



NUI Galway  
OÉ Gaillimh

# Report on the Aurora Leadership Development Programme Survey

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# Section 1: Introduction

## 1.1 Introduction

The Aurora Programme is a leadership development initiative established by Advance HE to address women's under-representation in leadership positions in higher education institutions<sup>1</sup>.

NUI Galway has supported women to participate in the Aurora Programme since 2015. Until December 2019, 75 women have partaken in the programme, including academic, professional/support and research staff.

The Aurora Survey was designed to understand if, and to what extent the programme's participation encouraged and/or supported women to pursue a leadership opportunity in the University.

## 1.2 Methodology

All 75 Aurora Programme participants were invited by email to complete the survey in December 2019. Overall, 41 participants responded to it, representing 54% of total participants.

The survey included 27 questions with a mixture of response types. Eight inquired on demographic background, 5 about employment status, 10 considered the respondent's evaluation of the Aurora Program, and 4 the leadership outcomes. The complete questionnaire is available as Annex 1.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/programmes-events/aurora>

## Section 2: Survey Results and Discussion of Findings

### 2.1 Respondents' profile (demographics and employment status)

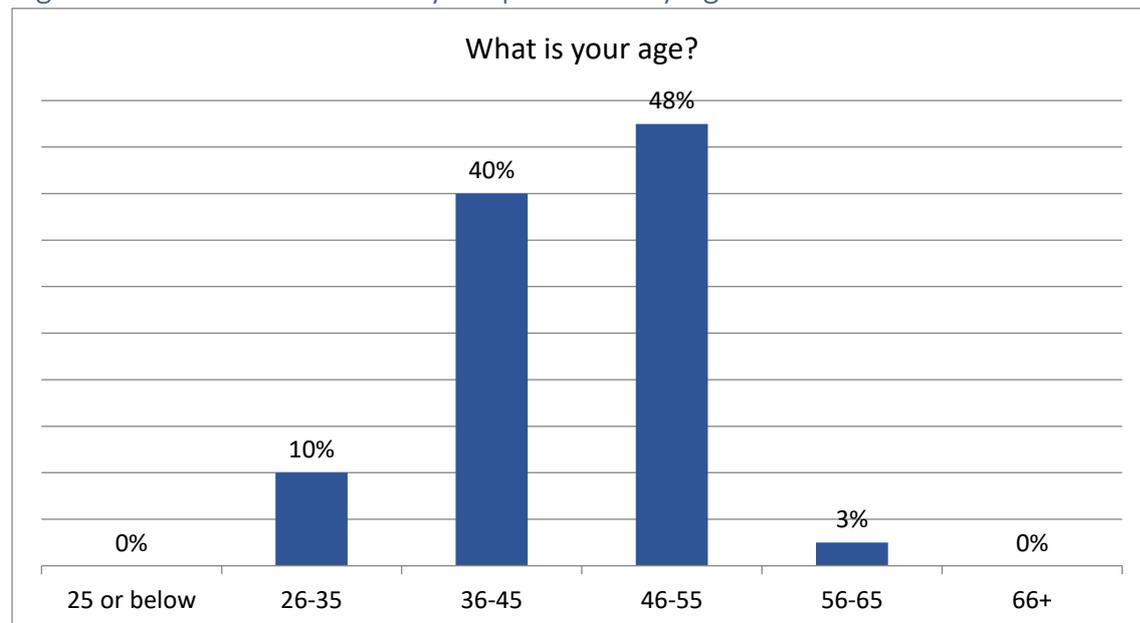
The vast majority of respondents (80%) were Irish, of whom 4,8% had dual Irish and second citizenship. Fourteen per cent (14%) were from other European countries and 4,8% from non-OCDE countries.

In terms of ethnicity, 82% of respondents self-described as White, Irish, White Irish, Caucasian, White Caucasian or European. The remaining participants (18%) preferred not to respond to this question.

Of the respondents, 79.49% were native English speakers.

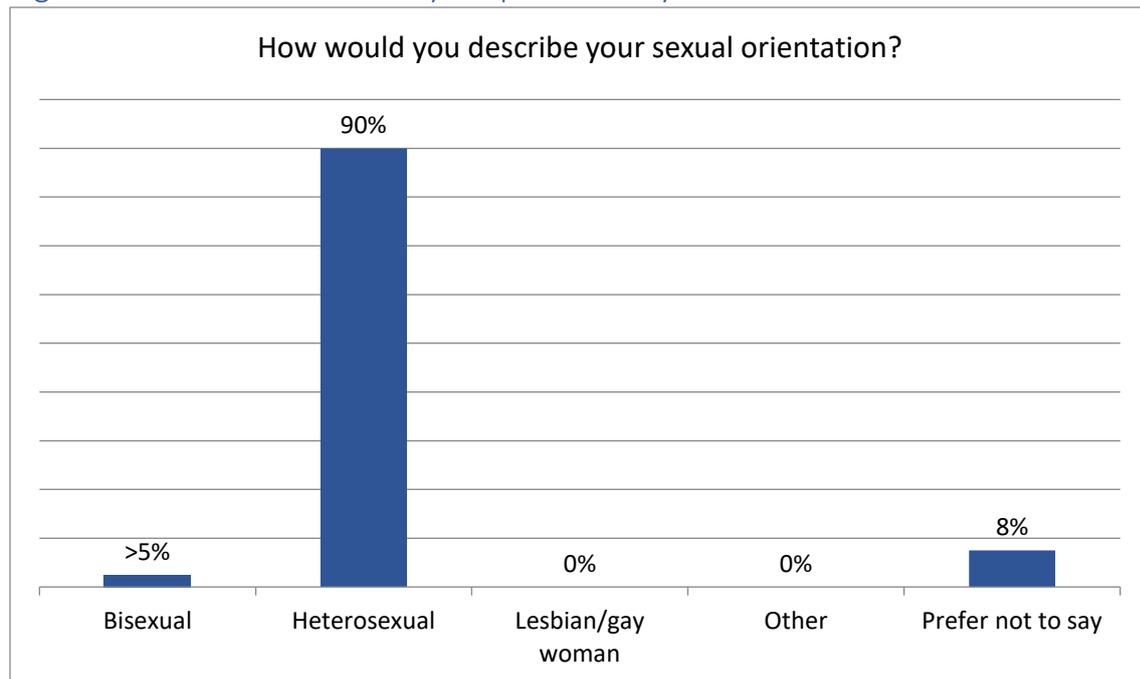
Figure 1 shows the distribution of survey respondents by age. 88% were located between the 36 to 55 age groups.

Figure 1: Distribution of Survey Respondents by Age



90% of respondents identified as heterosexual, while 7.5% (n = 3) preferred not to disclose their sexual orientation. Less than 5 (<1%) of respondents identified as having a disability (with reference to the Disability Act 2005), <5 respondents (<1%) identified as bisexual and <5 respondents (<1%) identified transgender.

Figure 2: Distribution of Survey Respondents by Sexual Orientation



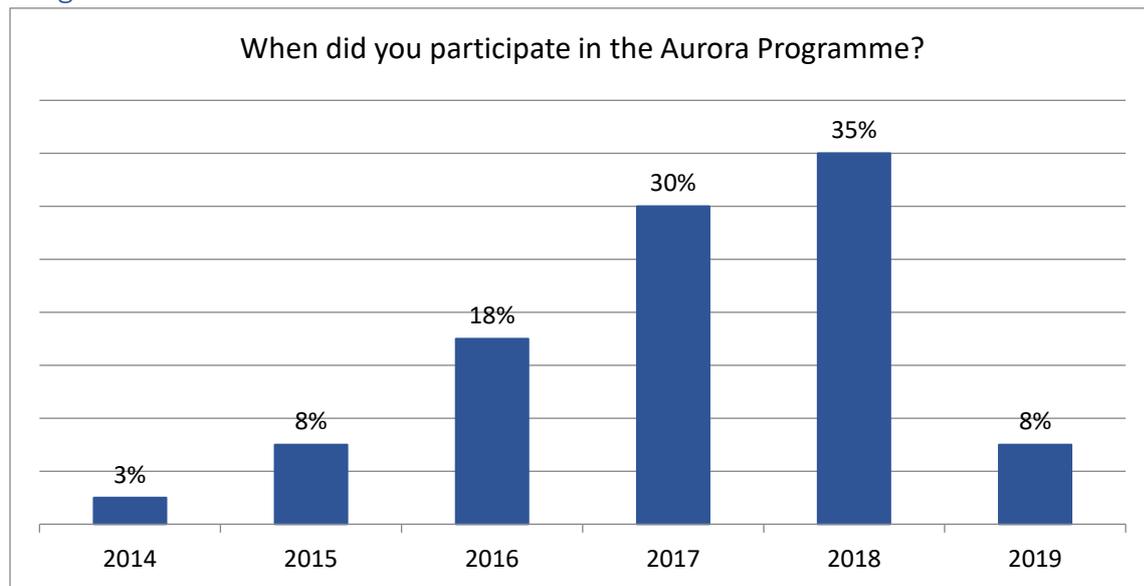
Of the respondents, 92.5% were permanent staff members, 97.5% worked full-time, and 80% were NUI Galway’s employees for more than ten years. Table 1 shows respondents’ employment category.

Table 1 Distribution of Survey Respondents by Employment Category

Staff Category	No. of respondents	% of category
Academic	21	52.50%
Research	3	7.5%
Support Services/Professional	16	40%
<b>Total participants</b>	75	54% of the total participants

80% of respondents reported having one or more caring responsibilities.

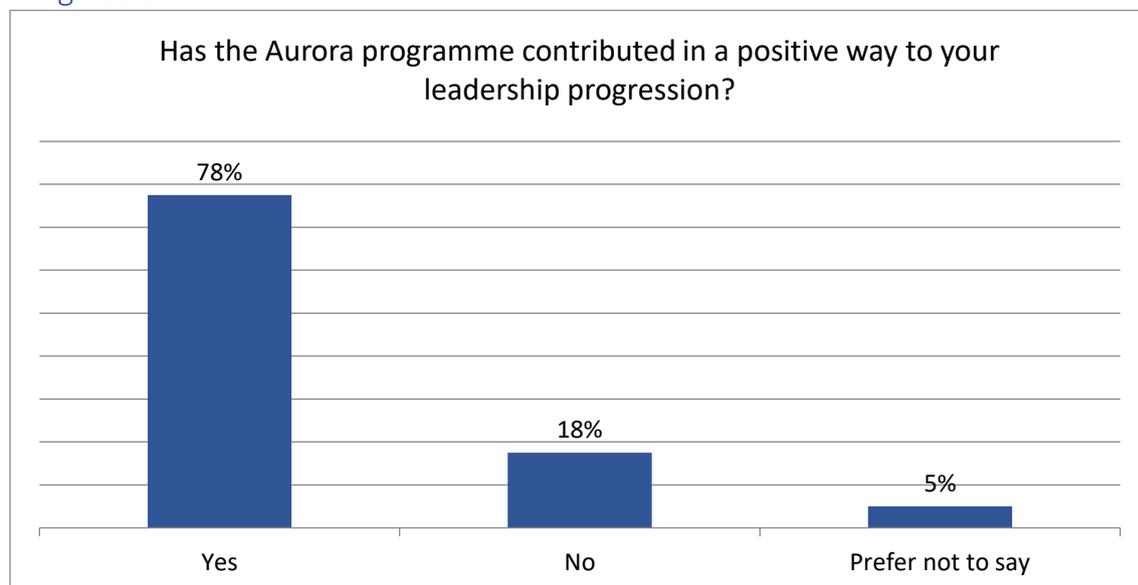
Figure 3: Distribution of Survey Respondents by Year of Participation in the Aurora Programme



## 2.2 Program evaluation

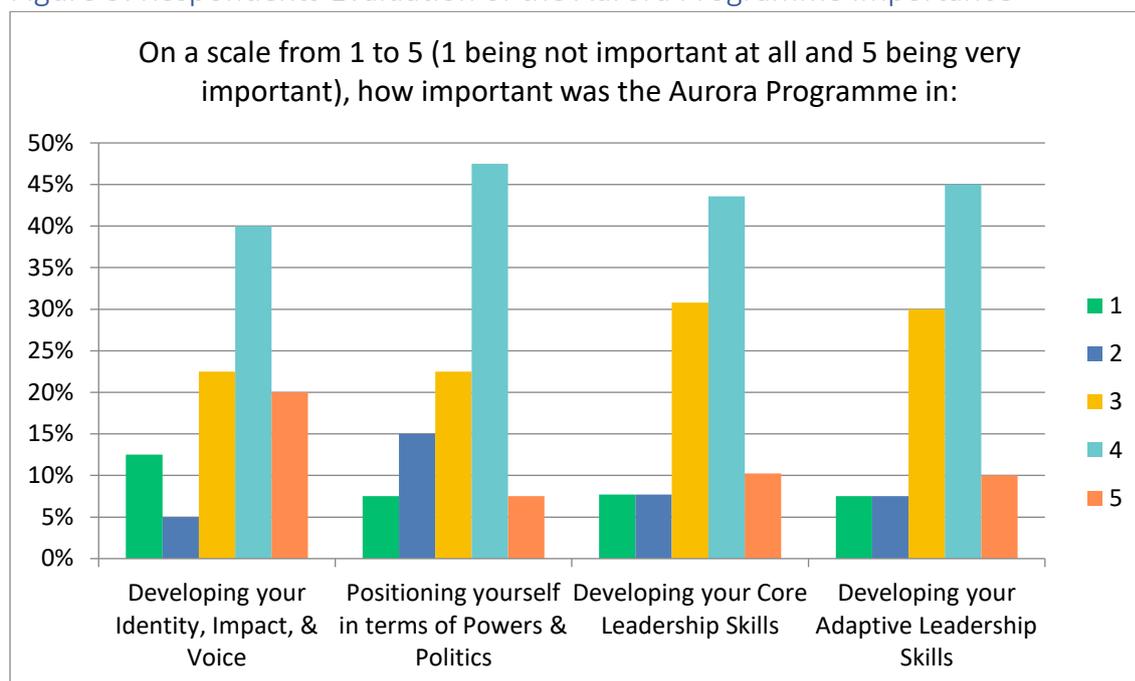
The Aurora Programme was generally well evaluated by participants. Of respondents, 72.5% agreed the program successfully responded to their leadership challenges (compared with 22.5% who disagreed and 5% who preferred not to respond).

Figure 4: Respondents Evaluation of the Aurora Programme Contribution to Leadership Progression



Of the respondents, 65% stated participating in the Aurora Programme was important or very important to their career goals. 25% declared the programme moderately important and 10% slightly important or not important at all.

Figure 3: Respondents Evaluation of the Aurora Programme Importance



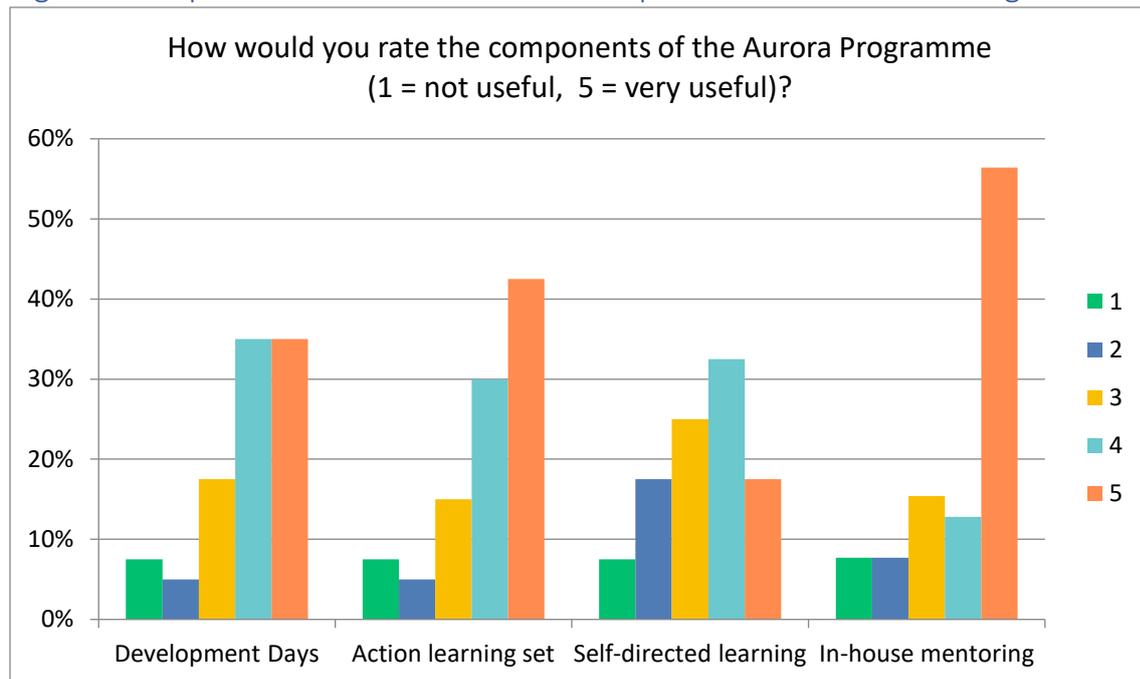
Respondents answers to the question related to benefits acquired by participating in the programme are shown in Table 2. Increased self-confidence, Expanded Network, and Leadership behaviours, skills and knowledge were chosen by more than 50% of respondents.

Table 2 Acquired Benefits by Participating in the Aurora Programme

Please indicate the benefits you acquired by participating in the Aurora Programme (you may choose as many options as you feel apply to your experience):		
Answer Choices	Responses	
Increased self-confidence	67.50%	27
Expanded network	67.50%	27
Collaborative problem-solving skills	30.00%	12
A leadership identity	40.00%	16
Leadership behaviours, skills and knowledge	62.50%	25
Other (please specify)	12.50%	5
	<b>Answered</b>	<b>40</b>
	<b>Skipped</b>	<b>1</b>

Other benefits mentioned included mentorship (twice), increased awareness of unconscious bias, support, and solidarity. One person declared not to have acquired any benefits.

Figure 4: Respondents Evaluation of the Components of the Aurora Programme



Regarding the respondents' evaluation of the Aurora Programme's components, more than 60% of respondents attributed high usefulness (4 or 5 in progressive scale) to In-house mentoring, Action learning set, and Development Days.

Of the respondents, 63% declared the Aurora programme partially addressed the leadership challenges they had identified in the application form. 25% reported it did so successfully and 8% disagreed. Among the respondents who commented on the question, 2 acknowledged the programme itself helped identify leadership issues, 2 emphasised the overcoming of challenges was accomplished in practice, and by experience rather than by training, three argued the most difficult leadership challenges are not individual but institutional.

#### Box 1: Respondent's Comments on Leadership Challenges

Selected extracts from answers to Question 25: **Did the Aurora programme successfully address the leadership challenges you identified in your application form?**

*"A toxic work climate cannot be 'fixed' by anyone programme as it is the result of generations of poor governance, management, neoliberal thinking and male-privilege."*

*"There seems to be no match between leadership abilities and opportunities."*

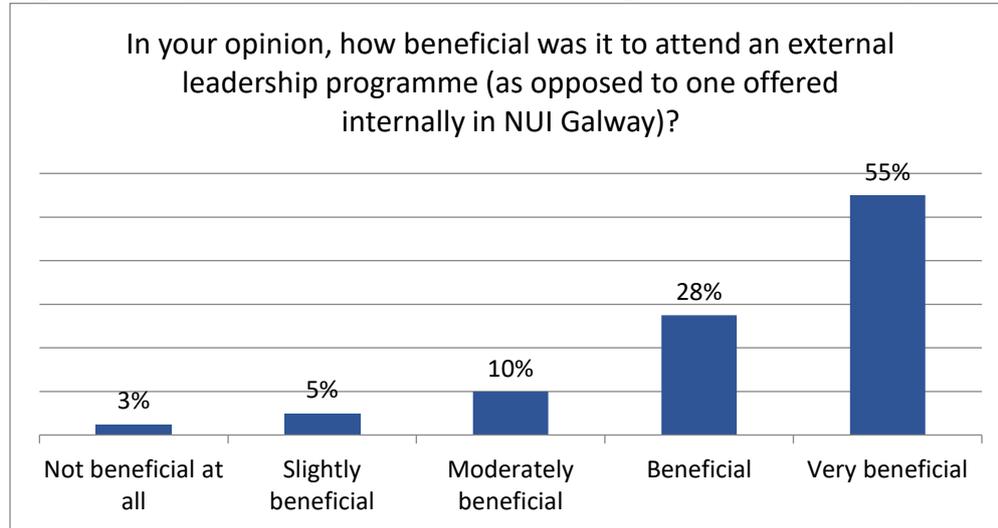
*"I keep being told I need strategic experience ... problem is that you don't get that experience at my grade."*

*"I convey my opinion effectively at decision-making meetings and in other fora. I productively advise early-career female colleagues. I have, however, learnt it is not possible to convince middle and senior staff of the importance of certain goals that will enhance the quality of NUIG and the need for actions and resources to achieve these goals. The 'Yes-man' mentality /behaviour is too deeply embedded and too richly rewarded at NUIG. I can also do nothing about the continued disproportional recruitment and promotion of male profs via nepotism."*

Respondents were asked how personally onerous in terms of time and commitment was travelling to Dublin to attend the programme. <5% declared it to be very onerous, 8% onerous, and 25% moderately onerous. Most respondents (66%) considered travelling slightly onerous or not onerous at all.

Most respondents (83%) considered either beneficial or very beneficial to attend an external leadership programme.

Figure 5: Respondents Evaluation of the Programme External Aspect



### 2.3 Leadership outcomes

Of the respondents, 87.5% stated they had pursued leadership opportunities since their participation in the Aurora programme, and <5% have not done so. Amongst those who did not, 15% declared a Lack of opportunity, 8% Lack of time and <5% indicated personal reasons. No respondent chose lack of confidence as a reason for not pursuing leadership opportunities.

Figure 6: Respondents Pursuement of Leadership Opportunities



Thirty-three respondents or 80.4% described successfully pursuing new roles and responsibilities related leadership opportunities, of whom 27 (65.8%) within the University.

When asked to share further leadership opportunities they expect to pursue in the future, 17 (41%) respondents mentioned concrete plans both within and outside the University.

### Box 2: Respondent's Comments on Future Challenges

Selected extracts from answers to Question 26: **Please share further leadership opportunities you plan to pursue in the future:**

*"My main challenge is to be successful in my research (and teaching) while exploring my leadership potential AND crucially pick up my children from the creche and reach a work-life balance. As I am expecting my second child in January as an academic, I envisage to prioritise research on my return. In the long term, I am interested in AS and in EDI in general and plan to take up a leadership role in this area if these arise".*

*"I think the programme is almost at saturation point, and those who have completed many years ago should have further leadership training offered. There are significant advances in the areas of emotional intelligence, adaptability, leading for change that are not covered on the programme that are needed".*

*"Like many other women I would be aware of at NUIG, I have no problem with taking on leadership positions, but I am done with pursuing any more of them within NUI Galway until I am actually promoted to Senior lecturer. I have performed various leadership roles over the years without that making any difference to how the University recognises me. Stop responsabilising women for their lack of success".*

The last question asked about any further comment respondents would like to add on the Aurora Programme. Twenty-five chose to fill the text box. Nineteen comments were complimentary, of which 5 explicitly thanked for the opportunity to participate, and 2 mentioned they would have resigned from NUI Galway if not for their participation. Two respondents stated it would be beneficial to have a follow on after the program.

Boxes 3 to 7, below, offer extracts of respondents' comments aggregated by theme.

### Box 3: Respondent's Complimentary Comments

Selected extracts from answers to Question 27: **Would you like to add any other comments on the Aurora Programme?**

*"I thoroughly enjoyed participating in this programme and gained a huge amount from it. It forced me to reflect on work-related issues; to explore and share issues with peers (and with myself) and be more proactive in future career planning. The mentoring programme was superb. It, unfortunately, came 10 years too late and I only wish we had this for all early-career colleagues."*

*"Aurora is a great programme, and we are lucky that so many from this University attend. It's an investment, and I am sure the University will benefit in the future once opportunities open up and are taken up by graduates of the programme."*

*"I think its impact was subtle - it shifted my internal perception of myself as a leader and of leadership as a desirable aspiration. I would like to see follow up 'booster' days to refresh what I learnt."*

*"The Aurora programme helped me transitioning to my new academic life while still ensuring my growth inherent to my work satisfaction."*

*"The expertise and experiences of the other women were amazing to hear and learn from. The programme must remain external to university spaces and include a diversity of staff - its the only way to feel like it is a learning opportunity and not a training exercise where you are monitored."*

#### Box 4: Respondent's Comments on Networking, Protected Time and Traveling

Selected extracts from answers to Question 27: **Would you like to add any other comments on the Aurora Programme?**

*"I'm not sure how much value the programme offers in terms of content. (...) The real value of the course to me was the discussions on the train, and the time it gave you to think about identity, purpose, leadership etc., which is not something we often have time for. I also found the mentoring excellent."*

*"I found the Aurora programme opened my eyes to the experiences of other women. (...) I bonded really well with the women in my group and we really helped each other through some difficult challenges."*

*"For me, the real benefit came from the expanded internal network and mentor relationship - these are benefits that could be applied to an internal Aurora-like programme which would expand the benefits of such a programme in a more cost- and time-effective way for a wider participation."*

*"I have childcare responsibilities but also care for an elderly person with a disability, and it was very difficult for me to manage the trips away. On the other hand, it was probably good to be off-campus and to be in a fresher space for thinking about things. It is also very hard to make proper time for things if they are on campus, as the pressure is always on to run back to the office to do something. The Dublin venue did, however, make for very long days and added to the logistical pressure. If NUIG is thinking of an alternative, something closer to home but still off campus would be better."*

#### Box 5: Respondent's Comments on Mentoring

Selected extracts from answers to Question 27: **Would you like to add any other comments on the Aurora Programme?**

*"The mentoring programme was superb."*

*"I also found the mentoring excellent."*

*"My mentor was great, and we still meet sometimes."*

*"Would have liked to have a mentor in place during the process rather than afterwards. Felt I could have integrated my learning better."*

*"I had also (I think) made it clear that I would be happy to meet with a potential mentor during my leave."*

*"Internally, the mentor element was a major downside to the programme, and unfortunately, I didn't benefit from this at all. the mentor assigned was not committed, and I'm not sure had understood the role assigned to them."*

*"I would suggest to also include external mentors as part in-house mentoring."*

## Box 6: Respondent's Complaint Comments

Selected extracts from answers to Question 27: **Would you like to add any other comments on the Aurora Programme?**

*"The timing was exclusively catering to the Dublin crowd. A mid-day to early evening seminar would have been much easier to organise for everybody outside Dublin. I would have liked to participate more after the programme to support new participants, but the timetable adjustments are no longer offered when the programme is over, so that it is difficult to free up time for a full-day event in a supporting role. I, therefore, would wish there were more local opportunities."*

*"Coming together in a big hotel meeting room and watch inspirational speakers who I could just as well watch on youtube giving TED talks, and talking to other people from different universities who work with completely different external conditions and challenges did not do anything for me. I am all for women getting together, and did enjoy internal women's events at NUIG, and embarked on the programme with enthusiasm. But after participating, I felt this was a completely pointless exercise; the role models were not really role models, they not much to look up to. Paying for an individualised career coach would have probably been cheaper and definitely more effective."*

## Box 7: Respondent's Comments on Institutional Issues

Selected extracts from answers to Question 27: **Would you like to add any other comments on the Aurora Programme?**

*"I think the programme is important for a number of reasons. First, it gave me the time to reflect and to think about my role in NUIG. (...) I remember being unexpectedly reduced to tears in one session (Another colleague from NUI G had to leave that session as she was so upset). Having the time to realise how unhappy I was, how miserable my job had become, how toxic this place was - also allowed me the time to re-envisage and re-imagine my role and what could make this position positive again."*

*"The lack of support from my School was disappointing - as I am research staff, there was a significant issue regarding them not wanting to support my travel to the programme. In the end, after much discussion they agreed to pay half - the other half I had to find elsewhere. (...) Very disingenuous considering they are currently working towards their Athena swan application - at the same time as putting actual barriers in front of women in fixed-term research contracts trying to build leadership skills...This ties into a larger issue of research staff not viewed as equal staff by many other staff - e.g. purposely not invited to staff social events where tech, admin and lecturing staff are, email lists (both school-level and university-level) that research staff consistently are left out of, other opportunities, e.g. relocation grants/triennial grants that research staff are not entitled to."*

*"I found the programme itself excellent. However, where the University is failing is in the follow-up. Once I had completed the programme, there was no opportunity to put the learnings into practice within the scope of my own role (...) Additionally, it is very difficult for staff who work part-time to progress; the percentage of staff on part-time hours reduce significantly as grades get higher. In summary, the Aurora programme is excellent, but the University seem to be failing in taking advantage of the learnings from it."*

## Annex 1: Survey Questionnaire

[Page Logic](#) [More Actions](#)



# AURORA

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### Aurora Survey

#### 1. Aurora Leadership Development Programme

**Dear Colleague,**  
Thank you for taking part in this survey to evaluate your experience as a former participant of the Aurora Leadership Development Programme. NUI Galway has supported women to participate on the programme since 2015 and at this stage we are seeking feedback to understand if, and to what extent your participation on the programme encouraged and/or supported you to pursue a leadership opportunity in the University.  
Your participation in this survey is entirely voluntary and all of the information provided by you is completely anonymous. Your responses cannot be traced back to you and the results will be presented in an aggregated format, apart from the use of selected qualitative comments which may be extracted from the completed questionnaires.

**Please complete this survey by 19th December.**

1. What is your age?

25 or below

26-35

36-45

46-55

56-65

66+

2. What is your Nationality?

3. How would you describe your ethnicity?

4. Are you a native English-speaker?

Yes

No

5. How would you describe your sexual orientation?

Bisexual

Heterosexual

Lesbian/gay woman

Other

Prefer not to say

6. Is your gender identity the same as the gender you were assigned at birth?

Yes

No

Prefer not to say

7. Do you consider yourself to have a disability?

Yes

No

Prefer not to say

8. How long have you worked at NUI Galway?

- Less than one year
- More than one year, fewer than five years
- More than five years, fewer than ten years
- More than ten years

9. On what sort of contract are you employed?

- Permanent
- Fixed term
- Fee-paid/hourly-paid

10. What is your working pattern?

- Full-time
- Part-time
- Other (term-time only or other flexible working arrangement)

11. What is your employment category in the University?

- Academic
- Support Services / Professional
- Research

12. Do you have caring responsibilities outside work? Please tick all that apply.

- Yes, I have childcare responsibilities
- Yes, I care for a disabled or ill person
- Yes, I care for an elderly person
- No

13. When did you participate in the Aurora Programme?

- 2014
- 2015
- 2016
- 2017
- 2018
- 2019

14. Has the Aurora Programme successfully responded to your leadership challenges?

- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to say

15. Please indicate the benefits you acquired by participating in the Aurora Programme (you may choose as many options as you feel apply to your experience):

- Increased self-confidence
- Expanded network
- Collaborative problem-solving skills
- A leadership identity
- Leadership behaviours, skills and knowledge
- Other (please specify)

16. Has the Aurora programme contributed in a positive way to your leadership progression?

- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to say

17. Considering your career goals, would you say your participation in the Aurora programme was:

- Not at all important
- Slightly important
- Moderately important
- Important
- Very important
- Comments

18. On a scale from 0 to 5 (0 being not important at all and 5 being very important), how important was the Aurora Programme in:

	1	2	3	4	5
Developing your Identity, Impact, & Voice	<input type="radio"/>				
Positioning yourself in terms of Powers & Politics	<input type="radio"/>				
Developing your Core Leadership Skills	<input type="radio"/>				
Developing your Adaptive Leadership Skills	<input type="radio"/>				

19. How would you rate the components of the Aurora Programme (1 = not useful, 5 = very useful)?

	1	2	3	4	5
Development Days	<input type="radio"/>				
Action learning set	<input type="radio"/>				
Self-directed learning	<input type="radio"/>				
In-house mentoring	<input type="radio"/>				

20. Personally, how onerous in terms of time and commitment was travelling to Dublin to attend the programme?

- Not onerous at all
- Slightly onerous
- Moderately onerous
- Onerous
- Very onerous

21. In your opinion, how beneficial was it to attend an external leadership programme (as opposed to one offered internally in NUI Galway)?

- Not beneficial at all
- Slightly beneficial
- Moderately beneficial
- Beneficial
- Very beneficial

Comments

22. Since your participation in the Aurora programme, did you pursue leadership opportunities?

- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to say
- Comments

23. If no, (you did not pursue any leadership opportunities since your participation in the Aurora Programme), why not?

- Not applicable
- Lack of opportunity
- Lack of confidence
- Lack of time
- I do not intend to pursue a leadership role anymore
- Other (please specify)

[Redacted text]

24. If yes, please tell us what leadership opportunity you pursued.

[Redacted text]

25. Did the Aurora programme successfully address the leadership challenges you identified in your application form?

- Yes
- No
- Partially
- Prefer not to say
- Comments

[Redacted text]

26. Please share further leadership opportunities you plan to pursue in the future:

[Redacted text]

27. Would you like to add any other comments on the Aurora Programme?

[Redacted text]