



Developing leaders in the public sector

Shared values to grow future leaders

The provision of training and development across the Welsh public service aims to equip current and future senior leaders.

There has long been an aspiration in Wales for a cohesive single Welsh public service guided by community and co-operative values. The Williams Commission highlighted the importance of a shared set of Welsh values and objectives, characterised by collaboration and effective sharing of best practice.

A key part of achieving this should be Academi Wales, which was established in 2012 to improve leadership and development training provision to public service employees across Wales. Its remit includes the uniformed services, health workers and national and local government; at all levels from graduate schemes to senior leaders.



A mixed picture with challenges

Public services leaders recognise the importance of leadership training and development. However, current provision and take up varies across the public sector.

Leadership training is evolving right across the Welsh public service, but some parts of the public sector are further ahead than others.

An over-reliance on self-selection and a lack of formal progression routes risks disadvantaging potential leaders from non-traditional backgrounds.

Many have only recently developed new leadership models, and some of the sector bodies are young organisations which need time to become established. However, the evidence shows that it is important to embed behaviour-based approaches and collaborative leadership within workforce strategies. It is difficult to change long-standing cultures and practices that stand in the way of new approaches to leadership development.

Most interviewees reported that their organisations have devoted fewer resources to training and development in recent years, although some were now trying to reverse this. The reduction was marked for local government and there are concerns about provision in some underperforming health organisations.

Even in sectors with comprehensive leadership training and development, as individuals move to senior leadership positions formal provision tends to dissipate, in favour of more informal

approaches such as conferencing and networking, and peer support. Interviewees also reported that it becomes increasingly difficult to find time for development as seniority increases.

Digital transformation represents a unique challenge because it requires a leadership approach that allows non-management employees to act on their own initiative.

We found that formal progression pathways are rare outside the uniformed services and the health sector. An over-reliance on self-selection and a lack of formal progression routes risks disadvantaging potential leaders from non-traditional backgrounds. A clearer progression pathway to senior appointments and a more proactive approach to talent management could reduce the risk of excluding those from under-represented groups and those whose career to date does not fit the traditional profile.

Digital transformation represents a unique challenge because it requires a leadership approach that allows non-management employees to act on their own initiative. This requires leaders to not only have a better understanding of digital and its implications for organisations, but it also requires them to empower people within their organisation.

The role of Academi Wales

Academi Wales is well respected for its training provision and contribution to leadership development and is seen as a champion of a single Welsh public service. However, its training tends to be taken up by those who are identified or self-identified as potential leaders,

and who believe that training and development should play a key role in progression.

Repurposing Academi Wales to focus on outcomes and service transformation could drive service improvements. It could also be relocated outside of the civil service, so that it is 'owned' by the whole public service.

Recommendations

A more focused approach to leadership across the public service could have significant positive impacts. These would include changes to training and development, formalising open recruitment and appointment processes, and increasing opportunities for secondments, peer challenge and networking. This could be achieved by:

- Tasking Academi Wales with promoting a uniform set of values and expectations for leadership development across the Welsh public service.
- Requiring Academi Wales and other providers to adopt an outcomes-driven approach with a focus on equipping leaders to drive transformation.
- Targeting leadership training and development offers on underperforming organisations that need it most.
- Providing more resources to support leadership development in sectors, such as local government, where there is currently relatively little provision.
- Requiring all public service organisations to establish a strategy for leadership development and clear progression pathways to senior appointments. Encouraging representative organisations and public service boards to foster collaboration, best practice, and peer challenge and support.



Find out more

For the full report see: Price, J., Johnson, C., Tilley, H., Martin, S. (2020). Developing Leaders in the Public Sector. Wales Centre for Public Policy

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For further information contact:

Dr Craig Johnson

+44 (0)29 2087 5345

craig.johnson@wcpp.org.uk

Wales Centre for Public Policy

Cardiff University, 10/12 Museum Place, Cardiff CF10 3BG



www.wcpp.org.uk



029 2087 5345



info@wcpp.org.uk



@WCfPP

