



The
Inspiring Leaders
Network

A DECADE OF IMPACT

Executive Summary

July 2025

Celebrating the Journey of the
Shadow Board Programme®

Executive Summary

The Shadow Board Programme® developed by the Inspiring Leaders Network (ILN), marks a decade of impactful leadership development across the NHS. This immersive and experiential programme addresses a critical gap: preparing senior leaders for executive roles through real-time engagement with board-level governance and decision-making.

Programme Highlights

- Over 75 programmes delivered across 60+ NHS organisations.
- 900+ senior aspirant leaders developed.
- 16% of alumni from Black and Minority Ethnic backgrounds.
- 600+ Action Learning Sets and 300+ Shadow Board sessions facilitated.

Impact and Outcomes

Participants showed a **33% increase in self-assessed capability across 23 board-relevant competencies**. Notable areas of growth included:

Strategic insight and system-level thinking.

Confidence in boardroom challenge and accountability.

Understanding of governance, assurance, and financial drivers.

Personal and Organisational Transformation

Participants reported:

- Greater confidence, clarity, and ambition for executive roles.
- Enhanced capability in paper writing, strategic analysis, and assurance reporting.
- Broader appreciation of system interdependencies and cultural leadership.
- Strong peer networks fostering ongoing collaboration and shared purpose.

Organisational Benefits

- Improved board literacy and leadership pipelines.
- Inclusive leadership development with visible impact on equity.
- Strengthened internal collaboration and culture of accountability.
- Tangible improvements in paper quality, challenge, and assurance.

Participant Reflections

- Described the experience as transformative, empowering, and motivating.
- Praised the delivery team for creating safe, reflective learning spaces.
- Emphasised the Shadow Board and Action Learning Sets as standout components.
- Expressed strong willingness to recommend the programme, often calling it a career-defining development experience.

Participants Voice

"This was the best development programme I've ever been on. It made me see that executive leadership is not only achievable, but something I want."

Absolutely invaluable. It helped me realise I am ready to think at board level."

"This programme lit a spark in me, I now see executive leadership as something I want and can achieve."

"The space to explore ideas without fear of judgement was empowering."

Conclusion

The Shadow Board Programme® bridges the experiential gap between operational and executive leadership, supporting strategic readiness and cultural transformation across the NHS. It serves not just as a development programme, but a system-wide intervention driving inclusive, resilient, and capable leadership for the future.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



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I want to take a moment to extend my deepest thanks to the exceptional team at ILN. This programme simply would not exist without your unwavering passion, commitment, and belief in the power of developing others. You have brought not only expertise, but also energy, care, and thoughtfulness to every aspect of our work. I am endlessly proud of what we have built together, the meaningful spaces we've created where learning feels genuine, safe, and inspiring. The consistent and powerful feedback we receive from participants is a true testament to your authenticity, empathy, and dedication. Together we have shaped something truly special something that has made a lasting difference.

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To the many NHS leaders who have engaged with us: thank you for your trust, your openness, and your hunger to grow. Your honesty, commitment to your colleagues and communities, and belief in the programme is what gives it its heart.

**WE THANK YOU
FOR YOUR CONTINUED SUPPORT IN
OUR PROGRAMMES**