

National Graduate Development Programme impact survey

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Summary

Introduction

This online survey of cohort 17 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 98 graduates who comprised cohort 17 of the ngdp. The survey was sent out in August 2018, one year after the graduates attended their final 'wrap up' event. A total of 47 replied – a response rate of 48 per cent.

Current sector of employment

At the time of responding to the survey, around one year after completing the ngdp, the majority of respondents (33 respondents - 70 per cent) continued to work in local government. Only four respondents (nine per cent) 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 (30 respondents - 91 per cent) felt that their overall experience in the scheme had improved their ability to perform their current role to a great or moderate extent. A similar proportion (31 respondents – 94 per cent) reported that their placement experience had improved their abilities to a great or moderate extent.

A somewhat lower proportion reported that the learning and development programme had improved their ability to a great or moderate extent (23 respondents - 70 per cent).

Career progression

A large majority of those respondents who remained in local government (30 respondents - 91 per cent) had progressed in their careers or taken on additional roles or responsibilities since completing the ngdp. Of that number, 70 per cent (21 respondents) felt that the ngdp had been instrumental in this career progression "to a great extent", with the remainder answering "to a moderate extent".

Open-ended questions

Respondents were invited to provide any further comments which they wished to make about the ngdp. These comments fell into five broad themes. The majority were positive: the strength of the ngdp is in the variety and breadth of experience it offers; access to senior management as a result of the scheme is highly prized; and the good reputation of the ngdp and the opportunities it gives individual graduates to boost their own reputations, is crucial to ensuring future career progression. Less positively, there is a perceived variability in the quality of placements across councils, and the official qualifications offered were found highly useful by some but less useful by others.

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

Methodology

An online survey form was sent via email to the 98 graduates who comprised cohort 17 of the ngdp. The survey was sent out in August 2018, one year after the graduates attended their final 'wrap up' event. A total of 47 replied – a response rate of 48 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 17 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 majority of 33 respondents – 70 per cent – reported that they still worked in local government. A further six respondents (13 per cent) still worked in some area of the public sector. In total, 81 per cent of respondents still worked within the public sector.

	Number	Per cent
Local government	33	70
Other public sector including ‘Other (please specify)’ ¹	6	13
Private sector	4	9
Studying	1	2
Not currently employed	0	0
Third sector	3	6
Self employed	0	0
Prefer not to say	0	0
Don’t know	0	0

Base: all respondents (47 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 and the following questions.

As Table 2 shows, a total of 30 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 18 respondents (55 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. One respondent chose this option, and described their current sector as working for a politician. Thus, this response has been added to those of other respondents who reported still working in the public sector.

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	30	91
To a great extent	18	55
To a moderate extent	12	36
To a small extent	3	9
Not at all	0	0
Don't know	0	0

Base: all respondents who reported that they were currently working in local government at the time of responding to the survey (33 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, 21 respondents (64 per cent) felt that their placement experience had improved their abilities “to a great extent”, and 10 respondents (30 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	31	94
To a great extent	21	64
To a moderate extent	10	30
To a small extent	1	3
Not at all	1	3
Don't know	0	0

Base: all respondents who reported that they were currently working in local government at the time of responding to the survey (33 respondents)

As Table 4 shows, evaluations of the ngdp learning and development programme were not quite as positive. Six respondents (18 per cent) felt that it had improved their ability to carry out their current role “to a great extent”, whereas 17 respondents (52 per cent) felt that it had helped “to a moderate extent”, and 10 respondents (30 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	23	70
To a great extent	6	18
To a moderate extent	17	52
To a small extent	6	18
Not at all	4	12
Don't know	0	0

Base: all respondents who reported that they were currently working in local government at the time of responding to the survey (33 respondents)

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: 30 respondents (91 per cent) said “yes”, and a further one (three per cent) said “no – but I expect to soon”. Two respondents (six per cent) who were asked this question answered “no – I plan to maintain my current role and responsibilities for now”.

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	30	91
No - but I expect to soon	1	3
No - I plan to maintain my current role and responsibilities for now	2	6
Don't know	0	0

Base: all respondents who reported that they were currently working in local government at the time of responding to the survey (33 respondents)

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

As Table 6 shows, 30 respondents – 100 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” or “to a moderate extent”. Seventy per cent of respondents answered “to a great extent”, and the remaining thirty per cent answered “to a moderate extent”.

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	30	100
To a great extent	21	70
To a moderate extent	9	30
To a small extent	0	0
Not at all	0	0
Don't know	0	0

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 (30 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 all respondents, including those who no longer work in local government, 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:

- It was widely acknowledged that the variety of placements and topics offered on the ngdp is the programme's main strength. Where criticism of the ngdp was (infrequently) offered in textual comments, this criticism tended to revolve around a lack of variety which individual graduates had experienced.
- Some respondents noted an issue with variable quality in placements, with some councils offering a more useful or accommodating ngdp experience than others. These respondents asked for the LGA to be more proactive in ensuring a minimum base standard of quality of placements across participating councils.
- Graduate participants prized the access to senior management gained through taking part in the scheme. It was widely felt that ngdp participants had greater access and exposure to senior staff and decision making than officers not taking part in the scheme.
- Participants also reported that the reputational prominence of the ngdp, and the opportunities which it gave them to boost their own reputations, was instrumental in securing further employment after the scheme. For example, one respondent reported that they were offered their post-ngdp job as a result of several senior staff mentioning them at a meeting at which they were not even present.
- The official qualifications, such as the ILM certificate, tended to polarise opinion, with some respondents finding them extremely useful, reputation-boosting and applicable to their everyday working lives, and others finding them overly abstract or irrelevant.

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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