

Sponsorship at its best - The role of Sponsor(s)



Cohort One participants have really valued the support and contribution of their sponsor. Click here to listen to their reflections on the value of a sponsor.

What do we mean by Sponsorship & what it looks like at its best?

The role of sponsors was a recurring theme during our inquiries across Social Care, Social Work, and Health to inform the design of Developing Senior Systems Leadership.

Contributors emphasised the size of the transition required to step up into a new executive, director, or senior systems-level role. In paraphrasing, many existing senior executive-level leaders from our inquiry process said to us:

*“Who knew what was really involved in the role, until I arrived!
I can see the real value in helping the next generation of senior leaders step in with
more insight, knowledge, and preparedness
– I want to help them; indeed, I am, we are, obliged to...”*
Chief Executive, Health - Inquiry Phase

Who is a Sponsor?

Sponsors can be the nominators and line managers of the applicant.

And/or Sponsors can also be other senior leaders who may not have a line management relationship with the applicant but want to be supportive. These could be internal or external to your own organisation.

Sponsors are likely to be at Chief Executive, Chief Officer, or Director level in Health & Social Work. In Social Care, they may be the Chair or Chief Executive of the organisation.

Sponsors external to the applicant’s organisation will hold senior systems-level leadership positions, potentially influencing the strategic and national landscape of social care, social work, and/or health in Scotland.

Benefits of sponsorship include:

- Learners grow in confidence to learn in the moment. They experiment, innovate, and trust their own judgement. They model these positive behaviours within their own teams and with others.
- It creates conditions for ongoing learning exchange, open and authentic conversation, and stretch learning experiences.
- Leaders learn from challenging circumstances rather than sometimes being overwhelmed by them. It avoids leaders from being crushed when they perceive they have made a mistake or them becoming indecisive, and reluctant to ask for support or to question.

Sponsor role in nominating and supporting you as a participant on the programme

How will the Sponsor add value to individuals and the cohort?

It starts from the outset – with a sponsored application

Sponsors are asked to complete a sponsor section in the application form, in support of the applicant. This gives them the opportunity to set out their personal commitment to supporting the applicant and demonstrate the types of additional learning activities they will sponsor the applicant to undertake. These activities (see list of ideas below) are complementary to the formal 'Developing Systems Leadership Programme'.

The Sponsor section is factored into the selection process and will be reviewed and assessed alongside the applicant's submission. If the applicant is successful, both submissions will be incorporated into a personalised learning contract that underpins both the personalised and cohort learning needs.

If the applicant is successful in securing a place...

Sponsors will be contacted during the selection process, to further consolidate their commitment and to understand what and how the Sponsoring community can collectively support the cohort learning experience across the programme.

There is no doubt that sponsors bring enormous benefits to a programme like this and often make a significant difference to the outcomes of the programme both for individual participants and for the learning community. The value of working with an established and experienced leader as a sounding board, mentor, and critical friend cannot be overestimated. There are many ways in which sponsors can add value and some of the specific contributions that could be made are described in the list below.

Sponsors and participants will define their own contracts, and at the heart of the relationship is a willingness to be available, to listen, to help make sense of the experience of the participants in developing their own leadership, and to use their own connections to open access to the system that participants will not get in their current role. Sponsors will have a wealth of advice and insight to bring to the relationship. And if they also bring curiosity and share some of their 'unanswered questions' about leading at the senior level. This can lead to a different type of conversation which is often transformational.

Overall, our intention is that sponsors will walk alongside you and the cohort - enhancing the learning experience and supporting you to transfer your learning into practice.

Ideas for Sponsored Learning Activity

Below are some examples of sponsorship in action, to help you consider the Sponsor's role in enabling leaders to transition into roles at the most senior levels. The examples provided are not intended to be an exhaustive list, but rather an example of what sponsorship of a participant in Developing Senior Systems Leadership might look like in practice.

Sponsored learning activity - some examples, in practice could include...

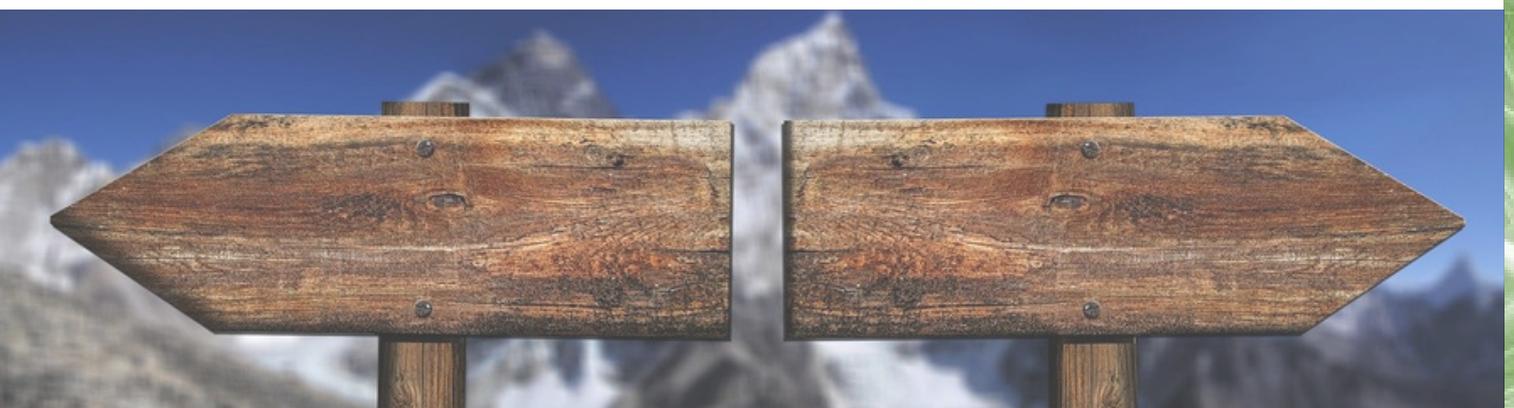
 **Contracting and Regular 1-2-1's** – Sponsor & Learner: focused on the learner, leaning into & reflecting on their learning goals, identifying opportunities to put programme learning into practice. Working with the sponsor, especially in 'challenging circumstances/ situations' to reflect on action and learning. Ongoing conversation & feedback, including Sponsor learning from the learner and adapting their practice too.

 **Insight into the 'executives' daily commitments** – making the invisible, visible – Sponsor enables the learner to walk in their shoes e.g., Providing cover / on-call duties on behalf of the organisation –observing interactions with other key stakeholders: people who use services, Non-Execs, politicians, Scottish government, etc.

 **Sponsored Experimentation in key settings and/or programmes of change.** Sponsors may support connections with other leaders within their own organisation or across the system. This could be in support of live collaborative work undertaken within the cohort.

 **Working with Feedback** – Giving it, seeking it out, receiving and integrating it. Sponsors support the learner to work with feedback as a regular practice – especially seeking feedback from all levels of leaders engaging with (not just seniors or peers).

Continued on next page...



Ideas for Sponsored Learning Activity (continued)

Sponsored learning activity - some examples, in practice could also include...

 **Experiencing the Board function, dynamics & accountabilities** - The sponsor helps create opportunities e.g. Shadowing/Mentoring from the Chair, establishing relationships and insights with Non-Executive Board members, Observing/contributing to board meetings (over time, i.e., beyond a one-off). The learner may also be supported to lead a high-profile executive portfolio on behalf of the executive team or management board, providing the opportunity to receive feedback from multiple executives or senior systems-level leaders.



 **Experiencing a wider strategic/governance environment** - e.g. Sponsor helps create opportunities for the learner to observe and/ or experience different settings e.g. insights into a Health Board, a Local Authority, Integrated Joint Board, Scottish Government, other National meetings, Scottish Parliament, Public meetings, or forums.

 **Strategic projects within organisation/system** - Sponsors identify and offer possible organisational/system pieces of work that may benefit from participants/alumni contributions.

 **Accessing other Leadership Insights and Perspectives** - Sponsors extend their own networks to secure experiences and/or individual learners 'self-agency' is enabled to go see/experience by the sponsor -e.g., a day in the life of a leader in a different organisation or sector.

 **Sponsors recognise and want a broader role in developing leaders within their organisation and the wider system.** - Sponsors recognise their role in developing senior systems leaders and are keen / expect to take part in offers like Developing Senior Systems Leadership e.g., as speakers, participants at cohort learning events, sponsors of individuals, supporters of live work.

 **Cohort/Sponsor Learning Community** - Conversations with sponsors and cohort one highlighted an appetite for creating a shared learning space together to share learning and explore leadership challenges and opportunities together. Whilst we are still experimenting and cocreating how this will work, with two sessions planned prior to the end of cohort one's formal time on the programme, we anticipate that these shared learning spaces will continue for subsequent cohorts and their sponsors.