

Project Success Story

Institution

The Carnegie Trust for the Universities of Scotland (which funds and supports PhD scholars across all the Scottish Universities)

Project title

Carnegie Trust Future Leaders Programme (for PhD Scholarship holders)

Background/Context

The [Carnegie Trust for the Universities of Scotland](#) (CTUS) was set up in 1901 by philanthropist Andrew Carnegie. It aims to improve and extend opportunities for both study and research in the universities and institutions of higher education of Scotland.

The catalyst for the Future Leaders Programme initiative emerged from a consultation between the Trust, their Board members and alumni, and the PhD students they support across the Scottish universities through scholarship grants. The initiative is an innovative example within UK higher education as it aims to support PhD scholars to develop their leadership skills at the outset of their career, and focusses around attributes and behaviours that include identifying strengths, openness, collaboration, curiosity, resilience and entrepreneurial spirit.

Solution

The Trust commissioned Advance HE to develop and facilitate a creative and impactful Future Leaders programme for their PhD scholars in 2020. The programme comprised three elements: mentoring partnerships between scholars and alumni; development sessions focused around aspects of leadership; and building a cohesive Carnegie Scholar community with the aid of a virtual platform for resources, discussion and information sharing (Advance HE Connect).

The development session programme was originally designed as a face to face immersive two-day residential event, however, as the coronavirus pandemic developed, the Carnegie Trust for the Universities of Scotland and Advance HE worked together to transition this effectively to a flexible online delivery format running over the course of five months. This revised longitudinal online programme format took account of multiple competing demands and challenges faced by scholars during the initial months of the COVID-19 pandemic. Interestingly, both Trust colleagues and Future Leaders scholars reported that an unanticipated benefit of this format was the pastoral support element that the programme offered scholars at a time when anxiety and stress levels were high.

Following the success of the programme, a second Future Leaders programme is in preparation which will build on the first cohort and focus around appreciative, relational and experiential training.

Outcomes

An evaluation of the Future Leaders programme was undertaken by the Advance HE Course Team, and revealed a number of positive outcomes from the programme. Future Leaders participants felt that the programme gave them a new perspective on leadership and gave them the confidence to take on leadership roles in the future. One said:

"Perhaps the biggest difference the Future Leaders programme has made to me in the context of my PhD is a new perspective on what it means for myself and others to 'play to their strengths'. It

seemed like many of us did not consider ourselves to be natural leaders beforehand, but found out that we do have relevant strengths."

Others talked about their awareness of leadership, what it might mean and the freedom to choose their own leadership style:

"The idea that you can be a different kind of leader and in being true to yourself you are actually a true leader never occurred to me before and I find the idea very exciting."

There was also a marked impact on participants' appreciation of their own strengths. When asked at the start of the programme many said their strengths were 'enthusiasm', 'confidence' and 'determination'. When asked again at the end of the programme, among the answers given were 'understanding', 'resilience', 'empathy' and 'communication', all skills vital to being effective leaders.

Perhaps the most visible and best reported impact on scholars was the positive network that the programme helped to establish. Scholars reported feeling much more engaged with each other and commented on their enjoyment of working collaboratively together. Observations by facilitators of the engagement change during sessions mirror this sentiment: They appear to communicate really well and have broken down any barriers between discipline areas and age. This is true also with the new relationships formed between mentors and mentees.

Programme participant Zita Babarczi, University of Stirling said: *"The Future Leaders Programme was a colourful, varied, interesting and in-depth guided tour into various facets of leadership, communication, and professional conduct which were especially valuable, I feel, to those from disadvantaged backgrounds or who speak English as a second language. The Carnegie Trust's training programme provided us with a toolkit to use in our day-to-day and professional life in the UK and abroad. The programme was also an excellent way of connecting with fellow scholars at a time when building community in person was impossible."*

Professor Andy Walker, CTUS CEO, commented: *"The Future Leaders programme turned out to be a crucial element of support for our PhD Scholars during 2020 – not only stimulating the students to consider the leadership roles they will be taking on in their future careers but also through building a supportive community during a particularly stressful time."*

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the programme's face-to-face elements had to be rapidly redesigned for remote delivery.

Advance HE's Programme Lead, Dr Jo Chaffer said: *"We took the decision to go online very early reflecting the need for some certainty, stability and sense of 'being in this together' and it paid off. Our facilitator team managed to retain the creativity, vibrancy and variety at the heart of the original immersive. I'd say it was this, combined with a genuine warmth and openness, that built the high-support/ high-challenge environment so essential personal and professional development."*

The success of the programme has led to the proposal of a second iteration of the Future Leaders programme to be delivered in 2021. The new programme will take into account recommendations from evaluation of the first cohort and will include asynchronous and synchronous sessions with the hope of possibly being able to also include a face-to-face event later in the year. Following the success of the mentoring element in 2020, this will form a key part of the 2021 iteration of the programme.

For more information on the Future Leaders 2 programme, please contact Advance HE's Head of Membership (Scotland) Catriona Bell, catriona.bell@advance-he.ac.uk.