective regional programmes.

Other subsequent publications also influenced the initiative, for example 'Leading for Learning' (NC, 2012). This explored the fourth of the resourceful leadership themes, openness to learning, and considered the need for senior leaders to build capacity and develop learning organisations and processes that underpin the notion of 'intelligent leadership'. The NST saw the importance of this research to succession planning. Consequently, the regions ensured that programmes also included concepts of system-level challenges, styles of leadership, leadership behaviours and their impact on cultural change, and the promotion of leadership skills, such as enabling, coaching, facilitating and collaborating.

Towards the end of the Initiative, a further publication 'Systems Leadership for Effective Services' (VSC, 2013) summarised the key features of a model of leadership that was *'increasingly being accepted as the most appropriate way of describing what DSCs do when they are most effective'* (VSC, 2013). The report reflects on a paper published by the King's Fund on 'Leadership of Whole Systems' that sets out 'seven guiding messages' for leaders and concludes that the *'prescription mirrors the research into aspects of systems leadership commissioned by the NC and VSC'* (VSC, 2013). The concept of systems leadership was, as we will see, explored in the 'maturity model' developed as an evaluation tool for LAs.

These publications identified that developing leadership capacity, culture and leadership behaviours were as important as systems, processes and procedures and that leadership throughout the organisation should be developed. As a result, there was a significant shift in emphasis and by the end of the initiative there was an acceptance of the importance of 'systems leadership' in ensuring the development of high quality children's services that are capable of self-improvement.

In 2011, the Black and Asian Leaders Initiative (BALI) was developed by the National College, in consultation with a number of DCSs and Assistant Directors. This initiative sought to provide practical work on career planning, with emphasis on the specific challenges faced by Black and Asian leaders, including recruitment and appointment to senior posts, and supporting middle managers to make the step up to more strategic roles in which they are expected to provide leadership outside the area of their immediate professional expertise. This national initiative was seen by the participants to be successful. Consequently, from 2012, the Department for Education (DfE) agreed that it could be funded from the Succession Planning Grant and it became part of the Succession Planning Initiative.

## 1.2 Implementing Succession Planning in the Regions

National government provided £4.8m over three years, which was used to provide grants to each of the nine regions of England and establish a small National Support Team (NST) which was to provide the oversight for the implementation of the Succession Planning Initiative and, from 2012, for the BALI. The NST was to provide guidance and assistance to the regions, monitor their plans, share good practice and collate data from regional activities for accountability and evaluation purposes.

Each of the nine regions was required to establish a Succession Planning programme. To support this work, a national framework document (NC, 2010a) was produced that included guidance on the development and implementation of the scheme. Its advice included:

- create a strategy for succession planning and use it to *'generate a sharply focused action plan'* (NC, 2010a, p7);
- *'establish the capacity to take action'* by *'using existing and new networks'* to implement *'an effective plan for improving talent management and succession planning'* (NC, 2010a, p12);
- identify and manage talent *'to include aspiring leaders with a broad range of skills and experience'* (NC, 2010a, p20);
- develop and support individuals through enhancing *'current training and development provision'* (NC, 2010a, p26);
- *'define and measure the success of the regional strategy and plan'* (NC, 2010a, p32).

To deliver the scheme, the expectation was that each region would establish a succession planning group chaired by a DCS. The Chair would be responsible for signing an agreement between the National College and the regional group to *'work in partnership on succession planning and talent management for senior posts in children's services'* (NC, 2010a, p5). The Chair would also act as a budget holder for the grant. Beyond that, the regional group would be left to create local solutions: to develop not only the programme but also the support required in implementing it.

Consequently, the structures developed to support the programmes have varied between regions. Each region, however, had a designated lead or co-ordinator who was seen by the NST as critically important to supporting and facilitating the development of the local programme. They were highly valued in the regions and also acted as a conduit to the NST, providing information on their region's progress and sharing good practice with other co-ordinators.

## 2. The Evaluation Strategy

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One of the requirements in the national framework was the establishment of a process for evaluating each regional Succession Planning programme. This section briefly sets out the evolution of the evaluation strategy from the original requirements as set out in the national framework (NC, 2010a) to the final guidance and framework developed by the NST in collaboration with the regional leads.

The national guidance was very clear that the evaluation process should enable judgements about the effectiveness and impact of the programmes to be made. The original guidance stated that in evaluating the impact of the regional strategy and plan it was important that:

- appropriate criteria were established first by having a *'shared vision ...getting stakeholders to talk about outcomes ...in three to five years...and how they would measure these outcomes in terms of the benefit to children and families, the workforce, children's services leaders, or their own organisation'* (NC, 2010a, p32);
- setting realistic targets was about *'both qualitative and quantitative...measures including both hard data and soft information to indicate progress'* (NC, 2010a, p32);
- *'mechanisms for gathering data'* were important but should not become a *'bureaucratic exercise'* but the quarterly reporting process will require *'progress to be recorded against a number of progress indicators'* (NC, 2010a, p33).

The guidance also stated that, in gathering qualitative feedback, a variety of methods including surveys, interviews and questionnaires should be used. The national framework identified that the use of 'Kirkpatrick's' four levels of evaluation adapted for the Succession Planning Initiative offered *'a structure for the development of a thorough, evidenced-based assessment of the impact and outcomes of the regional strategy'* (NC, 2010a, Section 13).

The four levels set out in the framework were:

- participant satisfaction;
- programme progress (in achieving the objectives);
- effective placements (the filling of vacancies); and
- regional results (against the regional plan).

One of the first tasks for each region was therefore to establish an evaluation strategy. The NST produced some notes in 2011 to provide guidance to the regions on the development of their evaluation strategies referring them back to the national guidance, but also alerting them to the potential of using the Outcomes Based Accountability model based on the work of Friedman (NST, 2011). The NST advised the regions that whatever approach they adopted they should keep it simple, suggesting that the following four questions may be sufficient to evaluate their programmes:

1. Did we do what we said we would do? In meeting the target number of participants;
2. How well did we do it? Participant satisfaction;
3. Has it made a difference? To the individual, the organisation and the system as a whole;
4. How significant are our achievements? Is there a legacy?

Evaluation feedback on the programmes would flow to the NST through regular regional quarterly reports. This feedback would include the recording of, for example, numbers of participants and the methods used in delivering the regional programmes.

An initial analysis by the NST during 2011/12 showed that the regions had *'good arrangements in place already for answering the first two questions'*. The majority of the evidence for these two questions was found to be easily assessable from, for example, the immediate feedback from participants on the programmes through the on-the-day evaluation forms or post-event feedback surveys. However, the NST concluded that further thought needed to be given to addressing questions 3 and 4.

The NST re-issued guidance notes to *'inform the emerging regional strategies'* and to confirm that by April 2012 regions were expected to have appointed a 'provider' to produce an overarching evaluation report of their programme. (NST, 2012a). These re-issued notes also provided a set of supplementary questions that led to some explanatory examples that were designed to support the regions in devising their evaluation strategies. The guidance demonstrated the relationship between two frameworks that regions appeared to be adopting to devise their evaluation strategy; those were either Kirkpatrick's, as set out in the National Guidance (NC, 2010a) or Friedman's OBA.

The NST's notes (NST, 2012a) were very clear that the evaluation reports should be *'forward looking rather than retrospective'* and be able *'to inform the next steps by DCSs to embed succession planning in the routine work of LAs and the region'* (p1). The NST felt it was important to establish a common language within the regional reports and agreement was reached with the regional leads to establish *'a common approach that will make it possible to produce a national report in April 2013 based on evidence from the regions'* (NST, 2012a, p1-2).

In 2011, just a year after the implementation of the Succession Planning Initiative, another regional initiative, funded by central government, was developed in response to the changes being imposed nationally on inspection and assessment arrangements and to concerns about underperformance by local authority children's services. This Sector Lead Improvement (SLI) initiative brought together, (in the form of a Children's Improvement Board (CIB)), the Local Government Association (LGA), ADCS, Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (SOLACE) and the Department of Education. Each local authority had representation at regional level from a lead Member, a chief executive and a DCS, as well as support from the Local Government Association. The basis of the SLI initiative was a self-assessment process undertaken by each local authority followed by a peer-challenge from another local authority within the region. The expectation was that this would lead to the development of transformational projects in order to share good practice across the region and improve performance.

As the SLI initiative was being introduced part way through the delivery of the Succession Planning Initiative, concerns were raised by a number of DCSs about their capacity to deliver both initiatives. Although there was recognition by many that there were synergies in the overall ambitions of the Succession Planning Initiative and SLI initiatives, they had very different foci and regional governance arrangements. The Succession Planning Initiative was concerned with leadership development in order to improve the quality of services for children and young people, whilst SLI used peer challenge and transformational projects to improve the quality of provision and performance of these services.

The regions approached this new challenge in a number of different ways. One region took the opportunity at an early stage *'through synchronised governance and planning arrangements'* to consolidate the two initiatives to create one coherent strategy. Others sought to work together to ensure that one element of their regional Succession Planning programme, the transformational projects, emerged from the self-analysis undertaken as part of the SLI initiative. However, in other areas the context and relationships across the region meant that opportunities were not taken at an early stage to align the two initiatives. In one region it was not until towards the end of their Succession Planning programme that meaningful discussions were taking place between the LA leaders.

The NST felt that it was also important to create a model of evaluation that was more sophisticated and sustainable. During its regular meetings with the nine regional leads a framework that described the different characteristics of a reflective organisation emerged. This resulted in the development of a 'maturity model'. The VSC and the NST although accepting that this model was not research-based felt that it *'captured some of the key features of the work that had been taking place... since 2010'* (NST, 2012b). It is described as setting out what local authorities can do *'individually and collectively, to develop the next generation of leaders, distinguishing between strategies that are emerging, developing and embedded'*.

The final element of the Succession Planning Initiative was that by January 2013, each region was to produce a Sustainability Strategy that would set out its ability to maintain leadership development into the future. Each regional strategy was to be formulated by the DCSs and the regional lead and then presented to the NST.



# 3. Succession Planning Programmes in the Regions

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The following section has four parts. The first provides a brief analysis of the changing context in which local authorities were operating including the development of the Succession Planning programmes and its relationship with other workforce development initiatives. The second considers the impact the context had on the developing the aims for the regional programmes and makes a comparison with national aims established in 2010 (NC, 2010a). The third part briefly sets out the programme delivery methods used by the regions. The fourth and final part looks at the evaluation strategies adopted by the regions.

## 3.1 Working in the regional context

As will be seen, there were a number of challenges facing LAs at the time the Succession Planning Initiative was being introduced that had an impact on the delivery of the initial aims and objectives of the Initiative and its focus. The National College and C4EO publication *'Resourceful leadership...'* (NC et al, 2011a) summarised these challenges for local authorities as operating in *'a tough financial climate, [with] high expectations of services at lower costs ... and public sector reform'*.

In setting out the extent of the financial challenges, the *'New futures...'* (NC et al, 2011b) document, published by the National College and ADCS, identified from a survey of local authorities that, while the government urged the protection of front line services, an average level of savings of 13 per cent had to be achieved. Feedback from the survey reported that there was a reduction in the number of senior posts, more internal recruitment, a reduction in middle management and restructured roles being developed with increased responsibilities, *'sometimes across departmental boundaries'* (NC et al, 2011b). One region reported that *'the changing nature of the role of the DCS together with these financial challenges...lead to a degree of scepticism about the relevance of the succession planning at this time'*.

DCSs were also under increasing pressure from external inspections and a significant number of LAs shifted their focus towards improving transactional processes, rather than organisational development and transformational priorities.

Another challenge for local authorities in 2010 was the number of individual and regional workforce planning organisations and service development programmes already in existence. A small number of regions felt that this seemingly complex picture of provision presented a

potential barrier to the implementation of yet another regional workforce development programme. This was due in the main to concerns about the lack of capacity within the LAs. Others, although recognising the challenge, felt that some coherence was needed and, as a minimum, agreed to meet with the various agencies at a regional planning level to create some consensus.

Other factors impacting on the implementation of regional Succession Planning programmes included the number of LAs in the region and the complexity of relationships between them; the turn over of DCSs; the size of the region; the political landscape; and the different priorities between urban and rural authorities. Such factors had varying impacts on the readiness of the each of the regions to successfully come together to develop a coherent leadership development programme. In some areas there was positive regional working and collaboration with commitment from the DCSs. However, one region reported that there was an initial lack of engagement from some DCSs and in some cases LAs not wishing to take part. The reasons given included: there was already a corporate leadership development programme; there was not a strong culture or desire for cross-boundary links and major restructuring or staff vacancies created a lack of a capacity to engage. This led to, for example, programmes being slow to get started, limited recruitment of participants and a reduced impact on the outcomes in the workplace due to the lack of support for participants from their senior managers.

All of these challenges impacted on the development of the Succession Planning Initiative and led to a re-focus of the original aims and objectives. One region recorded that their programme *'ceased to be about the personal and professional development of senior and middle managers and preparing them for the next stage of their career. It developed one which was preparing them for the changes happening around them and developing leaders for the future'*.

However, one region reflecting on the changing context established an integrated approach combining their Succession Planning Programme and SLI with an overarching aim to *'strengthen the work of children's trust partnerships in the region'* in order to *'improve outcomes for children, young people and families through an appropriate set of joint-work arrangements'*.

### 3.2 The Regional Aims for their Succession Planning programmes

The regional aims and objectives were influenced by the leadership research, outlined in Section 1, that focused particularly on issues relating to leading children's services organisations in the current context of significant change. Publications, for example, *'A system in transition'* (ADCS, 2011), *'Resourceful leadership...'* (NC, et al, 2011a), *'New Futures'* (NC et al, 2011b) and *'Leading Learning Organisations...'* (NC, 2012), provided evidence of the need for programmes to move away from traditional thinking about leadership and leadership development.

Clearly, from the outset, the focus of the Succession Planning programmes in all nine regions was on developing leadership skills. There were, however, some subtle differences that reflected the needs and priorities of workforce development in the individual regions. The main aim, in the majority of the regions, was to develop better leaders, and success would be shown as having a more effective talent pool. The aim was variously described as creating strategic leaders, a pool of talented leaders, outstanding leaders, confident leaders, flexible and agile leaders who were reflective and resilient. The regions wanted aspiring leaders who could develop their capacity and capability to lead. A small number of regions also wanted to increase the number and quality of leadership candidates. Many of these aims were also reflected in the BALI programme together with a focus on the challenges facing Black and Asian Leaders.

Other common aims across the regions included, for example, engaging with partners; creating a diverse pool of leaders and attracting potential senior leaders from a broader range of backgrounds and developing strategies for service delivery based on evidence of what works, building regional networks and affecting cultural change.

In a small number of regions, the main focus was on actually creating a development programme to reflect the current context, moving away from *'traditional approaches to taught leadership development programmes'*, to ones that *'supported leadership learning'* and *'the emergence of new models of leadership, better suited to partnership working, multi-agency provision and integrated service teams...'*

Success for these regions would be seen as having better learning opportunities in order to create better leaders.

However, over time, a number of the stated regional aims changed as the impact of, for example, the financial pressures were felt within the local authorities. One area changed their initial aim of developing *'a pool of capable, confident leaders who feel more able to step up into tier two posts'* to ensuring *'a pool of leaders who are confident to take on wider and more challenging roles'*.

The regions wanted to strengthen their own capacity to deliver and began to be more determined to ensure that their workforce was able to meet these challenges. One region stated that they wanted to ensure that they created a *'sustainable infrastructure which builds resilience into the region and results in a workforce that is well equipped to meet the challenges and embrace the opportunities presented by the new ways of working at a local and regional level across the range of children and health services'*. Another wanted to *'develop leadership capacity within the region that is able to respond with confidence to exploit the potential of these changes and drive forward service improvement and performance, [by] building internal capacity to continuously develop its workforce and...leadership potential through a sector led approach'*.

All these changes and shifts in focus can be summed up from one region's aspirations reported in 2011: *'The overall objective of the programme is to support and accelerate the development of skilled leaders in Children's Services who can engage with and lead the changes required to work collaboratively with a range of organisations to develop new models of service delivery'*.

In analysing the regional aims, even as they evolved, against the original ones as set out in the national framework (NC, 2010a), it is possible to conclude that the priority for developing effective leaders through the Succession Planning Initiative was still the main focus. However, it is interesting to note that the first national aim relating to increasing the number of candidates for DCS posts was not echoed in all of the regional aims. This clearly reflects the changing context in local authorities as noted earlier.

There is evidence that during the implementation of the initiative, there was an aspiration in a large majority of regions to involve partners and that would clearly support the initial aim of *'the emergence of new models of working, better suited to partnership working ...'* and also support the aim to *'attract potential senior leaders from a broader range of backgrounds...'* (NC, 2010a).

Although it is not clear that many regions focused their programmes on performance management nor looked at how to *'establish a more positive view of the senior leadership of children's services...'* (NC, 2010a), there is evidence that almost all regions saw the opportunity through their Succession Planning programmes to improve performance and the quality of service delivery.

The NST in their final meeting with the regional leads in March 2013 concluded that *'it is now widely acknowledged that the circumstances in which local authorities are working changed dramatically... . As a consequence the original aims and objectives for the programme underwent significant revision...the Initiative*



*ceased to be about preparing senior and middle leaders for the next stage of their career, and turned into one which was about supporting them in coming to terms with the changes going on around them'* (NST, 2013).

### 3.3 Programme Delivery methods

The NST and regional leads agreed that one of the most significant influences on the focus for the Succession Planning programmes was the publication 'Resourceful Leadership' (NC et al, 2011a). The research that led to the report established eight core leadership behaviours and their underpinning skills, knowledge and attributes. As a result, it is possible to identify across the regions, a number of common components in the delivery of succession planning.

All of the regions established some form of core programme that lasted between two and five days focusing on the role and behaviours of leaders. Some regions also included in their offer a wide range of additional optional or step-on/step-off elements. These optional elements included master classes led in the main by serving DCSs, action learning sets where colleagues worked together to solve problems and skill learning sessions to support regional coaching or mentor schemes. All of the regions asked each participant to complete a self-assessment, based on the eight leadership behaviours of the resourceful leader (NC et al, 2011a) and undertake a 360 appraisal that sought feedback from a range of colleagues within their own organisation and, in some instances, from partner agencies. In some regions these were used to support personal development plans. Just over half of the regions linked with Higher Education providers to enable participants to gain accreditation leading towards postgraduate qualifications. More latterly, as the SLI approach was being implemented, transformational projects were being included in the programmes, often led by alumni i.e. participants who had successfully completed the programme.

The BALI programme provided two residential seminars for each cohort plus an opportunity to train as mentors. The programme involved, for example, 360 appraisals, master classes on the challenge of leadership, experienced leaders sharing personal stories and career histories, sessions on the 'resourceful leader', support from a recruitment agency and media training.

### 3.4 Evaluation Method

As we have seen in Section 2, all of the regions established an evaluation strategy. Just over half stated that they used the Kirkpatrick levels (NC, 2010a, Section 13) as a basis for their strategy while the other regions used the Friedman OBA model (NFER, 2010). However, all of the regional evaluation reports referred to the impact of the programme in terms of the individual and the organisation. Evaluation of the BALI programme was

based solely on post-evaluation feedback.

In all of the region's evaluation processes there were four distinct elements for data and information collection:

- quantitative data on, for example, participation levels;
- post-session feedback from participants and in some cases from the providers of the programmes;
- reflective feedback on:
  - the participants' views on the impact of the programme on them as leaders;
  - the views of participants and others, including DCSs, on the impact of the participants in the workplace;
  - the impact the programme has had on the delivery of Children's Services.
- the legacy of the programme in developing future leaders.

As well as collecting numerical data all of the regions used 'on the day' feedback as part of the evaluation process and a small number of regions also used post-session evaluation processes, such as follow up telephone interviews. This provided data and immediate comment on the quality of the input, the relevance to the participants and achievement of aims for the session. Some of the regions used this information to support individual participants in developing or reviewing their learning needs through working with mentors or coaching supervisors. The post-session evaluation outcomes undertaken by the organisers of the events also led, where appropriate, to changes in content, delivery method or provider.

The third element of the evaluation process, reflective feedback, looked at the impact of the regional programmes on the participant's knowledge and understanding, the benefits it provided for them as leaders, the impact on the organisation and, the most challenging element, the impact on the quality of services. Information was collected, for example, through interviews, online surveys and questionnaires with the participants, their DCSs or line managers and other stakeholders. The National Guidance (NC, 2010a) reflected that it might take 3-5 years for this impact to be realised.

The evaluation reports commissioned by the regions provide feedback on, and analysis of, the four questions identified by the NST, as exemplified in the four elements outlined above. For clarity, this national evaluation will therefore follow the same format when analysing the regions' reports. The responses gained from the various reflective feedback approaches will be explored in the next section.

# 4. Evaluation of the programmes

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This section is divided into five parts. The first four are based on the regions' responses to the four questions established by the NST in 2012 (NST, 2012) to support the development of regional evaluation strategies and the fifth is an evaluation from the participants on the BALI programme. As previously noted, the four questions relating to the regional programmes were:

- Did we do what we said we would do? Meeting the target number of participants;
- How well did we do it? Participant satisfaction;
- Has it made a difference? To the individual, the organisation and the system as a whole;
- How significant are our achievements? Is there a legacy?

## 4.1 Did we do what we said we would do? Meeting the target number of participants

The information on participation rates was collated on a quarterly basis by the NST and sent to the DfE together with updates and an evaluation of the progress of each region's programme.

The final report to the DfE shows that over 3,000 people participated in the regional programmes and, in addition, some 60 participants took part in the BALI, with a further 25 places allocated for a third cohort. This is a significant number of people working in children's services who have received leadership development training over the last three years. Nearly seven hundred stakeholders were involved in planning the regional programmes and six hundred senior leaders, including the overwhelming majority of DCSs, were involved in the delivery of their regional programmes. The NST suggest that overall retention rates were '*relatively high*'.

The NST reported that the great majority of the 3,081 participants were from LAs, the remainder being from the voluntary sector and other partner agencies. Two-thirds of the participants were engaged in the 'core regional programmes' that were typically 4-5 days over a twelve month period. In addition, over 2,800 attendances at one-day learning events were recorded. As a consequence of the Initiative, over 550 participants trained as coaches or mentors and 450 became involved in transformational projects. Just over 150 participants trained as Action Learning Set facilitators.

These figures show that overall, the regions were successful in attracting a significant number of participants and that the programmes were well supported through contributions from senior leaders and participants who went on to provide additional support to others.

## 4.2 How well did we do it? Participant satisfaction

The feedback from the regional evaluation reports provided a clear picture of the participant's view of the Succession Planning Initiative and their level of satisfaction. Overall, participants were very satisfied and, as one individual reported, the programme in their region gave them '*a great opportunity through shared learning in a safe space away from the office to discuss issues; it's all good value...*'.

Although each region developed their own programme, it is possible to identify a number of common components. These are outlined below with brief evaluative comments provided by the participants and the NST. There were varying degrees of satisfaction from participants about the quality and relevance of the different aspects of the regional programmes. Some activities gained almost unanimous support and recognition of their value. Other activities were generally well received whilst, for some, there was a great degree of inconsistency of opinion from '*extremely valuable*' to having '*no impact*'.

### 4.2.1 Self-assessment and 360 appraisals

As part of the Succession Planning Initiative all of the participants took part in an initial self-assessment and regional 360 appraisal. It was seen by the participants as a highly valued element of their regional programme. This particular assessment tool, which was developed by the NST in partnership with the regional leaders, was based on the concept of the 'resourceful leader' and sought feedback from a range of colleagues within their own organisation and in some instances from partner agencies.

Typical feedback from participants stated that they '*found the 360 degree appraisal an incredibly useful element of the course. It made me take time out to reflect on my own practice, strengths and weaknesses and areas for development. It also gave me opportunity to seek more formal feedback from a range of colleagues not just my line manager*'.

The report from the final regional leads meeting (NST, 2013) recognised the value of self assessment and concluded that the 360 appraisals *'ensured that provision was personalised, rooted in research, and capable of adding value even for those participants who had significant previous experience of the kind of leadership development provided by Higher Education and local authorities'*.

## 4.2.2 Individual Coaching and Mentoring

A majority of the regional programmes also provided coaching and mentoring sessions for individual participants and, in some cases, these sessions used as their focus the outcomes from the 360 appraisals. In all these regions, this provision was seen by participants as a very successful element of the programme. One participant recorded that the process and support they got from their mentor led them to consider *'new ways of approaching issues..., provided them opportunities for self-reflection...'* and gave them the *'space to have non-judgemental discussions...'*

Many participants also went on to receive coaching training and again this was seen to be very successful enabling managers as one participant put it, to revisit *'how I give feedback to those I line manage'*.

## 4.2.3 Group coaching and Action Learning Sets (ALS)

Overall, these group activities were seen as the least successful element in providing a *'consistent experience'* to participants across the overall Initiative.

Almost all regions offered some form of group coaching or ALS as part of their programme. There was, however, a range of responses to these activities from participants. A majority of the participants across the regions reported that these group activities were extremely valuable. However, a significant minority of participants thought they were less successful and had *'no impact'*.

The group activities were seen as successful when the focus was clear, the facilitators were good and activities well structured. This resulted in participants sharing challenges and gaining from others' knowledge and skills. Activities were less well received when the dynamics in the group meant that they *'did not gel'* or *'bond'*. Whilst some groups valued a *'good mix of people'* others found that the effectiveness was weakened by the *'mixed-level of management'* in the group.

The feedback from the reports, the regional leads and NST (NST, 2013) recognised that another reason for these group activities not always being well received was that they often suffered from practical difficulties in maintaining consistent attendance.

## 4.2.4 Core Provision

Each region established some form of *'core provision'*, typically lasting between two and five days, focused on the role and behaviours of leaders. In some instances these were residential, in others a series of day-long events. This element was generally well received and evaluated by most participants as high quality. Feedback from some participants was less certain about how well the elements met their development needs. However, the majority of participants welcomed the opportunity these sessions gave them for networking across geographic and organisational boundaries, and providing space for reflection and learning. Positive comments were made in relation to leadership, linking theory and practice, and also, to providing a better understanding of the corporate and political context. Feedback included, *'It helped to build my confidence to work at a senior level, developed my knowledge and awareness of strategic leadership...'*

Another said that *'the network opportunities have been really useful... helping me to think differently about my role and relationships with partner agencies'*.

The final regional review meeting in March 2013 also recorded the value placed on this element of the programme and felt that participants had welcomed the opportunity to come together particularly as they *'struggled to come to terms with the changing landscape and found that they could no longer rely on familiar blue prints for service delivery'* (NST, 2013).

## 4.2.5 Step-on Step-Off Programmes and Learning Events

All of the regions offered additional components, some allowed the participants to select from a range of events, and others provided one off sessions in the form of, for example, master classes often delivered by DCSs from the region. The NST review meeting (NST, 2013) concluded that *'these were generally well received, and, in some regions had a bigger impact than might have been expected given they were often isolated events'*.

Participants in one region *'felt that the themes offered had been well thought through and highly relevant... and that the input from the DCSs through the master classes was valued in terms of their expert knowledge and their ability to bring real issues, deconstruct them and look at how to move things forward'*.

Another participant valued the *'pick and mix'* approach as good, *'giving the participants the opportunity to tailor the learning opportunity to meet their individual learning needs'*.

One region reported that participants felt that the *'flexibility inherent in the programme design was seen as a strength, and to offer a wide range of options to suit different interest and learning styles'*.

## 4.2.6 Higher Education Accreditation and Assignments

Just over half of the regions linked with Higher Education (HE) providers to enable participants to gain accreditation leading towards postgraduate qualifications. Other regions required participants to complete an assignment to enable them to critically analyse a project within their own local authority. However, there have been very few comments in the evaluation reports regarding the effectiveness of this element of the regional programme. What views there were, were very mixed. One participant did say that they welcomed the requirement to produce an assignment as it *'has helped me think about management and leadership...'*

Another participant felt that HE accreditation should have been part of their regional programme as *'it would have raised the bar and encourage people to see the worth of it'* but a third participant welcomed the fact that *'I didn't have to do assignments, which was refreshing, we're all so busy and it was enough commitment to go to sessions and participate without having to do homework'*.

There is therefore little evidence to show the impact of setting assignments and/or seeking accreditation as a component of a regional Succession Planning programme.

## 4.2.7 Transformational Projects

Transformational projects were introduced into the regional programmes by the regions just shortly before the implementation of the SLI initiative and there were mixed views from the participants about the success of this element of the provision. The NST review meeting concluded that this was mainly due to attempts to align the two major initiatives. They noted that in *'most regions the introduction of the transformation projects was, quite reasonably, delayed in order to capitalise on the sector led work to identify regional priorities. However, the effect of this was some loss of momentum, and whilst there are individual examples of transformation practice..., a number of regions struggled to make this element work'* (NST, 2013).

Participants felt that the projects were more of a benefit to the organisation and region than individuals seeking new leadership learning opportunities. In analysing the comments from the participants it appears that the projects were not always seen as a chance to develop their *'own leadership learning'* although they did provide a *'chance to observe others and contribute to the thinking'*. This view was supported by others who said that being involved in the projects *'did not result in significant new learning for me'*.

In one region, participants reported that they had not taken part in projects because they felt the *'opportunity had not been made clear, or because of the time involved*

*away from their day job'*. However, they did recognise that there could be benefits *'both for their own development, and for the hosting council(s)'*.

Overall, DCSs were less satisfied with the transformational projects. There were significant regional differences in how they were introduced and their late introduction meant that they were slow to get started. However, a majority of DCSs felt, that when strategically aligned, transformational projects *'provided real opportunities for participants to work together that has brought a range of skills, experience and knowledge together from different councils and applied them to real life issues'*. They reported back that from their perspective *'those that did take part ...found them challenging learning opportunities, and the region and individual councils are seen to have benefitted from the outcomes'*.

## 4.3 Has it made a difference? To the individual, the organisation and the system as a whole

This section has three parts and seeks to investigate the impact of the Initiative on the individual participants, the organisation (the LA) and the system as a whole, regionally and nationally.

### 4.3.1 Has it made a difference to the individual?

As noted above, all regions reported that, overall, there was a high level of participant satisfaction in the regional Succession Planning programmes. Evaluating whether it has made a difference to them in their leadership behaviours and the way in which they do their jobs is a more difficult task. Some regions noted that it was not possible to provide absolute proof of individual impact as there will have been other events that may have had an impact. However, as one region reported, the *'participants themselves had few doubts about attribution and were generally clear that the change they were describing in themselves was as a result of the programme'*.

Evidence from the regions on the impact of their programmes on the individual is, at this early stage, based on the initial perceptions of the participants, their DCSs and the NST.

#### 4.3.1.1 The participants' perception

It is overwhelmingly clear from an analysis of the evaluation reports from all of the regions that participants perceived the Succession Planning Initiative as having had a significant impact on them as individuals. Statements from the regional reports included, for example, that there was *'clear evidence of impact in their leadership roles'*, an *'overwhelmingly positive impact'* and one region even reported that the impact was *'substantial and went well beyond the individuals'*.

There was evidence from the regions to illustrate positive impact on their individual participants in all of the eight core behaviours of the 'resourceful leader' and particularly strong evidence in four of the behaviours: personal resilience and tenacity; the ability to collaborate; the strategic role of leaders and a belief in their team and people.

The most positive impact on individuals was reported to be in **personal resilience and tenacity**. A significantly high proportion of participants reported increased confidence in their leadership abilities and skills, and increased self-awareness, which had given them greater resilience. The vast majority of participants felt an increased confidence in themselves and in their ability to carry out their role following the self-reflection and 360 appraisal and the support that followed. The programmes increased the depth and understanding of leadership theory and practice and provided the participants with what a large number described as 'tools' to help them in their managerial and leadership roles. This also contributed to the positive feedback about their level of confidence. Examples from participants illustrate this:

*'The programme has 'allowed me to identify an inner confidence in myself as a leader and to have a bigger belief in myself and my strengths as a leader'.*

*'I have... increased knowledge and confidence to lead new initiatives...'*

*'I am happy to be more visible while leading and in meetings... I have been more comfortable with expressing my own opinions...'*

Participants had gained a greater understanding of 'their world' and a clearer insight into leadership at a corporate level, as a result of the valued opportunities to listen to other leaders. They reported that they now had a greater confidence in how they could contribute to the overall effectiveness of the organisation or aspire to become a more senior leader.

*'It gave me insight into the DCS role and opened up avenues for me to become more competent and confident through honing essential management skills in influencing, self reflection and coaching'.*

*'It was inspiring to see and hear from a variety of leaders and get a snapshot of 'our world' from their eyes. It was insightful to listen to their stories around how they managed and manipulated circumstance to beneficial outcomes'.*

There is also clear evidence that that the programme increased the resilience of the participants. Positive comments from participants included *'surviving and thriving through change'*; *'I used to feel like an emotional*

*sponge...'*; and another said that the programme *'helped build up my personal resilience during a period of change...[the] importance of having empathy, yet always having the underlying courage to make tough decisions and hold difficult conversations based on informed and rationale foundations'.*

Feedback from the participants provided a significant amount of evidence that the regional programme had a major positive impact on the behaviour related to working together, with one's team, partners and political and corporate leaders, that is, **the ability to collaborate**. The vast majority of participants had reviewed how they worked with their teams and provided more opportunities for their staff to be involved in decision making. They took a less 'command and control' approach to team management and asked for views from their staff before making a decision.

One participant said that the programme *'has taught me to be more varied in the ways in which I engage with others, to listen more and ask more questions'.*

Another stated that they now consider what *'learning styles they lean towards but also those of the team. Hopefully this had led to a greater understanding and acknowledgement of how we deliver effective services'.*

Other responses included *'I am now more collaborative in my approach and I have built better working relationships...'*; *'It has changed my leadership approach with work colleagues at the same level and those above...'*; and *'adapting my leadership style to ensure 'buy-in' from my team, involving them in decision making and recognising when others may not share my enthusiasm'.*

Although one participant did not think the programme had changed their approach, it had for them *'affirmed the approach I use'.*

Participants also reported that there was a positive impact on their ability to collaborate through the networking opportunities that the programme provided, both internally with other colleagues and externally with other LAs and, in particular, partner agencies. For example, participants stated that:

*'I now have a much greater understanding of multi-agency, multi- professional interaction that has helped my approach to the benefit ...of children and young people in my patch'.*

*'The insight I gained into other LA developments helped me to 'benchmark' my service developments'.*

*'Networking with colleagues from different specialisms was very useful in helping to appreciate the differences between roles and organisational cultures'.*

Through the programme *'I was able to develop an external network that gave me a set of people I could contact and say what do you think about this? It has given a collaborative approach where previously they may have felt in competition'*.

The participants, including those from the voluntary sector and other partner agencies, highlighted that, as a result of being on the programme, they had a greater understanding of the importance of the strategic role of leaders. This was manifest in the views of the participants being able to *'make a stronger contribution to the senior leadership team', 'working more effectively with members, DCSs and Chief Executives'* and having *'a better understanding of how they need to operate at a corporate level'*. Participants fed back that *'the programme helped me develop a strategic approach to work'* and that they *'felt like a 'bigger part of the picture and not isolated when dealing with service pressures'*.

Others said *'It helped me think outwardly, to think more strategically and to understand the pressure we are under'* and *'it gave me a better understanding of the political context, the role of members, the national agenda and role of LAs'*.

Evidence from the participants suggests that the programmes made a significant impact on their ability to **demonstrate a belief in their team and people**. In one region the perception was that the programme had had a *'transformational effect on the way they related to other people...'*

Other participants reported that following the coaching element of the programme they had learned to stop *'taking on the role of expert'*, become less directive and instead support their team to reflect on possible solutions.

One participant explained this through a meeting they attended on a safeguarding issue where, through adopting a coaching approach, they enabled the headteacher to *'identify their own solutions'*. Other participants reported examples including *'I used to offer solutions, but now I ask questions', 'I allowed my managers to handle a difficult situation... rather than me step in and take control'*. Others spoke of being able to delegate and feel able to *'let go of the detail'*, to model good leadership behaviour through having a *'greater clarity of purpose'* and to engage in *'problem solving with staff'*.

There was also a feeling of confidence in the participants' own ability that they could work in a positive and supportive way but still *'hold their staff and others to account'*.

The behaviour, as participants in one region suggested, that was 'constantly evidenced' was the **willingness and ability to learn continuously**. All the regional reports reflected that the learning from the programmes was

absorbed and taken back into the organisation. However, some participants were concerned about having the *'time or space to implement all of the useful things they had learnt within the programme once they got back to their jobs'*.

Others felt that the programme had *'reinforced the importance of taking time out for reflection, reading, learning and thinking about different contexts for leadership'*.

There was an acknowledgement by the participants that, as a result of the regional programme, there was now a common language within many of the leadership teams, use of coaching skills to support other staff and teams and the opportunity to share leadership models with colleagues. Also, *'the opportunity to reflect on myself opened my eyes to the benefits of different approaches and has mitigated my tendency to think there is a right and a wrong way of dealing with issues'*.

Another fed back that *'the programme has impacted upon my thinking and behaviour and I know try to think ahead more rather than day-to-day reactivity...'*

There was less evidence from the participants that their regional programme had enhanced their understanding of the remaining four behaviours: the **openness to possibilities, the ability to create and sustain commitment across a system, focusing on results and outcomes and ability to simplify**.

This is not to say that the participants did not report on these behaviours, rather that there is less evidence about their impact compared with the other four core behaviours. Some regions reflected that the initial regional analysis of leadership development requirements may have identified that these behaviours were already covered through other programmes or that the cohort of leaders being recruited to the programme already had strengths in these areas.

There were, however, some examples of participants explaining how they felt they were now **open to possibilities** through gaining confidence in knowing that *'different problems have different solutions, some need quick actions, some reflective [and some] collaborative decisions'*.

In one region the participants felt that they had **gained in confidence** from *'identifying and discussing leadership qualities, having opportunities to explore motivations, drivers and leadership aspirations'*. Others recorded that *'through newly acquired political awareness' they worked better with Members*, building support through discussion and had had a noticeable impact because they were *'better at communicating their case'*.

There was little evidence to support a change in behaviours relating to **focusing on results and outcomes**, but one region did report that their participants felt that there was already a *'strong drive for results... the programme helped them to be more explicit'*. Others, however, reported that the programme had *'promoted them to be more outcome focused and think how everything I do has to have a positive impact on children and young people'*.

One example where a participant felt that they had **the ability to create and sustain commitment across a system** was where they had been able to lead and articulate a vision for change to a range of people, including elected Members and secure sustained commitment. Others described examples where they changed the way they communicate with staff and achieved better working relationships as a result.

**Keeping it simple** was something that resonated with a few. One participant commented that they now understood that *'keeping messages simple across the service and with partners [would] get the greatest impact'*. A number of participants also recalled the impact on them of the analogy of *'getting on the balcony above the dance floor'*, using Ronald Heifetz's metaphor (Heifetz, 2009). They said this *'had helped them take a broader more strategic view in discussions and problem solving'* as a result of which they *'had become less pre-occupied with detail'*.

## Additional benefits

It is possible to identify three other benefits to individuals that emerged as a result of their involvement in the Initiative. These comments could not be classed as statistically significant but are interesting in their own right and are a valuable insight into the overall subjective impact of the Succession Planning Initiative. They are briefly described below.

The first was that the regional programmes had helped to refresh participants' *'motivation and enthusiasm'* for their job and that they had been *'inspired'* by what they had experienced. The second benefit was in relation to career progression, an initial aim of the Succession Planning Initiative. A number of participants reported that their programme had helped them to, for example, *'explore their career path'* or *'consolidate their career decisions'*; gave them *'confidence to apply for posts'*; was *'helpful in supporting their career aspirations'* and for some they gained promotion during the programme. The third outcome that, as will be seen, was more widely reflected by DCSs in their feedback, was that a small number participants felt their regional programme had helped them be recognised within their own LA to take on more responsibility. Examples include participants reporting that they had seen some *'increase in the scope and responsibility of their current job'*, another said that they had *'gained a more strategic and central role'*. Other

examples include being given an interim role to *'head up leadership and performance improvement'*, assisting in leading a service redesign and taking *'strategic responsibility for developing protocols'*. However, others did not feel that they had been given any opportunities to use their new skills and cited a lack of commitment or interest from their immediate line managers in the programme as the reason.

In conclusion, there is overwhelming evidence that, from the participants' perspective, the Succession Planning Initiative had a significantly positive impact on them. It has made a difference as far as they were concerned. It is not, of course, possible to say that there was positive impact on all of the participants on every core behaviour. However, it is possible to conclude from the participants, as a cohort of leaders and managers, that they are now more confident in their own abilities as leaders, are able to contribute more effectively within their own organisation and are better equipped to exploit the benefits of networking, not only to share good practice and learn from others, but also in the development of more coherent services for children and young people.

### 4.3.1.2 DCSs' and line managers' perception of the impact on their participants

The very positive feedback from the participants on the impact of the Initiative was also reflected in the views of almost all of the DCSs and line managers who were interviewed as part of the evaluation process. Interviewees stated, with few exceptions, that the participants had developed skills, knowledge and confidence. They reported that participants had significantly changed the way they worked and that the programme had brought about *'significant benefit to the region and to the sector'*.

In one region, even though the DCSs' perceptions were more mixed, there was a *'general consensus that for those who had attended the programme it had been a contributing factor in terms of leadership development and that the variance in impact was down to the difference in individuals' motivation, engagement and energy in terms of taking on board the learning opportunities and different learning methods'*.

A small number of DCSs, while recognising the importance of the Initiative and identifying some positive changes within their LA, queried how much these were actually due to the regional programme.

To explore these issues in a little more detail the feedback from the DCSs and line managers has been analysed in terms of the impact on participant's leadership skills, attitude, behaviour and role.

## i) Leadership Skills

The feedback from DCSs and line managers described participants as having a broader range of people and management skills. Consequently, participants were better able to manage their teams and had improved performance management skills. The DCSs saw participants showing a greater understanding of leadership at a senior level and being more able to contribute to the wider debate on, for example, performance and organisational change.

Line managers saw participants as being more strategic in their approach to challenges, more confident in handling difficult issues, more solution focused and more challenging of colleagues to improve and demonstrate better outcomes. Interviewees felt participants had gained improved listening skills, were more effective as influencers and negotiators and were better able to resolve problems.

Other improvements that were noted were in strategic planning and in understanding the strategic leadership role both within the Council and externally with partners. It was felt that participants had also gained a wider knowledge and understanding of the current context of children and young people services, the need to challenge conventional thinking and the role of partnership working. Participants were seen as more corporately and politically aware. Being able to communicate with politicians and chief executives more confidently had influenced the management style of some participants. However, one DCS reported that they did not think their programme had been effective in equipping people *'to work better in the corporate and political landscape'*.

Many DCSs agreed that the initiative had contributed to a more confident workforce with a greater understanding of integrated working and practice that was leading to better outcomes for children and young people, through the development of new ways of working.

Two examples illustrate some of these changes. The first was a positive difference in style of one participant that had led to *'improved morale in some service areas as a result of a more inclusive style of management'*. Another DCS reported a participant acting more strategically and who now *'owns organisational problems... where before [they] would only own issues directly impinging on their area of work'*.

## ii) Attitude

As a result of the Initiative, DCSs across the regions witnessed a workforce that was gaining in confidence and more able to work at senior management level. They felt that participants were now *'widening their horizons'* and *'looking beyond their role'* to see *'how they could influence the wider system'*. Participants were *'less focused on the operational aspects of their job and more*

*focused on a 'whole systems' approach'*. They were also *'offering to take on more responsibilities'*. One DCS stated that participants had come back *'buzzing and inspired'*.

## iii) Leadership Behaviours

DCSs reported that specific changes in participants' behaviour were seen through improved interaction and communication in meetings, more thoughtful approaches in deploying arguments and greater confidence in giving opinions and views. There was also evidence of participants taking the initiative in decision making through, for example, *'a willingness to undertake further training in coaching and 360 diagnostics to use both within the organisation and in the region and a greater willingness to look externally at what is working well in other areas'*.

DCSs felt participants had a better understanding of their role and behaviours needed to influence others. Examples included a participant who was now less confrontational and more tolerant when working with partners and another where the use of coaching style had *'added enormously to the functioning of the team'*. Increased confidence in participants' own abilities together with more effective strategic thinking had enabled them to be more active contributors to the wider management team. However, DCSs recognised that it was the attitude and commitment of the participants that was often the most significant contributory factor in accruing the benefits from the programme. Good attendance as an example, was important as *'where it was sporadic there was less evidence of impact'*.

## iv) Role

DCSs reported that the Initiative had given some participants the *'confidence'* to lead projects and many were now acting as alumni for the new cohorts on the programmes or supporting relevant pieces of work across LAs and contributing to the SLI initiative. For some participants it *'solidified' their ambition to go further, or step up to AD level'* if the opportunity arose. Participants had developed the *'capacity to take on new responsibilities'* and had *'gained the confidence and drive to move on'* and the programme was helping the participants *'promotion prospects'*.

### 4.3.2 Has it made a difference to the organisation?

The National College was very clear in its original guidance (NC, 2010a) that evaluating the Succession Planning Initiative was not only about identifying what improvements could be made quickly but also what outcomes needed to be achieved in the longer term. The evidence in this report so far, from both participants and line managers, illustrates some immediate benefits that have been achieved. These relate to the impact on



the individuals, as was expected at the outset, however, it was acknowledged that it will take longer to see the impact on the organisation.

It is possible from the perceptions of individual participants and DCSs to identify that some benefits in the leadership and management of the organisation have already been felt. The first is in relation to participants' approach to line management. Changes to their approach to managing teams, their response as a team member and how they work with other colleagues are described below. A second benefit to the organisation is in the way that participants manage the services and the way they solve problems or develop new ideas. However, changes to the overall culture of an organisation based on the involvement of individual staff participating in a leadership programme cannot be measured in the short-term and further research would be required to verify this.

#### 4.3.2.1 Changes in approach to line management

An analysis of the feedback from a significant number of DCSs found that, as a result of their staff attending their regional programme and *'bringing the learning back into the organisation'*, there had been a *'positive impact on the teams they managed, the management teams they belong to and partnerships they operate in'*.

Participants reported that they now not only felt more effective at dealing with issues and the people they managed but that this was impacting on their approach to line management. Examples they gave were that as managers they *'felt more confident in delegating to their staff through developing a climate of taking on responsibility rather than pushing everything upwards'*. They also spoke of *'fostering team work where tough issues are discussed, opinions shared and valued'* which they did not have the confidence or tools to do before.

Interviewees reported the positive impact of participants now being more effective as part of senior leadership teams. An example from one DCS described the Tier 3 managers as being *'more active contributors to the wider management team and have gained in confidence in their positions...'*. Another felt that their management team was now *'operating more corporately and working in creative ways'* as the participants had benefitted from a collective understanding of the need for a more strategic approach to their roles. They were now also *'better able to engage in strategic decision making'*.

Many of the interviewees also reflected on improvements in relationships with other colleagues particularly those in partner agencies. This was leading to more effective networking, sharing of good practice and finding solutions to joint problems. One respondent said that the programme had *'facilitated introductions ...where*

*people had the freedom to explore issues...'*. This had led to some very effective collaboration between local authorities and health services.

A further benefit to the organisation described by the DCSs was that there was some evidence that the positive changes in the behaviours of the participant managers was also *'filtering down'* to other managers and staff within the organisation.

In regions where participants reported that there was strong support from their DCS and their line managers they felt more confident *'that they could make a positive impact'* on their organisation. However, a small minority of participants felt that in order to maximise the impact from the programme, it was essential that there was a good understanding within the LA about the programme content so that they could continue to develop their learning on their return from the programme.

#### 4.3.2.2 Better ways of managing the service

Many participants, DCSs and line managers expressed the view that there were positive indications that services were being better managed as a result of participation in the programme.

Participants fed back that they felt more able to be effective in their roles as managers of their services as they now had a *'deeper understanding of how people work in the public sector, how to influence politicians and how to develop more effective relationships and networks'*.

They had also developed better negotiation skills and as a result, are better at problem solving. Participants gave examples of being more able to *'identify resource needs to resolve issues'*, *'able to identify when external expertise was needed'*, *'evaluate and assess performance'*, and *'make changes needed to service or personnel'*.

Many participants also felt that they benefitted the organisation as they were more confident as managers and were now better able to judge when to *'raise the profile and escalate issues internally'* and to ask for help. They reflected that this new inner confidence and better understanding of their role and responsibility was leading to more effective decision making and outcomes for service delivery.

One respondent gave the example of a having the confidence to bring difficult issues *'out into the open'* and cited a situation in a project for homeless young people that they felt had been handled in a much better way as a result of participants being on the programme.

Another benefit to the organisation identified by a DCS was through the participant bringing ideas and thoughts and

new skills back into the organisation. The point was made that they were in fact *'supporting the development of a learning organisation through the increased availability of coaching and mentoring, development of operational and strategic peer challenge, a common language and behaviours around system leadership'*.

Another respondent felt that changes such as these were providing *'some evidence of organisational resilience at a time of significant change'*.

Although there are numerous examples within the regional reports that a significant number of interviewees believed that the programme has indeed had a positive impact on the organisation, other respondents felt at this stage that the changes were either too *'difficult to quantify'* or *'quite subtle'*. Some DCSs reported that they felt the programme had led *'to a beneficial impact but not sure how beneficial'* or that the *'improved outcomes were not yet tangible'*. For others they felt it was *'too early to show evidence'* or to *'judge impact'*. However, there was agreement that the vast majority of those managers that had been on the programme were now *'more effective'*.

There was little information in the evaluation reports regarding evidence of changes to the culture of the organisation as a result of the programme. In one region a few participants felt there *'was no change or very slight positive change'*. They saw that it had *'changed the focus... teams were more positive and outcome based and success was celebrated'*. The summary from another region suggested that it was *'difficult to sustain a new leadership approach when it is different from the existing culture'* and in those circumstances implementing a *'change ...would be more effective in councils where learning is part of a concerted commitment to cultural change led by the DCS'*.

### 4.3.3 Has it made a difference? To the system

Although the regional evaluators found it difficult to identify any significant impact to the system, there is sufficient evidence to conclude that the Succession Planning programmes did have some impact across each of the regions. This is illustrated in two different ways. The first relates to networking across local authorities boundaries and with colleagues from other organisations. The second is as a result of the use of alumni or graduates from the initial cohorts of participants.

#### 4.3.3.1 Benefits of working with participants from a range of organisations

Overall, feedback from participants and DCSs was that through bringing people together from a wide range of services there was a greater sense of collaboration, and a greater willingness to share good practice, ask for support and work together to find solutions. This was, in the main, through better collaboration between LAs but there is some evidence of improved collaborative working and networks existing between LAs and other organisations. For those regions that were successful in drawing participants from other children's service organisations into their Succession Planning programme, there is now a shared knowledge and understanding about leadership, a common language and from that a greater willingness to work together.

One DCS reported that *'stronger networks and joint projects'* with children's services organisations were being developed in, for example *'adoption, peer improvement schemes...and the implementation of SEND in the NHS'*.

In another region, the benefits of working across organisations has not yet led *'to any formal partnering or additional joint or integrated working'* other than that already provided by the programme but the participants felt that that they were more able to progress ideas for future developments.

However, participants from other organisations such as health and the voluntary sector reported back that there was too much reference to LAs and the programmes were *'tailored too much towards the needs of LAs'*. One participant from health commented that *'although I can see opportunities to improve myself within the programme, I feel we could learn a lot more as a whole group by drawing upon different models of leadership across other organisations'*. This was a view shared by other non-LA participants.

Some DCSs reported that, in their view, the Succession Planning Initiative had resulted in *'system change'* across their region and three examples are set out below:

A regional approach had not only *'delivered efficiencies but had supported improvements in capacity and enabled staff to work across a broader range of activities'*.

The programme provided *'a vehicle for joined up thinking and learning across the region, and has given the flexibility to focus on shared priorities. It is likely that without such a programme there would be less of a focus on system leadership across the sector and sector support and capacity building'*.

One clear example of 'system change' occurred in a region that had taken a very early decision to merge the succession planning and SLI initiatives. This region has established a framework for its future that it considered to be a coherence and unified approach to sector led improvement.

### 4.3.3.2 Using alumni and programme graduates

The use of 'alumni and graduates' from the early cohorts of the Succession Planning programmes has had a positive impact on the 'system' albeit at a regional level.

One of the challenges faced by the DCSs and regional leads that materialised during the implementation of the Initiative was the capacity to deliver their regional programme to future cohorts. The notion of using alumni or graduates from the programme began to emerge. Here was a group of senior staff who had experienced the programme, contributed to its development through their evaluation and now had new and developing leadership skills. As we have already seen, the self-belief of these leaders had grown; many had been '*inspired*' and were now looking to develop their careers.

A number of regions built specific objectives into their programmes as they saw the graduates forming a '*talent pool*', not only for enhancing leadership strength across the region, but also as a way of continuing to deliver the leadership programme beyond the life of the grant. Eventually, all of the regions developed the use of alumni and graduates. There were some concerns raised by the DCSs and the alumni themselves about the time needed to support the delivery of the programme. However, their use was seen as a successful element of the programme.

The alumni were used in different ways across the regions. In most regions they were used as coaches to support participants' personal development as well as organisational development. In some areas they contributed to the taught elements including ALS and transformational projects. Graduates were also used, as SLI was implemented, in the Peer Challenge schemes.

In summary, the system is seen as being more cohesive across the LAs as a result of the programme's impact on individuals and, through them, on their LAs, increased networking with colleagues in other LAs and other organisations, and the use of the pool of graduates to increase the capacity to deliver training. The evaluation reports clearly describe LAs working more effectively together as regional bodies that look at both the delivery of children's services and ways of improving outcomes.

## 4.4 How significant are our achievements? Is there a legacy?

The previous section looked at the impact of delivering the regional Succession Planning programmes on the individual, the organisation and the system. In this section there is an exploration of the overall impact and significance of the achievements across the regions and whether they are sustainable. The analysis is broken down into four different elements.

### 4.4.1 Participation and cost

The first element looks at the number of LAs involved, the numbers of programme participants, the range of organisations that were involved and the costs associated with the delivery of the Initiative.

In terms of 'reach', the programmes were very successful in involving almost all LAs and a large number of individual participants. In eight of the nine regions all the LAs were involved from the beginning in supporting their programmes and recruiting participants. In the ninth region, in which the DCSs themselves acknowledge that there are historic issues regarding collaborative working, the take-up was slower. However, by the final quarter of the Initiative all but one LA was involved. This is a significant achievement.

A total of over 3,000 participants were involved in the Initiative. This is a significant number of senior staff. An additional 600 senior managers were also involved in contributing to their regional programmes. The majority of the participants were recruited by the DCSs from within their LAs. Although some DCSs worked in collaboration with partner agencies, often through the Children's Trust arrangements, there was insufficient focus on engaging non-LA organisations in the programmes. While over half of the regions succeeded in having some participants and involvement from health, police, the voluntary sector and a range of non-children's services staff from within LAs, overall this was limited. Consequently, the success in achieving one of the Initiative's initial objectives of recruiting managers from organisations other than LAs was disappointing overall.

Many non-LA participants felt that it would have been '*much better if the course was more inclusive of all partner agencies...*'. A number of suggestions were made by participants, in their feedback, to improve this aspect of recruitment, including a more consistent approach, building in processes to ensure that the cohort are drawn from a more diverse pool and even a selection process. This was seen as a more positive way to support retention and ensure the cohorts reflected the breadth of organisations.

A clear achievement and a strong element to the legacy of the regional programmes was the high participation rate and the high level of retention exhibited by participants. The very positive involvement of DCSs across all regions shows that LAs also highly valued the Initiative. Their support of the additional hidden costs and resourcing issues on top of the government's £4.8m grant, including releasing staff and paying travel and subsistence costs, supports the view that LAs valued the Initiative and were very willing to participate in it.

DCSs identified that the consequences of failing to invest in future development of leaders was potentially serious. They felt that the Initiative had produced not only leaders with better skills and greater knowledge, but also a large pool of future 'graduates' who can be used to develop the next cohort of leaders. However, there is a concern amongst some DCSs that the current financial climate may provide a challenge especially as the number of management posts declines making it difficult to enable remaining staff the time to engage in coaching the next cohort of potential leaders. New and creative ways of resourcing future programmes will need to be found at either an LA level or, perhaps more importantly, at a regional level.

#### 4.4.2 Planning for succession

Overall, the Succession Planning Initiative was very well received across all the regions and this can be seen as a significant achievement. This was shown in the very positive satisfaction levels reported by the participants. They clearly felt that the national Initiative, which had to meet a changing focus as well as local priorities, was very well constructed, used a good range of activities and was well delivered. Similarly, the Initiative received an overall high approval rating from DCSs and line managers because they saw the activities as high quality and the impact on the individual and system as clearly evident. The Initiative was seen as achieving many of its aims.

The Initiative's legacy is that it provides a vehicle for joined-up thinking across the regions and has given the flexibility for LAs to focus on shared priorities. It is, however, recognised that this legacy will only be sustainable if, for example, there is continued investment in alumni and each region ensures that there is an infrastructure to support the programmes. DCSs across all regions acknowledged that the programmes as they were originally formulated were not sustainable. The major challenge is the long-term viability of such programmes in the current financial climate but all the DCSs recognise there is an absolute need for continued professional development of existing and emerging leaders.

#### 4.4.3 Participants

Feedback from both the participants and the DCSs illustrates the significant impact that the national Initiative has made on a large cohort of middle and senior managers across the country in a range of organisations albeit that the majority are from LAs.

An achievement of the Initiative, as measured against the eight core behaviours, is that there are now a larger number of senior leaders who have successfully enhanced their skills and knowledge of leadership. The majority of the participants believe that they are now better leaders and this is echoed by their DCSs.

The Initiative provided many additional opportunities for the participants. A significant number are now experienced coaches and one participant saw this component as a '*legacy of the programme*'. Others now lead regional transformational projects, which they would not have considered before the programme. A great number of alumni or 'graduates' have volunteered to lead aspects of the programme or take on new responsibilities, and some have gained promotion.

The majority of participants have benefitted personally and professionally as a result of being on their respective regional programmes and they provide the major element of the legacy as alumni and as more effective, motivated leaders within their organisation.

#### 4.4.4 The Organisation and the Region

As was seen in Section 4.3.1.1 and 4.3.1.2 the overall feedback from participants and DCSs was that it was '*too early*' to tell if the Initiative had made a sustainable impact within the organisation or on the region or 'system'. Overall, while there has been some impact in these areas, evidence to date is limited.

The main reason for this is linked to the period of time from participation on a regional programme to achieving significant organisational shift. Although a majority of participants and DCSs felt that learning and enthusiasm had been taken back into the '*work place where it had a positive effect*' that impact might have occurred within the first few months and it is not possible to say whether it has become embedded or is sustainable especially in organisations with relatively few participants.

In terms of regional or 'system' change, the achievements can be seen to be more significant than those in the individual LAs and partner organisations. As has been acknowledged by the NST and the DCSs themselves, not all regions in 2010 saw themselves as cohesive units. However, the majority would say they now are. This legacy is based on the formation of the regional DCS planning groups that were established to oversee the implementation of the Succession Planning Initiative. There is agreement, as stated by the NST, '*that the*

*Succession Planning Initiative [has] helped to build much more robust regional structures ...*. However, there is still some way to go to assert that all nine regional structures have the capacity or even perhaps the commitment to continue to deliver such a major undertaking.

## 4.5 Evaluation Feedback from the BALL programme

All those who completed their programme by March 2013 rated their experience as good or excellent. Comments from the participants reflected on the overall experience, the quality of the contributors and the impact on them as leaders or potential leaders.

The overall reflections were very positive indeed. Participants felt that their programme was *'very well put together and balanced'*; the pace was right although a small number felt there was not enough time for reflection and discussion. The fact that the content of the programme was linked to the Succession Planning Initiative was also seen as important. However, a few of the participants expressed some initial difficulty with the *'notion of participating in a 'segregated' programme'* (VSC, 2012-13).

All the participants felt that the contributors were excellent and helped them *'to understand the value of having ambition and ensuring my leadership style can help achieve my goals'*.

One participant fed back that they felt *'the sessions made me think more strategically and how I can build more tactical relationships'*.

The sessions from the experienced leaders were very well received and the majority of the participants fed back that that they had *'had a real impact'*, sharing *'their journeys in a thought provoking way' and through their 'personal examples reiterate the challenges...'*. One of the participants also fed back that these leaders were *'fantastic role models'*. Others that the sessions had been *'inspirational, informative, encouraging, motivational...'*.

Other comments included *'the facilitation...was powerful; it enabled me to have an opportunity to see myself in action...'*. The opportunity to share and learn from others was also highly valued as was the use of the 360 appraisal in developing a learning plan. Comments included *'I have learnt so much about myself and how I come across'* and the 360 appraisal had *'provided an insight into leadership skills that I need to develop...'* and the programme was seen as *'an excellent opportunity for developing self-reflection and being more authentic reclaiming honest open feedback'*.

Four themes emerged from the feedback from the participants. The first was the significant contribution made by the contributors who were seen and *'empowering', 'motivating' and 'real'*. The second was the opportunity to network with others and form a *'cohort group'*. The third was the opportunity to review their careers and personal development needs and fourthly the opportunity to reflect on their practice and share this with other leaving one participant to record that *'I leave inspired and confident ... [with] self-determination to be ambitious, confident, persevere and re-direct energies'*.



# 5. Conclusions and next steps?

## 5.1 A summary of the major outcomes

The Succession Planning Initiative began in 2010 with a set of national aims that were reviewed by the regions to ensure they reflected the changing context for LAs. The resulting regional aims used to develop the local programmes can be summarised as *'creating a pool of leaders who are confident and able to take on wider and more challenging roles and engage with and lead the changes required to work collaboratively with a range of organisations'*.

Overall, the Initiative was very successful at achieving these aims. Even at this early stage, it is possible to conclude that the Initiative has been successful in positively impacting on the participants, LAs, and the wider system across the regions and in creating a legacy for the future. The BALI programme established in 2012 was also seen as highly successful. In summary, from an analysis of the nine regional evaluation reports, the evaluation feedback from the BALI programme and reflections from the NST, the major outcomes were as follows:

- The Initiative successfully involved all nine regions of England, all but one LA and over 3,000 participants.
- The Initiative has resulted in greater collaboration between DCSs at a regional level leading to a more strategic approach to workforce development.
- There is greater sharing of good practice and expertise between LAs.
- There is better networking between LAs and other organisations resulting in more effective partnerships.
- Across all the regions, the Initiative was very well received by the participants and gained a high approval rating from DCSs and line managers.
- Participants reported that they had greatly enhanced their leadership and management skills and knowledge and were much more confident.
- The Initiative was unsuccessful in engaging significant numbers of potential senior leaders from other organisations in order to provide a more diverse pool of participants.
- Many participants became coaches, mentors and project leaders; some took on new responsibilities and some gained promotion.

- There is now an effective alumni to support future cohorts on Succession Planning Programmes.
- Participants feel they now have the 'tools' to enable them to be better at managing their services and contributing to the strategic development of the organisation.
- Many DCSs and line managers have identified benefits in the leadership and management of their organisations and have seen a positive impact on the way teams are managed, on how participants operate in teams and in partnership working.
- The Initiative was most successful where DCSs and line managers fully supported their participants in the regional programme so that both the participants and the organisation benefitted from the positive impact of new leadership knowledge and skills and greater personal confidence.

## 5.2 The Legacy and Sustainability

The context in which LAs operate, deliver and commission services continues to change. For example, since the end of the Initiative the Government has announced the termination of funding for sector led improvement and further changes will surely follow. Consequently, the challenges of succession planning and the continuation of leadership development and sector-led systems for improving children's services will remain. To ensure that there continues to be an effective pool of leaders the regions will need to revise their current sustainability strategies and consider new and creative ways of resourcing their succession planning.

To guarantee succession planning is sustainable, careful consideration should be given to the following three key aspects and relating issues:

### 1. Priority and Infrastructure

- The aim of succession planning, the creation of the pool of talented leaders needed to improve outcomes for children, young people and their families, must be seen as **a national priority**.
- Support for the regions in developing and sustaining the Initiative and sharing good practice should be provided through **national organisations**, such as LGA, SOLACE and ADCS.

- There needs to be an awareness of other leadership development and sector-led programmes within each region to ensure there is a **coherent approach** to workforce development for individuals and organisations.
- The development of the **regional structures** and support from the regional leads has been an effective element of succession planning and needs to continue.
- DCSs, working together with other senior leaders, need to identify the **regional priorities and aims** for their programme.

## 2. Support and Commitment

- Succession planning will require **strong and effective leadership** at regional and local level.
- Commitment at regional level from **DCSs and other senior leaders** should include contribution of resources through effective use of both human and financial contributions, facilitating sharing good practice; peer challenge and providing increased networking.
- Every senior leader in each participating organisation needs **'ownership'** of the programme and to recognise its importance; its effect on their participants; how it will impact on the services they manage and the contribution the participants will be able to make to the strategic development of their organisations.
- There needs to be a stronger commitment to the **involvement of other organisations** outside LAs that deliver children's service and an increase in the number of participants from these groups.

## 3. Regional Succession Planning: Content and Delivery

- The NST's **'maturity model'** should be adopted as a basis for self -assessment in order to help set priorities for the LAs and regions.
- **Senior leaders** from participating organisations including LAs, Police, Health, voluntary sector and **alumni** from the programmes should be used to contribute and facilitate programmes.
- Regional programmes need to meet the needs of the workforce and **reflect the changing context of public services in general and children's services in particular at both national and local level.**

- Greater consideration should be given to the **recruitment** of participants regarding the level and **diversity** of the attendees.
- Participation should be made as **easy** as possible by a commitment to ensure release time to attend, time needed to travel, the spread of dates and timing of the day.
- Consideration should be given to the use of the **successful elements** of previous programmes including:
  - a clarity of objectives for the programme and, for individuals, a connection to the 'day job';
  - a self-assessment and 360 appraisal based on the 'resourceful leader' and individual learning objectives, and a personal development plan;
  - a core leadership programme with a clear focus and relevant content;
  - a programme of master classes using experienced senior leaders from a range of organisations to share their own personal experiences and leadership challenges;
  - networking and collaborative working;
  - well led ALS and transformational projects that have a clear focus.



# Conclusion

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There is a clear recognition that investing in effective leadership and skilful management is essential to achieving high quality outcomes for children, young people and families. It is seen as critical that there are knowledgeable, skilled and confident leaders.

Evidence from this report clearly demonstrates that the Succession Planning Initiative and its delivery through regional programmes has had a significant and positive impact on the participants and, through them, the delivery of improved children's services. The report also shows that LAs, working together within their regions, and in partnership with other agencies, was a successful approach to providing a succession of talented leaders and managers.

The stretched and diminishing resources for public services make sustaining this succession a more challenging goal. It is therefore essential that succession planning remains a national priority with a coherent approach, and effective national and regional leadership working within collaborative regional structures. Regional programmes should become an integral part of the working practice of each LA and all those concerned with the commissioning and delivery of services for children, young people and families.





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