

Project Success Story



Institution

University of Portsmouth

Project title

iLEAD, the University of Portsmouth's Inclusive Leadership Exploration and Discovery programme 2022-25

"A programme accessible to over 3,000 participants delivered over four years – 2022-2025 – co-created and delivered through a partnership between the University and Advance HE. The programme aims to promote and embed 'being inclusive' into how all people at the University of Portsmouth approach their leadership, whatever stage of career or position they occupy."

Background/Context

In the University [Strategy 2025](#), the University of Portsmouth set out its bold vision that, **"By 2030 we will be the UK's top modern university and one of the top 100 young universities in the world"**.

Central to achieving this vision is the University's commitment to engage every student in a life-changing experience: **"through innovative and inclusive education, every student – irrespective of their background – will reach their potential, with outstanding outcomes and employability."**

The strategy highlighted that the vision will only be realised if staff are fully and proudly engaged in working for the University. Indeed, the strategy started with the staff community *"as they make the University what it is."*

At the same time, the University, emerging from the challenges of the pandemic, seized the moment to engage and respond to staff feedback which revealed their aspiration for greater empowerment, trust and accountability; and for personal development opportunities to help them become more effective in their roles.

"We are an organisation dedicated to the learning and development of others. It's only right that we invest the time to develop ourselves...[and] We cannot be the institution that we want to be if we are not fully inclusive."

Professor Graham Galbraith, Vice-Chancellor

This was and remains the context and backdrop to the University's investment in the iLEAD Programme. It's a joint investment: by staff, committing to the vision and to the personal development necessary to achieve it; and for by the University, in dedicating the significant resources and will to initiate and implement such a far-reaching programme.

The approach

The University asked Advance HE to co-develop the Inclusive Leadership Programme, now known simply as iLEAD.

The University of Portsmouth has been an active member of Advance HE since the latter's formation in 2018, with nearly 900 Fellows, five accredited programmes, a Race Equality Charter Bronze award, an institutional Athena Swan Bronze award and 12 departmental Bronze awards and 1 departmental Silver award. The sound relationship was the bedrock of the development of the programme.

The University set out its objectives for the programme:

LEADING WITH VISION

UEB

Shape the future of the university and steer the vision for university-wide leadership

LEADING WITH PURPOSE

Senior Leaders

Lead transformation and growth in a fast-changing environment with a clear sense of purpose and conviction

LEADING WITH INFLUENCE

Leaders and Managers

Ability to lead, navigate and influence. Managing change and working through others to achieve results

ASPIRING TO LEADERSHIP

Aspiring Managers

Gain an understanding of yourself and others as managers. Develop a range of skills necessary for effective leadership and management

Advance HE developed an Inclusive Leadership Learning Framework that pieces together various leadership learning activities into a single entity to co-construct leadership learning programmes for people at different stages in their careers and whatever their background:



Inclusive Leadership Learning Framework

The University has grouped participants at four levels of seniority, mixing academic and professional services. These are the University Executive Board (UEB), Senior Leaders, Leaders & Managers, and Aspiring Managers.

All senior leaders including the University Executive Board are expected to go through the programme. In addition to the UEB team commitment, the Vice Chancellor introduces the first session for all cohorts.

An experienced team of Advance HE designers developed a series of sessions – a total 27 synchronous and asynchronous sessions delivered by 11 facilitators – focusing on inclusive leadership, ranging from; **'Leadership Unpacked'**, to **'Diversity – yours, mine, theirs, ours'** and **'Strengths: self-awareness, self-acceptance and self-mastery'**. These are, in turn, supported contextualising sessions exploring, for example, **'The HE landscape'**, **'Leading Strategically'** and **'Coaching skills'**.

"We need to be brave and inventive, and have trust in our leaders and managers. We need our leaders and managers – and that's you – to have the confidence to take control of their areas of activity; and to have the confidence to be accountable, creative, and innovative. This course will support you in doing this."

Professor Graham Galbraith, Vice-Chancellor, speaking to iLEAD delegates.

Early results and the green-shoots of impact

At the end of the first year, Advance HE delivered the first results from the detailed feedback designed into the programme. The aim was to capture participants' perceived gains and change in terms of inclusive leadership knowledge, attitudes and practice after engaging with the iLEAD programme.

Highlighting the initial measures, Advance HE researcher specialist, Dr Panagiota (Peny) Sotiropoulou, said,

“Overall, engagement with iLEAD significantly improved participants’ self-reported perceived knowledge, confidence and ability to role model and empower towards inclusive leadership. This is despite the fact that 50% of participants overall have not yet benefited from the entire provision, as they have some core modules pending completion.

“Specifically, participants’ inclusive leadership and management perceived knowledge improved by almost 12%, their perceived confidence improved by almost 16% and their ability to role model and empower towards inclusive leadership by almost 6%.”

The research showed **the biggest positive change in participants’ inclusive leadership and management was perceived confidence**. More specifically, their ratings in terms of their confidence in using mentoring (and reverse mentoring) in breaking down barriers and creating new pathways for inclusion and leadership improved by 20%; and their confidence in using peer learning to promote effective teamwork towards inclusivity and in using coaching skills to promote inclusivity as a core value increased by 19%.

Participants rated elements related to self-awareness/perceptions, like opening up to others’ perspectives, challenging their own biases and adapting their way of working so that it is inclusive, as the areas in which they benefited the most out of engaging with iLEAD.

“84% of all participants who completed both the entry and exit survey were able to indicate specific changes in their practice as a result of engaging with the iLEAD programme. These were mostly related to applying inclusivity and challenging inequities as well as being open to other’s perspectives, attentive to the use of EDI language and supportive of teamwork.”

Dr Panagiota (Peny) Sotiropoulou

Hear from the University

Reviewing the success and impact of the programme to date Fiona Hnатов, Chief People Officer at the University had this to say:

When I joined the University in Spring 2022 the then Inclusive Leadership Programme was very much in its infancy and I was excited to see that the University had embarked on such an extensive inclusive development programme.

In the last 18 months the iLEAD programme as it now is, has gone from strength to strength reaching over 300 staff across all areas of the university and at all stages of their leadership journeys. And I count myself within that number. We encourage all UoP leaders and managers to take part and I completed the programme with the rest of the Executive team earlier this year.

Retaining the same key themes as the Senior Leader, Leader & Manager and Aspiring Manager programmes, our provision created the space and opportunity for us to reconnect with our individual leadership styles and reflect on the leaders we are - and more importantly the leaders and role models we want to be - in order to best support the University community in delivering our strategic imperatives.

The most powerful intervention for us was the Leadership Exploration (LEGs) component. Following an adapted version of the Action Learning Set, the LEGs encouraged us to focus on ideas and aspirations as well as the more traditional challenges. With the opportunity for all participants to speak and be heard, and the power of reflection at their very heart, the LEGs and the legacy behaviours they have created have made a real change to the way we interact and collaborate as a team. I can not only see but feel the difference in the way we approach our discussions in terms of being more solutions focused, positive in our approach yet give space for genuine listening and debate.

My incredibly positive personal experience of the iLEAD programme and the benefits it has clearly brought to my peers makes it very easy for me to encourage colleagues to engage in the programme too. I particularly welcome having the opportunity to meet with learners at the start of each programme to launch the experience for them. I like to share the benefits and importance of colleagues taking time to reflect on their own style of leadership and explore different ways of working to support our drive in changing culture and this can start with role modelling exceptional leadership. The opportunity to replicate the change in approach, thinking and behaviour that I have witnessed across all areas of the University would see a hugely positive cultural change for us which will only strengthen our ability to achieve all the goals we have set for ourselves both personally and as an organisation.

Here are just some of the reflections of colleagues who have completed the programme:

"A great programme for anyone considering a leadership position. We explored the importance of inclusivity, representation and diversity in building a successful team. Being able to connect, share experiences and chat to colleagues across the institution was a key part of the programme and very beneficial in building our own support network across the organisation."

Aspiring Managers Cohort 1

"I have thoroughly enjoyed being part of the ILP and have learned so much that will be helpful to me moving forward in my career. It has helped me develop my skills in so many areas including giving feedback, challenging conversations and exploring issues and problems from different perspectives. I really enjoyed being part of a cohort of people going through the same programme together and got to meet some new friends and colleagues."

Leaders and Managers Cohort 2

"A helpful and insightful course which broke down many barriers around leadership and inclusivity. I now have a better understanding of strategies that can be applied to any different areas of the workplace."

Aspiring Managers Cohort 3

"I'm extremely glad I participated in this programme; it is a brilliant opportunity to discuss real issues in University leadership with a highly constructive group of colleagues and excellent facilitators."

Senior Leaders Cohort 3

"Over the past 2 years, I have questioned my effectiveness and capability as a leader. The challenges of the pandemic and isolation from colleagues were agonising for me as an extrovert and a people person. The ILP gave me an opportunity to reconnect with colleagues and to forge some new networks to enable me to be the leader I am and to recognise that my skills and abilities are of value and that I can and do make a contribution to the University."

Senior Leaders Cohort 1

Awards

In November 2022, the iLEAD programme was a finalist and runner-up at the Staff Development Forum awards. This highlighted the success of the University's work "to develop individuals and/or teams who have launched an initiative or project, during 2021-22, that has made a significant and positive impact to the Learning and Development / Academic Development / Organisational Development environment and shows evidence of collaboration both within and external to their own institution".

The 2022 SDF Developing Excellent Practice Award reflected the overarching theme of the SDF's 'Festival of Learning and Development' which was 'Influence, engage and augment...gearing up for your future L&D'

It is wonderful to be recognised for the work that we have done in partnership with Advance HE. The development and delivery of this inclusive leadership programme has had far reaching effects across the University and is a core element of our strategy to continue developing the skills and practice of our leaders and managers.

About the University of Portsmouth

The University of Portsmouth can trace its history back to 1869 and the formation of the Portsmouth and Gosport School of Science and the Arts.

University status was granted to Portsmouth in 1992, when the institution began to validate its own degrees (degrees had previously been validated by the Council for National Academic Awards).

"We're proud to be a breath of fresh air in the academic world – a place where everyone gets the support they need to achieve their best.

We're always discovering. We don't fit the mould, we break it. Just as the world keeps moving, so do we.

We're closely involved with our local community and we take our ideas into the global marketplace. We partner with business, industry and government to set the course for a better future. And we educate and transform the lives of our students to help them achieve their potential.

We stand out, not just in the UK but in the world. We excel in research areas from cosmology and astrophysics to cyber security, forensics and sport science. Since the first day we opened our doors, we've looked towards the future. And we're here to help you shape it."