



From Insight to Impact: Our Journey Towards Inclusive and Connected Cultures

2026 Report



Leading to Change

A Collective Journey of Leadership, Learning and System Change

This report is published in the context of renewed national commitment to improving working cultures across Scotland's public services. The Scottish Government's "Improving Wellbeing and Working Cultures" sets out a vision for compassionate leadership, inclusive workplaces, and psychologically safe environments — recognising that cultural transformation is essential to service reform.

Leading to Change contributes to this ambition not by replicating policy themes, but by enabling the conditions in which they can thrive: relational leadership, cross-sector collaboration, and equity in practice. Our work supports implementation of national policy by reflecting peoples' experience in leadership development activity, supporting leadership at all levels, and creating space for reflection, challenge and improvement.

Our Context:

- [Health and social care: improving wellbeing and working cultures - gov.scot and Improving Wellbeing and Working Cultures](#)
- [Health and Social Care Service Renewal Framework 2025-2035](#)
- [Scotland's Public Service Reform Strategy Delivering for Scotland](#)
- [Public service reform in Scotland: how do we turn rhetoric into reality? | Audit Scotland](#)
- [Health and Social Care Workforce Strategy¹](#)
- [Our Approach - Scotland's Population Health Framework - gov.scot](#)
- [Programme for Government 2025-26 Building the best future for Scotland](#)
- [The 21st Century Public Servant – Revisited – 21st Century Public Servant](#)

¹ Specifically the action 'Launch a new National Leadership Development Programme (NLDP) in the Summer of 2022 for all different levels within health and social care organisations and work to influence culture change across health and social care through this programme.' From 'Annex: Summary of Actions.

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Insights from Three Years of Leadership Development

Over the past three years, Leading to Change has operated in a dynamic and often turbulent public service environment and this has driven us to develop purposeful, empathic, innovative and sustainable solutions. Through continuous engagement, reflection, and adaptation, and grounding our approach in evidence and research, we have gathered valuable insights into what good leadership development looks like in practice — and what it takes to make it meaningful, inclusive, and impactful..

➤ Leadership is a System Lever — But Only When Connected

We've learned that leadership development must be embedded in the wider system to create real change. Standalone programmes are not enough as leaders need opportunities to connect, reflect, and co-create solutions across boundaries. Our stakeholder-led approach has shown that cross-sector dialogue and collaboration are essential to building trust and enabling reform.

➤ Impact is Felt Before It's Measured

As a non-employing programme, we've faced challenges in capturing traditional metrics of impact. However, we've learned that stories, reflections, and practice-based insights often reveal more than numbers. Leaders consistently report increased confidence, clarity, and resilience — and describe how they've used their learning to influence teams, services, and strategic decisions. In senior leader cohorts this has been seen to be a precursor to career moves following engagement with our programme.

➤ Equity Must Be Designed In

Leadership development must be accessible and representative and where psychological safety and belonging are not assumed but actively cultivated. We've learned that equity of opportunity is not a passive outcome — it requires intentional design, inclusive outreach, and continuous feedback. For us, equity of opportunity across sectors has also been a key focus as well as our work with leaders from diverse backgrounds, and relevant networks, which has helped shape more inclusive offers and surfaced systemic barriers that still need to be addressed.

➤ Feedback is a Strategic Asset

We've learned to treat evaluation and feedback as a strategic compass. Participant insights have shaped our delivery model, informed new offers, and helped us respond to emerging needs. By working in partnership with others, both internal and external to the public sector system, we have been able to use the 'doing with, not doing to' approach to evaluate in real time. This iterative approach has allowed us to remain relevant and responsive in a rapidly changing landscape with fiscal challenges.

➤ Leadership Needs Space to Think

In a context of increasing operational pressure, we've learned that leaders need protected time and space to reflect, connect, and think strategically. Our programme has provided space to think, feel, and connect — recognising that strategic clarity often emerges from reflective pause — and leaders have told us it has helped them reframe challenges, build resilience, and lead with greater clarity.

➤ System Alignment Strengthens Impact

The refreshed Leadership Success Profile (LSP) and associated tools at senior level have shown the benefit of a single leadership profile, language and development focus to the extent that we have replaced the legacy Self-Assessment Questionnaire and 360 Feedback tool with an Operational LSP at the heart. Together these have created a shared language for leadership across health, social care, and social work and a focus on transition needs for those focusing on a next step in their career. Early uptake has been positive, and the feedback has been honest and encouraging including trials within a wider public sector audience.

➤ Inclusion must Be Intentional

The launch of Diversity Coffee Connect and development of the Allyship and Inclusive Leaders Hubs illustrate how inclusion is embedded as a "golden thread" throughout the programme. This is an intentional approach to ensure diversity and inclusion are not seen as a 'tick box' exercise. We have witnessed a growing interest in anti-racism, civility, cultural humility and belonging through readership, registration and inquiry, and this finding reflects alignment with national equality priorities and Scottish Government moves to require anti-racism objectives for all Health Boards.

➤ Confidence is Foundational

Confidence has emerged as a recurring theme across all sectors and levels, from individual evaluation responses to events such as Taming Your Inner Critic² to our inquiry practices as a team. Reinforced by the success of the Developing Your Confidence as a Leader (DYCAAL) and supported by external evaluation of our senior leader cohort programmes, it links directly to psychological safety, understanding power differences, resilience, decision-making, and leadership effectiveness at all levels, all sectors and all roles.



Our Shared Vision

Scotland's health, social care, and social work workforce has shown extraordinary resilience in the face of unprecedented challenges. Yet the pressures of the pandemic, increasing complexity, and systemic inequalities have made it clear: we need to lead differently.

Leading to Change was commissioned in direct response to the Improving Wellbeing and Working Cultures action plan, which identified leadership as one of three critical pillars — alongside wellbeing and equality — for creating healthier, more inclusive working cultures. The programme was designed to support a national shift toward leadership that is kind, inclusive, and courageous, and that enables people at all levels to thrive.

At its core, Leading to Change is about creating the conditions for people to lead from where they are. It recognises that leadership is not confined to senior roles — it is a mindset and a practice that can be developed across all levels and sectors. Whether in a care home, a hospital, a local authority, or a third sector organisation, leadership is about how we show up, how we support others, and how we shape the culture around us.

The programme's design reflects the commissioning ambition to support:

- **inclusive, compassionate leadership** that enables public service reform
- **leadership development at all levels**, from emerging to executive
- **talent management and succession planning** to build a diverse, capable pipeline
- **systemic change** that addresses inequality and supports psychological safety.

Through its evolving offer — from Leadership Bites and Book Clubs to the refreshed Leadership Success Profile tools — Leading to Change has become a trusted national platform for leadership learning, reflection, and action. It is a space where leaders can build confidence, connect with peers, and contribute to a shared vision of a thriving, values-led workforce. The National Succession Planning activity aligned with Leading to Change and based in NHS Education for Scotland actively enables the talent management and succession planning for senior leaders from aspiring directors to aspiring chief executives.



The Case for Change

The commissioning of Leading to Change in 2022 was in response to a growing recognition that the way we lead — and the cultures we establish — are central to the sustainability of Scotland's health, social care and social work services.

The Improving Wellbeing and Working Cultures vision made this clear: to address workforce pressures, improve retention, and deliver better outcomes for people and communities, we must invest in leadership that is inclusive, compassionate, and values-led. The statement identified leadership as one of three essential pillars — alongside wellbeing and equality — for creating the conditions in which people can thrive.

At the time of commissioning, the system was grappling with:

- persistent workforce shortages and high levels of burnout
- a need for more psychologically safe, inclusive, and supportive working environments
- limited access to leadership development, particularly for those in frontline and operational roles
- a need to increase the diversity in senior leadership and succession pathways
- a disconnect between national reform ambitions and local leadership capacity.

Leading to Change was designed to address these challenges by creating a national, accessible, and inclusive leadership development offer. It was built to support leaders in navigating complexity, building confidence, and shaping cultures that prioritise trust, equity, and collaboration.

While systems leadership is an overarching context for the work of the programme, the design focus on self-leadership, confidence, and connection reflects the understanding that leadership is not just about systems — it's about people. It's about how we show up, how we support others, and how we create the conditions for everyone to lead well.

The need to continue this work is clear in the light of the current context as articulated in Scotland's Public Service Reform Strategy Delivering for Scotland and specifically in the [Health and Social Care Service Renewal Framework 2025–2035](#).

Our Approach

Co-Designing Leadership For Everyone

From the outset, Leading to Change was designed not as a top-down intervention, but as a collaborative, evolving response to the leadership needs of Scotland's health, social care and social work workforce. The Improving Wellbeing and Working Cultures action plan provided a number of specific actions for the programme focus, some of which were already in process. Using this and the aim to connect with the cross-sector workforce, the team was tasked with delivering a national leadership development offer that was inclusive, accessible, and aligned with the realities of practice.

At the heart of our approach is the belief that leadership is for everyone. Whether you're a team member, a service manager, or a chief executive, leadership is about how you influence, support, and inspire others. It's about how you lead yourself, your teams, and your system — especially in times of complexity and change.

To support this, we co-designed our offer with people from across the system — frontline colleagues, team leaders, senior leaders, and partners from the third and independent sectors. This ensured that our approach was not only strategic but also grounded in the day-to-day realities of those delivering care and support.

Through the development of the Chief Executive and Director level Leadership Success Profiles, which were extensively consulted on, much of our work is underpinned by the Leadership Success Profile (LSP) for operational leaders — a shared language for operational leadership in Scotland's health, social care and social work system. The LSP defines the behaviours, mindsets, and capabilities needed to lead well in today's context. It has shaped everything from our learning content to our refreshed suite of tools, including the Self-Assessment Questionnaire, 360° Feedback Tool, and Career Conversation Process.

We've also prioritised accessibility and flexibility. Our offers are designed to meet people where they are — whether that's a 45-minute Leadership Bites session during a lunch break, a reflective Book Club discussion, or a full-day in-person workshop on confidence and self-leadership. We've embraced digital delivery to reach rural and remote areas, while also investing in in-person events to foster deeper connection and collaboration.

This approach has enabled Leading to Change to become a trusted space for leadership development — one that is responsive, inclusive, and rooted in the belief that leadership is a shared responsibility.

It struck me that not only was there a strong willingness to advocate for leadership in the social care sector, but also an acknowledgement of the pressures we face and the importance of accessible events and resources.

Gillian Currie,
Independent Sector Lead, Scottish Care

Read Gillian's full testimonial on p34

Our Approach in Practice

The Journey from DSSL to ALS: Co-designing Senior Systems Leadership

Inquiry and Beginnings – 2021

Our approach to senior leadership development has evolved as the system itself has changed. In 2021, inquiry conversations with more than 100 stakeholders across social work, social care, and health made it clear: there was a clear need for a dedicated programme to grow senior leadership capacity and strengthen collaboration across sectors.

Designing and Delivering Developing Senior Systems Leadership – 2022-2024

In response, Developing Senior Systems Leaders (DSSL) was launched, informed by inquiry, evaluation, and lessons from previous programmes. Bringing together senior leaders from social care, social work, and health, DSSL

cultivated collaboration and collective leadership. Two successful cohorts demonstrated that this approach promoted reflection, connection, and tangible system impact. We also learned that active sponsor support for participants before, during, and after the programme, is key to embedding learning and driving change.

Transitioning to ALS – 2024 Onwards

Building on DSSL's success, and recognising the need to adapt to fiscal constraints, we evolved our approach once again. The result was Adaptive Learning Sets for Senior Systems Leaders (ALS): a shorter, more flexible, and sustainable programme that continues to support inquiry, focus on addressing live work challenges, collaboration, shared learning and insights from system wide guest speakers. Participants can also access a mentor from our senior leadership community whilst on the programme.

ALS was launched quickly, building on our strong system relationships. Priority for our first cohorts went to social care and social work leaders identified through the DSSL Cohort three inquiry, giving them an alternative development route.

What We've Learned: Foundations for the Future

Through these successive iterations of a senior leadership development offer and by listening closely to participants and their sponsors, we've gained valuable insights on how to approach leadership development in this context:

- Create space for cross-sector collaboration to support shared learning and leadership development aligned with Scotland's vision for health and social care.
- Establish leadership learning communities involving participants and sponsors to embed and sustain change beyond formal programmes.
- Focus on real work learning to ensure relevance and maximise value for participants.
- Enable shared understanding of structural, cultural, and power differences across sectors to strengthen systemic leadership.

- Include guest contributors and alumni to provide authentic insights into the realities of senior leadership.
- Prioritise regular, dedicated time and face-to-face engagement to build psychological safety, resilience, and supportive relationships.
- Design with awareness of seasonal system pressures to ensure feasibility and responsiveness.

The belief that leaders grow other leaders stands strong in our community. Through the work of DSSL and ALS, connections continue to be made and built upon. This has meant that many senior and executive leaders have joined Leading to Change as guest contributors within our programmes. From fireside and open space conversations during DSSL – to talking candidly about their experiences during the launch and development sessions for ALS – these contributions continue to have a huge and lasting impact on participants.



I thoroughly enjoyed the guest speakers and the different perspectives they brought; I felt that this really supported me in terms of reflecting on where I am in terms of my leadership, my aspirations and how to manage imposter syndrome.

Having access to senior leaders in the system to hear about their real-life experiences was uplifting and inspiring.

DSSL Cohort 2 participant

Our Journey: 2022-2025

The journey of Leading to Change began in October 2022 with a clear mandate: to support the development of inclusive, compassionate, and courageous leadership across Scotland's health, social care, and social work sectors. **From the outset, the programme was designed to be responsive — listening to the workforce, learning from lived experience, and adapting to meet emerging needs.**

The launch brought inherited events under a refreshed brand, introduced a new website and rebranded app, and created spaces for connection and shared learning through **Community Events**. Early offers such as **Diversity Coffee Connect (DCC)** and diversity blogs embedded equality and inclusion at the heart of the programme, while links to external resources and national initiatives strengthened its reach.

In **2023**, this commitment to listening deepened through the **annual inquiry**, which gathered both qualitative and quantitative insights from across the workforce. These findings, alongside learning from the **senior leaders' inquiry**, informed the development of future offers, including the **Developing Your Confidence as a Leader (DYCAAL)** programme and the design of **Adaptive Learning Sets**. This evidence-based approach ensured that new initiatives addressed real needs and emerging priorities and reflected voices from across social work, social care, third and voluntary sectors.

By **2024**, the programme introduced fresh formats shaped by ongoing collaboration and feedback. The **Book Club** series offered an accessible way to explore leadership concepts through shared reading and discussion, while **Leadership Podcasts** extended learning into flexible, on-demand formats through real stories from real leaders across sectors. The **DYCAAL pilot** and **Leadership Bites Series 1**, supported self-leadership and authenticity to build confidence and provided key leadership theory — a combination proving to be a critical enabler of building effective leadership — while

the successful pilot of **Adaptive Learning Sets** created space for senior leaders to engage in deeper, peer-driven learning.

In **2025**, the programme reached another milestone with the refresh of the **Leadership Success Profile (LSP)** and the launch of a new suite of tools: the **Self-Assessment Questionnaire (SAQ)**, **360° Feedback Tool**, and **Career Conversation Process**. These tools provided structured, reflective development pathways and were met with strong demand from leaders seeking clarity, confidence, and connection. The development of our social media presence into YouTube and Instagram was a direct result of inquiry feedback and an external review of our approach.

Throughout this journey, Leading to Change has remained committed to accessibility and inclusion. All 32 local authority areas have been reached, with participants from every sector — including NHS boards, health and social care Partnerships, local authorities, and the third and independent sectors. Events have been delivered online and in person, with formats ranging from 45-minute sessions to full-day workshops and our digital estate is constantly reviewed for engagement levels and to meet public sector requirements for accessibility.

This journey has not been linear. It has been shaped by listening, learning, and adapting — and by the thousands of leaders who have engaged with the programme, shared their stories, and helped shape what Leading to Change has become.

At the beginning of the Developing Senior Systems Leaders programme (cohort 1), I was a Senior Operations Manager with Carr Gomm and quite convinced that the course was not designed “for the likes of me”: a third sector social care professional with a determination to change the world.

My scepticism (and trepidation) was quickly dispelled, as I realised that this is precisely the forum — presenting the best opportunity — to connect with like-minded colleagues from throughout the health and social care system: a group of thoughtful, insightful, and super considerate professionals committed to doing the very best for our country.

The programme exposed me to new learning, including listening for the song beneath someone's words to develop deep listening skills, but it also opened my eyes to the reality that those I perceived as powerful can oftentimes feel powerless; those that I see as influential can sometimes feel limited and restricted by prevailing narratives and organisational stasis. The system needs disrupters — like those engaged in this programme — to be the change that we want to see. We should never doubt that a small group of thoughtful individuals can change the world!

By the end of the programme, I had been appointed as Carr Gomm's Deputy Chief Executive, and I am now in the post of Chief Executive. The programme challenged me to reflect on my purpose, and I am now even more determined to contribute to improving Scotland's beautifully complex health and social care system. I feel an obligation to do everything I can to speak truth to power; to fight for social justice; and to support people to achieve their potential and live their best life. We must all work together to improve our system. That is the only way that we can do it.



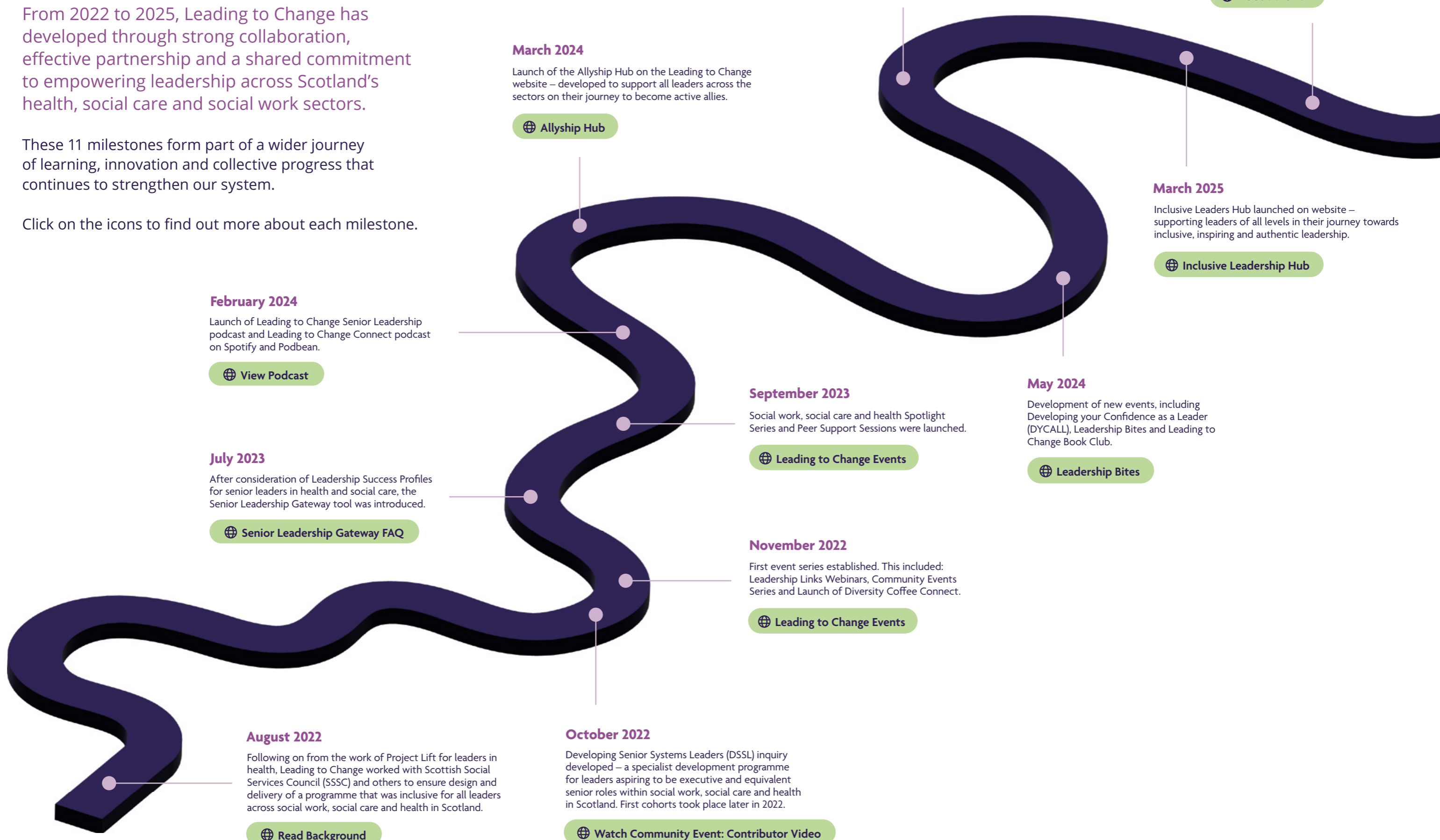
Andrew Thomson,
now Chief Executive of Carr Gomm
DSSL Cohort 1 participant

Leading to Change Roadmap

From 2022 to 2025, Leading to Change has developed through strong collaboration, effective partnership and a shared commitment to empowering leadership across Scotland's health, social care and social work sectors.

These 11 milestones form part of a wider journey of learning, innovation and collective progress that continues to strengthen our system.

Click on the icons to find out more about each milestone.



February 2024

Launch of Leading to Change Senior Leadership podcast and Leading to Change Connect podcast on Spotify and Podbean.

[View Podcast](#)

July 2023

After consideration of Leadership Success Profiles for senior leaders in health and social care, the Senior Leadership Gateway tool was introduced.

[Senior Leadership Gateway FAQ](#)

August 2022

Following on from the work of Project Lift for leaders in health, Leading to Change worked with Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC) and others to ensure design and delivery of a programme that was inclusive for all leaders across social work, social care and health in Scotland.

[Read Background](#)

March 2024

Launch of the Allyship Hub on the Leading to Change website – developed to support all leaders across the sectors on their journey to become active allies.

[Allyship Hub](#)

October 2022

Developing Senior Systems Leaders (DSSL) inquiry developed – a specialist development programme for leaders aspiring to be executive and equivalent senior roles within social work, social care and health in Scotland. First cohorts took place later in 2022.

[Watch Community Event: Contributor Video](#)

September 2023

Social work, social care and health Spotlight Series and Peer Support Sessions were launched.

[Leading to Change Events](#)

November 2022

First event series established. This included: Leadership Links Webinars, Community Events Series and Launch of Diversity Coffee Connect.

[Leading to Change Events](#)

June 2024

The design of Adaptive Learning Sets (ALS) began, an exciting offer for senior leaders, with first cohorts starting later in the year.

[Adaptive Learning Sets](#)

June 2025

New Leadership Success Profile developed as the basis for the updated Leadership SAQ and 360 Feedback reports – powerful and insightful tools designed to support operational leaders across the system.

[About the LSP](#)

March 2025

Inclusive Leaders Hub launched on website – supporting leaders of all levels in their journey towards inclusive, inspiring and authentic leadership.

[Inclusive Leadership Hub](#)

May 2024

Development of new events, including Developing your Confidence as a Leader (DYCALL), Leadership Bites and Leading to Change Book Club.

[Leadership Bites](#)

Journeying with Senior Leaders

Scottish Directors of Public Health (Scottish DPH) Leadership Development Programme

From the start, Leading to Change embraced the need to support Senior Leaders in both collective and cross sector cohorts. As referred to earlier, our approach in practice has been a collaborative model using co-creation and inquiry, building networks, connections and leaders who develop leaders.

The Scottish Directors of Public Health (Scottish DPH) Leadership Development Programme is an example of a role-specific cohort and, with Developing Senior Systems Leaders, provided a strong evaluation practice for our work.

This leadership programme was developed with and for the group of 14 Scottish DPH or those in acting or interim roles from the 14 territorial health boards in Scotland and the DPH of Public Health Scotland (PHS).

The programme sits in a wider landscape of leadership development support for the public service workforce that seeks to enable informal and formal systems and collective leadership across an integrated workforce of health, social care and social work. Designed to integrate the organisational development priorities of defining responsibilities for Scottish DPH and address the leadership development needs identified, the design of the programme alternated between dedicated sessions for DPHs, extended sessions to include Deputy DPHs and sessions which included stakeholders who were also responsible for Public Health outcomes.

In December 2022, the programme delivery team shared eight prospective outcome indicators based on the scoping work and onboarding interviews. These were then refined to produce an agreed list of 12 outcome indicators. This provided a starting point; although there was a general lack of consistency across most of the indicators, there were areas of comparative strength.

By December 2023, there were notable improvements across all the outcomes. The balance of noting important achievements, whilst recognising the need for maintaining momentum and making progress was widely acknowledged.

The Scottish DPH report that the best thing about taking part was the dedicated time to engage with others and get to know their colleagues. All Scottish DPH's agreed that their "feeling at ease and safe to take part" had improved significantly and that "being able to be fully present" was listed as improved overall. There was a growth in more relational practices and reflective conversations amongst the group, which have practical consequences. One participant said:

We see ourselves as equal collaborators and professional partners, able to offer specialist independent professional advice. We are unwilling to compromise our professional values and independence.



Scottish Director of Public Health Leadership Development Programme



Susan Webb, Director of Public Health and Health Policy NHS Lothian, Chair of Scottish Directors of Public Health

Directors of Public Health (DPH) in Scotland were aware our stakeholders felt we could have greater impact if we worked more collaboratively together. As we sought to re-mobilise post the COVID 19 pandemic, I was delighted that the Leading to Change team agreed to support us to address this challenge by developing strong collaborative leadership. Individually we had participated in leadership development, however this programme, co-produced with facilitators to meet our needs enabled us to learn together. Team development was key to the improvements we identified both through self-reflection and feedback from stakeholders.

Participation improved awareness of our individual and group strengths (and weaknesses), developed a shared narrative, improved trust, and provided insights into how we worked. Things we did not make time for in our busy business meetings. Ultimately helping us to move from a group of individuals to a team with agreed priorities for action.

We are better at listening to each other and can challenge more constructively both in our meetings and the wider system. Using live examples, the programme provided tools and techniques to understand difference and reach consensus. A year on we are still using these tools to manage more tricky situations.

Our systems leadership approach has seen us collaborating with our stakeholders to produce consensus statements on issues such as healthy weight and tobacco to influence policy. We have contributed staff time to public health action teams to deliver a once for Scotland approach where it is appropriate to do so. We focused our capacity to issues that really matter with each DPH taking a lead role on our collective behalf. The feedback we have had is our stakeholders recognise the change in how we work and the value that we can bring.

Whilst the programme is formally over, our collective leadership journey continues with our shared goal of accelerating improvement in population health in Scotland.

Our Collective Leadership

The voice of local public health in Scotland

Our own collaborative working is paying off and we witness better collaboration amongst our partners. We are looking outwards, speaking and contributing in different ways, in meetings and through papers that we have issued in response to specific issues. It's an example of real progress that our papers have been well received. Our ideas are much more widely understood and taken more seriously. We're seen locally as a member of the SDPH group and helps us to apply our learning to local partnership working.

Our distinct role is better understood, and our contribution more widely acknowledged. It feels like others are listening and we find that encouraging. It can still be like snakes and ladders and there are unresolved tensions, but the context is different, and it does feel that this has been influenced by our actions.

There has been a shift in tone and feeling amongst the group that helps us to enact stronger collective leadership. There have been, and remain, differences amongst us, but we have not been thrown off course by these. Our common focus on communities and the health of the public anchors us. There is much more trust amongst us and more delegation of tasks and responsibilities.

Looking back, this is a sea change. In the past we have been a very traditional group, with little real collective effort. There has been significant disruption with public health in recent years, not least the pandemic. And since then, there's been the establishment of Public Health Scotland. But now we have a much clearer shared vision and a sense of our own power to convene, and advocate the case for public health. We are more thoughtful and strategic in the way we take up our role. We are much more actively present, and we participate as a good partner.

The immediate and continuing challenges within the public health system are immense and the focus now must be on delivery. We will have to work differently with the money we have. This means we will have to stop doing some things and look to others that might step into any gaps. Whilst we are a more credible team and our priorities are clear, there is still significant work to do to implement the Public Health Framework.

There is much that we can still learn from each other, and we will need to make sure we dedicate the time to reflect and learn together and use the tools we now have at our disposal. There is no doubt we could do more to continue to support each other, especially for the smaller Boards. In the next year, we expect new people to step into DPH roles and want to welcome and support them well, and ensure they understand the importance of how we work together given the impact that it has had.

We are wondering about how our wider impact will be evaluated. We expect to see 10-year and interim measures of success of the Public Health Framework, and it will be important that we have the right 'light touch' metrics and the data to demonstrate the impact of our leadership.

Participating in the Adaptive Learning Sets programme was an enriching, worthwhile experience, arriving at a pivotal point in my career and supporting my leadership of Scottish Ballet's SB Health initiative.

My professional cross-sector network has expanded, directly resulting in collaborative opportunities beyond our facilitated sessions. Dedicated time to reflect, share and create space with and for others encouraged me to remain open and curious - resulting in greater awareness of perceived enablers and barriers in implementation of our work within and across multiple community and health settings.

Practically, I have a range of new tools and strategies that I have since applied within a team setting to support future planning. Taking part in 'case clinics' with my ALS cohort encouraged me to reflect on the perceived value and strategic positioning of our programme at the intersection of arts, culture and health. I now feel more confident in articulating this to the many stakeholders across health and culture, which play a key role in our work.

As I transitioned to a more senior role, exploring the Leadership Success Profile offered reflections on the behaviours and traits that have potential to limit or increase my growth, and how I can use this awareness when trigger points arise. I continue to refer to this as I lean into the new challenges and opportunities of my role, particularly around transitions, enabling outcomes and shaping cultures.

I would strongly recommend the ALS programme and am grateful to NES and the ALS team for creating such thoughtful conditions for us all throughout the process.



Lisa Sinclair,
Head of Engagement - Scottish Ballet
(Adaptive Learning Sets, Cohort 3)

I found the development programme hugely beneficial in terms of the time invested, career development and systems leadership. The programme afforded me the time and space to reflect on my leadership style/s, engage with peers and build networks considering the complexity of the system within which we work and the need to develop the ability to lead within the system. I went into the programme struggling with imposter syndrome and being a little uncertain as to my future career development however throughout I was able to work on this through the course content, residential days and one to one sessions with Joanne.

I now feel much more comfortable in terms of my ability to both manage imposter syndrome and also reframe this as vulnerability and professional curiosity. The one to one sessions were particularly useful to me in terms of digging deeper into my feelings around this as well as having the space to really consider the potential career routes open to me leading to making a successful application to an interim promoted post during the programme. I would absolutely recommend undertaking a similar programme to those operating in a leadership role across the complex social work, social care and health system.



Ruth MacMillan,
Shetland Island Council and Shetland Health and Social Care Partnership
(DSSL Cohort 2 participant)





Participating in the adaptive learning sets for senior systems leaders was one of the most enjoyable and useful courses I've ever done. As someone who was looking to make the transition to an Executive Director role it was fantastic to engage with other people from different professions and sectors who were at a similar stage in their leadership journey. Listening to and thinking about the challenges we all face not only gave me a greater appreciation of the whole system complexities but also helped me develop skills and insights into how I can navigate the politics and more successfully approach wicked issues.

I particularly enjoyed hearing from guest speakers in Senior roles about their own personal journeys and reflections. The support and encouragement provided by the facilitators was amazing and being “forced” to create the time to pause and reflect has become a discipline that I have now built into my everyday life.

Whilst undertaking the course, I successfully applied for the position of Executive Medical Director. I think the skills and insights I gained, especially from the adaptive learning sets not only contributed to my appointment but has helped make my transition into this role more positive and effective.

To anyone who is thinking about stepping up into a senior role within the next couple of years all I can say is get yourself on this course, I can't recommend it highly enough.



Sara Else,
Medical Director NHS Western Isles
(Adaptive Learning Sets for senior systems leaders, Cohort 1)

Journeying with Leaders at all Levels

As well as focusing on senior leadership development at the beginning of the Leading to Change programme, we also wanted to focus on how we made leadership development accessible to everyone across health, social care and social work, at different levels, irrespective of their role and remit and whether they had a formal leadership role or not.

This aligned with our commission to support the improvement of workplace cultures across the system and therefore supporting all leaders in all roles, including self-leadership.

Open events have been the easiest and most accessible way for leaders across a range of roles and geographies to engage with us. We developed a series of leadership events to offer choice and relevance to individuals looking to find some form of leadership support – in a way that was accessible to those who were having to carefully manage their own capacity.

We began with the successful format of our legacy Community Events Digital series, in partnership with Kaleidoscope who had been instrumental in designing and evaluating our previous Project Lift series and were focused on community contributors and the opportunity for attendees to connect.

Our offers also included the Leadership Links masterclass style webinars featuring a range of speakers offering expertise in leadership areas.

As part of the equalities focus, we designed our first new event: the Diversity Coffee Connect series, creating safe spaces to hear from Diversity Blog authors and to connect and converse over key topics and experience. As that grew over time, through social media interaction. We looked to connect with other engaged groups.

The Spotlight Series was created to offer insights into interesting and innovative practices happening across the system to share ideas, inspire others and increase understanding and awareness of what working in these sectors is like.

Our data shows that the number of people engaging with our events has increased over the three years and which types of events are most popular. We find that there are some topics that draw engagement to events, to social media posts, podcasts and our Friday Emails such as difficult conversations, cross sector stories of innovation, research on leadership in social work, belonging and psychological

safety, managing teams, psychological first aid and building trust. We have developed other resources that help people to understand what leadership looks and feels like for others and to help them reflect on how that might apply to them and their role. This builds on our events, most of which we develop into resources with recordings, reflective questions and insights from the collective learning in the session. All of these are available on our resources page³.

Our 'leaders at all levels' work is operational 24/7 as we build our online presence through LinkedIn, Instagram, Facebook and YouTube. Our content is available to read, watch, listen to or work through at any time of day and night which enables us to support those working evenings, weekends and nightshifts. One of our most popular resources is our Awesome Cards⁴ where anyone can send a beautiful digital card directly to someone they want to support, encourage or reassure in less than a minute – straight to their phone or laptop with a personal message. Our Awesome Christmas cards are also very popular as are our My One Thing Cards. These are a build on the Awesome Card model that we offer to everyone coming to an online or in person

³ <https://leadingtochange.scot/resources>

⁴ <https://leadingtochange.scot/awesome-cards>



event as we encourage them to note one thing that they will stop, start or continue as a result of the event. By using this small action, we are gently but consistently encouraging a culture of actively taking at least one action away from each learning event, and encouraging leaders to gather these, revisit them and use them in conversations with their team, their managers and other leaders.

Inspired by the Leading to Change Book Club, I recreated a 'Book Club' with my team... it generated a lot of discussion and was way more fun than me just doing a presentation.

Leadership Bites

Leadership Bites was developed as dynamic learning space, designed for those new to leadership, early in their journey, or simply seeking a refresh. With Series 1 taking place in 2024 and Series 2 in 2025, participants were able to explore core leadership models and communication skills in short, focused sessions.

Series 1 focused on foundational leadership models such as Self-Leadership, the Three Horizons Model, and Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. These sessions offered practical insights into what it means to lead, regardless of role or sector.

Series 2 built on this by diving into **Communication for Leadership**, covering topics like the Four Types of Conversation, Active Listening, and Giving Feedback. This series responded directly to participant feedback, highlighting the importance of communication in effective leadership.

A standout feature of Leadership Bites has been the Flexible Final 15: a wellbeing-focused option that allows participants to either stay on for deeper discussion or take a short break before their next commitment. This learner-led approach supports autonomy and wellbeing, making the sessions even more accessible and impactful.

To extend learning beyond the live sessions, each topic is accompanied by a Leadership Bites Takeaway, a downloadable one-page resource that shares ideas for personal reflection or team-based development.

Plans are in discussion for a possible Series 3 based on the theme of Change to continue to build both our flexible resources and the learning path for those who have completed Series 1 and 2. We will use our evaluation and wider annual inquiry exercise to test this plan with our audiences.

[Leadership Bites Programme](#)

Participating in Leadership Bites gives me a real sense of achievement... I always leave these sessions feeling motivated and positive.



Journeying with Operational Leaders

In between senior leaders and leadership at all levels we have a group of people in operational leadership roles that we support. This is a large group of people across health, social care and social work and with a diverse range of needs in relation to leadership development.

There are some that are very new to their formal leadership role and are just trying to figure out who they are as leaders, what their strengths and areas for development are, and who may not have had any leadership development to date. At the other end of the spectrum there are people in more senior leadership roles, who are not yet at director level and who may, or may not, have had some leadership development before. This group tend to be looking for leadership development to help them address particular challenges, to support their collaboration with others, or to help them transition to a more senior leadership role.

NES national leadership programmes for this audience are supported by members of the Leading to Change team partnering with colleagues in the ODLL⁵ team. Across recruitment and selection, operational and steering groups, coaching, marketing, delivery and evaluation, ODLL and Leading to Change support operational leaders on the following programmes: New Horizons, You as a Collaborative Leader (YaCL), Leading for the Future (LftF) and the Scottish Clinical Leadership Fellowship (SCLF).

We have developed two key offers that support this audience, both of which allow for the range of role and experience that are found in this group.

Developing your Confidence as a Leader (DYCAAL) was borne from a team inquiry session that was then verified in our annual open inquiry (case study below). Focusing on the premise that 'competence without confidence' is no competence, we designed an event for self, then for team leaders and are now expanding this suite into team dynamics and inclusive leadership. It is an offer that makes it safe for leaders to admit they lack confidence, to identify what is causing that and to work through ways to build up that confidence. Without exception, participants report increased hope and confidence as well as leadership insights on completing the event. By working in partnership with two rural health boards, we have been able to pilot this with cross sector groups and health groups – all with mixed leadership levels. We have also partnered with care homes, care at home groups, national care organisations and local authorities to develop this work further.

Leadership Bites tackled another outcome of our inquiry – how to give access to leadership development for those not yet in formal roles. By offering a short, focused session on a theory or model, followed by small group connection and the My One Thing approach, leaders can learn about content that they had previously believed was not for them. We offered this to 'emerging, new to role or 'slightly rusty' leaders and we have had all three groups represented with positive feedback. The combination of connection and a safe place to revisit leadership theory in a short, focused session has been welcomed with many learning from each other, building knowledge, confidence and the preparation for competence.

We are aware that this is one of the areas of our work that requires further development, and we have not focused as much on leadership development for operational leaders to this point as many employers already deliver leadership and management training for this group. Our role in Leading to Change is to support leadership development and this is why it's important for us to understand the needs of each group of operational leaders and what's already available elsewhere to ensure we work to complement rather than to complicate the current landscape.



⁵ ODLL – Organisational Development, Leadership and Learning is a team within NHS Education for Scotland's (NES) People and Culture Directorate. Leading to Change also sits within the NES People and Culture Directorate.

Developing Your Confidence as a Leader (DYCAAL)

Why this and why now?

Confidence is a cornerstone of effective leadership—fueling decision-making, resilience, and the ability to influence others. Recognising this, the Developing Your Confidence as a Leader (DYCAAL) programme was born from a team development day conversation and has since grown into an engaging, multi-format learning offer reaching people across social work, social care, and health.

Delivered both online and in-person, DYCAAL supports leaders at all levels—from emerging to experienced—through tailored sessions on self-leadership and team leadership. The programme aligns with the Leading to Change Leadership Success Profile, keeping it relevant and supporting the wider leadership strategy.

Participants have engaged in interactive sessions, reflective exercises, and peer learning, with sessions held in Dundee, Dumfries, Edinburgh, and Angus, as well as virtually via MS Teams. Core learning outcomes include understanding the role of self-confidence in leadership, identifying personal strategies for growth, and exploring self-leadership through practical actions.

Feedback has been significantly positive. Participants report increased confidence, appreciation for psychologically safe learning environments, and value in connecting with peers. Common themes include the prevalence of imposter syndrome and the importance of self-compassion and reflective practice.

Strategically, DYCAAL is fostering a culture of positively authentic leadership. Leaders are encouraged to “show up” with vulnerability, build trust within teams, and lead with clarity and purpose.

Looking forward, the programme aims to expand its reach, embed confidence-building across a wider range of leadership pathways, and continue evolving through participant insights—ensuring our cross-sector workforce is equipped to lead with confidence and compassion.



Leadership Bites: A journey of continuous learning

Lyndsay Kenny is a Project Support Officer for NHS Education for Scotland

She shares her experience of engaging with Leadership Bites sessions as a meaningful way to continue her professional development. With a background in Business Management and a passion for leadership, she finds the short, accessible format and welcoming environment ideal for refreshing her knowledge and connecting with peers across the system.

I am always seeking opportunities for continuous learning and development and was immediately drawn to the Leadership Bites sessions when I saw these advertised. I signed up for as many sessions as I could manage. I previously completed a graduate apprenticeship in Business Management and particularly enjoyed the leadership and management modules during my studies, so I was keen to refresh and extend my knowledge on these topics.

Participating in Leadership Bites gives me a real sense of achievement. It's a valuable way to invest in personal development, especially when work is busy and it can be challenging to take time out for learning. The sessions are relaxed and informal, and the Leading to Change team consistently create a welcoming and comfortable environment.

While some of the content revisits concepts I studied at university, I still find the sessions engaging and worthwhile. They are a helpful refresher and reinforce the importance of applying leadership theories and tools to support both personal and team performance whilst prioritising personal wellbeing.

I really enjoy the breakout discussions with colleagues from across health, social care and social work. These conversations offer fresh perspectives on the topics we are learning about and highlight how people in different roles apply leadership principles in practice. This shows the diversity of experiences within the sector.

One of the things I appreciate most is the short format. The sessions are just 45 minutes long, which makes it easy to fit into a busy schedule without feeling overwhelming. Working from home, I've also come to value the opportunity to connect with others and have meaningful conversations with others at various stages of their leadership journey.

I always leave these sessions feeling motivated and positive. They are a beneficial part of my working day and a great way to continue growing both personally and professionally.



The Journey to Inclusive Leadership

Utilising the golden thread approach to embed Inclusive Leadership

The last decade has witnessed the evolution of Leading to Change (Leading to Change) from a leadership development initiative (Project Lift) focused largely on capability building to one that intentionally embeds compassion, equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) as core drivers of leadership excellence and culture change. The Improving Wellbeing and Working Cultures (IWWC) embodies a national vision to enhance, enable and empower inclusive cultures by sharing learning across social work, social care, and health.

From the early launch of Leading to Change, feedback from the communities we serve emphasised a pressing need to address structural inequities shaping leadership experiences across social work, social care, and health in Scotland. This recognition marked the beginning of Leading to Change's "golden thread" model—an interwoven commitment to wellbeing, leadership and equalities that runs consistently through all programmes rather than appearing as a standalone offer. Inclusive leadership practices are mainstreamed into all core leadership programmes, events, blogs, podcasts and resources on offer by Leading to Change.

In addition, we have created open toolkits, such as the Allyship Hub and the Inclusive Leaders Hub, highlighting best practice, case studies and practical tools to support leaders at all levels to embed inclusive practices within their teams, organisations and local communities.

Today, inclusive leadership is reflected in every element of Leading to Change's design, programmes and resources to elevate underrepresented voices and intersectional groups. Programme content integrates subject experts, lived-experience narratives, and facilitation practices that model allyship, collaboration and psychological safety.

Participants report increased confidence in navigating cultural complexity, psychological safety and creating equitable team environments.

Looking ahead, Leading to Change aims to expand its inclusive leadership footprint by strengthening data-driven approaches to identify and dismantle systemic barriers, enhancing co-production with communities and on general leadership development for emerging leaders from diverse backgrounds. The future vision is clear: an inclusive leadership culture where inclusion is not an aspiration but the standard shaping how the health, social care and social work care systems in Scotland lead, collaborate, and transform.

If leadership is not inclusive. It's not compassionate. If leadership is not compassionate, it's not inclusive.

Michael West



Reach and Engagement

Since its launch in October 2022, Leading to Change has become a trusted and valued part of Scotland's leadership development landscape. The programme has delivered a wide-ranging offer that is accessible, inclusive, and aligned with the realities of practice — and the impact is clear.

Over the past three years, the programme has delivered 100 individual events, recorded more than 8,000 registrations and 4,600 attendances across its suite of Leading to Change events, and has reached over 63,000 accounts on LinkedIn alone. The Leading to Change app has over 16,000 users completing 10,823 SAQs⁶, 329 Career Conversations⁷, and 192 '360 Feedback' coaching sessions.⁸

The number of leaders across all levels increases when we include our senior leadership development cohorts; Directors of Public Health, Developing Senior Systems Leaders and Adaptive Learning Sets, our operational leadership offers of Developing Your Confidence as a Leader Self and Teams, and our involvement in supporting the delivery of the NES National Programmes. Our core open events are for leaders at all levels; Leadership Links, Leadership Bites, Community Events, Book Clubs, Spotlight Sessions, Diversity Coffee Connect and Developing Your Confidence as a Leader. The increasing scale and depth of engagement demonstrates a strong appetite for leadership development that is flexible, relevant, and values led.

The programme has reached leaders across all sectors: Healthcare, health and social care Partnerships (HSCPs), social care, social work, Third Sector and Voluntary Organisations; and there have also been small levels of representation from local and national government, statutory bodies, and independent providers.

Leaders from all levels of the system have engaged: Team Members, Team Leaders, Supervisors, Managers of Services or Projects, Senior Managers and Executives, Professional Function Specialists and others.

Geographically, the programme has also reached participants from all 32 local authority areas, ensuring that leadership development is not limited by geography or role.

For the larger scale senior leader development programmes, external evaluation has been commissioned to gain deep, validated insights into the impact and lessons learned from these crucial offers. Each of these has offered a wealth of valuable evidence that continues to shape our approach to systems leadership at this level.

Beyond the numbers, the programme's impact is felt in the stories and feedback of those who have taken part. Participants consistently report increased confidence, greater self-awareness, and a renewed sense of purpose. The opportunity to connect with either peers or others from across the system has consistently been a positive outcome and leaders from both our senior leader programmes and our open offers have shared career changes or promoted posts influenced and enabled through their involvement with our work. They describe Leading to Change as a space where they feel seen, safe and supported, and inspired to lead in new ways.

⁶ 1,270 of which are Leadership SAQ launched 30th June 2025

⁷ 33 of which are the newly LSP aligned tool

⁸ 24 of which are the newly LSP aligned tool

Growing into Leadership: A Transformative Journey with Leading to Change



Amina Slimani-Fersia a Lead Clinical Pharmacist for Primary Care in NHS Fife.

Over three years of engaging with Leading to Change, Amina Slimani-Fersia describes a deeply transformative leadership journey shaped by reflection, connection, and practice. From practical tools to mindset shifts, each session—from Leadership Links to Diversity Coffee Connect—has helped her grow into a more confident, inclusive, and compassionate leader. The evolving format of events and the strengthening sense of community have broadened her perspective beyond pharmacy, encouraging system-wide thinking. Key sessions like **Taming Your Inner Critic**, **Leadership Confidence**, and **The Fearless Organisation** book club have left lasting impacts, while her involvement in equality, diversity and inclusion (ED&I) initiatives and reverse mentoring have deepened her commitment to inclusive leadership.

When I look back over the past three years of [attending Leading to Change events](#), I genuinely believe they have been transformative in my leadership journey. Each session, whether Leadership Links, Diversity Coffee Connect, Spotlight Series, or the Book Club has left me with something meaningful. Sometimes it was a new tool I could put into practice straight away; other times it was a shift in mindset that gave me fresh confidence.

What I have really gained, though, is a sense that leadership is something we grow into through reflection, connection, and practice, rather than something we “arrive at.”

Each session has reinforced the importance of inclusive, compassionate and values-driven leadership, while also challenging me to reflect on my own practice. I have particularly valued the balance between theory, reflection, and lived experiences of other leaders across health and social care, which has broadened my outlook beyond pharmacy and encouraged me to think system wide.

The events have changed over time and so has my experience of them. The early webinars felt structured and content-focused, whereas more recent sessions have been more interactive and reflective. I noticed the community aspect grow stronger, with attendees sharing more openly, creating a real sense of mutual learning. Diversity Coffee Connect has also deepened. It has moved from awareness-raising into tackling more challenging topics, such as being an ally to neurodiverse colleagues and working collectively on health inequalities. That shift has made the sessions feel alive and relevant, and I always come away with something that changes how I see myself as a leader.

Some sessions have been especially impactful: Leadership Links sessions stand out as especially practical and confidence-building. [Taming your Inner Critic](#) was a light bulb moment. I recognised how often self-doubt was holding me back, and I began to replace those inner voices with more constructive self-talk. After the session on [Leadership Confidence](#), I was able to take that further, learning how to present myself with greater confidence, which I drew upon during both interviews and wider networking. [Right Conversation, Right Time](#) has also been invaluable, helping me approach challenging conversations with honesty but also compassion. I find myself drawing on it regularly in my daily work. [Amy Edmondson's The Fearless Organisation](#) book club tied these themes together. It reinforced the central role of psychological safety, not just as a concept but as a daily practice in how we show up for our teams. The [Trauma-Informed Practice](#) spotlight reshaped how I think about staff wellbeing and the unseen challenges people may carry. It encouraged me to pause, listen, and lead with greater empathy. The [Human Learning and Quality Management Systems](#) spotlight stretched my thinking about linking leadership

with improvement science, complementing my learning from the Scottish Quality and Safety Fellowship Programme. Finally, [Collective Leadership to Tackle Health Inequalities](#) opened my eyes to how leadership is not confined to organisations but shared across systems and communities.

These experiences changed how I lead. I now put more energy into creating safe, inclusive spaces for colleagues, influenced by both Diversity Coffee Connect and my involvement in ED&I reverse mentoring through Fife HSCP. When I compare my leadership self-assessments from 2022 and 2025, I can see the shift clearly. In 2022, my strengths were there, but there were gaps in feedback, collaboration under pressure, and how much I stretched myself. By 2025, I developed strengths across all nine dimensions of the Leadership Success Profile, particularly in inclusion, collaboration and self-leadership.

This reflects the impact of engaging fully with Leading to Change, not just attending sessions but contributing, applying the learning, and reflecting on it. Because of this growth, I had the confidence to take on new opportunities: applying for my current role, standing for election to the Royal Pharmaceutical Society Scottish Board and chairing local and national groups. I feel braver about putting myself forward, but also more grounded in what matters: compassion, inclusion, and helping others flourish.

Gillian Currie is an Independent Sector Lead for Scottish Care.

She reflects on her evolving relationship with Leading to Change, sparked by a powerful presentation at a Scottish Care National Conference. As a leader in the Independent Sector, she embraced Leading to Change's flexible and inclusive offerings, ranging from bite-sized sessions to in-depth webinars, as both a resource for local providers and a personal development opportunity.

I first became aware of Leading to Change when two of the team spoke at a Scottish Care National Conference. It struck me that not only was there a strong willingness for there to be advocates for leadership and support for the social care sector, Leading to Change also acknowledged the pressures on the independent sector and the importance of accessible events, resources and training for social care staff.

I signed up for the weekly and monthly email bulletins. This ensured I had up-to-date information on all Leading to Change events and resources, and I could then disseminate these to my local providers. What was evident was that the offer from Leading to Change was very flexible, from bite-size lunchtime sessions to longer webinars. I could also signpost providers to recorded webinars. The flexibility to access events was particularly suited to the social care sector as staff often struggle to be released or find time for protected learning and leadership support.

As a leader within the social care sector, I saw Leading to Change as a not only a resource for my local providers but also a development opportunity myself as Independent Sector Lead. I would regularly attend Community events, Leaderships Links webinars and Spotlight sessions.

There were two standout events for me. Firstly, [Leadership 101: Role Modelling Starts with Self](#) in May 2023. This 90-minute webinar was supported by a Connect and Reflect pack that was shared post session. This allowed me to take my learning to peer support sessions with colleagues. We then could discuss topic themes such as being a role model for the independent sector, exploring actions, attitudes and values. The second event was in 2024, when I was approached to support an in-person Scottish Social Services Council Supervisors session in Glasgow that Leading to Change were also contributing to. I encouraged local staff to attend and participated on the day. This gave me the opportunity to meet in person and connect with the Leading to Change Lead, who I had heard speak at the Scottish Care National Conference.

This ongoing relationship with the team and the wider delivery team has been a supportive, collaborative and fruitful partnership for Scottish Care. I value their openness, time and offer of support. We are now currently planning a Developing your Confidence as a Leader event for Glasgow care at home providers, and I was excited to offer this to local social care staff.

It is evident that over the last three years the offer from Leading to Change has adapted and responded to the needs of the health, third and independent staff groups. I find it to be an inclusive space for providers I support, which is very much appreciated and valued. I look forward to further opportunities to collaborate with Leading to Change in the future. We need platforms like Leading to Change that ensure the social care sector can support and nurture their leaders and future leaders. This ensures the ongoing sustainability of the sector.

Championing Leadership in social care: A Collaborative Journey with Leading to Change

Tools for Development – for Leaders Across our System

In June 2025, Leading to Change launched a refreshed suite of leadership development tools, aligned with the updated **Leadership Success Profile (LSP)**. These tools are designed to support leaders in understanding their strengths, identifying areas for growth, and having meaningful development conversations with peers and managers.

The refreshed suite includes:

- **self-assessment questionnaire (SAQ):** A reflective tool that helps leaders assess their alignment with the LSP and identify areas for development
- **360° feedback tool:** A structured process for gathering feedback from colleagues, peers, and line managers to support deeper self-awareness
- **career conversation process:** A guided framework for meaningful development conversations, helping leaders explore their aspirations, strengths, and next steps.

These tools were developed in response to growing demand for practical, accessible, and evidence-informed resources that support leadership development in real time⁹. The new LSP and resources address this as being relevant to those from team leading stage to aspiring directors. They are designed to be used flexibly — as standalone resources or integrated into wider development programmes — and are supported by trained practitioners across the system.

In the 3 months from launch¹⁰, the tools have seen strong uptake, with:

- **1,270** Leadership SAQs completed
- **33** Career Conversations delivered
- **24** 360° Feedback sessions facilitated

Early feedback indicates that the tools are helping leaders build confidence, clarify their development goals, and feel more connected to the wider leadership community.

The tools also reinforce the programme's commitment to **self-leadership** — recognising that effective leadership begins with self-awareness, reflection, and intentional growth. They are particularly valued by operational leaders and those in emerging roles, who often have limited access to formal development opportunities.

For further engagement data, please see the [Data Annex](#).

I am keen to share this resource with peers and colleagues including those in my team who are currently looking at progressing in their leadership journey.

Leadership SAQ Feedback participant

⁹ Previous to this point the Self-Assessment Questionnaire was aimed at aspiring director level, and while there was some usefulness to all who completed it, the scoring was not always relevant to those at earlier career stages.

¹⁰ 30th June 2025 launch, 3rd October 2025 is the data point for this report.

Looking Ahead

Our Commitment to Leadership at Every Level

Over the past three years Leading to Change has shown that inclusive, accessible, and values-led leadership development works. The foundation is strong — and the journey continues.

Looking ahead with the current context as our compass.

The programme will evolve to meet workforce needs and national reform ambitions. Both the **Improving Wellbeing and Working Cultures Action Plan**¹¹ and the **National Workforce Strategy for Health and Social Care**¹² call for sustained leadership that drives reform, supports wellbeing, and embeds equity. The **Public Service Reform Strategy** and the **Health and Social Care Service Renewal Framework** both advocate the need for our workforce to be working in more collaborative, flexible ways and for a radically different approach to collaboration and integration which enables all to play a key role in shaping and developing services.¹³

Public service leaders face growing challenges: shifting citizen expectations, technological disruption (including artificial intelligence), community distress, rising incivility, diversity and inclusion issues, and persistent underfunding. In health, social care, and social work, these pressures manifest as unclear leadership pathways, governance complexity, resource constraints, and the need for digital transformation amid retention and diversity struggles.

Future leaders must work with complexity, develop and value new ways of working, and thrive in changing environments.¹⁴ Our role is to help them develop the capability to:

- collaborate across boundaries
- focus on outcomes and prevention
- champion equity, inclusion, and fairness
- foster accountability, transparency, and continuous improvement.

Learning to adapt to the real needs of the system and our workforce

From the beginning, Leading to Change was designed to be adaptive — a programme that would grow in response to the needs, voices, and experiences of Scotland's health, social care, and social work leaders. Over the past three years, this commitment to learning through listening, inquiry and co-production has been a defining feature of the programme's success.

Through thousands of interactions — in events, evaluations, coaching conversations, and co-design sessions — we've gathered a rich body of insight into what leaders need, what works, and where we must go next.

¹¹ Referred to in [Improving Wellbeing and Working Cultures](#)

¹² [Health and Social Care Workforce Strategy](#)

¹³ [Health and Social Care Service Renewal Framework](#) p5-6 and the [Scotland's Public Service Reform Strategy: Delivering for Scotland](#). p10

¹⁴ [The 21st Century Public Servant – Revisited – 21st Century Public Servant](#)

Our Learning

➤ Confidence is foundational

It is a critical enabler of leadership across all sectors and levels. Engagement with key programmes and events¹⁵ shows that leaders value time and space to reflect, build self-awareness, and connect in psychologically safe environments.

➤ Leadership is everyone's business

Strong engagement from team members, supervisors, and emerging leaders—not just those in formal leadership roles—underscores the need for accessible, flexible development for all levels.

➤ Inclusion must be intentional

Initiatives like Diversity Coffee Connect provide spaces to explore leadership through equality and lived experience, highlighting the need for targeted support for underrepresented groups. Free, easily accessible resources such as the Allyship and Inclusive Leaders Hubs offer practical tools for individuals and teams.

¹⁵ Examples: Leadership Bites, Developing Your Confidence as a Leader (Self, Teams, Webinar), Taming Your Inner Critic.

¹⁶ Examples: Developing Senior Systems Leaders, Adaptive Leadership Sets, Spotlight Series, Recruitment for National Leadership Programmes.

➤ Co-design builds trust and relevance

Collaboration with partners, practitioners, and cross-sector stakeholders ensures the offer remains grounded, relevant, and responsive—particularly for the third and independent sectors¹⁶.

➤ Small, consistent touchpoints matter

Short formats like Leadership Bites and Friday Leadership emails, supported by social media and a pillars approach, embed leadership thinking into everyday practice and maintain engagement through regular digital touchpoints.

➤ System alignment strengthens impact

The refreshed Leadership Success Profile (LSP) and associated tools create a shared language for leadership, supporting consistency, clarity, and stronger links between individual development and system priorities.

Drawing on what we have learned our priorities are:

Expand use of the LSPs': Embed LSP models across development offers, evolve the language, and increase access to tools like the Self-Assessment Questionnaire, 360° Feedback, and Career Conversation Process. Provide guidance for practitioners and managers and raise awareness of their value. Maximise engagement through our suite of engagement channels and methods.

Pilot and Refine: Test the Operational LSP with local authority teams, and more widely across health, social care and social work and methodically gather cross-sector feedback to ensure relevance. Continue improving accessibility through the **Senior Leadership Gateway** to support development, engagement and succession planning for aspiring and current directors and Executives.

Embed Confidence and Connection: Integrate self-leadership, psychological safety, and cross-system collaboration into all offers. Expand senior leadership development for diverse and specific contexts, including remote and rural leadership and strategic medical leaders.

Strengthen Operational Leadership: Deliver accessible, engaging, and bite-sized learning for operational leaders at all levels across health, social care, and social work aligning with both the Operational LSP and evolving leadership needs in public sector contexts in Scotland.

Deepen Equity and Inclusion: Grow initiatives like **Diversity Coffee Connect**, and develop the **Allyship Hub** and **Inclusive Leaders Hub** to amplify underrepresented voices and ensure accessibility. Develop inclusive leadership as our golden thread more explicitly across our developing offers.

Support public services reform: Work with the Scottish Government and public sector partners to develop and deliver leadership development in support of public service reform.

Invest in Evaluation: Develop the skills and capability within our team and partners to advance our evaluation and impact measurement. Evolve our practice using data and stories to measure impact, improve offers, and better support leaders to thrive.

Our Commitment

As we enter the next phase, Leading to Change will remain a space for reflection, growth, and connection — where leadership is a shared practice, not a title. We are committed to building the capability of Scotland's leaders to succeed as **21st-century public sector leaders**¹⁷ and to reform and transform our health and social care system.

¹⁷ [The 21st Century Public Servant – Revisited – 21st Century Public Servant](#)

Hearing senior leaders speak candidly about their own approach, journey, learning, successes and frustrations has helped me to see a way forward for myself.

DSSL Cohort 2 participant

Senior leadership insight was important to help me understand my behaviour and influence, strengths and opportunities.

The guest speakers were inspirational and allowed me to accept that being my authentic self is OK and important.

ALS participant

Final Thought

Over the past three years, feedback indicates that our work has successfully fostered psychologically safe environments, supported peer learning, and provided practical tools to strengthen self-leadership and team effectiveness. Engagement levels have been high, with insights reinforcing that confidence is built through self-awareness, vulnerability, inclusion, and trust.

We will continue to build on this foundation to support Public Service Reform, where strong whole-system leadership will be essential to enhancing public service leadership, culture, delivery, and impact. This will be particularly important in delivering new policy frameworks, including service renewal and public health, as well as supporting the development of sub-national structures and the launch of Public Service Delivery Scotland.

Looking ahead, there is an opportunity to further embed confidence-building across leadership pathways, expand resources, and strengthen delivery through ongoing evaluation and a robust evidence base of effective practice.

These are exciting times for us and those who engage in this work with us.



Acknowledgements

At its heart, Leading to Change is a movement — and movements are built by people.

We are deeply grateful to the thousands of leaders who have engaged with the programme over the past three years. Whether you attended a single session, contributed to a co-design workshop, shared your story, mentored, contributed, sponsored or helped shape a new offer — your voice has mattered. You have helped us build something that is grounded, inclusive, and responsive to the real needs of the workforce.

We would like to thank:

- the **participants** — from team members to Chief Executives — who brought their curiosity, courage, and lived experience to every session, conversation, and collaboration
- our **delivery team**, whose creativity, care, and commitment have brought the programme to life across Scotland
- our **partners and collaborators**, including NHS Education for Scotland, Scottish Government, Scottish Social Services Council, Scottish Care, Coalition of Care and Support Providers Scotland (CCPS), Social Work Scotland (SWS) and many others, who have helped us co-design and deliver a truly cross-sector offer
- the **co-design contributors**, who generously shared their time, insights, and lived experience to shape the programme's content, tone, and accessibility
- **those involved in shaping, refining and launching the Operational Leadership Success Profile**, whose work laid the foundation for a shared language of leadership across the system and the tools that make it accessible
- the **facilitators, coaches, and practitioners** who have supported the delivery of our tools and sessions with skill, empathy, and professionalism
- we also acknowledge the support of the **commissioning team at the Scottish Government**, whose vision and trust enabled this work to begin — and whose continued partnership has helped it grow.

This report is a celebration of what we've achieved together — and a reminder that leadership is a shared responsibility. Thank you for being part of this journey.

Daysix works with Leading to Change to share their commitment to developing leadership across health, social care and social work. We are inspired by their mission to foster kind, inclusive, and collaborative leadership that strengthens the workforce and improves the care provided to people across Scotland. The Leading to Change team is a joy to work with — passionate about their purpose and creative in finding new ways to engage and inspire others. Together, we ensure their website, app and digital communications are engaging and audience-focused, and we have been proud to produce two series of the Leadership Stories podcasts, which highlights the real experiences of leaders across the system.

James Tulloch,
Project Manager, Daysix

Through the Friday Leadership emails I have been able to access further information on the weekly topic through articles and videos. I've also been able to share the importance of psychological safety with the team.

Annual Inquiry Respondent

Leading to Change has made a significant contribution to the promotion of events such as National Wellbeing Week, resulting in increased participation across the health and social care workforce. Through the promotion of events in their newsletters and effective utilisation of social media platforms they have successfully encouraged greater sign-up rates, thereby fostering a more connected and resilient professional community.

Gillian Ross,
Scottish Government

Some of the organisations and groups we've worked with



V&A Dundee | V&A



- Equality and Human Rights Commission
- The Open University
- Scottish Leaders Forum
- Civility Saves Lives
- Improvement Service
- University of Strathclyde
- Fife Council
- Angus Council
- Realistic Medicine
- One Parent Families Scotland
- CCPS
- Care inspectorate
- Health and Social Care Scotland
- Who Cares? Scotland
- Scottish Social Services Council
- Scottish Care
- Scottish Ambulance Service
- Social Workers Union
- Scottish Association of Social Work

And many more from across the system

References

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- Health and Social Care Service Renewal Framework 2025-2035
<https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/strategy-plan/2025/06/health-social-care-service-renewal-framework/documents/health-social-care-service-renewal-framework/health-social-care-service-renewal-framework/govscot%3Adocument/health-social-care-service-renewal-framework.pdf>
- Scotland's Public Service Reform Strategy Delivering for Scotland.
<https://www.gov.scot/publications/scotlands-public-service-reform-strategy-delivering-scotland/>
- Public service reform in Scotland: how do we turn rhetoric into reality? | Audit Scotland
<https://audit.scot/publications/public-service-reform-in-scotland-how-do-we-turn-rhetoric-into-reality>
<https://www.gov.scot/publications/national-workforce-strategy-health-social-care/pages/9/>
- Scotland's Population Health Framework
<https://www.gov.scot/publications/scotlands-population-health-framework/pages/6/>
- Programme for Government 2025-26 Building the best future for Scotland
<https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/advice-and-guidance/2025/05/programme-government-2025-26/documents/programme-government-2025-26/programme-government-2025-26/govscot%3Adocument/programme-government-2025-26.pdf>
- The 21st Century Public Servant – Revisited
<https://21stcenturypublicservant.wordpress.com/updating-the-21st-century-public-servant/>

Data Annex

All Events - Total Attendance

Leadership Links (2022-25)	2,933
Community Events (2022-2024)	421
Diversity Coffee Connect (2022-25)	409
Spotlights (2022-25)	301
Leadership Bites (Open) (2024-25)	255
Taster Sessions (2022-23)	67
Psychological First aid (2022)	57
Leadership Bites (Cohort) (2025)	50
Coffee & Collab (2022)	14
Senior Carer Self-Leadership Development (2024)	35

All Events - Sector Breakdown

HSCP	710
Health	2,068
Health & Social Care - Statutory body	29
Health & Social Care - Voluntary	42
National or Local Gov	21
NHS	364
Other	250
Social Care	271
Social Care statutory body	4
Social Care - Voluntary or Independent	21
Social Work	140
Social Work - statutory body	18
Social Work - Voluntary or Independent	3
Third Sector & Voluntary or Independent	127
Unknown	561

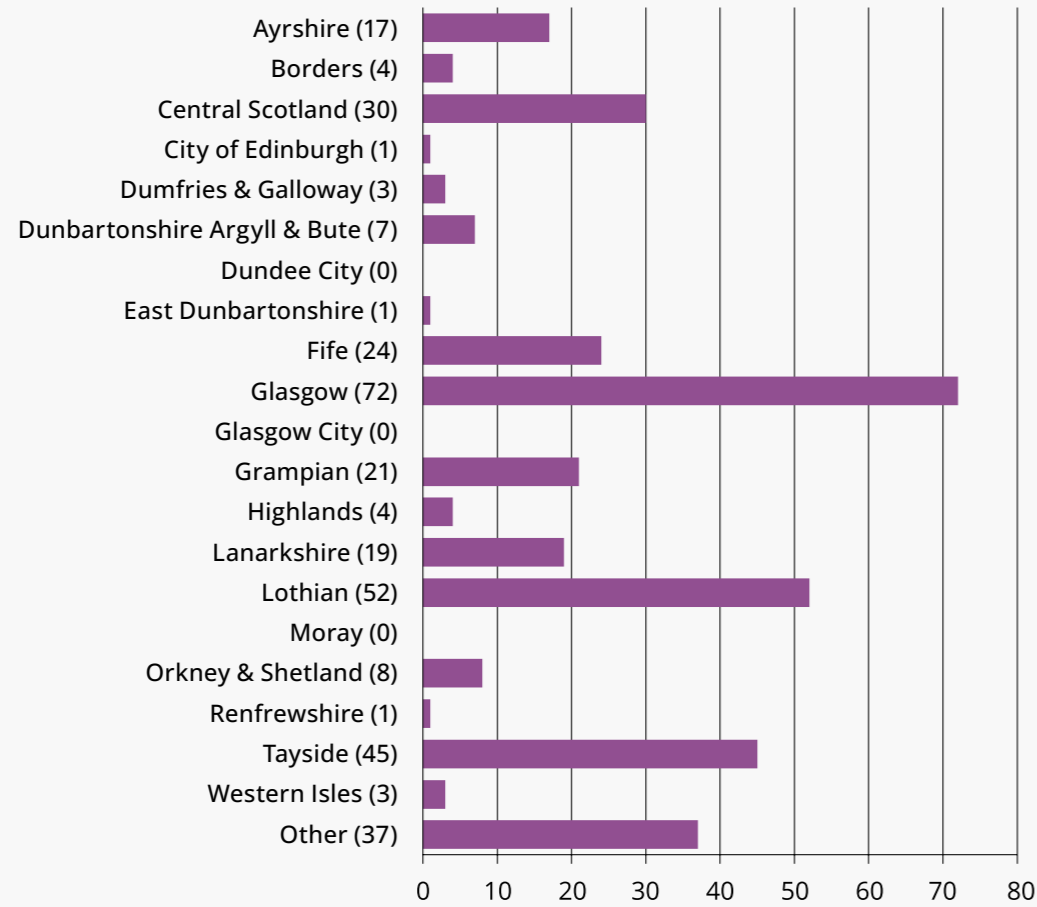
Attendee Local Authority at Events

The data reflects the number of attendees from each local authority. Leading to Change began requesting location information from 2024 onwards. In the first instance, in 2024, Leading to Change asked for location data from 23 locations in Scotland. This was only for the Spotlight, Leadership Bites and Book Club series.

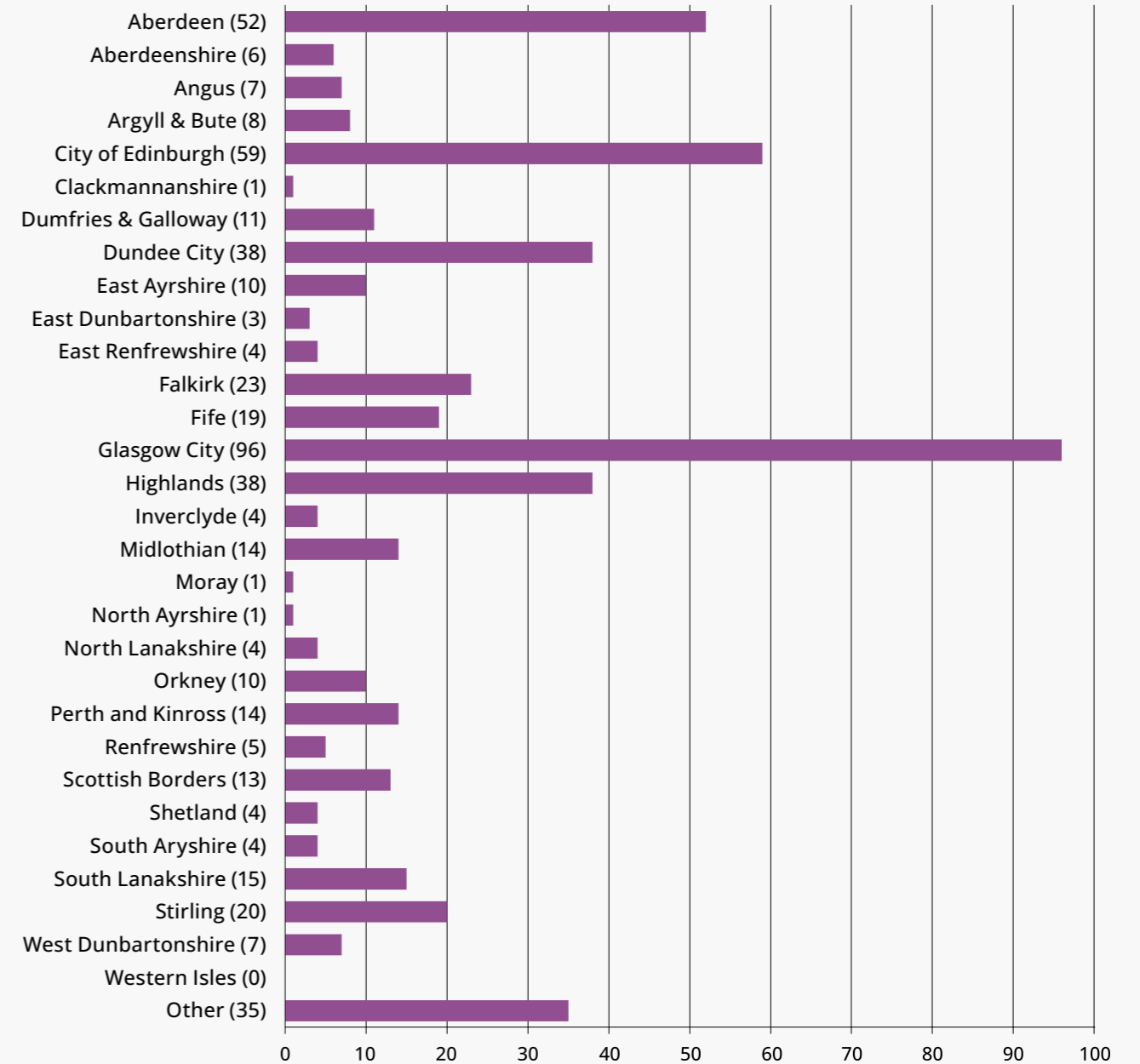
In 2025, this data was extended to local authorities across Scotland to show a wider representation of our reach. We also started to ask for this information across all our event series.

Our next stage in ensuring inclusivity is updating our event sign-up forms to list Comhairle Nan Eilean Siar instead of Western Isles.

Locations 2024

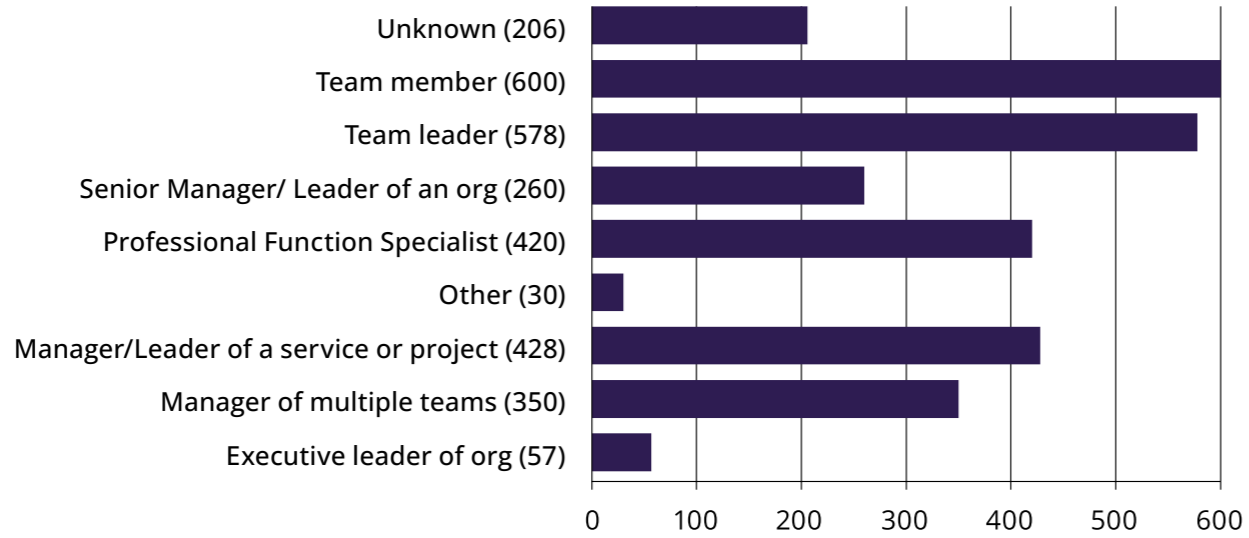


Local Authorities 2025

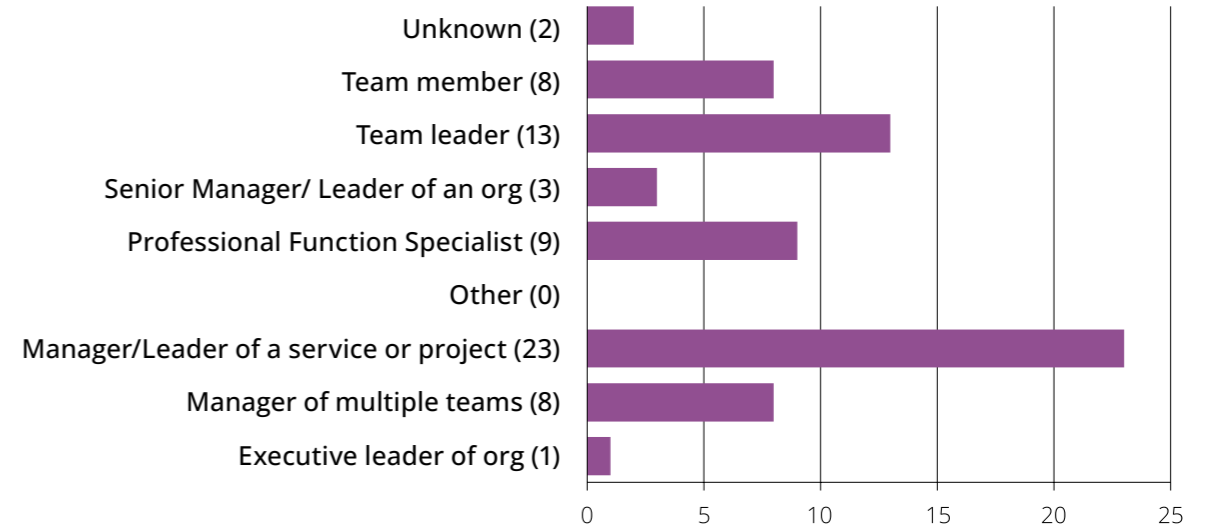


Attendee Role Type at Events

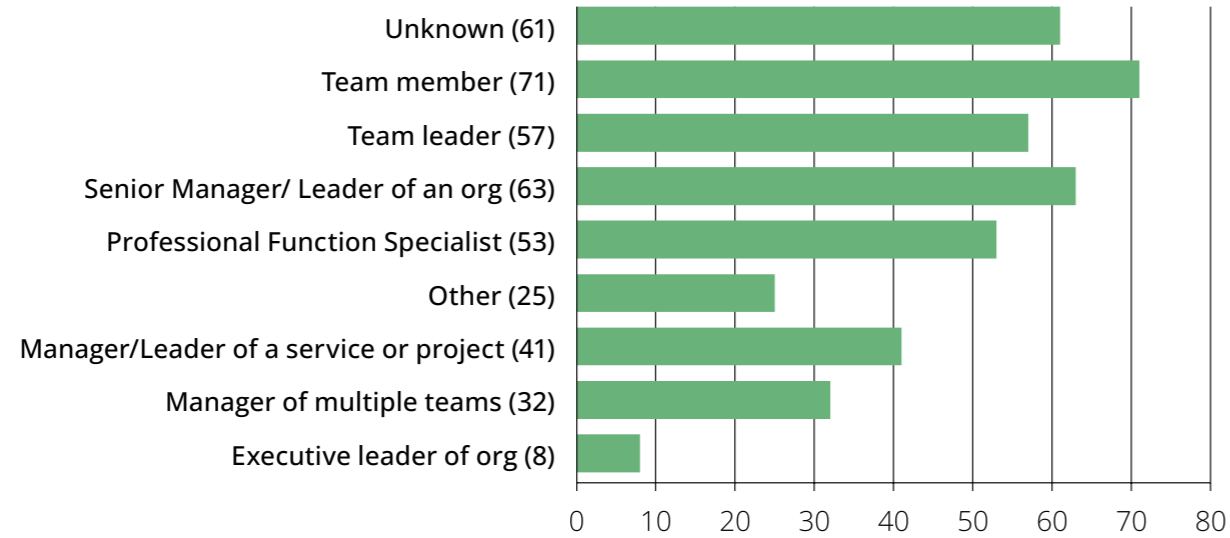
Leadership Links (Total 2,929)



Taster Sessions (Total 67)



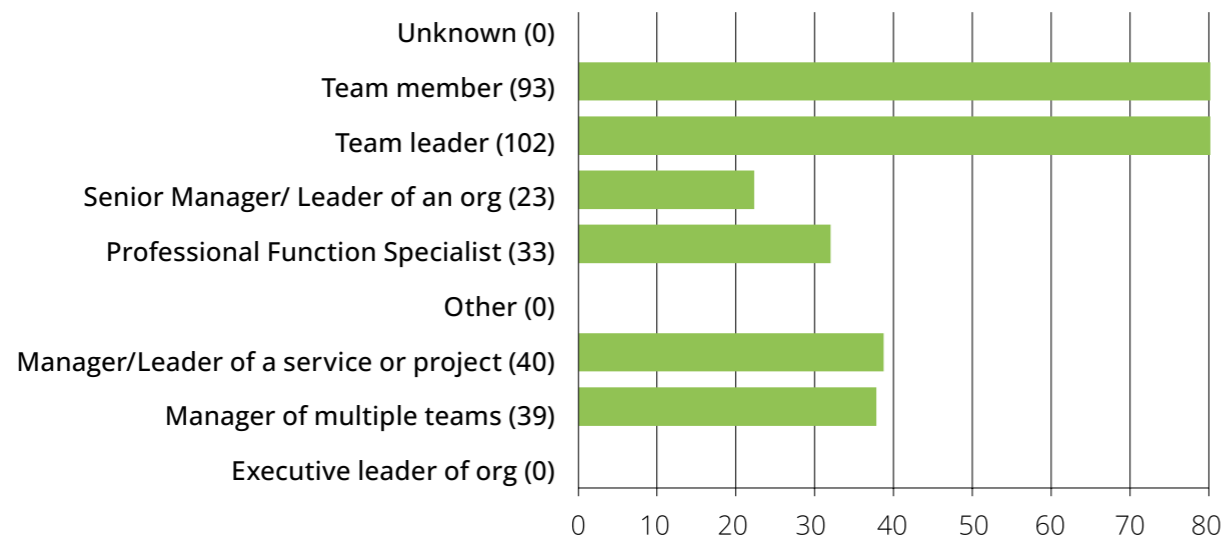
Diversity Coffee Connect (Total 411)



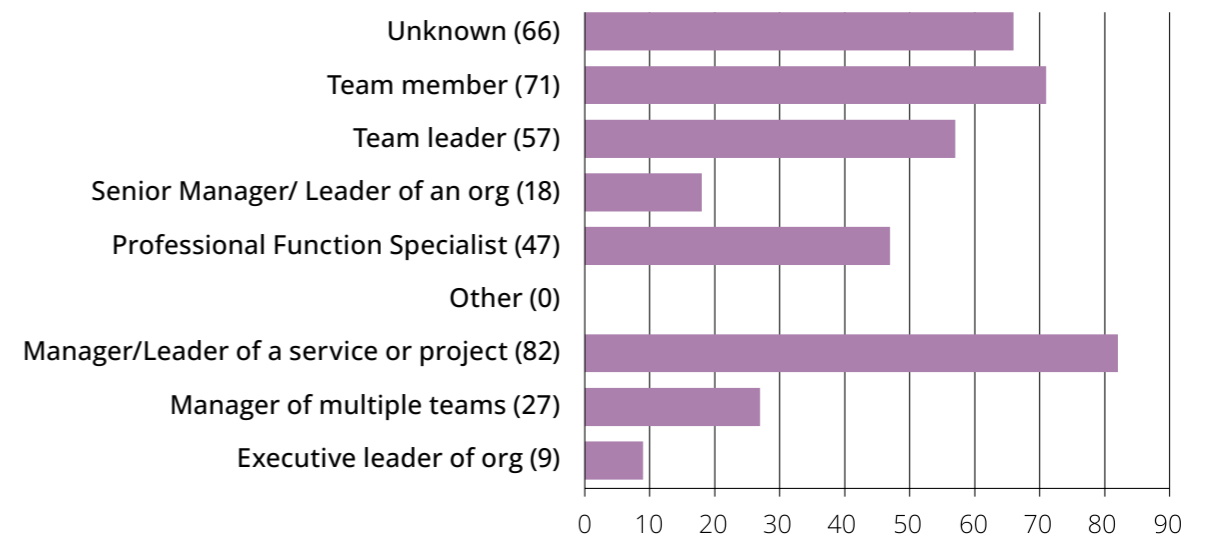
Book Club (Total 98)



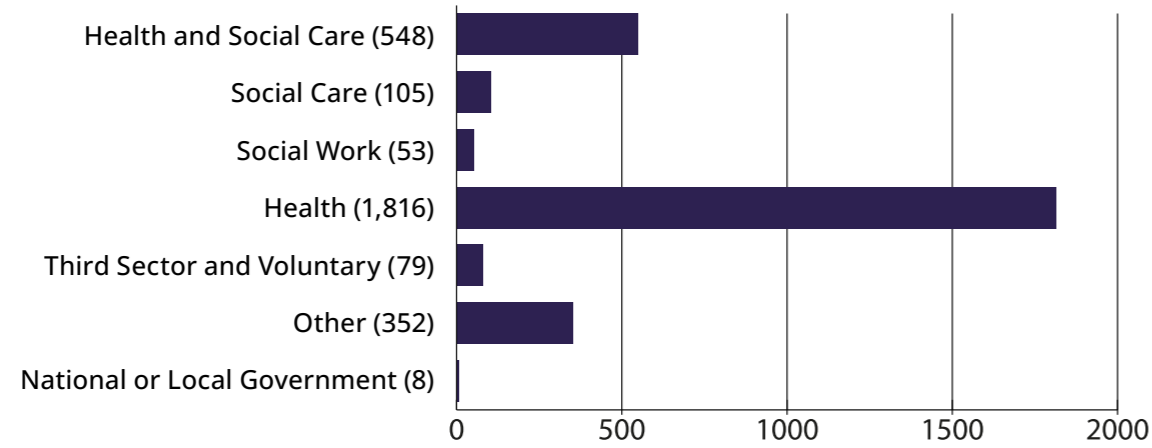
Leadership Bites (Total 330)



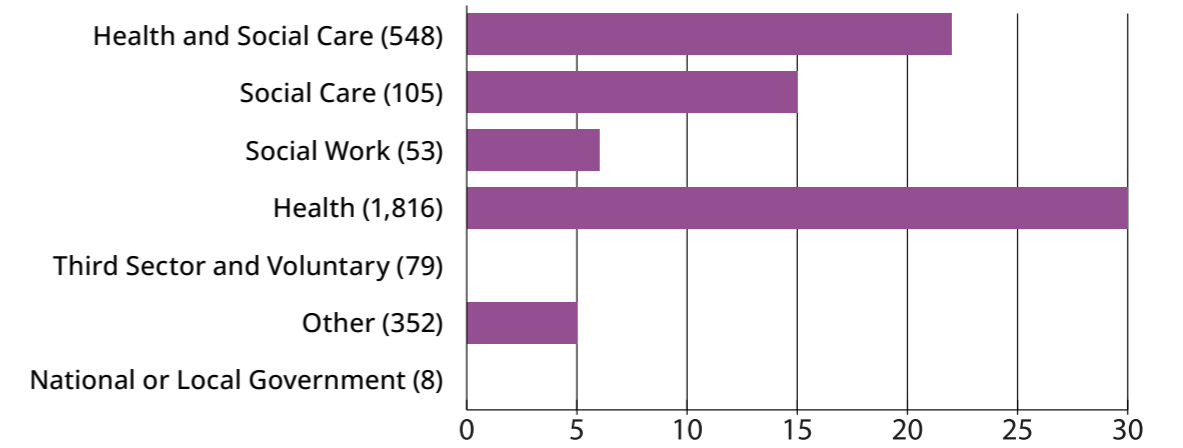
Spotlight (Total 377)



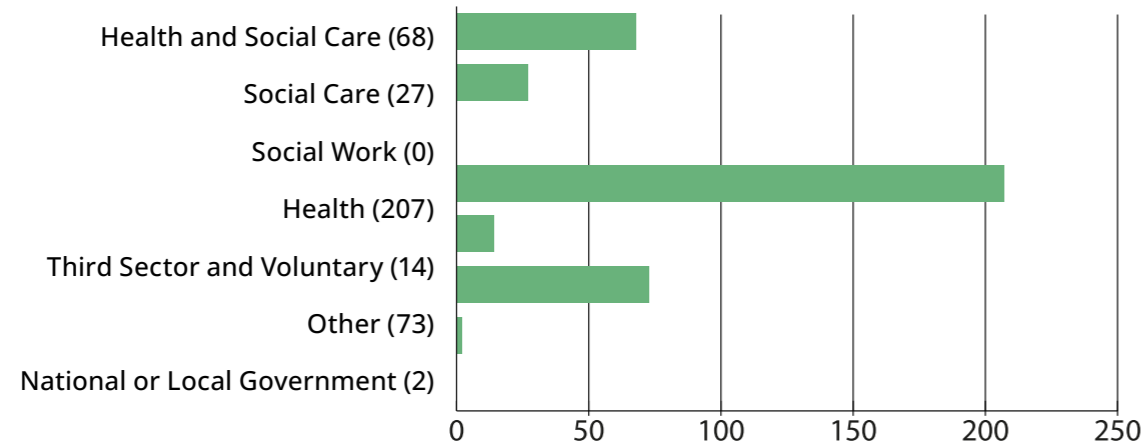
Leadership Links (Total 2,961)



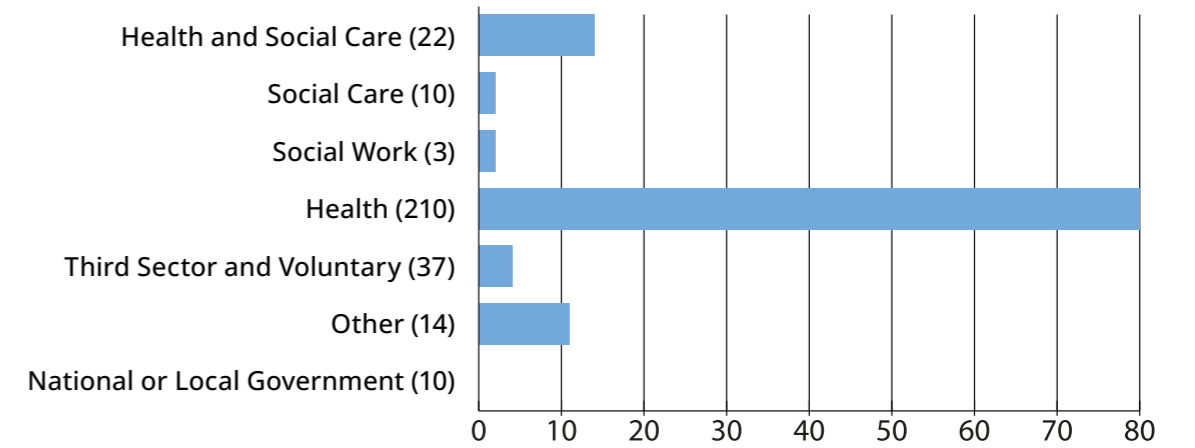
Taster Sessions (Total 78)



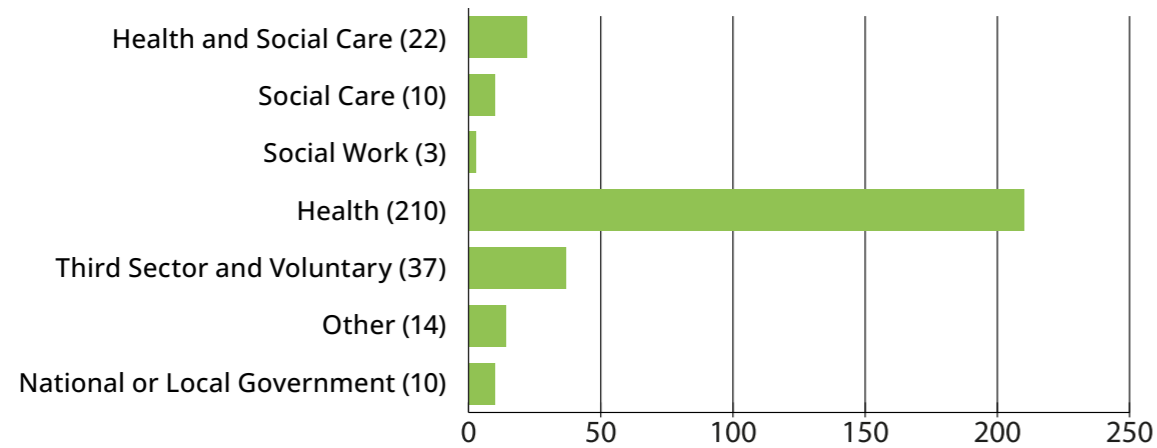
Diversity Coffee Connect (Total 391)



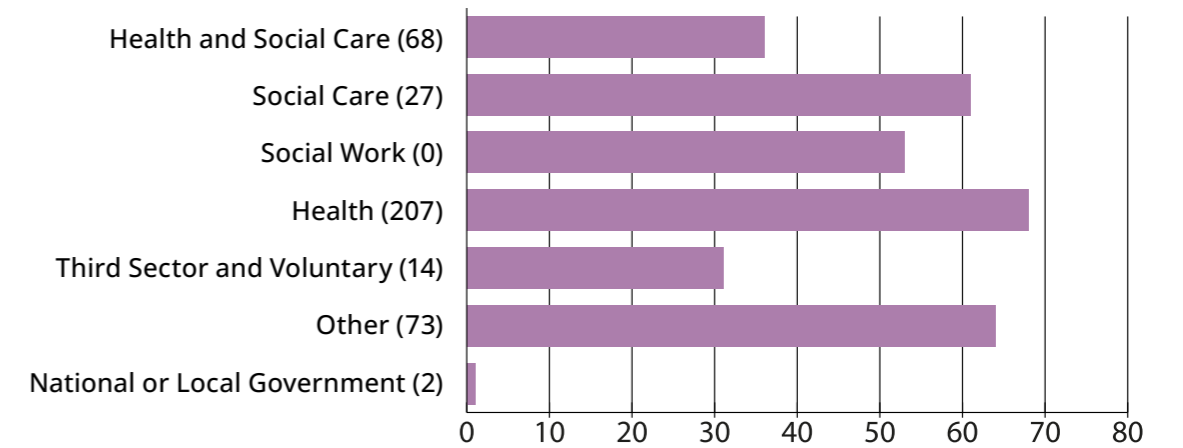
Book Club (Total 113)



Leadership Bites (Total 306)

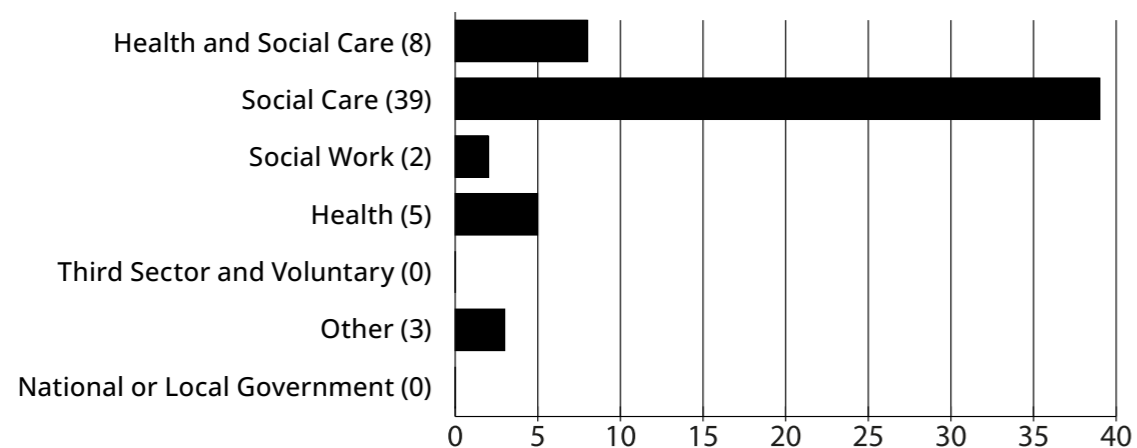


Spotlight (Total 314)



Attendee Sector Breakdown at Events

Psychological First Aid (Total 57)



The Psychological First Aid events were managed by Leading to Change for Scottish Government.