



Aspirant DCS Programme: Cohort 3

Information session

February 2012

Agenda

1. Context

- Programme aim
- Recruitment trends for senior leadership posts in children's services
- Where does the Aspirant DCS programme fit within the DCS provision?
- Who should apply?

2. The programme

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 - Programme elements
 - Programme plan
- Roles and responsibilities

3. Applying to the programme

- The assessment process
- Presenting your evidence
- What next?

Programme aim

The Aspirant DCS programme's specific contribution to children's services leadership is to focus on those people who 'aspire' to the role of chief officer with responsibility for children's services and support their development as influential leaders who inspire outstanding service delivery.

The aim of the programme is to create a credible pool of candidates who have the necessary desire, knowledge, capability and experience to be considered by employers for this role.

Recruitment trends for leadership roles in children's services

Key research findings from 2011 workforce surveys

- Annual turnover is about 20% or approximately 30 DCSs.
- Currently about 30% of DCSs have a wider portfolio. The expectation in almost every authority is that the DCS will carry additional corporate responsibilities, even if their departmental role remains unchanged.
- A clear message from workforce surveys is that many local authorities are now moving very rapidly towards implementing new arrangements for delivering services and all the indications are that the pace of change will continue to accelerate. Some DCSs, for example, commented variously that 'Everything is up for re-design'... 'the main emphasis of change is on re-design'... 'it is all about re-design and openness to possibilities'.
- New business models are emerging such as trusts, voluntary sector, traded services and shared services.

Recruitment trends for leadership roles in children's services

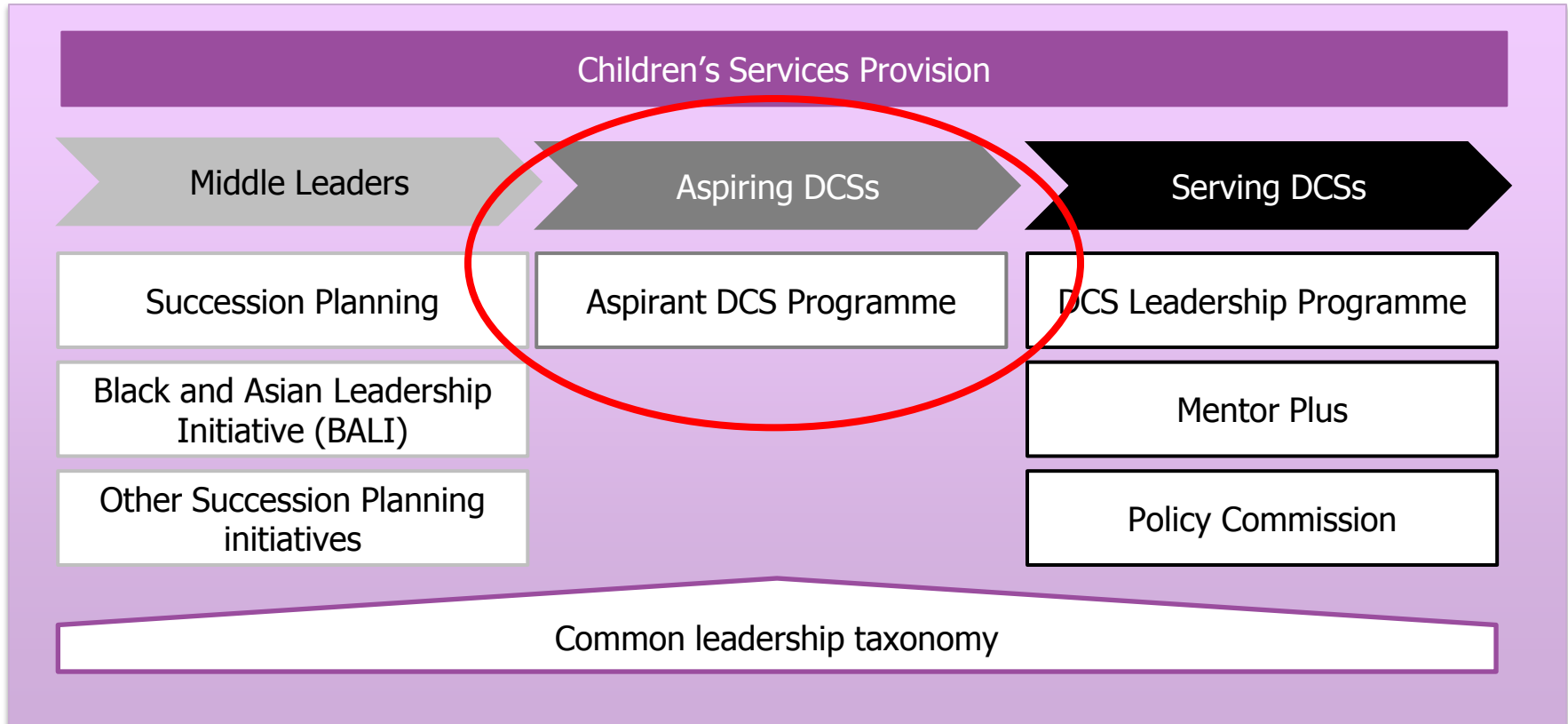
Key research findings

- Since the beginning of the current financial year, there has been a significant change in the way in which local authorities are filling the statutory position of the DCS.
- Of the 19 vacancies that have been arisen:
 - 5 are currently being filled by professional interim DCSs
 - 5 are currently being filled by a second tier officer acting up on an interim basis
 - 5 are currently being filled by the former director of adult services on a permanent basis
 - 2 are currently being filled by internal promotion within children's services
 - only 2 are currently being filled via the traditional route of external advert and appointment.

The evidence from previous quarters is that a significant number of the second tier officers acting up on an interim basis will eventually be confirmed in post.

- This is almost certainly a consequence of the financial constraints under which local authorities are operating, and the significant reduction in the number of senior posts across the whole of local government.
- Evidence from the regional workforce surveys suggests that this is also a feature of recruitment to second and third tier posts.

Where does the Aspirant DCS programme fit within the DCS provision?



Who should apply?

- Individuals who have worked in children's services or have other **appropriate experience** at assistant director level or equivalent, including those who have worked in leadership roles in children's services outside a local authority.
 - The programme is intended for those who are **highly committed** to becoming a local authority chief officer with responsibility for children's services and envisage applying for this post 12 - 18 months prior to their application for the programme.
 - Those who feel they meet these criteria will require **sponsorship** from a director of children's services as well as their line manager or other appropriate senior colleague and must be able to commit the time required to complete the programme in full (minimum of 28 days in 12 to 18 months).
- NB.** The programme will not meet the requirements of everyone who aspires to be a chief officer with responsibility for children's services. It is not a pre-requisite for becoming a chief officer with responsibility for children's services, nor a guarantee of appointment.

Introduction to the programme

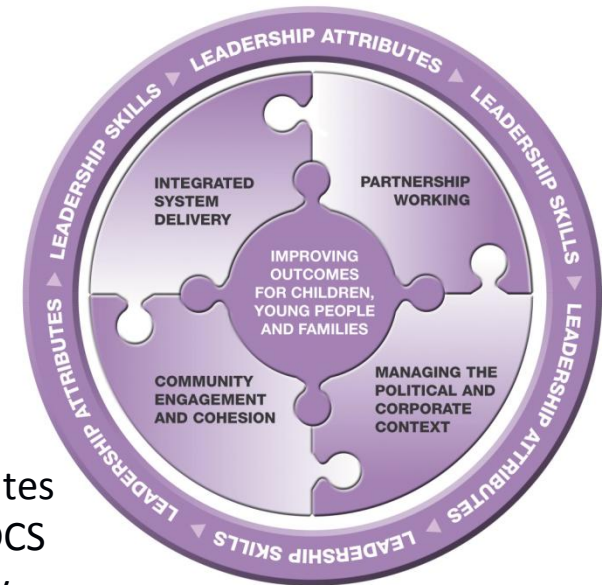
The leadership framework

The primary aim of the framework is to:

‘define the key knowledge, skills and attributes needed by those fulfilling the DCS role so they might provide effective leadership across children’s services in order to achieve positive outcomes for children, young people and their families.’

The framework consists of a central core of key leadership attributes and skills. These are considered to be integral to all aspects of a DCS role and also shown by leadership research to be related to highly effective leadership performance. They are central to, and supported by, areas of knowledge which represent the functional aspects of the director of children’s services role organised into four areas of strategic leadership.

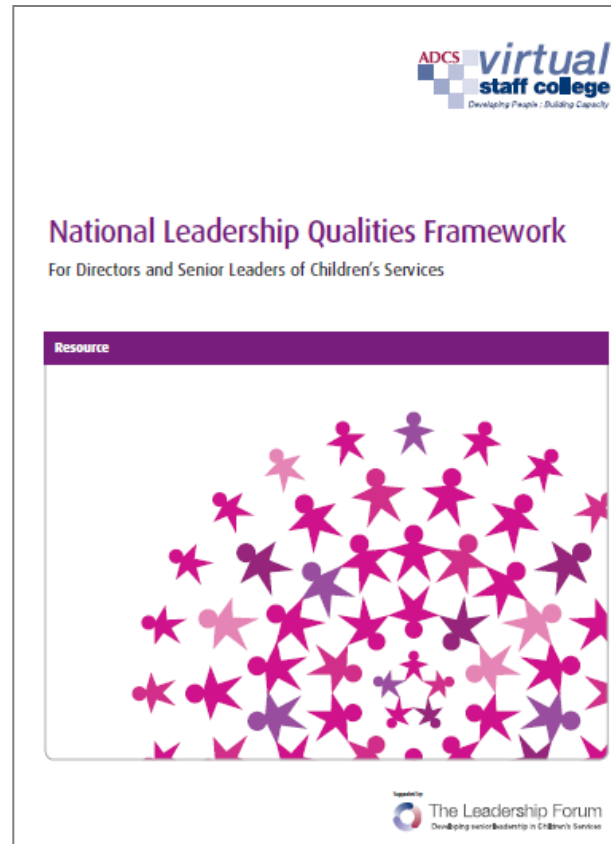
Eight attributes have been drawn from relevant documents and research covering leadership qualities in the public and private sectors.



Introduction to the programme

Leadership skills

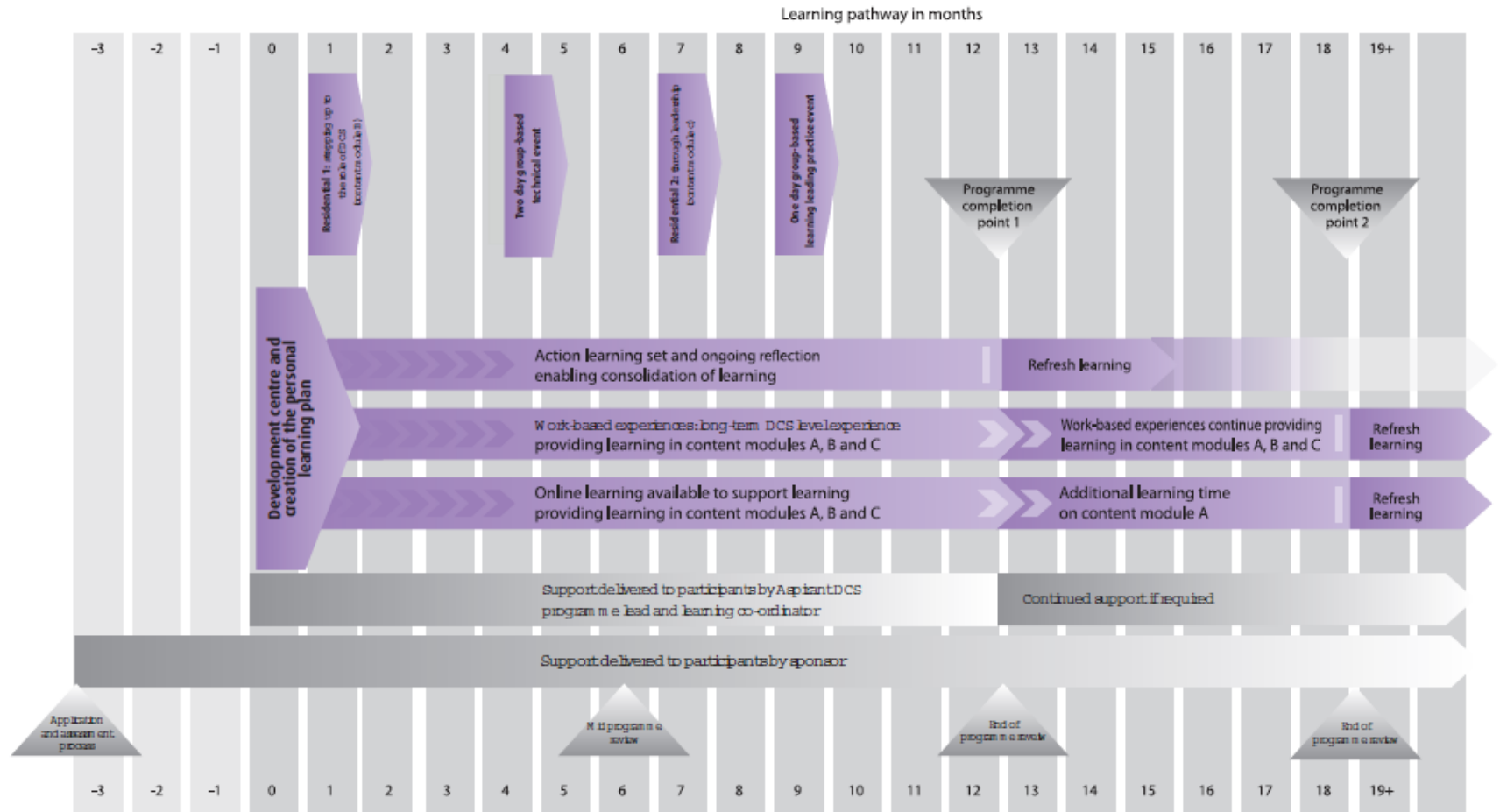
- be strategic
- communicate effectively
- work with others
- cope with uncertainty
- promote learning



Leadership attributes

- moral purpose
- integrity
- insight
- innovation
- self-awareness
- resilience
- adaptability/flexibility
- courage and passion

Aspirant DCS programme



Content module A:	Improving outcomes for children and young people
Content module B:	Organisational awareness
Content module C:	Leadership

Residentials will be no longer than one week in duration

Programme elements

The personalised learning journey

Participants will be offered a variety of ways to learn during the programme. This will enable participants to have a highly personalised learning journey that reflects their personal learning style, professional and personal circumstances, as well as meeting their bespoke learning and development needs. A number of content themes will be covered through various different activities during the programme. The primary method, by which these content themes will be covered, is indicated below.

Content Modules	Delivery Channels			
	Online content	Small Group	Work based experience	Residential
A: Improving outcomes for children and young people	✓	✓	✓	
B: Organisational awareness	✓		✓	✓
C: Leadership	✓		✓	✓

Aspirant DCS Programme - elements

Component	Description
Assessment process	Prospective candidates apply and are put through a rigorous assessment process, including an application form and interview.
Development centres	The first programme event for successful candidates is the development centre: a one day event at which candidates review their current skills and expertise and identify areas that they wish to work on during the programme. The output is a Personal Learning Plan.
Residential	The residential events deliver the core components of leadership taxonomy. There are two core residential events, spaced throughout the 12 months. Overall development on the programme is celebrated and reviewed at two further events: a mid-programme review and end of programme event.
Action Learning Sets (ALS)	Aspirant DCSs meet in small regionally based groups to discuss personal wicked issues and strategies for dealing with them. The groups are facilitated by learning coordinators, who also conduct a six one to one reviews with each Aspirant during the programme. There are six ALSs throughout the year.
Group-based learning (GBL)	The objective of GBL events is to address gaps in Aspirants' technical knowledge. Each cohort has two events: technical and leading practice, which combined build participants' knowledge gradually throughout the year.
Work-based learning	Participants complete a work-based experience, which typically involves a placement within another local authority or service area.

Programme elements (1/5)

Development Centres

- Successful applicants will attend a development centre, which is the first stage in their learning journey and marks the beginning of the programme.
- The development centre comprises a series of exercises where participants will be observed to gather further information about their development needs. They will also receive one-to-one feedback on a personality questionnaire.
- Using all of the available information from the assessment process and the development centre, participants will work in groups and with independent assessors and will be supported and challenged as they critically reflect on their learning needs. This will inform the development of a personal learning plan, which the participant and facilitator will design together.

Programme elements (2/5)

Residential learning

- Participants attend two residentials as a full cohort covering topics such as understanding the DCS role and function, the challenge of leadership and practical application of leadership concepts
- Residentials last for four days and take place in Nottingham at the National College Learning Conference Centre, where accommodation is also provided
- The first residential will:
 - focus on what is required to step up to the role of DCS
 - develop an increased understanding of the role, covering both the technical leadership and high-level management skills required
 - explore topics such as performance management in areas of non-expertise
- The second residential will:
 - focus on the challenge of leadership and what it takes to transform children's services in the toughest of circumstances
 - expand on previous learning
 - focus on the practical application of leadership concepts, such as adaptive leadership, to support the participant's personal understanding and preparation for the DCS role
- There is an expectation that all participants will attend both residentials. The group learning experience is a powerful element of the programme and allows participants to share learning and develop networks across the sector

Programme elements (3/5)

Action learning sets

- Action learning sets underpin all of the programme elements. Participants will take part in action learning sets to consolidate learning from across the programme, including their work-based experiences. Small groups work together to share knowledge, experience and ideas.
- The action learning sets are organised on a regional basis and are facilitated by a learning coordinator who also provides one-to-one support to individuals in the group.

One-to-ones

- Following action learning set meetings, learning coordinators arrange one to one meetings, either in person or by telephone to discuss participants' development and progress. These meetings also include completing participants' personal learning plan and programme reviews.

Online

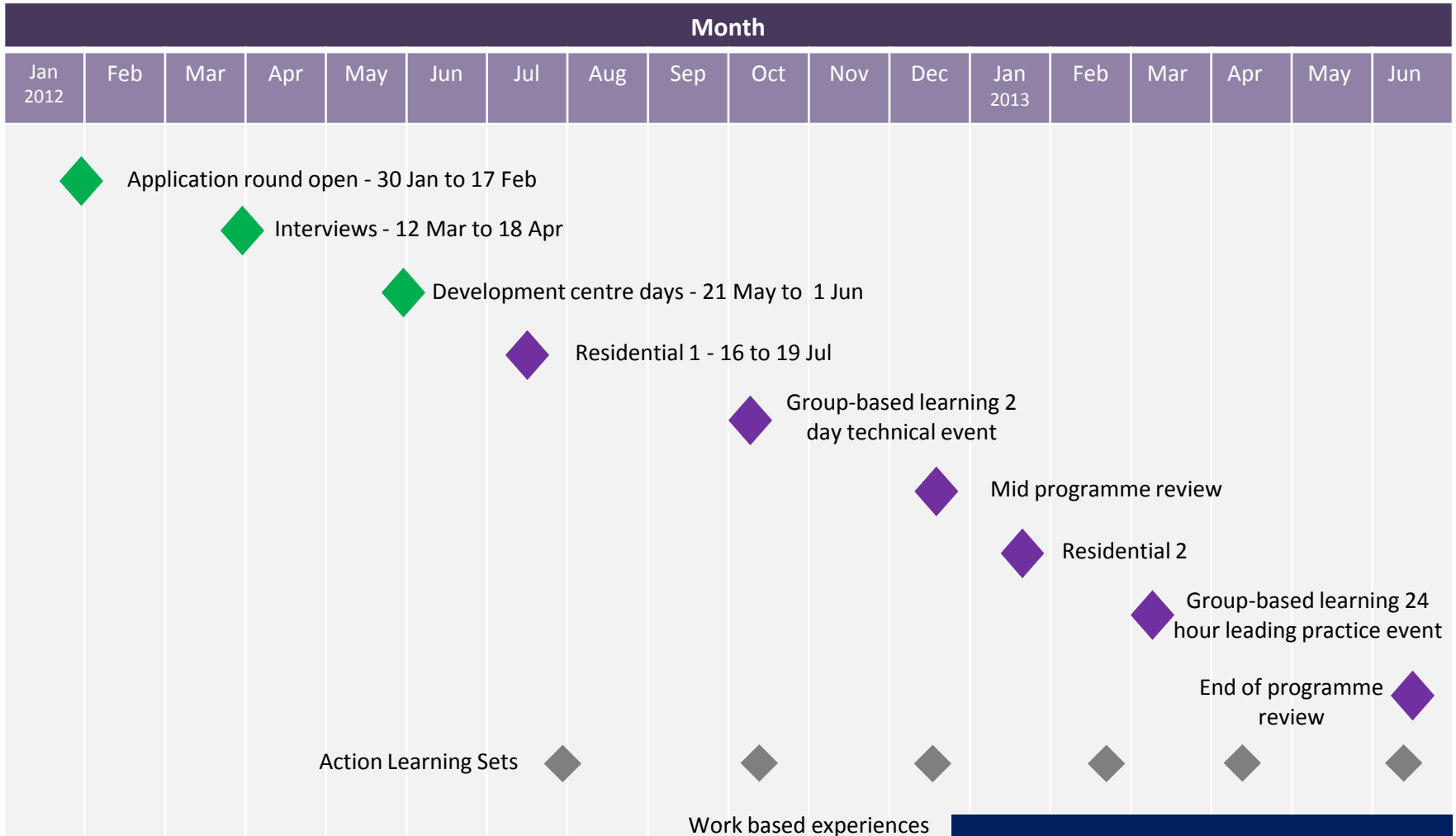
- Participants will have remote access to an extensive resource of key knowledge areas that are critical to the role of Chief Officer with responsibility for children's services. This will include materials in a variety of forms, such as case studies, podcasts and blogs. Where the personal learning plan identifies the learning need, it is expected that participants will complete online learning modules as a pre-requisite to joining the first residential. Again, this will allow the development of a core foundation of knowledge across all participants prior to coming together as a whole group.

Programme elements (5/5)

Work-based experiences

- Participants are supported to learn by establishing unique and individualised work-based experiences with their DCS sponsor. Working with their sponsor, participants identify learning experiences through the local authority, the region or other organisations involved in the delivery of services for children and young people. These work-based experiences will take two forms; extended experiences plus a series of short learning opportunities.
- Participants will be expected to undertake an experience long enough to provide deep and sustained learning opportunities relevant to the role of chief officer with responsibility for children's services . For example, this might include:
 - a governance review of the Local Safeguarding Children's Board
 - a school re-organisation
- It is anticipated that there will also be a number of shorter experiences during the programme. These might include a visit to a particular service, shadowing a colleague in a meeting or spending a short period of time in a specific area, such as the youth service or with a third sector provider.

Programme plan



Programme plan – time required

- **Development centre**
 - 1 day
- **Action learning sets**
 - 1 half day every 2 months
- **One-to-ones**
 - 1 hour session every 2 months
- **Residential learning**
 - 2 x 4 day residentials
- **Group-based learning**
 - 2 day technical event
 - 24 hour leadership in practice event
- **Online learning**
 - Dependent on participant
- **Work-based experiences**
 - Dependent on participant

We estimate that each participant will spend approximately 19 days taking part in the facilitated aspects of the programme over the course of 12 or 18 months

This does not include the amount of time spent on work-based experiences or online learning, which is determined by each individual

You should allow at least 28 days of your time to interact fully with all dimensions of the programme

What are the participant's responsibilities?

By submitting their application form to the Virtual Staff College, potential participants are confirming their motivation to become a Chief Officer with responsibility for children's services and their intention to apply for this post as their next career move.

Participants will also commit to:

- attend the full duration of the programme (typically 12 to 18 months),
- complete their individual learning requirements, as defined by their personal learning plan agreed at the programme start
- contribute to peer learning experiences for the duration of the programme
- actively participate in scheduled group activities, as defined by the personal learning plan
- attend both of the residentials
- make best use of the available time of the sponsor to support their development
- undertake a number of work-based learning opportunities
- undertake a mid-point review and attend a scheduled end of programme assessment

Who will support participants?

Aspirant DCS Programme lead

Participants will be supported during the programme by the Aspirant DCS Programme lead. The programme lead will be the first point of contact in relation to the co-ordination and management of the programme for both participants and sponsors.

Learning coordinator

The learning coordinator will support the participant to consolidate their learning. He or she will work closely with a small group of participants for the first twelve months of the programme in an action learning set. The learning coordinator will be responsible for facilitating regional action learning set meetings, as well as providing participants with the opportunity for one-to-one support. Participants will therefore be able to develop a relationship with the learning coordinator that encourages critical self-reflection and challenge in a safe environment.

Sponsor

The sponsor will provide a participant with one-to-one support rooted in the practical realities of the role of Chief Officer with responsibility for children's services . They will act as both mentor and a critical friend, providing practical support as well as professional challenge to enhance learning. The role will commence with the application process and will continue throughout the programme.

What are the sponsor's responsibilities?

Support during the application and assessment process

- Sponsors and applicants are expected to discuss participation in the programme together, based on the results of the applicant's pre-application self-assessment and/or personal reflection.
- Sponsors will need to:
 - complete a sponsorship nomination form, detailing strengths, development needs and suitability for the programme
 - confirm their commitment to supporting the applicant throughout the programme including identifying work-based experiences and providing ongoing support challenge
 - authorise and support the applicant's absence from the workplace to attend the programme

Support during the programme

- Sponsors will:
 - review the personal learning plan with the participant to understand learning needs in detail
 - will work closely with the participant and the wider children's services community to identify appropriate work-based experiences for the participant and broker relationships
 - take a role in the mid-point review, evaluating evidence of learning with the participant and consider how far learning has developed against the initial personal learning plan
 - agree any changes in the learning journey with the participant at the mid-point review, including additional work-based experiences that may be required

What is the time commitment for sponsors?

The amount of time that a sponsor is expected to commit will vary according to the needs of the individual they are supporting.

- Support for the application process is likely to take between a half and a full day and it is likely that the ongoing time commitment throughout the programme will be between two and four hours a month.
- It is anticipated that the mid-point review will require half a day to complete and the end of programme assessment is likely to require a commitment of half a day to support the participant in their preparation for assessment.

The assessment process

Prospective applicants will need to complete the application and assessment process with the support of their sponsor. This process will identify and establish whether:

- a potential applicant meets the eligibility criteria
- whether they are committed to becoming a Chief Officer with responsibility for children's services
- whether their development needs can be met within 12 to 18 months

Those individuals, who are deemed through the assessment process to have needs that cannot be met by the programme, will receive constructive feedback to support their future development.

The application and assessment process comprises a number of steps:

1. online pre-application self-assessment to help gauge readiness for the programme
2. sponsor conversation
3. completion and submission of the application process and sponsor nomination
4. independent review of application forms
5. professional and behavioural interview with independent assessors and representation from the children's services community
6. independent review of interview results
7. identification of participants

The assessment process

1. The initial assessment

- sponsor nomination and application process
- independent filter of application forms
- professional and behavioural interview

Place confirmed on the programme

2. The development centre

- psychometric feedback
- individual and group exercises
- the personal learning plan
- action learning sets

3. The mid programme review

4. The end of programme review

Pointers for the application process

1. Use the resources provided to help with preparation – pre-application self-assessment, programme details and National Leadership Qualities Framework
2. Look at the resources and information on the Virtual Staff College website
3. Set time aside for the process, in particular the conversations and the application form
4. Notify the identified sponsor promptly
5. Discuss the application form with your line manager / sponsor
6. Think about the context of any activity
7. Think of appropriate examples of experience and expertise, recent and relevant work you have delivered – what was the situation? What was your task? What actions did you take? What were the results? What did you learn from it?
8. Provide targeted information
9. Think widely about development needs
10. Make reference to recent 360 documents, project evaluations and appraisals
11. Have personal information to hand
12. Draft responses off-line
13. Complete the application in stages

What next?

1. If you have any **questions** about the programme or your application, call one of the numbers below tomorrow between 9am and 5pm.
 - Mike Woolf 07795 591086
 - Ian Waters 07786 250487
 - Kat Benjamin 07977 565370
2. Fill in the **pre-application self assessment questionnaire**
 - Available to download on the Virtual Staff College website, www.virtualstaffcollege.co.uk
3. Fill out your **application form** and get your sponsor to fill out the **sponsor nomination form**
 - Available to complete or download on the Virtual Staff College website
 - **Both must be completed by 5pm on 17 February 2012**
4. Attend an **interview**
 - Interviews will be held between 12 March and 18 April 2012 for those who pass the application stage
5. Your place on the programme is confirmed and you attend a **development centre** in your action learning set – the first event for cohort 3 of the Aspirant DCS Programme. This will be held between 21 May and 1 June 2012

Questions



A copy of this presentation can be found on the virtual staff college website. Follow the link below, or go to the homepage and click on More Details for the Aspirant DCS Programme and the presentation is linked from the Apply section..

<http://www.virtualstaffcollege.co.uk/index.php/aspirant-dcs-programme/apply-for-the-aspirant-dcs-programme/>