

City of Culture Leadership Programme Evaluation

Interim Phase Report

February 2022

Henry, N. and Broughton, K.

Contents

1. Evaluation of the City of Culture Leadership Programme.....	3
1.1 Introduction.....	3
1.2 This Report.....	3
2. The City of Culture Leadership Programme	4
2.1 Programme activity	4
2.2 Recent activity: Views from the cohort.....	5
2.2.1 A sense of change in the programme	5
2.2.2 Summary	7
2.2.3 Cohort suggestions for the programme	8
3. Leadership Journeys: leadership diagnostic.....	9
3.1 Leadership Diagnostic: A longitudinal comparison	9
3.1.1 At cohort level – an uplift in the overall scoring of leadership characteristics, especially for personal professional leadership development.....	10
3.1.2 Almost three-quarters of cohort individuals reported an overall uplift in their individual leadership characteristics score.....	10
3.1.3 Summary	11
4. Leadership Journeys: cohort interviews	12
4.1 Introduction.....	12
4.2 Leadership styles	12
4.3 Perceptions of leadership journeys	12
4.3.1 Confidence building.....	12
4.3.2 Skills and knowledge	13
4.3.3 Cohort collaborations.....	13
4.3.4 Networks and contacts	13
4.3.5 Step changes and Light Bulb Moments	14
4.4 Cultural Leadership in Coventry: aspirations and legacy.....	14
4.5 Summary	15
5. Conclusions.....	16
5.1 Conclusions.....	16

1. Evaluation of the City of Culture Leadership Programme

1.1 Introduction

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

The successful bid was led 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 both transforming leadership and the outcomes and impacts of Coventry UK City of Culture 2021 (CoC21).

To be delivered over 24 months, the core aims of the CoCLP are 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
- Inspire social change through cultural leadership.

Given these aims, the objectives are 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 Ethnic¹ communities to support the legacy of UK CoC 2021
- Deliver against the key outcomes and impacts of UK CoC 2021.

An *Initial Phase Report* has been completed previously setting out the recruitment and initial phases of the programme, early indications of progress and learning from the initial phase².

1.2 This Report

This short Interim Report covers the programme period July 2021 to December 2021, a period during which programme delivery and its context continued to be impacted substantially by the pandemic, related government restrictions and, more generally, continuing impacts on working and personal lives.

This Interim Report covers:

- A further round of completion of the Leadership Development Diagnostic by the cohort of programme participants, and
- A further round of individual interviews with the cohort of programme participants.

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

² Henry, N., Broughton, K. and Barker, V. (2021) *City of Culture Leadership Programme: Initial Phase Report*. A Report to Coventry City of Culture Trust, Coventry University

2. The City of Culture Leadership Programme

2.1 Programme activity

Following completion of the Foundation Strands, the curriculum focus of this period of the programme was on the Programme Development Strands: Enabling my Creative Practice, Building my Business and Developing my Leadership.

Whilst the continued and relentless impact of the pandemic on cultural activity and daily life continued to be felt throughout this period, with the easing of restrictions the programme adopted a hybrid model with on-line and face-to-face delivery (and often combined). This was joined with greater access to the dedicated physical space for the cohort in Fargo Village (a re-purposed industrial space in the centre of Coventry designed for creative, independent businesses, cultural events and public activities).

A new aspect of the curriculum was the introduction of Artist Spotlights whereby each of the cohort members took it in turns to talk on their current projects, understanding of their personal development and to raise topics of personal interest for conversation.

These shared learning and reflective sessions sat alongside a further emphasis on individual coaching using a dedicated programme coach. Running in parallel with coaching, resource was introduced to support mentoring relationships and the brokering and co-ordination of specific opportunities for cohort members as their leadership journeys began to be formulated more strongly.

Continued understanding of the diversity and depth of access needs and requirements were reinforced through these developmental conversations and included additional training for programme staff and the sourcing of further expertise and cohort support through local and national providers.

The early part of this reporting period saw Coventry City of Culture 2021 expand its array and extent of activity after its delayed May 2021 start, cohort members developing their practitioner and leadership confidence, and the programme's profile being raised, leading to the emergence of a number of individual and cohort opportunities. Examples included specific involvement in the production and delivery of different funded City of Culture projects; guest appearances, inputs, presentations and chairing at several local, regional and national events, summits and such like dedicated to ideas and discussions around the role of culture (in places) today; and participation in small community and enterprise projects with local institutions and stakeholders.

Programme Development

As 2021 has come to an end, the programme's emphasis has amplified around:

- 'what it takes to realise potential': the need to reinforce the stewarding and facilitation of a person-centred learning and development experience attuned to the individual access and support needs of this highly inclusive cohort of learners - and which in turn has supported these individuals to seek to 'own their leadership'
- 'leadership outcomes': related to the developing assets and potentials of both the individual learners and the collective cohort, further interrogation and exemplification of "what does it mean to be 'changemakers'" – in Coventry. In the programme's progression of ideas

shaping, project development, brokering, co-ordination and embedding into (especially local and regional) opportunities, the possibilities of 'how change is made' have continued to be revealed beyond the cohort's original project ideas on entering the programme. Change processes might include, for example, creative practice (through varied public, civic and enterprise projects); influencer, contributor and demonstrator roles; as well as more evident leadership modes through institutional positions, organisational employment and/or the development of new cultural and social change infrastructures.

2.2 Recent activity: Views from the cohort

A total of 11 interviews of cohort members for this Interim Report took place between October and November 2021. Since the last set of interviews in early February 2021, the majority of interviewed cohort members remained very positive about the leadership programme as a whole and highly appreciative of those involved in delivering it. A range of reflections were provided by cohort members about the programme's recent activities, and the most common themes that arose are outlined below.

2.2.1 A sense of change in the programme

Engagement

Cohort members lamented the unavoidable negative impact that the pandemic has had on the programme. The loosening of pandemic restrictions allowed the opening of Fargo as a key resource, and enabled cohort members to meet in person. However, there was a consensus that attendance at cohort group sessions/activities had gradually reduced over time and particularly since summer 2021. This included the gradual shift away from wholly on-line delivery.

The most common reason put forward for fading attendance was that cohort members were too busy with their own individual development and work. As things 'opened up' more, and as the programme's support progressed, greater choices and opportunities for cohort members to develop as leaders was seen as reducing their capacity to attend.

"It became really difficult to actually be able to touch base. And I started to then decide, work out like, 'hold on, in this programme, it's about my leadership – so if I'm doing my leadership work and not going to the programme, is that ok?'" (Interview Recording 8).

Similarly, as capacity to engage became more challenging, several cohort members described their utilisation of the programme as becoming 'on-tap', engaging in what they felt was relevant to helping their individual development and work they were now doing.

It was noted also that short notice of activities/sessions being communicated meant that in a number of instances this approach had to be adopted, although recordings of sessions were very helpful for those unable to attend.

Concurrently, some cohort members felt that people should make more of an effort to engage in group sessions/activities. They cited reasons such as the agreed 'co-creation' approach of the programme, showing respect to those delivering the sessions, and given the generous funding members were receiving from the programme.

Whilst engagement in group cohort activities/sessions had reduced over this period, it was recognised by interviewees that engagement in individual-centred support activities had increased.

There was a consensus also of regret regarding the loss of a key leading member of the Programme's delivery, as many cohort members found this individual's input particularly inspiring and very supportive. Most viewed this individual as the leading figure for the Programme and some felt this withdrawal had been a factor in the loss of momentum and focus within the Programme over this period.

Activities

There was a consensus across the interviewees that the leadership sessions were inspiring and insightful regarding reflecting on their own leadership style aspirations. Cohort members also agreed that the inspirational talks from a variety of cultural leaders were very beneficial, for example:

"Hearing first-hand experiences from people at the top of the tree, kind of made me sit and think about how I, as an individual, would want to work, again, within this industry. And how I would want to support others within the industry. So there's been a few speakers that have really stood out to me... There's not been one speaker that hasn't been open and honest – everyone has given back" (Interview Recording 9).

The individual-centred support has been extremely well-received by almost all cohort members. There was a consensus that the one-to-one support was highly engaging and impactful, for example:

"Some of the one-on-one conversations, for example with xx, that helped me a lot as well. Just like talking about where I am in terms of my progression, in terms of what I want to do in the arts sector in Coventry. It made me visualise where I want to be, for example, in the next couple of years. What I want to do. Who are the people I need to contact to achieve some of the objectives that I have" (Interview Recording 7).

The interviewees strongly appreciated the process of identification and setting-up of mentor support and viewed it as highly beneficial. Such access to people and networks was something that a number of cohort members had previously never had:

"I felt like it's been hard to find someone who's more established than me in my industry that is willing to, sort of, help. So yeah, that's been good" (Interview Recording 4).

During this period, the continued impact of the programme stipend, growing consideration of use of individual learning funds, and other resources made available, became more evident in responses:

"I think because it gives you the time, you know, and that's a big thing isn't it, you know. If you're just developing as a leader you do do lots of training and you do do lots of reading, but you're not paid for the time. So I think having that financial aspect to the programme has been really beneficial, because it allows me to book time out in my diary and not have to worry – I can dedicate this and I haven't got to worry about the bills mounting up" (Interview Recording 3).

There is an opportunity cost to doing training as an investment (at least in the short term), so the stipend compensates for the potential financial losses of investing time and effort in development programmes. This has also incentivised some members to look at future

funding (e.g. from Arts Council England) for further training. The financial support has also meant purchase of much-needed equipment to assist development in some instances.

Cohort members also appreciated the allocated space in Fargo, which had become available as pandemic restrictions were lifted.

Legacy

The CoCLP sits within the broader Coventry, UK City of Culture 2021 programme and its strong commitment to legacy.³ In turn, and especially given the future leadership objectives of CoCLP, legacy is a key objective and concern of the programme. This interim period included the programme entering in to its final planned six months and more explicit consideration of legacy.

A number of interviewees mentioned a lack of understanding and/or clarity about the programme's next steps, its official end point, and what legacy activities might take place to sustain 'the cohort' after the programme ended. 'Reset' conversations were mentioned as part of the post-summer activities, including discussion of legacy, but a sense of haziness was evident in many interviews:

"We had quite a clear curriculum for the year and I'm not really 100% sure where we are on that now...And also like the, you know, the legacy conversations that I've been involved in, seem to be very very loose, very loosely held and unclear as to what I could bring to the table for that. And I was really unclear as to what the City of Culture bring to the table on that" (Interview Recording 2).

It may be that such dialogue, information and communication was unclear, or had not been absorbed by some cohort members; arguably it could be expected that such pathways may materialise as leadership develops further across the cohort.

2.2.2 Summary

The continued impact of the pandemic on the programme, including keeping momentum and managing the gradual 'return to normal', has been evident in this period as the context for what could be seen as a transition phase in the programme's curriculum delivery.

This transition saw expansion of individual support sustaining engagement in the programme as some group activity momentum waned. Overall, the cohort remained very positive and appreciative of the support and resources that the programme offered at this stage. Indeed, there was a sense of continued expansion of appreciation and understanding of the programme's benefits and opportunities.

The transition of – or evolution in – the programme was described in one instance as 'The Guilt of Choice'. As individual leadership journeys continued to develop and expand – facilitated by the programme – so engagement in the, but more so commitment to, group and cohort activities and the programme's opening founding approach became harder. Yet, of course, by taking up and driving forward individual opportunities, some cohort members have been demonstrating both 'taking ownership' of their leadership and/or 'leadership in action'; key objectives and outcomes for the programme:

³ See https://www.coventry.ac.uk/globalassets/media/global/city-of-culture/monitoring--evaluation/city-of-culture_pme-strategy_jan20.pdf

“But I’ve got loads of work because of that programme and because of the stuff before, so I’m doing the leadership ‘in action’. So that was like the real... that was like the biggest tussle” (Interview Recording 8).

2.2.3 Cohort suggestions for the programme

A range of suggestions were made in cohort interviews when considering their experience of the programme during the interim period of reporting:

- Increasing engagement in group activities/sessions: better mechanisms to hold people to account for their attendance; greater notice periods for communicating activities/sessions; content of some activities/sessions being more appropriate to where certain cohort members are now at (though members were aware of the inclusion issues surrounding this, given the diversity of the cohort).
- Greater notice periods and longer durations before deadlines for involvement in projects/productions under the City of Culture 2021 – to support enhanced planning, design and collaboration.
- Further clarification of the relationship between the Leadership Programme and the City of Culture 2021 Programme and its membership in regards to opportunities and connections.
- Developing group legacy: legacy activities to be taken forward in the context of individuals or on a small group basis. Suggesting a network-based or more individualised approach to legacy activities for the cohort (and check-ins): *“A project of 15 artists takes like years to cultivate and have the right process. So I think there’s going to be pockets [of collaboration within the cohort] and they’ve already started to arise and that’s not a problem, they’re really really good. But defining ourselves or doing one thing as a whole, you know, is slightly unreasonable because it would detract from some of the micro stuff that we’re doing. I think us, as individuals, are probably doing better work than if we were to pool our resources – at this moment” (Interview Recording 8).*
- Keeping up cross-cohort information through a short Briefing Communication or equivalent which would outline the main activities/roles that each cohort member is involved in.
- Further promotion and marketing of the cohort and their activities; for example, as part of the City of Culture programme.

3. Leadership Journeys: leadership diagnostic

3.1 Leadership Diagnostic: A longitudinal comparison

The evaluation is undertaking a longitudinal diagnostic exercise with the participant cohort. This diagnostic has been designed alongside capturing the activity and monitoring data required by the national evaluation.

Table 1 below provides the scores by the cohort across the 21 questions asked within the Leadership Development Diagnostic. Initial Diagnostic reporting took place in January 2021 with Interim Diagnostic completion in August 2021.

Table 1: Cohort Leadership Characteristic Scores

Diagnostic Question	Initial Diagnostic Average Score (out of 10)	Interim Diagnostic Average Score (out of 10)	Change from Initial to Interim Diagnostic	Range of Scores Initial	Range of Scores Interim
1. I can motivate others to effect positive change	7.73	8.07	0.34	4 to 10	5 to 10
2. I can persuade policymakers and funders of the value of what I do	6.27	7.13	0.86	3 to 9	3 to 10
3. I feel confident practicing advocacy and leadership	6.73	7.47	0.74	4 to 10	4 to 10
4. I am better able to communicate my own vision for the future	7.13	7.53	0.40	4 to 10	5 to 10
5. I can explain the values and vision that drive my work and my approach	7.53	8.13	0.60	5 to 10	4 to 10
6. I understand my leadership style	6.13	7.80	1.67	3 to 8	3 to 10
7. I am better at working collaboratively with others to achieve more together	6.93	7.67	0.74	4 to 10	4 to 10
8. I have more connections and wider networks now	7.27	8.27	1.00	3 to 10	6 to 10
9. I know how to learn from, work with, and maintain relationships with connections in my network	7.00	7.80	0.80	3 to 9	4 to 10
10. I know how to build confidence in others and support their goal realisation	6.80	8.00	1.20	3 to 9	4 to 10
11. I understand the ways in which working together can benefit the city	8.07	8.13	0.06	5 to 10	5 to 10
12. I am better at actively including others in my work	6.93	7.53	0.60	3 to 10	5 to 10
13. I understand how to recognise the importance of diversity and inclusivity in my work	7.93	8.67	0.74	3 to 10	7 to 10
14. I am better aware of the context I am working in and how I can make a difference	6.60	7.20	0.60	2 to 9	4 to 10

15. I understand the meaning of context	7.73	7.80	0.07	2 to 10	1 to 10
16. I understand how to adapt my leadership to my context	6.73	6.80	0.07	2 to 9	1 to 10
17. I have made progress on my leadership journey emotionally	6.93	7.53	0.60	4 to 9	1 to 10
18. I have made progress on my leadership journey professionally	6.40	8.27	1.87	2 to 10	7 to 10
19. I know how to identify my own skills development needs and address them to improve my leadership	6.47	8.00	1.53	3 to 9	4 to 10
20. I know where to go for information, support and resources as part of my leadership approach	6.60	7.40	0.80	2 to 9	3 to 10
21. I feel connected to Coventry as a leader	6.60	6.60	0.00	3 to 9	1 to 10
MEAN AVERAGE	6.98	7.70	0.72	N/A	N/A

3.1.1 At cohort level – an uplift in the overall scoring of leadership characteristics, especially for personal professional leadership development

Looking at Table 1, across the cohort, and for all the questions totalled, the average (mean) score rose from 6.98 on the Initial Diagnostic to 7.70 for the Interim Diagnostic. It should be noted that one participant answered a score of 10 (out of 10) for all the questions asked but even with exclusion of these scores the overall mean rose to 7.54.

Looking across individual questions, the highest reported increase was Q.18 'I have made progress on my leadership journey professionally' increasing by 1.87, alongside 'I understand my leadership style', a 1.67 increase, and 'I know how to identify my own skills development needs and address them to improve my leadership', with a 1.53 increase.

All other increases were 1.00 or below with Q.21 'I feel connected to Coventry as a leader' seeing no change in average score. When testing the scores with the removal of the candidate scoring 10 for every question, Q.11, Q.15, Q.16 and Q.21 saw slight reductions in average score between the initial and interim diagnostic. In comparison to the uplift in scores against personal leadership development, these scores suggest greater challenge about finding the position of their leadership role within the city and its contexts.

3.1.2 Almost three-quarters of cohort individuals reported an overall uplift in their individual leadership characteristics score

Of those recording an uplift in their scores in Table 1, eight individuals saw significant increases in their overall average score of between 1.09 and 2.29. One candidate saw a drop in average score of 1.62.

Looking across the leadership characteristic questions, whilst a couple of questions saw a significant uplift in their minimum score recorded (for example, Q.13 'I understand how to recognise the importance of diversity and inclusivity in my work'), a number of questions saw lower minimum scores recorded such as Q.17 'I have made progress on my leadership journey emotionally' and Q.21 'I feel connected to Coventry as a leader'.

3.1.3 Summary

In summary, the diagnostic reported an overall upward trajectory in candidate's scoring of their leadership across an array of characteristics. In some instances this uplift was significant, and only in one case did individual scoring see a significant drop. Particularly notable was candidates growing confidence and understanding of their own personal leadership development, although there was some evidence that this should be set against the yet to be full developed aim to find a role for this enhanced leadership potential in the city.

4. Leadership Journeys: cohort interviews

4.1 Introduction

Whilst this remains an interim reporting moment, some indicative questions were asked of cohort members concerning areas such as their emerging (knowledge of) 'leadership style' and their 'leadership journeys' as they progress through the programme. The majority of cohort members appeared through their responses to be able to associate with a particular leadership style or theme. Furthermore, they could articulate developments in their leadership journeys, both through positive perceptions and/or demonstrable examples.

4.2 Leadership styles

The most common leadership style that cohort members discussed was that of 'authentic leadership' or 'authenticity' in leadership. Cohort members did not always name the concept of authentic leadership explicitly, but rather implicitly – for example, a number felt that they related to the idea of 'being themselves' and 'being inclusive' in leadership roles.

A number of interviewees highlighted a 'collaborative leadership' style – highlighting the importance of listening, empathy and being supportive, as well as leading by example. A further style mentioned was that of 'transformational leadership' – identifying and then jointly making the most of other people's positive attributes, assets, soft/hard skills and knowledge. One cohort member suggested a 'fluid leadership' model whereby leaders can 'appear' from various groups for specific activities they are passionate about or confident in.

4.3 Perceptions of leadership journeys

Interviewees were asked for their views on their personal leadership journeys since their last interview, including providing examples of such development in their leadership. Key themes raised in the responses are outlined below.

4.3.1 Confidence building

As a direct result of the leadership programme, the most common development mentioned in their leadership journeys was that of 'increased confidence'. A range of deliverables were responsible for this, in particular the sessions by the lead delivery person for the programme, Cultural Leaders talks, and the support offered in one-to-one sessions. Examples provided of increased confidence were numerous. For example, one interviewee stated how they now feel sufficiently confident to 'take the reigns' as a leader, after the programme finishes:

"I feel I've been given the confidence and the tools to just carry on and not need to ask permission or anything. It'll just be 'right, I fancy doing this project, let's find some money, let's find some people'." (Interview Recording 1)

Another cohort member highlighted how their increased belief and knowledge of things had in combination increased their confidence:

"A little bit of everything – more belief, more knowledge about funding, more knowledge about structuring the company, more knowledge about changing and moving forward and what we can do different to be more efficient" (Interview Recording 8).

Others talked of now being able to 'see the wood for the trees' and which enabled them to identify those things necessary for their professional role and personal development too. Or

that the one-on-one support enabled them to be self-reflective and resulted in improved confidence *'to just go for it'* with certain ideas and to turn them into reality.

Even if some members of the cohort were well-established with skills and networks, almost all interviewees said that the programme's support had enhanced their confidence, and new developments ascribed to confidence included taking a new play to a festival and accelerated business entrepreneurship.

4.3.2 Skills and knowledge

Similarly, the impacts of the acquisition of skills and knowledge during the programme were beginning to be mentioned. One interviewee highlighted the importance of the programme for learning about how to run a business:

"The 'business' side of the programme has helped me a lot, I think. I'm all good with the creative aspect of my work but the business side is what I struggle with. So I've used those sessions mainly...yeah, for finance and stuff like that" (Interview Recording 4).

Another already had good experience of leadership but commented on how they were utilising the programme to 'repurpose' their skills and experience into the arts and culture sector, identifying the 'steps' for developing their own business in this arena. A further interviewee had invested some of their Individual Learning Fund into a formally accredited training programme; what they described as a bold step which they would previously not have taken.

4.3.3 Cohort collaborations

A number of examples of collaborations between cohort members were described. One interviewee reported the development of 'pop-up shops' as a result of collaboration between two cohort members sharing ideas, actions and resources, and utilising the programme's support and facilities. Another cohort member received support and resources from at least three other cohort members to develop and deliver dance projects and educational initiatives:

"So I spoke to xx and xx sent an email to the cohort...and there were some people interested from the cohort which came, and managed to deliver it...The involvement and the help has been really beneficial to me – as well as the support that you have from everyone. And just by knowing the cohort – for me the leadership programme has been the middle person or the middle between the artist and getting in touch with CoC 2021" (Interview Recording 7).

Furthermore most of the interviewees also cited City of Culture 2021 projects whereby the whole cohort had collaborated as a group to deliver specific projects despite the challenges of tight deadlines and short notice.

4.3.4 Networks and contacts

A majority of interviewees (though less so for some more established cohort members) reported that the programme had been instrumental already in creating or enhancing their networks and key contacts (beyond those generated in the cohort). One member, for example, reported that their wider networks had been significantly expanded as a result of their involvement and a key person in their sector is now acting as their mentor locally. They were highly positive as to how this mentor was exactly the type of local mentor they needed to progress their project which had already had some success.

Another cohort member stated that whilst they had experience of developing and delivering projects, being relatively new to the Coventry area, the programme and cohort were crucial to developing their networks and contacts needed to get these off the ground:

“I just don’t know how...who are the people that I need to talk to? Especially because I was working a lot outside Coventry. I didn’t know a lot of people in Coventry, so it was good to have that and see who’s there. As well as other people to see that I’m here and realise what my skills are and how I can help within their organisation, for projects and things like that. Having that recognised by others was really good for me. My business, opened in 2019, has grown, every year, and the leadership programme has been part of that journey and that helped with that massively.” (Interview Recording 7).

4.3.5 Step changes and Light Bulb Moments

Cohort members were asked about important ‘light bulb moments’ that may have made a step change in how they thought or acted in terms of their development. One interviewee stated that, following a workshop, they had learned they were more confident and communicative in specific contexts, and this was really important to know when deciding on what events or activities to engage in:

“Like, when meeting people for the first time, to go through this model of ‘Affinity, Curiosity, Confidence, Commitment’. And that was like, such a light bulb moment for me, because I definitely tried all of those but in the opposite order. And thinking about when you lead with ‘curiosity’ it’s like – its very nosey. If you lead with ‘confidence’ it’s a bit arrogant, if you lead with commitment its clingy...And I got myself into a real funk, thinking that I wasn’t able to communicate and nobody around me understood what I was saying...And I think I had to do a speech for [an event] and like, ‘oh wow, like, I CAN communicate’. I just have to make sure that the ‘context’ in which I’m in is right for me to communicate” (Interview Recording 11).

Another light bulb moment was identified connected to one-to-one sessions:

“It’s the first time I’ve had the opportunity to have like a really good peer-to-peer chat, with someone listening and reflecting back what I’ve said, and encouraging me with the things that I believe in and feel that are going to be beneficial to people. And then to have that captured...It’s really helped me to prioritise the things that I feel are important...Like, the space to do that has been a real game changer” (Interview Recording 2).

For one interviewee a step-change example in the development of their leadership and business was that without the support of the programme they argued that they would have been unlikely to have gained possession of a retail unit.

4.4 Cultural Leadership in Coventry: aspirations and legacy

Given the objectives and desired outcomes of the leadership programme, interviewees were asked about their aspirations in relation to legacy and engagement with and/or embedding within arts, culture and change-making networks within Coventry.

For some, in particular the more established members, they reflected on how the programme has been delivering an ‘enhancement’ of their skills, knowledge and aspirations and often in a more incremental way rather than through tangible step-changes. For others, the programme has been highly influential in developing their personal and professional aspirations, whether in existing roles or through new projects.

One cohort member felt that, because of their young age, they were often not taken seriously regarding their creative and business ideas. As part of the leadership programme,

the interviewee argued how this had provided a sense of legitimacy or authority; people 'took xx more seriously' which helped to overcome barriers. In relation to this, a number of the cohort highlighted the importance of the programme supporting access to, engaging and, ultimately, embedding them within particular networks that would support the achievement of their aspirations. At the same time, there were members of the cohort who felt that the responsibility to achieve these aspirations was on the individual and that they needed to be as pro-active as possible.

One cohort member felt they were still deep in the training and development phase of their journey but were 'on the cusp' of taking their knowledge and skills 'out there'. Another cohort member felt that there now needed to be more focus from the programme on developing their organisation as much as them as an individual, and that remained their focus. One cohort member also said that there needed to be more formal mechanisms for the cohort to 'learn from each other' as there were a lot of skills and knowledge to hand just within the cohort itself, and that this had not been exploited sufficiently. Another cohort member also felt that people should be pro-active in linking up with other cohort members in order to develop opportunities, as this had been very beneficial to that cohort member. Greater communication and marketing of the cohort's work was suggested by some members.

There was some discussion of the role of the City of Culture (or City of Culture Trust) in relation to supporting the cohort and having a legacy. There were mixed views on this – some had benefited a great deal from the City of Culture whilst others felt that opportunities had been missed or that there were other strategic agendas that were not aligned to their own. Networks discussed by interviewees were predominantly specific networks in their own sub-sector that they were involved in, in contrast to any broader sense of an ecosystem.

Various cohort members are now working on funding bids for a range of professional development, business development and other project ideas for the future.

4.5 Summary

Based on the cohort interviews, the majority of cohort members can describe a journey of development of their confidence, leadership skills and knowledge, and in many cases with demonstrable examples and real-life outcomes. These journeys are differentiated in scale and scope, and can be connected to the variety of activities which have been undertaken within the programme to date.

Belief in and knowledge of individual leadership styles is discernible as the basis for growing evidence of leadership in action.

5. Conclusions

5.1 Conclusions

This Interim Report provides a short update on the programme for the second half of 2021, when pandemic conditions and related government regulations were still in force, and when the economy and society began to open-up – if with substantial uncertainty. One such uncertainty could be encapsulated as physical, on-line and/or hybrid?

For the programme this delivery context combined with a growing paradox for the participants as to how to manage individual development opportunities and leadership growth vis-à-vis instilled group dynamics and commitments.

One strand of evidence for such advances in individual development and leadership across almost all the cohort – and to a significant extent for some – is within the increased scores reported against the Leadership Characteristics Diagnostic.

A further evidence strand is that provided in descriptions of leadership journeys in interview; where programme participants were able to identify and demonstrate how greater confidence, knowledge and skills and forms of collaboration are seeing emerging demonstrations of forms of leadership such as through creative practice, commissions and entrepreneurship.

As participants entered the final few months of the programme, insights and concerns around individual, group and (place-based) legacy dynamics were beginning to come to the fore.

The Final Evaluation will see a further round of diagnostics and cohort interviews and journeys alongside interviewing of a broad range of individuals associated with the programme as the basis for a return to the original aims, objectives, expected outcomes and evaluation questions set for the City of Culture Leadership Programme.