Aurora is a great success story. Over the past six years 5,895 women from over 175 institutions across the UK and Ireland have participated. This highlights the huge commitment of the sector to achieve gender equality and invest in the development of current and future women leaders. It also represents a unique opportunity to embed strong networks to enable pathways to share best practice, insights and experiences. This innovative development process is for those who identify as women up to senior lecturer level or professional services equivalent.

WHAT’S IT ABOUT?
Aurora has been introduced to help address the under-representation of women in senior posts in higher education as outlined in the Advance HE’s Stimulus Paper ‘Women and Higher Education: Absences and Aspirations’ by Professor Louise Morley (January 2013). Many influential stakeholders including vice-chancellors and Office for Students agree the situation calls for immediate action to encourage more women to enter leadership. Feedback tells us that higher education institutions would like to support more women to apply for leadership roles and feedback from women suggests that early leadership development would facilitate this.

Aurora has been designed to take a partnership approach with universities and higher education colleges. This involves the institution making a commitment to provide mentors and role models as well as participants so that the issues and challenges of leadership progression for women are recognised more widely across the university or higher education college.

WHAT DOES AURORA COVER?
Aurora addresses core areas associated with leadership success:
• Understanding organisations and the sector
• Developing leadership behaviours, skills and knowledge
• Identifying and overcoming barriers and obstacles
• Growing confidence and a leadership identity
• Building networks, coalitions and support processes

Aurora incorporates these areas by using a combination of: development days (four, at approximately monthly intervals); two action learning sets and self-directed learning that complements the key themes and supports participants’ own development needs and in-house mentoring.
PROGRAMME STRUCTURE

Aurora is a multi-faceted development initiative. The subjects of the conference style development days are:

IDENTITY, IMPACT AND VOICE
Participants will explore their identity and what it means to bring their whole selves to their leadership role. They will gain an understanding of what it means to have impact as a leader in a range of work situations, and about visibility and ‘voice’. They will work through some practical, valuable tips and tools to better influence through communications with clarity, confidence and authenticity.

POWER AND POLITICS
This day explores the culture and politics of organisations and ways to work effectively within them. Participants will consider how motivations influence working preferences and are encouraged to build lasting, mutually supportive coalitions, maximise their opportunities for influence, networking and an accurate personal profile, while remaining authentic and true to self.

ACTION LEARNING SETS
The middle day of the programme is set aside for a full-day of action learning. The participants of each set will be seated at the same table on the Power and Politics day and it will be the responsibility of the set to agree a venue and manage the action learning process on the day. There is no external facilitation. Participants of each set will utilise the sessions to air their personal work-related challenges and seek support through the action learning process to identify solutions and next steps. Whilst two formal action learning sets are scheduled it is anticipated that institutions will support Aurora participants in maintaining these sets as a positive approach to problem solving and as a way of developing networks, sharing good practice and learning from experience.

CORE LEADERSHIP SKILLS
Core Leadership Skills will introduce the underpinning skills needed by all leaders and managers in higher education. Participants will consider their value set and their purpose in higher education, how to influence and negotiate as leaders and how to work with stories and storytelling in their leadership.

ADAPTIVE LEADERSHIP SKILLS
Participants will be introduced to the main principles of adaptive leadership and how these are relevant to women in higher education. Participants will be encouraged to consider how to adopt an experimental mind-set and how to identify leadership archetypes. How to have courageous conversations and take a new perspective on challenges. The day is about using adaptive leadership to enhance performance and success.

SPECIAL FEATURES

Self-directed learning:
To get the most out of taking part in Aurora we have provided a selection of online resources. These include reading, reflection, activities and challenges. These materials and information can be accessed throughout Aurora and are updated throughout the year. They echo the subjects of the development days – participants may follow the stream that precedes or follows the development day they are about to attend or have just attended; or they can focus on a stream that particularly interests them and follow it throughout the programme. Those with more time may choose to engage with all of the streams for the duration of the programme. For more instant discussions amongst Aurora participants there is an Aurora community Jisc mail list. (LF-Aurora@jiscmail.ac.uk). To sign up to the Jisc mail list, visit the public Aurora JISCMail page.

Mentoring:
Aurora participants are required to have a mentor to support and guide them throughout and after the end of the formal learning process. Usually these mentors will have been identified by the university or higher education college’s ‘Aurora Champion’, the central human resources or staff development department and may be part of an existing mentoring scheme. Mentors may be male or female (depending on the preference of the mentee) and be well established and knowledgeable members of the institution who will usually be more senior than the Aurora participant.

WHO CAN APPLY?
Aurora is for those who identify as women up to senior lecturer level or professional services equivalent in a university or higher education college, ambitious for a career in the sector and interested in exploring leadership and management as one option for progression. As we are asking for an institutional commitment, in most circumstances applicants will have been selected by the HEIs to take part in the process.

MORE INFORMATION & HOW TO APPLY

www.advance-he.ac.uk/aurora
aurora@advance-he.ac.uk
“Schemes such as Aurora are hugely important in enabling women to explore their leadership aspirations and abilities in a supportive environment, and to develop their leadership potential. Many of our former participants have found the ‘cohort’ nature of the scheme, the shared learning and the mentoring it provides invaluable.”

Professor Jane Norman, Vice-Principal and Aurora Champion, University of Edinburgh

“I thought the presentations were excellent. I felt energised and primed to take action from all the inspiration and wisdom in the room.”

Grainne Mooney, Communications Manager, Dublin City University

The Aurora programme has inspired me to think of myself as a leader. It has shown me that I can be a unique leader; that I can remain authentic to myself and don’t have to conform to a masculine model of leadership. Aurora has encouraged me to start taking risks, daring to say ‘yes’ to things that terrify me. As I have taken small steps this has given me confidence to take bigger steps. Even before I have a formal leadership position, I can do leadership acts now.”

Aurora participant 2017/18

“I found the programme to be pioneering in so many ways. The carefully crafted cumulative structure underpinned by mentoring allows for rich participant discussions and learning. The guest speaker input is excellent, it was impressive to hear such inspiring senior women in leadership sharing very honest accounts of their personal journeys.”

Dr Mary Collins, Senior executive development specialist, Royal College of Surgeons, Aurora Role Model

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Aurora participant 2017/18

“Great initiative. I am becoming more and more convinced that providing women with a supportive network and role models is key to success and progression of women in higher education.”

Federica Alberti, Senior Lecturer, University of Portsmouth

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