

Leadership Essentials impact survey 2019/20

A survey of delegates



Acknowledgements

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Summary

The Local Government Association's (LGA's) 'Leadership Essentials' is a series of events designed as themed learning opportunities for councillors. Each event concentrates on a specific portfolio area, such as planning or children's services, or a specific theme, such as communications or digital leadership. This report presents the findings from an impact survey sent to delegates of the 2019/20 Leadership Essentials programme.

Methodology

In September 2020, all Leadership Essentials delegates were invited to complete an impact survey between six and eleven months after completing their course. Of the 478 delegates who received a survey, 82 responded (a response rate of 17 per cent). This lower-than-average response rate is most likely due to the increased burden councillors were facing due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Key messages

Most respondents said Leadership Essentials had helped them to improve the way they carry out their role. More than a quarter had progressed to a new role – or had taken on additional roles or responsibilities – since attending their respective course. The main ways Leadership Essentials had helped councillors to improve or progress were said to be 'networking and sharing experience and good practice', 'increased understanding and knowledge', 'developing a focus on a specific work area' 'confidence building', 'scrutiny and challenge' and 'developing communication skills'.

Results

- Most respondents (89 per cent) who attended Leadership Essentials in 2019/20 said it had helped them to improve the way they carry out their role to a great or moderate extent.
- Thirty-four per cent of respondents said they had progressed to a new role – or had taken on additional roles or responsibilities – since attending their respective course.
- Responding to an open question about how Leadership Essentials had helped councillors to improve or progress in their role, the main themes discussed were, 'networking and sharing experience and good practice', 'increased understanding and knowledge', 'developing a focus on a specific work area', 'confidence building', 'scrutiny and challenge' and 'developing communication skills'.

Introduction

The Local Government Association's (LGA's) 'Leadership Essentials' is a series of events designed as themed learning opportunities for councillors. Each event concentrates on a specific portfolio area, such as planning or children's services, or a specific theme, such as communications or digital leadership. A survey was sent to delegates of the 2019/20 programme to assess its impact and help ensure it is meeting the needs of councillors.

Methodology

All Leadership Essentials delegates from the 2019/20 programme were invited to complete an impact survey between six and eleven months after completing their course. The survey contained a small number of questions looking at the extent to which attending Leadership Essentials had achieved a lasting impact on participants. A copy of the survey can be found in Annex A.

The survey was sent in September 2020 to all delegates who had taken part in events between October 2019 and March 2020. Of the 478 delegates who received a survey, 82 responded (a response rate of 17 per cent). This lower-than-average response rate is most likely due to the increased burden councillors were facing due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This response level means the results should not be taken to be more widely representative of the views of all councillors. Rather, they are a snapshot of the views of this particular group of respondents.

The results presented in this report have been aggregated, and no individuals or authorities are identified in this report. Where tables and figures report the base, the description in brackets refers to the group of people who were asked the question. The number provided refers to the number of respondents who answered each question. Where sample sizes total less than 50, absolute numbers are reported alongside percentage values.

Leadership Essentials Impact Survey 2019/20

This section provides full results for each survey question.

Impact on performance in role

All respondents were asked to what extent, if at all, they thought attending their respective Leadership Essentials courses had helped them to improve the way they carry out their role. Most respondents (89 per cent) said that it had helped to either a great or moderate extent (see Table 1).

Table 1: To what extent, if at all, do you think that attending the Leadership Essentials course has helped you improve the way you carry out your role?

	Number	Per cent
To a great or moderate extent	73	89
To a great extent	36	44
To a moderate extent	37	45
To a small extent	9	11
Not at all	0	0
Don't know	0	0

Base: (all respondents) 82

Notable progress

All respondents were asked if they had progressed to a new role or had taken on additional roles or responsibilities since attending the Leadership Essentials course. Thirty-four per cent said they had and four per cent said that they expected to soon. Sixty-one per cent of respondents planned to maintain their current role and responsibilities for now. See Table 2.

Table 2: Since attending the Leadership Essentials course have you progressed to a new role or taken on additional roles or responsibilities?

	Number	Per cent
Yes	28	34
No – but I expect to soon	3	4
No – I plan to maintain my current role and responsibilities for now	50	61
Don't know	0	0
Not applicable	1	1

Base: (all respondents) 82

Those respondents who had progressed to a new role, or taken on additional roles or responsibilities, were asked if they thought their participation in the Leadership Essentials course had had a positive impact on their ability to achieve this. Seventy-five per cent of respondents (21 delegates) said that this was the case to either a great or moderate extent. See Table 3.

Table 3: To what extent, if at all, do you think that participation in the Leadership Essentials course had a positive impact on your ability to progress and/or take on additional roles or responsibilities?

	Number	Per cent
To a great or moderate extent	21	75
To a great extent	11	39
To a moderate extent	10	36
To a small extent	4	14
Not at all	3	11
Don't know	0	0

Base: (all respondents who had progressed to a new role, or taken on additional roles or responsibilities) 28

Examples of progress

Respondents who selected 'to a great extent' or 'to a moderate extent' when asked a) if attending Leadership Essentials had helped them improve the way they carried out their role and/or b) that their participation in Leadership Essentials had positively impacted on their ability to progress and/or take on additional roles or responsibilities were asked to provide brief details of how the programme had helped them improve or progress in their role. A total of 63 responses were received. A summary of the main themes is provided below.

Networking and sharing experience and good practice: About a quarter of respondents said that the opportunity to network with colleagues from other authorities, share knowledge and to discuss ideas, opinions and approaches was helpful.

“Meeting others in the same role and exchanging experiences.”

Leadership Essentials, Health

“Speaking to delegates from other parts of the country gave me a greater insight into the role and I discovered things I hadn't even thought about. I realised that I was not alone in my uncertainty and the support and information I received was invaluable.”

Leadership Essentials, Children's Services

“I found the interaction with other councillors of great value and the wide variety of opinions teased out by the course leaders was interesting and inciteful.”

Leadership Essentials, Cohesion

Increased understanding and knowledge of role: About a quarter of respondents said the Leadership Essentials programme had helped them to develop a better understanding of their own role, had influenced their approach and had also helped to improve their knowledge. For example:

“The course broadened my outlook and has altered my approach to my work.”

Leadership Essentials, Cultural Services

“I better understand my role, and that of statutory partner organisations, in relation to safeguarding.”

Leadership Essentials, Children’s Services

“Allowed me to take a wider perspective view.”

Leadership Essentials, Sport

Developed a focus on specific work area: About a quarter of respondents said that as a result of attending the course they had developed a greater interest, awareness, understanding of or ambition for developing a specific area of activity. For example:

“Enlarged my ambition for Audit and Governance.”

Leadership Essentials, Audit Committees

“Course prompted me to think about adult social care in the context of other council services e.g. housing and I have since made contributions to driving forward our policies in these other areas.”

Leadership Essentials, Adult Social Care

“I took a project forward on dental health for people in care homes. This was something I identified specifically during the training as a challenge I could take forward. I also went back and asked a lot of questions about things I had learned on the course.”

Leadership Essentials, Adult Social Care

“Having taken part in this training I was able to win a place on the shadow cabinet where part of my role has responsibility for climate

change within our group. I have been able to shape the council's approach through scrutiny and I now sit on a cross party working group on the issue. We continue to push for more ambition in dealing with the issue."

Leadership Essentials, Climate Change

Building confidence: About a fifth of respondents said they had developed more confidence as a result of attending the course. This included improved confidence in the way they were carrying out their role, in their decision making and gaining a greater level of self-belief.

"This course has given me the confidence to try new things, push myself harder in my professional development and take on an opposition leadership role."

Leadership Essentials, Climate Change

"I have more confidence in my abilities therefore I doubt myself less."

Leadership Essentials, Being an Effective Cabinet Member

Scrutiny and challenge: A small number of respondents said they had learned more about the importance of scrutiny. As a result of the course they had developed their understanding and their ability to challenge and to ask questions.

"...the course gave me a greater understanding of how scrutiny works and the importance that scrutiny has in any authority."

Leadership Essentials, Scrutiny

"The course showed me how to scrutinise Children's Services effectively, something I needed to learn."

Leadership Essentials, Children's Services

Developing communication skills: A small number of respondents said the course had helped them with their communication skills. This included gaining confidence in public speaking and chairing meetings as a result of exploring new skills and techniques.

"It made me think differently and helped me structure a meeting with head of service in a more positive manner."

Leadership Essentials, Housing

"The inclusive way I chair meetings has been commented on. This is not only from members of my political party but others who have expressed how I ensure everything is included in discussions be it

elected members or members of the public who are in attendance by request.”

Leadership Essentials, Scrutiny

COVID-19 response: Two respondents noted that the Leadership Essentials courses they attended in early-2020 had specifically helped in managing their response to COVID-19 and with recovery planning.

Further comments

Respondents were asked if they had any further comments about the Leadership Essentials course that they attended. A total of 45 responses were received. A summary of the main themes is provided below:

Positive experience: Many respondents described their course positively and mentioned the knowledge, learning and confidence and that they had gained as a result of attending. Several said that they would recommend others to participate in the future. For example:

“I would recommend all the LGA training to any councillor who wishes to gain confidence, understanding and progress.”

Leadership Essentials, Climate Change

“I found it very helpful and provided a good opportunity for self-reflection and how my role can influence policy within my portfolio team.”

Leadership Essentials, Children’s Services

Networking: Around a third of respondents had benefitted from the networking opportunities on their course, adding that this aspect provided them with support and was a good chance to exchange opinions and experiences, particularly with those from other authorities or parties:

“A positive experience and a chance to learn from others’ experiences.”

Leadership Essentials, Adult Social Care

“It was really useful to work with colleagues who were on the completely opposite end of the political spectrum and exchange views.”

Leadership Essentials, Climate Change

Speakers: A few respondents spoke highly of the course speakers, describing them as expert in their field:

“The delivery was first-class, the speakers powerful and credible...”

Leadership Essentials, Children’s Services

A small number of respondents made suggestions for improvements or raised issues they had experienced on the course. Some examples are given below:

- “Although the course is called ‘housing’, it actually only covers the development of new housing. There are many other aspects to a housing portfolio (Asset Management, Repairs contracts, rent arrears etc) and something on these could be useful. Also found the first day a very long day and the second very short...” (Leadership Essentials, Housing)
- “Mix us up a bit more. Two days on the same table with the same people...” (Leadership Essentials, Audit Committees)
- “Some sessions could have needed more time.”
- “I’d personally like to see some additional information regarding interpreting data from Children's Services.” (Leadership Essentials, Children’s Services)
- “I was part of the first cohort and there was considerable cancellations/non-attendance which I think reduced the unspoken elements of the course of networking and shared experience etc.” (Leadership Essentials, Town Centres)
- “Following up the opportunities after the course with speakers could be made a little stronger as you come away excited but not having a natural link after means the opportunities can be lost in the day to day noise of local government.” (Leadership Essentials, Housing)

Annex A: Questionnaire

Q1) Please enter your details below:	
Name	
Role	
Council	

Q2) To what extent, if at all, do you think that attending the Leadership Essentials course has helped you to improve the way you carry out your role?	
	Please tick
To a great extent	
To a moderate extent	
To a small extent	
Not at all	
Don't know	

Q3) If you answered 'not at all' to Q2: Why do you think that participation in Leadership Essentials has not helped you improve the way you carry out your role? If you have any suggestions as to how the programme could be improved or developed to help with this.	

Q4) Since attending the Leadership Essentials course have you progressed to a new role or taken on additional roles or responsibilities?	
	Please tick
Yes	
No – but I expect to soon	
No – I plan to maintain my current role and responsibilities for now	
Don't know	
Not applicable	

Q5) If you answered 'yes' to Q4: To what extent, if at all, do you think that participation in the Leadership Essentials course had a positive impact on your ability to progress and/or take on additional roles or responsibilities?	
	Please tick
To a great extent	
To a moderate extent	
To a small extent	
Not at all	
Don't know	

Q6) If you answered 'a great' or 'moderate extent' to Q2 or Q5: Please provide brief details of how the Leadership Essentials course has helped you improve or progress in your role, including examples of things that you have done differently as a result.

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Q7) If you have any further comments about the Leadership Essentials course you attended, please use the space below.

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