WSLA: an evaluation

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# Introduction

In 2011 the University wanted an archive of women and sports movement. An international organisation empowering women as a direct consequence of the 1994 declaration of rights for women in sport. The Anita White Foundation was born and had two arms: archive and leadership. To ensure its legacy the Women in Sports Leadership Academy was developed and was internationally focused. The organisation Females Achieving Brilliance (FAB) was brought in to support the programme and together the project gained momentum and was spread by word of mouth through the various sporting organisations.

The international focus was important and the concentration was given to sub Saharan Africa, the Middle East and South America. It was anticipated that there would be half and half participants from the UK and the other areas. With fundraising and charges allowing sponsorship to go ahead.

The WSLA week began in 2014 and has gone from strength to strength.

The purpose of this report is to look at the impact of the WSLA Week on the graduates and their organisations and to evaluate these impacts. A series of interviews, focus groups and a questionnaire was used to find out what the graduates thought about WSLA and the results are analysed here.

# Methodology

It was decided to embark on a mixed methods approach and utilise a mix of focus groups, interviews, and a questionnaire. The focus groups were used for the current cohort of participants during the WSLA week and interviews were used for background information and past graduates of the WSLA Programme who attended the 2017 WSLA Week to help out. The questionnaire was used in order to reach as many graduates from around the world as possible and cover the most topics for review.

The focus groups were a qualitative approach and open questions were asked of the participants. This was also true for the interviews and a richness of dialogue was anticipated. The questionnaire was also fairly qualitative in its approach. Although there were a few questions in the beginning that were ranked for ease of analysis, the majority of questions in the survey were open questions. This is quite unusual for a survey such as this and normally they are quantitative in their approach. Open questions in a survey are often left unanswered as they are seen as time consuming so it was a risk to include them (O'Cathain 2004). The resulting data was rich and copious and well worth the risk that was taken.

The questions for each of the three methods chosen were developed from the aims and objectives of the project. These are as defined here:

* Review the effectiveness of the WSLA programme on the individual participant. This includes their impact on their working environment since participation in WSLA
* Review the effectiveness of the WSLA programme on the ability for participants to take ownership of, and responsibility for, their own personal development plans, decision-making, and career advancement.
* Review the impact of the WSLA programme on the organisation from which the participants belong
* Assess the wider benefits to women and sport.
* Assess the impact of networking and broader cultural understanding the WSLA programme allows among its diverse participants.
* Evaluate the theories, ideas, opinions, and approaches used in the WSLA residential programme.
* Identify and report on areas of additional strategic added value.
* Make recommendations for improvement of the programme.

All the objectives were covered in either one or more of the research methods used and in some instances a comparison of data could be used. The following sections highlight the data that was collected and gives and analysis of the dialogue.

# Focus Groups

There were five focus groups arranged during this year’s WSLA week. Three were with the 2017 participants and two were with a group of returners who had come back to help out with the residential week. The participants were asked four questions about WSLA and their answers collated and analysed as followed. The returning WSLA Graduates were asked an additional question shown at the end of this section.

**How did you hear about WSLA?**

The vast majority hear via word of mouth. Either someone else from the organisation had attended or the participant had met someone who had attended. A couple had heard of it through the FAB network and the opportunity was publicised and part funded through Sport Scotland. All feedback given was positive and all experiences discussed by past graduates were encouraging people to attend.

**What are your expectations of the course?**

Linking skills was paramount in expectations:

“I have a business degree so this links in nicely to sports management.”

“I have a history of marketing and branding and moving towards women in sport and this course will link my skills and give me the opportunity to meet new people and become a better communicator.”

Understanding the International slant:

“Working as a small policy group and quite removed so needed to widen the scope and have a dual perspective with an international slant.”

In fact, the Global aspect of WSLA seemed apparently quite important to a number of respondents and many comments were given about the need to understand the wider cultural benefits of sport especially for those engaging in international sports events such as Tokyo 2020.

**What do you hope to change in the future?**

Organisational change was a big draw along with changing the roles of women as part of this. Increasing the globalisation of sport and spreading the understanding of internationalisation of sport. Being more effective in work was a common dream and supporting women to take on leadership roles.

The majority of comments were to push themselves in their management roles and to help others to increase their effectiveness thereby increasing the effectiveness of women in sport in general.

**Is there anything the course is missing?**

The majority of participants wanted it to be longer in order to fit in more – both new and extended material. Getting to know more people rather than just those in each group was a common complaint.

Bring all the good practices together and reflect. More emphasis on critical thinking. Show participants how to use the tools to move from middle management to leader. Provide a drop in centre to talk through ideas. Mentoring at the end of the week to check progress and next steps.

Using reflection better was commented on a couple of times: more reflective time – just 5 minutes here and there to stop and think. It was also requested that more information was given before the course to help participants prepare.

Those focus group graduates who had returned to WSLA to help out were asked an additional question:

**What has changed for you since WSLA?**

“Have gone through 4 different roles since WSLA. Created a women’s leadership group in my organisation. Expanded networks. Taken part in keynote conferences. Now giving back.”

“2 promotions – development manager and now part of the senior management team. Joined a Board as a Trustee. Improved my relationship with my Boss. Involved in FAB stuff and facilitating WSLA. Feel I am a better leader. My responsibilities have grown. WSLA has directly impacted on me and is a reason for all the promotions and things that have happened to me.”

“Attitude I left with helped me to succeed. WSLA make you go inside yourself and see what you are capable of. Very motivating. Just go for it now. Motivated other women. I now have an all women management team for the regional games in Botswana.”

This has been an interesting question and one that is repeated in some way in the questionnaire so it will be interesting to see if the feelings are the same across the board.

# Questionnaire

The participants from all four years of the WSLA Residential were sent a questionnaire to complete of their expectations of WSLA and how WSLA had impacted on their working lives. There were a few questions to start that were rated and will be analysed as percentages but the majority of questions were open-ended and will be part of a discussion.

# Descriptives

The majority of graduates worked in the country they were from with just a few exceptions. The average (mean) age of participants is 37 years old. The range was large and covered the ages between 26 and 59 years. There was a reasonable spread across the ages with 70% being aged between 30 and 49.

The following graph highlights the years that each participant attended WSLA.

**Figure 1 The year each participant attended WSLA**



Each respondent was asked about their current job role and whether it had changed since attending WSLA. About 35% of respondents had changed their role to something else and the majority of these were promotions or branching out on their own in consulting positions with many of them citing WSLA as giving them the motivation and encouragement to make the changes. Bearing in mind the amount of graduates from this year’s WSLA answering the questionnaire they will not have had time to make any career changes.

Graduates were next asked to comment on how successful certain aspects of the WSLA programme had been. They were asked to rate on a scale of 1-10 where 1 means not at all successful and 10 means very successful. The following is a summary of the findings. If we assume that anything from a 7 and above means ‘successful’ then the following findings apply:

88% of respondents felt that the residential week was successful at helping graduates develop confidence and competence in a range of leadership behaviours. Whereas only 74% produced a Personal Development Plan with clear goals.

29% of respondents felt the career strategies they developed were not successful and highlights a need for realism in the planning stages. When it came to networking and intercultural understanding the result was 82% felt the residential week had been successful in increasing the graduates understanding of intercultural understanding.

89% felt a greater self-awareness after the week with the other 10% only feeling moderately successful and not unsuccessful (see figure 2)

**Figure 2 I have greater self-awareness - To what degree have they been successful?**



When questioned about access to international mentoring networks and the extension of each participant’s network there were 25% of respondents who felt this had been less than successful and could be an area for greater thought in how to tackle this in the future.

The principles that underpin the week were also discussed and opinions sought on how successful these have been. Again, a scale of 1-10 was used where 1 means disagree and 10 means agree. The following is a summary of the findings. If we assume that anything from a 7 and above means ‘agree’ then the following findings apply:

88% of respondents agreed that the programme will be facilitative rather than prescriptive allowing the graduates to focus on self-sustained learning. An astounding 92% of respondents felt that they agreed that Graduates will be supported to take ownership of, and responsibility for, their own learning. When it comes to creating a safe working environment more than 75% agreed with either a 9 or 10 (see figure 3).

**Figure 3 A safe working environment will be created and a sense of collegiality and trust among the women will be nurtured.**



95% agreed a set of shared values to encourage reciprocity, mutuality and respect for diﬀerences and diversity was successfully created. 92% of respondents felt they agreed that a ﬂexible approach to meet the diverse needs of speciﬁc groups, individuals, and cultures was achieved and 90% agreed that a variety of theories, ideas, opinions, and approaches are drawn on in order to develop learning that ‘sticks’. Finally 91% of respondents agreed that the activities were learner-centred and highly participative using discussion, small/syndicate groups, role plays and scenarios/case studies.

All in all it appears that the graduates have had a residential week that manages to achieve all of its guiding principles and offers, therefore, a rounded experience for each participant.

# Qualitative Analysis

Graduates in the questionnaire were asked a variety of questions around how the WSLA residential had impacted on their lives. The following is a series of examples from the analysis of the responses.

Graduates were asked if the content of the residential week had had any impact or led to a change in the way they work.

“In terms of content the coaching approach was really useful, and I have been using it since then.” This was felt by a number of respondents. Respondents also reported on using the techniques themselves in the workplace especially for those in leadership development roles. The growth mindset sessions were a hit with quite a few people with comments ranging from:

“Growth mindset session has really impacted on how I work and communicate more generally. I really try to focus on the input and effort, rather than just praising success. Interestingly this has also had a really profound impact on how I speak with my young nieces and I am really conscious of the language I use with them to help them develop and not be afraid of aiming high.”

Many people felt that although their style may not have altered a great deal since WSLA their behaviour had changed as they were more aware of the impact they had on others. Quite a few felt the GROW Model was convincing and had a lasting impact. "Concept of GROW, Negotiation skills, conflict and mentoring processes have helped in my work with immediate reportees.”

Graduates commented on how worthwhile the managing change work had been and as companies adapt and people move job roles the managing change work was useful:

“Change Management - our organisation is undergoing big structural changes. Being aware of the processes around managing change has enabled me to have more empathy; as well as change my approach when introducing new concepts and ideas.”

Graduates were then asked: Is there any content (e.g. approaches, ideas, theories) used in the residential week that stand out to you most vividly? Do you still use the content today? Some of the answers show a great deal of impact has been felt.

“The task we had to do about listening and not being involved with other things when someone is having a conversation with you. I ensure that my cell phone is off at dinner or in a public gathering. I give time and attention to someone in a one-on-one situation and freely correct people when they do not reciprocate the behaviour.”

“I often go back to the folder with all the material, among the things that where most useful, I find the fix vs growth mindset, and almost all of the self-assessments. I have used them not only for myself, but also for my own team members.”

The GROW Model, Mindset and team behaviours were the most popular aspects of the week with many commenting on the impact they had had both at the time and on the present work.

Graduates were asked if anything was missing from the week. One of the things that came out of this question was more time with facilitators on a one to one basis. This could be for talking about personal development. This was something that it was seen could have had more emphasis during the week and more time spent making a PDP. Introducing a mentoring scheme for graduates to lengthen the experience was suggested by a few who felt it would enhance the week if they had regular contact with a mentor. Apart from these few suggestions many felt the week was a fabulous experience that did not lack anything specific.

## Leadership behaviours

The content of the residential week was to focus on various leadership behaviours or competencies that research shows to be critical to be a great leader. Graduates were asked how they felt the team went about achieving this via the following behaviours and were asked for examples of the impact it has had.

- Providing direction

Providing future direction for an organisation using resources eﬃciently and eﬀectively to achieve the goals of the organisation

- Creativity and innovation

Enabling creativity to ﬂourish in people in how they analyse problems and identify opportunities for innovative solutions.

- Performance management

Ensuring there is a culture of continuous personal improvement which supports people to maximise their potential while achieving goals and targets that meet the needs of the business.

- Self-management

Planning and taking responsibility for your own success; managing your own emotions in challenging circumstances.

- Communication, team and partnership working

Ensuring that messages are understood by any audience; working eﬀectively with internal and external people to ensure that the needs of the business are met.

**Providing direction**

Some graduates felt that it was less so at organisational level but more so at the individual level. It is up to the participant to transfer this from individual level to organisational level. This is shown by this comment:

“I feel that the week was more about me personally as opposed to a future direction for an organisation. I think if this statement read' providing future direction for you as a leader...', then the answer would overwhelming be that the week absolutely helped me to think about future direction. For me it wasn't possible to then make the connection back to my then organisation, because of things way outside of my control. The culture I was working in simply did not allow me to flourish and continue to grow as a leader and therefore help the organisation achieve their goals. However, the clarity I began to develop from WSLA enabled me to make positive career choices. So on an individual level, yes, the team did facilitate this development.”

Or put simply by another comment:

“Not sure that this was fulfilled. I felt like the week provided direction for my career journey but not so much relating to the organisation.”

**Creativity and innovation**

The general feeling is that this was achieved and comments varied:

“From what I can remember the home 'hubs' allowed a lot of creativity and working with each other. Using the orienteering as leadership / team building. The Dragon's den approach to pitch an idea to provide a solution was good.”

“Absolutely. There was a real sense of creativity and innovation throughout the week and the team definitely created an environment where we were able to look for innovative new ways of thinking. The diversity of thought in the group really influenced this too - with different cultures, different views and a whole range of different experiences adding to an atmosphere that positively encouraged us all to think differently.”

**Performance Management**

It was felt this was achieved in a variety of ways. The most common method was through the PDP each day:

“Yes they achieved this very well. There was a lot of time spent looking and creating PDPs and setting realistic targets. This is what I have taken back and implemented with staff.”

“The key tool supporting this was the PDP I feel. I think having this as a backdrop to the week really helped me to think about goals and targets for the future and how I could be more effective in certain areas. The growth mindset session as also critical in setting this tone for the week.”

Graduates are also using the knowledge gained in their job roles and making a difference themselves.

“I have undertaken 1-1 with my team - imparting the knowledge I have gleaned and encouraging them to become more self-aware.”

“I have started to use the personal development grid for myself and staff and encourage them to analyse performance, leave behind what is not working take more risks and balance the quality of work/soft impacts and the performance targets. The mindset session helped me to identify when I revert to my comfort zone as well as work with staff on their mindset especially as we move forward to our new organisation and will work differently and hopefully more creatively.”

**Self-management**

“This is the area where I feel that I have continued to work on and develop personally since my return from WSLA and this has helped me to see other people better and understand them more, also not to take everything that is offensive personally.”

“Really great, this was the key for the week really. Focused on the individual rather than the organisation in which they work”

There was a lot of praise for how this was developed during the week with many finding it the most useful and self-sustaining of development tools. That said, in 2014 there were a couple of people who felt it needed a little more attention. Obviously improvements have been made as this has not been commented on since. It was also commented that there were a variety of ways in which this was delivered:

“The session around career planning including pairs exercises ensured a real focus on your success and long term planning. The session on day 5 phenomenal woman also highlighted the need to really promote success which I have started to do as well as develop a plan for women with ambition within our organisation and provide future mentoring support. The 360 degree feedback session and process helped improve my self-awareness and identify areas for improvement that can be reviewed again next year.”

Overall a successful area of WSLA that has the majority of graduates practicing what they have learnt in their own jobs.

**Communication, team and partnership working**

Although achieved it appears more so at a personal level than organisational level and there is a suggestion that ‘real play’ could be used in WSLA to enhance this.

“I am not entirely sure that this objective was met for me in terms of relating things back to the business. I felt that my WSLA week was very much about my own personal development and giving me space and time to think about myself as a leader and how I wanted to grow and progress. I think it is difficult to directly then link this back to meeting business needs, but this may well differ depending on individual circumstance. Again, if this was about communication and engagement and working with others from a personal perspective, this was certainly achieved by the team throughout the week. the link back to the business need less so, although I do feel that I am applying the behaviours I learned and developed on WSLA in my career now - where success ultimately is about matching personal skills with business need. It feels a bit indirect though.”

Communication was key to the WSLA week and this was interpreted in a variety of ways. The opportunity to present was commented on a lot and many wished for more opportunities like this.

“Getting to work in teams with women from all over the world was a good way to work on our communication. There were some reminders throughout whenever there were some lapses around this which was also useful.”

“The different activities were an excellent way to show how effective communication is important. Both the treasure hunt and the 5 minute presentations were great. The treasure hunt highlighted how people can be so focused on the outcome that they don't always listen to others opinions. This was something that I experienced but by giving my response more thought and backing my suggestion up, they group eventually listened. The presentations were good as you had to listen to what everyone saying in order to give feedback. This is one area that I was looking to develop as I now know to give more detail when communicating to both internally and externally in order to meet my objectives”

“I am open to different ways of communicating and recognised that variety is important and people respond in different ways.”

Generally speaking the Leadership Behaviours were well covered during the WSLA weeks with only a slight fall in coverage in 2014 of Self-Management. This appears to have been addressed in more recent years as there are no comments regarding this made since. From the comments it is also apparent that the Dragons Den activity has proven very popular yet this was only used in the first year, 2014. Maybe there is a case for looking at including it again in the future. Many comments were made on how the Leadership Behaviours were mostly used in a personal capacity rather than an organisational capacity. That said, many of the comments show that the lessons are taken on board on a personal level and then translated back in the work place to have an organisational impact. It is not, therefore, necessary to pay too much attention to developing the organisational behaviours.

# Final Qualitative Analysis

A series of questions were asked to cover the final aims of the research around wider impacts including diversity. The first question was looking at participant’s impact on their working environment and whether **WSLA had contributed to a change in working practices**. Of course the 2017 graduates have had no time since their course to have a major impact on their working environment so some missed this question out, but, many also expressed their hopes for how their experience will impact their working lives.

Change is common and this is on a personal level as well as an organisational level.

“I have developed personally and have 'out grown' many colleagues within the organisation - which leads me to ask the question - should I have left, or can I change the culture within my working environment?”

“WSLA has contributed massively to my working procedures. I plan far more effectively and am a more process driven person (beforehand I was notoriously a do-er, not a planner!). It's invigorated my leadership style, and I spend far more time being self-aware and taking the needs/body language of people in my team a lot more seriously.”

“Yes - probably more so initially - maybe the changes have just become part of my everyday working.”

“Absolutely. In addition to better self-confidence and recognition of my self-worth and value within the organisation, I have provided valuable input to the strategic direction of the organisation. I was invited to be a part of the organisation's strategic development committee. I have also introduced the development of new and improved policies with the aim to improve our approach to internal staff development and engagement.”

It appears that there have been significant impacts felt on the working environment as graduates are more confident in their dealings with management and their teams.

Graduates were then asked if they had **taken ownership of, and responsibility for, their own personal development plans, decision-making, and career advancement since attending WSLA?** One thing that came out of this question was that the survey itself had given graduates the opportunity to reflect on their practices and develop strategies for ensuring that WSLA continues to have an impact. This was particularly pertinent for those who had attended WSLA a few years ago rather than more recently. Generally speaking there had been many graduates who had taken control of their lives.

“Yes, I have applied for and been promoted outside of my original role and company. I have also successfully applied for 2 trustee positions and a further role supporting a third on their fundraising and comms committee.”

“Yes, I moved jobs, took on a new opportunity and have since been promoted further, WSLA helped me see that this was a decision I needed to make and gave me more confidence to do so.”

“Yes. Absolutely. My PDP was so helpful in helping me take small steps forward, and my WSLA experience enabled me to take a metaphorical step back to really think about where I wanted to be. I left WSLA with a PDP (which I fulfilled and completed) and the start of a feeling that I wanted my future career to look very different. At the time I didn't know what that would look like, but I at least felt that I wanted to explore other things. I am now in a completely different role, working with a completely new network of people. This isn't entirely attributable to WSLA, but my week in Bognor in 2015 certainly provided the spark that lit these new flames.”

Some graduates had not done any work on this area and felt they needed to pay attention to it more. The good thing is that there is a desire to do this and the survey has reignited the spark of enthusiasm to progress.

**Have you remained in contact with other women on the programme and how has this network benefited you personally and professionally?**

“Yes, I use 3 of the women as sounding boards and guides for strategic and emotional support by tel and Skype mainly. We have infrequent meet ups”

“Have met up with several WSLA graduates at various conferences, which is great and good for the confidence when networking. Have also remained friends on social media with several and linked to others via FAB and other work links.”

 “Yes, I have remained in contact with other women on the programme, especially the ones in Scotland. On a local level, I know have contacts from different sports that understand the dynamics of the Scottish sport system while still have different ideas and perspectives. The global network is also incredibly useful by providing me with the opportunity of exchanging with someone that is completely removed from my situation and in a different cultural context so their perspective on things again will be very different. It's also been wonderful on a personal level to meet so many interesting people from around the globe.”

“Yes! Personally I have made amazing friends and have travelled from the UK to India, Sydney and PNG to see them. Professionally the London network has been extremely important and I'm working closely with Virginia from British fencing on a unique project.”

Facebook and LinkedIn are also common tools for staying in contact. Not all have stayed in contact though and this seems to be due to being too busy, having a baby, or changing jobs. Those that have stayed in contact have met socially at meals as well as through conferences and sporting events and find the support offered by these friendships a boost to confidence.

It is not necessarily common for graduates to remain friends or in contact after events such as WSLA therefore it is particularly interesting to find that it is the majority rather than the minority that are friends here. One participant thought that the lack of contacts was something that WSLA could address and try to improve:

“Only the Kenyan ladies, sadly. This was one area that needs to improve. I did send a few emails out and got no replies.”

This wasn’t an ethnic issue – those who struggled with keeping in contact came from all ethnicities.

**Do you think that your attendance on WSLA has had a wider impact on women and sport?**

“YES! Definitely. The fact that a lot of women globally face the same challenges across all the sporting codes motivates me every single day to do my bit and not give up even when I feel like hope is lost, I click on Google, read one story and get back on the fighting horse.”

Comments were made on the expansion of WSLA – WSLA New Zealand for example and how other activities are being participated in as a direct result of WSLA.

“I have just reconnected with this aim and I am now beginning to work with the Female Sport Forum in Northern Ireland around Leadership and Coach Development. Watch this space.”

“In the short-term no. But in the longer-term and indirectly, yes. I left WSLA with a strong desire to do something within the realms of diversity and inclusion, with a gender focus, and I am now involved in this in a positive way. A project that is about to come to fruition will most definitely have a positive and wider impact on women in sport in a way I never thought possible in my previous role. I am excited by the opportunity and in a small way, WSLA gave me the confidence to pursue my ideas and believe in myself that I could make a difference.”

There were a variety of comments regarding it being a slow burner……the bigger WSLA becomes the greater chance it has of impacting on the women’s sports movement globally but although some spoke of working on smaller projects and building up others looked at direct impact on large events.

The next question has featured in answers to many other questions and shows the importance of the topic. The graduates were asked:

**Do you think the cultural diversity of WSLA has allowed a greater understanding of sport around the world and has this impacted on the way you work?**

For some women the cultural diversity is not apparent in their job roles whereas for others it is an important issue. This difference of opinion in need translated into a difference of opinion in whether it was achieved.

“I don’t think it was diverse enough or that there where many discussions on the situation of women in sports in the different regions/ countries.”

“It definitely allows for a greater understanding of sport around the world but this has had little impact on me in my professional life.”

“Yes. I work in professional sport. It was great to learn alongside women who are working in Olympic sport and Sport development across the world. It has given me perspective and insight into other challenges that sports face and barriers that are common, and allowed me to consider other perspectives in my workplace.”

“Yes, but I think it is broader than just the cultural diversity. Every individual involved in the week brought their own unique style and experience and thoughts. So whilst there were obvious examples of gaining a greater understanding, for example around canoeing in Africa or IWG because of the graduates from those countries, there was also great learning closer to home in terms of organisations such as Street Games and the BHF. Simply spending time with people and hearing their stories helps develop a greater awareness of things that go on and the challenges that everyone faces - many of which are from a similar place.”

Quite a few were shocked at the stories told by graduates but also felt it did not impact on them personally – just made them more aware and put many things into perspective:

“I felt the range of backgrounds of the delegates really did make the week very special as I have spent limited time with individuals from other countries and cultures. Many of the stories from other delegates reminded me of the power of sport and how we can use sport for change in a broader sense. It also highlighted to me how lucky I am in my role as a woman in my country and the opportunities and different culture that exist compared to other countries and the barriers faced.”

Generally it was felt that this was an important aspect that was underrated. It had an impact on the majority of graduates but in many instances it was an immediate impact that then went away once they re-joined the world of work.

Two final questions were asked of the respondents:

**Has WSLA remained in contact with you after the residential week and how beneficial has this been to you?**

“The contacts that remained where mainly through newsletters or to ask for feedback about the program itself. The LinkedIn group was not active at all.”

“The occasional email and Jordan’s newsletter. It would be helpful to have tips and learning opportunities as well as the general updates. More could be done with linked in”

“Yes - it's kept the lessons, learnings and values alive. It's meant I've still felt a part of the WSLA community.”

There were some ‘grumpy’ respondents who felt the follow up was less than expected and although they are outweighed by the more positive respondents there are a fair amount of them so this is an area that needs attention by WSLA.

Finally the graduates were asked to: **describe your feelings about WSLA in one sentence,** a selection of these are shown here…..

“Empowered me to step up, lead and be brilliant.”

“Brilliant memories but wish I could do it again knowing now what I know about myself thank you”

“An empowering, inspiring and challenging week that equipped me to become a more efficient employee and better leader, keen to help even more women in sport as a consequence.”

“The WSLA was an opportunity to focus on myself, surrounded by inspirational women and I left empowered and energised with a deeper understanding of who I am and where I am going.”

“I still have the song we sang in my mind :)”

“WSLA invigorated me through encouraging me to open myself up, value my own contribution to sport and society, and connecting me to role models who, two years on, are still critical in my growth.”

“WSLA provided the opportunity to reflect, review and reengage in a more effective way to develop myself and my working self to become more aspirational, strategic and effective.”

“I came feeling anxious, I left feeling I could change the world.”

“I feel strengthen by the support and guidance that I have received through my life-changing WSLA journey.”

# Conclusions and Recommendations

The project has proved that the WSLA Week is a well thought after experience that leaves graduates better equipped for leadership roles in a sports environment. In essence, it achieves what it sets out to do. That said, there are a few minor issues that have been raised during this research that could be used to enhance the programme and improve the delivery.

Getting to know more people during the course of the week – although it was understood that there are only so many hours in the day it was mooted that it would be nice to get to know more people than just those in the home groups. This could be achieved by maybe changing groups during the week or having more larger group activities or possibly making sure different groups went to lunch together or had down-time together. Another issue with this area is the need to cement international mentoring networks as these were seen as fairly unsuccessful. By getting to know more people on the course would allow for these networks to formulate in the first instance.

Making more of reflective time – this was also a time issue but graduates felt it was an important area as it fed directly into their PDP and goal setting for the future and allowing, and encouraging, reflection for just a few minutes on a regular basis encouraged the graduates to formulate what is important to them and makes for a more successful outcome in the long run.

29% of respondents felt the career strategies they developed were not successful and highlights a need for realism in the planning stages. Being able to plan career strategies was seen as an essential part of ensuring the success of WSLA and gave it its longevity. The one to one time taken to plan these was valued and some requested more time could be given. Being more reflective would help with this issue but realism in the goal setting is imperative.

One to one sessions and mentoring were given as activities that needed enhancement. There were quite a few comments on how working to increase the impact of WSLA on each participant meant increasing the impact of the PDP as this was the legacy of WSLA. Increasing the opportunities to talk to a mentor and continuing mentoring sessions after WSLA had finished were seen as steps that could be taken. Mentoring is also linked to communication and the idea of ‘keeping in touch’.

Impacting on an organisational level was quoted as needing attention. WSLA impacts on the individual and they in turn impact on the organisation but it was not always seen as being so and the impact WSLA has on the organisation does not appear to be as much as it aims to have. This was commented on many times and is something that could require some careful thought. Due to the different ways of looking at this issue it could be seen as being dealt with as the impact is personal and then translated to the organisation so could be seen as a non-issue. This research has identified the issue as a potential problem but it does not offer a way of solving the problem, if it is deemed a problem – that is for the committee to discuss.

Staying in contact – both as a peer mentoring exercise and as a WSLA informative exercise – is deemed as a success by some but not all. In many cases the communication has slipped and many people feel alienated. Changing jobs, having babies and generally not having enough time are quoted as reasons for losing contact but it seems this research project has inspired many to try and make contact again and WSLA could facilitate this through a useful communication challenging graduates to make contact and talk to each other. WSLA could also use the opportunity to improve their LinkedIn site and relaunch this to facilitate communication.

WSLA is a hugely successful venture that is having a lasting impact on its graduates since its inception in 2014. WSLA has matured over the years and expanded. What this research has shown is that it should not lose sight of its core values and concentrate on the development of women in sport leadership. As long as its core is stable the other issues identified here should follow suit.

# References

O'Cathain, A. and Thomas, K. (2004) "Any other comments?" Open questions on questionnaires – a bane or a bonus to research? BMC Medical Research Methodology. Open Access 08 November 2004