

Accelerate

Empowering social care leaders:
learning from the fourth cohort

Foreword



Glen Garrod
Executive director of adult care and wellbeing at Lincolnshire County Council, and honorary secretary of ADASS

After a year in which the pandemic forced the Accelerate programme – like most other things – into the virtual world, 2021 marked a welcome opportunity for applicants to come back together in person and to learn collectively.

With Covid-related pressures continuing during the programme period, and the sector's future being staked out in the social care and integration white papers along with other government announcements, many participants remarked on how pleased they were to be able to reflect on their challenges in the company of peers.

For 2021, ADASS was glad to receive a more diverse group than has been the case in previous years – a priority for us given that, despite the adult social care workforce being relatively more diverse than the population of England, senior leadership roles are still too dominated by white men. For this Accelerate cohort, anyone with a protected characteristic who applied was guaranteed an interview. We also had equality, diversity and inclusion expert Claire Leandro on the interview panel to help ensure there was fair representation among applicants selected.

With the programme entering its fourth year, it was heartening that the volume and quality of applications continues to underline its value to ADASS members. At

least one of the 2021 cohort based their decision to put in for Accelerate in part on the recommendation of a peer from within their local authority who had completed the programme in a previous year.

As ever, I'd like to take the opportunity to pay tribute to those who have helped the programme move from strength to strength. In particular our partnership manager Cat Alabaster, who had Marie Rogers' sizeable boots to fill when she joined ADASS last year, has continued to develop Accelerate and other key initiatives – not least the successful first iteration of SpringBoard, which offers similar development opportunities to principal social workers.

Thanks also to Tony Pounder for his crucial role in helping lead the work that went into making this year's Accelerate such a success. And of course none of this would have been possible without our colleagues at Newton, who have done such a strong job of returning the programme to the in-person realm – long may the partnership continue.

 *For 2021, ADASS was glad to receive a more diverse group of participants than has been the case in previous years"*

Introduction



Steve Phillips
Senior partner, Newton

Like Glen, we at Newton were delighted to welcome Accelerate participants back 'in person' this year, with all the benefits we know that brings.

When I reflect on some of the current challenges adult social care leaders are facing regarding recovery, reform, and the ongoing imperative for transformation, I am proud that the Accelerate programme, and the flourishing alumni programme, are providing the space for colleagues to share, reflect on and work through some of these together.

As I look forward, I very much echo Glen's priority of encouraging and promoting diversity in our future cohorts,

and also that we invest in how the equality, diversity and inclusion agenda becomes core to the delivery of the Accelerate programme.

As always, our thanks goes to the ADASS team, for continuing to jointly invest in a partnership that is built on shared values. I look forward to welcoming the 2022 cohort.

 *I am proud Accelerate is providing space for colleagues to share, reflect on and work through their challenges together"*



Meet the 2021 cohort

Back row (L-R)

Andy Biddle
Director of adult social services, Portsmouth City Council

Caroline Baria
Deputy director for integrated commissioning, Leeds City Council

Ros Cox
Deputy director for integration and transformation, Bristol City Council

Fiona Musgrave
Assistant director for integration and partnerships, Cumbria County Council

Front row (L-R)

Tracy Meyerhoff
Assistant head of adult social care, Hull City Council

Nathan Atkinson
Assistant director of strategic commissioning, Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council

Claudia Brown
Divisional director of adult social care, Tower Hamlets Council

Nick Pryke
Director of integrated discharge, Norfolk & Waveney Sustainability and Transformation Partnership

Sam Fitzgerald
Assistant director for adults' services, North Northamptonshire Council

What is the Accelerate programme?

The Accelerate programme develops the ability of directors and senior leaders in adult social care to deliver strategic and organisational change.

Designed by ADASS and Newton, the programme is aimed at directors and assistant directors of adult social care services. There have been four cohorts, in 2018, 2019, 2020 and 2021.

Each participant brought a real-life high-priority major change project to the Accelerate programme that was their focus for the course.

The programme is divided into four modules that mirror the stages of a major change project.

Each module consists of a two- or three-day residential where participants deepen their understanding of Newton's change methodology, hear from guest speakers, and share and debate ideas.

THE FOUR STAGES ARE:

- **Assess** – Identifying and quantifying the opportunities for change, including how to work with stakeholders, measuring success and planning next steps.
- **Design** – Refining the opportunities, designing and piloting new ways of working, including designing effective pilots.

- **Implement** – Delivering the solution with local teams and measuring benefits, including communicating and embedding change in behaviour.
- **Sustain** – Supporting teams to sustain the changes permanently, including sustainability planning and how to keep change going in challenging times.

Participants are also paired with a programme partner who, together with the peer support from others on the programme, offers an additional source of advice on effective change.

The Accelerate programme is now in its fifth year.

Getting the traction to deliver multi-agency change

Caroline Baria, deputy director for integrated commissioning, Leeds City Council

● Prior to joining Accelerate, Caroline Baria had carried out “quite a few” change programmes within her own council, Leeds. But now she was being asked to lead on a “massive” project to transform how homecare in the city operates, pulling in health services and local commissioned providers, whose staff become part of multidisciplinary teams for the first time.

The urgency of the project – which aims to improve conditions for care staff as well as people accessing services, and was being piloted for 18 months from autumn 2020 – had only been increased by the pandemic’s impact on adult social care. Under the scheme, care staff are empowered to work more flexibly rather than sticking to rigid time slots, with a population health management approach being used to aid resource allocation.

Caroline’s motivation for applying for Accelerate was largely driven therefore by wanting to get more of a handle on “how you work across different agencies and really get traction outside of your own organisation to lead on multi-agency change”, she explains.

“I was seeking the discipline and rigour of establishing an evidence base and using that to get people to sign up, but also then to help identify future targets,” Caroline adds, noting that she saw getting to grips with financial analysis as perhaps her biggest challenge. “Also, using data to then measure the impact of any change once the programme was underway – in adult social care and health we are data-rich but don’t always make use of it very well.”

While one element of the

programme – an aim to draw on community resources to support people’s care – was hampered by the early 2021 lockdown, the majority of it ran to plan. The added pressure exerted by coronavirus on services increased the extent to which the NHS felt it had “skin in the game”, which actually benefited cohesion between partners, Caroline says.

With the pilot recently having concluded, researchers from Leeds Beckett University are carrying out an external evaluation of it. An interim mid-term assessment “really

highlighted benefits to people who access care and support in terms of consistency and flexibility of care”, with care workers commenting favourably on the new way of working, although financial benefits are still to be conclusively proven.

But, Caroline adds, there is no such ambiguity in terms of how participating in Accelerate affected her ability to manage the pilot project. “I’ve got such a better

understanding of how to measure the impact of changes,” Caroline says. “It has really helped improve my confidence, because when you can speak with more detailed knowledge, the benefits of being able to communicate using language people understand are priceless.”

The networking opportunities provided by the programme – which were partly disrupted by the pandemic for last year’s cohort – were also crucial, Caroline concludes.

“I remember one module where we all turned up and just went, the work situation’s awful [because of Covid pressures],” she says. “We were able to take a bit of time out to talk about it, and everyone walked away feeling so much better because it no longer felt like we were just going through this within our own system, but sharing a common experience.”



I’ve got such a better understanding of how to measure the impact of changes – it has really helped my confidence”

‘Being clear on the why’

Fiona Musgrave, assistant director for integration and partnerships, Cumbria County Council

● Unlike many of her peer participants, Fiona Musgrave’s role for Cumbria County Council as assistant director for integration and partnerships is, she points out with a smile, an entirely strategic one with no operational lead responsibilities.

During the ups and downs of Covid-19, Fiona adds, this became something of a running joke with colleagues commenting on her “talking about recovery again – while we’re still fighting fires”. But it also meant that during her time on the Accelerate programme, she was able to keep that focus on recovery – the county’s, from the pandemic, which she pitched as her change project – aligned with the course content.

“The timing was perfect, in terms of getting the recovery strategy through cabinet and signed off, then getting an outcomes framework, and making use of all the new tools,” she recalls.

With the recovery project encompassing a range of strands reaching well beyond adult social care, Fiona pulled out a selection of outcomes relating to people, to apply directly to learning sessions. “But I was then able to use them a basis for all the other outcomes that we developed – across the whole programme,” she says, adding that the resulting framework ended up being more detailed than it would have been had she not joined Accelerate.

Asked about which elements of the programme proved most useful, Fiona quickly singles out its focus on “being clear on the why” in relation to projects.

“The recovery strategy was developed right across all agencies, not just health and care but the local enterprise partnership, the voluntary sector, district councils – it was everybody,” she says. “So understanding exactly what our problems were, and why we needed to recover – it felt so simple, but was a really, really useful thing to do.”

Like a number of other participants, Fiona also emphasises the value she got from stepping away from intense 15-hour home-working days – into a reflective space with people from other roles and parts of the country – as being huge.

“It reinforced some of the things I knew were most important to give time to, and reminded me that I’m quite good at this stuff, I can do the helicopter view,” she says. “From the course, having conversations with some people who are very operations-focused, being able to talk to them about the strategic, and them look at me going, ‘Oh my God, I never even thought of that.’ I’m not better or worse than anyone else, but I bring a different perspective.”



'Building a network of peers'

Samantha Fitzgerald, assistant director for adults, communities and wellbeing, North Northamptonshire Council

● "We were embarking on a journey as a new unitary authority, and part of me thought, gosh, there's a lot to do," says Samantha Fitzgerald. "I saw applying for Accelerate as an opportunity to get some support from the course, which I absolutely did, but also to build a strong network of peers for information sharing and bouncing ideas off."

When she applied for the programme, Samantha was working for the old Northamptonshire County Council. But by the time it was getting underway in spring 2021, the county had been split into two new unitary authorities – West and North Northamptonshire, with Samantha based at the latter.

Besides wanting to strengthen her overall skill set and network, Samantha was in charge of a change project, the seeds of which predated local government reorganisation in Northamptonshire, before it was delayed by the pandemic. With the number of unplanned admissions among over-65s to the county's hospitals averaging 3,000 more a year than peer areas, the Admission Avoidance pilot aims to create multi-disciplinary support to ensure more people classified as frail can be assessed, diagnosed, treated and discharged home on the same day. Besides avoiding unnecessary admissions, the service – which includes investing in new specialist reablement workers – aims to offer people the support to live independently.

"It's a project I feel really passionate about, and I wanted to know I had the ability to run it myself, to own and drive it without any assistance," adds Samantha of her motivations for applying for Accelerate.

Reflecting on her experiences since then, she says an important lesson was how the programme "really stretched me, and made me think about the journey I needed to take people on".

"They were up for it, but we're looking at a workforce against the backdrop of the local government reform journey we've been on, the transformation we've done in adult social care, and also the pandemic response," she goes on. "They were tired, fatigued, and therefore being able to really go over questions of why this is so important, and why we need to do this or that, was

crucial not only for my own adult social care staff, but for health partners who I had to get on board."

The project, which is now underway, is exceeding its initial targets for admissions avoided, Samantha says. "The only limiting factor at the moment is the ability to recruit enough staff to do more – we're currently working on a plan as to how we scale this up to be able to deliver as much as we need to."

Of Accelerate's impact on how she's gone about things, Samantha says the programme's modular format has helped enable a more "structured" approach, with her feeling more self-assured in delivering her change project. The programme methodology has been useful in revisiting some elements of North Northamptonshire's broader changes, and is now being embedded into the fledgling council's processes.

"Part of what I wanted from the course was to become more confident and capable in my role as an assistant director – and I left it not only feeling that, but also looking forward to developing more in the future," Samantha says. "It was challenging, and took you out of your comfort zone, but in a really positive way – all of that was very much on the backdrop of a support network of peers around you."



 *I feel really passionate about my project, and wanted to know I had the ability to run it myself without assistance"*

Bringing a stalled scheme back into alignment

Nick Pryke, operational director for transformation and recovery, Norfolk County Council

● Within Nick Pryke's local authority, the Accelerate programme comes highly recommended. Norfolk County Council's DASS, James Bullion, is a former ADASS president, while the director of commissioning, Gary Heathcote, was part of the 2020 cohort.

Both colleagues pointed Nick in the direction of the programme to help him with two distinct aspirations. The first was to support his personal career development goals, which encompassed applying to move up to an executive-level role within 12 to 24 months. More pressingly, Nick says, a change project he was leading to transform discharge-to-assess services in the county had become "stuck" – to the point where he admits he was "pretty dejected" as he started Accelerate, which he hoped could help him plot a path forward.

"We had three very distinct models that weren't necessarily producing the right outcomes," he says. "There was a great focus on how quickly we were getting people out of hospital, but very little on the recovery and also their experience of longer-term care." The three systems – local authorities, health and community providers – operating in the Norfolk and Waveney area were "protective" about how they operated, making progress difficult.

Despite the project already having been started, Nick explains that he was able to retrofit some of his learning from Accelerate in order to get things onto a more positive track. "We'd jumped maybe two steps ahead without really defining a vision, so I did a piece of work to align things, and we delivered some key priorities ahead of the winter period."

While Nick subsequently took a "conscious decision" to move on from leading the project, he remains invested in it from the social care side and says he feels pleased that now "a clear plan is there". The toolkit gained from his involvement in Accelerate has also, as Nick hoped, helped shape his personal plans, although not in the way he necessarily expected.

"I had been looking towards director-type roles, and certainly some of my peer group are now doing that," he says. "But at the moment, I now feel much more comfortable with allowing myself to get much more involved with experiencing various things – which could include more transformation projects – rather than worrying too much about what my next step is in terms of jobs."



Thinking beyond a firefighting approach

Andy Biddle, director of adult care, Portsmouth City Council

● “Firefighting is the business of adult social care,” says Andy Biddle wryly. “The problem is, especially with the pandemic overlaid onto it, that firefighting can take your eye off the horizon, causing you to get lost – that’s not good for your staff team, and it’s certainly not good for your residents.”

Andy, who became the DASS at Portsmouth City Council about a year ago, says he was drawn to Accelerate for a number of reasons. But one of the most important was to facilitate some “focused participative time” away from the daily pressure cooker, in the company of others experiencing similar challenges.

 *We’ve moved things forward in terms of evidence – it comes back to asking questions, structuring things the right way”*

“That’s a really rich environment for learning,” he goes on. “That’s both learning how you do things for yourself, and there are also likely to be good initiatives you can take from others, put your own badge on, do stuff in your local authority that’s worked well elsewhere.”

He illustrates the point with reference to a conversation with another participant who suggested using occupational therapists (OTs) in a different way, asking them to accompany care provider staff conducting assessments in order to help inform decision-making.

It’s an approach that dovetails with Andy’s change project, which focused on discharge to assess, and in particular ensuring that once people were at home, their support was at exactly the right level. “It was understanding people’s independence, having settled back into

their homes, with the aim of recycling some domiciliary care – which is in very short supply – back into the system.”

With social workers and OTs also at a premium, Andy says that carrying out the pilot was a struggle – but a worthwhile one, which revealed that assessments were often being conducted too early after discharge from hospital. “We’ve moved things forward in terms of gaining evidence,” Andy says, adding that he now has the go-ahead to recruit more staff to expand the project.

“It comes back to asking the right questions, structuring things in the right way,” he adds of his learning from Accelerate. “If you’ve got that structure to hang off, you’re clearer about the progress that you’ve made and the change that you want to make – as opposed to the firefighting approach, which just says, ‘There’s a fire, go and put it out.’”



‘It’s pointed me in the direction I need to go’

Nathan Atkinson, assistant director for strategic commissioning, Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council

● “Part of my challenge in doing Accelerate has been that I hardly did any social care, in its truest sense, for about 18 months while the programme was running,” chuckles Nathan Atkinson. “As I was leading my council’s response to Covid, I’ve been running warehouses, buying forklift trucks, making sure people are jabbed and working with the voluntary sector – so I’m only catching up with working on a change project now.”

Nathan has been working on change management in one form or another since joining Rotherham council, which was under government intervention until less than a year before coronavirus hit.

“The challenge to turn round the authority and prove critics wrong, get a

bit of pride back in the place, has been a real driver for me,” he says. “But with Accelerate I wanted to get more of the theory behind the practice [of delivering change] – which I’d kind of dived into in my work, without some of the academic rigour around it.”



The new change management project that Nathan is taking on – a service redesign relating to supported housing for 18-65-year-olds – is already benefiting from the past few months’ learning, despite it being put into action later than originally planned.

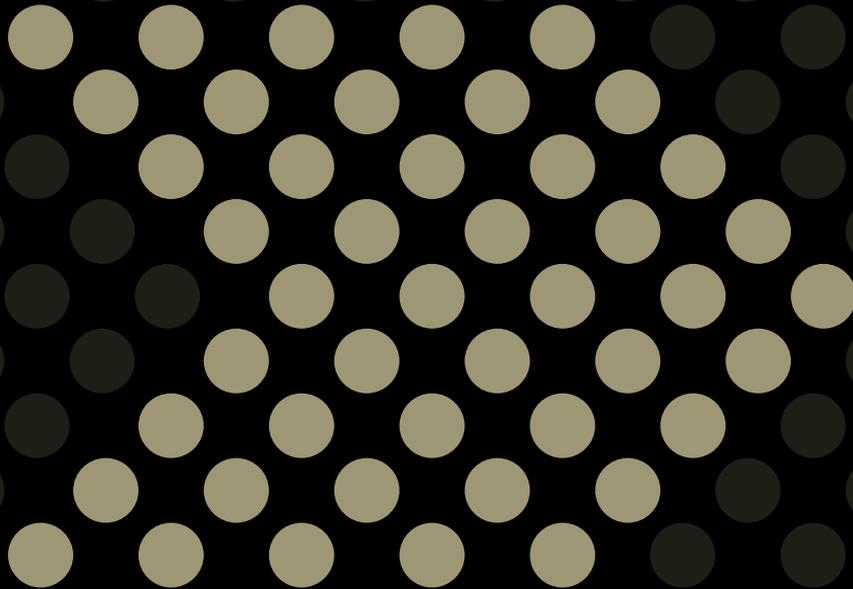
“I’ve always understood the broad concepts of benefits realisation, risk and so on, but not necessarily applied stuff at the right point,” he says. “For instance, a lot of my key performance indicators and measures I’ve tended to develop later on – whereas the learning is that you develop them pretty early doors and you build your model around what you’re intending to achieve.”

Other areas, such as the focus on how candidates articulate themselves, with an eye towards their final presentation, have been similarly helpful, Nathan continues. “I always thought I wouldn’t fall into the trap of talking in social care platitudes and just banging on about independence and so on – but I did, and I think that polite challenge on that’s been really quite useful,” he says.

What the course has also done, Nathan adds, is to “tease out where my strengths are – and the granular detail that’s required for big complex projects is what I really don’t like, so it’s about [considering] how I can get key stakeholders in to fill these gaps”.

This realisation, he says, has helped provide fresh clarity to his future career pathway – which ironically is now likely to lead away from DASS roles, and towards other senior posts such as that of assistant chief executive.

“I was wrestling with which way to go, at a bit of a crossroads,” he says. “I think it’s pointed me in the direction I need to go in.”



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