



Whitaker Institute Policy Brief Series

Policy Brief No.: 58

April 2020

Cluster: Work, Society and Governance

Theme: Public Sector Innovation and Reform

Further Reading:
NUI Galway (2019). [SPS SPS and PO Executive Leadership Programme Evaluation Report](#) for DPER.

Garavan, T., McCarthy, A, and colleagues (2020). Training and organisational performance. [Human Resource Management Journal](#).

Contact:
Prof Alma McCarthy
alma.mccarthy@nuigalway.ie
Dr Denise Holland
denise.holland@nuigalway.ie
Dr Katerina Bohle Carbonell
katerina.bohle-carbonell@nuigalway.ie

Read More About:
[SFI project: The Role of Talent and Human Capital Management in National Science Foundations](#) at the Whitaker Institute for Innovation and Societal Change

The content and views included in this policy brief are based on independent, peer-reviewed research and do not necessarily reflect the position of the Whitaker Institute.

Sign up to the Policy Brief Series [Here](#)

Leadership Development for Senior Civil and Public Service Managers

The Irish Civil Service Renewal Plan sets out a vision for a high performing system with the capability to meet the challenges facing Ireland over the coming years. In accordance with Action 10 of the Civil Service Renewal Plan, the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (DPER) implemented a senior executive leadership programme (ELP) aimed at Assistant Secretary General (and equivalent) and Principal Officer (and equivalent) management grades across the Irish civil service. At the end of 2019, the ELP had been delivered to over 120 senior managers.

Professor Alma McCarthy, Dr Denise Holland and Dr Katerina Bohle Carbonell were recently commissioned to evaluate the leadership programme. The evaluation report completed by NUI Galway drew on survey, focus group and interview data collected from ELP participants, their line managers and other key stakeholders. The evaluation report is available to download [here](#).

The NUI Galway evaluation study found that the ELP is highly regarded by programme participants and their line managers as an effective leadership and talent development initiative. Feedback is predominantly very positive about the ELP programme design, content and delivery. Participants report a number of benefits from the ELP including: development of their leadership capability; enhanced confidence as leaders; network development; dedicated time and space for critical leadership self-reflection; and better team management. The positive impact of the ELP is reinforced by the line managers' evaluations. The majority of ELP participants indicate that they have transferred the learning from the ELP to their work. The key challenges included sufficient time to transfer learning, the balance between theory and practice, and the effectiveness and timing of coaching and mentoring. The NUI Galway report sets out a number of areas for change and key recommendations.

Policy Recommendations

The following are key policy recommendations for senior civil and public service leadership development:

- Senior leadership development programmes should include a range of relevant self-awareness and self-analysis tools and techniques including psychometric profiling, coaching, mentoring and 360-degree feedback to enhance understanding of leadership style and impact.
- Ensure leadership development programme design is multifaceted to include off-site residential elements which enable deep immersive learning, coaching, modular inputs, development centres, and input from senior leaders who have successfully navigated the challenges of the role.
- Senior leadership development programmes should include features to leverage participant learning including alumni supports post-completion to sustain and embed learning.

