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Evaluation of Queen's Nurses Leadership Programme run by the Queen's Nursing Institute

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1. Executive summary

This evaluation reports on the first iteration of the Queen's Nurses Leadership Programme delivered from May 2017 to April 2018. Employing three evaluation frameworks, the report reviews curriculum documents and course content, and explores the experiences of Cohort One group members as reported in a focus group held in April 2018.

The evaluation finds a high degree of congruence between the programme's four key themes of *self*, *organisation*, *team* and *future*, and positive participant assessment of the efficacy of the course in respect of each of these organising themes.

The distinctive contribution the programme has made to participants' learning is established, with particular learning gain noted in the affective and psychomotor domains of practice.

Within the context of positive overall participant assessment of the programme, some small-scale variations are reported in respect of the elements of discovery and experiential learning, and in relation to participants' experience of mentoring arrangements.

The report concludes by suggesting some of the distinctive emphases of the programme and identifying the success of the programme philosophy and culture in developing and sustaining a positive learning experience in the field of leadership development.

2. Background and scope

This evaluation of the first iteration of the Queen's Nurses Leadership Programme (2017-18) was undertaken by Dr Roger Dalrymple, Principal Lecturer in Education at Oxford Brookes University between April and August 2018. The aim of the evaluation was to arrive at an independent assessment of the efficacy and impact of this first run of the programme and to identify any emergent recommendations that might inform future delivery of the provision.

Data sources for the evaluation were as follows:
- A critical review of documentation associated with the QNI Leaders Programme including the programme handbook, the pattern of study for the programme, and the indicative course content description;
- A focus group meeting with Cohort 1 participants attending their final residential session on 20 April 2018;
- Access to the evaluative feedback provided to the Programme Leader by course participants and mentors from Cohort 1.

The report will evaluate the provision against three classic evaluation frameworks for continuing professional development provision - Bloom's (1956) taxonomy of education objectives; Biggs's notion of constructive alignment; and Kirkpatrick's (1994) four-level scheme for the evaluation of continuing professional development programmes. The evaluation will also identify themes emerging from the evaluative feedback gathered from participants in a focus group held in April 2018. The report will conclude by highlighting the distinctive features of the programme and outlining any ramifications for future delivery.

Roger Dalrymple
September 2018

3. Context and structure of the QNI leadership programme

In 2017-18 the Queen's Nursing Institute delivered the first run of a Queen's Nurses' Leadership Programme with the aim of supporting the professional development of Queen's Nurses to become future community nursing leaders, to the benefit of the people, the families and the communities they serve. Running from May 2017 to April 2018, the programme comprised 10 study days and a number of online and independent study activities, framed by two sustained residential sessions in May 2017 and April 2018. The course embeds its own evaluative processes at the mid-point of the programme (November 2017) and the close of the programme (April 2018). Enhancements based on feedback at these two staging points is embedded into subsequent course delivery.

This first run of the programme was financially supported by charitable endowment funds committed by the QNI Trustees and was selective, admitting 12 participants, all of whom completed the course successfully in April 2018. An expectation of 100% attendance is stipulated for the course and the course team confirmed that this expectation had largely been met with a very few instances of individual absence due to unforeseen circumstances.

The principal aim of the QNI Leaders programme is 'to prepare participants to become influential community healthcare leaders of the future and to develop, promote and support excellent nurse leaders and role models in the community who can improve services for communities at system and practice levels.'[1] The associated objectives for the programme are focused into the four developmental domains of self; organisation; team; and the creation of congenial conditions for a positive future. The objectives are set out in the programme documentation as follows:

1. **Self** – understanding and development of self through personal reflection
2. **Organisation** – Understanding health and social care structure and a systems leadership approach to service delivery.
3. **Team** – Understanding and leading others – people management and staff.
4. **The Future** – consideration of future career aspirations.

The learning and teaching strategy for the programme seeks to support and advance these aims on a number of fronts. Study days involve a range of different learning formats and

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[1] *Queen's Nurses Leadership Programme Handbook* 2017/2018, p.3.

activities including lectures, presentations, workshop, group work, simulations and site visits. Independent and collaborative study activities include online postings where participants are prompted to respond to 'provocations' to discussion and debate, posted by the course team. This online discussion component is designed to sustain the learning community in the periods between face-to-face study sessions. Participants' project management skills are developed by their identification and development of a practice project which is refined and focused through the duration of the programme and reported on at the closing session; their reflective skills are exercised and developed by means of a personal diary, provided by the course team at the outset of the programme and populated in both independent study time and in dedicated writing time built into the structure of the programme itself.

The programme is not academically accredited or designed for delivery at a particular academic level but its content and critically evaluative character align broadly with the expectations and demands of graduate or Masters level provision in leadership and management. This is reflected in the high quotient of critical evaluation and reflective engagement in the learning tasks and discussion activities as well as the engagement with key theories and principles of leadership development including those of Goleman, Maslow, Drucker, Belbin, Adair and Tuckman. Likewise, the ten study days (totalling some 80 hours of contact time with the course team) would broadly align with the amount of contact time expected on a postgraduate certificate programme (where a total of 600 hours of learning effort would be anticipated but most likely only 60-80 of those hours would be direct teaching contact with staff, the remainder being independent study and preparation for assessments).[2]

3.1 Mapping of the programme against selected QAA Business and Management benchmarks

The programme also aligns with elements of the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) subject benchmark statements for Business and Management (although as a leadership programme, the course is naturally more focused on qualities reflected in the latter element of the benchmarks and as it is not academically accredited nor specifically mapped to a particularly academic level, there is less of the kind of sustained engagement with theory and literature than would be the case on a formally accredited programme; rather the emphasis is on practical knowledge, personal development, and emotional intelligence – all of which

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[2] In distinction to the programme, academically accredited provision would of course involve a summatively assessed component, usually in the region of 12,000 words for a postgraduate certificate of 60 credits.

aspects were remarked upon by focus group participants as having been key areas of learning gain during their participation on the programme.

A mapping of those elements of the QNI Leaders programme which most closely align with the QAA Business and Management descriptors is as follows.

QAA subject knowledge descriptors	QNI Leaders' Programme
Customers: management of customer expectations, relationships and development of service excellence.	Explicit emphasis on service delivery is included in the *Organisation* strand of the course.
People: leadership, management and development of people and organisations including the implications of the legal context.	These considerations are addressed in the *Organisation* and *Team* strands. Participants identified the particular value of the 'Being on the receiving end of me' activity.
Organisational behaviour: design, development of organisations, including cross-cultural issues, change, diversity and values.	These aspects are addressed in the *Organisation* and *Team* strands.
Social responsibility: the need for individuals and organisations to manage responsibly and behave ethically in relation to social, cultural, economic and environmental issues.	Focus group feedback reflected participants' sense that they were able to engage with these issues and articulate personal perspectives and ethical commitments.

QAA subject skills and practice descriptors	QNI Leaders' Programme
People management: to include communications, team building, leadership and motivating others.	These areas are addressed in *Team* strand. Focus group feedback confirmed the value of such experiential activities as modelling the chairing of meetings and practising difficult conversations.

Innovation, creativity and enterprise: the ability to act entrepreneurially to generate, develop and communicate ideas, manage and exploit intellectual property, gain support, and deliver successful outcomes.	Focus group feedback suggested that this element of creativity and enterprise had been particularly nurtured in the *Self* strand of the programme.
Networking: an awareness of the interpersonal skills of effective listening, negotiating, persuasion and presentation and their use in generating business contacts.	Participants indicated they had derived networking benefits from the course *per se.*

QAA other generic skills and attributes	QNI Leaders' Programme
Articulating and effectively explaining information.	There is a strong emphasis on the development of communication skills in all of the course content. Focus group comments confirmed the effectiveness of this dimension.
Building and maintaining relationships.	Participants reported a strong emphasis on these elements.
Communication and listening including the ability to produce clear, structured business communications in a variety of media.	
Emotional intelligence and empathy.	
Conceptual and critical thinking, analysis, synthesis and evaluation.	These qualities are actively encouraged in the resources and materials for all strands.
Self-management: a readiness to accept responsibility and flexibility, to be resilient,	This is established as an admissions requirement for the course.
Self-starting and appropriately assertive, to plan, organise and manage time.	This is stablished as an admissions requirement for the course.
Self-reflection: self-analysis and an awareness/sensitivity to diversity in terms of people and cultures. This includes a continuing appetite for development.	These qualities are actively encouraged in all strands of the course and strongly represented in the focus group responses.

This high correspondence between programme content and the QAA benchmark statements for business and management arguably reflects the pedigree of the delivery team as experienced developers of academically accredited provision at Masters level while also demonstrating a more agile and flexible approach than a formally accredited programme might always allow.

4. Participant views on the question of accreditation

Discussion with participants in the focus group established that the programme's freedom from direct academic mapping and accreditation was experienced as a benefit. Participants valued the flexibility to develop their own learning goals and appreciated the principal emphasis of the programme on measuring self-development against an ipsative scale of self-reference rather than employing the kind of extrinsic measures more typically seen in academically accredited programmes. This was strongly valued by participants with indicative focus group responses including the following:

> I don't feel there has been for me any theory at all in that way. We've mentioned X or Y but yeah that hasn't featured at all for me; I couldn't say one author or theorist [had predominated]. (Respondent C)

> I think in the first few days there were lots of references but then after that we didn't get really… I think people were talking about their theories and views. (Respondent D).

> It's been eclectic. No one model [has dominated]. (Respondent E).

Members of the focus group also showed general agreement with one participant's suggestion that the course would lend itself well to a retrospective Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL) process at a future stage:

> If you wanted to apply what you've learned through an academic model then you could absolutely pick aspects of the course out very easily and apply them to something or reference it to some model or theory – that is absolutely possible. So you could potentially APL what you've done and try and get credits for it. I absolutely think you could do that.

In terms of academic level and rigor then, the programme reflects the experience and background of the curriculum development and delivery team as higher education professionals; the course clearly derives a strong theoretical and academic grounding from this expertise and experience while primarily emphasising personal and individual

development for programme participants – something that was very positively evaluated in the focus group.

5. Evaluation against Bloom's taxonomy of educational objectives

The first of the three evaluative frameworks employed in relation to the provision was Bloom's influential taxonomy of educational objectives (1956). With reference to the programme documentation and the focus group held with Cohort One participants in April 2018, this evaluation has considered the effectiveness of the programme when mapped against Bloom's three domains of learning. There is strong evidence that programme participants recognised learning gain in each of the three domains of learning identified by Bloom: the cognitive (where conceptual change and understanding are realised), the affective (where attitudes, values and feelings are influenced) and the psychomotor (where practical skills and abilities are practised and acquired). Discussion with participants in the focus group established that they considered all three domains had been addressed but that here had been particular value added in the affective domain with insights generated into personalities, interactions and ways of being in the workplace.

5.1 The cognitive domain

Focus group comments indicated that while some course content had been familiar to participants, new approaches and re-framing of existing understanding had been achieved. Participants considered that engagement in the course had consolidated their knowledge of different frameworks and schematics for understanding such topics as team working, communication, motivation, managing conflict, and change management. Participants reported how this had in part been achieved by the inputs of guest speakers who had provided inspiring addresses and authentic voices to the group. 'Take-home statements' from these speakers had resonated with programme participants and were vividly recalled in the focus group, examples including: 'Be at the table or be on the menu'; 'What is it like to be on the receiving end of me?'; and 'Stop-Think-Respond'. It was clear that these inputs to the programme had prompted much ongoing reflection among participants who had actively taken these principles back into the workplace and subsequently applied them to practice. While participants were clear that existing knowledge had been updated and refreshed, the most measurable impacts had been in terms of personal development and individual distance travelled – notions which open onto the affective domain of Bloom's learning schema.

5.2 The affective domain

The focus group feedback emphasised the considerable affective impact of the programme. This reflected the underpinning theory resources which include such theorists as Goleman on emotional intelligence and a group of foundational theorists on reflective practice. Yet the comments also confirmed the affective impact of a number of experiential activities embedded in the programme, including an immersive experience in a sculpture park and the addresses made to the group by a number of stakeholders and service-users who had compelling personal stories and experiences to relay. The focus group feedback again confirmed the value of this kind of input since it prompted reflection and enabled discussion:

> 'Whilst we've been focusing on ourselves we have been looking, you know, where are we going, what are you doing.'

> 'I think what we've remembered and focused on is more the personal self and our futures'.

> I think those were lightbulb moments about ourselves or our leadership or something that really resonated with us personally.

One focus group participant was less comfortable with the addresses from two individuals who had experienced traumatic events in the past, relating how she 'struggled with where they were on their own personal journey'. Nevertheless, all participants considered that these more challenging affective inputs had been handled sensitively and tactfully and had been appropriately framed by the course leader.

Also in relation to the affective domain, participants emphasised the extent to which they felt the course had afforded them a powerful reflective space in which to develop as leaders. One focus group participant remarked on how the course had left her 'feeling valued but also having the space in a comfortable, nice environment to relax and think' while another suggested that so powerful was the sense of a reflective and safe space it was almost akin to participating in a retreat: 'I think it's probably sanctuary isn't it? It's the retreat thing. That's felt very important again for the whole feeling.'

5.3 Psychomotor domain

While many leadership development programmes might be able to measure impact in the cognitive and affective domains it is significant that in the case of this programme,

participants also mentioned practical skills that they had developed in the psychomotor domain. These ranged from practical strategies and interventions that might be applied when chairing meetings or facilitating difficult conversations, to establishing and curating a professional social media presence for the first time. One participant reported how she felt she had gained 'a virtual toolbox' during the programme and was now equipped with this in meetings and workplace interactions, extending her repertoire of practical strategies and interventions when working with others. Another reported on the value of activities and exercises which had involved the modelling and enacting of different processes and strategies which might be used in the workplace:

> We practised chairing meetings and techniques you'd use. Practised brave conversations. And also the recruitment thing [. . .] that was very practical about how to do CVs; how to search up things. There was also a Twitter session about how to use Twitter and some of us who weren't on Twitter have now become prolific 'tweeters'. Yeah there were some sort of practical things as well.

Another participant emphasised how valuable she had found a session exploring the creative thinker and that this had changed her perceptions of colleagues who showed a tendency to 'fidget' in meetings. Where previously this might have been a source of distraction or annoyance for her, she now actively provided resources for this purpose:

> And I also do it for my meetings now: there's boxes that go in the middle of the tables. For fiddly bits. Fiddly bits and sweets. It really, really works to get the best out of people.

These examples of added value in the psychomotor domain arguably represent a distinctive strength of the QNI leaders programme. While leadership development programmes will customarily seek to inform understanding and may offer some modelling of ways of being and ways of relating in the workplace, a clear theme in focus group feedback was this markedly rich array of practical skills and interventions offered on the QNI leaders programme, with clear evidence of these having been applied, implemented and evaluated during the lifecycle of the programme itself and with participants already noting and reporting positive outcomes as a result.

6. Evaluation against Biggs's (2000) principles of constructive alignment

The focus group also provided an evaluative opportunity to explore the extent to which participants had experienced the programme as constructively aligned: i.e. there was congruence between specified learning objectives, learning and teaching strategies and, where relevant, assessment and feedback strategies. Participants reported high congruence

in respect of these aspects, discerning a tight fit between the learning environment, learning activities and teaching approach and philosophy of the course team. Indicative quotations included the following:

> Having that residential got it off the right start and it also feels like it's closing it properly.

> It's the first time I think I've ever been on a course, and I've been on loads, and some have lasted a long time [. . .] that as a group we've absolutely got with authenticity unconditional positive regard for eachother and often we say it don't we but actually I think [. . .] there's no backbiting, there's no upmanship; it's just incredibly supportive.

> If you didn't feel safe, comfortable, supported you wouldn't have shared.

Only in respect of some of the immersive and experiential activities was there some difference of opinion as to how well the entirety of the programme aligned. The principal focus in discussion of this kind was the immersive learning experience in a sculpture park at which participants had been invited to explore, discuss and reflect upon a range of sculptures in a setting. Here the very open approach to emergent learning and to allowing participants to find their own significances and forge their own connections in relation to the experience had left some participants more engaged than others:

> I did take a while to work out what the point of it was. It was only afterwards really that I found something in it that was why we'd done it and what was useful and then it was useful.

> I think for me that emphasised that if you were a left or right brain thinker it made you come out of your comfort zone and go into your other unknown territory. For me I thought, I've never been in a sculpture park; why would we want to go to a sculpture park? But I came out of the other end. [. . .] I would enjoy going to a sculpture park now. It's because I never even thought that was of any relevance to me. That's one side of the brain thinking – and you've got to use them both.

> I think for me the sculpture park – we were all a bit suspicious initially. Then we were split into groups of three; then we had to link the sculptures to leadership [. . .] That for me was a good flow of how we've learned something and developed our creative thinking. [. . .] For me that all linked in together.

This same theme of participants needing to reflect on a learning episode before they grasped its full significance or relevance was also evident in relation to some of the guest

speeches by service-users and stakeholders. One participant indicated she would have valued additional framing or contextualisation of the inputs by two of the guest speakers:

> I think there's something about being really clear why you are doing that. And for me; we're nurses. [. . .] We've all got examples of people who have just been unbelievably resilient and strong. And to bring someone out... It just didn't work for me at all. And I'd have liked to have been very very clear what we were going to get off the experience.

While this view found some support in the focus group there was equally a recognition that too much framing and contextualisation can work against the form of discovery learning and emergent meaning-making that the course overall tended to promote.

The only further area in which participants suggested less integration of a course element was in the variable experiences reported of mentorship. All feedback was positive in terms of access to an appropriate and supportive mentor, but there was variation in the extent to which the mentors had been drawn upon and some suggestion that mentors might benefit from further briefing. Indicative quotations from the focus group were as follows:

> We've missed talking about the mentors because for some of us that was a really good point. For others it didn't. That needs to be acknowledged that it worked for some and not for others. [. . .] And there was that offer at the beginning that if it didn't sit with you then you can go back and look for another one but it didn't feel comfortable…

> I think some of us were fortunate to have mentors who were also professional coaches [. . .] my mentor knew I needed coaching [. . .] and she almost didn't need the script about what to do and I hear that maybe other people didn't know what they were supposed to be doing.

> Mine said: 'You sound like you've got it all sorted; I don't think I can offer you very much.'

At the time of the focus group, participants mentioned that revised and enhanced arrangements for mentors were already planned for future iterations of the programme and that their feedback on the experience had been heard and was being responded to fully.

7. Evaluation against Kirkpatrick's − Reaction, learning, behaviour, results

Thirdly, it is instructive to review the provision against the evaluative framework proffered by Kirkpatrick (1994) for the evaluation of training programmes. This fourfold scheme invites the evaluation of continuing professional development programmes against the reference points of participants' reactions; their learning; their behaviour; and results. When

mapping against this framework, the present study can speak most volubly to the first two levels since these were the most salient and measurable at the time of conducting the focus group and evaluation. Focus group responses touched to a limited extent on the latter two levels in terms of reporting changes in behaviour and early beneficial results from participation in the programme but a longitudinal study would be best placed to offer a full assessment against these domains.

An initial mapping of this evaluation's findings against Kirkpatrick's four domains is as follows.

Reaction (Evaluation on this level measures how those who participate in the programme react to it).	As we have seen, participant reactions stressed the programme's far-reaching influence on them, particularly in terms of personal development. When invited to suggest a key term that summed up their reactions to the course, focus group participants volunteered the terms 'Reflective'; 'Affirming'; 'Family'; 'Inspiring'; 'Comforting'; 'Safe'; Empowering'; and 'Transformational'. Participants went on to elaborate on these key terms and to indicate the different dimensions of impact they had experienced on the course. It was evident that all participants considered the learning gain to have been considerable and that their positive reactions were an abiding dimension of their course experience.
Learning (The extent to which participants change attitudes, improve knowledge, and/or increase skill as a result of attending the programme).	As we have seen, the focus group data shows how participants had already applied theories, principles and practical strategies from their learning on the course in their working settings. Some individuals had changed roles or settings since the commencement of the course and applied learning in a new context. Others had simply modelled or enacted a new approach to leadership and management in their existing settings. Participants were able to identify a number of examples where learning derived from the course had been applied to the effective leadership of teams, communications with stakeholders, and resolution of challenges. The dominant learning gain was identified as being in the affective domain and in respect of emotional intelligence, authentic leadership

	and an increased ability to empathise and to imagine 'being on the receiving end of me.' While it would be a helpful further step to triangulate the participants' self-report against other measures of their learning, the focus group data offers a strong basis for anticipating a high degree of learning gain from the first iteration of the programme.
Behaviour (The extent to which change in behaviour has occurred because the participant attended the programme).	The latter two levels of Kirkpatrick's framework are less amenable to detailed mapping without a more longitudinal follow-up, the focus group data having been gathered in April 2018 as the programme was drawing to a close. A further census date for evaluation at the six-month or one-year mark would obviously be best-placed to measure the extent to which participants' behaviour has changed as a result of attending the programme. Nevertheless, the focus group data included a number of examples where participants identified practice changes they had made *during the life-cycle of the course itself*. As we have seen, these included changed approaches to difficult conversations, to the chairing and running of meetings, and to facilitating team work. One of the most abiding behavioural changes reported was the impact of the 'being on the receiving end of me' exercise, with one participant reporting: 'So if I'm dealing with somebody or speaking with somebody it made me think literally about how it would be if I was literally on the receiving end.' Likewise, another participant who had changed roles in her organisation during the period of the course was able to reflect on how she had drawn upon 'the knowledge that I've now been able to acquire and use it to the good.
Results (The final results that occurred because the participants attended the programme).	Evaluating the full scope of the final results that occurred because the participants attended the programme would again require further longitudinal follow-up and can reach only provisional conclusions based on the self-report of participants at the April 2018 focus group. Nevertheless, those instances of self-report included some illuminating workplace feedback from colleagues and stakeholders, implying the positive outcomes from the

	programme even at this early stage of measurement and evaluation. One participant remarked that since changing roles within her organisation 'I've noticed the influence and the things we've actually learned have really impacted and continue to do so.' Another remarked how the change in practice involved 'using yourself as the leadership tool rather than learning some theoretical concepts about how you do leadership and this is the process and system.' A third remarked how she had changed her practice around incident reports, now following up directly and contacting the individual emphasise the care and support structures that might have been left implicit before: 'So now I'm now sending that back to the person who actually reported it saying I've seen this; it sounds a horrible situation; how are you feeling? Would you like to talk to me or to the pastoral care team or is there anything I can do, that type of thing.' These early indications gesture towards positive results both in terms of individual actions and in terms of culture development in the workplace; the likelihood is that a follow-up at a further census date in the future would reveal further examples of impact and influence.

Based on Kirkpatrick (1994), pp. 19-24.

The QNI Leaders programme thus shows many positive indicators when evaluated against the Kirkpatrick framework, with demonstrable outcomes against the first two levels and emerging and developing outcomes indicated against the second two levels. The indications are strong that the initial findings would be bolstered by further follow-up at a more longitudinal point after the conclusion of the course.

8. Summary

In summary there is good evidence of the positive and far-reaching impact of this first iteration of the Queen's Nurses Leadership Programme. Measured with reference to a range of evaluative frameworks for educational provision, and informed by the responses and perspectives of the Cohort One participants, it is clear that the course has impacted positively on learning and development and can show immediate outcomes in practice.

Distinctive features include the 'light touch' with which the theoretical underpinnings are conveyed; the strong culture of positive regard in which learning in the affective domain is maximised; and the high quotient of practical or psychomotor skills the participants consider they have gained from engagement in the course enabling them to move their practice forward in line with the programme's objectives of benefiting people, families and communities.

9. References

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