

Evaluation of the Future Generations Leadership Academy 2021-22 Programme

Final report by Arad Research

January 2023

INTRODUCTION

The Future Generations Leadership Academy recruits young people aged between 18-30 from across Wales' public, private and voluntary sectors – and trains them in the Well-being of Future Generations Act (WFGA) and in developing their leadership skills.

The Future Generations Commissioner (FGC) commissioned Arad Research to evaluate its Leadership Academy 2021-22 Programme, and this is the final report of that evaluation. Based on case study interviews with a range of participants, line managers and senior stakeholders, the aim of the evaluation was to review the ways in which the programme is having impact at organisational level. The evaluation also offers recommendations for improvements as well as drawing on lessons learned from other relevant leadership programmes.

These findings should be considered in conjunction with the findings of the UpRising Impact Report of the 2021-22 Future Generations Leadership Academy. These findings are based on case studies from Welsh Government (WG), Natural Resources Wales (NRW) and Costain. This report provides findings and recommendations and not the individual case studies which will be published on approval of the organisations.

Methodology

Arad adopted a mixed-method approach to the research. This involved desk research to identify examples of good practice and semi-structured interviews with FGC Academy participants, line managers, sponsor organisation representatives and strategic stakeholders. In total, Arad interviewed 6 FGC Academy participants, 5 line managers and/or sponsor organisation representatives and 2 strategic stakeholders (one of whom also acted as a reverse mentee).

This report includes a review of good practice from similar types of leadership academies and the conclusions and recommendations from ARAD for the Future Generations Leadership Academy going forward.

Review of Good Practice

This section presents the evidence from a short review of research similar initiatives to the FGC Leadership Academy. The purpose of this review has been to identify examples of good practice and lessons learnt from these initiatives to inform recommendations for the potential future design and delivery of the Academy.

Conclusions

This report concludes with a section that summarises the main findings from the case study interviews and presents recommendations for future iterations of the Academy. The conclusions cover a range of key points, including the effectiveness of the Academy model, recruitment processes, line manager support and peer networks, reverse mentoring, individual action plans, organisational good practice, Welsh language opportunities, and partnerships.

GOOD PRACTICE REVIEW

Introduction

This section presents the evidence from a short review of research similar initiatives to the FGC Leadership Academy. The purpose of this review has been to identify examples of good practice and lessons learnt from these initiatives to inform recommendations for the potential future design and delivery of the Academy.

Rationale for Leadership Academies

The review has found a range of examples of leadership academies at a national and international level. These academies are run by public and private sector such as the NHS, national governments and the Institute of Chartered Engineers in the UK¹ and the World Bank² and the YMCA Europe³ at an international level. Broadly, the aims of setting up leadership academies are similar across organisations. They include developing the leadership skills of those who work for the respective organisations, building knowledge, soft skills such as communication, confidence and the behaviours of young managers, enabling these individuals to reach their full leadership potential. The programmes also aim to give participants a wider perspective on policy and build new networks of contacts.

While the aim is to develop participants' skills there are benefits for the organisations themselves in creating a robust and diverse pipeline of new leaders to advance to the most senior and critical roles. Some organisations tie their respective leadership academies to their wider social and economic goals. For example, the YMCA Europe aim for their Academy participants is that *'they live as active citizens, promote social change and strengthen their movements as bearers of democratic values and change-makers.'* The World Bank ensures its participants engage in intensive training on the policies, products and operations of the World Bank, to address global development challenges.

¹ <https://www.ice.org.uk/media/2twlriect/future-leader-scheme-2022-brochure-final.pdf>

² [Young Professionals Program \(WBG YPP\) \(worldbank.org\)](https://www.worldbank.org/youngprofessionals)

³ [YMCA Europe Leadership Academy | YMCA Europe](https://www.ymca-europe.org/leadership-academy)

Leadership Academies have wider strategic goals as well in line with the aspirations of the FGC Academy to promote and support implementation of the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act. The YMCA Europe's Academy is based on the wider goals of promoting youth participation, its values and forms on the basis of "Have your say" manual and European Charter on Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life.

The Young African Leaders Programme⁴, funded by the European Commission, aims to catalyse and foster changes as envisioned in the Africa Agenda 2063 and in the Africa-EU Partnership. In Wales, the NHS develop a group of aspiring managers with guided support to deliver high quality improvements to patient services. to ultimately improve the health of everyone in Wales.

Design, content and delivery

The Academies addressed by this short review also have commonalities in their design and delivery. The content of these interventions usually range across the provision of learning and development interventions to support participants to develop and demonstrate personal leadership effectiveness and contribute to wider organisational systems. Learning generally revolves around a mix of e-learning and face to face engagement through modules, building to recognised short-course qualifications and, in some longer-term examples, such as Academi Wales, a Masters degree. As with the FGC Leadership Academy, a few also involve individual learning plans or, in the case of, the YMCA, creating social projects within teams.

Professional development accompanies this learning. This revolves participants being coached and / or mentored by senior leaders, with supporting events and management structures to create networking opportunities. Some participants work within their respective units, aiming to make a difference at a micro-organisational level while others move around the organisations in order for them to gain experiences in a range of different

⁴ [Young African Leaders Programme • European University Institute \(eui.eu\)](https://eui.eu/)

roles. In some cases, these professional development opportunities again link to the wider strategic goals of organisations.

For example, participants of the Academi Wales programme have work experience placements across different organisations in order to promote the values of One Wales Public Service. In the World Bank's case, work placement rotations are a core component of the curriculum, providing the participants with the exposure to understand how institutions work (and can work together) as well as how to align their skills.

Participants are normally recruited through open recruitment processes within the respective organisations. Others such as the Young African Leaders programme, funded through DG for International Partnerships of the European Commission, targets under-35's who are high potential policy-makers, diplomats, and professionals from across Africa. The YMCA Europe targets 30 young leaders of civil society organisations (CSOs) from approximately 15 European countries, who take or are going to take governing or managing positions in their respective organisations.

While the National Academy for Educational Leadership (NAEL) targets older middle managers for its Associate model⁵, the principles are the same in developing individuals to act as thought leaders; articulating and implementing a vision and strategy for educational leadership in Wales.

Sustainability

The leadership academies have a focus on how to retain and apply the knowledge and skills developed by participants. Some, such as the ICE Future Leaders, become part of the Alumni Network which provides ongoing opportunities to engage with a dynamic peer group for the rest of their career. The World Bank's academy organises regular events for participants to stay in touch with programme alumni, stakeholders and broader World Bank staff. NAEL's alumni act as ambassadors, advocates and representatives of their Academy, drive higher

⁵ [System Leadership - National Leadership Wales \(nael.cymru\)](http://nael.cymru)

expectations of leadership in schools and supporting the implementation of the Curriculum for Wales.

Other programmes expect that participants continue their progress through advocacy campaigns, partnerships and negotiations policy and democratic governance and decision making.

Evaluating impact and lessons for the FGC Academy

The short nature of this research exercise has not allowed for any deeper consideration of the impact of these programmes and published evaluations appear to be few and far between. The evidence does however indicate that the current design and delivery model developed by FGC has many commonalities with the identified leadership programmes and, in some cases, innovations, such as reverse mentoring. These programmes have all focused on developing the skills and knowledge of young leaders, be it in the public or private sector, in line with wider organisational or policy goals and have placed an emphasis both of learning and professional development opportunities to deliver on these goals.

Lessons from Arad's previous evaluation work on projects for NAEL, Academi Wales and Teach First have also identified some common themes and considerations for FGC in future. These have included the importance of ongoing networking and professional development opportunities for Alumni to ensure sustained impact, alignment with policy and enhance their visibility within their respective organisations. The NAEL model also focuses on co-construction of the learning content and activities, which could be further developed through FGC at the outset of the programme and linked to future development of individual action plans (IAPs).

These models also delivered training for line managers and mentors to ensure consistent engagement across programmes, with participants, line managers and mentors all working to the same goals. These programmes place a greater focus on monitoring and evaluation of progress, with built in accountability systems for participants. These elements could all potentially address some of the challenges identified by the case studies with regards to

engagement of reverse mentors, tracking and understanding of participants' impact, consistency of approach across the programme partners, and provide a future structure for alumni to continue to develop their skills and influence over time.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

All case study organisations have focused on developing the skills and knowledge of young leaders, be it in the public or private sector, in line with wider organisational or policy goals. They have placed an emphasis both of learning and professional development opportunities to deliver on the goals of the Academy. Overall, the impact for case study participants and organisations has been very positive. Participants have developed a range of new skills including leadership, communication and team working, developing confidence to engage with senior colleagues and lead on aspects of the WFGA within their respective organisations. Participating organisations have increased awareness of the Act and how their organisations can lead in implementing it as well as investing in young talent.

Effectiveness of Academy model

One key factor in the development of the FGC Leadership Academy has been organisations' positive views on the effectiveness of the model in providing a structure for investing in young talent and promoting diversity. For representatives from the case study organisations this was an important element linked to their understanding and implementation of the Act. The Academy model also allows participating organisations to take a visible and leading role in promoting WFGA, something which links to their own sustainable development and environmental goals. Overall, the Academy is seen to be adding value - creating future leaders of diverse individuals coming from different backgrounds and sectors.

Recruitment processes

Recruitment processes have generally been open and built on some of the lessons learned from the first academy with regards to supporting diversity and timings. One organisation

which took on 6 participants did consider the process to be time intensive, indicating that this may need to be addressed if the Academy is scaled up in future. One organisational representative also called for 'more of a steer' from FGC with regards to identifying suitable candidates although other organisational structures and decision making was reported to have worked effectively.

Line manager support and peer networks

A key element of effective participation in the Academy for participants has been supportive line managers. This was a feature of successful working in the case study organisations who organised a range of opportunities for participants to apply the leadership, communication and teamwork skills they developed. These included shadowing senior staff, workshops and focus groups, next stage planning, section 20 reviews and other activities. Participants outlined the benefits of this support, which has allowed them to progress in their roles, and make progress towards their goals.

Another important feature of the Academy has been the peer learning supported by the programme. This has largely developed organically although participants were keen to note the supportive role of the Academy in allowing these links to develop. This is another aspect of the Academy which has further developed since the first cohort, creating a support network and also an opportunity to exchange ideas about WFGA. Future iterations of the Academy can continue to build Alumni network to help sustain the momentum and enthusiasm created by this peer support. Organisational representatives suggested further planning to provide support structures and ongoing professional development to enable Alumni to consistently engage post-Academy.

Reverse mentoring

While recognised as an innovative component of the Academy the case study organisations indicate a mixed picture overall for the reverse mentoring process. For several participants, it has been a hugely valuable and transformative experience, enhancing their skills and

knowledge and confidence and developing their networks. Others had less positive views, largely due to the inconsistent engagement of their mentees. In future FGC could consider developing clearer structures and requirements to support the process. Good practice outlined included arranging regular catch up meetings, where possible meeting face to face, and developing ideas and action points to progress the relations on a professional basis.

Individual Action Plans (IAPs)

There was a similar mixed picture regarding the individual action plans (IAPs). These were brought in to address challenges highlighted by previous internal evaluations regarding the joint action plan from the previous Academy. A few participants interviewed outlined a range of benefits in terms of deepening their understanding of the Act and how it can be applied at an organisational level. Others, however, had found the workloads difficult to manage and had not yet finished their IAPs to their satisfaction.

Some organisational representatives saw the value in the content and the process of what participants produced but others found the concept lacking clarity and called for a greater focus on supporting wider organisational change. A representative from one organisation called for an 'earlier steer' on the (IAPs) to define desired outcomes and manage the legacy of these projects better. Other suggestions included considering more manageable, bite-size projects with a focus on 'quick wins' i.e. projects that can influence decision making and policy outcomes or interactive research projects with built in problem solving.

Organisational good practice

Several case study organisations illustrated good practice in raising the profile of the WFGA internally. Steps included evaluating the progress of the organisation, strategy and key activities against the seven wellbeing goals to try and identify where they are performing well or areas that need improvement, and the second to create an action plan to address these gaps. Participants, line managers and senior managers have all worked jointly towards these goals within some organisations and this has been supported in others with

awareness raising activities, focus groups and reviews. These approaches have supported the goals of the Leadership Academy in promoting the WFGA and also provided a focus for the engagement and progression of participants to develop their leadership skills.

Good practice has also been evidenced in terms of promoting collaboration between organisations involved in the Academy. A small number of private sector organisations continue to meet regularly to try and collaborate in different topics, guided by WFGA. This is an approach that can potentially be extended to all partners to add further value to the promotion and implementation of the Act. These types of dynamic partnerships under the aegis of the Academy could also further promote public-private sector cooperation, and exchange of good practice. They could also address some of the challenges identified in the case studies with regards to the visibility of the programme and understanding of how partners are operating.

Welsh language opportunities

Two participants interviewed noted the lack of activities and material in the Welsh language and the lack of attention to the Welsh language in the delivery of the Leadership Academy. They found this a missed opportunity, especially since one of the seven well-being goals set out in the Act is 'A Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language'. They felt that this goal should receive the same level of attention as the other six goals. The participants also noted that most correspondence relating to the Academy was in English only. For future Academies, they recommended more focus on the Welsh language and culture throughout the delivery and suggested offering Welsh lessons for those who wanted them as part of the Academy.

Partnerships

Better partnerships could also be promoted at the outset of the Academy through more communications regarding the aims, objectives and project management structures of the Academy, for example at the programme launch. This could contribute to ensure a broad

understanding of how all partners are engaging with the Academy, sharing good practice as to how to effectively manage participants in line with programme and organisational aims. Sharing of good practice in how the WFGA has been promoted and delivered, illustrating how it is being formalised and operating in innovative environments within public and private sector would also benefit participating organisations.

This approach could be linked to suggestions from organisational representatives and participants for better planning and communication from FGC, including clear commitments over the timeframe of the Academy and a calendar of upcoming events. Some representatives also suggested making more use of partner organisations to help plan and deliver the Academy. Again, this was focused on sharing of good practice and creating management structures to improve visibility and accountability for all organisations. This would allow the FGC to consider scaling up elements of the programme to create more momentum and sustainability for the programme in future.

Learning from good practice

The examples of good practice have also identified some common themes and considerations for FGC Academy in future. These have included the importance of ongoing networking and professional development opportunities for Alumni to ensure sustained impact, alignment with policy and enhance their visibility within their respective organisations. The NAEL model also focuses on co-construction of the learning content and activities, which could be further developed through FGC at the outset of the programme and linked to future development of individual action plans (IAPs).

These models also delivered training for line managers and mentors to ensure consistent engagement across programmes, with participants, line managers and mentors all working to the same goals. These programmes place a greater focus on monitoring and evaluation of progress, with built in accountability systems for participants. These elements could all potentially address some of the challenges identified by the case studies with regards to engagement of reverse mentors, tracking and understanding of participants' impact,

consistency of approach across the programme partners, and provide a future structure for alumni to continue to develop their skills and influence over time.

Recommendations

1. FGC should consider the provision of new support structures and ongoing professional development to enable Alumni to build on their leadership skills in order to continue to promote the WFGA within their respective organisations.
2. FGC should consider developing clearer structures and requirements to support the reverse mentoring process. This could include guidelines to engagement, suggestions for structuring and timing the sessions, action points to sustain the activities and training opportunities.
3. The individual action (IAP) element of the Academy should be reconsidered and made more flexible, interactive and tied in to influencing decision making and policy outcomes.
4. The Welsh language should be more effectively integrated into all aspects of Academy delivery and activities to promote the WFGA.
5. FGC should strengthen the partnerships between participating organisations and the Academy itself. These partnerships could be a focus for any future upscaling and structured to ensure common goals, visibility, accountability and opportunity for effective monitoring of progress.
6. Participating organisations should be encouraged to co-construct activities based on their expertise and share good practice regarding promoting and integrating the WFGA.

