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LEADERSHIP
PROGRAMME**



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Leadership programme secures funding to support more SMEs on road to recovery

A hugely successful leadership programme, created specifically to help SMEs build resilience and manage the impact of Covid-19, has secured funding to support an additional cohort of businesses from the region next month (March), as well as confirming a second round of the programme to take place later this year.

Round one of the Small Business Leadership Programme (SBLP) has supported more than 150 businesses across the North East and Cumbria over the past six months.

Funded by the Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy, the SBLP provides a free, 10-week training programme for senior leaders in SMEs. It covers a range of practical topics and is delivered online by small business experts – including entrepreneurs, business leaders and academics – from Newcastle Business School at Northumbria University.

To date, nine cohorts (of up to 25 business leaders) have joined or completed the Programme, representing a diverse mix of sectors – from manufacturing, engineering and bio science to design, tourism, IT and dentistry.

Dr Matthew Sutherland from Newcastle Business School, who has co-led the Small Business Leadership Programme in the region, said: “When we launched the SBLP last year we knew that many SMEs were facing unprecedented challenges. We wanted to deliver a programme that would provide the right mix of practical support, insight and expertise to help them recover. Importantly, we also wanted to connect small business leaders with peers from across the region to facilitate shared learning.

“We’ve been delighted to have helped more than 150 business already and the recent confirmation of funding for future courses – one cohort next month and up to nine more groups later this year – is testament to the success of the Programme and the importance of its role in helping the regional business community to rebuild.”

With eight, 90-minute webinars, alongside independent and peer-to-peer learning, the Programme is designed to support and fit in with business delivery. 100% of participants from the first cohort agreed that the Programme was comfortably manageable alongside their day-to-day workload. More than 90% of participants said that the Programme had helped them to develop strategic leadership skills, strengthen their business networks and plan for future growth.

Speaking about his experience on the Programme, Kemoy Small, Director at Newcastle-based travel and tourism company The Reight Group, said: “The SBLP really helped me during a time of significant change, when our core business – corporate travel – was pretty much on hold and we were busy diversifying into new markets. The Programme provided the focus I needed to shape our long-term plans and it gave me confidence in our new strategy. Since completing the course we’ve rebranded and launched a new marketing campaign.

“I’ve realised that even when you run your own business, you don’t have to have all the answers. It was so inspiring to share knowledge and experience with other small business leaders and to gain insight and advice from the tutors on the programme. My number one goal is to grow the business and what I’ve learned and gained from this Programme has absolutely given me the right tools to do that.”

Nick Smith, co-founder and director of The Steam Machine Brewery based in Newton Aycliffe, County Durham, added: “Like everyone during the pandemic, we have met with challenges. From the SBLP we have gained invaluable tips and new skills that we’ve implemented into moving our business forward. These are things I wish I had known from the start of my journey! But the changes we are now making are inspiring the whole company and re-igniting our team with energy ready for the challenges we will face in the short and long term.

“It was great working with our peer group too. Everyone came from a different industry, and it was fascinating to see the crossovers in leadership, and what we could gain from each other. I would highly recommend this course to anyone involved in leading an organisation, and I can honestly say it is the most valuable thing I have done since starting a business. I feel my eyes have been opened to a whole new world!”

To sign up for a free place in the next cohort, starting on 16 March, visit the Small Business Charter website: <https://smallbusinesscharter.org/sblp-registration/>.

To find out more and to register interest in securing a future place on the Programme, visit the Northumbria University website: <https://www.northumbria.ac.uk/business-services/small-business-leadership-programme/>. Dates for round two of the Programme will be announced in the coming weeks.

The Small Business Leadership Programme is being delivered across the country by a consortium of business schools accredited by the Small Business Charter (SBC). Newcastle Business School at Northumbria University was accredited in 2015; the national accreditation recognises business schools that excel in supporting SMEs and the local economy.

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