

## **Preparing for Leadership (PfL) at the University of Warwick** **February 2016 Pilot Review and Impact Report**

### **Background**

Preparing for Leadership is a two-day professional development programme written and developed for researchers who are starting to take leadership roles or who wish to take on more leadership roles in the future. This two-day programme, designed by Vitae supported by the Research Councils, uses an experiential, coaching and action-learning approach to guide early career researchers through aspects of leadership, such as, leading yourself, intellectual leadership, and team leadership. PfL is suitable for researchers of all disciplines, and particularly benefits from bringing together mixed groups of disciplines and departments.

PfL was run at the University of Warwick in February 2016. A two-day course taking place over two weeks, participants were provided with lunch, a networking and practice sharing opportunity and leadership training away from the office/lab environment.

The course has a proven success track record and is known to help participants to:

- ✓ assess their current position
- ✓ identify where they would like to progress to and what it takes to be in that role
- ✓ have a plan to get there

Through the programme, participants are provided with the opportunities to:

- ✓ appreciate the critical situations that have led them to be successful to date
- ✓ consider what leadership might mean
- ✓ have an insight into their preferences
- ✓ clarify the tasks that are expected now and in future roles
- ✓ identify the areas of competency that are required for the next steps into leadership positions
- ✓ create a vision and implement their strategy
- ✓ decide the culture they want to create
- ✓ decide how to get the best out of other people
- ✓ plan to develop themselves to do all of these things more effectively
- ✓ appreciate what is important and essential in any future role
- ✓ develop a peer network

The course allowed participants to gain a real insight into the leadership challenges facing Research Active Staff at the University of Warwick, an understanding of the leadership and governance structure of the University and offered practical Warwick-centred examples of leadership situations. The course drew from a variety of faculties ensured a mix of subject area specialisms and potential opportunities for collaboration.

### **Review and Evaluation**

This impact briefing draws on the work of the Vitae Impact and Evaluation Team and utilises an adapted Impact and Evaluation Framework to demonstrate the impact of Preparing for Leadership (PfL) six months after the first pilot was completed.

### **Impact Level 0: Foundations**

In February 2016, LDC piloted the first Pfl course specifically designed for members of staff with 'research', 'academic' or 'teaching' in their terms and conditions of employment. This pilot was used to demonstrate the need for a bespoke programme of leadership development designed especially for this group of staff. The course was attended by 14 participants (50:50 male/female split) from WMG, WMS, Engineering and IAS.

### **Impact Level 1: Reaction**

The initial reaction to the Pfl course has been overwhelmingly positive. Participants reported that the course was a valuable use of time and helpful in upgrading managerial skills. In addition, the format of the course provided useful time for “thinking” about leadership as part of career planning and supported reflective learning through unique leadership insights.

The participants stated the course provided a good balance of time for reflection and engaging and entertaining course activities.

*“I was able to reflect on my own experience of leadership and management...very thought provoking”* Participant, Feb 2016

*“[I] enjoyed the various group work sessions and learning from the experiences of other researchers”* Participant, Feb 2016

*“The learning method is in fact activity-led learning; it makes you think carefully about the leadership and managerial roles as part of your career and support[s] reflecting on them to make it more effective in your daily jobs”*  
Participant, Feb 2016

As is often the case with extended courses, participants were grateful for the opportunity to meet, interact and network with other staff from different disciplines at the University.

*“It is also a good networking opportunity to meet people from other departments as well as externals. I found the programme very useful to achieve my research-activity aims and to build and manage a good relationship with external research institutes”* Participant, Feb 2016

### **Impact Level 2: Learning**

Preparing for Leadership (Pfl) focuses on personal development through peer coaching. Participants are asked to help their colleagues find their own solutions to the issues they are facing and encourage them to commit to action. Learning is experiential, coaching, and action focussed. As a result participants are guided by experienced facilitators, rather than taught. (See Background for learning outcomes).

Participants reported their learning in terms of increased understanding and knowledge to manage and lead a team, the type of leadership (both with L and I) roles that are available and what they valued in a leader. Other areas of learning included improved active listening skills, interview skills, prioritisation and

assertiveness. Finally, an unexpected learning outcome from the course was an increase in the preparedness to submit funding applications (bid writing).

*“It was really helpful to attend the Preparing for Leadership course so that I could actively consider the type of leader I wanted to be, before finding myself in a leadership role” Participant, Feb 2016*

*“It was useful to reflect on different leadership styles and the values I find important in order to consider the organisational culture I would want to create within a team” Participant, Feb 2016*

*“The course also taught me that you can lead (with a little I) without being in a Leadership (management) position.” Participant, Feb 2016*

The structure of the course (action coaching) places the emphasis of learning to the participants, a co-creation and shared learning approach with a large focus on application of learning back to H.E. & the research active staff member’s workplace. The commitment to action allows for continued learning long after the end of the course.

### **Impact Level 3 Behaviour**

Career development and future planning has been a significant theme when assessing changes in behaviour. One participant noted that they were able to *“fill in the gaps in my evidence for promotion (e.g. beginning to write my promotion document)”* whilst another stated they had gained the confidence to submit an application to a new academic opening at WMG Warwick. Other participants noted that they have been more aware of the opportunities to use the skills developed as a result of Pfl including:

- ✓ Building and managing better relations with external research institutes
- ✓ Being more strategic in career decisions
- ✓ Being more conscientious about others’ perceptions
- ✓ Supporting decision-making within research teams
- ✓ Supporting students during supervision more effectively
- ✓ Organising and managing multidisciplinary research
- ✓ Considering leadership positions as the next career step
- ✓ Motivation to continue to develop leadership skills
- ✓ Confidence to apply for a role with more leadership responsibilities
- ✓ Realising the need to actively engaged in current leadership opportunities
- ✓ Recognising that leadership was a career goal

*“Organizing and managing multidisciplinary research is one of the main area I have used the skills I learned” Participant, Feb 2016*

*“The course increased my awareness of leadership around me as well as my own leadership experiences which I feel equipped to build on” Participant, Feb 2016*

*“I will be moving into a new role where I would be leading and managing more in the next few months [I will be using the skills I learned here]” Participant, Feb 2016*

*“I have been much more strategic about how I see myself as a leader, I have been more conscientious about how I think others see my leadership currently, and in the future” Participant, Feb 2016*

*“I got motivated to train myself to flourish the leading side of my character.” Participant, Feb 2016*

*“It gave me the confidence to apply for a role with more leadership responsibilities.” Participant, Feb 2016*

Importantly participants who attended PfL recognise that the decision to lead is one which they are in control of *“I realised that I need to actively lead where I am at. To do that, I need to get serious about my career goals and plan how I will achieve them” Participant, Feb 2016.*

#### **Impact Level 4: Outcomes**

This level measures the final impacts of PfL in relation to positive outcomes. Throughout this review of PfL, participants consistently reported increased confidence and a more positive outlook on leadership roles.

Participants are more proactive in seeking out opportunities to practise the skills learned and this change in behaviour is resulting in PfL alumni sharing examples such as

- ✓ Successfully securing a new academic post at WMG
- ✓ Starting a mentoring scheme as a launchpad for active pursuit of career goals
- ✓ Putting forward a research paper proposal
- ✓ Facilitating a research idea generating workshop
- ✓ Writing a NIHR Fellowship application
- ✓ Applying to new academic openings at the University

*“I started in the mentoring scheme and this has acted as a Launchpad for my active pursuit of my career goals. My lightbulb moment in this course was that I realised I want to be a leader.”*

#### **Review**

PfL is a successful course. Participants were able to comment on all the areas outlined in the learning objectives at the start of the course. It is a testament to the quality of course and facilitation that a number of participants were able to report level 4 impacts within six months of completion.

The major themes to report from the success of this course are reflection, confidence and networking all of which are articulated by a Research Fellow from WMS:

*“The preparing for leadership course was a really valuable use of my time. I was able to reflect on my own experience of leadership and management and*

*identify my leadership skills, as well as future goals. The course gave me the opportunity to build my leadership knowledge and skills dynamically with a wide range of other university staff, allowing for unique insights to be discussed in our breakout sessions.” Participant, Feb 2016*

## **Recommendations**

Participants were satisfied with the course organisation, time of year and length of time between day one and day two of the course. There was agreement the mix of reflection time and activity met the needs of the group.

*“It was useful to reflect on different leadership styles and the values I find important in order to consider the organisational culture I would want to create within a team.”*

The following list of recommendations to further enhance the course have been suggested by participants:

- ✓ The creation of a participant forum/private online space within the LDC site to encourage further collaboration and networking. (The plan being after October 2016 Pfl cohort to create a virtual PFL cohort ‘community’)
- ✓ Additional networking events for Research Active Staff
- ✓ Organise/facilitate networking specifically for collaboration
- ✓ Researcher forum breakfasts

Sandy Sparks  
Learning & Development Advisor, Research Active Staff  
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