Inspiring Leadership Conference 2019
6 - 7 June, ICC, Birmingham

Delegate evaluation feedback report

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#ilconf19
Dear Colleague,

Firstly, a big thank you to all of you who took the time to respond to the post conference evaluation survey.

We received over 340 completed questionnaires providing us with a rich source of data on which to continue building the Inspiring Leadership conference experience.

It has been great to hear that a good number of you had a positive response to this year’s keynote speakers and that you appreciated our branded water bottles.

There was also a theme that the Friday finish time was a challenge particularly for those delegates travelling a distance home from Birmingham and the lengthy breaks were an issue for some, we’ll take a look to see what we can do here for 2020.
In addition to the quantitative data on speakers, workshops and conference facilities, you provided us with qualitative feedback that tells us how you felt about the conference. It is in this verbatim commentary that we find the rich insights into what works well, what needs improvement and ideas for future conferences.

The verbatim feedback this year stretched to 145 pages of A4! That’s nearly 30,000 words, the equivalent of a good-sized dissertation and an awful lot of rich data to absorb. We would like to share some of the feedback headlines throughout this document with our delegates, feel free to share with others.

Let’s start with a few positive and negative comments that we received…

“Inspirational, renews and reminds me of moral purpose and challenges my thinking. Makes me feel proud to be in education.”

“If you only go to one conference each year, make sure it is this one.”

“An opportunity to refresh and reflect. A chance to think about your leadership role in a positive and relaxed atmosphere. A real 'pick me up', bring your team... Just great.”

“Well worth the journey - every year we leave with a new idea/ gem to implement to improve our leadership of the school.”

“I found the breaks too long and the finish time too late on the Friday.”

“Didn’t like having to eat a hot meal standing up during lunch time!”

“Quality time to be able to reflect on your leadership. Quality time to share and listen to colleagues. Quality time to hear inspirational speakers.”

“It gave us a different perspective on leadership styles and issues that are transferable to our work in school. Refreshing.”

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Masterclass and Workshops

Based on the above small selection of comments, it’s clear that for some Inspiring Leadership is a must attend conference and for others we just didn’t quite tick all the right boxes. For 2020 we will use the results from the evaluation survey to try our best to tick as many of those boxes which we didn’t quite tick this year.

Overall 4 of the keynote speakers and 2 of the masterclass speakers were rated 90%+ excellent or good. 87% of delegates said that Inspiring Leadership either met or exceeded their expectations and 76% of respondents said they would attend the conference again.

Workshops, as always, were a bit more hit and miss. 10 of the 16 sessions offered at this year’s conference scored above 10% poor. Conversely 5 of the sessions scored between 65% and 100% excellent or good.

This year we received an unprecedented number of requests from commercial education sector service providers to deliver a workshop session at the conference. The majority we declined however after careful sense checking we accepted a number of workshops submissions where we felt the content would be of value to delegates attending these sessions. In hindsight this proved to be a mistake with delegates attending the sessions feeding back to us that they felt the session were overly ‘salesy’. We have in turn reported back to those organisations that received criticism and learned the lesson for future years.

As we continue to work hard on this area of the conference content, we will be looking closely again at how we develop this part of the conference programme and will be more selective when formulating the workshop programme to strive to ensure it contains only invaluable content for our delegates.

Question 8 asked if there were specific speakers, you’d like to see at future conferences and question 11 asked what topics and themes you’d like to see in future years.

In response to these questions we received a wide range of suggestions which will form the basis of the 2020 Organising group kick off meeting scheduled for mid-September.

Keynote and Masterclass speakers were rated an average of 83% ‘EXCELLENT’ or ‘GOOD’.
The objectives of many of the sponsors and exhibitors is simply to build awareness of their brand and service or product offer. Sure, some are there simply to secure sales, but these tend to be few, and most are just looking for good quality conversations with senior leaders to secure potential leads with the potential for future business in the year ahead.

Curiously through for some delegates the breaks are not long enough and longer is sought as time for reflection or so that the conference feels ‘less rushed’.

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We are always challenged to freshen up the exhibition by securing new organisations that returning delegates may not be aware of and ensuring that sponsors and exhibitors feel that they have had ample opportunity to meet their objectives. We are delighted to say that we had 21 new exhibitors join us for 2019.

We are continually seeking to balance the needs of sponsors, exhibitors and delegates. We asked our sponsors and exhibitors what their objectives are for attending the conference and here’s what some of them said:

“Meet school leaders and nurture relationships.”

“To connect with local schools and to raise awareness of new branding.”

“To find out if the audience fitted with our objectives and to find out if our message resonates.”

“To network with school leaders and demonstrate products.”
Insights

Perhaps the question that offers us the greatest insight into the impact of the conference and the benefits it offers to school leaders, their teams and ultimately their students is ‘Do you intend to do anything differently as a result of what you have heard and learnt at the conference?’ With 10 pages of comment in response to this question to add to the 21 pages of comment provided in response to the question ‘What was the most valuable element of the conference?’ we derive a huge sense of satisfaction that so much positive action is inspired by the content of the conference.

For a good number of you it was about learning that things are not as bad as we think with Ben Page. For others Sarah-Jane Marsh and Professor Nick Harding ignited the importance of taking care of our staff and reminding them about our core purpose. For some, it was Gyles Brandreth sharing his experience of leaders throughout his life and Emmanuel Jal making us ask ourselves ‘who owns your mind?’. Dr Pedro Noguera inspired us to rethink how we remove barriers and to focus on the good teacher in us. Finally, Lyse Doucet told us amazing stories of courageous leadership and the need for empathy whilst Katherine Grainger left us thinking about the difference it makes when we have someone who genuinely believes in us.

A small selection of comments is shown below:

“All the speakers were truly inspirational. Lovely to have the life stories included to make us think hard about how we are shaping the next group of leaders in sport, entertainment, business or education.”

“For me I found the session on equity really fascinating and the things the professor talked about resonated with me. I also thought the people on the stands were very focussed and passionate - there some extremely useful contacts made for services I will tap into in the not too distant future.”

“Being reminded of having beliefs and purpose and being inspired by speakers who were able to talk about outstanding leadership against the odds.”

“Having time to talk and reflect with colleagues on what we had seen, heard and felt.”
Do we receive negative comments? Yes of course.

In asking ‘What was the least valuable element of the conference’ and ‘What would we need to do to exceed your expectations next year?’ we invite critical comment on the conference experience in order to make this better for you.

It is of course always rewarding to receive the positive stuff, but it is these critical comments where we can learn the most and make compensating adjustments in the following year. However, there are some areas where we just cannot meet these requests. For example, running workshops on both conference days would require us to hire workshops room from the ICC on both conference days increasing the costs to the conference and the duration of the lunch and refreshment breaks are necessary to ensure exhibitors have sufficient face time with delegates.

We don’t pretend to get it all right for everyone and we know that the Inspiring Leadership experience isn’t right for everyone. But for those leaders that derive great value from the conference and return year after year we will continue to listen to the feedback, learn and improve to deliver the highest quality speakers and conference content.

87% of delegates said that the conference either ‘MET’ or ‘EXCEEDED’ their expectations.

“Wonderful 2 days at Inspiring Leadership with first class speakers from all walks of life. Refocused me on my beliefs, my purpose as a principal and given me the courage to go on… Brilliant!”

-2019 delegate
We'd love to take credit for this piece of poetic feedback but in truth, with only a tiny bit of editorial licence this is what a good number of you told us you value most about the conference experience.

“Time”

Time away from school to slow down, time away from school to consider
Time away from school to listen, time away from school to think
Time away from school to focus
Time to refresh, time to re-focus
Time to energise, time to engage
Time to talk, time to listen
Time out to reflect, time with colleagues
Time to network
Time to breathe

Time to be inspired
Why we do what we do…

“Hearing from people that leave you feeling inspired and remind you why you do the job that you do. The speakers motivate me to go back into school and be the best head that I can be; inspiring and motivating my staff to ensure the children receive the best possible education.”

“Speakers that made me reflect on how my school is led and how children are inspired to learn, and teachers inspired to teach.”

“The feeling that others all feel the way you do and the space to reflect and remember why we do what we do and how important it is.”

The Inspiring Leadership Conference is just as important to us as organisers as it is to our delegates and it is feedback like this that reminds us why we do what we do each and every year. Whether you have been supporting Inspiring Leadership since it first began or whether this was your first time, we would like to take this opportunity to say thank you to everyone that has attended.

See you next year!
SAVE THE DATE!

We are pleased to announce that the seventh Inspiring Leadership Conference will take place on 4 – 5 June 2020 at the ICC, Birmingham.

We look forward to seeing you there!
Inspiring Leadership Masterclass Series

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Inspire Yourself, Inspire Your School

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Manchester
Thursday 10 October 2019
5pm - 8pm
Science and Industry Museum

Jointly hosted with colleagues at Tree Of Knowledge, this masterclass features best-selling author, comedian, international keynote speaker and Managing Director of TOK, Gavin Oattes for an inspirational learning experience like nothing else you’ve seen before.

Joining Gavin on stage will be Sharon Amesu, Chair of the Institute of Directors, North West and Founding Fellow at the Society of Leadership Fellows.

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