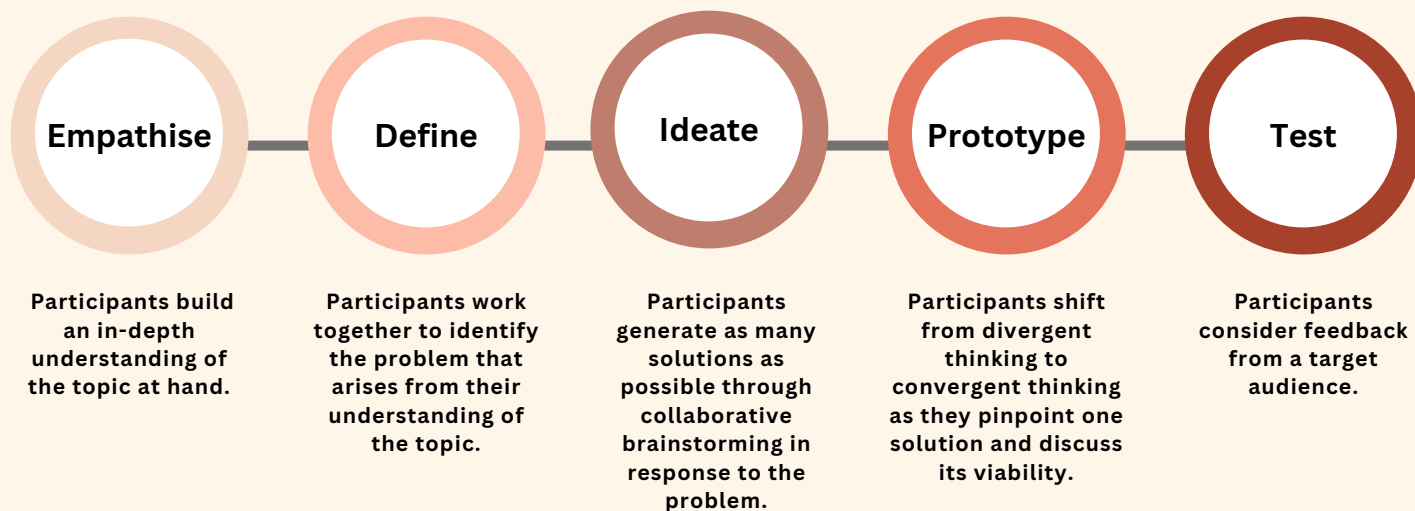# Workshop Briefing: Advancing Leadership Development in UK Early Years

In a series of two design thinking workshops in November 2022, leaders from influential early years (EY) sector bodies across the UK collaborated to recommend sector-wide advancements in leadership development. The stages of design thinking, a five-stage innovation process based on collaborative, solutions-based thinking, are detailed below.

Empathise

Participants build an in-depth understanding of the topic at hand.

Define

Participants work together to identify the problem that arises from their understanding of the topic.

Ideate

Participants generate as many solutions as possible through collaborative brainstorming in response to the problem.

Prototype

Participants shift from divergent thinking to convergent thinking as they pinpoint one solution and discuss its viability.

Test

Participants consider feedback from a target audience.

The process outlined in this briefing fostered a solutions-focused approach to addressing the most pertinent issues surrounding leadership development facing the UK EY sector. The participants in these workshops, listed alphabetically below, brought a wealth of perspectives, experiences and insights to the discussions. We are grateful for their rich contributions, which have the potential to advance leadership development across the entire UK EY sector.

Alison Precup, Scottish Social Service Council

David Goodger, Early Years Wales

David Wright, Paint Pots Nursery

Dawn Bunn, Clybiau Plant Cymru

Diarmuid Moore, Early Years- The Organisation for Young Children

Felicity Dewsbery, Pen Green

Gill Mason, Kids Planet

Glenda Walsh, Stranmillis University College

Hayley Edwards, NDNA Cymru

Helen Williams, Mudiad Meithrin

Jacqueline Lamb, Indigo Childcare Group

Joanne Benford, Pen Green

Kathryn Peckham, Nurturing Childhoods

Kim Shubrook, Teach First

Linda Baston-Pitt, PurpleBee Learning

Michael Freeston, Early Years Alliance

Mireille MacRaild, HFL Education

Pamela Stein, The Leadership Wizard

Polly Crowther, Early Insights

Rebecca Curtis, Ambition Institute

Sara Bonetti, Education Outcomes Fund

Sarah Ellis, Early Years Alliance

Sarah Shreeve, Teach First

Stella Ziolkowski, NDNA

Valerie Daniel, Washwood Heath Nursery School

Design Thinking Stage 1: Empathise

To lay the foundation for the series of design thinking workshops, the first session began with a brief overview of the findings from the systematic literature review (access here) and case studies (access here). The summary slides used to convey the main findings during the presentation are included below.

Practical content and delivery for EY

Relationships and dialogue
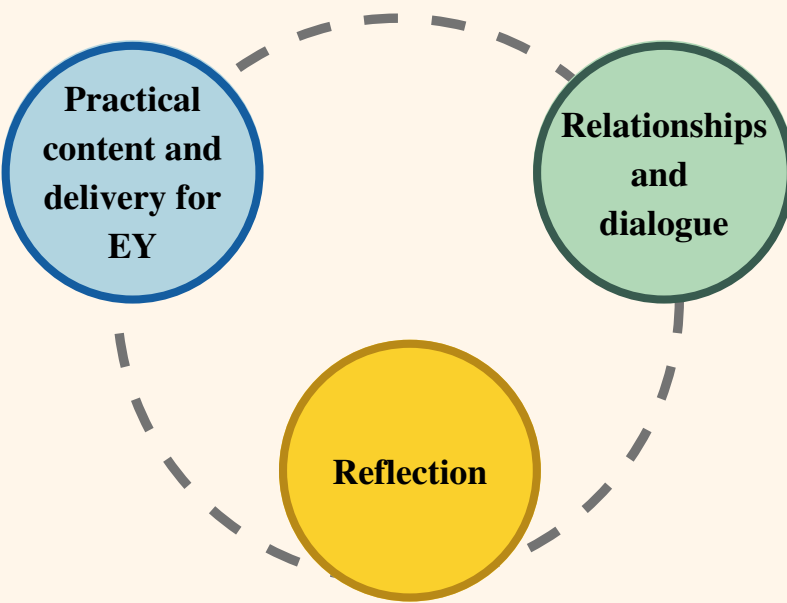
Reflection

Our previous research detailed the importance of practical content and delivery, relationships and dialogue and reflection in digitally mediated leadership development (DMLD).

Interviews with UK EY organisations highlighted the potential to advance leadership development through digitally mediated professional learning, via these four focuses.

Dropping the binaries

Immersive and experiential technology

Moving Forward

Nobody left behind

Getting serious about evaluation

After sharing the findings, the participants discussed how our research concerning leadership development through digital mediation related to their experiences across the EY sector in England, Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales.

Design Thinking Stage 2: Define

In the **define** stage, we chaired a discussion around the question: What do we need to do to move forward as a sector in terms of leadership development? Responses were remodeled into problem statements, listed below. In groups, participants decided which problem they would focus on for the remainder of the workshops. The final three choices are highlighted.

How might we address issues of digital exclusion such as access to appropriate technology and confidence around use so that we reach all leaders in the sector?

How might we better capture the physicality of the EY sector through DMLD and professional development (PD) so that we can maintain specificity of EY content with the flexibility of online learning?

How might we make EY leaders feel valued so that they see and uphold the importance of PD within their job roles?

How might we create bespoke DMLD so that training is relevant to the different contexts of settings (as well as individual leaders)?

How might we support the skills gap for new leaders so that they are confident in their role?

How might we get the sector to prioritise leadership development in the context of the EY sector's problems such as ratios, recruitment, retention and sustainability so that we may focus on professional development?

How might we design digitally mediated leadership development that promotes authentic reflection by protecting time for professional development so that leaders may engage critically with their roles?

How might we encourage leaders to make time and space for leadership development so that they can focus more on their professional learning so as to best support children, families and staff in the long run?

Design Thinking Stage 3: Ideate

To conclude the first design thinking workshop, we shifted into the **ideate** stage. Each group generated as many solutions as possible in response to their chosen problem statement. These solutions were crafted in a "the sky's the limit" environment, with the mindset that resources, time and logistics would not pose a barrier. The brainstorms of each group are shared on the following three pages.

Make time for leaders to breathe so they can think about the training that they want and need

Create better salaries and better conditions so leaders feel valued and are more likely to engage

Catalyse a culture change in how EY is viewed by other professionals, government and career advisors

Build the confidence of the sector through a four nations approach so that leaders see their value and
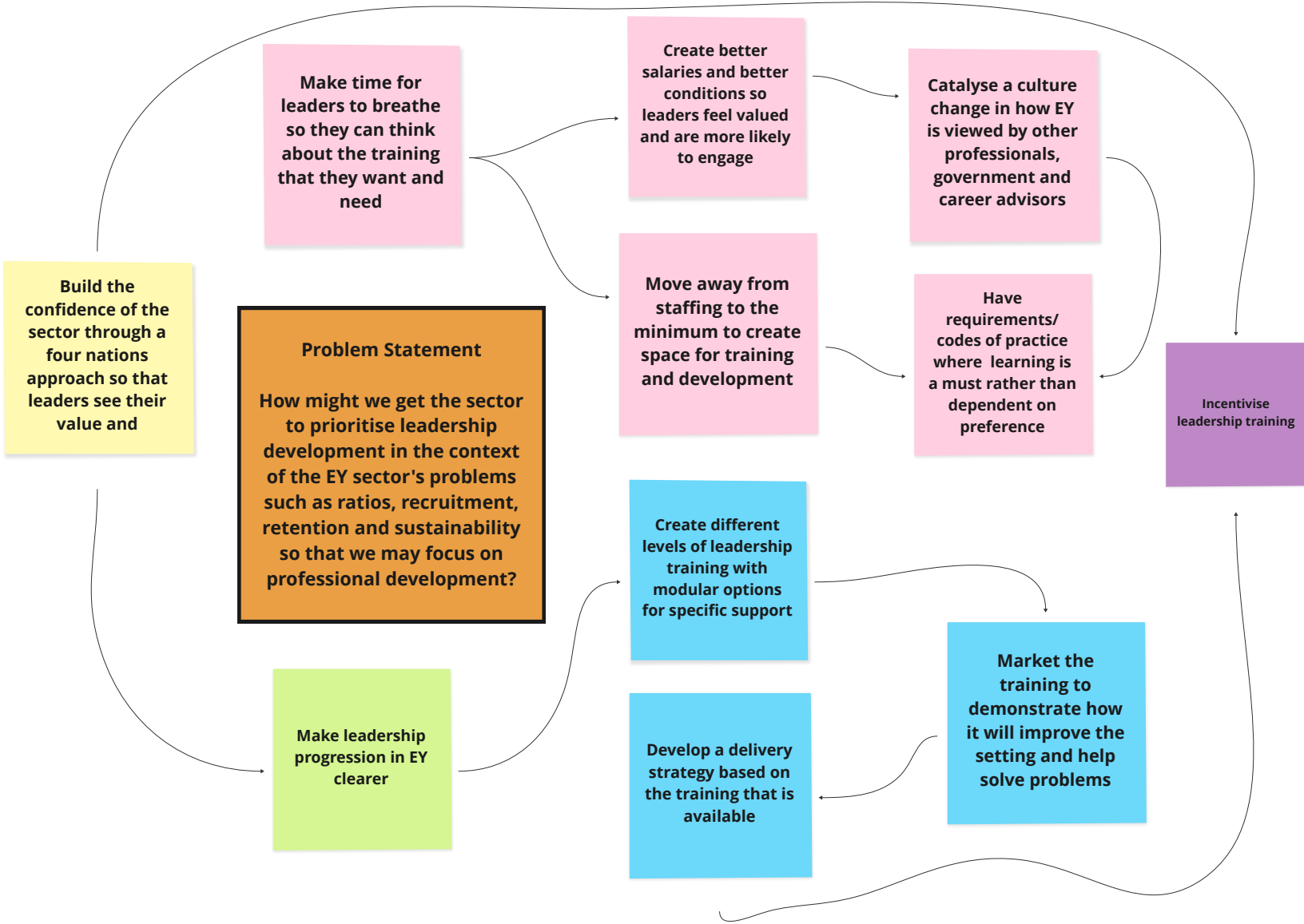
Problem Statement

How might we get the sector to prioritise leadership development in the context of the EY sector's problems such as ratios, recruitment, retention and sustainability so that we may focus on professional development?

Move away from staffing to the minimum to create space for training and development

Have requirements/ codes of practice where learning is a must rather than dependent on preference

Incentivise leadership training

Create different levels of leadership training with modular options for specific support

Make leadership progression in EY clearer

Develop a delivery strategy based on the training that is available

Market the training to demonstrate how it will improve the setting and help solve problems

Problem Statement

How might we design digitally mediated leadership development that promotes authentic reflection by protecting time for professional development so that leaders may engage critically with their roles?

Embed culture of professional leadership development within settings

Communicate a clear vision of professionals being responsible for their professional development in settings

Timetable time for learning, implementation and reflection within the setting

Core aim: Define effective reflective leaders

Define how leaders use reflection in action on an ongoing basis. Always encouraged by the "so what?"

Define what it means to be a reflective leader

Include prompts/ questions on reflection techniques

Build self awareness into learning

Use bite-sized chunks of learning and apply learning to practice

Instil personal ownership of self refection

Identify appropriate learning

Pinpoint how to develop learning within workflow

Deliver trainings in evening because people can take more ownership of the training/learning

Harness small blocks of learning

Build an internal or external (trained) mentor or coach into learning

Provide government funded days for CPD to enable managers to provide CPD that is tailored to meet a

Create a regulation for time allocated to CPD annually or biannually

Set expectation for management (i.e. proprietor/owner/CEO) commitment to CPD

Provide financial incentives for leadership training

Problem Statement

How might we encourage leaders to make time and space for leadership development so that they can focus more on their professional learning so as to best support children, families and staff in the long run?

Codify what professional development looks like - e.g. time for reading

Link training to a licence that results in continuation of role and practice

Codify job roles and pay scales linked to training

Allocate every EY professional a coach or mentor that is specifically trained/accredited to support the EY sector

Invest in funded EY sector mentors, that provide sustainable professional growth and improvement

Design Thinking Stage 4: Prototype

In the second design thinking workshop, participants shifted from divergent thinking to convergent thinking. To engage in the fourth stage of design thinking, pinpointing and developing the most impactful solution, the discussions became rooted in the realities of the EY sector. To reach a consensus, the groups reconvened and, together, explored the viability of their solutions.

Problem Statement

How might we get the sector to prioritise leadership development in the context of the EY sector's problems such as ratios, recruitment, retention and sustainability so that we may focus on professional development?

Solution

While there are many interconnected parts to the brainstorm above, the first step in prioritising professional development amongst EY leaders is getting EY leaders to see themselves as professionals. This depends on a cohesive and coordinated four nations effective campaign to elevate the status of the sector, changing how EY is viewed by other professionals, government bodies and career advisors. Once the view of EY leaders' professional status changes, focus can shift to other areas mentioned on the brainstorm.

Problem Statement

How might we design digitally mediated leadership development that promotes authentic reflection by protecting time for professional development so that leaders may engage critically with their roles?

Solution

The core idea of the brainstorm above was to define what an effective reflective leader is and how leadership development programmes can practically support reflective practice. There are a plethora of ways this can be implemented, from setting aside time for reflection during the work day, to ensuring leaders have the skills needed to engage in self reflection. Therefore, to build a widespread approach to this, it is important to promote reflection in effective leadership development.

Problem Statement

How might we encourage leaders to make time and space for leadership development so that they can focus more on their professional learning so as to best support children, families and staff in the long run?

Solution

While Wales and Scotland have guidance concerning regulatory requirements for PD, there is no articulation in England of PD expectations. Therefore, in order to ringfence time for leadership development, a consistent framework for each of the leadership functions (leading staff, leading the curriculum, performance management, etc.) is required. This would create a consistent approach to professional development inputs across England.

Design Thinking Stage 5: Test

In the final stage of the design thinking workshops, the participants confirmed who the target audience was for each solution and decided the first steps we need to take for each solution. Below, we have detailed the main outcomes of the entire design thinking process and how we plan to take these advancements forward.

Problem Statement

Orange: How might we get the sector to prioritise leadership development in the context of the EY sector's problems such as ratios, recruitment, retention and sustainability so that we may focus on professional development?

Blue: How might we design digitally mediated leadership development that promotes authentic reflection by protecting time for professional development so that leaders may engage critically with their roles?

Purple: How might we encourage leaders to make time and space for leadership development so that they can focus more on their professional learning so as to best support children, families and staff in the long run?

Way Forward

Orange: In order to prioritise professional development, we need EY leaders to see themselves as professionals. This depends on a four nations effective campaign to elevate the status of the sector. Working across the four nations of the UK is essential.

Blue: In order to promote authentic reflection, we need to define what an effective reflective leader is and how leadership development programmes can practically support reflective practice.

Purple: In order to ringfence leadership development in the English EY sector, we need regulatory expectations about what leadership development involves. Clear expectations will enable the sector to better plan how to deliver leadership development in an equitable way.

Intention

Orange: We need to generate connections across the four nations, enabling team working between professionals, sector bodies and government departments in England, Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales.

Blue: We need to generate dialogues across the UK EY sector about what reflective leadership looks like and how we can support it.

Purple: We need to liaise with the Department for Education (DfE) and Ofsted to understand how they might consult with relevant sector bodies in the creation of such expectations.

First Steps

Orange: Map the connections that already exist in EY across the four nations.

Having identified gaps, meet with stakeholders to explore how we can extend four nation partnership working.

Blue: Support practice-sharing between training providers on supporting reflective leadership.

Start and sustain a conversation via social media and sector-facing publications between EY leaders about reflective practice.

Purple: Meet with the DfE and Ofsted to weigh their interest in creating expectations for the sector about leadership development.