

National Graduate Development Programme impact survey

August 2017



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Summary

Introduction

This online survey of cohort 16 of the Local Government Association's National Graduate Development Programme (ngdp) was intended to evaluate the overall impact of this graduate scheme, as well as to identify potential ways in which the scheme could be improved for future participants.

Methodology

An online survey form was sent via email to the 104 graduates who comprised cohort 16 of the ngdp. The survey was sent out in August 2017, one year after the graduates attended their final 'wrap up' event. A total of 57 replied – a response rate of 55 per cent.

Current sector of employment

The majority of respondents (44 respondents - 77 per cent) continued to work in local government following the scheme, at least until the time at which they completed the survey in August 2017. Only three respondents were working in the private sector at this time.

Evaluation of improvements in ability

Of those still working in local government at the time of completing the survey, the majority of respondents (25 respondents - 57 per cent) felt that their overall experience in the scheme had improved their ability to perform their current role "to a great extent". An identical number reported that their placement experience specifically had improved their ability to a great extent.

A considerably lower proportion, however, reported that the learning and development programme had improved their ability "to a great extent" (six respondents - 14 per cent). However, a further 21 respondents - 48 per cent - reported that the learning and development programme had improved their ability "to a moderate extent".

Career progression

A large majority of respondents who remained in local government (39 respondents - 89 per cent) had progressed in their careers or taken on additional roles or responsibilities since completing the ngdp. Of that number, 82 per cent (32 respondents) felt that the ngdp had been instrumental in this career progression "to a great extent".

Open-ended questions

Respondents were invited to provide any further comments which they wished to make about the ngdp. When analysed, these comments fell into five broad themes: skills and responsibilities (mostly positive), consistency and management (mixed), outcomes and destinations (mostly positive), learning and development (positive, though some negative comments about the formal learning), and recruitment and rotation (mostly positive, though with some negatives).

Introduction

This online survey looked at the extent to which the National Graduate Development Programme (ngdp) has had a lasting impact on those who have participated. The survey was sent to the graduates who comprised cohort 16 of the ngdp, which finished in the summer of 2016. The survey was sent out in August 2017, one year after the graduates attended their final 'wrap up' event.

The results will help the Local Government Association (LGA) improve and develop the programme.

Methodology

An online survey form was sent via email to the 104 graduates who comprised cohort 16 of the ngdp. The survey was sent out in August 2017, one year after the graduates attended their final 'wrap up' event. A total of 57 replied – a response rate of 55 per cent.

Whilst these results should strictly be taken as a snapshot of the views of this particular group of respondents, rather than representative of all cohort 16 graduates, this level of response means that the results are likely to provide a good indication of the views of the cohort more widely.

Please note the following when reading the report:

- Where tables and figures report the base, the description refers to the group of people who were asked the question. The number provided refers to the number who answered each question. Please note that bases vary throughout the survey.
- Throughout the report percentages in figures and tables may add to more than 100 per cent due to rounding.
- The following conventions are used in tables: '**' - less than 0.5 per cent; '0' – no observations; '-' – category not applicable/data not available.
- Where the response base is less than 50, care should be taken when interpreting percentages, as small differences can seem magnified. Therefore where this is the case in this report, absolute numbers are reported alongside the percentage values.

National Graduate Development Programme impact survey

This section outlines the full set of survey results.

Current sector of employment

In order to assess the rate of retention of ngdp alumni to local government and the public sector more widely, respondents were asked to specify the sector in which they currently work (that is, the sector in which they worked at the time of completing the survey).

As Table 1 shows, a considerable majority of 44 respondents – 77 per cent – reported that they still work in local government. A further eight respondents (14 per cent) still work in some area of the public sector. In total, 91 per cent of respondents still work within the public sector.

	Number	Per cent
Local government	44	77
Other public sector including ‘Other (please specify)’ ¹	8	14
Private sector	3	5
Studying	1	2
Not currently employed	1	2
Third sector	0	0
Self employed	0	0
Prefer not to say	0	0
Don’t know	0	0
Total	57	100

Base: all respondents (57 respondents)

Evaluation of improvements in ability

Respondents were asked to rate the extent to which the ngdp and various aspects of the programme improved their ability to carry out their current role. Only respondents still working in local government at the time of completing the survey were asked these questions.

As Table 2 shows, a total of 40 respondents (91 per cent of those still working within local government) indicated that participating in the ngdp improved their ability to perform their current role to either a great or a moderate extent. This includes 25 respondents (57 per cent) who reported that this applies to them “to a great extent”.

¹ An open-ended response entitled “Other (please specify)” was available as an answer to this question. Three respondents chose this option, and all specified their current sector in the open-ended text box provided. LGA Research and Information examined these responses and concluded that all three could be described as “Other public sector”; thus, the responses of both groups have been aggregated.

Table 2: To what extent, if at all, do you think that participation in the following improved your ability to carry out your current role? The ngdp overall

	Number of respondents	Percentage of respondents
To a great or moderate extent	40	91
To a great extent	25	57
To a moderate extent	15	34
To a small extent	3	7
Not at all	1	2
Don't know	0	0
Total	44	100

Base: all respondents who reported that they were currently working in local government at the time of responding to the survey (44 respondents)

Respondents were then asked how much specific aspects of the ngdp improved their ability to carry out their current role. As Table 3 shows, respondent evaluations of their placement experience were virtually identical to evaluations of the ngdp overall. Twenty five respondents (57 per cent) felt that their placement experience had improved their long-term abilities “to a great extent”, and 14 respondents (32 per cent) felt this “to a moderate extent”.

Table 3: To what extent, if at all, do you think that participation in the following improved your ability to carry out your current role? Your placement experience

	Number of respondents	Percentage of respondents
To a great or moderate extent	39	89
To a great extent	25	57
To a moderate extent	14	32
To a small extent	4	9
Not at all	1	2
Don't know	0	0
Total	44	100

Base: all respondents who reported that they were currently working in local government at the time of responding to the survey (44 respondents)

As Table 4 shows, evaluations of the ngdp learning and development programme were generally less positive. Just six respondents (14 per cent) felt that it had improved their ability to carry out their current role “to a great extent”, whereas 21 respondents (48 per cent) felt that it had helped “to a moderate extent”, and 16 respondents (37 per cent) felt that it had helped “to a small extent” or “not at all”.

Table 4: To what extent, if at all, do you think that participation in the following improved your ability to carry out your current role? The learning and development programme

	Number	Per cent
To a great or moderate extent	27	62
To a great extent	6	14
To a moderate extent	21	48
To a small extent	10	23
Not at all	6	14
Don't know	1	2
Total	44	100

Base: all respondents who reported that they were currently working in local government at the time of responding to the survey (44 respondents)

An open-ended question followed these three questions which asked respondents who answered “not at all” why they felt participation in the ngdp had not improved their ability to perform their current role. One respondent answered, saying “Because I have not changed jobs. I was in this role before I started the NGDP. I was not able to go on placements so did not benefit from the essential skills that would have provided”.

Career progression

Next, those respondents who were still working in local government were asked whether they had progressed in their career, or taken on additional roles or responsibilities, since participating in the ngdp. The overwhelming majority gave an affirmative response: 39 respondents (89 per cent) said “yes”, and a further four (nine per cent) said “no- but I expect to soon”. No respondents who were asked this question answered “no – I plan to maintain my current role and responsibilities for now”, although one person answered “don't know.”

Table 5: Since participating in the ngdp have you progressed in your career or taken on additional roles or responsibilities?

	Number of respondents	Percentage of respondents
Yes	39	89
No - but I expect to soon	4	9
No - I plan to maintain my current role and responsibilities for now	0	0
Don't know	1	2
Total	44	100

Base: all respondents who reported that they were currently working in local government at the time of responding to the survey (44 respondents)

To directly measure the impact of the ngdp on this progression, respondents were asked to what extent they attribute their career progression to participation in the programme.

As Table 6 shows, 32 respondents - 82 per cent of respondents who were still working in local government at the time of the survey, and who had experienced career advancement since participating in the ngdp - reported that participation in the programme had a positive impact on their career progression “to a great extent”. A further six respondents (15 per cent) answered that this was true “to a moderate extent”. Only one respondent answered that their career progression had only been helped by the ngdp “to a small extent”, and no respondents who were asked this question answered “not at all”.

Table 6: To what extent, if at all, do you think that participation in the ngdp had a positive impact on your ability to progress and/or take on additional roles or responsibilities?

	Number of respondents	Percentage of respondents
To a great or moderate extent	38	97
To a great extent	32	82
To a moderate extent	6	15
To a small extent	1	3
Not at all	0	0
Don't know	0	0
Total	39	100

Base: all respondents who reported that they were currently working in local government at the time of responding to the survey, and who subsequently reported that they had progressed in their career or taken on additional roles or responsibilities since completing the ngdp (39 respondents)

Open-ended questions

The survey concluded with two open-ended questions. The first asked respondents to provide any details on how participating in the ngdp has helped them achieve their career goals. The second asked for any final comments about their experience of the ngdp. As responses covered similar topics, the responses were analysed together and the key themes are summarised below.

Skills and responsibilities

A very large number of comments, most of them positive, were provided by respondents regarding the extent to which participation in the ngdp developed their skills and gave them sufficient responsibility in their roles. This theme can be broken down into topics as follows:

- *The ngdp improved respondents' skills and working abilities* (17 comments). Several respondents reported that participation in the programme had enhanced their skills in a range of areas, most notably confidence and knowledge and understanding of local government: "The NGDP provided me with an excellent base knowledge in the organisation and the local government sector that I utilise every day in my current role".
- *The ngdp provided respondents with a high level of responsibility, which they appreciated* (12 comments). Several respondents highly valued the level of trust and opportunities to demonstrate their skills which they received: "I was given a number of important pieces of work and given responsibility, and an opportunity to prove myself which I do not think other young people in a similar organisation would have without the backing of the ngdp scheme".
- *The ngdp helped prompt personal introspection and long-term career planning* (four comments). Some respondents wrote that participation in the scheme had greatly encouraged their inclination to examine their own skills and motivations, as well as those of their colleagues: it is "an experience which has greatly developed me as an individual, improved my self-awareness and consideration of others".
- *The ngdp challenged participants to step outside their comfort zone, which they appreciated* (three comments). Some respondents highly valued the ngdp's tendency to expose them to challenging situations which they otherwise would not have

considered getting involved in: “I recently was seconded to [a major incident] to help work with the emergency response team. I was able to step back from a very stressful and intense situation, with significant political pressure and media attention, to think strategically and improve processes. This was as a direct result of my experience at [my host council] and my learning from the development programme of the NGDP”.

- *A minority of respondents may not be challenged enough* (one comment). One respondent, who had not experienced this personally, “was disappointed to hear of people at other councils doing administrative tasks”. See below for issues on the variable quality of placements across councils.
- *Some respondents may not be equipped with enough project management skills* (one comment). One respondent reported that “I do not feel that I have been able to get enough exposure to project management as part of my placements and this seems to have had a negative impact on my ability to progress my career”.

Consistency and management

A considerable number of comments were directed at issues of consistency in the scheme between participants and councils, the involvement of senior management in the scheme, and the impact of the latter on the former. This theme can be broken down into topics as follows:

- *Respondents appreciated working directly with, and becoming visible to, senior managers* (12 comments). Respondents appreciated this exposure both because it enhanced their confidence and because it provided them with opportunities to demonstrate their skills to senior staff members for progression and advancement: “During my placement I was able to interact with senior management very regularly in a variety of settings... This has given me the confidence to make myself known to senior management in my new role”.
- *Respondents reported that the quality of ngdp placements varies considerably between local authorities* (nine comments). Networking with other participants made it clear to many respondents that some were having a far more positive experience than others: “different participants have good or bad overall experience dependent on which council they are hired by. I think the lack of equality in this [is] unfair”.
- *Respondents identified commitment and participation from senior management as crucial to the success of their placement* (eight comments). Some respondents reported that the senior management of their council was highly involved with the scheme, which had a positive effect; others reported that the scheme was neglected: “the experience of the individual is highly dependent on... buy in from senior managers and the chief exec of the council”.
- *Respondents appreciated the high-level, corporate focus of the scheme* (eight comments). Several reported the benefits of working on projects with a “big-picture” corporate focus: “The high level, project focus of the scheme meant I have been prepared to deal with corporate projects”.
- *Respondents requested more support and standardisation of the scheme from the LGA* (four comments). Largely in connection with the issue of placement quality variability identified above, some respondents felt that the LGA should be doing more to directly ensure a guaranteed minimum standard of quality for scheme placements: “I feel on reflection it would be beneficial to the schemes wider appeal if this was more centrally controlled”.

Outcomes and destinations

Many comments were made concerning the roles in which respondents have found themselves following their participation in the scheme. This theme can be broken down into topics as follows:

- *Many respondents reported considerable advancement within local government following their participation* (14 comments). A number of “success stories” were reported by respondents, for example: “I started in local government in September 2014 and almost three years later I am leading on a range of strategic commissioning programmes in health and social care - this would not have been possible without the skills that I gained through the graduate scheme and the support that I got while I was on it”.
- *Some of the skills learned on the scheme are sufficiently broad for respondents to find success in other sectors* (eight comments). As Table 1 showed, a minority of respondents are not being retained to the local government sector following the scheme: “I’m working in property PR now, which requires detailed knowledge of local government and planning policies, so it has been useful in that sense”.
- *Respondents were inspired by the prospect of making a difference in local government management* (five comments). Some respondents were inspired by the prospect of public service and potential to make a difference to people’s lives: “I see [the ngdp] as the most effective way of leading transformative change in a positive way”.
- *At least one respondent is interested in actively continuing to promote or extend the scheme* (one comment). One respondent wrote that “I have moved to [an] organisation where the ngdp is not running and am a strong advocate for introducing the scheme.
- *The scheme may be instrumental in overcoming prior barriers to advancement which some participants may have faced* (one comment). One respondent wrote that “It helped me break through the glass ceiling I had experienced in my career”.

Learning and development

As Table 4 above implies, respondents had mixed experiences of the learning and development component of the ngdp. This theme can be broken down into topics as follows:

- *The scheme provided respondents with a valuable formal qualification* (11 comments). The opportunity to work towards the ILM Level 7 Diploma in Leadership and Management was highly valued by many participants and management staff: “the senior management valued the qualification, which has led me to a management role”.
- *Respondents appreciated the opportunities to network with other like-minded individuals at events for ngdp participants* (nine comments). As one respondent wrote, “Spending time as a large group of ngdp grads is a brilliant way to reflect on this range of experiences and opportunities in local government and to meet like-minded people who are facing similar challenges”.
- *A small number of respondents felt the taught workshops could be made more interesting or more directly applicable to their roles* (three comments). According to one respondent, “the Warwick element could be improved significantly as very little of what was covered there has been useful in the day job”.

Recruitment and rotation

Finally, some comments were made on the process by which the ngdp recruits, assesses and assigns participants to specific placements. This theme can be broken down into topics as follows:

- *Rotation of participants through a wide variety of departments was highly valued* (14 comments). Respondents greatly appreciated the variety and breadth of skills and experience which was provided by their rotation throughout their local authority: “the real benefit was the opportunity to try different departments to work out where my interests/passions lay”.
- *Where respondents were not rotated, they found this very frustrating* (two comments). Some respondents, perhaps owing to the variability of scheme quality outlined above, were not rotated between different departments and found that the range of skills which they gained was too narrow: “At [my host council] we were not able to do placements... it was difficult to gain any experience from different departments because no one had the time to give”.
- *The scheme should aim to provide more support for “home grown” candidates already originating from a local council* (two comments). There may be an issue with participants continuing to be regarded as they were before they entered the scheme, and not being given sufficient opportunities: “Do not offer the internal programme because the graduates just do not get the same level of exposure”.
- *The scheme may wish to change its name to increase its appeal to prospective applicants* (one comment). As one respondent suggested: “I really think the scheme needs a name change. The name doesn't give any indication that it relates to local governments so I find that it needs quite a bit of explanation”.

Annex A: Questionnaire

1. What sector are you currently working in?

- Private sector
- Local government
- Other public sector
- Third sector
- Self employed
- Studying
- Not currently employed
- Other (please specify)
- Prefer not to say
- Don't know

To those who still work in local government:

2. To what extent, if at all, do you think that participation in the following improved your ability to carry out your current role?

Please tick one option for each row

	To a great extent	To a moderate extent	To a small extent	Not at all	Don't know
...the ngdp overall					
...your placement experience					
...the learning and development programme					

To those who answered not at all to 'the ngdp overall' option in Q2:

3. Why do you think that participation in the ngdp did not improve your ability to carry out your role? If you have any suggestions as to how the programme could be improved or developed to help with this, please use the space below.

To those who still work in local government:

4. Since participating in the ngdp have you progressed in your career or taken on additional roles or responsibilities?

- Yes
- No – but I expect to soon
- No – I plan to maintain my current role and responsibilities for now
- Don't know

If yes:

5. To what extent, if at all, do you think that participation in the ngdp had a positive impact on your ability to progress and/or take on additional roles or responsibilities?

To a great extent
To a moderate extent
To a small extent
Not at all
Don't know

To those who answered not at all to Q5:

6. Why do you think that participation in the ngdp did not have a positive impact on your ability to progress and/or take on additional roles or responsibilities? If you have any suggestions as to how the programme could be improved or developed to help with this, please use the space below.

To those who answered a great or moderate extent to Q2 or Q5:

7. Please briefly provide any details of how the ngdp has helped you improve your ability to carry out your current role or progress in your career, including examples of things that you have done differently as a result.

To all respondents:

8. If you have any final comments about your experience of the ngdp or how it has impacted your career, please use the space below.

Many thanks for taking the time to complete this survey. Your feedback will be used to improve and develop the programme



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