

Forum for the Future

The UK's leading sustainable development charity

Forum for the Future was founded in 1996 by campaigners Jonathon Porritt, Sara Parkin and Paul Elkins, and is now recognised as the UK's leading sustainable development charity. Its mission is to accelerate change to a sustainability of life not only through a healthy environment, but also a better quality of life, strong communities, and practical answers to poverty and disempowerment.

Working with more than 150 partners that include companies, local authorities, regional bodies and universities and as a charity with an educational purpose, the Forum seeks to build capacity of people and organisations and to overcome the many barriers to more sustainable practice.

Appointing its first CEO, Peter Madden in 2005, freed up Jonathon and Sara to concentrate a much stronger focus on the Forum's work with Forum's partners in business, local and regional government, health and education sectors and with the professions.

How the partnership began

Forum for the Future began running a Master's degree course in Leadership for Sustainable Development in 1996. Its aim at that time was to give each year 12 outstanding young graduates with leadership potential and a passion for a sustainable development a fast track to the best in knowledge and experience, including the new practice developed by Forum and its partners. The focus on the emerging generation of leaders was intentional. Not only was this to develop a noticeably effective cohort of sustainability literate potential leaders, but also to influence others, especially in education and training.

The Leadership Trust became involved following discussions between Sara Parkin and Paul Winter (Chief Executive of The Leadership Trust). The Trust saw it as an opportunity to develop and expand its work within the voluntary sector and an opportunity to work with a type of leadership group that is very relevant to the future.

The masters programme

When speaking to the Editor of The Leadership Trust's newsletter, *LT Focus*, back in 1996, Sara explained: "There are lots of projects working with young people who are on the margins – either economically,

socially or educationally. This is great, but we feel that unless people in positions of leadership open up the doors to make a difference, there is a danger of building up frustrations." With this in mind, The Leadership Trust was asked to contribute an experiential leadership module to the Forum for the Future Master's programme.

The programme as it runs now takes ten months to complete, and is highly structured. The programme is validated as a Masters in Professional studies (Mprof) by Middlesex University. It has three core elements:

Understanding leadership

As well as their time with The Leadership Trust, students reflect on their experience of leadership – in themselves and in others – while on placement and in relation to the group learning model the Forum uses. This includes personal skill development such as reflective practice, personal responsibility for achieving learning outcomes and meeting deadlines, team building, business plan development, presentation and facilitation skills, conceptualising and researching and so on.

Sustainability Knowledge

Leading academics, thinkers and practitioners provide seminars on four themes: science; people and community; ecological economics; ethics and values; with students contributing from their own knowledge and experience and, within reasonable boundaries, self-managing elements of their learning to fill gaps, pursue interests and so on.

Work-based learning

This incorporates carefully prepared and debriefed high-level placements in six sectors: campaigning organisations; local or regional government; national or EU politics; business; finance and regulation; media. Each placement lasts a month and the insights offer first hand experience into how very different organisations and sectors are tackling sustainability.



Forum for the Future Alumni weekend

Each year 12 students are taken on to the programme, and since its inception over 100 scholars have taken part.

The Leadership Trust aims to challenge the student's preconceptions of leadership and provide a practical opportunity for their personal development. Students attend The Trust's centre at Ross-on-Wye for two residential programmes. The first module takes place following the first placement. Following an experiential process, students develop their personal leadership skills and build strong working relationships. The second module takes place in the following June where they reflect on their efforts to apply their learning in their placements and within the group, share and explore new learning and look towards the future.

The Leadership Trust's involvement with the Master's programme also extends to hosting the annual Alumni weekend at The Trust's facilities in Ross-on-Wye. This is an opportunity for past scholars not only to get together to catch up on what people have been doing but also to attend sessions to deepen their learning. The 2005 event included topics such as: *International Development and Africa*; *Energy and Climate Change* and *the Pros and Cons of Tools of Mass Collaboration for Sustainability*. Guests provided high level insights and stimulation about the business and political world in which sustainability leadership operates.

Evaluating outcomes

Since it began in 1996, over 100 scholars have been through the programme and are now working in a diverse range of organisations:

- NGOs;
- Local or regional government;
- National or EU politics;
- Business (including their own);
- Finance and regulation;
- Media;
- Academia;
- Others, including community organisations.

BP's CEO, John Browne, who employs four graduates presented the diplomas in 2005 to mark the 100th graduate and to underline the importance of sustainability literate leadership to major employers.

The Research Centre for Leadership Studies at The Leadership Trust in conjunction with Forum for the Future conducted a qualitative study into how the programme had impacted on participants. The research was designed to evaluate outcomes of the programme at the individual level. Outcomes evaluation focused on changes in attitude, perspectives, behaviour, knowledge, skills, status or level functioning. Results showed that the programme has been a great success in terms of personal development, networking abilities and leadership development. Whilst most were

not yet in a traditional "leadership" roles, many still pointed to specific learning from the leadership programmes. One scholar commented, "In terms of being able to step back and achieve that critical distance within those kinds of high pressured situations that's something that I've taken with me everywhere."

The leadership modules have evolved and developed over the eight years of the relationship. This has been fundamental in establishing the framework for programmes that The Leadership Trust now delivers for Emerging Leaders in the private sector. The two Alumni weekends so far have each attracted 70% of graduates who find it invaluable to the development of their inter-year networking to improve the group's capacity to help each other generate innovative solutions to often complex difficulties encountered in the workplace.

The future

The relationship between Forum for the Future and The Leadership Trust continues to be a positive one for both organisations and looks set to continue with the current intake of scholars.

The academic study by the Research Centre at The Leadership Trust and Forum for the Future has made recommendations to follow up the initial research with a further study of scholar impact in five years. Then it will become clear what impact they have had on the bigger sustainability agenda and how the scholars' careers have progressed individually, and as an influential group.



Sara Parkin

"In terms of being able to step back and achieve that critical distance within those kinds of high pressured situations, that's something that I've taken with me everywhere."

Forum Scholar

The Leadership Trust (Training) Limited
Weston-under-Penyard
Ross-on-Wye
Herefordshire HR9 7YH
Tel: 01989 767667
Fax: 01989 768133
E: enquiries@leadership.org.uk
W: leadership.org.uk