



Coventry City of Culture Transforming Leadership Programme

Final Evaluation Report

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Executive Summary

Project Context, Aims and Objectives

The City of Culture Leadership Programme (CoCLP) was one of eighteen projects funded in 2019 by the Arts Council England (ACE) Transforming Leadership Programme. The ambition of the larger programme was that the leadership and workforce of the arts and culture sector will be supported to be appropriately skilled and from diverse backgrounds to support continued sector growth and long-term sustainability.

The City of Culture Leadership Programme (CoCLP) was the successful project bid by Coventry City of Culture Trust in partnership with Beatfreaks, Coventry University (Centre for Business in Society; Faculty of Arts and Humanities, International Centre for Transformative Entrepreneurship), Coventry University Social Enterprise, people make it work, TRG and Warwick Arts Centre. The bid's joint aim was to support the aims of both Transforming Leadership and the legacy aims of Coventry UK City of Culture 2021 (CoC21) which include inclusive sector development.

Whilst impact was varied and ever changing, it should be noted that the entire period of the CoCLP was heavily impacted by the pandemic, including the various 'lockdowns', related government restrictions, and impacts on working and personal lives, especially for those with health issues.

The City of Culture Trust were the accountable body. Representatives from the bidding organisations formed a Steering Group for the programme. In operational terms, the CoCLP was co-ordinated by the City of Culture Trust Programme Coordinator supported by the main delivery partner, people make it work.

Delivered over 24 months, the core aims of the CoCLP were to:

- Enhance the diversity of leadership in Coventry's cultural and creative sector to reflect the city's demographics
- Develop great, skilled cultural leaders embedded in the city of Coventry, and
- Inspire social change through cultural leadership.

Given these aims, the objectives were to:

- Develop and support 15 people who want to change the city, and be the next cultural leaders in Coventry
- Target unequal access to cultural management and leadership opportunities in Coventry
- Bring forward established, independent and emerging leaders from Coventry's Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities¹ to support the legacy of UK CoC 2021, and deliver against the key outcomes and impacts of UK CoC 2021.

Through its alignment with the UK City of Culture 2021 'Story of Change' and ACE Transforming Leadership, underlying the CoCLP's aims and objectives were three key elements that formed a framework for expected Programme delivery and experience: diversity, co-creation and the meaning of cultural leadership.

¹ BAME is the term used in initial programme scoping and recruitment material and does not reflect the current language preferences of the participants, programme team or Trust.

Within its person-centred frame, leadership programme activities – at individual and group level - included:

- Formal and informal personal, leadership and management training
- Leadership exposure from across the cultural sector
- A peer-based support programme
- Development of a dedicated learning hub
- Individual stipends (£10,000) and learning development funds (£4,000)
- Mentor and coaching programme
- Project development activity
- Matching with sector opportunities – from city to international level
- Final showcase event organised by the cohort.

Access to planned dedicated physical space in Coventry's creative industries-themed Fargo Village was severely curtailed until the last few months of the Programme, due to Covid-19 measures. In contrast, a dedicated on-line Learning Hub became a key resource and channel.

The Evaluation

Coventry University was engaged at the bidding stage to provide evaluation expertise and activity. The evaluation framework was set by the combined strategic objectives and evaluation requirements of the national ACE Transforming Leadership Programme – and its national evaluation activity – and the expected outcomes and impacts of Coventry UK City of Culture 2021, and its associated Programme Monitoring and Evaluation Strategy (PMES).

The evaluation methodology included review of programme documentation, monitoring reports and programme outputs and interviews with the Programme delivery team. Interviews with Steering Group members took place at programme commencement and end. Programme participants (the cohort) undertook the completion of an on-line Leadership Development Diagnostic and semi-structured interviews (or other forms of written or spoken word responses) at commencement, during and end of the Programme.

Individual sections of this Final Report provide the views of each of these interview groups.

Recruitment

Through an inclusive recruitment process a total of 96 Programme applications were received from individuals who wanted “to change the city and be the next cultural leaders in Coventry”.

The selected ‘cohort of 15’ met the programme aims of recruiting both against the diversity characteristics of the city and under-represented groups within cultural leadership. The Coventry cohort was notable in reflecting gender diversity. It was especially notable for its success in recruiting individuals declaring a disability or long-term health condition.

The remaining applicants, the ‘81 Allies’, following Development Days for all applicants were provided with 1:1 strength-based personal feedback and signposting in support of their careers and project ideas.

Individual Leadership Outcomes

All fifteen participants completed the Programme.

In the Final Diagnostic, across the 21 questions asked, out of a possible score of 10, no individual question scored a mean-based average of less than 7.31 for the cohort as a whole.

Across each of the 21 questions, the mean-based average diagnostic score increased for the cohort as a whole from the beginning to the end of the Programme. Overall, across the cohort, and for all the questions totalled, the average (mean) score rose from 6.98 on the Initial Diagnostic to 8.10 for the Final Diagnostic, an increase of 1.12.

On an individual level, the substantial majority reported an increasing mean average score, at high scores, by the time of the Final Diagnostic. Two participants reported a lower average score in the Final Diagnostic than in the Initial Diagnostic. Changes across the cohort ranged from a reduction in score of -1.57 to an increase of 3.14.

The Final Diagnostic asked a set of ACE mandated questions to provide data for the national evaluation across all the ACE Transforming Leadership projects. There were 13 respondents to these questions. Participants were asked to select from a list of Leadership Characteristics all those areas that they felt had been impacted by participating in the Programme.

Authentic in your own vision and voice	11
Collaborative in practice and enabling of others	10
Situated and contextually aware	8
Able to bring others with you	7
Inclusive and open to all communities	6

Participants were asked to select one of the above leadership characteristics they thought had changed the most through participation. Six participants chose ‘*authentic in your own vision and voice*’, (5 ‘changed a lot’, 1 ‘changed a little’).

A range of leadership achievements across each of the cohort members was evident by the end of the Programme. Examples included: consultancy work; creative project commissions and grant funding, creative industry full time employment; business registration and further skills and leadership development.

In interviews, and expressed on numerous occasions, the most common impact that the Programme had on individual participants was ‘improved confidence’ (and self-understanding), through coaching and mentoring, to follow their leadership and creative vision(s).

“I think having other people reflect back to you that what you are doing is important and has a space...I think that leads to a level of confidence in what I’ve been pursuing”.

“I’ve got a lot more confident in myself, in running a business, just from other people’s experiences and learning from them, listening to them. Given me more confidence in doing it myself”.

“Yeah, yeah, definitely developed. I think I’d be more confident being more comfortable, not necessarily feeling the need to jump at every opportunity that comes. So, there is a, there is a pacing to it, there is a plan, a thought process

behind things, yes to try things on, open to try things, but actually, it's got to fit it's got to feel and fit, be reciprocated both ways, not just all or one way"

"Because before I couldn't see myself being a leader, as per se. So that's why I've immersed myself into this programme, just because I wanted to see what does it mean to be a leader? And what do I need to do to be a leader and I found that actually what I was doing before I was growing, to become that, and the leadership programme has kind of opened the doors and showed me that I can be a leader"

"I've been interested in leadership and how people lead and what do leaders do, and what does it mean, etc. But it's sort of kept a bit more focused on this continuum, journey, or learning"

"...and kind of always having this dream and not really being able to, like, you know, bring it into reality. I think it's, it's kind of been more at the forefront of my mind, and more. You know, step by step, even though I have been, like, super busy, it's been I've been more able to pick up on those on those actions and, you know, things that I've needed to put in place to sort of start to make progress in that"

Collaboration as a Cohort

Examples of collaborative outputs by the cohort included: Coventry Cultural Strategy refresh consultation, the Big Tent Festival, the final showcase event and smaller group collaborations such as pop-up activity or support with local creative projects.

The collective aspiration of the Programme was acknowledged by the participants as challenging to keep in focus and implement in practice, as they continued to develop their own individual journeys of development and leadership.

Meeting the Programme Objectives

Overall, it is clear that the programme objectives were met in the main – and that these were achieved in the challenging external circumstances of the pandemic:

- A total of fifteen individuals who wanted to change the city were recruited, supported, and completed the Programme demonstrating a range of achievements and evidence of their leadership development
- The Programme's successful recruitment strategy identified a larger group of 'changemakers' in the city – the 81 allies – although their engagement essentially ended early in the Programme
- CoCLP supported creative leaders, entrepreneurs and practitioners who were more representative of the city's demographics than the current leadership profile. CoCLP successfully targeted unequal access to cultural management and leadership opportunities in Coventry given the underserved, marginalised and excluded socio-economic characteristics of the successful applicants
- Experiencing a number of barriers such as financial, neurodiversity and health conditions, and with a range of protected characteristics, the recruited cohort included also established, independent and emerging leaders from Coventry's Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities

- Set against the key outcomes and impacts of UK City of Culture 2021, CoCLP had a series of leadership outcomes ‘for individuals’, ‘for organisations’ and ‘for the arts/culture sector’:
 - expected outcomes for individuals around leadership were generally met
 - there was sporadic evidence of engagement with, and a leadership resource to, organisations generated by the Programme. At Programme end there were partial signs of ‘closing the gap’ between the cohort and organisations to achieve the desired organisational outcomes, and
 - Coventry pioneered an inclusive leadership development model, demonstrating the value of diversity in leadership, but outcomes and impacts to support building a more resilient, sustainable, place-based sector remained nascent at the Programme’s end.

Aim 1: Enhance the diversity of leadership in Coventry’s cultural and creative sector to reflect the city’s demographics

The major success of CoCLP has been to implement an inclusive approach to cultural leadership and development.

Using a recruitment approach designed to support inclusivity, CoCLP engaged successfully with emergent leaders and change makers reflective of the city, under-represented within cultural leadership, and who have been enabled to participate in the programme through removal of barriers to participation (the cohort of 15).

The success of this inclusive engagement process delivered a developmental opportunity, micro-grant funding and (loose) network membership for a similar and much larger potential leadership group in the city (the 81 Allies).

Utilising a co-creation approach, all the cohort completed the Programme. There is clear evidence of leadership characteristics and outcomes achieved across the cohort, including a range of personal achievements.

The cohort can self-identify as leaders, have developed a range of knowledge, skills and practices of leadership and have the confidence and enhanced ability to navigate progress of their careers.

To achieve these outcomes the Programme needed to provide greater levels of individual support – including the Programme undertaking its own learning in the support offered.

The need to move to a stronger person-centred delivery model, combined with the relentless impact of the Pandemic on delivery processes and modes, impacted on collaborative Programme leadership activities.

Diversity of leadership journeys is evident across the cohort. Some are still early in these journeys, some have strengthened their chosen pathways considerably and there are a mix of cultural, social, economic and creative practice pathways.

Over the period of Programme delivery, the context has been one of substantial societal questioning of existing social and economic structures and ‘norms’. This has included issues of equality, diversity and inclusion. This context was seen to be influential for the cohort, galvanising and supporting their identification as leaders as well as highlighting needs and intersectional issues.

Aim 2: Develop great, skilled cultural leaders embedded in the city of Coventry

In the creation of leadership journeys by the cohort, this aim and the nature and extent of 'embedding' in the city of Coventry has been subject to examination and debate.

As with the ambitions of the larger ACE Transforming Leadership programme, an expected outcome had been that Programme 'graduands' would be better enabled to move into the organisations and workforce of the arts and culture sector ('arts, museums and libraries'), including potentially attaining leadership positions and roles within existing cultural organisations, city and sector structures. This can be seen as a process of 'embedding'. More intermediate steps might, for example, see an expansion of networks and contacts, collaborations and growing visibility.

For CoCLP there was an additional early expectation that such visibility and impact might be achieved from the combined and collaborative presence and weight of the cohort acting within the city.

On the Programme's end, there are a few examples of the cohort's growing relationships and positions with existing structures but, in most cases, the development of leadership journeys has not included seeking such outcomes. To use the words of interviewees, the cohort has shown a lack of interest in 'positional power' and sought (other) ways to 'speak truth to power'. Arguably, their developing visions of leadership have included their own 'sense of sector' – or at least what they wish to be part of, and/or seek to change/lead.

These more differentiated pathways might better be understood as contributing less to 'existing structures' in the city and more so to a diffuse and multi-dimensional city ecology. Cohort interviewees did describe their newfound confidence to self-identify as leaders within their own communities, practice areas and niches and which are to be found throughout various 'under the radar' parts and networks of the city (given the Programme's initial inclusive and place-based recruitment approach).

Recognition of individual, differentiated, and diffuse pathways stands in contrast to initial transformational – and possibly in hindsight ambitious – Programme expectations that a highly engaged, networked and visible cohort of newly empowered and diverse leaders would enable, support, and even drive, organisational, sector and city change.

Greater provision of person-centred support, and the Pandemic's impact on delivery worked against such ambitions, but so too did the lack of substantial Programme delivery with a greater 'investment in place', including stronger and sustained mechanisms to connect the cohort to existing (demand) structures.

The '81 allies' opened a window of opportunity for greater place-based impact, but the Programme was unable to take this forward.

Aim 3: Inspire social change through cultural leadership

The Programme has inspired social change through cultural leadership.

The Programme began this process through its successful and innovative inclusive recruitment approach. Through careful and substantial design it uncovered and brought forward a large number of individuals with the potential to undertake, or undertaking, social change (within the city). This comprised the cohort and allies, a large number of whom did not identify (formally) with cultural leadership or the cultural sector.

Both groups have gone on to undertake social change projects (Programme projects, microgrants) although collated knowledge of these and their impacts is lacking.

Of potentially greater, and longer term, impact is the role of the Programme cohort as agents of social change. Other terms used to describe this group has been as 'disruptive activists' and taking forward models of 'lived experience leadership'.

The strongest leadership characteristic articulated by the cohort at the end of the Programme was 'to be authentic in vision and voice'. Given historical underinvestment and marginalisation, the development of a set of (cultural) leaders with an understanding of context, the confidence to speak truth to power and the spaces within which to do so could be a significant legacy for the city.