Introduction and guidance
Contents

1 The course: an overview 3
2 Take control of your own development: join in with our development community 4
3 Your learning journal and discussion space 5
4 Who we are 5
Acknowledgements 6
This course, and another written by the same authors, *Introducing leadership in voluntary organisations*, are designed to develop your understanding of leadership, and to help you develop your leadership practice in the voluntary sector context. Both are aimed at anyone working in or around voluntary organisations – whether as volunteers or employees, whether in a management position or not. *Introducing leadership in voluntary organisations* offers a general introduction to leadership, and you are strongly recommended to undertake that course before embarking on this one: it provides background and terminology that provide important foundations for this course.

The course takes a deeper look at leadership, focusing on its collaborative dimensions. Specifically, this course will address the following areas.

In Week 1, we will introduce our definition of collaborative leadership and discuss why the environment voluntary organisations work within is especially conducive to such ways of working.

In Week 2, you will learn in more depth about the interconnected subjects of identity and participative practice in leadership. You will learn what we mean by both terms and engage with some examples of how applying this twin focus might be useful.

Week 3 focuses on you as someone in leadership. We explore the identity of the practitioner and suggest ways in which you can reflect in order to improve your capability as a collaborative leader.

Week 4 asks you to focus on exploring the unknown in collaborative leadership. We introduce some ways in which you can analyse and work with organisational language and introduce the notion of stretch questions as a valuable way of exploring the unknown.

Week 5 focuses on constructive challenge in collaborative leadership, making the case for more robust ways in which we can push one another to more creative solutions.

Week 6 focuses on the particular challenges and characteristics of collaboration across organisational boundaries, and the implications for leadership. It explores the tensions which arise for leadership in inter-organisational contexts.

Week 7 explores an issue which underlies much of collaborative working, but which often remains hidden – power. We will explore the issues which arise when working in contexts of power asymmetry, and the potential for exerting influence in these contexts.

Week 8 wraps up the course. It looks back on some of the main themes, with a focus on collaboration over the longer term.

The course is designed as a mix of reading, viewing and participation. We will be presenting some ideas but rely on your active participation to make the course a success. You will learn from one another, and we from you.
Throughout this 8-week course we will keep referring to ‘development’, rather than alternative terms such as ‘teaching’ or ‘education’. You will spend some time learning about collaboration and collaborative leadership. However, the main focus of your work will be on developing yourself as a practitioner, as someone confident and capable of stepping into leadership work.

This does mean that you will need to take control of your own learning. We will invite you to reflect on collaborative leadership within your own working environment. More than this, we will actively encourage you to try out certain ideas in your work context that will aid your development.

We have set up a discussion forum where you can discuss and debate the course content with your fellow learners and with us, your course authors. You will also see that you have a learning journal where you can record your own thoughts on your development in leadership. Key members of the OU’s Centre for Voluntary Sector Leadership will be able to see what you write and we may anonymise and draw on some of what you say for future research – we see this as a circular relationship where we develop one another’s knowledge. The aim is to build a community of learning: we are all in this together.

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3 Your learning journal and discussion space

You will notice that throughout this course we will point you to an online space where you can reflect on your learning, engage with the activities we set you here and talk with others pursuing the course. This space is comprised of two main areas.

The first is your learning journal. Only you and the course team (Owain and Carol) can see what you write here. The space is designed to enable you to reflect on your own development as you progress. Keeping a learning journal is good practice because it allows you to connect your learning to your work explicitly and also allows you to track progress over time.

The second area you will notice is an active discussion forum. This is a space where you can debate and discuss ideas generated in the course with others. It is not solely a space for text and we will be asking you to post photographs in addition to writing. We encourage challenge and debate but please do maintain a civil tone and keep things focused on ideas rather than on personalities. The area will be facilitated and we do reserve the right to delete any contributions we think run counter to the spirit of generosity and robust challenge valued on the course.

Finally, we expect to be challenged ourselves, so if you find yourself taking issue with any aspect of the course or if there is something you think should be explored in more depth – please post something online or email us directly.

4 Who we are

Owain Smolović Jones is a lecturer in organisation studies at the Open University Business School’s Department of Public Leadership and Social Enterprise. His main research focus is leadership and the political. Prior to working for the OU he worked in leadership development facilitation and research at the New Zealand Leadership Institute (NZLI), University of Auckland. He secured his PhD at Cranfield University, basing his thesis on public sector leadership development programmes. Prior to earning his PhD he worked in professional politics – but that seems like a long time ago now …

Carol Jacklin-Jarvis is a lecturer in management at the Open University Business School’s Department of Public Leadership and Social Enterprise. The focus of her research is collaboration between voluntary and public sectors and the practice of leadership in the collaboration context. Carol completed her PhD at the Open University after a career of over 25 years in voluntary and public sectors. At the weekend, she is often found volunteering in her local community, cooking and serving community breakfasts and dinners – and cleaning up afterwards!
Get started with Week 1.

Acknowledgements

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