How can we build capacity for Collective Leadership for Scotland?
The challenge

With the development of the revised National Performance Framework, the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015, the Local Governance Review and the Christie Commission, there is 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 tackle inequalities.

Whilst there are some areas where good progress has been made, there is also growing understanding of the complex, systemic and interrelated nature of many issues that we are trying to address.

With this comes the recognition that no single organisation, group or agency can tackle these alone, and that effective collaboration in support of transformed outcomes is difficult to achieve.

This work is often complex, messy and unpredictable.

‘The multiple causes of social problems, and the components of their solutions, are interdependent. They cannot be addressed by uncoordinated actions among isolated organizations.’

Kania and Kramer, Collective Impact

Myron Roger’s Maxims

- Real change happens in real work
- Those who do the work do the change
- People own what they create
- Start anywhere, follow it everywhere
- Connect the system to more of itself
- The process you use to get to the future is the future you get
The programme builds explicitly on work by Workforce Scotland, the Scottish Leader’s Forum, and by working with public services to collaborate on complex and systemic issues in service of wider public service transformation.

Collective Leadership for Scotland makes an offer of support and learning to teams of people working to tackle systemic issues which reach beyond the boundaries of traditional hierarchies and public institutions.

The emphasis is on 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 is therefore a very different prospect to a leadership development programme that you attend away from the work you are doing and the people you are working with, creating opportunities for a greater depth of focussed learning around an issue of collective importance.

The overarching Collective Leadership approach is a structured 3-year programme of activity to build capacity for collective leadership for Scotland which takes the form of four interlinked strands of work.

With all of this very much in mind, Collective Leadership for Scotland was launched at a Scottish Leaders Forum event in January 2018, which engaged participants in the question of “How can we build capacity for Collective Leadership for Scotland?”
We know that we can’t solve complex problems with only what we each know now and therefore we need to create spaces where collective answers and action can emerge, drawing on every relevant perspective.

The programme works in real time with multi-partner groups of leaders at whatever level they are in the system, seeking to tackle a societal or place-based issue and actively drawing on theories and learning relevant to the issue and to leadership.

The aim is that this approach embeds system learning, action inquiry and the development of facilitative and inquiring leadership.

How we do this:
We work directly with 10 - 12 new multi-partner Collective Leadership participant sites each year.

This creates the potential to work directly with around 150 leaders at all levels of the system each year, including chief executives, community council leaders, citizen representatives, education managers, civil servants, senior health managers and many more.
Collective leadership is a new and emerging concept that we are testing in practice. We are learning all the time about the conditions and behaviours that help it thrive and the sites are the key learning space generating this.

It is also important that we continue to stretch our practice, evaluating the impact we are having and bringing in evidence from outside of the programme so we can find out what impact the programme is having.

**How we do this:**
By investing in the development of highly skilled facilitators, drawn from across public services and beyond, we provide an extremely well evaluated and highly valued residential 4-day facilitator development programme every 6 months for already skilled facilitators to develop the specific skills and capacity to work on complex issues with Collective Leadership participant sites.

This is supported by ongoing development and supervision when facilitators are working actively with sites.

Working with this level of complexity is challenging and the pressure to revert to the ways of doing things that we are familiar and comfortable with runs extraordinarily high.

Two facilitators support each collective leadership site to keep a focus on bringing about transformation and support the group to persevere in working differently, bringing challenge and creating a buffer zone for reflection and learning.

This is critical to the work, creating an integral emphasis on learning as the work progresses.

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Developing, nurturing and deploying highly skilled facilitation

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Building in learning and evaluation from the start and sharing learning widely as we go

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**How we do this:**
We are developing a collective approach to research and evaluation with partners in our participant, facilitator and research communities.

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We are challenging our current thinking and practice by developing an international faculty of mentor thought leaders.

Our first Thinking Partner is Peter Senge from MIT, author of “The 5th Discipline” and co-author of “The Dawn of System Leadership”.

Our research and practice publication series is one way of shining a light on what we are learning and contributing to the wider evidence base. Other ways include working with academic partners and providing ongoing and embedded opportunities for peer learning and engagement, including an annual conference on Collective Leadership.
We have found that it is important to create some shared knowledge and common language across the wider public service system to help explain why and in what circumstances we would work in a collective leadership way.

This is to both help participant sites to prepare well for the work and to influence the wider system to improve understanding of the bigger systemic picture.

Creating structured and regular opportunities for shared learning around the theories, models and practices and making connections to other system leadership programmes

**How we do this:**
We hold Taster Sessions each month in locations across Scotland for individuals and potential Collective Leadership participant sites to understand and experience the theory and practice of Collective Leadership, and understand the commitment required, in advance of applying to be a Collective Leadership site.

This also provides an opportunity for the thinking which informs the Collective Leadership approach to be understood more widely across the public service system, providing a common theoretical framework of language and understanding, even where this does not progress to becoming a Collective Leadership site.

The Taster Sessions enable us to engage with around 250 leaders each year.

We are also prototyping different approaches with partners to introduce the theory and core elements of Collective Leadership to be delivered on a regular basis across public services.

We are taking explicit steps to make connections with other leadership development initiatives and programmes in order to draw together relevant work under the broad umbrella of Collective Leadership and learn how we can make a difference together.
Today, many of us are “swimming in the same river”—trying to cultivate collective leadership in diverse settings around the world even while our larger cultural contexts remain firmly anchored to the myth of the heroic individual leader. This search for a new type of leadership creates a real possibility to accelerate joint learning about system leaders. For undoubtedly, we are at the beginning of the beginning in learning how to catalyze and guide systemic change at a scale commensurate with the scale of problems we face, and all of us see but dimly.”

Peter Senge, the Dawn of System Leadership

Where we work

We work with teams of people on complex issues in locations throughout Scotland to learn together about Collective Leadership.
The following Core Characteristics of Whole-Systems Leadership (University of Minnesota and Life Science Foundation 2010) underpin the programme.

**Deep listening**

Listening to learn and temporarily suspending judgment.

**Awareness of systems**

Understanding communities, organisations, and groups as adaptive, changing systems to gain a fuller perspective of the situation and expand and refine your options for action.

**Awareness of self**

Being aware of your motivations, feelings, and beliefs to help you to make effective decisions about how to behave.

**Seeking diverse perspectives**

The respectful inclusion of all voices so that, rather than presenting a problem, conflicting opinions become a potential resource, helping to sharpen thinking and generate innovative options for action.

**Suspending certainty, embracing uncertainty**

Seeing beyond your habitual frame to get a broader and potentially more accurate view of what is going on.

**Taking adaptive action**

Learning from everything you do, taking time to recognise patterns and reflect on their meaning before jumping to a solution, balancing an inclusive, deep listening approach with a bias towards action.

‘Each organization often has a slightly different definition of the problem and the ultimate goal. These differences are easily ignored when organizations work independently on isolated initiatives, yet these differences splinter the efforts and undermine the impact of the field as a whole. Collective impact requires that these differences be discussed and resolved. Every participant need not agree with every other participant on all dimensions of the problem. In fact, disagreements continue to divide participants in all of our examples of collective impact. All participants must agree, however, on the primary goals for the collective impact initiative as a whole’

Kania and Kramer, Collective Impact
What are we learning?

- Collective leadership is not appropriate for all types of issues. It is a facilitative mechanism to help us to unleash the power of policy, evidence, design, transformation and learning in service of tackling the complex, intractable issues that maintain inequalities and poor outcomes for many in our society.
- We cannot make this kind of change by telling people to do it - the commitment to act and innovate comes from a collective and sustained visioning or imagining of a different future and taking deliberative action from which, together, we reflect and learn.
- We are often drawn together as partnership groups around complex issues, but it is not always obvious how we need to work together and what we need to do differently to enable us to genuinely come up with a new approach which will deliver the kind of Scotland we aspire to.
- We need a clear appreciation of the power and importance of relationships to enable our work. This does not mean that we always have to agree with each other. We want to develop relationships which are robust and honest, where we can disagree positively and still move issues forward.
- When leaders can come to the work with real openness, not feeling they need to know the answer; can suspend judgement and listen and inquire about how the system is and how others experience and understand it; if they can hold back from jumping to solutions before taking time to undertake collective meaning-making; then these conditions can provide the platform for new and innovative thinking and action. Skilled facilitation and creation of the spaces to explore these issues are key.
- Actively making connections across the system so there is greater visibility of work happening in different pockets of the public service system, helps the system to see more of itself and 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. The Collective Leadership approach being developed in Scotland is attracting interest from across the UK and globally with Peter Senge becoming our first Thinking Partner and developing links to the Academy for System Change www.academyforchange.org

‘At no time in history have we needed such system leaders more. We face a host of systemic challenges beyond the reach of existing institutions and their hierarchical authority structures. Problems like climate change, destruction of ecosystems, growing scarcity of water, youth unemployment, and embedded poverty and inequity require unprecedented collaboration among different organizations, sectors, and even countries. Sensing this need, countless collaborative initiatives have arisen in the past decade—locally, regionally, and even globally. Yet more often than not they have floundered — in part because they failed to foster collective leadership within and across the collaborating organizations.’

Peter Senge, the Dawn of System Leadership
Collective Leadership for Scotland facilitators worked with a group of Deputy Directors within the Scottish Government, alongside some external stakeholders, who were focusing on how they can work more effectively together towards the newly refreshed National Performance Outcomes.

“We chose to work as a Collective Leadership group, considering this as a microcosm of wider collective leadership on this outcome and adopted the model of action inquiry, offered by the facilitators.”

“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.”

“This felt uncomfortable to begin with, without the usual programme plan which would normally give us certainty of process. The agreement was to work in an emergent way, that allowed for gaining wider perspective and the opportunity to go deeper into themes and topics.”

“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.”
In Fife, a local partnership group at the Council focused on how it could be connecting more effectively to achieve better outcomes for children and families.

The work had to overcome barriers of different perspectives, understanding of the issues and suspicion of a different way of working.

Ultimately, the group developed a more collective ethos and are building trusting relationships that underpin practice, leading to changes in their ways of working amongst social work and schools.

“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
Is the Collective Leadership programme right for you?

Collective Leadership is an offer to provide skilled facilitation to any group of leaders from across public service partners who are working together to tackle a real, intractable, adaptive or wicked issue. Each partner has a stake in the issue and may have a different view about the nature of the problem and how it should be tackled.

It is not an offer of facilitation to tackle crisis-type interventions which need command and control responses or managerial issues which require improvement of processes and procedures.

We work with teams who are:

• Seeking to increase the value which can be gained by collective effort. We seek to get beyond partners coming together to join up individual service or organisational responses.

• Willing to place learning and inquiry at the heart of real work, explicitly drawing on and being informed by models and theories appropriate to transformation. The approach is deliberative and developmental for leaders who participate. There needs to be openness to working in this way, a willingness to pay attention to emerging learning.

• Willing to use action Inquiry as a method of examining and reflecting on individual leadership contribution, which puts action at the heart of the work being undertaken. Individual and collective leadership is viewed from the point of view of the impact it is having on the wider system and the issue being addressed.

“Though they differ widely in personality and style, genuine system leaders have a remarkably similar impact. Over time, their profound commitment to the health of the whole radiates to nurture similar commitment in others. Their ability to see reality through the eyes of people very different from themselves encourages others to be more open as well. They build relationships based on deep listening, and networks of trust and collaboration start to flourish. They are so convinced that something can be done that they do not wait for a fully developed plan, thereby freeing others to step ahead and learn by doing. Indeed, one of their greatest contributions can come from the strength of their ignorance, which gives them permission to ask obvious questions and to embody an openness and commitment to their own ongoing learning and growth that eventually infuse larger change efforts.”

Peter Senge, the Dawn of System Leadership

• Focused upon the real, complex work and so open to the fact that one model won’t work for all sites. As a guide, however, participation in the Collective Leadership programme may involve a site working with our bespoke facilitation support for around 6 to 12 months on the complex issue they are trying to address.

This could be a pattern of monthly meetings of the partnership site with the facilitators, where the real work is done, but where some time is set aside to focus on what is being learned about Collective Leadership. Participant sites will also be expected to allocate 2 days over this time for different elements of learning, including being part of shared learning events twice each year.

If this is something you can sign up to, then the Collective Leadership programme might be right for you.
Our team

**Janet Whitley**
Janet leads on strategic leadership and partnership development for Collective Leadership, seeking to make connections across organisations and sectors and engaging with organisations and individuals with an interest in the Collective Leadership work.

She joined the Scottish Government in 2010 and has had various roles since then, supporting transformation across public services.

This involves working closely with the Scottish Leaders Forum and leading on Workforce Scotland, which has developed a suite of collaborative learning offers aligned to the needs of Public Service Reform.

Much of this work involves working closely with an extended team of collaborative partners across public service organisations.

**Dot McLaughlin**
Dot is the Collective Leadership Programme Manager, a facilitator and works with leadership teams across the country.

She is responsible for the development of work within the collective leadership sites and provides ongoing support. Before this, Dot worked for the Improvement Service for ten years. She has a background in social work, working with young people in, and moving through, care, as well as managing hospital and community-based services for people with learning disabilities.

**Karen Lawson**
Karen is a facilitator and works with leadership teams across the country, also leading on aspects of facilitation development and support and Mindfulness.

Alongside this, she has a lead role in developing and managing Workforce Scotland’s annual Fire Starter Festival. Karen is Collaborative Learning Lead within Scottish Government, where she started working in 2015 to develop collaborative and innovation approaches to support public service transformation.

**Keira Oliver**
Keira leads on Research and Learning

She is a facilitator and Principal Social Researcher within the Scottish Government. Since 2015, Keira has led on the Scottish Government support of u.lab, a change leadership programme, convening the ulabscot holding team and co-facilitating the u.lab hub host programme.

**Alison Trimble**
From The Kings Fund, Alison is working in partnership with the core team, leading on facilitation strategy and as a facilitator working with leadership teams across the country.

She has extensive experience of working with senior leaders in the public sector as well as working with third sector and community-based leaders. She draws on a range of system development approaches including whole systems and psychodynamic ideas.
How you can get involved

If you feel that our work on Collective Leadership for Scotland resonates with you, we would be delighted to hear from you.

Get in touch by visiting our website: workforcescotland.com

Join our mailing list

We regularly send out information, news and events on Collective Leadership for Scotland and Workforce Scotland through our mailing list. You can sign up to keep up to date.

Come along to our Taster Sessions

We host regular Taster Sessions right across Scotland so you can find out more about our work and meet the team. If you have a complex issue you are tackling, are interested in becoming a facilitator, or just want to learn more about Collective Leadership, keep an eye out for when we’re coming to a location near you.

Sign up to our events

We have ongoing opportunities for peer learning and engagement, including our publication series events, regular workshops, and our annual Collective Leadership for Scotland Conference.

Apply for our Facilitation Development Programme

We seek to recruit and support experienced facilitators to Collective Leadership for Scotland on a bi-annual basis. Our programme blends theory, practice and reflection, so that facilitators develop the specific skills and capacity to work on complex issues with multi-partner teams.