

Collective Leadership for Scotland: Year 1 Report

Building the foundations...

Introduction

Collective Leadership for Scotland was launched at a Scottish Leaders Forum event in January 2018, with the guiding question of “How can we build capacity for Collective Leadership for Scotland?”

This felt like a very prominent question already in the room as, with the development of the revised National Performance Framework, there has been a growing recognition of the need for shared responsibility in leadership and action across public services. Equally, there is a growing understanding of the need to work differently to achieve better outcomes and an appreciation of the complex, systemic and interrelated nature of many issues that we are trying to address. With this comes the clear recognition that no single organisation, group or agency can tackle these alone.

What’s the offer?

Informed by Systems Thinking, Collective Leadership for Scotland supports teams of people in their places of work and leadership to tackle systemic issues which reach beyond the boundaries of traditional hierarchies and public institutions. The emphasis is on learning and building capacity for leadership which appreciates and engages with the whole system, including the behavioural and relational aspects, and where openness, learning and willingness to take collective action are at the core. It’s challenging because it goes to the heart of the values and vocation of public service leaders, requires a willingness to hear and act on system outcomes and it can lead to a fuller expression of partnership working.

Building foundations – the year at a glance

Building Capacity and Capability in Public Services: -

Since our launch we have:

- **Completed work with over 80 leaders in 5 sites** – developing new ways of working on the revised National Performance Framework (two sites), national work on policing and mental health and place-based sites in Fife and Angus.

“The group were suspicious of the proposed change and there were some feelings of distrust and a reluctance to engage. This changed using the collective leadership approach; individuals became more open to discussing the difficult issues they were facing.” Roy Lawrence, Fife Council

“We chose to work as a collective leadership group, considering this as a microcosm of the wider collective leadership on this outcome and adopting the model of action inquiry, offered by the facilitators. This felt uncomfortable to begin with, without the usual programme plan which would normally give us certainty of process. We felt challenged into working differently, recognising that the task required us not to shy away from being open about the complexities, and we welcomed the support to stay in that space. The facilitators used different and innovative methods which held the uncertainty and we needed this in order not to fall back into usual ways of working.” National Outcomes work, Joe Griffin (Director, Scottish Government)

- Initiated work with a further **85 leaders in 6 sites** from national work to tackle societal issues to the development of a place-based approach in Edinburgh.

“So far, this feels like the most constructive approach we’ve taken in a long time to finding a fresh way to look at this issue. I am certainly very pleased with what this approach has delivered so far, and the fact that it provides us with a basis for supporting the development of the agenda in the future.” Policy Lead for a Societal Issue

- **5 additional new sites** due to begin in Spring tackling both national and locally based issues with another **60+ leaders**. Active discussion with a **further 10 potential sites**.
- Over **200 people across Scotland volunteered to** participate in Taster Sessions. We held -
 - **10** open sessions across Scotland
 - **4** bespoke sessions with teams in Drumchapel, West Dunbartonshire, Wester Hailes and Orkney
 - **2** Masterclass sessions with civil servants.

Building Capacity to Deliver the Programme:-

Since our launch we have:

- Designed and delivered two intensive 4-day Facilitation Development programmes (six-monthly), with theory, practice and reflection to increase the number of facilitators to support Collective Leadership work across Scotland. Two more planned

for March and November 2019. **23 people participated** in the training, building capacity to work with participant sites and within their home organisations.

- Provided **5 peer facilitation support sessions** for the ongoing development of facilitators active with sites.
- **Published our first research paper** “New Territories for Evaluation” and in the process of producing a second, further defining and reflecting on different models of collective leadership and the unique offer being developed in Scotland.
- Completed a collaborative **Writing Sprint**, resulting in a publication on The Power in Beginnings.
- Delivered our first **National Learning Event** where 6 sites shared their stories of Collective Leadership.
- Introduced the concept of **Collective Leadership Faculty** and began work with Peter Senge and Margaret Wheatley in Faculty roles.



Collective Leadership Programme Design

The Programme seeks to create the conditions for system change through work in four interlinked activities:

- Practice
- Capacity building
- Community building
- Research



Practice

Participant Sites

At the heart of the Collective Leadership offer is direct, skilled and complexity focused facilitation of leadership teams who are working in real time on deep-seated issues of concern. The work takes place around national issues or tackling the complexity of intervening in a geographic place.

"It's really exciting to think what we have achieved and where it could go next ... if we hadn't been willing to start small we would never have done anything ... I would never have imagined what it was possible to achieve, look where we are now ... we can take this much further and make it even bigger." Arbroath Locality Partnership

Capacity Building

Facilitation development

Skilled facilitation in complex settings is a key success factor for the programme. The skills to carry out this work are scarce, so we have designed, piloted and further refined a 4-day residential programme to develop the capacity of skilled facilitators who can support the work of Collective Leadership in participant sites. This has provided development for 23 facilitators across Scotland, increasing the capacity that can be deployed across the range of work within the programme.

Ongoing development and supervision of facilitators takes place through Peer Supervision sessions which run monthly and provide ongoing opportunity for facilitators who are actively working with sites to connect and learn together.

"The course was a great chance to further develop self-awareness, in an environment of noticing what was going on for me (thoughts, feelings, behaviours and patterns) in the context of the group with some theoretical input. The environment was unique in terms of the hotel being on a campus with a timetable for 'doing' as well as reflecting."

"I did indeed learn a lot at Stirling, and appreciated the many and varied ways we were asked to work as a group, and in smaller groups and individually. I liked the traces of the u process that I could see through the design. I loved the emphasis on creativity, and other ways of knowing. As I said at the close, I was also deeply discomfited by the experience. I suspect you saw that and might go so far as to say it was a deliberate part of the design."

Facilitative Leadership

In this first year, we have noticed a need and appetite in the wider system to develop skills and capacity for a more facilitative style of leadership to support Collective Leadership. Therefore, in 2019 we will offer opportunities through the provision of a formal programme for leaders who wish to take a more facilitative approach to their own leadership.

Community Building

Taster sessions

We offer these sessions each month in locations across Scotland and for new participant sites. The purpose is to raise awareness of the approach and the learning and theory which is informing it and to build common language and understanding across the system.

This is often the initial contact from which a future site is formed, however the sessions are proving to be a key intervention in of themselves.

"..loved the interactive nature of this event where we had the opportunity to get to know each other and share our experiences and knowledge. Often in a very open, honest way. Demonstrates that how an event is run or unfolds is often at least as important as the subject matter." Senior Civil Servant

"What felt important to me [from the session was] continuing to untangle the distinctive features of collective leadership, utilising this approach to find a way through organisational uncertainty and complexity, recognising the importance and value of good facilitation, creating an environment for a learning organisation, promoting active listening and reflection skills." Kristy Docherty, Queen Margaret University

Telling the Collective Leadership story

To continue to build the Collective Leadership narrative, we have sought a wide array of opportunities to tell the story of what we are learning, through social media, speaking at conferences and through our own schedule of events.

Going forward, the Scottish Leaders Forum will continue to be important partners in the programme as it guides and aligns its focus in pursuit of the stretching outcomes at the heart of Scotland's National Performance Framework.

Connecting the System to More of Itself

This work builds very explicitly from several strands of Collective Leadership work, internationally, across Scotland and in particular sectors, e.g. u.lab, Scottish Leaders Forum and Workforce Scotland, Pioneering Collaborative Leadership and the Fire Starter festival. As we develop, we are committed to continue to develop and nurture these connections, building a wider Collective Leadership movement.

The Collective Leadership Programme is led by a small team within Scottish Government working in collaboration with a much wider interest group across public services. Capability and capacity is drawn from across public services to ensure that the programme has sufficient resourcing to meet its expressed aspirations.

The role, structure and strategic focus of Workforce Scotland is a particular focus in 2019, in order to strengthen the collective ownership and cross public service support for the work. Regular progress reports, covering the areas of most importance to these audiences will be further developed with the Scottish Leaders Forum, alongside a range of opportunities to engage with the work.

Research

Faculty and Research Network

We are working to bring together a network of researchers, practitioners and site participants to surface and share the learning about Collective Leadership generated within the programme and to test ways of understanding its impact.

A small number of core theorists, whose work has been particularly influential in the design and development of this work, have been invited and accepted to be associated Faculty. Peter Senge has taken up the role of our thinking partner and mentor and we are currently working with Margaret Wheatley on an offer linked to our facilitative leadership work. This demonstrates the international recognition of the work within the programme.

“Collective Leadership is still a concept, an idea...but the real question is what does it mean in practice? So I’m particularly interested in getting more connected to the efforts in Scotland because you’ve been at this for a few years now - and I’m sure it’s messy and I’m sure it’s never perfect and it’s two steps forward and one step back, then you do a little shimmy side-to-side, as you deal with the different issues as they arise. But I think that is the way it works and we’re not going to solve the problems we face today with overly simplistic nostrums of taking charge...it’s just not adequate.” Peter Senge

Publication Series

Many of the concepts needed to build Collective Leadership capacity are not well known and the support to do it can be opaque. The intention of the publication series is to “work out loud”- shining a light on the concepts, support required and stories from the sites we are working with.

How to surface the impact the programme is having has been a question from the start and so our first publication was *“Collective Leadership: Where Nothing is Clear, and Everything Keeps Changing - Exploring new territories for evaluation”* which has been very well received: <https://workforcescotland.files.wordpress.com/2018/11/collectiveleadershipreport1.pdf>

“I read your writing and found it refreshing, inspiring, timely and important. I am sure it will form a much-needed part of the emerging dialogue around evaluative approaches that truly recognise and embrace complexity.”

“The paper is great. I loved reading it and found it very insightful. I think it captures a lot of the learnings and also advances the concept of collective leadership in many aspects. I like how action inquiry and collective leadership are interlinked.” Katrin Kaeufer

Key Learning about Collective Leadership to Date

Whilst we are only 1 year into the programme, we are learning that Collective Leadership:

- Is not appropriate for all types of issues. It is most appropriate in tackling complex systemic issues across organisational and sector boundaries.
- Takes time to reach a point of readiness to work as a collective leadership site and the readiness of leaders to step into this way of working, both individually and collectively, is crucial for success.

- We are often drawn together as partnership groups around complex issues, but it is not always obvious how we need to work together.
- Critical to working in this way is recognition that it is about “in here” as well as “out there” – we need to develop the skills and attributes to be able to work collectively within both the individual and groups for greatest impact on the system.
- The correct conditions can provide the platform for new and innovative thinking and action. In complexity, we need to pay attention to what works and ask what is enabling this to happen?
- We cannot make this kind of change by telling people to do it. We need a clear appreciation of the power and importance of relationships to enable our work. This clearer and deeper understanding of relational leadership is not about “all agreeing” but how we foster positive disagreement within existing power dynamics.
- There is a clear need for skilled facilitation and creation of the spaces to explore and have frank and honest conversations.
- The pull towards the “known” is very strong and so consistent and long-term facilitation helps support and hold the space for change to emerge and become embedded.
- Working in this way allows the system to see more of itself which supports greater opportunities for intervening on a much bigger scale.
- There is a growing national and international recognition of the impetus created by leaders working collectively to transform outcomes.

If you would like to find out more, visit our website workforcotland.com or contact us at Janet.Whitley@gov.scot