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# **Evaluation of Destination Leadership Programme**

## **Report Summary**



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19.10.2017

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## 1.1 The Programme

The Destination Leadership Programme (DLP) aims to build the skills and knowledge required to be an effective *destination* leader in Scotland. Participation lasts six-months (typically October to March) and comprises a mix of workshops, residential weekends and a destination leadership project. Graduates have the opportunity to participate on an active alumni programme. Successful participants gain an **Executive Certificate in Destination Leadership** from Edinburgh Napier University.

The DLP was evaluated independently<sup>1</sup> for Scottish Enterprise in the summer of 2017.

## 1.2 Benefits of participation

Our evaluation feedback found that the DLP enables participants to identify the factors that make their destination successful *and* gives them the confidence to take on a destination leadership role. It also shows them how to encourage others to get involved in strengthening their destination.

### 1.2.1 Individual benefits

The DLP provides participants with an in-depth insight into their personal **leadership styles and preferences**. This helps them to understand their strengths and those of others - this has a positive impact on their collaborations at a destination level. They also report that it has a tangible benefit on their commercial leadership skills.

*“The course has given me the skills and confidence to take on a mentoring role of a post-graduate.”*

*I now understand my role as a destination leader and am keen to encourage and motivate others.”*

The DLP **increases participants’ confidence** – participants, especially women, noted that they were leaders within their organisations before the DLP but would not previously have taken the risk of putting themselves forward to drive destination development activity. The DLP changed this view and this in turn had a positive impact on their businesses. The DLP has **enhanced peoples’ careers**.

The DLP has **significantly strengthened networks**. Many participants noted that they considered themselves well networked at the start but that these connections tended to be narrowly defined (i.e. within their specific tourism segment or niche). A common response was that *‘I now have a much bigger black book. I can pick up the phone to someone in a different area of tourism and they will always take my call and understand what I’m talking about’*. This is important as it shows that the DLP helped to create a common language and understanding amongst participants around the value in collaborating.

*“I am more willing to take on a leadership role, due to increased confidence following DLP.”*

*I’m seeing opportunities at the destination level that can be taken forward. The Leadership Skills weekend was particularly insightful.”*

<sup>1</sup> The evaluation covered 4 years from 2013 - 2017

### 1.2.2 Organisational benefits

Performance improvement was not limited to individuals. Participants' employers also benefitted through individuals enhancing their leadership skills which significantly improved their performance – when asked whether their participation had enhanced their *commercial* leadership skills, just under one third (31%) gave the highest score of '5' while a further 28% cited a '4'. Given participants tended to be in senior positions at the time, this level of improvement is impressive.

### 1.2.3 Wider Tourism Destination benefits

Cross sectoral collaboration has increased and there is a better understanding of the diversity of Scotland's tourism offer amongst participants (in particular, those from Edinburgh).

On a more subtle level, those who have completed the DLP understand why people from other tourism segments might contact them. Participants on leadership development programmes frequently comment that a key benefit is the 'creation of a common language' within their organisations that helps improve communication and gain greater alignment. The DLP appears to have achieved a form of this alignment, not so much by language, but by creating a shared understanding of what (collaborative) actions might be taken at a destination level and why.

## 1.3 Programme components

### 1.3.1 Workshops

Participants described the workshop speakers and content as being of 'exceptional quality' with perspectives from Vienna, Hong Kong, Melbourne and Helsinki to name a few.

Participants noted that they were viewed as equals by the speakers, who were genuinely interested in their views - they realised that their Scottish knowledge and experience was valuable. Participants could have real discussions and debates with internationally recognised experts, in addition to being able to access them afterwards for one to one conversations.

### 1.3.2 Residential Weekends

Residential weekends contributed significantly to developing participants' professional networks. The [Leadership Weekend in particular](#) was very highly rated. It enabled the participants to gain genuinely new insights on their personal preferences and approaches. It also allowed them to work as a team in a 'safe' environment to test out ideas and techniques (some of which resulted in group projects).

[Learning journeys](#) to Manchester, Amsterdam and Bergen were a specific type of residential weekend and were considered to be an especially valuable element of the overall DLP experience. Participants gained insights that were valuable to the destination and to their businesses.

### 1.3.3 Group Project

The DLP has seeded a range of **destination development projects** that participants considered were instrumental in driving destination-level improvements. These included, but were not limited to:

- China Ready
- Women in Tourism
- Curious Edinburgh
- Music Tourism
- Our Edinburgh

The Programme also led indirectly to project activity, for example through a collaborative promotion link between Glasgow Airport and the Argyll and Islands destination.

### 1.3.4 Alumni Activity

Eighty eight percent of respondents have participated in the DLP Alumni network which has stimulated tourism contacts across all years of the DLP and across destinations. It was also seen as a continuous form of learning and an excellent follow on from the programme.

## 1.4 Overall conclusion

Overall, the DLP evaluated very positively. The DLP has engendered significant enthusiasm amongst participants and increased their competencies. Respondents were clearly and positively invigorated by the experience and this manifested itself through their actions:

- Proactively taking the lead to “seed” new ideas to take forward within their destination
- Maintaining links with members of their cohorts following completion.

These findings reinforce the conclusion that the DLP is enhancing participants’ personal leadership skills *and* is doing so through showing how to enhance the operation of their destination and the strength of its offer. This finding indicates that the DLP has been successful in creating the ‘executive infrastructure’ necessary to strengthen Scotland’s key tourism destinations.

It has also been genuinely valuable for participants’ personal development and in several cases has been (positively) career changing.