



HEAR IT FROM OUR 2025 TRAILBLAZERS

How did it feel to be selected as a TrailBlazer?

“ It felt transformational and affirming. I’ve worked hard to progress in my career, often setting my own goals and pushing myself forward. Being chosen to join the TrailBlazer programme made me feel that my dedication was recognised. It was especially encouraging to know that others saw my potential and wanted to invest in me. ”

LISA BRYANT

University of Brighton

How did it feel to be selected as a TrailBlazer?

“ I was extremely humbled, proud and surprised! My HRD had made me aware of the opportunity and encouraged me to apply. So receiving the acceptance on to the programme was a lovely moment to reflect on how much faith my Senior leaders had in me, as well as being really encouraged that out of all UK institutions I had got one of the 16 places! Even getting a place was such a boost of confidence that I could have the potential to take steps towards leadership in HE.

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SARAH POLLARD

York St John University

How did it feel to be selected as a TrailBlazer?

“It felt like a real privilege and endorsement to be offered this opportunity and it was a boost to my confidence reading my manager and HRD’s comments in the application.

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ABI JOWETT

University of Edinburgh

What were the most valuable aspects of the programme for you?

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The programme gave me a range of valuable techniques whilst directing my personal development towards mindfulness and intentional communication. It taught me to slow down, reflect, and be present when engaging with others — something that has already changed how I connect, listen, and influence. This skillset proved to be beneficial when handling complex situations and liaising with a range of stakeholders.

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LISA BRYANT

University of Brighton

What were the most valuable aspects of the programme for you?

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For me, it was really valuable to have the opportunity to take some time out from the normal flow of work, do some self-reflection and step outside my comfort zone in a supportive setting. Something I have continued to benefit from since the programme are the connections I built with a network of peers who have provided support and learning. It was also great to be able to network with the coaches and to benefit from their knowledge and feedback.

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ABI JOWETT

University of Edinburgh

What were the most valuable aspects of the programme for you?

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This programme is not a ‘formal’ training session where you maybe expect hours of being talked at through PowerPoints. Through various unexpected activities, we were given practical tools to be able to take away and increase our confidence and self-awareness, and also develop our communication and presentation styles. I’m grateful for the ‘out of the box’ approach that our trainer used to deliver the sessions as thus I now have memories and advice that will last me a lifetime.”

SARAH POLLARD

York St John University

What impact has being a TrailBlazer had on your career or professional development since completing the programme?

“ Since completing the programme I feel that I have grown in my self-belief. I have also been successful in promotion to a senior HR partner role. ”

ABI JOWETT

University of Edinburgh

Can you share one memorable highlight or ‘lightbulb moment’ from your TrailBlazers experience?

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My biggest lightbulb moment was realising that I don’t always need to keep “doing more” to develop and be successful. Instead, I can achieve greater impact by pausing, being mindful, and focusing on the quality of my interactions. That reset has genuinely transformed how I feel about myself, giving me extra confidence in my ability to achieve a successful career as a senior leader and mentor.

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LISA BRYANT

University of Brighton

Can you share one memorable highlight or 'lightbulb moment' from your TrailBlazers experience?

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For me a memorable highlight was one of our first activities, we were asked to walk around the room without bumping into one another. Then we were told to stop, close our eyes and then point out where a particular person was stood. It was good fun but also It was a great reminder to consider are we aware of our surroundings? Both physical location and aware of people, their reactions and when they maybe aren't being themselves. As leaders we need to be aware of what's going on around us and adjust/react accordingly.

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SARAH POLLARD

York St John University

What skills, knowledge or networks have stayed with you long term?

“ The main skill/knowledge development for me has been my confidence in communicating. Whether that be facilitating an engagement session with colleagues or when delivering a report or presentation to our Senior Leaders and Executive Board. I remember that we are all human and draw on our specialities and experience to do the job we are asked to do. The practical tools we were taught are now at the forefront of my mind to consider mind, body language, tone of voice and breath before jumping into delivering any messages. It has also been great to stay in touch with all the other Trailblazers and check in with each other now the programme has finished. ”

SARAH POLLARD

York St John University

What would you say to someone who is unsure about whether to apply?

“ JUST DO IT! You won't regret it! 🤪 ”

SARAH POLLARD

York St John University

What would you say to someone who is unsure about whether to apply?

“ I would say don't overthink it –
there's a reason you've been selected! It will likely be different to anything you've done
before so go into it with an open mind and ready to engage and be challenged. ”

ABI JOWETT

University of Edinburgh

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The programme was such an empowering and unforgettable experience, and I feel incredibly proud to have been selected and now be a TrailBlazer!

It was completely different to what I expected, but a thousand times better. It challenged me as a person and I learnt so much about myself. It also gave me the opportunity to meet some fantastic and inspirational people, both participating in the programme and running it.

The programme can open doors and opportunities that you may not have even considered, so to anyone thinking of applying do it! You never know where it will take you!!

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CARINA GILSHNAN

Canterbury Christ Church University

