

## SUPPORTING ASPIRING AND EMERGING LEADERS

### BACKGROUND

Newcastle University's Faculty of Science, Agriculture and Engineering (SAGe), keen to build on its International Reputation, was looking to support its aspiring and emerging younger leaders.

As well as understanding more about how to be more effective as a leader in research, and a developer of other researchers, SAGe was looking for this remarkable talent to become fully integrated to the faculty as a whole, to the University, and to the global Scientific Community to realise the University's desire to demonstrate 'Excellence with a Purpose'.

Oakridge Consulting was appointed to prepare, in conjunction with the senior team at SAGe, a highly engaging, experiential, challenging and action-based programme. It was also important that there were tangible outputs on which the faculty could continue to build.



#### From the Organisational perspective, as well as the Individual's development, the programme needed to:

- raise the bar for the faculty to go beyond targets and achieve aspirations
- clarify what "excellence" truly means for the faculty and what needs to be achieved making a binding commitment to action. That excellence must have a purpose which motivates both self and others and collectively makes the faculty cohesive, determined, and strong; 'Excellence with a purpose'
- demonstrate what "leadership" means, individually and collectively, for the faculty and what it must seek to achieve with a true sense of individual responsibility
- strengthen change resilience enabling the faculty and its members to lead on change in an active and participative way
- put true meaning to collaboration and breaking-down silos and move beyond the well-intended rhetoric to a faculty-wide culture of engaged collaboration
- raise the profile of the faculty within the University, the community, and the UK as a whole to become a noted place of purposeful and excellent science

## THE APPROACH

### A 2-day off-site and residential programme was designed which incorporated:

- Collaboration – to break down barriers and spark scientific creativity
- Coaching – to nurture talent and focus on performance
- Research leadership – to inspire others
- Peer to Peer coaching – to support each other
- Blue Sky informal thinking – to create the space where the unthinkable happens
- Influencing and negotiation – to ensure ideas spread and are recognised
- External Speakers – to benchmark, push boundaries, provide fresh perspectives
- 1:1 and Group access to the Dean of School – to demonstrate high visibility senior leadership
- Personal action planning – to translate thinking into action

The programme also gave all participants the opportunity to present and to outline their thoughts, challenges and purpose and to have their voice clearly heard by their peers and by the senior leaders of the faculty. The core presentations on which participants worked on beforehand and then revealed were at the heart of the meeting, drawing from both the intellectual strength and commitment of these talented research leaders to science.

- What is research excellence? What are the appropriate measures?
- What does “with a purpose” truly mean? What is our purpose?
- Which Universities are truly outstanding in our field and why?

Facilitated by two Oakridge consultants, the programme created an environment where participants could have their voice heard. It brought together all schools across the faculty and in total 24 people participated.

In advance of the 2-day programme, the SAgE facilitated a pre-course workshop to allow people to discover the aims of the workshops alongside an opportunity to start the preparation for their group presentations. This was an integral part of the programme enabling SAgE to position the programme appropriately and to facilitate research leaders from many different disciplines to begin working together.

*“It is probably small things that I will start out with: follow up the action points from the coaching exercise; use coaching in my interactions with students; use the inputs on influencing and negotiating on appropriate occasions; manage my time more effectively.”*

*“Well done to all involved in the organisation of the workshop, it was informative and enjoyable (more events like this are needed). I thought the Dean was very engaged in the whole process, and showed a willingness to both advise and listen; which produced a very productive environment.”*

*“Thank you for creating this great space to get to know our early career peers within the Faculty! Seeing that our Dean of Research participated in the workshop as well and carefully listened to what we had to say, made a strong impression.”*

## RESULTS

**The programme was very well received within SAgE and has proved extremely beneficial for participants, the faculty and the University.**

**90% (19/21) of participants would recommend the programme to colleagues.**

A great advantage of the programme for participants was the opportunity to work and meet other colleagues across the different schools. In essence, it legitimised networking across the schools and emphasises its importance as part of a performance culture. The benefit of this cannot be underestimated, in that it helps collaboration, cross-working and support.

The participants were extremely focussed and engaged going into the programme, which resulted as part of the preparation and pre-work. These people will now become buddies, mentors and coaches for other team members within the school, which is an added advantage, and creates a supportive coaching culture.

The incorporation of an external speaker brought a great insight for people and allowed them to see what happens 'outside' of Newcastle University. The dimension of hearing a successful professor speak of his challenges and struggles and how he overcame them was invaluable; sharing this vulnerability was extremely powerful for delegates.

As a result of the programme, delegates have expressed a closer connection the faculty and a definite increase in their alignment to the University mission and vision. With a better appreciation of what the faculty is trying to achieve, this has empowered participants to recognise how they respond to students and the general public as ambassadors for Newcastle University.

The Faculty now plan to pull together a faculty steering group to ask people what they would change and to outline their thoughts and give feedback on their role within the University as a whole as a regular occurrence.

The programme will become an annual event and participation is seen as aspirational and part of an exclusive development opportunity rather than a 'right of passage' to echo the objective of supporting those most willing and capable to make the difference.

**Werner Hofer, Dean of Research and Innovation at SAgE goes on to say:**

*"Leadership training is one of the key tasks in improving the performance and coherence in an academic setting. Conducting it across larger units, like Faculties, and creating a cohort of future leaders with common ambitions, common views on research quality and research performance and the ability to communicate across boundaries creates a coherence which is otherwise difficult to achieve.*

*This was the rationale for the workshop and it determined both, the duration of the workshop and the setting where it took place. Oakridge have done a very good job in setting up the agenda, delivering the modules, and preparing the participants for follow-on work on leadership. The quality of the facilitation is witnessed by the very good feedback we received from participants. It is our intention to make this workshop a recurring event for all our early career researchers."*

