

Evaluation of the Common Purpose Nature Recovery Leadership Programmes for the North of England and Scotland

January 2025

Ellie Brodie
Director
Grounded Insight

www.groundedinsight.org

Table of contents

01. Executive Summary	01	08. Activities: assessing the components of the Programme	24
02. Introduction	05	Praise for Common Purpose team	25
03. Evaluation Aims and Objectives	06	Impact of uneven Programme pacing	26
04. Methodology	06	Limited consolidation of learning	26
05. Findings	09	Questionable understanding of Scottish context	28
06. Rationale: drivers and anticipated (post-2025) outcomes for the Programme	10	09. Participant Outcomes: Understanding the difference the Programme made to the participants	29
The nature crisis in context	10	1. Enhancing participants' ability to lead and collaborate across boundaries	30
Need for leadership development in the nature sector	11	2. Building networks and a cohort working in solidarity	33
Driver 1: Need for cross-sector collaboration	12	3. Personal development and resilience	38
Driver 2: Lack of leadership development in and across the nature sector	13	4. Increasing leaders from under-represented communities	41
Driver 3: Heterogeneity of the nature sector workforce.	14	10. Reflections and recommendations	44
Driver 4: Depleting resilience and risk of burnout	15	Composition of cohort	44
07. Enabling Inputs: understanding the knowledge, time and funding which kickstarted the Programme	17	Balance between nature and leadership	45
Common Purpose: thought leadership	17	Getting even more from the Programme	46
Funding and in-kind contributions	19	Geography	46
Participant recruitment and cohort profile	20	11. Appendix - Stakeholder Interviewees: Funders, Steering and Advisory Groups	47
Evaluation participant profile	20		

Executive Summary

Introduction

The Common Purpose Nature Recovery Leadership Programmes ('the Programme') for the North of England and Scotland gathered a diverse group of emerging leaders working in nature recovery. It aimed to give participants the leadership skills, connections, and inspiration to enable them to progress in their organisations, in the wider sector, and beyond, to become key players in the regeneration and restoration of England and Scotland's natural heritage.

Evaluation Aims, Objectives and Approach

This evaluation aimed to assess the impact of the Programme on the participants and on meeting the Programme's aims and objectives of:

- enhancing participants' ability to lead and collaborate across boundaries
- growing new networks by connecting with diverse participants and speakers, and build a cohort of leaders
- improving participants' self-awareness and personal resilience to meet the challenges of being a leader in the nature sector
- increasing the number of leaders from under-represented communities who are developed to take on senior roles in the sector

As a pilot, the Programme could provide a template for a larger-scale nature recovery leadership programme. A theory of change was created for the evaluation which was appraised through 36 one-to-one in-depth interviews with participants and other stakeholders.

Rationale and evidencing the need for the Programme

To address the nature crisis and meet government goals to recover nature, we need a workforce which is equipped to lead across organisational, geographical and sectoral boundaries. Yet the nature sector suffers from a lack of cross-sector collaboration, leadership development and diversity. Combined with the need for leaders to have deep personal resilience in the face of the scale of the nature recovery challenge, these factors create the rationale for this Programme for emerging leaders in nature recovery.

Enabling inputs

Common Purpose's approach to developing cross-boundary leadership capabilities beyond individuals' direct control is called Leading Beyond Authority (LBA), and was the key framework for the taught elements of the Programme. Programme funding was provided by the National Lottery Heritage Fund and Esmée Fairbairn Foundation. Other sponsoring organisations, including Nature North and NatureScot, the National Trust and The Wildlife Trusts, provided in-kind support, helped advertise the Programme and recruit participants.

Recruitment needed to happen quickly once funding was awarded which impacted on the composition of the cohort. Most participant interviewees were from the voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) sector and the private sector, with fewest from the public sector and most were working at either national or regional scale at manager level. Most participants were working as partnership or programme managers of nature and natural capital.

Programme Activities

The Programme is designed as a whole, with each component complementing and supporting the others. It was comprised of five core elements: an online learning platform, live online sessions, in-person events including a three-day residential and a one-day full cohort gathering, one-to-one coaching and peer coaching.

The feedback on the Programme elements was, on the whole, very positive, with participants valuing both its holistic nature and the individual elements of the Programme. The Common Purpose team received praise for the facilitators, level of organisation, speaker line-up and taught content. The in-person elements were valued, whilst the online platform was not. The main areas of improvement for the design and content of the Programme related to pacing, more opportunities to consolidate learning and more country-specific knowledge in the case of Scotland.

Participant Outcomes

Aim 1 - Leading Beyond Authority and collaborating across boundaries

Participants demonstrated that the Programme had enhanced their ability to Lead Beyond Authority, i.e. to lead and collaborate across boundaries. This was due to the combination of taught material including the Leading Beyond Authority framework, learning from inspirational speakers and putting tools and techniques into practice during the Programme. Participants demonstrated they were applying what they had learnt both in and outside work.

Aim 2 - Building networks and a cohort working in solidarity

Many participants reported that the Programme had given them new connections and they enjoyed being part of a new network. For some, this network is already active and bringing benefits; others saw it as being useful in future. Participant network(s) seem to primarily have been built at the in-person events and through the peer coaching groups.

Not all participants developed new networks. This appears to reflect the composition of the cohort which, in turn, reflected the sector more generally, i.e. the cohort was made up of a core of environmental professionals working in the environment sector. A need to increase the diversity of cultures and backgrounds and of sectors was identified. Being more targeted about the level of experience of participants was identified as a further need.

In sum, the cohort was perhaps too varied in terms of the level of experience and stage in career and not varied enough in terms of sector and background, to meet fully meet this Programme aim.

A key theme in relation to participants feeling part of a cohort working in solidarity for nature recovery was about the balance between the leadership elements of the Programme and the nature elements of it. Many participants wanted nature to be more integral to the Programme in terms of the practical application of the concepts, the speakers and the delivery team.

Aim 3 - Personal resilience and confidence

The evaluation found that the Programme built participants' confidence and resilience, with the one-to-one coaching being a key enabler, as well as peer coaching, hearing inspirational speakers' leadership challenges and taught elements of the Programme including on public speaking. Several participants had applied for and got more senior jobs because of feeling an increased level of confidence through being on the Programme. Whilst overall this aim was demonstrated to have been met, a minority of participants were surprised by, and uncomfortable with, the level of self-reflection and openness about personal feelings the Programme invited.

Aim 4 - Increasing leaders from under-represented communities

Efforts were made to recruit participants from under-represented communities in the environment sector, specifically people from a minority ethnic background and women. Targets for Scotland for people from a minority ethnic background were exceeded but were missed in the North of England. More women were recruited in both cohorts than men, exceeding the 50% target.

Participants did not feel that this aim had been fully met, and participants tended to reflect the heterogeneity of the environment sector. However, there are strengths to build on. The Cultural Intelligence element of the taught Programme was valued and some participants reported feeling more equipped to be more inclusive of all communities in their work because of being on the Programme.

Reflections and recommendations

The Nature Recovery Leadership Programme was a pilot and the evaluation was tasked with exploring what could be improved upon should it be continued or rolled out. We have the following reflections, considerations and recommendations.

Composition of cohort

- Give sufficient time and expertise to creating a suitable process for, and recruitment of, participants from a range of sectors and backgrounds. This will require engaging with leaders from organisations in different sectors to ensure that participants are drawn from community and arts backgrounds as well as corporate and public sector ones.
- Consider changing the focus and name of a future Programme and the marketing of it to make it more appealing to, and inclusive of, other sectors.
- Create a more secure grounding for conversations to happen around race and intersectionality within the Programme.
- Consider developing an additional programme, for example a cross-sectoral programme for people of colour.
- Encourage smaller organisations to participate, including through the continued availability of a bursary. A future bursary scheme will need to provide a robust mechanism to ensure that organisations in receipt of it are both highly committed to the Programme and are in financial need.
- Consider helping provide a fertile landing ground for participants returning to their host organisations so that they are not alone in being cultural change agents. In the first instance, this could be as simple as agreeing some terms of engagement setting out the expectations of the host organisation and the participant resulting from participating in the Programme.
- Consider developing an international aspect to the Programme, drawing on Common Purpose's international experience, with the aim of conveying diversity in leadership styles and roles and that participants' efforts to recover nature at home are part of a global effort – which could, in turn, help with their resilience and feelings of solidarity.

Balance between nature and leadership

Whilst it is clear that participants gained a lot from the Programme in terms learning about and applying leadership concepts, many felt that the 'nature' part of the Programme was not sufficiently prioritised and integrated. Some ways this could be addressed in a future programme could include:

- Create opportunities for participants to work on projects together for example by bringing the open space session from the alumni gathering earlier in the Programme and using the online sessions to support collaborative working that may have been kicked off in-person.
- Provide inspiring speakers of nature leadership in action from those outside the nature sector (e.g. investors, corporates, non-nature public sector, international, farmers, developers, etc).
- Create opportunities to apply leadership learning in practice (e.g. at the face-to-face gathering or online) with a focus on nature.
- Create more opportunities for participants to be in nature over the Programme.
- Clarify the balance of nature and leadership in marketing and communications about the Programme (i.e. pre-application stage) to manage expectations.

Getting even more from the Programme

There are some considerations for how the value from the Programme could be increased yet further, for example:

- Create more opportunities for participants to consolidate learning
- Consider the pacing of the Programme and spreading some of the intensity of the residential and the first few months of the Programme more evenly over its duration
- Create summaries, 'cheat sheets' and other relevant material such as a Programme booklet to accompany the Programme, and make this accessible
- Provide more information on the agenda items so that participants who like and need to prepare are able to
- Explore whether host organisations could have more of a role, for example by championing the participant's involvement in the Programme in internal and external communications channels and tasking participants with creating a project to take back which adds value to their organisation
- Consider what happens next with the current cohort, which could be linked to the previous point by tasking them with taking hold of a project with others in the cohort and using them to support some of the thinking about what could come next in a future programme.

Geography

Participants were generally content with the boundaries of the Programme being Scotland and the North of England. There was limited cross-fertilisation of the two cohorts, besides the one day alumni gathering which few of the Scottish cohort participants based north of the Central Belt attended. It is interesting that of the North of England cohort, most participants had a regional or very local focus, whilst most of the Scotland cohort had a national focus.

Having a regional element made sense to participants and to supporting organisations, including attaching the Programme to a vehicle such as Nature North. However, it does appear to be even more important to get the right mix of people in the cohort and ensure that the Programme aims are honed, focused and communicated at the outset to potential applicants.

Introduction



Common Purpose's Nature Recovery Leadership Programme ('the Programme') for the North of England and Scotland gathered a diverse group of emerging leaders working in nature recovery. It aimed to give participants the leadership skills, connections, and inspiration to enable them to progress in their organisations, in the wider sector, and beyond, to become key players in the regeneration and restoration of England and Scotland's natural heritage.

The climate crisis is more widely acknowledged, understood and prioritised than the nature crisis. Yet biodiversity is in freefall and its decline represents an imminent threat to our existence. Whilst government targets exist, such as the protection and conservation of at least 30% of land and sea for biodiversity by 2030, there remains a lack of profile for, and investment in, the nature sector - including in the workforce we need to deliver nature's recovery.

Through one lens, the nature sector can be viewed as being well established, if we look to the incredible work of a wide range of NGOs working for biodiversity, many of whom were part of this Programme as a consultee, supporting partner or host organisation of Programme participants. On the other, it can be seen as an emergent industry, with corporates from water companies to pension funds turning their attention to nature-based

solutions such as carbon capture and water management; and developers in England needing to deliver on statutory requirements for biodiversity net gain.

Acknowledging the need for a supported, resilient and connected workforce to recover nature, Common Purpose set out to use their experience, skills and networks to investigate whether a dedicated leadership programme was needed for emerging leaders in nature recovery. Through conversations with numerous organisations, they established there was a need to build the resilience, skills, diversity and collaboration across boundaries of those working for nature. Common Purpose sought to test the concept of a Nature Recovery Leadership Programme for emerging leaders and delivered a pilot leadership programme in the North of England and in Scotland.

Funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund and Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, and with the support of a steering group and advisory groups for the two areas, 96 emerging leaders took part in the Programme between May – December 2024.

This report shares findings and insight from the independent evaluation, conducted by Grounded Insight. We hope the findings and recommendations that stem from it can pave the way for development of future leadership programmes for those working to recover nature.

Evaluation Aims and Objectives

The evaluation aimed to assess whether the Programme had met its stated aims and objectives, and to understand its impact on participants. The Programme's three overarching aims were to:

- equip emerging leaders in the sector to become the next generation of senior leaders in the field
- increase the number of leaders from under-represented communities who are developed to take on senior roles in the sector
- build a cohort of leaders who are connected and can provide a sense of solidarity through sharing ideas/strategies and supporting one another's efforts

To meet the three aims, the Programme's key objective was to equip emerging leaders in the sector to lead more effectively within and beyond their organisations by:

- enhancing their ability to Lead Beyond Authority – increasing their ability to lead and collaborate across boundaries of sector, geography, culture, and professional discipline
- growing new networks – by connecting with diverse participants and speakers
- improving self-awareness and personal resilience to meet the challenges ahead

As a pilot, the Programme could provide a template for a larger-scale nature recovery leadership programme, and so the evaluation also aimed to understand differences and similarities between the two geographies of the North of England and Scotland.

Methodology

Common Purpose sought an independent qualitative evaluation to query, challenge and elicit insight about the Programme and uncover its value and impact. This independent evaluation complements Common Purpose's quantitative feedback from the whole cohort which included three feedback surveys on participant experiences of the Programme and a diversity survey.

Grounded Insight created a theory of change (see page 10) to help understand and describe the assumptions and connections between the Programme's inputs and activities and its intended outcomes and impacts.

To gather information under each section of the theory of change, 36 one-to-one in-depth interviews were carried out on Microsoft Teams with the following key groups of people:

- a selection of stakeholders from the steering group and two advisory groups (x 10 interviews, see Appendix)
- coaches (x 2 interviews)
- Programme participants (x 24 interviews; 10 from Scotland and 14 from the North of England)
- Chief Executive, Common Purpose International (x 1 interview)

A selection framework for participant interviewees was created by Grounded Insight which included factors such as geographic location, gender and sector and was used by Common Purpose to identify 30 participants to take part in an interview.

Accounting for cancellations and non-attendance, 24 interviews were conducted and are reported on.

Stakeholders from the funders, steering and advisory groups were asked about their involvement in the Programme and why they thought it was needed. They were asked about the change they hoped would lead from the Programme, i.e. the future-focused elements of the theory of change regarding outcomes for participants, for the nature sector and for nature itself. A list of stakeholder interviewees is included in the Appendix.

Coaches were asked for their impressions about the main strengths and challenges they observed participants face as individuals and as a cohort; any noticeable features of the cohort in comparison to other leadership programmes and sectors they coach; any noticeable differences between the Scottish and North of England cohorts, and suggestions for future programme roll out. Common Purpose International's Chief Executive was asked about the pedagogy and theory behind the Programme activities.

To allow Programme participants reflection time before the interview, they were provided with key lines of questioning via email beforehand which included:

- personal and professional changes from being on the programme
- applying learning from the Programme, including collaborating across sectors
- connections and relationships built through the Programme
- inclusivity and representation in the sector, and the role of the Programme in this
- suggestions for improving the Programme
- other changes in the sector that are needed for nature's recovery

Grounded Insight attended both the North of England and Scotland residential events and the alumni one-day event to observe sessions and converse with participants, staff, coaches and funders. This familiarised the evaluator with the Programme content and participants, provided insight about the contexts for the two cohorts and helped develop the theory of change. The evaluator was introduced in plenary to all participants so everyone understood their role and that any information gathered through conversations and observation would not be reported on but may be used in other ways, e.g. to inform the design of the evaluation.

Summary: Evaluation Aims, Objectives and Approach

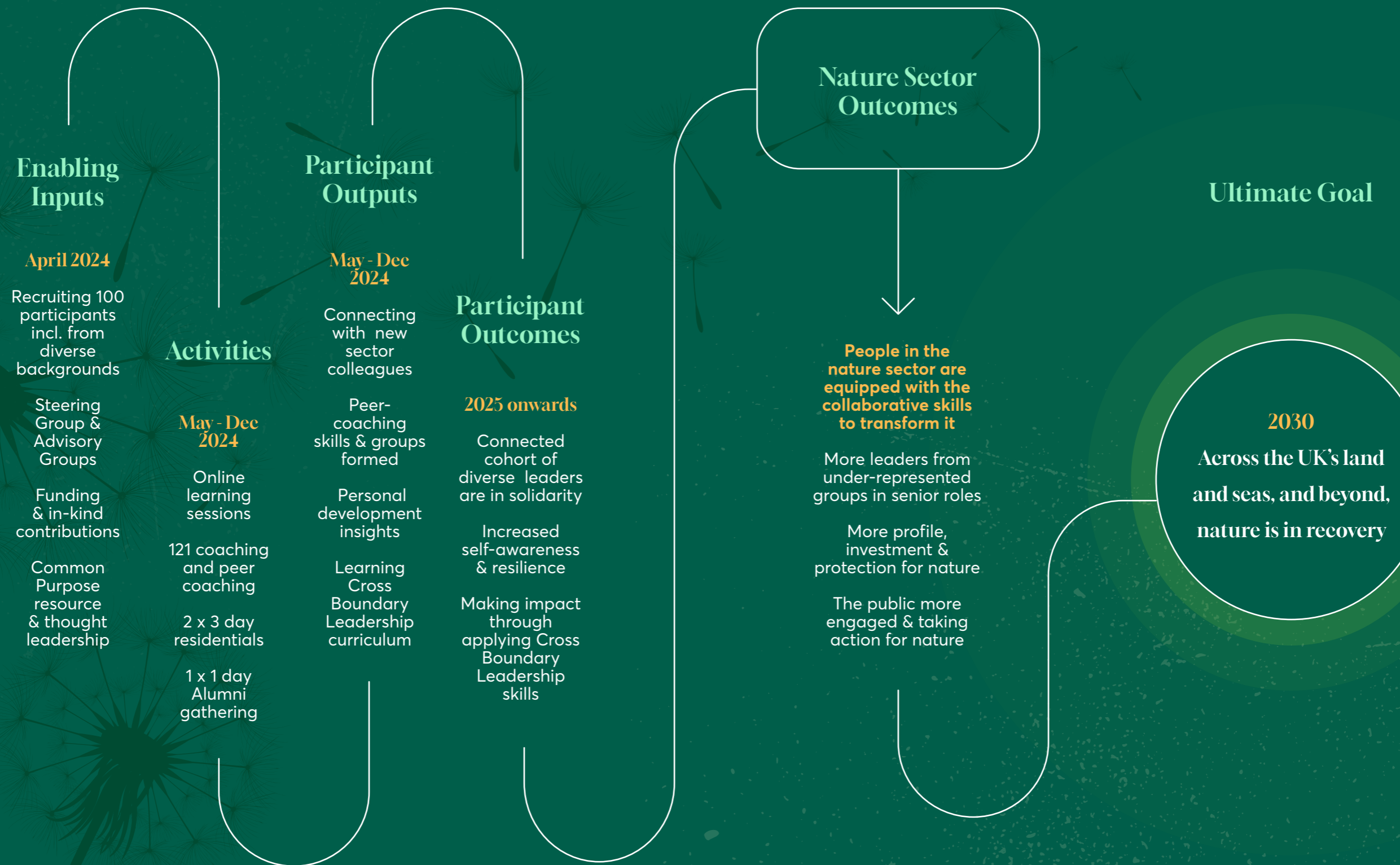
The evaluation aimed to assess the impact of the Programme on the participants and on meeting the Programme's aims and objectives of:

- enhancing participants' ability to Lead Beyond Authority to lead and collaborate across boundaries
- growing new networks by connecting with diverse participants and speakers, and build a cohort of leaders
- improving participants' self-awareness and personal resilience to meet the challenges of being a leader in the nature sector
- increasing the number of leaders from under-represented communities who are developed to take on senior roles in the sector

As a pilot, the Programme could provide a template for a larger-scale nature recovery leadership programme. A theory of change was created for the evaluation which was appraised through 36 one-to-one in-depth interviews with participants and other stakeholders.

Nature Recovery Leadership Programmes

Theory of Change



Findings

The evaluation findings are presented in four sections:

- **Rationale: drivers and anticipated (post-2025) outcomes for the Programme**
- **Enabling Inputs: understanding the knowledge, time and funding which kickstarted the Programme**
- **Activities: assessing the components of the Programme**
- **Participant Outcomes: understanding the difference the Programme made to participants**



Rationale

drivers and anticipated (post-2025) outcomes for the Programme

There are numerous and connected reasons for investing in a Nature Recovery Leadership Programme, from the global biodiversity crisis, through to sector, organisational and individual factors. Stakeholders reflected on the drivers for, and the outcomes they hoped would result from, investing in emerging leaders in the nature recovery sector.



The nature crisis in context

The UK has lost nearly half of its biodiversity, and is ranked in the bottom 10% of 240 nations and territories for its biodiversity intactness, whilst the latest State of Nature report reveals one in six species are at risk of becoming extinct in Great Britain. This matters, not just because nature is intrinsically valuable, but because biodiversity underpins the processes that support all life on earth – from the air we breathe to the food we eat.

There are several important policy and financial drivers for addressing the nature crisis. The UK Government has committed to protect and conserve a minimum of 30% of land and sea for biodiversity by 2030, known as 30 by 30, with its Environment Act making this a legally binding target. Scotland's Biodiversity Strategy underwrites its commitment to halting nature loss by 2030 and to make substantial progress towards restoring nature by 2045. Both the UK and Scottish Governments have also committed to achieving net zero emissions targets by 2050 or before.

New markets are developing for biodiversity including through England's new Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) regulations which came into effect in 2024. Now, developers in England must deliver a minimum 10% increase in biodiversity for new developments, for at least 30 years. Alongside markets driven by regulations such as BNG are global initiatives driving change such as the Taskforce on Nature-related Financial Disclosures (TNFD), a reporting framework for companies to list their impacts and dependencies on nature.

Despite these statutory and private sector drivers, and the perilous consequences of delay for nature and for economies, action is slow and piecemeal, and the rhetoric and ambitions are not being met with sufficient urgency and results. Targets are repeatedly missed, such as for peatland and woodland restoration rates, with numerous challenges inhibiting action on nature recovery. One such challenge is finance – with the finance gap to meet the UK's nature-related outcomes, estimated to be between at least £44 billion and £97 billion over the ten years from 2022 – 2032, including an estimated £9 billion finance gap in England and £8 billion gap in Scotland for protecting and/or restoring biodiversity. A key barrier to private sector investment in nature at scale includes the limited capacity of the current supply chain to deliver a robust and replicable pipeline of nature-based projects, which means projects cannot be readily aggregated to investment-scale. Stakeholders highlighted the need to work at pace and at scale to restore nature, and of this requiring different skill sets and different organisational cultures.



The ability to make [nature recovery] happen on the scale we need has been really challenging. Between 2,500 to 5,000 hectares are needed to have a functioning ecosystem to get nature recovery going – no one organisation or group can do this itself. It requires all those additional people beyond the sector to make recovery happen at scale. (Stakeholder interview)

Need for leadership development in the nature sector

One key hindrance to the nature sector acting at pace and scale is a lack of capacity in the nature recovery workforce. The Green Skills Taskforce, for example, report a shortage of skills and training opportunities for green jobs including leadership skills. In November 2024, an NGO and business coalition led by IEMA called for green skills to be prioritised by all countries at the international biodiversity conference, COP 16, or further jeopardise nature recovery. Meanwhile, the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM) has launched a campaign, Green Jobs for Nature, to make careers geared towards restoring and replenishing the natural environment more visible and achievable.

Four key drivers are at play across the third, private and public sectors which together make the case for a dedicated nature recovery leadership development programme for emerging leaders.



Driver 1: Need for cross-sector collaboration

Addressing biodiversity decline requires unprecedented collaboration across sectors and disciplines - no single organisation or individual can solve this complex challenge alone. Nature transcends human-made boundaries, and large-scale recovery efforts demand cross-sector cooperation, involving infrastructure developers, water companies, government agencies, local authorities, and pension funds, amongst others.

Leaders working for nature recovery need the ability to work effectively with people from other sectors and build collaborations that deliver results. Yet those working in and with nature tend to work in silos, including those with common values, structures and aims such as the environmental NGOs. Leaders must bridge these divides and foster collaboration across sectors and disciplines, playing to the strengths of their organisations.

Stakeholders reflected how collaboration across sectors and organisational boundaries is an aid to working more quickly and creatively, to getting more finance into nature and to moving nature from a niche into a mainstream sector. Several reflected on the traditional nature conservation sector being characterised by ecologists, and that now people working in the sector need to be skilled in networked solutions, influencing beyond their own organisations, to help move the sector into the position as important as banking and the service sector.



If we're going to solve the nature crisis, we need to work across organisations and work together. Hopefully [through the Programme] we have 100 people who will keep in contact and work together. (Stakeholder interview)



Let's put nature at the heart of the nation's recovery – if we get this right, we won't have to fight over the crumbs. So, let's work together on the collaborative plan that we all benefit from rather than survive on the few crumbs. We need to change the dynamic and focus on the superpowers we have that are complementary rather than competitive. (Stakeholder interview)

The most cited reasons participants gave for joining the Programme was to develop their network with others in the nature sector and/or with people at a similar stage in their career. Participants commented on this leadership programme being unique and special because it was bringing together other nature recovery leaders, and that the nature recovery aspect jumped out to them – including for those who were actively looking for a leadership development programme.



The nature recovery aspect jumped out to me, and I loved the idea of being connected with a cohort of people working to the same goal. My role can feel quite isolating despite its emphasis on partnership. (Participant interview)



I had a goal to build a network of people working in the environment in the North West... I wanted to build a community of people working on the ground in nature recovery. (Participant interview)



There are a lot of leadership courses out there... but what was special about this one was bringing together other nature recovery leaders. (Participant interview)

Driver 2: Lack of leadership development in and across the nature sector

The nature sector lacks development opportunities in comparison to other sectors, particularly for emerging leaders. Whilst internationally there is the [Bio-Leadership Fellowship](#), there is no domestic equivalent; nor is there an equivalent to the [CLORE Social Leadership Programme](#) for emerging leaders in the social sector, or to the [Nuffield Farming Scholarships](#) for emerging leaders in agriculture.

The larger nature NGOs including the RSPB and the National Trust have their own in-house leadership courses, but they are relatively small scale. Civil servants working in the environment bodies have access to leadership development training, but it doesn't connect with other sectors.

The impact of this was described by stakeholders as having a pinch point at middle manager level, where there is a lack of the capacity, especially in the NGO sector, to deliver solutions, even though the aims for nature recovery were felt to be agreed at director level. One stakeholder reflected that local leaders don't feel equipped to find solutions in their organisations, and this is where they see the 'break point'.

Several stakeholders reflected that technical skills are grown in the sector, with less focus on leadership. One stakeholder noted that there are challenges recruiting project managers to deliver landscape-scale nature recovery projects, which is also hindering progress. The impact of this is a lack of diversity of thought and limitations to the impact of the sector on the task in hand.



There's huge expertise in the wildlife and nature sector but we're seeing a decline in biodiversity and the ability for people to connect with nature isn't where it needs to be, so we have to do something different - one answer is having diversity of thought. (Stakeholder interview)

Several participants also noted a lack of leadership development opportunities within the sector, and a number of participants were actively seeking a leadership development course due to being in a new role with a more strategic focus or having new responsibilities such as line management, or for more general reasons of career development. Participants also mentioned wanting specific areas of personal development, including help with feeling more confident working in, and being a leader in, higher profile situations in the nature sector, as well as help with feelings of 'imposter syndrome' in the sector due to being from a different background such as the arts.



And [the Programme] gives them career pathways. We're really stuck in straight up and down career ladders and people need to be a lot more fluid to get the career and development they want. People need to be really focused on that, and it gives people confidence to see jobs in other organisations. (Stakeholder interview)

Driver 3: Heterogeneity of the nature sector workforce

The nature sector does not reflect the diversity of the UK population: research highlights that just 7% of those working in the environmental charity sector identify as Black, Asian or minority ethnic, compared with a 14% national average across all people in employment. The Green Jobs Taskforce found that students from ethnic minority groups make up fewer than 10% of enrolments in green courses such as geography, environmental conservation and environmental sciences, even though they represent 22% of higher education student bodies, and are more likely to desire a job that helps the environment.

The lack of diversity in the nature sector is a serious issue which stakeholders and participants emphasised as they reflected how the nature sector needs to become more culturally sensitive, welcoming and representative of the communities it serves. On the one hand this is about fairness and equity, on the other it is a practical need to have as many people as possible involved in helping nature to recover. Stakeholders described the need for structural, institutional and interpersonal changes to move the nature sector and nature discourse beyond what was described by several stakeholders as its construction as White heritage.



To restore nature at scale there's a need for... inclusion of those excluded from nature... you need leadership for this – different and good leadership and this is why we want to do this. (Stakeholder interview)

The lack of diversity in the nature sector is hindering its capacity and reach, with a need for a more diverse and a larger workforce to meet the scale of the challenge. This includes understanding the need and value of looking outwards to all communities and of the limitations of not doing so.



The problem we have in nature recovery is sometimes people working in this sector are not fully informed about engaging more effectively and proactively with communities... Look at the staff, the volunteers - they are not diverse at all. Maybe one or two tick the box. They lack knowledge about other cultures with different perspectives on nature – so they lack knowledge of how to welcome and include this knowledge in their practices. You find no minoritised people in these spaces as they are seen as White spaces. So this kind of culture can be very pernicious. We can't address inequalities if we don't see that our practices really impact on other people... So I'm hoping that the leadership programme will bring about change so people in these communities are empowered to have a sense of belonging and coproduce knowledge in the spaces they occupy. (Stakeholder interview).



Stakeholders reflected their aspirations for participants to be helped through the Programme to be reflective, reflexive, to see the bigger picture and understand how their current personal context may be limiting their impact, especially regarding more people being engaged in nature.



'It's important for people to own up to the fact that they have a lot to learn from each other... understanding other people's lived experience, this is how we build our knowledge and capacity... It's fundamental the participants have a deep, reflective and reflexive way of seeing themselves and to see 'Where am I as a leader?' Nature recovery isn't just about the green spaces, it's the whole ecosystem – people are included in the whole ecosystem... people have different cultural understandings of nature and the contributions they want to make... Most people working in the environment sector are quite privileged - so people have to understand the communities they are working in - they have to take on board the communities' lived experience. (Stakeholder interview)



... helping participants see the bigger picture. Translating nature into something that's meaningful for the general population. It's hard when you're close to something – 'How can you not understand the benefits of biodiversity and habitats?', but it isn't always top of everyone's list of priorities. If you don't know it's there, how can you expect people to care about it?' (Stakeholder interview)

One stakeholder reflected that whilst there is some entry-level support such as New to Nature, run by Groundwork, there are few development programmes for people in the sector from excluded backgrounds seeking to move up into leadership positions, and that this Programme could help meet this gap. Another stakeholder noted that the environment sector is 'full of White middle-aged people', and that a more diverse and larger workforce is needed to deliver their organisation's strategy.

Driver 4: Depleting resilience and risk of burnout

People working in the nature sector tend to do so because it aligns with their values, and because they care deeply about nature and building a sustainable world. The scale of nature's decline and the forces working against it can lead to overwhelm and burn out. Research shows that burnout in the climate and environmental change workforce can feel more intense, more urgent and harder to overcome than in other sectors. Feelings of despair, grief and eco-anxiety are common. Building resilience is therefore key, especially for emerging leaders who have a lot of working life ahead of them. Part of being resilient is being part of a cohort working in solidarity for nature, which is a core aim of the Programme.

For most participants, there were several complementary reasons which drew them to apply, and for some, the Programme 'ticked all the boxes'.



The link was forwarded to me by a colleague who I work closely with. From a career development perspective, I thought it looked interesting. And collectively bringing together lots of people from across the region who are working for the same outcome perhaps with some different priorities in that. So, getting to know a wider network of people attracted me as well. (Participant interview)

Stakeholders also reflected on this need for building personal resilience, noting that middle managers are at the front line of the climate and nature crisis and that this has a personal impact.



You have to have personal resilience – you have to balance the scale of change that’s needed with a frustrating pace of change... So being inspired and energised is really important.
(Stakeholder interview)

Never has there been a more urgent time to equip the leaders of tomorrow with the networks, skills and resilience to face and tackle the nature crisis. The Nature Recovery Leadership Programme directly speaks to this need.



Summary: Rationale and evidencing the need for the Programme

To address the nature crisis and meet government goals to recover nature, we need a workforce which is equipped to lead across organisational, geographical and sectoral boundaries. Yet the nature sector suffers from a lack of cross-sector collaboration, leadership development and diversity. Combined with the need for leaders to have deep personal resilience in the face of the scale of the nature recovery challenge, these factors create the rationale for this Programme for emerging leaders in nature recovery.

Enabling Inputs

understanding the knowledge, time and funding which kickstarted the Programme

The elements that went into developing the programme included inputs from Common Purpose, funding and in-kind contributions from a range of organisations and recruiting nearly 100 participants from across the North of England and Scotland.

Common Purpose: thought leadership

Common Purpose have been delivering leadership programmes across the world since 1989. The organisation's founders created a framework to develop cross-boundary leadership capabilities beyond individuals' direct control called Leading Beyond Authority (LBA).



Leading Beyond Authority is predicated on the idea that everyone can exercise leadership – in their family, community, in their organisation... it isn't what job you have, it's how you do it. Our approach is anyone can exercise leadership from any position if you choose to do it. This is an important part of the story. (CEO, Common Purpose International, interview).

LBA was the key theory and leadership framework which was taught on the Nature Recovery Leadership Programme (see Box 1). It encompasses skills such as building relationships of trust with communities and stakeholders, communicating ideas and plans in a way that resonates with your audience, partnership working and building effective coalitions and collaborations and adapting to new environments.



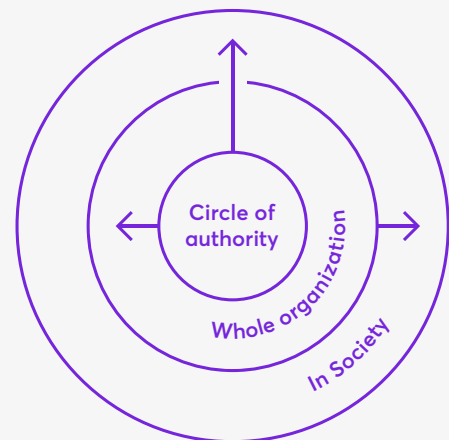
Box 1: Common Purpose's Leading Beyond Authority framework

The first and inner circle is the individual's sphere of direct control – within which they exercise management responsibilities, control budgets and operate within their area of technical and professional expertise.

The second circle represents the zone between the edge of their direct control and the outer limits of their organization or business. This arena is populated by colleagues and key stakeholders.

The final and outer circle represents the outside world – in which authority is either unclear or not present, in which there are many competing and at times contradictory interests at play and in which the status and expertise gained in the inner circle is often significantly less useful.

By developing LBA competencies, leaders become more effective at working collaboratively and so are able to accelerate complex change.



Another part of the theory which sits within LBA is Cultural Intelligence. Common Purpose developed this idea from witnessing through delivering their programmes the difficulties people experience understanding the other – and as a way of talking about difference that is positive, rather than negative. In Common Purpose International's CEO's words, Cultural Intelligence, or CQ, is 'not a mitigation measure, it's a development skill.'

The Nature Recovery Leadership Programme drew on learning from other environmentally focused leadership programmes Common Purpose has run, including Sky Blue, an online leadership programme for people working on environmental challenges, and the MAVA Leaders for Nature Academy, as well as the American Express Leadership Academy for non-profit sector leaders in the UK. Of particular inspiration for the Nature Recovery Leadership Programme was the MAVA Leaders for Nature Academy, an intergenerational, international leadership programme for people working in MAVA's conservation partner organisations. This inter-generational programme highlighted leadership development needs to equip young and senior leaders working in conservation to be empowered, resilient, supported, connected and able to draw on differences in people, experiences and perspectives.

Besides the thought leadership and previous experience of running similar programmes, Common Purpose provided considerable in-house expertise to get the programme up and running, from creating engaging materials to practical project and stakeholder management and communications. They drew on their extensive alumni to provide speakers at the online and in-person events. The CEO of Common Purpose International was praised by stakeholders for the way in which they had consulted with them, gained understanding of the issues, built consensus and generated momentum for the Programme to get off the ground.

Funding and in-kind contributions

This Programme aligns with the priorities of the organisations which supported it. Two main funders supported the Programme: the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) and Esmée Fairbairn Foundation. The Heritage Fund have a new ten-year strategy, Heritage 2033, which includes supporting nature recovery and supporting greater inclusion, diversity, access and participation. Both strategic investment principles can only be achieved through a larger, better connected, more resilient and more diverse nature sector workforce.

Esmée Fairbairn's key priorities in Our Natural World, one of their three investment themes, is improving the natural world through supporting peat, freshwater, space for nature, nature friendly farming and fishing in tandem with nature. Diversity, equity and inclusion is a cross-cutting theme and was the funder's entry point into this Programme, offering insight as to where colleagues in the sector need most support.

Nature North was the key supporter of the Programme in the North of England, bringing its focus on cross-regional work including through Investible Propositions – which can only happen across boundaries of place and sector. NatureScot was the key supporter in Scotland. It too has a focus on building collaborations across sectors and landscapes, not least through green finance investment programmes, IRNS and FIRNS.

Other key organisations including The Wildlife Trusts, the National Trust, the Woodland Trust and the Rivers Trust provided a range of support, including development funding, providing speakers, venues and catering, insight which helped build the case for support and shaped the Programme, promotion of the Programme and providing an ongoing steer.

Several organisations formed the Programme's advisory groups (one for England, one for Scotland) including the Sheffield Environment Movement and the Women's Environment Network. Individuals on the advisory groups provided their expertise on engaging and recruiting a diverse range of participants and gave support with recruiting and selecting participants.



Participant recruitment and cohort profile

The Programme was aimed at emerging leaders with five years or more professional and/or voluntary experience working for nature recovery in any field, sector or discipline in the North of England or Scotland.

The Programme aimed to increase the number of leaders from under-represented communities who are developed to take on senior roles in the sector. To meet this aim, Common Purpose recruited people from diverse backgrounds with a particular focus on people from minority ethnic backgrounds and women. They had a target for recruitment of participants from minority ethnic backgrounds of 18% for the North of England and 4% for Scotland. Of those participants who completed a voluntary survey, 9% of the North of England group (35 respondents) and 12% of the Scotland group (31 respondents) identified as being from minority ethnic backgrounds. The target for women was 50% for both cohorts, and was exceeded, with 62% for the North of England and 68% for Scotland.

Table 1 shows the sectors participants who completed the Programme were from.

Table 1: Whole Programme sectoral representation

Sector	Scotland (49 people)	North of England (47 people)
Public	41%	38%
Not for profit	37%	47%
Private	18%	9%
Academia	2%	2%
Community	2%	4%

Common Purpose's recruitment campaign drew on their extensive networks around the UK including organisations in the private and public sectors and alumni of other environmental programmes, social media promotion and advertising on their website. Members of the stakeholder and advisory groups were encouraged to promote the Programme to their staff and networks.

Evaluation participant profile

Of the 24 participants who took part in an evaluation interview, 14 were from England and 10 from Scotland. People from a wide range of types of organisation and sectors took part in the Programme evaluation. Of those interviewed, most were from the voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) sector (10 people), followed by the private sector (9 people), then the public sector (5 people).

The VCSE organisations ranged from the largest national nature and heritage NGOs to small and local community-based organisations. The public sector organisations included the statutory nature bodies for Scotland (NatureScot) and England (Natural England), local and combined or regional authorities. The private organisations included farming, consultancy, water and energy companies, a housing developer and a national estate. Evaluation participants covered a good range of geographic scope in their roles, with some operating nation-wide and others at a regional, city, community or farm/estate level (see Table 2). Only one person had a dedicated marine focus, with the vast majority working with a terrestrial focus.

Table 2: Geographic scope of role

Geographic scope of role	No of participants
National	8
Regional	7
City	4
Community	1
Farm/estate	3

The focus of participants' roles included those working:

- as partnership or programme managers of nature and natural capital projects
- directly with or directly overseeing those managing land
- in technical roles with a nature focus (e.g. nature specialists in private and public sector organisations), and non-nature focus (e.g. engineer in a private company)
- with a community focus (e.g. community organising)
- in policy, public affairs and communications roles.

One of the coaches noticed that most of the Programme participants they coached either individually or in the peer coaching worked in coalitions and networks, which they felt makes having certain skills such as communication, negotiation, management of partnerships and influencing even more important as they are working across lots of difference organisational cultures.

Looking across both cohorts, of the Scotland cohort, six out of ten worked nationally compared to two out of 14 in the North of England cohort; and of those working in land management practice, three of the four were based in England.

The participants interviewed for the evaluation typically had over 5 years professional and/or voluntary experience. Two participants fell slightly below the threshold with 4 years' experience, whilst the range of experience of other participants spanned between 5 years and 27 years, with over half of participants having at least 10 years' experience. Participants were asked how long they had been in their current role (see Table 3), with the majority being in their current role for three years or less.

Table 3: Length of time in current role

Length of time in role	No of participants
1 year or less	5
1 yr, 1 month - 2 years	7
2 yr 1 month - 3 years	1
3yr 1 month - 4 years	6
4yr 1 month - 5 years	2
8 years	2
25 years	1

Most participants reported working at manager level (11 participants) followed by people who were in a specialist advisory or technical lead role (5 participants). Other roles included head of (2 participants), consultant (2 participants), coordinator (1 participant), director (1 participant), and officer roles (2 participants). [1]

Challenges around recruitment of participants

Several stakeholders reflected that recruiting the numbers and the diversity of participants was a challenge, in terms of how emerging leaders were defined, which sectors they were from and the diversity of their background. Most participants were from environmental NGOs and there were some important gaps in sectoral representation.

The Common Purpose International CEO reflected that whilst the recruitment campaign had resulted in a good mix of applications from those involved in nature recovery it was more difficult to recruit participants from other sectors. They felt that the name 'Nature Recovery Leadership Programme' was off putting for organisations beyond the nature sector, particularly business, as they did not see themselves as being involved directly in nature recovery.

Several stakeholders reported a considerable development and gestation period before the award of Programme funding, followed by the need to act extremely quickly to recruit participants at short notice. It was felt there was not sufficient time to do outreach and get the Programme widely publicised to recruit people who would really fit the programme, nor to get more of a mix between NGO, public and private sector participants.

[1] Type of position in organisation were categorised by Grounded Insight based on participants' job title and how they described their role. The description is therefore not necessarily the same as the person's job title.

One method for widening access included the provision of bursaries to help support organisations and individuals for which the Programme fee was a barrier. Whilst some stakeholders felt this was an important element of widening access, a question was raised about whether organisations applying for bursaries genuinely did reflect an inability to pay, or a lack of valuing of learning and development and unwillingness to invest in staff development.



Summary: Enabling inputs

Common Purpose's approach to developing cross-boundary leadership capabilities beyond individuals' direct control is called Leading Beyond Authority (LBA), and was the key framework for the taught elements of the Programme. Programme funding was provided by the National Lottery Heritage Fund and Esmée Fairbairn Foundation. Other sponsoring organisations, including Nature North and NatureScot, the National Trust and The Wildlife Trusts, provided in-kind support, helped advertise the Programme and recruit participants.

Recruitment needed to happen quickly once funding was awarded which impacted on the composition of the cohort. Most participant interviewees were from the voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) sector and the private sector, with fewest from the public sector and most were working at either national or regional scale at manager level. Most participants were working as partnership or programme managers of nature and natural capital.

Activities

assessing the components of the Programme

The Programme was delivered both online and in person between May – December 2024. The Programme comprised five main elements (see Box 2).

Box 2: Main elements of the Nature Recovery Leadership Programme

1. Online learning platform

The platform included videos, discussions, exercises and other material and the means to connect and interact with other Programme participants and the Common Purpose team.

2. Live sessions online

Five live online learning sessions were conducted over May – July 2024 which included:

- Discussions and exercises to build relationships across the group and develop the participants' understanding of Leading Beyond Authority.
- Insight sessions in which the participants explored real-life leadership experience through the eyes of inspirational leaders.

3. In-person events

The participants came together in their respective country groups over a three-day residential in June 2024, one in the North of England, one in Scotland, to hear from and question leaders from different sectors and explore:

- Personal resilience to meet the challenges ahead
- Developing the ability to Lead Beyond Authority—how to lead across boundaries
- Building connections and sharing experience across the group.

They met as one whole cohort for a one day in-person alumni gathering in Newcastle in September 2024 to practice and showcase storytelling skills, hear from more inspirational speakers and work collectively on shared challenges in nature recovery in an 'open space' session.

4. Individual feedback

At the beginning of the Programme, participants completed a 360-degree feedback survey based on Leading Beyond Authority competencies to help them identify their strengths and blind spots. They then received two sessions with a coach to debrief on the 360 feedback and discuss any specific development areas that had emerged from the process.

5. Peer Coaching

Participants learnt how to use a coaching style in small peer coaching groups and received several coach-facilitated peer coaching sessions followed by time and space to hold their own independent sessions. Peer coaching is a way to share personal challenges, compare experience and develop strategies for action. The relationships built in peer coaching groups can continue beyond the programme.

The Programme is designed as a whole, with each component complementing and supporting the others. Participants were therefore not asked about individual elements, but about their experience of the whole Programme. Much of the feedback was very positive, with participants valuing the holistic nature of the Programme and all its elements.



It's hard to pinpoint [one thing]. But the whole energy and spark about it. The online sessions. The residential was really good. I loved loads of different parts of it. Even the icebreakers were done well. [The session on] what has shaped our own identity. All of it was really, really good. (Participant interview)

Praise for Common Purpose team

The Common Purpose team received praise for the organisation and facilitation of the residentials, and overall Programme. Participants commented that they had learnt from the facilitators' techniques and style, and that the organisation of the Programme had been very good.



The generosity of spirit and real presence that the whole team brought to the space - it shone through. It was amazing to be in the presence of the facilitators from Common Purpose – and it ran right the way through, with those stood in the background and those at the front (Participant interview)



Reem and Gurjit [the facilitators] are the older siblings you wish you'd had. There's a lovely dynamic between them, they were both really inspirational. They have been brilliant, I loved having them facilitating. All of the back-office stuff - Becky and Susan - has all been brilliant, clearly laid out, explaining 'this is where you need to be and what you need to bring.' This stuff is so important as it helps people feel more relaxed when they arrive. The Common Purpose team are fab, I think they are brilliant and lovely. I've had a really nice time. It's given me an energy boost, I'm feeling more enthusiastic and hopeful. (Participant interview)



From an organisational perspective, the Common Purpose team have been absolutely fantastic. Trying to corral 100 people is never easy and between them all they've done a fantastic job. Particularly Gurjit and Reem as leaders of the material - they were so good, so engaging - I can't sing their praises highly enough. I've been to so many training events where the person standing at the front has been so dull you want to instantly switch off - they managed to keep everyone engaged. They're a good double team. (Participant interview)



I'm just really impressed with the organisers, facilitators, guest speakers... all of it came together really nicely and you can see people are really passionate about it from a leadership perspective and the nature recovery perspective. (Participant interview)

Participants valued the face-to-face elements in particular as they found them more engaging and exciting, they felt more of a sense of being part of a group and one person noted that Zoom doesn't work for people working in some organisations (e.g. a local Council). One person commented that they found some of the online sessions challenging as there were so many chat messages they couldn't listen to the talking as well. The online platform was barely mentioned by participants, and when it was, it was noted as not being very user friendly, easy to navigate or enabling for knowledge sharing and collaboration.

There were three main points of feedback on how the Programme could potentially be improved in terms of its design and content. These relating to pace, consolidation of learning and having more country-specific knowledge in the case of Scotland.

Impact of uneven Programme pacing

Regarding pacing, Common Purpose designed the Programme to be intense at the beginning because their experience is that this helps to prevent waning enthusiasm and people dropping off. A lot of the taught thought leadership about LBA was given online so the in-person retreat and alumni gathering could focus on the other elements. Participants reflected that there was too much input at the beginning, that the energy had tapered off, and that they would have preferred a more equal spread. Comments included:



There seemed to be a lot going on in the Programme in the beginning. I feel it's almost narrowed down in terms of what's happening – I don't know if that was part of the design so we could put what we've learnt into practice – but I'm not sure if this has quite worked. Perhaps some additional check-ins or smaller activities in this time frame might have supported this a bit better. (Participant interview)



I think more equally spread out in a way it felt there was a lot going on at the beginning and limited at the end - to keep the equal motivation. (Participant interview)

Specific feedback on the residential concerned the packed agenda, with several people being too tired and full of information by the third day to absorb information. There were mixed views on whether there was enough time for people to have conversations with other participants, with some people wanting more space and time for that.

Limited consolidation of learning

Secondly, to make the Programme more impactful, some interviewees suggested it includes more opportunities for participants to work collaboratively on a nature recovery-focused project with other participants. This could perhaps be an outcome of an open space session held earlier on in the Programme rather than when it was held at the alumni gathering in September.



Maybe it would be cool to think we were working on something - giving us collaboratively an opportunity to lead together on a piece or tangible outcome... say a group of people who wanted to do something on green finance, a project outcome could be to all come together and deliver a business case for an idea for nature recovery - we could practice presenting and come up with a cool idea for nature. (Participant interview)

Interestingly, it was felt by one person that this collective project could also have happened online –



There are other ways to get us to work in small groups virtually - things like setting a shared challenge, something outside of our day-to-day remit that we could have all thought outside the box.... there was no opportunity to share or [work together] (Participant interview)

Several people felt that more information in the form of a cheat sheet, checklist, programme summary, and outputs from sessions would have been useful and that there was limited consolidation of learning.



There were some excellent tools and principles and techniques but unless you come back to them or have a cheat sheet, a checklist, it can go out the window... If it's hidden away on the website with no refresher it can go out the window. (Participant interview)



One thing I struggled with, especially during the residential, was that more information on each of the agenda items would be very useful... I found some of the exercises difficult to start as I didn't know what the goal was or what the output from the session would be. (Participant interview)



There are barely any notes - I was trying to be in the moment and absorb it and listen. Maybe a one pager for each session or theme - a final course booklet would be useful - the three key things from each thing to take away. One of the big notes I have is to download everything off the online platform - but I don't know what materials are on there - are all of the slides on there? (Participant interview)



Questionable understanding of Scottish context

A third general piece of feedback about the Programme activities related to the Scotland cohort specifically. Several of the Scotland cohort queried the venue choice for the residential (the Botanical Gardens in Edinburgh) and for the alumni gathering (Newcastle), noting that neither location is suitable for people working north of the Central Belt. One participant noted that some of the coaches had travelled far, and some via plane, to get to the Edinburgh residential which they were uncomfortable with given the context of working in nature recovery.

Some felt that these decisions reflected a broader lack of knowledge of the Scottish context:



Scotland geographically - maybe we should have met up more in central Scotland - in Perth or something. For people from Highlands and Islands, Edinburgh's not convenient – they didn't appear for Newcastle either. (Participant interview)



The Botanics is stunning - but we lost networking time moving over the city. Basing it in a conference venue where accommodation is on site might have made it easier for everyone. (Participant interview)



This is nature recovery and meant to be specific to Scotland, but there was little understanding or knowledge of the Scottish context. This was really obvious when it came to organise the meeting in Edinburgh - accommodation in Edinburgh is a nightmare all the time - this caught them by surprise. Something else that struck me. The coaches involved had all travelled from south of England and didn't seem familiar with working in Scotland or with the sector in Scotland. (Participant interview)

Summary: Programme Activities

The Programme is designed as a whole, with each component complementing and supporting the others. It was comprised of five core elements: an online learning platform, live online sessions, in-person events including a three-day residential and a one-day full cohort gathering, one-to-one coaching and peer coaching.

The feedback on the Programme elements was, on the whole, very positive, with participants valuing both its holistic nature and the individual elements of the Programme. The Common Purpose team received praise for the facilitators, level of organisation, speaker line-up and taught content. The in-person elements were valued, whilst the online platform was not. The main areas of improvement for the design and content of the Programme related to pacing, more opportunities to consolidate learning and more country-specific knowledge in the case of Scotland.

Participant Outcomes

Understanding the difference the Programme made to the participants

This section reports thematically on findings from participant interviews under the Programme's main aims and objectives of:

1. **Enhancing participants' ability to Lead Beyond Authority to lead and collaborate across boundaries**
2. **Growing new networks by connecting with diverse participants and speakers, and build a cohort of leaders**
3. **Improving participants' self-awareness and personal resilience to meet the challenges of being a leader in the nature sector**
4. **Increasing the number of leaders from under-represented communities who are developed to take on senior roles in the sector**



1. Enhancing participants' ability to lead and collaborate across boundaries

The Programme aimed to equip emerging leaders in the sector to become the next generation of senior leaders in the field including through learning leadership concepts, practical tools and hearing from inspirational speakers leading in different sectors.

Leadership concepts: Leading Beyond Authority

Around a third of participants highlighted the thought leadership of Leading Beyond Authority and Cultural Intelligence as being useful. They mentioned core concepts to the curriculum which had stayed with them, including:

- 'core and flex', i.e. an awareness of their values and beliefs which are fundamental and non-negotiable, and those which can be more flexible, as well as other people's
- the 'inner and outer circle', i.e. an understanding of different spheres of influence and how they might influence beyond their immediate circle of control or authority
- identifying their 'growing edge', i.e. the area beyond their comfort zone which could hold the greatest potential for their personal development and expansion, and which is not meant to be comfortable
- their 'knots', i.e. better understanding thorny personal issues or challenges on which they may be getting stuck and which could be holding back their professional development

One participant, for example, described how the Leading Beyond Authority and Cultural Intelligence concepts helped them to see how being from an arts and community background rather than an ecology or environment background could be an asset rather than a hindrance in their role of embedding a new approach of community organising in their organisation. Another noted how the concepts of 'core and flex' had helped them understand and accept why certain things for them are non-negotiable in a work context.

Several participants highlighted the value of having the overarching framework of Leading Beyond Authority in contextualising themselves and their position in their organisation and/or partnership arrangement, and therefore how and why they could have been getting stuck or held back, for example, by self-limiting views; and/or how they could influence beyond their formally prescribed or designated authority.



Leading Beyond Authority and the circles was a new way of thinking about it rather than just collaborating in terms of knowing what each other is saying, the potential to make a difference by not feeling you have to stay in your sector but influencing across and into other sectors... And that you can do more - you don't need to be constrained by your role and position in an organisation, you can achieve despite this. (Participant interview)



It's been good to put a name to what I was doing - a lot of my job is Leading Beyond Authority - our team is 000.35 of our business - 3 people out of 1000 work in sustainability... Also the other stuff about cultural intelligence... I thought I was quite good at this, but it's a skill you constantly need to hone. (Participant interview)



For me, the thing that made the biggest difference was Julia Middleton's online session on Leading Beyond Authority. I often feel frustrated that I'm an island - this moment of realising the reason I feel like that is because I have been Leading Beyond Authority, there's a name to the feeling I've had. This was a real eureka moment. (Participant interview)

Putting tools into practice

Participants shared that they had already applied the learning from the Programme by putting into practice tools and techniques they had been introduced to. In terms of reaching beyond their immediate circle of influence and collaborating beyond boundaries, both key parts of Leading Beyond Authority, several participants commented that they felt better equipped to do this.



One of the nice things about the Programme was throughout it all it was really making the connections and realising so many people are there, ready, willing and able to connect and to collaborate... I have a partnership role... but this is a key focus for a lot of organisations... I definitely feel better equipped [to collaborate]... this comes from the confidence as well which has been a big positive. (Participant interview)

One participant had taken an activity about working with different opinions and problem-solving from the residential and applied it with the partnership they manage, which had got partners on board with collaborative problem solving, and in turn taken pressure off the individual. They had also set up a communications group to collaborate on a partnership communications plan rather than attempting to do this by themselves.

Several participants highlighted other tools they had learnt including adapting their language to influence others. One participant working with green social prescribing commented that they had been emboldened to seek new partners in a new sector (the health sector) due to the new tools and language they had learnt on the Programme. Another noted,



One thing I learned is influencing language. I didn't realise that it's good to study a potential new partner and understand how your language changes with this. Talking about those things externalise this and makes it real and valid and it's helped me want to approach new people a bit more. (Participant interview)

Participants also noted that they valued the taught Programme input on public speaking and how to create and deliver a TED-style Talk. One participant had an intention to improve their public speaking before attending the Programme and through integrating what they'd learnt on it, especially through the TED-style Talk work on storytelling and being oneself, they had given a university lecture and nominated themselves at a storytelling night speaking in front of around 80 people. Another noted that they had changed their delivery style at events to be more engaging and several more valued the coaching provided by one of the Programme facilitators in providing a framework for public speaking to work through in the TED Talk style.

Impact of inspiring speakers

Participants valued hearing from speakers who shared insight about challenges of leading, as it helped them feel reassured that leadership isn't easy, and that senior people feel uncomfortable and find it challenging.



The Leading Beyond Authority and especially Julia Middleton giving her talk to us – her saying “if you want to make people happy, go and sell ice creams”, that leadership is difficult. When you’re moving into those realms you’re moving into the outer circle of Leading Beyond Authority and it will feel uncomfortable and difficult. This has stuck with me. (Participant interview)



I liked hearing him [CEO of Rivers Trust] talk and the [CEO] from NatureScot and the SEPA CEO... hearing them talk about their background in really senior positions that still have these thoughts and feelings helped settle a lot of things in me - people are just people, you just need to have to the conversation. (Participant interview)

The case study session on deer management at the Scotland residential was very well received, with several participants mentioning the value of the practical application of Leading Beyond Authority and the authenticity of the speakers. None of the North of England cohort mentioned the equivalent case study which was conducted online. Several people highlighted one speaker at the Scotland residential in particular as being inspirational for his authenticity, his example of leadership in action and his achievements in raising and progressing issues of race and ethnicity in the Police force: Dal Babu, former Chief Superintendent in the Metropolitan Police.



Summary: Aim 1 - Leading Beyond Authority and collaborating across boundaries

Participants demonstrated that the Programme had enhanced their ability to Lead Beyond Authority, i.e. to lead and collaborate across boundaries. This was due to the combination of taught material including the Leading Beyond Authority framework, learning from inspirational speakers and putting tools and techniques into practice during the Programme. Participants demonstrated they were applying what they had learnt both in and outside work.

2. Building networks and a cohort working in solidarity

A key aim of the Programme was to build a cohort of connected leaders who can support each other's efforts, share ideas and strategies and provide a sense of solidarity. A Programme objective was therefore to provide the conditions for participants to grow new networks by connecting with diverse participants and speakers. This element was primarily facilitated through the in-person events (the residential and alumni gathering) and the peer coaching element.

Creating a professional network

Most participants highlighted relationships they'd built and feelings of being part of a cohort and a support network.



The thing I have got most from [the Programme] is understanding how everyone working in similar sectors has similar problems in terms of partnership working - so more than anything, a support network. (Participant interview)



I've gained experience of being around new people and new ways of doing things. It's a new thematic sector for me – it's opened my mind being surrounded by a cohort. I'm more appreciative of their background and way they think. (Participant interview)

Many participants described a range of different connections and relationships they had made on the Programme. Some of these connections were already leading to action, such as promoting their organisation's fund, delivering talks and workshops for other participants' organisations and developing new partnerships. One participant had got a new job at another participant's organisation after having a conversation about each other's work. Participants described drawing on the expertise of the cohort, for example getting advice on a communications strategy from one of the communications leads and exchanging information and contacts around tree planting and growing. Several mentioned they valued the establishment of the full cohort LinkedIn group, and subgroups such as for neurodiversity.

Several participants highlighted that the collaborative element of the Programme was a motivation for doing it. For some, this aim had been met, and they felt plugged into a network, had expanded their network of contacts and gone on to collaborate with other participants in various ways, such as attending and speaking at events and organising meetings.



The collaborative element drew me to the course and I feel better equipped [to collaborate] because of the connections and relationships from the in-person sessions. For example, I organised a meeting with someone else who works on BNG [biodiversity net gain], an area I specialise in, I've built those connections. And the in-person meetings – they're formal but informal – we're all on a level, in the same space, with the same nerves and excitement. This made it an organic building of relationships. I can now reach out to other experts in the field and build connections... (Participant interview)

One participant commented that they felt they were creating a 'powerful movement' with other participants about how to get traction on progressing recommendations that had been made in projects they had delivered.



Peer coaching group networks

In reflecting on the connections they had made with others on the Programme, many participants commented on the peer coaching element. For some, the peer coaching groups were a highlight, and will continue beyond the lifetime of the Programme. One of the coaches commented that the group were extremely enthusiastic, that they gelled quickly and understood the process quickly – and as a coach, they were quickly able to step back so the group could practice their coaching skills. One participant especially valued that their peer coaching group were all roughly the same stage in their career and at a similar age, partly because many of them were feeling ‘imposter syndrome’ and that their group had gone out of their way to maintain their connection.

Several participants commented on the value of the expertise in their peer coaching group which they had drawn on already or thought they would in future. One person had got a new job in which they would have an oversight of fundraising and grants. Whilst this was an unfamiliar subject for them, they were reassured as one of their peer coaching group was a fundraising lead based in the same region who they could talk to.



The peer coaching group will definitely be one of [the highlights]. There's a consultant, someone who works in more of a social charity, someone in a Rivers Trust and in the water sector. So we all have different experiences. If I have an ecology question, now I might go to the person in my coaching group who's an ecology consultant. I now have a contact into the Rivers Trust which is probably not relevant now but it's a useful connection to connect people in my region to that. The social charity could give me a perspective on partnership opportunities...if someone is having a frustration with partnership I might have a perspective from the other side. (Participant interview)

Even for some who weren't sure if they would meet up in future, the peer coaching had been a positive experience.



My peer coaching group are lovely - we have good banter - we'll see what happens if we meet up. I enjoyed peer coaching and being among people who love what they do. Being with different types of people gives me a sense of solidarity and comradery - it's nice to have that network and sense of community. Sometimes it can feel isolating. (Participant interview)

Tensions about Programme target audience and representation

Whilst there were many positive comments about the connections and networks participants had made through the Programme, not all felt this way. Participants commented on the need to increase the diversity of cultures and backgrounds, of sectors and of being more targeted about the level of experience of participants. This links to who the Programme was aimed at and the recruitment process.

Participants commented that the Programme had mostly environmental professionals from the environment sector on it, and that it felt like a programme for people from the nature sector rather than a nature recovery programme. Inevitably perhaps, given the lack of diversity of the environment sector workforce, participants noted a lack of diversity of people from different cultural backgrounds and that there needed to be more representation of wider society, i.e. of all those affected by nature recovery.



Just trying to get more people from different cultural backgrounds maybe if they're not in nature, getting them from community. It felt dominantly White people. To do pilots you need people from different backgrounds. (Participant interview)

Several participants suggested that greater care is taken over the selection of people based on their level of leadership and experience because there was a wide mix which meant that the content of the Programme was not necessarily pitched at the right level for them, nor did they make the connections that they were hoping to on the Programme.



And [in future] thinking really carefully about the extent of content and who they are aiming for. Maybe be clear it is for early career [rather than emerging leaders] and the current form may be more suitable for that. (Participant interview)

Ultimately, this feeds through into the Programme aims about having the right mix of people in the room to address nature challenges.



The decision-makers are not the delivery people: those are the funders or the corporates who want to do something for ESG or your council transport team or your planners who need to do BNG as part of a new development. We need those people in similar management positions to understand the importance of nature within the work that they do. Without them we won't have progress... we agreed we didn't have the right mix in the room to address nature challenges. We made a network of people with similar challenges realising how much we all have in common, but that doesn't solve any of the challenges. (Participant interview)

One participant felt that the Programme was not forward looking, and that to gear up for the future, more people with different interests and backgrounds needed to be involved rather than it being 'a classical representation of the sector.' Other sectors which were highlighted as needing more representation were land agents and surveyors and farming. Indeed, for some participants from a minority sector, such as farming or a utility company, the Programme had had limited value in terms of connections with the cohort because they were too far removed from the core of the cohort, either because they were working at the practical, grass roots end of nature recovery at the individual farm or estate level; or at extremely large-scale end, looking for connections to help with multi-million pound Nature-based Solutions infrastructure works. Several participants worked within a confined boundary such as Greater Manchester Combined Authority which hindered their ability to work collaboratively beyond those also working in the set boundary.

Tensions about nature versus leadership focus in Programme delivery

Several people would have valued more speakers from the nature sector, and for more of the Programme to be delivered by people with knowledge of the sector. This touches on a wider point and a key theme identified in the evaluation which is around the balance in the Programme between it being a leadership programme for any sector, or one for those in the nature sector.

Participants felt that more could have been made of their collective knowledge and passion for nature, of the key issues they have in common and of how to influence people within and beyond the nature sector. The open space session at the alumni gathering in which participants could nominate an issue they wanted people to work on with them was appreciated, but was generally felt to be too little, too late.



There's value there regarding tools and techniques to any kind of leadership but how you then apply it through a nature lens needs to be explored. The people delivering this aren't necessarily nature experts but there's [value in] the practical day-to-day [for example] I'm speaking to a business here, how do I go about using these tools? Are there some kind of role plays? How to apply this in practice through a nature lens rather than just a leadership lens? It's the practical application [that's missing] - what are the scenarios you could go through about how you do it in practice? (Participant interview)



The leadership elements could be applied to any sector, but we have all these people in the nature sector in a big room which doesn't always happen, so we need room to talk about the issues more - and this might lead to more taking on after the session ends. Open Space - it may be including some of this in the residential. (Participant interview)



To be delivered by people who have real knowledge and experience in the sector - bring in people from the sector to have a more in-depth role in delivery. (Participant interview)



If there was more nature stuff in there - this is how you can influence people more with regard to nature – it could have been a bit more nature-focused and say 'this is how you communicate and get people excited about nature'. (Participant interview)

These comments need to be weighed alongside the other positive feedback about the leadership and facilitation expertise of the Common Purpose team, and about the speakers. Whilst no Programme can be everything to everyone, questions of the focus and target audience for a future Programme and ways in which nature can be more prominent - including through the speakers, opportunities for group work and discussion, and for being outdoors – will need more consideration.



Summary: Aim 2 - Building networks and a cohort working in solidarity

Many participants reported that the Programme had given them new connections and being part of a new network. For some, this network is already active and bringing benefits; others saw it as being useful in future. Participant network(s) seem to primarily have been built at the in-person events and through the peer coaching groups.

Not all participants developed new networks. This appears to reflect the composition of the cohort which, in turn, reflected the sector more generally, i.e. the cohort was made up of a core of environmental professionals working in the environment sector. A need to increase the diversity of cultures and backgrounds and of sectors was identified. Being more targeted about the level of experience of participants was identified as a further need.

In sum, the cohort was perhaps too varied in terms of the level of experience and stage in career and not varied enough in terms of sector and background, to meet fully meet this Programme aim.

A key theme in relation to participants feeling part of a cohort working in solidarity for nature recovery was about the balance between the leadership elements of the Programme and the nature elements of it. Many participants wanted nature to be more integral to the Programme in terms of the practical application of the concepts, the speakers and the delivery team.

3. Personal development and resilience

A key objective of the Programme was to improve participants' self-awareness and personal resilience to meet the challenges ahead. Participants highlighted many ways in which their awareness, confidence and skills had increased through being on the Programme, especially drawing on the one-to-one coaching, the personal insights through the taught course curriculum as well as the personal development (as distinct from the network building) impacts of the peer coaching.

One-to-one coaching and confidence building

One of the coaches observed that the cohort seemed to be very values-led, and that their work was a vocation rather than a job. They noted that participants reflected on the frustrations of the day-to-day detail of their work getting in the way of the 'macro challenge' of the climate and nature crisis. They also felt that there was a humility to the cohort, which could have unintended consequences:



There's a humility. This is linked to the lack of or lesser ego. But I think where I feel that could present a challenge for them is when they are dealing with, interacting with people in organisations that are less self-aware. I think they can make themselves smaller – there is a diminishing, 'I'm not important', instead of being 'I'm going to go out there, I've got this'. Perhaps less assertive than they could be, than I see with other leaders perhaps. (Coach, interview)

Around a third of Participants mentioned the value of the individual coaching including the 360-degree feedback. Many commented on the value of self-reflection, with several likening coaching to personal therapy, and of having insight into how they scored themselves lower than those completing their 360-feedback helping them feel more confident in themselves.



The coaching session brought it out and looked at the root and reasons why. It was very exposing, more like therapy...something I may have been avoiding for a long time and it came at an opportune time and it probably released more than expected. [It was] very draining, very positive and unexpected. (Participant interview)

Practical suggestions from coaches, such as creating a few sentences to act as 'touchstones on top of my to-do list', were valued. One participant's coach asked them to journal, and a reflection from this was that they had feelings of low confidence and mood swings, with little provocation. Journaling helped them put strategies in place including putting an application in for a new job and getting it – on a day that they weren't feeling confident, but had the insight that they might be tomorrow.



And I applied for the job and got it. Would I have put the application in [without coaching]? The day I had to put the application in, I was down in the dumps. If I hadn't had the insight from my personal coaching, I may have missed a really big opportunity. (Participant interview)

One participant was suffering from a feeling of despondency having worked in the environment sector for a long time, noting that not a single biodiversity commitment had ever been delivered under international agreements and that legislation had made no difference. Looking for inspiration from being on the course, they had found it – highlighting their coach had helped shift their mindset to feeling more positive and resilient to negative things, and that it is better to try than to give up. Another participant had moved into a new role and realised through their coaching that they were experiencing a crisis of confidence and had withdrawn somewhat in meetings, keeping quiet, and had help and support to work through this including realising they didn't need to have all the answers, in spite of having them in their previous job.

Peer coaching and skills development

The skills gained through peer coaching was highlighted by participants as being of value. Participants valued the skills the Programme had given them in actively asking questions, being curious, and holding back from jumping in with solutions and problem solving – making it their problem to come up with the solution and not needing to know the answer to everything. Several people noted they are either already applying these skills in their team, or plan to as they take on new responsibilities - several as line managers, one as a new CEO.

Whilst peer coaching was generally cited as a positive, there were a few less positive comments, including that it felt a bit tokenistic and an add on, querying if the time could have been spent in a different way.

The techniques that were introduced in peer coaching were connected with a separate taught session on giving feedback which was noted as being extremely useful by several participants. One person shared that they work in a flat structure and had shared the video from the Programme on giving and receiving feedback, noting that because it was an external source rather than them saying it made it feel more valid, and that colleagues liked it.



Increased confidence through the Programme overall

Many participants described how the Programme had helped them feel more confident, without specifying individual components, indicating that it was the whole package working together rather than any specific element. Participants noted a shift in being more willing to put themselves in the spotlight, including with public speaking – one participant had just given a keynote speech for a university staff network, and drawn on techniques from the TED-style Talk as well as broader themes from the whole Programme such as being vulnerable, understanding ones' core values and also being authentic, and keeping talks and messages simple.



It's changed me in the fact that my confidence is through the roof. I am usually in the background saying to other people, "you can do this"... [I avoid putting] myself in the spotlight as I think I'll trip up on my words... it's part of my learning... [seeing] failure is an opportunity - through the process of being on the course (Participant interview)

Some participants noted that they now have the confidence that they can and should be in higher level jobs and a leader in the nature recovery field, having more insight into and being firmed about their own values and feeling less 'imposter syndrome'.



I didn't realise I'd plumb the depths when attending the Programme, especially after the three day residential, it was a fantastic process, challenging in different ways. I realised I had a chip on my shoulder, a lack of confidence with people in a more authoritative position or with influence and having boldness and confidence. It felt really personal to me – that this maybe is holding me back regardless - this was a real knot I fell on that I wanted to untie. For me this process has been one of growth and feeling more confidence in spaces and to back myself - this has applied in any situation now - I'm trying to work on this. (Participant interview)

Several people had applied for and got new jobs in more senior positions, including one person who became a CEO of a small charity. They felt they had felt more confidence and were better able to take on more responsibility, in part through being on the Programme.

Reticence around appropriateness and value of self-reflection

Many participants commented on the level of self-reflection that the Programme had demanded. For some this was welcome, but for some it was a surprise and not welcome or, for them, appropriate. For example, a member of the Scotland cohort reflected on the level of self-reflection and openness that was expected in a way that would never normally be at their work. This felt culturally inappropriate for them working in the nature recovery space and they knew a lot of people in the room, including a former line manager, a senior manager and someone they had worked with at Scottish Government. They felt that they were there as an organisational representative and that sharing their innermost feelings in the Programme's open forum would be akin to doing so in a work meeting. They felt the facilitators didn't necessarily appreciate this and found being in smaller groups including the peer coaching groups much easier.



A lot of us knew each other and.. as much as Chatham House applies, you know what you said... this got misread as us not opening up - it upset me that people thought that - it was just 'I can't do it in this space' - I think there wasn't a full understanding of the nature recovery sector side of this. (Participant interview)

This links back to the challenges around recruitment and having people from the same sector in the room.

Summary: Aim 3 - Personal resilience and confidence

The evaluation found that the Programme built participants' confidence and resilience, with the one-to-one coaching being a key enabler, as well as peer coaching, hearing inspirational speakers' leadership challenges and taught elements of the Programme including on public speaking. Several participants had applied for and got more senior jobs because of feeling an increased level of confidence through being on the Programme. Whilst overall this aim was demonstrated to have been met, a minority of participants were surprised by, and uncomfortable with, the level of self-reflection and openness about personal feelings the Programme invited.

4. Increasing leaders from under-represented communities

The Programme aimed to increase the number of leaders from under-represented communities who are developed to take on senior roles in the sector. To meet this aim, Common Purpose recruited people from diverse backgrounds with a particular focus on people from minority ethnic backgrounds and women. They had a target for recruitment of participants from minority ethnic backgrounds of 18% for the North of England and 4% for Scotland. Of those participants who completed a voluntary survey, 9% of the North of England group (35 respondents) and 12% of the Scotland group (31 respondents) identified as being from minority ethnic backgrounds. The target for women was 50% for both cohorts, and was exceeded, with 62% for the North of England and 68% for Scotland.

This qualitative evaluation aimed to dig a little deeper into questions of diversity, equity and inclusion by asking interview participants if they saw themselves as someone from an under-represented group in the sector. If they did, they were asked how the Programme may have helped them be better equipped to progress in the sector; and if not, they were asked if and how the Programme may have helped them be better equipped to be more inclusive of society.

Heterogeneity of the environment sector

Most of the participants acknowledged the heterogeneity of the nature sector, observing that it was overwhelmingly White and middle class. Most interviewees did not see themselves as being from an under-represented group. Those who did see themselves as being from an under-represented group identified their ethnicity, nationality and/or being a person of colour, and several commented that that the Programme reflected the under-representation of people of colour in the sector.



I think the programme reflected the gap in under-representation in the sector. It's clear there's under representation. Mainly on the ethnic side - maybe the sector is White majority sector. From what I saw, it's mainly people who are British or have been living here for a long time. (Participant interview)

In terms of the question of whether these emerging leaders were developed by the Programme to take on more senior roles in the sector, it is difficult to generalise given the small sample size. However, it is possible to say that those participants who identified as being from an under-represented group in the sector expressed ways in which the Programme had helped develop them personally and/or professionally. They mentioned developing confidence, putting themselves forward more, public speaking, adapting language to influence others, giving feedback and help to develop their network and contacts.

Several participants highlighted how they felt being a person of colour in a predominantly White space raising issues of race. Another person who identified as a person of colour said that it had been good to see issues raised about the under-representation of people of colour in the nature sector in a predominantly White group. They had raised concerns about the lack of representation of people of colour from the nature sector who were facilitating or speaking in the Programme. Another reflected this in relation to their leadership development as learning.



And I took that as a learning myself for my leadership is to be able to know that it's not for me to teach someone or for me as a person of colour to be there when someone is ready to offload... I don't have to accept that. So that was something that I took from that within the leadership, that it's about also protecting yourself and not putting yourself in vulnerable situations. (Participant interview)

Whilst most participants did not see themselves as being from an under-represented group, many of them did describe ways in which they felt different in the environment sector. Besides ethnicity, participants mentioned their sexuality, class and social mobility, gender, neurodivergence and physical disability. Several people also noted the invisible nature of some difference. A consistent theme from participants was that the sector needs to reflect the diversity of all society, which it currently doesn't do.



Away from the diversity and inclusion, I think this type of sector is more about the ownership of the place around us - so we need the highest level of representation - if we want to work on nature recovery we need all people affected by it. (Participant interview)

Programme's focus on inclusivity

People were asked if they felt better equipped to be more inclusive of the communities the nature sector serves, and several mentioned the taught element of Cultural Intelligence, whilst others highlighted that the Programme had helped them be more aware of difference. One participant reflected that they were more aware of the importance of a fund they managed for ensuring an equitable distribution of access to urban green space, especially for communities living in areas of multiple deprivation. Others described how they felt better equipped to be more inclusive of all communities because through the Programme they had worked with people who had different perspectives, including different sectoral perspectives. Common Purpose's approach and its focus on cultural difference and intelligence was highlighted.



This is what Common Purpose brings to the table - inclusivity ran through the whole programme. The cultural intelligence piece was really interesting... I feel more equipped to talk to people from different backgrounds. I didn't see it as a particular problem before, but I value what others bring to the sector. There's still a challenge and issues, even though this cohort was more diverse than the sector as a whole. Within the sector it isn't split evenly - people who work in ecology tend to be from one background, campaigning or social mobility tend to be from other backgrounds - within the sector it is partitioned - so how we bring this together is interesting. (Participant interview)

One participant drew on their learning from the Programme to help them challenge an organisation they were working with to be a more inclusive organisation – they utilised their learning from the Programme to frame new thinking with the organisation and be a little disruptive as otherwise, demographically and on the part of the audience they were speaking to, there would be no change.

Going further: intersectionality and outreach

Some participants felt that the Programme could have gone further in several ways regarding inclusivity and representation and working with difference. One participant suggested that the Programme could create a more secure grounding at the outset of where race intersects with all manner of things in life, and how people position and value people in their core and flex. They suggested giving space for these discussions to take place throughout the Programme, as well as understanding how race intersects with all protected characteristics which tend to get separated out with defining intersectionality at the outset. They suggested that people need to have working definitions and grounding of terms such as equity and intersectionality, with room for discussions to happen and felt that people want to share their feelings and thoughts, but don't feel there is space to do so, nor that it needs to be uncomfortable. This was reinforced by another participant who commented that,



The course could have done more in this aspect [of race and intersectionality]. I don't feel more confident in this area of work. The Programme could have allowed a good space to challenge this more and supported us to have more challenging conversations as well. I think there's a massive place for that in the course – it would have been nice to allow more time on this subject and have more conversations around it. (Participant interview)

One person of colour felt that it was predominantly 'whiter' people in the room and that the organisers had not gone in search for other people, which they could have done by connecting with organisations that could reach people in communities and bring more diverse people from different backgrounds. Having more people of colour from the nature recovery sector be speakers on the Programme was one suggestion from someone who queried why research for these people hadn't been done. They offered a list of suggestions of such speakers to one of the team. Another suggestion was that more diverse participants could be recruited by reaching into sectors such as planning which were more diverse than the nature sector.

Summary: Aim 4 - Increasing leaders from under-represented communities

Efforts were made to recruit participants from under-represented communities in the environment sector, specifically people from a minority ethnic background and women. Targets for Scotland for people from a minority ethnic background were exceeded but were missed in the North of England. More women were recruited in both cohorts than men, exceeding the 50% target.

Participants did not feel that this aim had been fully met, and participants tended to reflect the heterogeneity of the environment sector. However, there are strengths to build on. The Cultural Intelligence element of the taught Programme was valued and some participants reported feeling more equipped to be more inclusive of all communities in their work because of being on the Programme.

Reflections and recommendations



The Nature Recovery Leadership Programme was a pilot and the evaluation was tasked with exploring what could be improved upon should it be continued or rolled out. We have the following reflections and recommendations.

Composition of cohort

The Programme aimed to foster cross-boundary collaboration, between sectors, geographies, cultures and backgrounds. However, the evaluation found that this aim was hindered by the lack of diversity of ethnic and sectoral background of participants, whilst it was too mixed in terms of people's level of professional experience.

There appear to be several reasons for this, one obvious one being that a feature of the environment sector is that it lacks diversity and therefore recruiting primarily from within the traditional nature sector (namely from within the statutory nature bodies and NGOs) will replicate that. The short timescale for recruitment did not allow for more extensive outreach into leaders in other sectors to encourage them to put participants forward. Also, the name of the Programme could be off-putting for some organisations beyond the nature sector, particularly business, as they did not necessarily see themselves as being involved directly in nature recovery.

The participation of smaller organisations may have been hindered by the costs, and so ensuring that the bursary for participants continues will be important in future, though this will need to be balanced with teasing out questions about affordability, and cultural as well as financial barriers to learning and development, to ensure that host organisations are genuinely committed to the development process of their emerging leaders. Understanding more about what organisations can afford, including what they put towards training and development, was suggested by one stakeholder.

One stakeholder noted that the lack of diversity in the sector as a whole can mean an additional and unfair burden falling particularly to people of colour to highlight the cultural elements in the sector which perpetuate its lack of diversity with the burden of changing the system falling to them. They also suggested that the Programme was possibly trying to do too many things at once in removing barriers for people who are more diverse so they can progress in their careers, connecting people across sectors and creating better leadership in general in the sector.

For future programmes we make the following recommendations:

- Give sufficient time and expertise to creating a suitable process for, and recruitment of, participants from a range of sectors and backgrounds. This will require engaging with leaders from organisations in different sectors to ensure that participants are drawn from community and arts backgrounds as well as corporate and public sector ones.
- Consider changing the focus and name of a future Programme and the marketing of it to make it more appealing to, and inclusive of, other sectors.
- Create a more secure grounding for conversations to happen around race and intersectionality within the Programme.
- Consider developing an additional programme, for example a cross-sectoral programme for people of colour.
- Encourage smaller organisations to participate, including through the continued availability of a bursary. A future bursary scheme will need to provide a robust mechanism to ensure that organisations in receipt of it are both highly committed to the Programme and are in financial need.
- Consider helping provide a fertile landing ground for participants returning to their host organisations so that they are not alone in being cultural change agents. In the first instance, this could be as simple as agreeing some terms of engagement setting out the expectations of the host organisation and the participant resulting from participating in the Programme.
- Consider developing an international aspect to the Programme, drawing on Common Purpose's international experience, with the aim of conveying diversity in leadership styles and roles and that participants' efforts to recover nature at home are part of a global effort – which could, in turn, help with their resilience and feelings of solidarity.

Balance between nature and leadership

Whilst it is clear that participants gained a lot from the Programme in terms learning about and applying leadership concepts, many felt that the 'nature' part of the Programme was not sufficiently prioritised and integrated. Recommendations for ways this could be addressed in a future programme include:

- Create opportunities for participants to work on projects together for example by bringing the open space session from the alumni gathering earlier in the Programme and using the online sessions to support collaborative working that may have been kicked off in-person.
- Provide inspiring speakers of nature leadership in action from those outside the nature sector (e.g. investors, corporates, non-nature public sector, international, farmers, developers, etc).
- Create opportunities to apply leadership learning in practice (e.g. at the face-to-face gathering or online) with a focus on nature.
- Create more opportunities for participants to be in nature over the Programme.
- Clarify the balance of nature and leadership in marketing and communications about the Programme (i.e. pre-application stage) to manage expectations.

Getting even more from the Programme

The Programme was a big investment from funders, supporting organisations, host organisations and the participants themselves. Whilst most participants clearly got a huge amount from it, there are some considerations for how the value from the Programme could be increased yet further, for example:

- Create more opportunities for participants to consolidate learning
- Consider the pacing of the Programme and spreading some of the intensity of the residential and the first few months of the Programme more evenly over its duration
- Create summaries, 'cheat sheets' and other relevant material such as a Programme booklet to accompany the Programme, and make this accessible
- Provide more information on the agenda items so that participants who like and need to prepare are able to
- Explore whether host organisations could have more of a role, for example by championing the participant's involvement in the Programme in internal and external communications channels and tasking participants with creating a project to take back which adds value to their organisation
- Consider what happens next with the current cohort, which could be linked to the previous point by tasking them with taking hold of a project with others in the cohort and using them to support some of the thinking about what could come next in a future programme.

Geography

The geographic boundary of the Programme was reflected on by participants in so far as they were generally content with the boundaries being Scotland and the North of England. There was limited cross-fertilisation of the two cohorts, besides the one day alumni gathering which few of the Scottish cohort participants based north of the Central Belt attended.

It is interesting that of the North of England cohort, most participants had a regional or very local focus, whilst most of the Scotland cohort had a national focus.

Having a regional element made sense to participants and to supporting organisations, including attaching the Programme to a vehicle such as Nature North. However, it does seem even more important to get the right mix of people in the cohort and ensure that the Programme aims are honed, focused and communicated at the outset to potential applicants.

Appendix - Stakeholder Interviewees: Funders, Steering and Advisory Groups

Name	Job Role	Organisation	Role in Nature Recovery Leadership Programme
Zarina Ahmad	Head of Programmes	Women's Environment Network	Advisory Group (Scotland)
Maxwell Ayamba	Founder and CEO	Sheffield Environmental Movement	Advisory Group (North of England)
Drew Bennellick	Head of Land, Sea and Nature Policy UK	National Lottery Heritage Fund	Funder
Nick Halfhide	Interim Chief Executive	NatureScot	Steering Group
Mike Innerdale	Chair of Nature North and Regional Director/ Northern England	Nature North and National Trust	Steering Group
Liam McAleese	Director Our Natural World	Esmée Fairbairn Foundation	Funder
Annette McDonald	Deputy Managing Director	Tatton Group	Advisory Group (North of England)
Erica Stewart-Jones	Head of Learning & Organisational Development	RSPB	Steering Group
Patience Thody	Deputy CEO	The Wildlife Trusts	Steering Group
Adam Tunningley	Director of Operations	Natural England	Steering Group