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# Department of Health and Social Care

## Independent evaluation of the Ignite pilot training programme

### Final report

June 2025

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## 1. Executive summary

The Ignite pilot training programme was commissioned by the Department of Health and Social Care following a review into commissioning capabilities in the adult social care sector in England. The programme aimed to strengthen senior commissioners' ability to address complex commissioning challenges and be an agent of change.

The programme launched in July 2024 and concluded in March 2025. It consisted of three in person core modules, and two online applied learning hubs as well as elective virtual masterclasses and spotlight sessions.

An independent evaluation of the programme was commissioned from the Institute of Public Care (IPC) at Oxford Brookes University, who analysed data provided by EY, the lead programme delivery organisation, and undertook surveys and interviews with programme participants, their line managers and Directors of Adult Social Services (DASSs). This evaluation report summarises the evaluators' findings, observations and insights into the success of the programme, and makes recommendations on what a longer-term version of the programme might look like.

### 1.1. Summary of findings

There was a high number of expressions of interest (196) for the programme, exceeding the maximum places (153), which were all filled. Programme participants worked in 122 local authorities covering the full geography of the country, although there was less participation from some London boroughs. The majority of participants were senior commissioners, suggesting an appetite for this type of training programme for such commissioning roles. However, a significant minority had more junior roles, which was not the intended audience for the programme and negatively impacted the success of the programme's aims and objectives.

Engagement in the programme appeared to be good throughout, with an average attendance rate of 80% across all components of the programme. However, engagement varied, and there was a slight reduction in engagement with the core modules as it progressed, which may be indicative of the programme offering less value to some participants.

Participants generally found the programme a worthwhile experience – with good quality content and delivery, focussing on core commissioning skills, behaviours and practice examples. However, a number of experienced commissioners on the programme did not feel the content was pitched correctly for senior commissioners. They felt that the programme did not offer them anything new nor allowed them the opportunity to unpick the “real world” strategic commissioning challenges they face.

Most participants responding to a post-programme survey administered by the programme deliverers, reported an increase in their commissioning knowledge, skills and confidence. However, the return rate of the post-programme survey, when compared to the pre-programme survey, was much lower and so it was not possible for evaluators to state with confidence that this was the experience of most participants. There were mixed views from participants' line managers and DASSs

as to whether the programme increased their knowledge, confidence and commissioning skills.

Areas of strength of the programme were:

- The benefit of being able to connect with and share experiences and practice with commissioning colleagues from other areas of the country was overwhelmingly the biggest benefit of the programme.
- The usefulness of having time and space away from the day-to-day hustle and bustle of their role, in order to reflect on their practice, was appreciated. In person sessions were frequently reported as being the preferred method of delivery.
- Being given access to, and guidance around, using the West Midlands ADASS data hub and other practical tools participants could take away and embed in their day-to-day practice was a benefit.

Less helpful aspects, or things that could be improved were:

- Programme content focussed on core commissioning skills, which did not enable exploration of the more complex issues facing senior commissioners such as working systemically with strategic partners in complex systems.
- The mix of participants in terms of seniority and experience level, at times, hindered strategic discussion and learning opportunities.
- The format of some sessions, particularly the online masterclasses, was not conducive to sharing learning, being too short to allow for discussion.
- The pre-recorded provider videos were not received well by some participants, who felt they were one-sided, demoralising for commissioners and did not reflect examples of local good relationships with providers.

There is limited evidence of the application of learning by programme participants, but there has only been a short time between programme end and final evaluation activities. A few participants were able to give limited examples of specific projects within their current role for which they had applied learning from the programme, although it was too soon to understand the impact of these activities. The majority of impact on commissioning practice was shaped by the networks and connections with other commissioners across the country.

Reflecting on the future of the programme, DASSs felt ongoing investment in a programme aimed at senior commissioning officers was important and would support succession planning and talent management for future leadership positions, such as assistant directors and directors of commissioning. Potential future financial investment by local authorities in such a programme would be dependent on getting the pitch of the programme right, as well as money being available to invest in training and development.

## 1.2. Conclusions and recommendations

Whilst delivered well, this pilot programme was not wholly successful as training for senior commissioning officers, those with leadership responsibilities, and those who are responsible for, or are interested in, strategic market shaping and commissioning

activities. There is little evidence to suggest the content and delivery strengthened senior commissioners' ability to address **complex commissioning challenges** and be an agent of change. Instead, it focussed on the core principles of good commissioning practice, which was of more value to less experienced or senior commissioning officers. This type of commissioning training is already available from established training providers.

There is unmet need for a development programme that offers senior commissioners professional recognition and regular opportunity to reflect on their practice and solve shared, complex challenges with similar colleagues across the country.

IPC offers four recommendations:

1. Carefully consider the target audience for any future commissioning training. This will allow a programme(s) to be designed more precisely around their specific development needs. For example, a programme could be for aspiring senior commissioning officers, or it could be a programme that targets people already in senior roles to develop their strategic leadership skills within commissioning.
2. Consider where future programme(s) sit with existing commissioning training available in England. Many local authority areas are not aware of existing accredited commissioning training, which may have resulted in more junior participants being nominated rather than focussing on the more senior roles as intended. A better understanding of current commissioning training will help the Department to be more explicit about how the programme(s) differs from existing offers.
3. If the programme is continued, adopt a different delivery approach. Rather than a 'traditional' style of presentations on theory and/or models of practice, followed by scenario-based exercises, we suggest designing events to bring participants together to discuss a particular strategic commissioning priority or challenge. These in-person training sessions should be facilitated by a skilled individual or organisation with experience of commissioning adult social care.
4. Continue to invest to support networking by commissioners across the country. This could include the organisation and facilitation of ongoing in-person events, such as workshops or meetings for participants of the pilot programme, as well as any potential future cohorts.

## 2. Introduction

### 2.1. The Ignite pilot training programme

In December 2021, the UK Government published the [People at the Heart of Care: adult social care reform white paper](#), which set out an ambition for local authority market shaping and commissioning focussing on partnership working, building on existing community assets and understanding what people need from care.

A review into the commissioning capabilities in the sector identified some good practice across England, but this was seen as inconsistent. This review identified a significant gap in strategic commissioning skills, including leadership, and abilities to respond flexibly and innovatively to individual needs and local contexts.

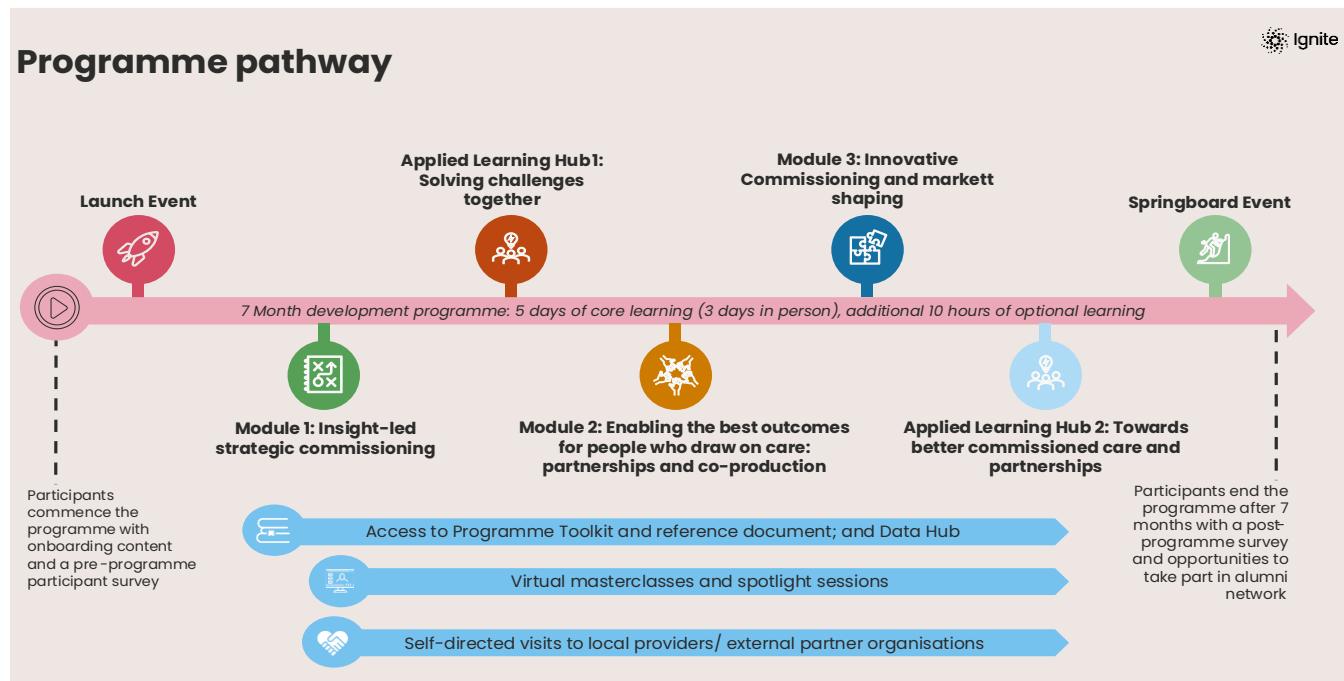
In a subsequent policy paper [\(Next steps to put People at the Heart of Care, 2023\)](#) the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) committed to delivering a package of support to strengthen commissioners' use of strategic, preventative and outcomes-based market shaping approaches. Central to this is the delivery of the Ignite pilot training programme that aimed to:

- Provide senior commissioners with the space and understanding to address complex commissioning challenges, today and for the future.
- Enhance capability needed to be strategic in commissioning approaches and market shaping activities.
- Provide insights into what it takes to redesign care services and commissioning models and what it takes to form strategic partnerships within complex systems.
- Share different strategies and approaches to commissioning with the aim of having a positive impact on the lives of those who draw on care and support.
- Strengthen advocacy and leadership skills needed to be an agent of change within complex systems.
- Connect senior commissioners across the country to share insights, experiences and provide peer support in addressing common challenges and opportunities.

The programme was designed and delivered by EY in partnership with Social Care Institute of Excellence (SCIE) and the West Midlands Association of Directors of Adult Social Services (ADASS), bringing together experts within the field of adult social care and commissioning – including access to adult social care intelligence and databases, ability to link into relevant networks for engagement and co-design, and strong links to social care policy and practice.

153 senior local authority adult social care commissioners in England took part in the programme between July 2024 and March 2025.

The diagram below shows the shape of the programme and its key components:

**Figure 1: Programme pathway**

## 2.2. Independent evaluation

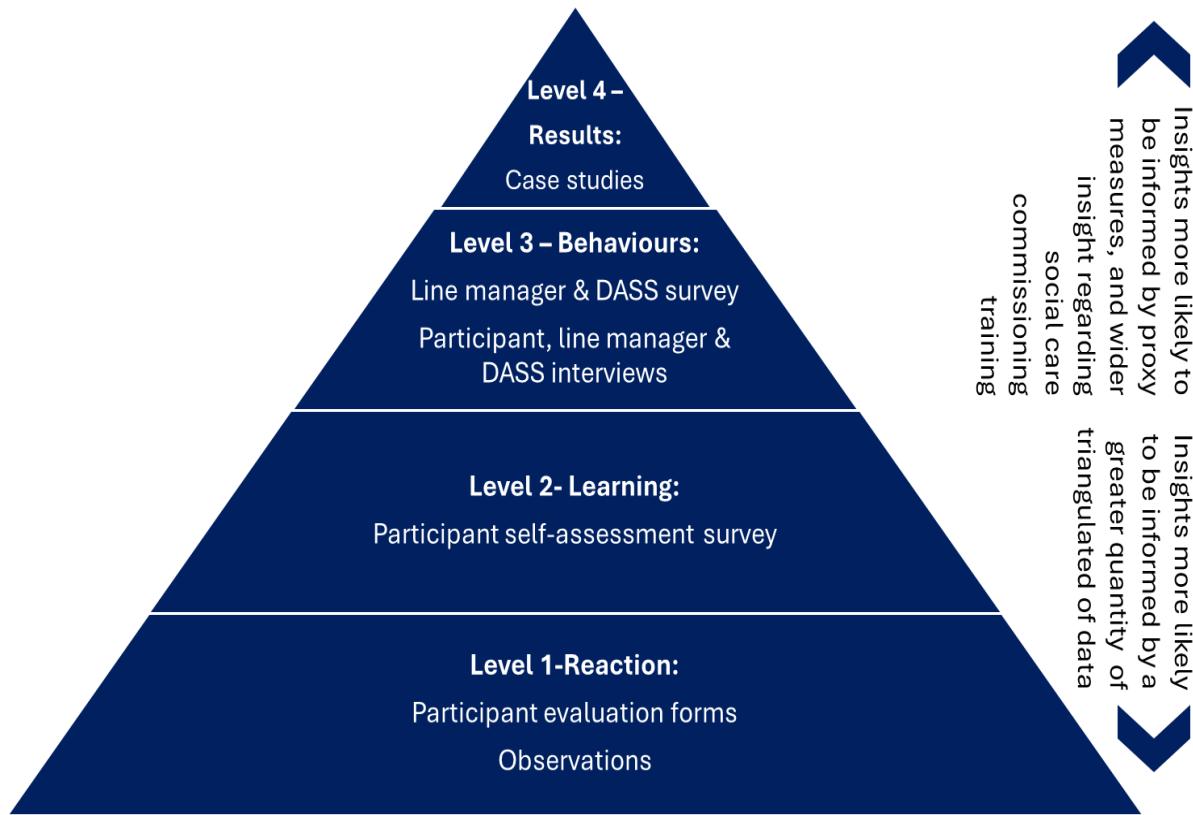
The DHSC commissioned the Institute of Public Care (IPC) at Oxford Brookes University to carry out an independent evaluation of the programme. The aims of the evaluation are to:

- Understand the quality of the programme and its content and assess how effective the training has been in setting participants up to be successful in meeting the programme objectives. This includes understanding what processes contributed to the programme's successful elements as well as any areas for improvement.
- Assess the impact the training has had on participants and whether the programme reflects and meets the needs of others in the sector, as well as people who draw upon care and their families.
- Analyse the levels of local authority interest, take up of commissioners on the programme, and line manager support for participants who applied and/or enrolled. This should help to understand demand for the training as well as how effective the advertising and branding for the programme has been.
- Collect examples of local practice shared through the programme, if possible.
- Highlight where participants and/or their line managers or Directors of Adult Social Services (DASS) report improvements to commissioning practice as a result of the training. The evaluation may be able to point to potential impacts that might be seen if the programme were to be delivered over a longer period.
- Inform DHSC's future policy thinking around continuation of the programme and potential scale up. The evaluation should make recommendations on what a longer-term version of the programme should look like, considering what worked about the pilot and identifying where improvements could be made.

The purpose of this final evaluation report is to summarise the findings, observations and insights into the success of the programme and to make recommendations for improvements.

The evaluation approach drew on the Kirkpatrick Model<sup>1</sup> of learning programme evaluation.

**Figure 2: Kirkpatrick Model of learning programme evaluation (adapted by IPC)**



Evaluation activities were organised around the four levels of:

1. **Reaction:** observation of sessions and analysis of post session feedback measured levels of engagement and participants' initial reactions.
2. **Learning:** pre and post self-assessment survey explored how the training developed participants skills, knowledge and confidence.
3. **Behaviours:** surveys and interviews with participants, line managers and DASSs captured noticeable changes in activities, approach or behaviours which could be attributed to the programme. This will help to build a 360 understanding of the change that participants experienced and delivered.
4. **Results:** case studies to capture the story of learning and how it is being implemented.

<sup>1</sup> Kirkpatrick (2016) Four Levels of Training Evaluation. Association for Talent Development.

### 2.2.1. Evaluation activities conducted

Initially, IPC conducted an inception stage of the independent evaluation of the programme which included the following activities:

- A systematic review of the rationale and aim of the programme – using information received from the delivery partner, EY, that was collated during their 'discovery' phase, prior to designing the programme.
- Completion of a theory of change (appendix A) and evaluation framework (appendix B) for IPC to use as the basis of the evaluation.
- A detailed evaluation plan, which outlined the activities IPC would complete to fulfil the questions posed in the evaluation framework (appendix C).

Between July 2024 and March 2025, the following evaluation activities were completed:

- Analysis of participants' pre-programme and post-programme self-assessments.
- Observation of programme sessions by the evaluation team (n=14).
- Analysis of participants' post session feedback forms (n=508).
- Analysis of EY bi-monthly dashboard of programme data, including geographic spread of participants, attendance rates, and analysis of reasons for any local authority areas not engaged with the programme, where given.
- Review of the usage of the West Midlands ADASS Data Hub between July and December 2024<sup>2</sup>
- Analysis of responses to an independent survey sent to stakeholders involved in designing and delivering the programme, e.g. national care provider representative organisations, to understand their experiences of being involved with Ignite.
- Analysis of responses from programme participants to an independent midpoint survey.
- Analysis of responses to an independent post-programme survey sent to the line manager and DASS of participants who completed the programme.
- Key themes collated from post-programme one-to-one interviews with programme participants, their line managers and DASSs in relation to experiences and benefits of the programme.
- Where possible, the collection of case study examples demonstrating where the programme has influenced a change in commissioning practice or skill set.

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<sup>2</sup> Timeframe of the data hub usage shared with IPC

### 3. Interest and engagement in the programme (Level 1: Reaction)

#### 3.1. Number engaged with the programme

##### **Evaluation question: What has been the level of interest in the programme?**

Interest in the programme can be explored by looking at the numbers of participants who expressed interest in the programme and then went on to sign up to it. A maximum of 153 spaces were available for senior commissioners to join the programme between July 2024 and March 2025.

- The DASS of every local authority area in England with adult social care responsibilities was contacted and asked to nominate a member of staff to join the pilot programme. The programme was also promoted at the ADASS Spring Seminar.
- IPC understands there was initially an option for senior commissioning officers to apply in the absence of a DASS nomination, however, all participants on the programme were supported by a DASS nomination.
- In total, 196 commissioners were nominated and went on to express interest in the programme by completing the participant application form.
- Subsequently, a total of 153 participants were invited and went on to sign up to the programme. As such, the programme was fully subscribed, indicating a high level of interest in the pilot.

#### 3.2. Geography of the participants

In total, 122 different local authorities had at least one person accepted onto the programme. This represents 80% of all councils in England with adult social care responsibilities (122/153). 20% (31/153) of the participants accepted onto the programme had more than one colleague from their organisation accepted.

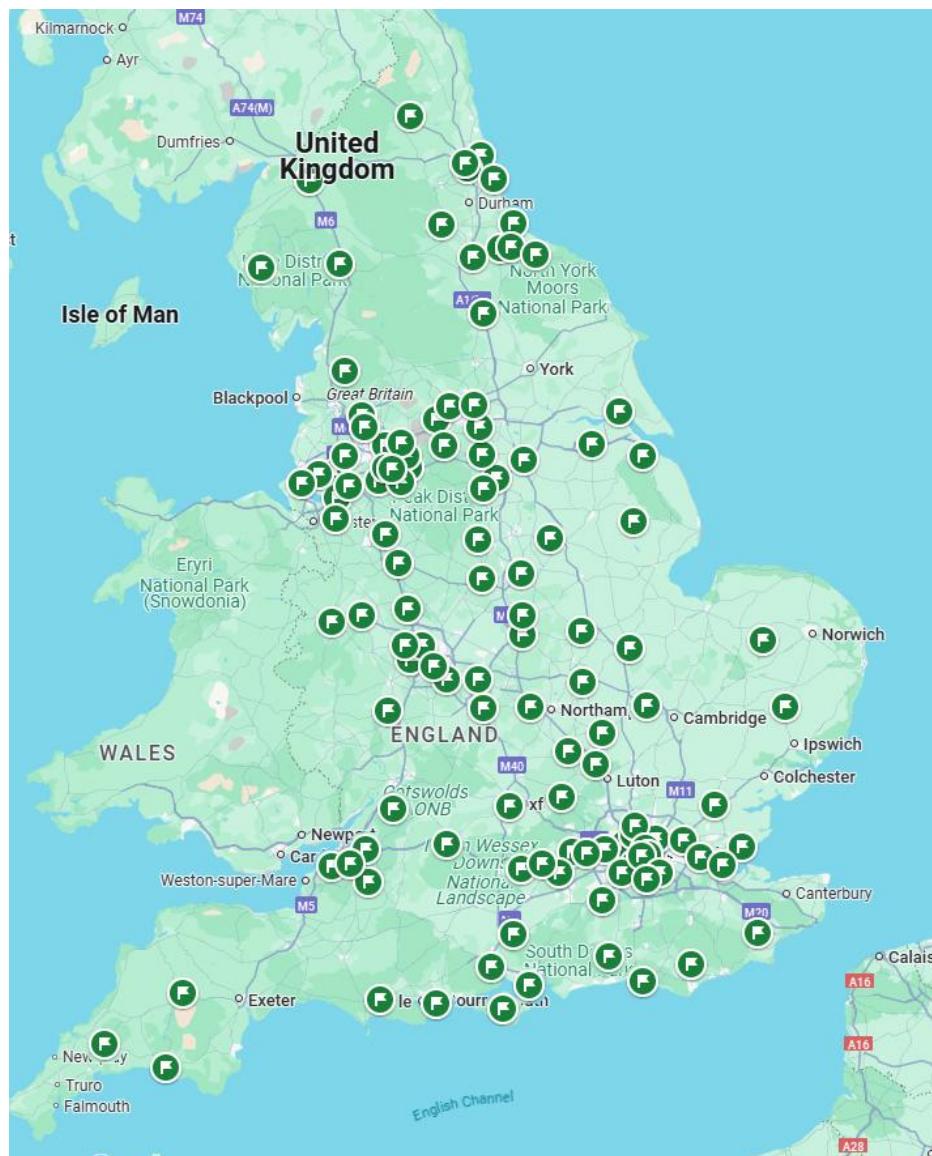
The reasons why some areas were offered more than one place included:

- Venue Selection i.e. ensuring each location of delivery (Manchester, Birmingham, London and Bristol) had a sufficient number of participants attending to bring value to all cohorts.
- Ensuring, as much as possible a fair regional coverage on the programme.
- Ensuring, as much as possible a balance of local authority areas classified as mainly or largely rural (50-80% or more of the population resides in rural areas), urban with significant rurality (between 26% and 49% of the population resides in rural areas) or defined as an urban city or town.

IPC understand that it was agreed for venue selection was prioritised when finalising the participant list for the programme.

As illustrated by the map below, there is a reasonable geographical spread across England for the local authorities engaging in the programme.

**Figure 3: Map showing the geographical spread of local authorities engaging with the programme**



### 3.2.1. Areas that did not engage in the programme

According to the information shared with IPC, 29 local authority areas did not respond to the invitation to nominate a senior commissioning colleague to attend the programme. Geographically, this non-engagement was fairly evenly spread across the country, with a slight concentration in the south as illustrated by the map below. It is also worth noting 14 out of the 33 (42%) London Boroughs did not engage.

**Figure 4: Map showing the geographical spread of local authorities who did not engage with the programme**



The DASSs for each of these areas were contacted via email by IPC to understand the reasons for non-engagement with the programme. Responses received (n=5) are summarised below:

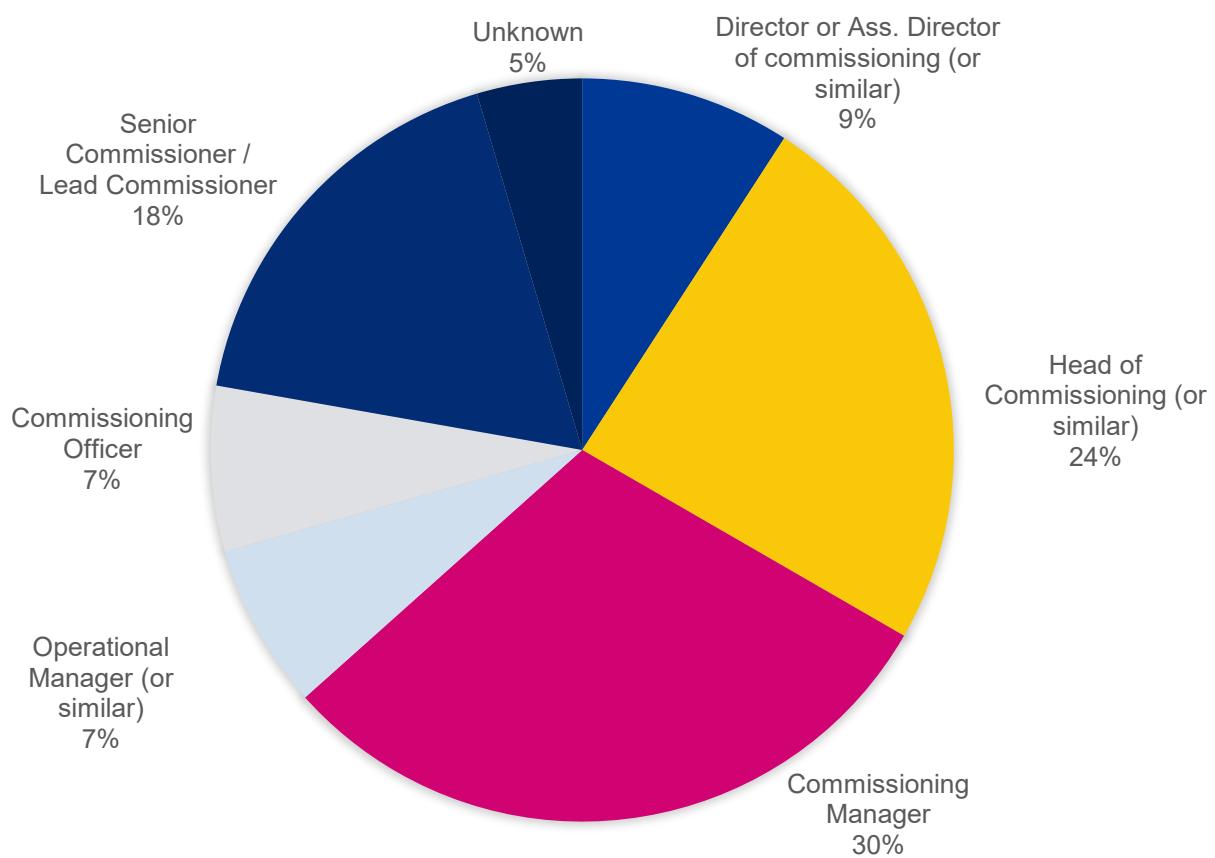
- An experienced commissioning function was in operation and it was not made clear how the programme would add any value to the organisation.
- Capacity in the commissioning function was low at the time when applications and nominations were required, and the programme was a significant commitment.
- Turnover and sickness in the team (including DASS) and/or restructure of the commissioning functions made nominating an appropriate colleague challenging.

### 3.3. Types of commissioning roles engaged with the programme

The programme was aimed at senior commissioners, offering the opportunity for colleagues to work together to address complex commissioning challenges, today and for the future (see theory of change model Appendix A).

Evaluators analysed participants' roles to see if the intended audience had been achieved. Whilst it is not simple to categorise every participant - as each local authority will have different job titles for similar roles - this was done based on our knowledge of commissioning functions and teams. The below pie chart demonstrates the proportion of commissioning roles engaging with the programme.

**Graph 1: Commissioning roles engaged in the programme**



- Nearly two thirds (63%) of programme participants have a role that can be categorised as a Director or Assistant Director of commissioning, Head of Commissioning or a Commissioning Manager. This represents the majority of the participants and is in line, IPC believes, with the intended target audience for the programme.
- 18% of the participants are either senior commissioning officers, or commissioning officers with a lead portfolio, such as home care or adults with learning disabilities. Such roles also could be well-aligned with the intended audience of the training pilot.

- A minority (7%) of participants are Operational Managers or equivalent – an example of these types of roles are Service Manager or Operational Manager. These participants may have a responsibility for commissioning, alongside other responsibilities.
- Another 7% of participants are commissioning officers.
- A few (5%) participants' job titles were unknown (usually left blank in the information shared with the evaluators).

Therefore, whilst it appears that, in the main, the targeted audience of the programme has been achieved, there is a proportion of participants that appear to be in relatively junior roles or potentially not within strategic or leadership positions, which was not the intention of this programme. The target audience for this pilot was those in more senior positions seeking to develop their strategic commissioning and leadership skills. As DASSs were responsible for nominating colleagues to attend the programme, this may suggest additional information or support may have been required to ensure colleagues with the intended breadth of commissioning responsibility and experience were nominated, or additional screening on the roles and responsibilities of those nominated may have been required by the programme delivery team.

## 4. Stakeholder engagement in the design and delivery of the programme (Level 1: Reaction)

**Evaluation question: To what extent do stakeholders involved in co-designing the training programme feel they were listened to, and their views were incorporated into the final design of the programme?**

Key stakeholders were identified and engaged with as the Ignite programme was being designed. This included the following activities:

- 9 interviews completed with DASSs or Directors of Commissioning;
- 9 focus groups completed with 53 commissioners;
- 8 interviews with provider membership bodies and 4 providers;
- 6 interviews with charities / third sector organisations;
- 52 people engaged through user-centred research across homecare, residential care, day care, reablement services, mobility and mental health services, housing and social prescribing.

As such, evaluators felt it was important to understand these stakeholder's experiences of being involved in the design of the programme.

IPC were given the contact details of the provider organisation stakeholders involved in the above activities, and invited them to complete a short survey and follow up interview to understand their experiences of being involved with the programme,

including whether they felt their inputs were listened to, and that they were able to have an influence on the content of the programme.

Two care provider membership bodies responded to this survey, who advised they had been involved in both the design and delivery of the programme. Both agreed that being involved in the design and delivery of the programme was a worthwhile experience. However, there were differences of opinion by the respondents as to whether their views and ideas were listened to during the design of the programme – with one respondent strongly agreeing they were, but the other stating they were not sure. Similarly, one respondent felt they had been engaged at the right time to influence the design of the programme, but the other strongly disagreed that this was the case, and this was re-iterated by the one provider body that accepted the invitation to be interviewed:

*“In the end, we were quite disappointed. It felt like yet another programme commissioned by the Department to the usual suspects. Whilst the programme was very slick, it was not an effective product.”*

The stakeholder interviewed felt they had to fight to bring the care provider voice to the programme - “we had to use the powers of persuasion”. Whilst this organisation felt there were intentions to involve the voice of the provider at the start of the design process, they felt the end result was provider organisations only being a small part of the delivery e.g. one masterclass and pre-recorded videos in module two.

*“Strikes me as pointless that there wasn’t a provider angle throughout each module – as we are the end customer of a commissioning process. In the end, we felt a bit side-lined.”*

This stakeholder felt a future programme needs to consider how you involve care providers as partners in the design and delivery of such a programme much more carefully, including ensuring equal partnerships and decision-making power, continuing to pay care provider organisations to be involved, and demonstrating meaningful collaboration with care organisations from the design point to its delivery.

## 5. Programme delivery and attendance rates (Level 1: Reaction)

**Evaluation question: What has been the level of engagement in the programme?**

### 5.1. Delivery summary

The Ignite programme launched in July 2024, and delivered the following sessions up to March 2025.

1. **Two launch events** – hosted online for two hours
2. **Three in-person core modules** - these are the mandatory modules of the programme that were delivered in person, across eight cohorts and four locations – Bristol, Manchester, London and Birmingham.
  - Module 1 - Insight-led strategic commissioning
  - Module 2 – Partnerships and co-production
  - Module 3 – Innovative commissioning and market shaping
3. **Eight elective masterclasses** – hosted online for one hour. Participants were required to attend 4 out of the 8 masterclasses, and 'Data literacy and analysis' was a mandatory session. The topics delivered were:
  1. Data literacy and analysis
  2. Equity, diversity and inclusion
  3. Co-production
  4. Provider relationships
  5. Asset based commissioning
  6. Workforce planning
  7. Innovation
  8. Joint commissioning
4. **Five spotlight sessions** on good practice examples – hosted online for one hour. The topics delivered were:
  1. Community-led schemes
  2. Neighbourhood-based care
  3. Prevention-based commissioning
  4. Innovative contracting
  5. Leveraging technology for strategic commissioning practices
5. **Two applied learning hubs** - 24 groups of participants attended two peer-led applied learning hubs– hosted online for two hours, supported by an independent facilitator.
6. **Two springboard events** – to mark the end of the programme. These were hosted online for two hours.

## 5.2. Attendance rates (Level 1: Reaction)

The below tables illustrate engagement with the programme by showing the number of participants who signed up (indicating interest) versus attended and attendance rate (indicating engagement) the various programme sessions.

**Table 1: Session attendance rates**

Session	Number Signed up	Number attended	% attendance rate
Launch event	153	147	96%
Module 1 (Cohort London 1)	18	18	100%
Module 1 (Cohort London 2)	16	15	94%
Module 1 (Cohort London 3)	21	20	94%
Module 1 (Cohort Birmingham 1)	17	17	100%
Module 1 (Cohort Birmingham 2)	21	20	95%
Module 1 (Cohort Manchester 1)	19	19	100%
Module 1 (Cohort Manchester 2)	21	18	86%
Module 1 (Cohort Bristol)	20	18	90%
Module 2 (Cohort London 1)	16	15	94%
Module 2 (Cohort London 2)	15	13	87%
Module 2 (Cohort London 3)	22	16	73%
Module 2 (Cohort Birmingham 1)	18	11	61%
Module 2 (Cohort Birmingham 2)	21	18	86%
Module 2 (Cohort Manchester 1)	19	16	84%
Module 2 (Cohort Manchester 2)	22	21	95%
Module 2 (Cohort Bristol)	21	16	76%
Module 3 (Cohort London 1)	16	12	75%
Module 3 (Cohort London 2)	16	14	88%
Module 3 (Cohort London 3)	17	13	76%

Session	Number Signed up	Number attended	% attendance rate
Module 3 (Cohort Birmingham 1)	19	16	<b>84%</b>
Module 3 (Cohort Birmingham 2)	22	16	<b>73%</b>
Module 3 (Cohort Manchester 1)	21	17	<b>81%</b>
Module 3 (Cohort Manchester 2)	21	16	<b>76%</b>
Module 3 (Cohort Bristol)	21	15	<b>71%</b>

**Table 2: Masterclass attendance rates**

Masterclasses	Number Expected	Number attended	% attendance rate
Data Analysis Masterclass 1 (06/08/24)	63	63	<b>100%</b>
Data Analysis Masterclass 2 (02/09/24)	90	76	<b>84%</b>
Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (19/09/24)	104	95	<b>91%</b>
Co-production (02/10/24)	104	99	<b>95%</b>
Provider relationships (16/10/24)	95	108	<b>114%</b>
Asset-based commissioning (26/11/24)	143	100	<b>70%</b>
Workforce planning (16/01/25)	137	79	<b>58%</b>
Innovation (05/02/25)	143	113	<b>79%</b>
Joint Commissioning (26/02/25)	87	94	<b>108%</b>

**Table 3: Spotlights attendance rates**

Spotlights	Number Expected	Number attended	% attendance rate
Community-led schemes (18/09/24)	153	107	<b>70%</b>
Neighbourhood based care (22/10/24)	153	103	<b>69%</b>
Prevention-based commissioning (27/11/24)	153	91	<b>59%</b>
Innovative contracting (14/01/25)	153	111	<b>73%</b>
Leveraging technology for strategic commissioning practices (25/02/25)	152	83	<b>54%</b>

**Table 4: Applied Learning Hubs attendance rates**

Applied Learning Hubs	Number Expected	Number attended	% attendance rate
Applied Learning Hub 1 (Sept/ Oct 24)	153	132	<b>86%</b>
Applied Learning Hub 2 (Dec 24 / Jan 25)	153	122	<b>80%</b>

**Table 5: Springboard Sessions attendance rates**

Springboard Sessions	Number Expected	Number attended	% attendance rate
Springboard session 1 (Cohorts 1-4; 27/02/25)	66	45	<b>68%</b>
Springboard session 2 (Cohorts 5-8; 20/03/25)	97	72	<b>74%</b>

The average attendance rate is 80% across the programme which is fairly positive in terms of engagement. However, there was a reduction in engagement with the programme as it progressed, particularly evidenced within the mandatory core modules for the course with Module 1 having a 95% average attendance rate, Module 2 82%, and the final Module, 78% attendance rate across the eight cohorts. This suggests that the protected time required to attend these sessions became less important or less of a priority to some participants as the programme advanced, which may be indicative of the programme offering less value to some participants.

Attendance rates for the elective masterclasses are positive, at an average of 89%. However, the attendance rates at the masterclasses appeared to reduce as the programme progressed, with the exception of the very last masterclass on joint commissioning, where more than expected attended (94/153 participants in total), suggesting this was a topic of particular interest to the participants.

The applied learning hubs were well attended with over 80% of participants partaking in both of these sessions. 21 participants did not attend the first applied learning hub, and 31 did not attend the second applied learning hub. IPC understand anyone who missed the applied learning hubs were offered to join other groups. Reasons for non-attendance included illness, caring responsibilities, annual leave, and competing work priorities.

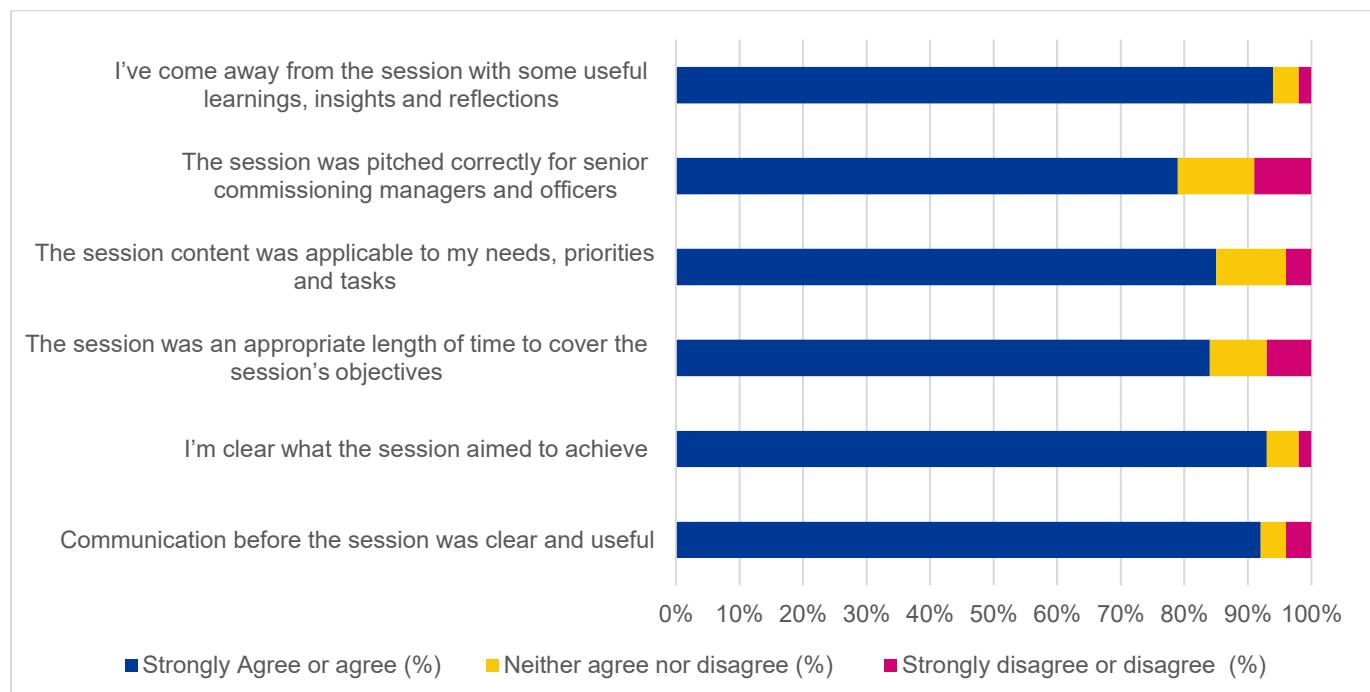
The spotlight sessions had a below average attendance rate when compared to the other sessions), of around 65%. Finally, the springboard events had an average attendance rate of 71%.

## 6. Participant evaluations (Level 1: Reaction)

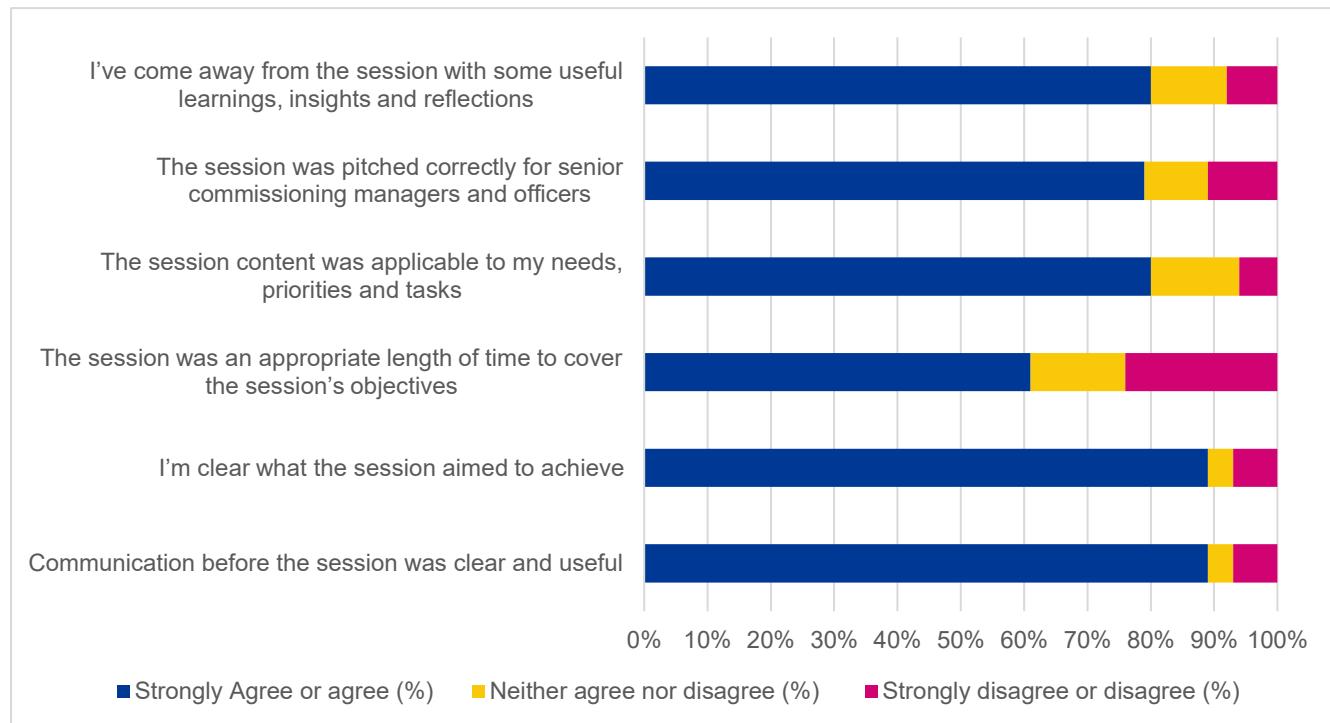
**Evaluation question: To what extent do participants feel that the programme has been a valuable experience?**

The graphs below summarise the feedback received about programme delivery via the evaluation forms sent to participants by EY shortly after attending the sessions. As a summary, the tables focus on the overarching 'reaction' questions asked by the evaluation forms across the three types of sessions – the core modules, masterclasses and the spotlights. Feedback was not requested following the applied learning hubs.

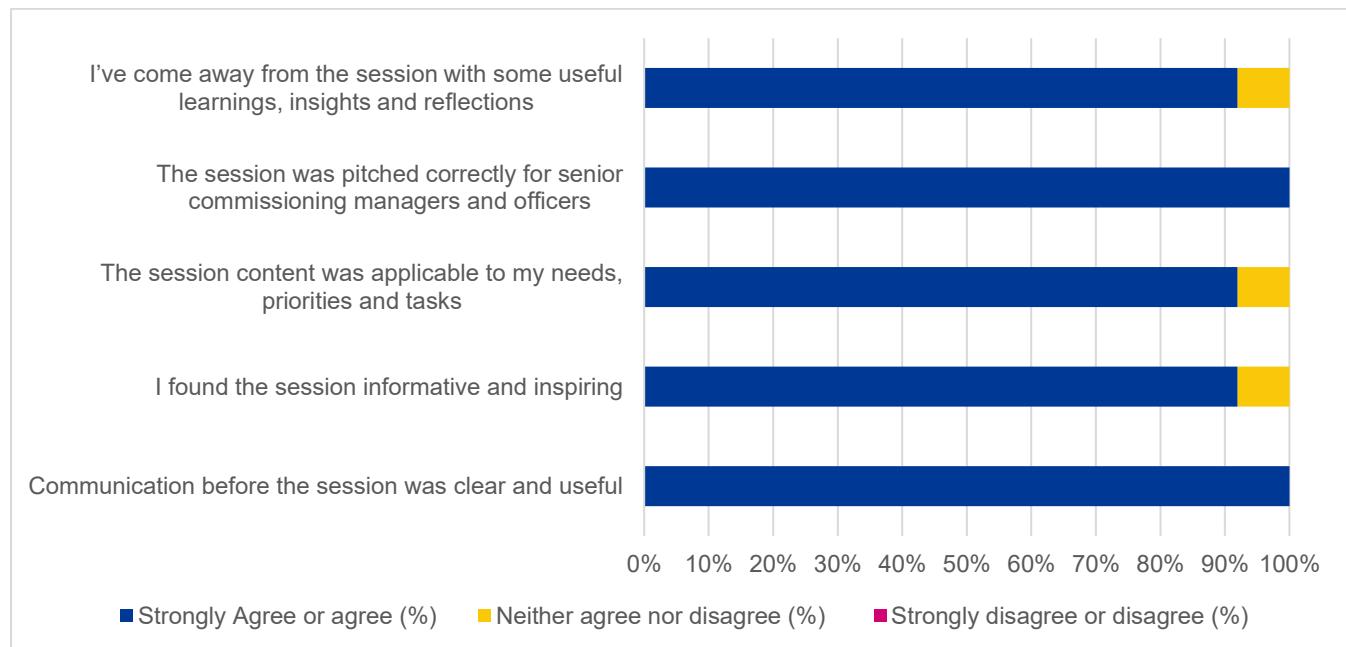
**Graph 2: Feedback received about all core modules (N=267) - 68% evaluation form return rate**



**Graph 3: Feedback received about all elective masterclasses (N=122) - 15% evaluation form return rate**



**Graph 4: Feedback received about all spotlight sessions (N=13) - 3% evaluation form return rate**



This feedback suggests that the participants who completed the evaluation forms generally responded positively to the programme. Although in the minority, 15% of participants reported being unsure if the core modules were successfully pitched at the target audience of senior commissioning managers or officers. In addition, 35%

of respondents did not agree that the masterclasses had been of an appropriate length to cover the session's objectives.

It should be noted that the return rate for the evaluation forms across the programme were less than optimal (29% return rate across the whole programme) and thus it is difficult to make any firm conclusions about the overall experiences of the programme across all participants. The core modules had the highest return rate of evaluation forms at 68%. This reflects IPC's experience that participants are more likely to engage with evaluation forms when requested to complete them within in-person sessions, and this may be something to consider in terms of monitoring the reactions of any future programmes.

## 6.1. Feedback themes

This section provides a summary of the key feedback themes provided by participants via the completed EY evaluation forms.

### 6.1.1. Core modules

#### 6.1.1.1. Benefits and key takeaways from the sessions

A commonly reported benefit of the in-person modules is the ability to meet other commissioning colleagues from outside their region and network with each other. This includes working through practical exercises together, debating solutions to common challenges, and hearing and learning from others' experiences.

Several respondents also appreciated the introduction to practical tools that they are able to use in their practice going forward. For example, the [data hub](#) (see section 10 for more details), consideration and advice on being more strategic, Charles Green's Trust Equation and [de Bono's 6 hat exercise](#) (a thinking methodology that supports participants to consider a commissioning challenge from different perspectives or via different approaches, whilst wearing 'different hats').

Participants also highlighted the benefits of being out of the workplace or office, and being given protected time to think and reflect on their practice.

In addition, the style, skills and knowledge of the facilitators and trainers were praised by many participants, and there was some recognition by participants that feedback from previous modules had been responded to.

#### 6.1.1.2. Suggestions for improvements or changes

Several participants stated that more time to hear and discuss real life experiences or examples of good practice using the expertise in the room would have been beneficial. Some reported that the sessions focussed more on theory and they would have liked more opportunity to work through the realities and challenges of these topics and work together to find practical solutions.

Across all core modules, some respondents questioned if the sessions had been pitched to senior commissioners, as per the aims of the programme. Interestingly,

there was a mixture of responses regarding this with some participants reporting the modules to be too complex, but for others it was too basic. This brings into question whether the target audience of the programme (i.e., senior roles, with leadership responsibilities and involved in, or at least interested in, more strategic commissioning responsibilities) has been adequately advertised and achieved. In particular, for module 3, there was some shared feedback that the module should have been further focussed on systematic innovation and/or transformation, rather than only focussing on a service or function level (e.g., day services).

In particular, for module 2, there was a varied reaction to the pre-recorded videos from a provider perspective. Some participants stated they enjoyed listening to these videos and hearing a national care provider's experience and/or point of view, whereas others did not find these videos helpful, constructive or wholly representative of the different types of provider organisations they work with. It was challenged by one learner that the questions asked to the providers by the programme designers were negatively framed and created an "us and them" culture within their responses. Another respondent mentioned it felt like a "bashing" of commissioners, and did not land well with the participants in the room. It was suggested this could be improved by including more balanced videos which highlight good practice between commissioners and providers, as well as the negative experiences.

There was also some feedback that the voices of people with experience of adult social care could be included more in these modules.

Finally, there was some shared feedback regarding the timings of the modules – including the finish time being too late (in particular for those who need to travel), and that energy levels in the room appeared to reduce as the day went on. In addition, a request was made for there to be more protected time for the breakout discussions and networking.

## 6.1.2. Masterclasses

### 6.1.2.1. Benefits and key takeaways from the sessions

Respondents reported that hearing from experts by experience and/or panel experts was positively received throughout the masterclasses, offering a fresh and helpful perspective on the commissioning topics / theory, as well as providing an example of its practical application.

Some respondents committed to doing things differently following the sessions, such as accessing the data hub and changing their approach to working with providers as strategic partners.

Some participants reported enjoying and benefiting from the "bitesize" and "swift" masterclass sessions. Whilst opinions on this varied, a small number of respondents did appreciate the online nature of these sessions.

One respondent stated that the use of Slido was helpful in the masterclasses to hear other colleague's thoughts and views.

### 6.1.2.2. Suggestions for improvements or changes

There were a couple of suggestions for a more practical approach to the masterclasses, including more opportunity for breakout sessions to share each other's experiences regarding the particular topic or bringing the topic to life further with a real-life example of good practice. Others reported that whilst the examples offered in masterclasses were interesting, they weighed too heavily on the theory of the practice, rather than allowing a detailed conversation / debate into the 'how', including advice regarding implementing a new way of working.

In addition to the 'how', others commented that the 'so what?' was missing within some of the masterclasses, i.e. demonstrating the impact and outcomes of what has been achieved for local people and communities as a result of a particular commissioning practice or innovation.

The length and format of the masterclasses were queried by respondents, including whether one hour is sufficient time to deliver a masterclass on a particular subject, and facilitate a Q&A panel with the speakers. There was feedback that not enough time was protected or given to the Q&A element of the masterclasses and reducing the presentation time to increase the discussion / Q&A time would be more beneficial for the audience. Alternatively, others have suggested if the format continues as a webinar approach (i.e. mainly a presentation or talk with little interaction with the participants on the video call), a recording of these sessions for people to access when they need it / want it would be preferable.

Finally, some respondents felt that additional recognition of the current realities of the commissioning environment may strengthen these sessions e.g. where finances are being stretched and not every local authority can afford the support of expert organisations to support them in innovation and practice.

### 6.1.3. Spotlights

#### 6.1.3.1. Benefits and key takeaways from the sessions

Similarly to the masterclasses, the small number of respondents who returned an evaluation form (n=13) highlighted they particularly benefited from hearing from speakers with lived experiences and a practical case study of good practice.

Some of the respondents made commitments to share their learnings and reflections with their wider teams and consider how these sessions can inform their practice going forward.

#### 6.1.3.2. Suggestions for improvements or changes

A couple of respondents stated that the spotlights would be improved if the case studies presented were more varied, for example, more than one community-based project being showcased, as well as consideration of the topics for wider commissioning responsibilities e.g. supported living as well as home care.

In addition, others reported that they would have liked more time / opportunity for discussion with their peers about the ideas / case studies offered to them, as well as more information about the impact of the spotlights e.g. cost avoidance, and outcomes on individuals, the wider population and system.

#### 6.1.4. Applied learning hubs

As mentioned above, participants were not asked to evaluate the applied learning hubs. However, the facilitators of these sessions provided the following reflections on this part of the programme:

- It was felt this part of the programme worked well with participants benefitting and enjoying the opportunity to reflect, network, learn and support each other in a psychologically safe environment.
- Recognition that the action learning methodology is a discipline, and some participants needed additional support to engage in this way. Some facilitators allowed 'advice mode' to continue, if they felt the group was not ready for the coaching approach. IPC agree that it can take time for groups to form, and the skills of listening and coaching to become more natural. As such, more than two of these sessions may be beneficial for a future programme, to allow these skills to develop.
- Group dynamics, including different skills, experiences, and roles in the room was particularly noticeable in this part of the programme, according to the facilitators – at times at the expense of the intention of applied learning.

*"The group reflected that local authorities in general can have a blame culture due to high public scrutiny and criticism and be competitive in between them. Hence, it is a massive relief to have a safe space like Ignite, Modules and ALHs – but will still be very hard for seasoned professionals to let their guard down, especially in front of 'junior' colleagues.*

EY offered the following feedback from participants focussing on what worked well about the applied learning hub approach:

*"I feel like a different person to the one at the start of the session"*

*"It's been like an energy shot. I feel really empowered"*

*"It's great to feel it's not just me and we're actually all in this together – I don't feel so alone"*

*"Provider visits – epiphany! Having a discussion with a provider when I had no agenda and wasn't asking for anything from them led to establishing close relationships based on partnership and they came back to me with an idea to save £250K!"*

## 7. Observations (Level 1: Reaction)

### Evaluation question: What has been the level of engagement in the programme?

Evaluators observed 14 training sessions across the programme. The purpose of the observations was for IPC to gather insight into how the programme was delivered (e.g. the different methods / approaches used by facilitators to deliver the aims and objectives of each session), how well the session engaged participants, and how well the sessions were received by the participants. This methodology sits within Level 1 (**reaction**) of the evaluation framework. The evaluators who completed the observations were chosen as they have substantial experience in delivering social care commissioning, as well as being skilled training facilitators.

- When observing in person events:
  - IPC evaluators placed themselves in the room so they were able to observe, but do not distract or disturb participants.
  - Evaluators introduced themselves at the start of sessions, aiming to minimise any anxiety regarding our presence.
  - During group exercises or breakout sessions, with permission, evaluators listened into conversations from the groups.
- When observing online events:
  - IPC evaluators introduced themselves at the beginning of the session and remained muted, with their camera off throughout the session.

An observation template document was completed for each session observed, which asked the evaluators to comment on:

- Number of participants attending and their attendance for the entire session
- Style of delivery and facilitation of the sessions
- The perceived engagement levels of the participants
- Any immediate feedback from the participants

Between July 2024 and March 2025, IPC observed the following Ignite sessions:

1. Data literacy and analysis masterclass (02/09/24)
2. Community-led schemes spotlight (18/09/24)
3. Equity, diversity and inclusion masterclass (19/09/24)
4. Co-production masterclass (02/10/24)
5. Provider relationships masterclass (16/10/24)
6. Neighbourhood based care spotlight (22/10/24)
7. Module 2 – Partnerships and co-production (19/11/24)
8. Asset based commissioning masterclass (26/11/24)
9. Prevention based commissioning spotlight (27/11/24)
10. Innovative contracting spotlight (14/01/25)
11. Innovation Masterclass (05/02/25)
12. Module 3 – Innovative commissioning and market shaping (11/02/25)

13. Leveraging technology for strategic commissioning practices (25/02/25)
14. Joint commissioning masterclass (26/02/25)

## 7.1. Core modules observation

### 7.1.1. Module 2

#### 7.1.1.1. Attendance

IPC were informed that 21 participants were expected to attend Module 2 on 19<sup>th</sup> November 2024, held in Birmingham. 18 participants arrived in total. Five participants left the session early (between 15:00-15:30, when the session was due to finish at 17:00). However, it is believed this was due to poor weather (snow) and travel conditions, rather than lack of engagement or interest in the programme.

#### 7.1.1.2. Style of delivery and facilitation

IPC observed a mixture of delivery styles, including the presentation of slides, facilitating group conversations within the room, and breakout exercises throughout the day.

A hypothetical case study breakout exercise appeared to be received positively by the participants with all breakout groups holding good levels of conversations, sharing experiences with each other and providing challenge or different points of views.

This module utilised videos of provider interviews throughout the day in order to bring in the perspectives of providers when working in partnership with commissioners. Participants were pre-warned that some of the providers are frustrated and to remain open minded when hearing these perspectives. In spite of this, however, IPC remain unsure how well this exercise was received in terms of their assumed purpose e.g. to raise awareness of providers' experiences to aid better partnership working. Whilst there was some acknowledgement of this, in the main it felt that the videos caused the commissioners in the room to feel defensive and led to a lengthy and emotive conversation about how providers can be challenging to work with and that they are profit focussed. IPC also observed participants huffing and laughing during the videos.

On the whole, the videos did not feel very balanced in terms of how all partners (commissioners and providers) could work together and potentially caused people in the room to disengage with them.

*“When you give people the opportunity like this to vent, this is not the whole picture, it is too one-sided”*

In terms of the breakout exercises and discussions throughout the day, IPC felt the participants sitting on various tables could have been mixed up further to support further networking and learning, as it appeared that people from similar areas and/or local authorities sat together in the room.

### 7.1.1.3. Engagement

IPC felt the overall engagement of this session was generally good. There were sections within the session where participants appeared very engaged, but others where they did not. IPC observed that everyone in the room contributed to conversations and/or breakout discussions.

Positive signs of engagement included note taking, concentration on the presentation and facilitators, verbal noises or signs of agreement (nodding for example). A stretching exercise was introduced by the facilitators after lunch to re-energise the room. However, engagement levels appeared to reduce as the day went on, in particular in the afternoon session. This included an increase of people looking at their phones, yawning and side talking / whispering on tables which could be distracting for others. IPC did not see any evidence of this being addressed by the facilitators.

### 7.1.1.4. Feedback received

Feedback given to the evaluators by the participants present within the observed module included:

*"I am enjoying the programme so far. I liked Module 1. I've not been able to get to all the masterclasses I would have liked to – it would be good if these could be recorded so I can catch up at a later time*

*The action learning sets are being received well. These need to be supported by a long-term arrangement and continue post the course -e.g. a call to action when we are struggling with something to ask our colleagues to work through this with us".*

A fellow participant agreed with the above quote stating that they hope the applied learning sets will continue, with fellow commissioners ensuring they have protected time for ongoing reflective work, creating a culture of practice (rather than returning to business as usual once the course has finished).

Another participant said that they felt the in-person events would be better with all cohorts together, taking a 'ted talk' approach, where there are showcases of good practice happening across the UK. This individual stated they have not enjoyed or benefitted from online masterclasses as well, as they found it hard to maintain engagement within the online sessions, and felt they are not supportive of hearing from the wide breadth of participants on the programme.

*"The best thing has been sharing our practices and hearing the experiences from others. This has provided me with some reassurance that our practice is good, or that we are managing the same challenges as others, as best as we*

*can. The real challenge will be implementing the learning and taking it beyond the training classroom.”*

Finally, one participant stated that whilst they are enjoying the programme in general, it is not what they expected. They reported to struggle with the in person all day events, as they felt the pitch for senior commissioners has not been achieved, and rather the content was a refresher to what they already knew

*“If senior commissioners / Assistant Directors / Directors of Commissioners don’t know this stuff already, I’d be concerned”*

This individual also reflected that there is a large variety of roles and experience in the room, with some colleagues being very new to commissioning.

*“This means it feels like the content / pitch is attempting to cater for all which is not what I was expecting.”*

## 7.1.2. Module 3

### 7.1.2.1. Attendance

IPC were informed that 21 participants were expected to attend Module 3 on 12<sup>th</sup> February 2025, held in London. 17 participants arrived in total, and IPC were informed that no apologies had been sent. One participant was required to leave the session early, after the lunch break. This was due to an urgent issue; they apologised profusely and did appear saddened to be leaving the session early.

### 7.1.2.2. Style of delivery and facilitation

IPC observed a mixture of delivery styles, including the presentation of slides, case study video, facilitating group conversations within the room, and breakout exercises throughout the day. Facilitators themselves appeared very welcoming and engaging, often placing themselves at the front of the room with open body language.

This module included a creative icebreaker, which appeared to get a good amount of energy in the room, with lots of laughter and engagement throughout, demonstrated by excellent presentations following this exercise.

In particular, the de Bono 6 hat breakout exercise, which was used to unlock thinking and consider options from different points of view, demonstrated good engagement rates within the room, with lots of interesting conversations / debates observed.

Once again, in terms of the breakout exercises and discussions throughout the day, IPC felt the participants sitting on various tables could have been mixed up further to support further networking and learning, as it appeared that people from similar areas and/or local authorities sat together in the room. There was more evidence of this in module 3, but facilitators often left this to the discipline of participants to mix

themselves up, which IPC felt had mixed success (e.g. some people were very willing to do this, others less so).

An IPC evaluator reflected on the title of module 3 and queried whether this related strongly enough to the content. Whilst there was a strong focus on innovation, how this can support effective market shaping was less evident in the delivery and content, and the titles of such sessions may need further consideration.

#### 7.1.2.3. Engagement

IPC felt the overall engagement of this session was excellent. This appeared to be a very engaged room, with participants focussed on the presentations, taking notes, nodding and contributing to discussions. IPC did not observe significant issues regarding looking at phones or laptops throughout the session. Facilitators effectively ensured the group remained together and successfully challenged any side conversations when they occurred (which was minimal).

However, the session ended with quite high-level theory on innovation which seemed misplaced. IPC wondered if this would have been better placed at the start when scene setting the definitions of innovation. It was unclear how much this benefitted the audience who had spent the day discussing and debating the opportunities to innovate e.g. the Social Care Innovation Network 10 commandments for innovation covered at the end of the day. Some signs of disengagement at this stage were observed, although it is acknowledged that it was also the end of the day when energy levels may be dipping.

#### 7.1.2.4. Feedback received

The IPC evaluator spoke to a few participants to ask for feedback on how they are experiencing the programme so far:

*“It’s been fairly good.... Best parts have been the action learning hubs and the in-person modules mainly as you hear from others. First module felt quite ‘lecture-y’ and covering a lot that I already knew so felt disengaged with this. But since then, it’s felt more interactive.”*

A couple of other participants, whilst overall had felt the programme had been helpful, commented that the content had been too high level and was too theoretical. They felt the programme had not fully allowed them to dig into the complex issues, environments and partnerships they are required to manage.

*“So far it’s been a worthwhile experience, the best part has been connecting to others...it’s been a bit round the edges, rather than focussing on the meaty issues... And I’ve really noticed the absence of ICB in the discussions”*

*“Sometimes it needs more meat on the bones with the topics – is there a framework that allows us to actually do this? (Innovate). A library of resources? Its all currently just in people’s heads.”*

One participant suggested a future programme could include regularly bringing people together to apply the theory to the ‘big ticket’ items for the current commissioning environment e.g. commissioning residential care and working together to drive ideas / suggest solutions. This participant felt that the applied learning hubs achieved this in a bitesize way but could be expanded. The 6 hats exercise went down really well with this person, as they were currently reviewing their day services strategy so found this enormously helpful – as it was a more practical and relevant exercise for them.

## 7.2. Masterclass observations

### 7.2.1. Attendance

Overall evaluators observed good numbers of participants attending the online masterclasses. There is evidence of participants dropping in and out of these sessions, but not in significant numbers across the masterclasses observed, which may suggest a good retention and engagement level for those attending these sessions. More frequently it was observed that participants arrived slightly late (i.e. 10-20 minutes after the start of the session) to the masterclasses, but following this the numbers on the call remained relatively stable.

### 7.2.2. Style of delivery and facilitation

In general, IPC observed the following styles of delivery and facilitation throughout the masterclasses:

- Presentation slide deck covering the background, legislation, introduction and theory around the topic in question.
- Verbal only presentations from speakers who have examples of good practice and/or expertise in a particular commissioning area.
- Speakers / facilitators that are experts in the field and/or by experience bringing impassioned and inspirational professional and personal experiences to the session.
- Demonstration of the Data Hub.
- Case study presentations.
- Panel discussions with the option of a Q&A at the end of the session.
- Use of Slido to generate online discussions.

Overall, these sessions appeared to share helpful information, theory and examples of good practice as a one-way dialogue. Whilst the chat function on Microsoft Teams and Slido were encouraged to be used to support the involvement of participants, these were seldom used by the majority of people on the call. In addition, the short length of the sessions (60 minutes) meant there was little interaction, and questions in the chat, or via the Q&A link, could go unanswered. IPC observed that this

improved throughout the delivery of the programme, with facilitators more successfully keeping speakers to time and protecting a small amount of time for Q&A (e.g. 10 minutes).

IPC also observed some interesting topics and presentations but felt they would have benefited from a stronger link to the practical elements of such approaches for commissioning. For example, the asset-based commissioning masterclass described asset- and strength-based approaches as a concept well but could have provided a better link to what this means for the application of commissioning in adult social care.

### 7.2.3. Engagement

As the elective masterclasses are hosted online, many participants chose to keep their cameras off during the sessions and thus making it challenging to gauge engagement rates. However, of the very small numbers of people with their cameras on, IPC observed evidence of possible engagement via nodding and heads down looking as if they were making notes.

There was also evidence of engagement both in the chat function, with questions being posed and responded to by participants themselves, and the use of emojis / reactions in Microsoft Teams such as applauding and hearts. It was observed that some facilitators would also use the comments in the chat to bring people into the conversation, which was positive.

IPC would question how successful the use of Slido was to engage people in the masterclasses, however. Of the masterclasses observed using Slido, IPC have noted an average of only 19% of people on the call participating with the Slido questions and discussion points between April and November 2024.

### 7.2.4. Feedback received

There is evidence of positive feedback of the sessions from a small amount of the participants per session, who utilised the chat function to thank the speakers and to say how valuable the session had been as the session was closing. No negative feedback regarding the masterclasses were observed via this function.

Asset based commissioning masterclass:

*“Really interesting and shows the importance and power of Council wide / partnership wide / community wide culture and approach”*

Joint Commissioning Masterclass:

*“This was one of the more useful masterclasses, thank you for your insights”*

## 7.3. Spotlight observations

### 7.3.1. Attendance

Spotlights appear to have been well attended, with only a small number of drop outs observed as the sessions progressed.

### 7.3.2. Style of delivery and facilitation

Spotlights sessions were promoted as “*an opportunity to highlight innovative and best practice examples, to share insights, and inspire participants in making positive changes in their commissioning approaches. The spotlight session brings the topic to life, conveying the context, challenge, journey and outcomes. Spotlights will be delivered in the format of an interview or ‘fireside chat’ with representatives from the organisations and bodies delivering best practice as well as representatives of people who draw on care and support to share their experiences on the example being showcased*” and IPC did indeed observe this type of delivery style for these sessions.

The examples offered were interesting and relevant to commissioning in adult social care, although at times IPC were concerned that some of the speakers were using the space to advertise or promote their services which may not be appropriate for a national training programme (e.g. the leveraging technology for strategic commissioning practice spotlight session).

These observed sessions appeared to have been facilitated well and ensured there was protected time for questions and contributions from the participants on the call. There was evidence in both the chat, and through verbal contributions, of participants sharing their own practice or similar examples / projects in their own local area which is positive.

As with the masterclasses, IPC felt the sessions may not have sufficient time dedicated to them, as once again not all questions were able to be answered within the hour. However, for these sessions there was a commitment by the facilitators to answer the questions offline and share afterwards.

### 7.3.3. Engagement

As with the elective masterclasses, many people chose to keep their cameras off during the session and thus making it challenging to gauge engagement rates. However, there was good engagement of the Chat function to ask questions and make comments throughout the sessions. However, it is worth noting too much activity in the chat function could be distracting, and impact engagement / attention on the presentation and speaker.

### 7.3.4. Feedback received

There is evidence of positive feedback of the spotlights from a small number of participants per session who utilised the chat function to thank the speakers and saying how valuable the session had been as the session is closing.

*"This is really inspiring - great to have this brief insight into a fab project/service. Thank you!"*

## 8. Midpoint survey – (Level 1: Reaction and Level 2: Learning)

### Evaluation questions:

**To what extent do participants feel that the programme has been a valuable experience?**

**To what extent do participants feel empowered and able to demonstrate that they are embedding / sharing their learning in their local areas?**

**To what extent do commissioners feel connected and have plans for ongoing / long-term relationships with other commissioners in the country?**

At the approximate half way point of the programme, IPC contacted all participants and invited them to take part in a mid-point survey that aimed to:

- Understand the people's experiences of the programme so far, including what is going well and whether they believe there are any areas for improvement.
- Identify any examples where participants have been able to apply their learning from the programme into their commissioning practice.

An online survey was sent to all participants (n=153) on 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2024, with a three-week period for completion (closing on 23<sup>rd</sup> December 2024). A total of 64 responses were received to the survey, giving a response rate of 42%.

The findings from this mid-point survey were detailed in the Interim Report provided to the DHSC in January 2025. This showed that the majority of people who completed the survey felt that Ignite had been a worthwhile and valuable experience at the midway point of the programme (75% of the respondents rating their experience so far as excellent or good, 22% stating their experience had been fair, and 3% reporting a poor experience)

There was a strong indication that the most valued element of the programme at this stage had been the opportunity to network and connect with other commissioners across the country – either through the in-person modules, hearing examples of good practice through the spotlights or via the applied learning hubs. Some people suggested this element could be strengthened for the programme going forward i.e. increasing formal opportunities to meet with commissioners across the country to showcase good practice and work together to problem solve common, but complex commissioning challenges.

A common disappointment voiced by the participants, via the mid-point survey, was that the content of the Ignite programme had not been pitched correctly or successfully at the senior commissioning level. The commissioning theory was reported to be too basic, and people felt the sessions did not allow sufficient time and space for innovative and strategic thinking or problem solving. Others felt the programme had not consistently considered the realities of the contexts and environments commissioners are working within currently (e.g. within financial constraints and the Integrated Care Board landscapes).

For the purposes of this report, the detailed analysis of the midpoint survey can be found in Appendix E.

## 9. Pre and post programme survey (Level 2: Learning)

### Evaluation questions:

**To what extent do participants feel that the programme has been a valuable experience?**

**To what extent have commissioners improved their knowledge, skills and confidence in the particular areas of focus for the programme – including strategic leadership, market shaping, data and intelligence and meaningful collaboration and engagement?**

As part of the programme, the EY team asked all participants to complete a pre-programme survey (completed between June and September 2024) and a post-programme survey, completed in March 2025. There were 149 completed responses for the pre-programme survey (97% completion rate), and 59 for the post-programme survey (39% completion rate).

This reduction in completion rate means that conclusions drawn from post-programme responses, and comparisons between responses pre and post programme (where questions were repeated, regarding learner's confidence and knowledge in certain areas of commissioning) should be interpreted cautiously as they will not pertain to a majority of the participants.

We are unsure why there was such a drop in engagement with the pre- and post-programme survey. It could be an indication of survey fatigue and/or a reduction in motivation to complete such surveys after the programme has finished.

In addition, there are inconsistencies between some of the statements participants were asked in the pre-and post- self-assessment surveys – in particular for confidence levels. It is understood from conversations with EY that this was an error. Statements should have been identical in the pre and post programme survey, but there were version control issues.

Unfortunately, these issues combined have significantly impacted IPC's ability to confidently demonstrate the extent to which the programme has supported the majority of participants to increase their confidence, knowledge and skills in particular areas of commissioning practice

The detail of the pre-survey questionnaire was included in the Interim Report to the Department, and has been added in Appendix D.

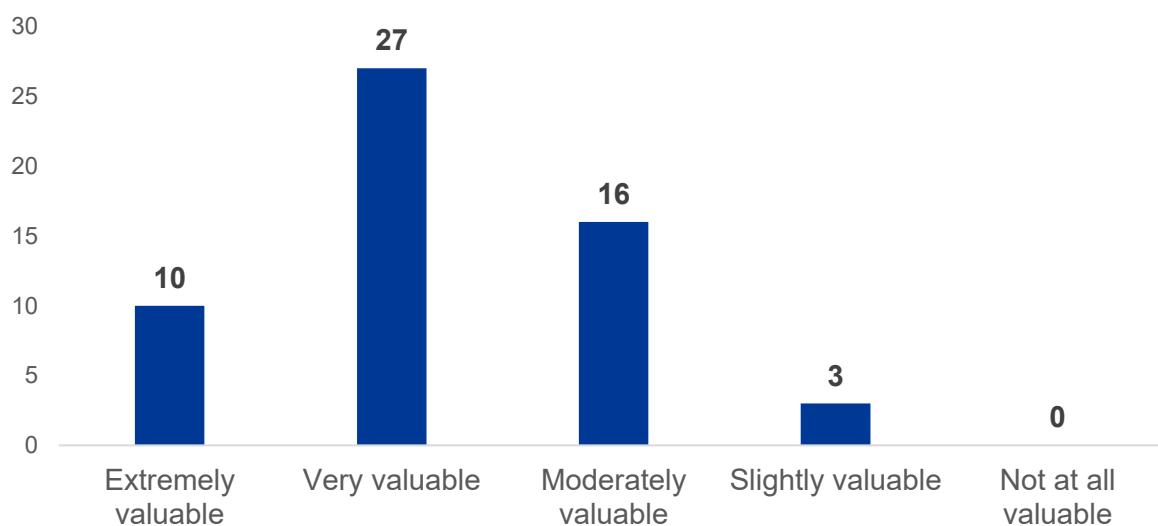
## 9.1. Overall experience

The first question in the post-programme survey asked participants to describe their experience of the programme in a few words and the following themes were collected through our analysis (n=59):

- 67% of respondents reported that the programme was a positive experience for them, stating the programme was interesting, engaging and variable. However, others (approximately 10% of respondents) reported their enjoyment and experience of the programme was inconsistent, or not beneficial at all.
- The majority of respondents (61%) reported that a key benefit of the programme was networking with peers and sharing experiences and ideas with other commissioners across the country
- A small number of respondents, however, reported that the programme was not pitched correct for senior commissioners, and felt more practical tools on leadership is needed for this audience.

Respondents were asked through a multiple-choice question to rate overall how they found the programme, and this is illustrated in the graph below:

**Graph 5: How would you rate your overall experience with this programme? (n=56)**



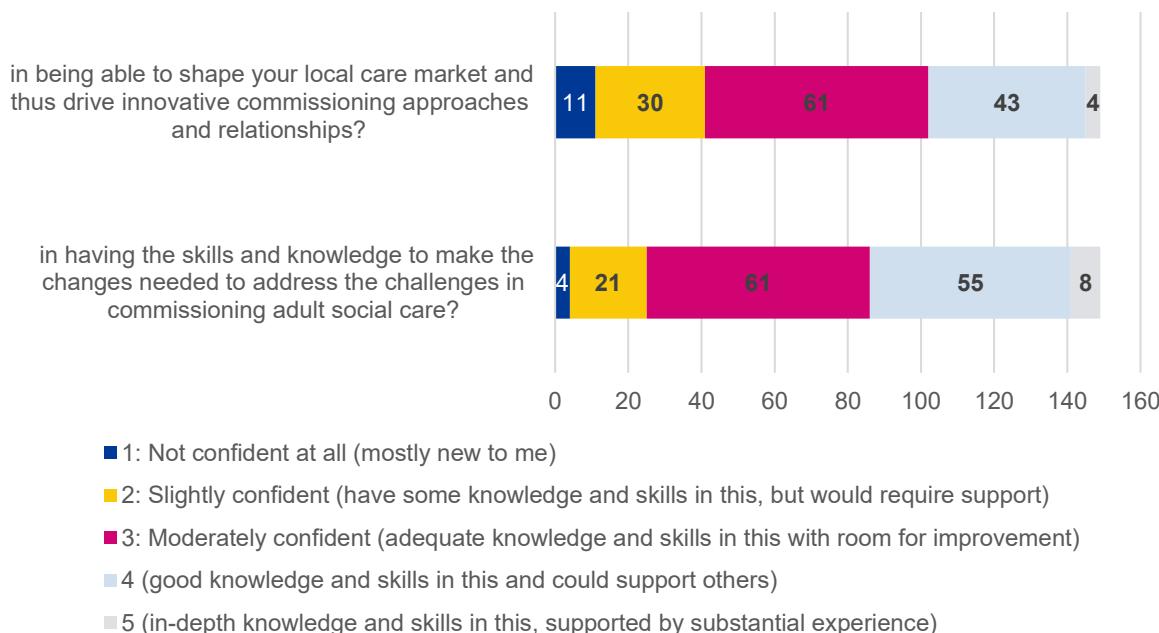
Graph 5 shows that 18% of respondents felt the programme was 'extremely valuable', 48% felt it was 'very valuable', 29% felt it was 'moderately valuable', and 5% felt it was 'slightly valuable'.

## 9.2. Confidence, knowledge and skills in areas of commissioning

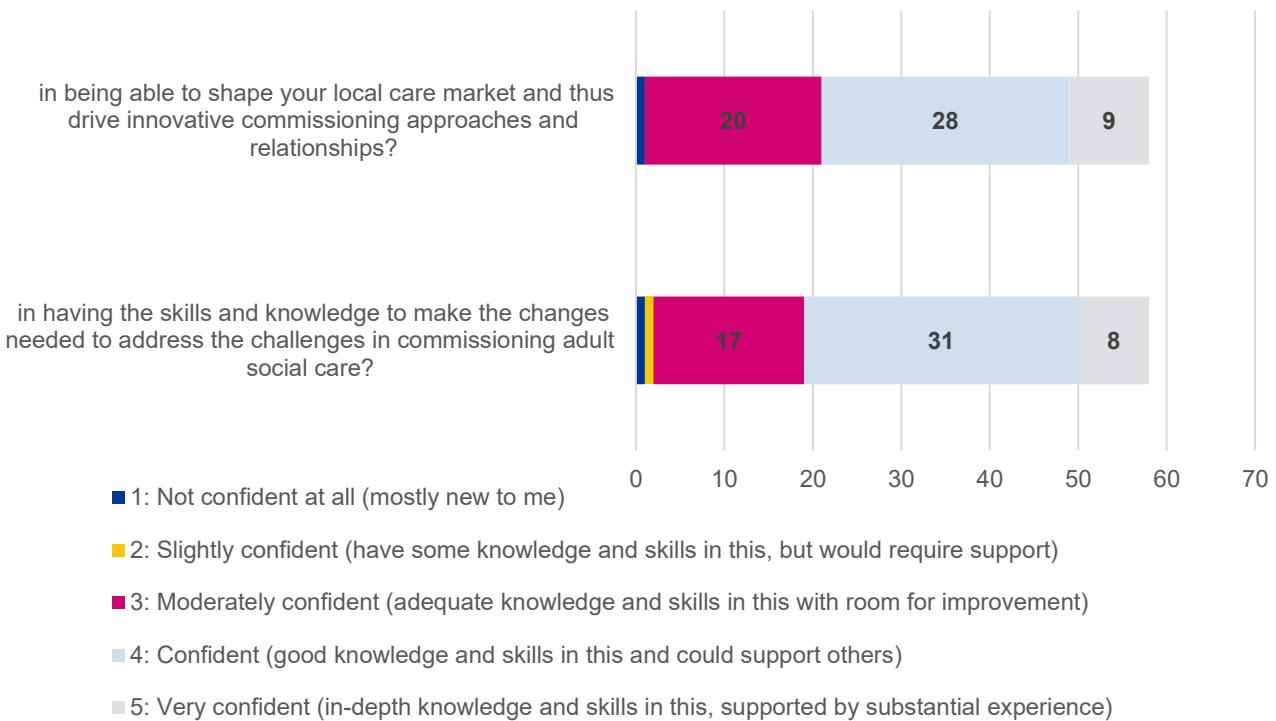
### 9.2.1. Confidence

Survey respondents in the pre-programme survey and post-programme survey were asked to rate how confident they felt in certain areas of commissioning. Statements were presented as in the formal “how confident do you feel in X?”. Respondents rated their confidence on a scale of 1 (Not confident at all) to 5 (Excellent). Some of the confidence statements were asked both pre- and post-programme, whilst others were asked only post-programme<sup>3</sup>. The response analyses are displayed in graphs 6 to 8.

**Graph 6: Pre-programme: On a scale of 1 to 5, rate your confidence...(n=149)**

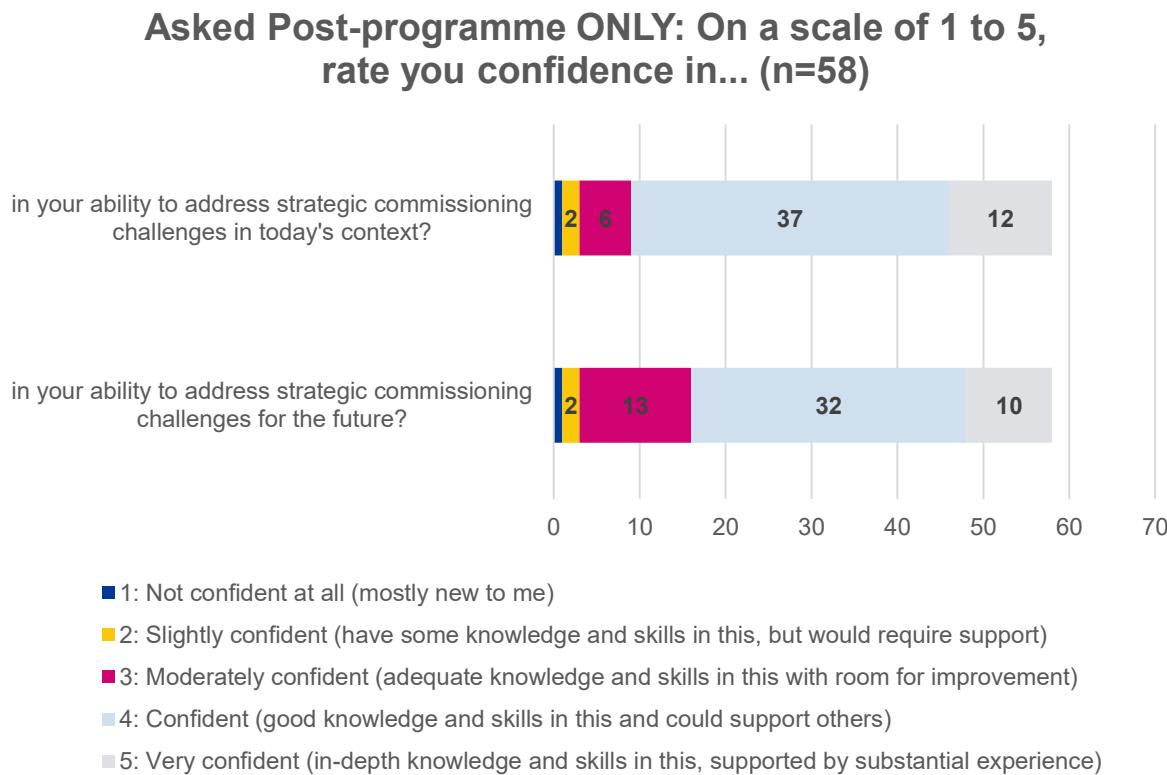


<sup>3</sup> It is understood from conversations with EY that this was an error. Statements should have been identical in the pre and post programme, but there were version control issues. This has provided some challenge for IPC's analysis using this intelligence.

**Graph 7: Post-programme: On a scale of 1 to 5, rate your confidence...(n=58)**

Whilst interpretation of these graphs should be treated with some caution due to the reduction of respondents from the pre-programme survey, and the post programme survey, there is an increase of respondents rating themselves as 4 or 5 (in-depth knowledge or good knowledge) for confidence levels regarding the changes required to address the challenges in commissioning adult social care. A small proportion however stated they did not feel confident or only slightly confident in these elements following programme completion.

**Graph 8: Asked Post-programme ONLY: On a scale of 1 to 5, rate your confidence in...(n=58)**

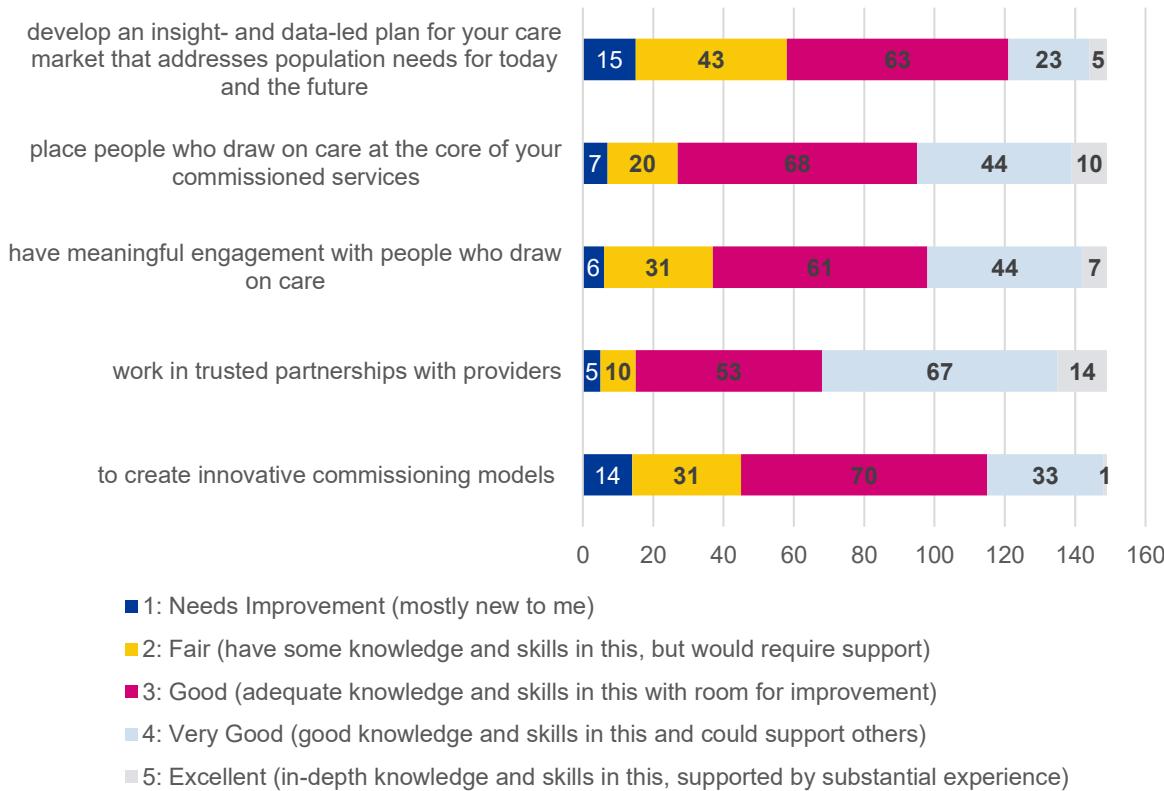


Graph 8 shows respondent's rating for confidence statements which were asked via the post- programme survey. Unfortunately, different confidence statements were asked pre- and post- the programme, making comparisons and analysis of the programme's impact difficult i.e. changes in these ratings (and their attribution to the programme) cannot be measured. However, the graph shows that 49 out of 59 respondents rated themselves as confident or highly confident in their ability to address strategic commissioning challenges in today's context, and 42 out of 59 respondents rated themselves similarly for their ability to address strategic commissioning challenges in the future.

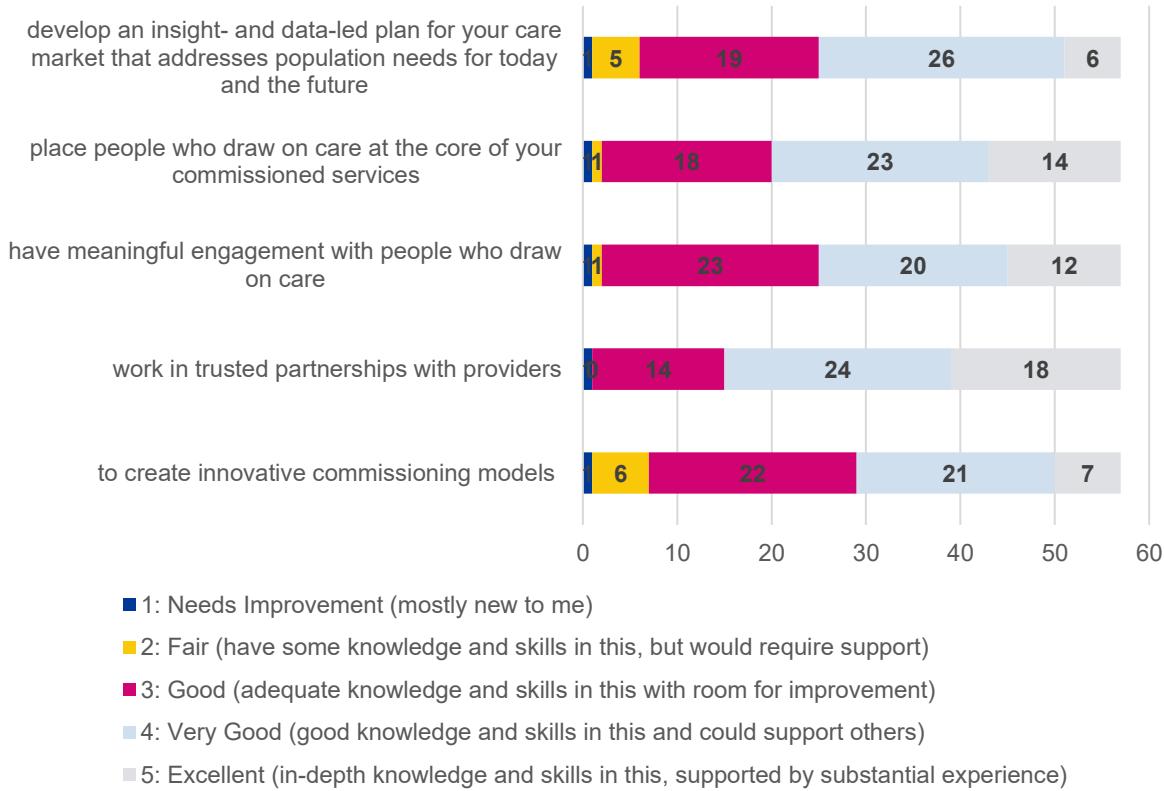
### 9.2.2. Abilities

Respondents in both the pre-programme and post-programme survey were asked to rate their ability in specific activities/skills, on a scale of 1 to 5. The proportion of respondents scoring themselves at each level, pre- and post-programme, are displayed in graphs 9 and 10. These graphs demonstrate that there was an increase of ability rating by the proportion of respondents who completed the post-programme self-assessment, particularly in their ability to *develop an insight- and data- led plan for their care markets that addresses population needs for today and the future*, as well as ability to *create innovative commissioning models*.

### Graph 9: Pre-programme: On a scale of 1 to 5, rate your ability to... (n=149)



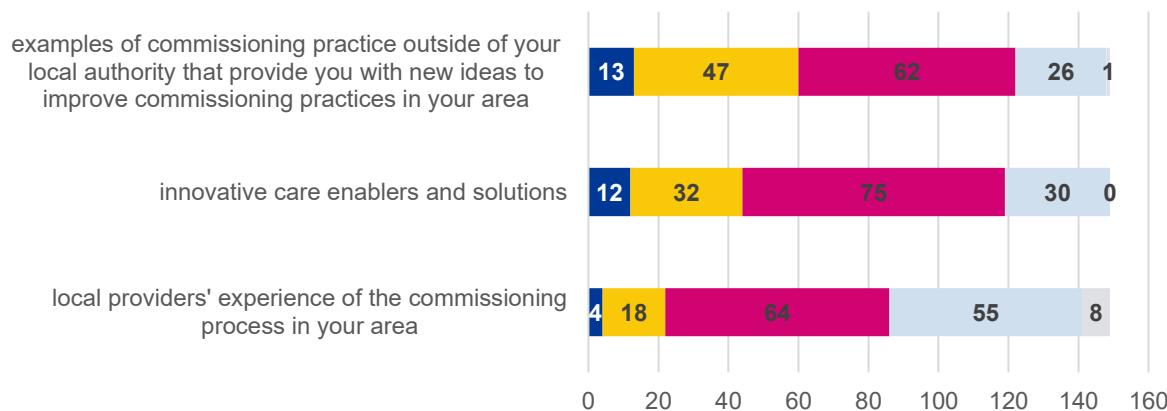
### Graph 10: Post-programme: On a scale of 1 to 5, rate your ability to...(n=57)



### 9.3. Understanding

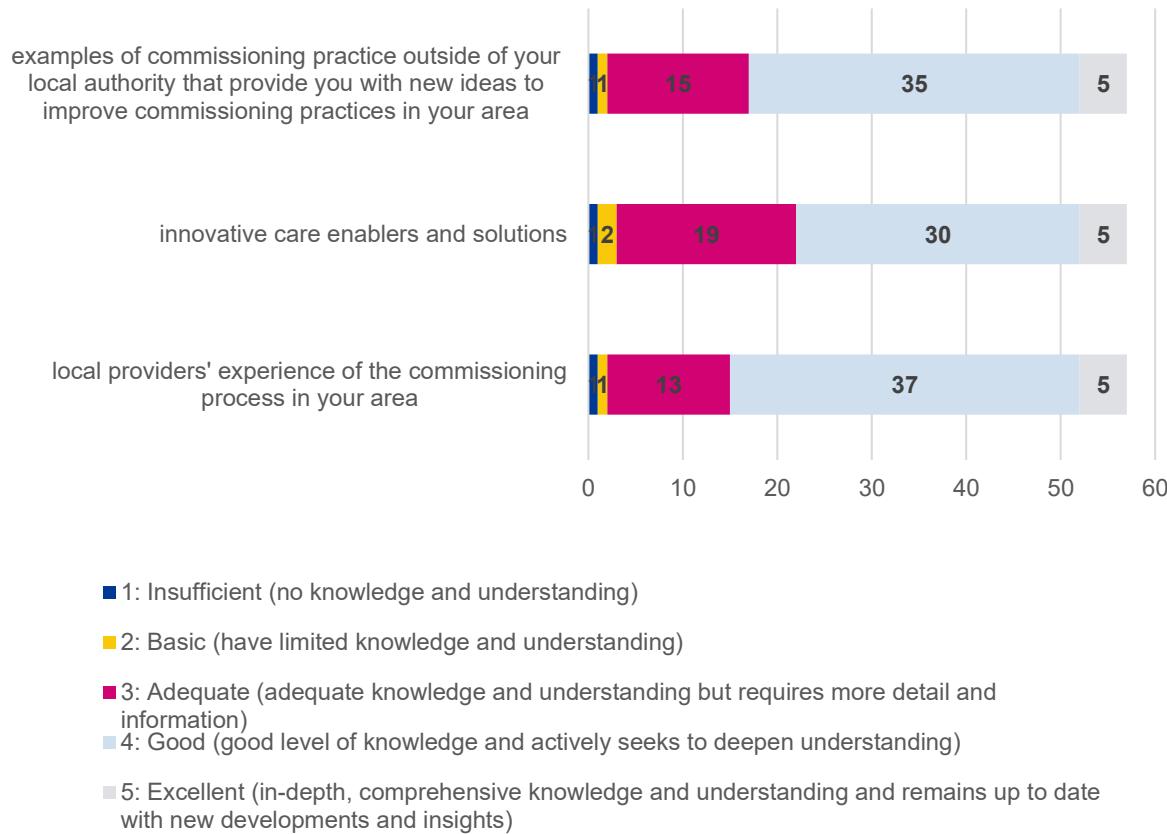
Respondents in the pre- and post- survey rated their understanding, again on a scale of 1 to 5, of three particular areas within commissioning. Their responses pre- and post-programme are displayed in graphs 11 and 12.

**Graph 11: Pre-programme: On a scale of 1 to 5, rate your understanding of...(n=149)**



- 1: Insufficient (no knowledge and understanding)
- 2: Basic (have limited knowledge and understanding)
- 3: Adequate (adequate knowledge and understanding but requires more detail and information)
- 4: Good (good level of knowledge and actively seeks to deepen understanding)
- 5: Excellent (in-depth, comprehensive knowledge and understanding and remains up to date with new developments and insights)

**Graph 12: Post-programme: On a scale of 1 to 5, rate your understanding of...(n=57)**

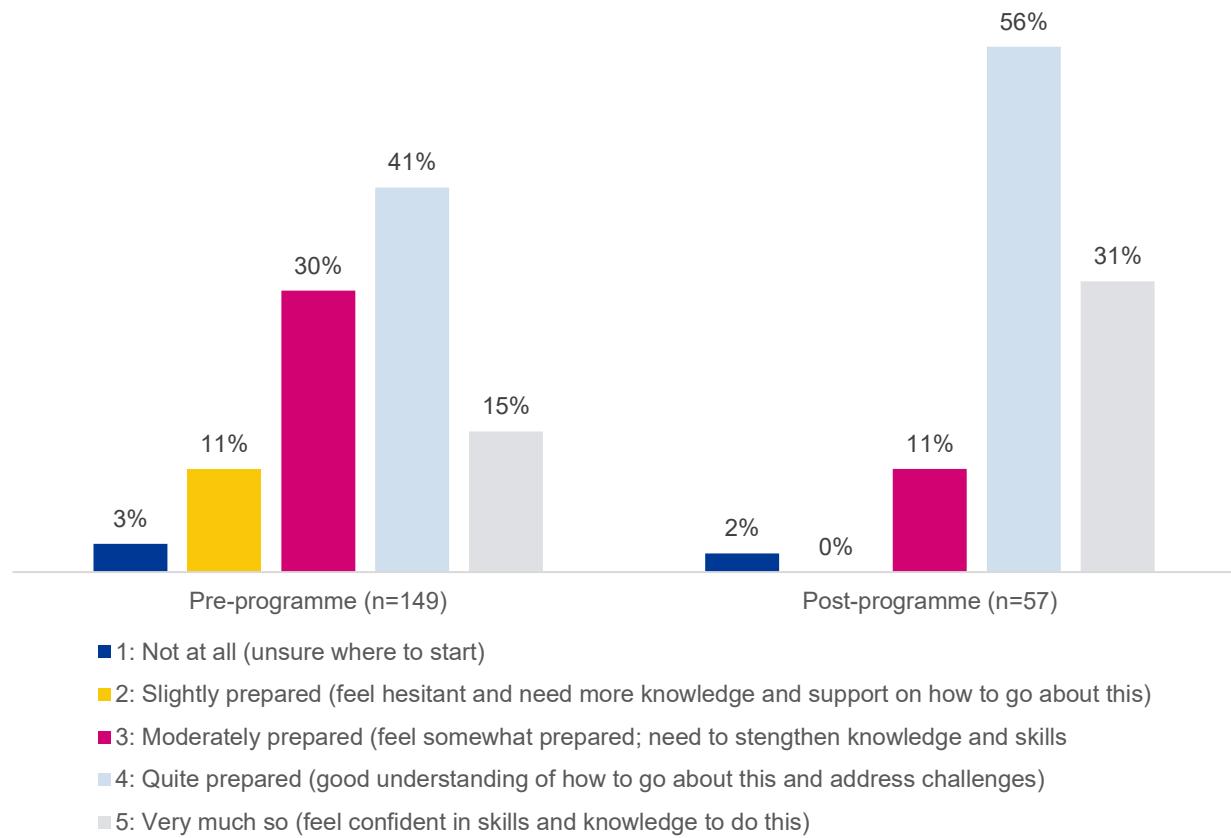


Graphs 11 and 12 show that there was some change in proportion of respondents rating themselves with higher understanding, for all three of the statements, between the pre-programme and post-programme survey. Notably, for understanding of '*examples of commissioning practice outside your local authority that provide you with new ideas to improve commissioning practices in your area*' there was an increase in the proportion of respondents rating themselves as 4 (Good level of knowledge) or 5 (Excellent in-depth knowledge) at the post-programme survey (70% of the post programme survey respondents). Similarly, the proportion of respondents rating themselves as 4 or 5 for understanding of "*innovative care enablers and solutions*" increased post-programme (representing 61% of post programme survey respondents).

#### 9.4. Wider impacts

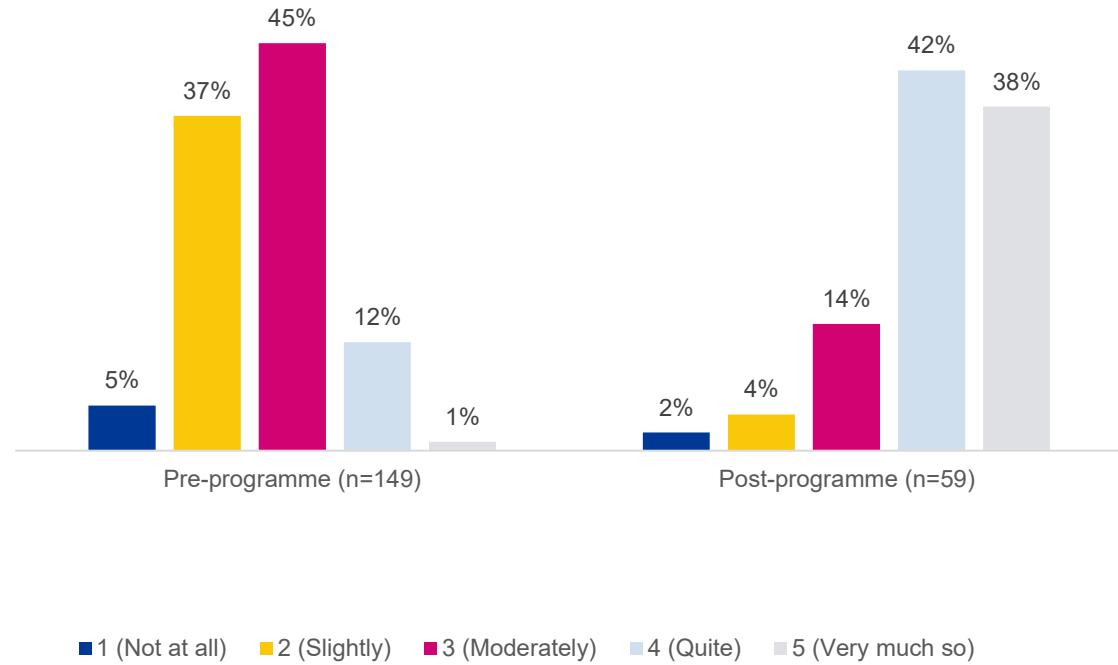
In the pre-programme and post-programme surveys, respondents also rated themselves against two more general statements thinking about their experience as senior commissioners.

**Graph 13: On a scale of 1 to 5, to what extent do you feel prepared to lead and advocate for change as a commissioner of adult social care in your area/within your local authority?**



Graph 13 shows that 87% of respondents (n=57) rated themselves as either 'quite' or 'very much so', in terms of how prepared they felt to lead / advocate for change as a commissioner of adult social care in the post programme survey.

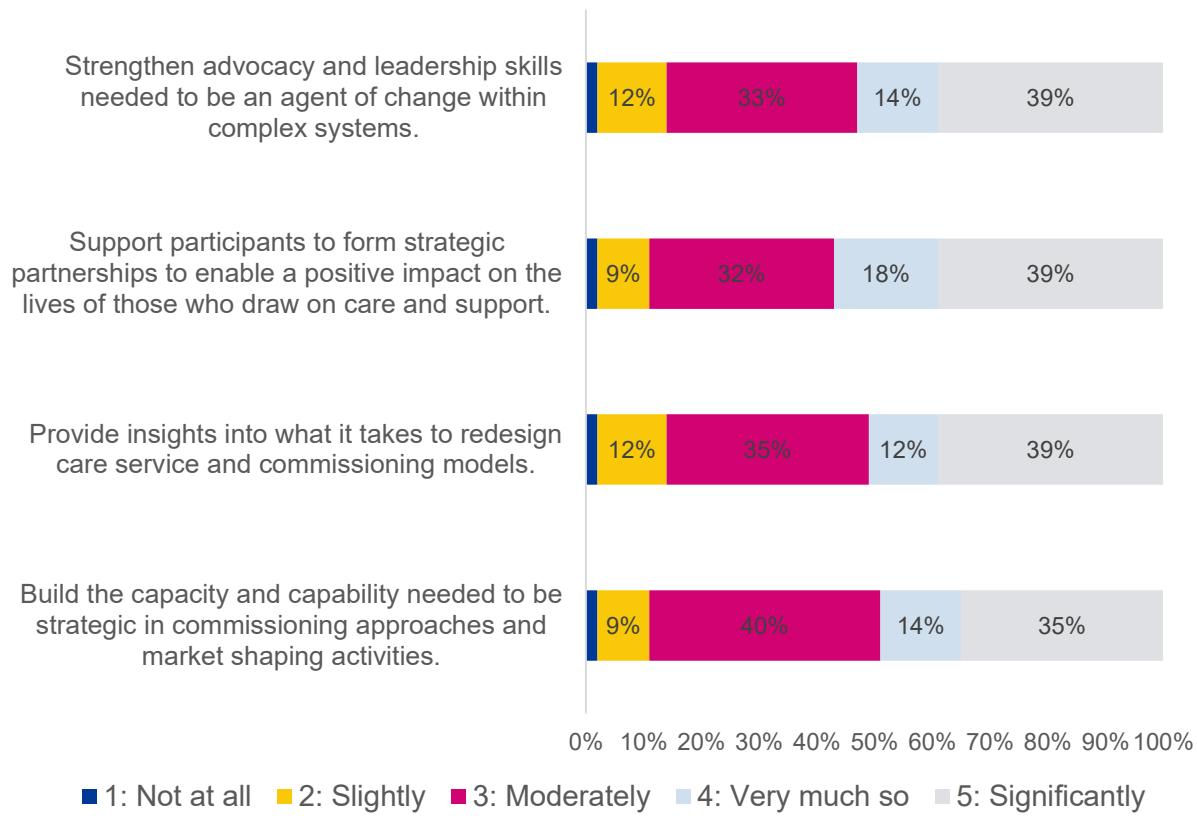
**Graph 14: On a scale of 1 to 5, to what extent do you feel connected with other senior commissioners across the country to share insight, experience and provide peer support?**



Graph 14 shows that the 80% of the respondents (n=57) said post-programme that they felt 'quite' or 'very much so' connected with other senior commissioners across England following the Ignite Programme.

## 9.5. How well were programme objectives met?

At the end of the post-programme survey, respondents were asked to rate, on a scale of 1 to 5, to what extent each of the objectives of the Ignite programme had been met. The responses are shown in graph 15.

**Graph 15: On a scale of 1 to 5, to what extent were the Ignite objectives, met?**

As shown in graph 15, between 49% and 57% of respondents (28 to 33 individuals, out of the 57 answering this question), felt the objectives of the programme had been met 'very much so' or 'significantly'. The objective that was rated the most favourably (i.e. the most respondents felt it has been achieved 'very much so' or 'significantly') was '*support participants to form strategic partnerships to enable a positive impact on the lives of those who draw on care and support*'.

For each of the objectives, between 32% and 40% of respondents rated they had been achieved 'moderately' (this would equate to between 18 and 23 individuals). Between 11% and 14% of respondents felt that the objectives had been met 'not at all' or 'slightly'; this represents between 6 and 8 respondents per objective. There were two objectives that 14% of respondents rated as met 'not at all' or 'slightly', these were '*provide insights into what it takes to redesign care service and commissioning models*' and '*strengthen advocacy and leadership skills needed to be an agent of change within complex systems*'.

## 9.6. Conclusion

Of those who completed the post-programme survey, there appears to be a good proportion reporting good to excellent levels of confidence, abilities and understanding of the intended commissioning skills of the programme, as well as an increase in those feeling connected to other commissioners and being able to lead and advocate for change as a strategic leader. However, the direct attribution of this to the programme is difficult to conclude due to the reduction of engagement with the

post-programme survey (39% return rate) compared to the pre-programme survey (97% return rate), as well as the inconsistency of rating scales used in the confidence questions. In terms of the success of the programme, most respondents for the post programme survey felt the objectives had been met, modestly at the very least. However, a small number of respondents reported that the objectives, as listed in this survey, had not been achieved, or only slightly been achieved.

## 10. Use of the Data Hub (Level 3: Behaviour)

**Evaluation question: To what extent do participants feel empowered and able to demonstrate that they are embedding /sharing their learning in their local areas?**

West Midlands ADASS have developed an interactive, online tool, known as the data hub. This tool aims to provide public data on local population needs, the care market, adult social care performance, workforce numbers, pay and conditions and pay expenditure of English local authorities. As part of the Ignite programme, all participants were trained on and granted access to this data hub in module 1 *insight-led strategic commissioning*. All Ignite participants have been granted long term access to the data hub.

Evaluators reviewed the use of the West Midlands ADASS data hub at the half way point of the programme to see if there are any early indications of whether commissioning practices / behaviours are changing as a result of the programme. We had hoped to provide additional information about the use of the data hub up to March 2025, however this was not provided to IPC, and so we are only able to demonstrate the use of the data hub between 16<sup>th</sup> July and 14<sup>th</sup> December 2024.

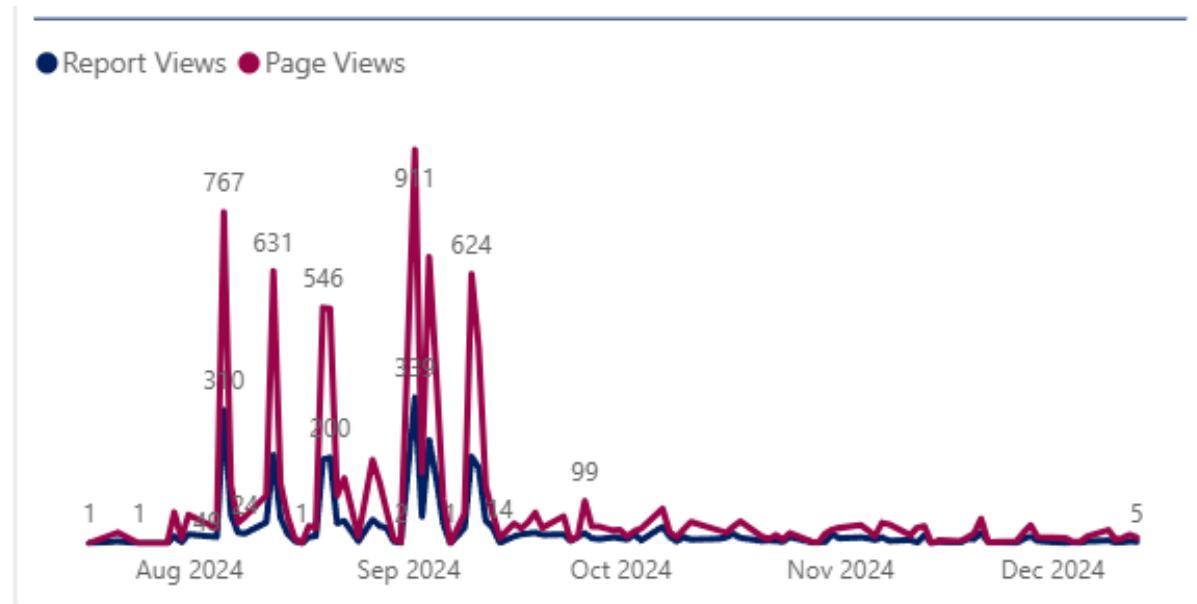
This data hub was shared with the candidates in Module 1 and the Data literacy and analysis masterclass to support candidates to intelligently use evidence and data to inform commissioning decisions.

According to West Midlands ADASS:

- 153 of the Ignite candidates (100%) accessed the hub between July and December 2024.
- There were 3,620 report views on the hub, and 9,499 individual page views by the programme's participants during this time period.
- The most frequently viewed page on the data hub was the 'Care Markets Profile' with the Care Homes page being the most popular on this page, followed by CQC ratings and domiciliary care
- Other popular pages that have been accessed by the participants were population estimates and population projections.

### 10.1.1. Data hub views by data

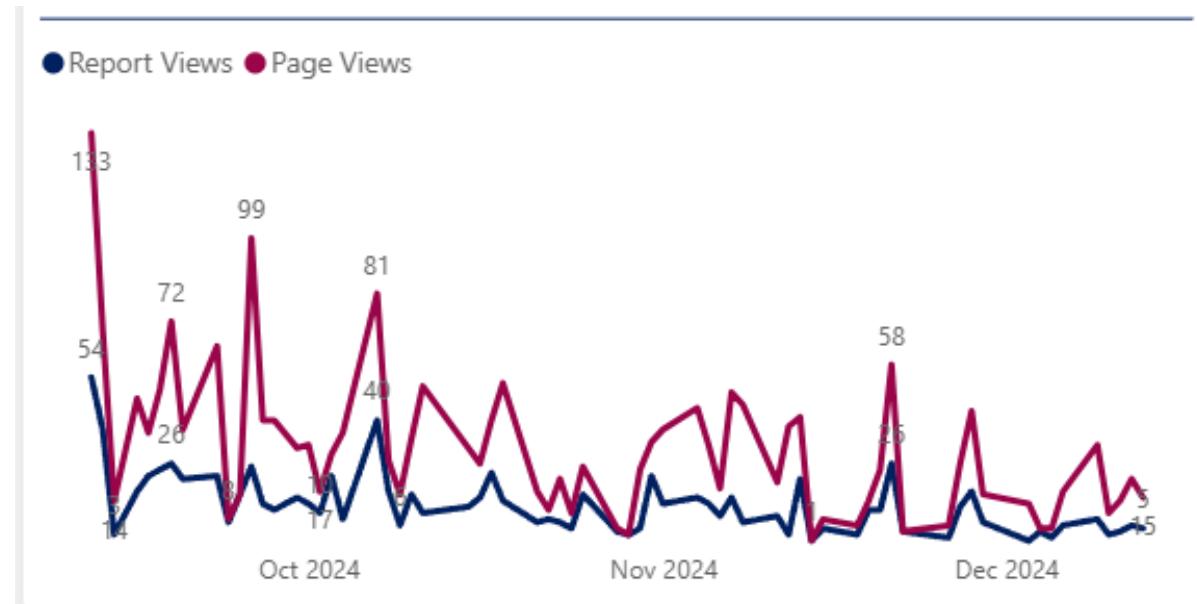
**Figure 5: Report views and page views by date**



The above image illustrates that activity and usage of the data hub by participants was highest between 6<sup>th</sup> August and 12<sup>th</sup> September, which aligns with the delivery of the two data masterclasses and Module 1 across the eight cohorts. The most activity on the data hub by participants was seen on 2<sup>nd</sup> September 2024 – when the second data literacy and analysis masterclass was delivered.

Looking at the below image, whilst the activity has reduced since the delivery of module 1 and the data masterclasses, there was some evidence of ongoing use of the data hub by participants, looking more frequently at pages on the hub than downloading reports.

**Figure 6: Report views and page views by date**



## 11. Participant interviews (Level 3: Behaviours)

### Evaluation questions:

**To what extent do participants feel that the programme has been a valuable experience?**

**To what extent do participants feel empowered and able to demonstrate that they are embedding / sharing their learning in their local areas?**

**To what extent do commissioners feel connected and have plans for ongoing / long-term relationships with other commissioners in the country?**

Following the conclusion of the programme in March 2025, IPC contacted all participants (n=153) and invited them to take part in an interview in order to explore their views on the programme, including any benefits of attending the programme, and whether they felt there are any areas for improvement. Additionally, the interviews sought to capture whether participants felt they had been able to apply, or were planning to apply, their learnings from the programme in their commissioning practice and/or organisational approach to strategic commissioning. This included attempting to identify any specific examples of innovative or strategic practice that had either already started or there were plans for this to start soon.

23 participants (15% of programme participants) were interviewed between 19<sup>th</sup> March and 14<sup>th</sup> May 2025. There were at least two interviewees from each of the eight training cohorts, giving good representation of the experiences and learnings from the programme across the country. The roles of interviewees ranged from commissioning officers and senior commissioning officers, to heads of service and directors of commissioning. All interviewees reported they had completed the programme.

It is important to note the short time between the programme concluding and the completion of the interviews. Whilst evaluators were seeking examples of changed and/or improved practice following the programme, it was apparent that it may be too early to capture comprehensive case studies or examples of impact. However, in the absence of this, evaluators sought to collect any intentions and initial steps to do things differently as a result of the programme.

### 11.1. Hopes and aspirations for the programme

When asked what motivated them to partake in the programme, the majority of participants commented that they feel there is limited opportunities for commissioning training available in the UK, particularly at a more senior level. For example, some had awareness and had even completed the Skills for Care Level 5 Training Programme but suggested that they were interested in a programme that considered the strategic, leadership elements of commissioning.

*“Been a commissioning for 10 years and 4 years in a senior role – but I’ve never had formal commissioning training”*

*"There is a gap in the market for professional development for commissioners - Level 5 is quite light touch and focused on commissioning practice and not leadership... (training) needs to tackle the wicked challenges of tomorrow facing all commissioners"*

Others responded that they had been nominated by their DASS and had less expectations on the programme. However, they continued to appreciate the opportunity of the training, even if this was to share materials with their wider team rather than expecting to learn something new themselves.

*"[It was] more [like] you have to go on this, rather than "would you like to go on this?"*

## 11.2. Experience of the programme

Most interviewees reported a positive experience of the programme. They reported enjoying the time out of the working environment "to think and reflect", and to meet others beyond their local region, noting that such opportunities were "very rare".

EY were praised as the deliverers of the programme by a number of participants, highlighting that delivery was effective, well organised and structured, and had clear aims and objectives.

*"Its been a very positive experience for me- it has given me some space away from the day job to think about things differently as well as networking with others"*

Some participants reported that the in-person events were of most value to them, allowing them the space to reflect, take a break from the day-to-day pressures, and network and meet colleagues from other areas.

*"programme has been really useful...it was good to work with peers on shared problems and to work with more senior experienced commissioners"*

*"opportunity to take time out to think and collaborate with similar roles outside of council boundaries... allowed me to think differently about innovation rather than fire fighting on a daily basis...but we are already doing most of the things in the programme - such as coproduction, use of data, provider relationships"*

The extent to which participants felt the programme met their expectations varied markedly between experienced, senior and less experienced commissioners. Some reported that they felt the content of the programme had been pitched too broadly, working with the wide range of commissioning roles and experience attending the programme.

*"I have mixed views - overall the course was aimed at slightly lower than a senior commissioner - such a commissioning officers - detailing bread and butter issues most senior commissioners should already know, but don't have an answer as to what could be done differently"*

*"On balance moderately disappointed - didn't really hit the mark including the provider session. Course was not aimed at the next round of strategic commissioner leaders and didn't offer anything new or innovative...a lot of the material was relatively old-hat"*

*"This is something that, if I was a new commissioner, I would think this is really helpful, but because I've been doing this role for a long time, it just felt really like... if I don't know this by now, then I think I have bigger problems"*

### 11.3. What was helpful?

Participants praised the programme for allowing them to take time out of their day-to-day, and have the time to think, reflect and meet colleagues from all over the country experiencing similar challenges, and to hear about different ways of working. This is a clear message throughout the all of the evaluation activities – the opportunity to meet other commissioners, network, form relationships and share practice has been a big and key benefit from this programme.

*"I've made connections and I'm able to go and just ask people now and because they were part of it, they're more willing to come back to you, partially because they know who you are now. But secondly, they know that you've been on this and that's what it is. Otherwise, you're a bit stabbing in the dark."*

*"Realisation that we are all in it together"*

A common reflection was that commissioners are “firefighting” on a daily basis, to the detriment of their ability to think strategically about future arrangements and needs. A key takeaway for participants has been the importance of delegating to others to allow senior commissioners the space and protected time to think about the bigger picture.

*“Made us sit back a bit and think...what we're doing really a lot of the time is here and now, you know like the sort of firefighting day-to-day stuff rather than focusing on like the sort of strategic stuff. So, I think it's made me try and find that time...we're spending a lot of time on this kind of emergency stuff and crisis stuff but yeah not perhaps enough time on the sort of strategic stuff...”*

Others reported benefitting from access to the data hub from West Midlands ADASS as a key takeaway from the programme. Participants are hopeful access to this tool can be shared further, so they can then cascade more widely with their team / colleagues rather than being the only member who can currently access this (and therefore not able to delegate to, for example, intelligence or analyst officers, who it would benefit).

*“The first one we did was on the dashboard and how we could use that information. That was really, really good. So, it was quite practical. You got to have a good go at it and it's got you starting to think about some slightly different things. So that was really helpful”.*

Topics highlighted in interviews as being particularly helpful were:

- Module 1 and masterclass: Data and analysis
- Module 1: prioritising time and space to be strategic / leadership theories
- Masterclass on individual service funds / direct payments
- Masterclass introducing community catalysts in terms of engaging with the voluntary sector effectively
- Masterclass on co-production
- Masterclass on technology and artificial intelligence
- Module 3: use of De Bono's 6 hats model – a thinking process that helps people be more productive, focussed and consider different perspectives

However, others also noted that whilst the content of the programme was well presented, accurate and appropriate for good commissioning practice, it was not necessarily anything new or innovative to them:

*“There was no wow feeling from the spotlight sessions - nothing new or particularly innovative”.*

Many of these challenges are common across most councils, and the programme material sometimes reinvigorated interest in previous attempts at innovation. For

example, one interviewee noted that they are reconsidering the use of individual service funds (previously trialled) in response to the programme material.

#### 11.4. What was not helpful?

As above, a number of interviewees commented that, whilst the material and delivery of the programme was of a good quality and had appropriate basic commissioning theory, they did not feel the programme offered anything new to them in terms of innovative thinking regarding their own practice, or supported them in managing 'wicked issues' such as managing market instability and strategic relationships across local systems. The content was felt by most interviewed to be too basic, and did not stretch them to unpick the "real-world" complex challenges:

*"To talk about those things that we all are experiencing that are really challenging, you know, working in a political environment, working with no money or less money and still being expected to have positive outcomes, all of that stuff kind of felt like people would raise it and facilitators would say, oh, thank you for that comment. But then now we're going to move on, you know, and it's like, OK! It just felt like they were very focused on like really sticking to like the session plan and the curriculum, which I do get, but I'm just not sure that that's probably what was actually most valuable in having everyone kind of together in those spaces".*

*"So that's what I think needs to happen next time- it needs to be a little bit more focused on how we could all work together. So perhaps could we have something where you've got a collection of people that are all having an issue with a similar thing. Could we get together and could we develop something together? So, we're sharing a resource rather than us all then having to go away and each working on something slightly different. Pooling the resources and making better use of that that would be quite helpful or at least sharing information and being able to pull that together"*

*"What it didn't do, and the thing we felt was missing was how do you commission in today's environment. So, today's environment is very, very different. You know there's a lot of stresses in the system in terms of finances. A lot of stresses in terms of, you know, the kind of sustainability of the sector and a lot of pressure in terms of just what we have to deal with day in, day out and as part of being a strategic leader. Some of the things that you need to*

*manage and decisions that you need to make in that context and it did feel like that perhaps you know the sessions weren't quite really acknowledging that."*

Similarly, others noted that part of the issue was the wide breadth of commissioning knowledge, experience and skills of those attending the programme.

*"Councils sent a range of different roles to the programme - including some more junior staff, so it was difficult for EY to pitch it right - there were new commissioning officers on my table alongside heads of services and assistant directors...the material was relevant to strategic commissioners but it is incumbent on local authorities to send the right person"*

In terms of the structure of the programme, a number of people felt the masterclasses did not meet their expectations. Some of this was due to the nature of online delivery (e.g. hard to concentrate and remove self from the day-to-day, as well as lack of ability to network in these sessions), whilst others commented on the length of these sessions being too short to be able to explore the topics in adequate depth.

*"I struggled quite a lot to get on the ones online, even though technically they should be easier. They're very difficult when you've got people ringing you, and whereas when you took the day, you were completely away and it nobody could contact you. That was really, really helpful to be able to just have the time away, to think a bit differently."*

Finally, in terms of the programme's content and topics, a significant majority of participants interviewed highlighted that the provider perspectives that were delivered to them via pre-recorded videos, or via a masterclass, offered little opportunity for a two-way dialogue. This was reported as a very disappointing aspect of the programme. Participants acknowledged that whilst it is helpful to hear the perspectives of providers, the provider content delivered in the programme was viewed as antagonistic, and therefore did not contribute to aiding the crucial relationships between adult social care commissioners and the provider market.

Participants felt this would have been much more constructive as a two-way conversation, focussing on finding solutions, rather than outlining the problems in working relationships. Others highlighted that the messages in the provider session and videos from national care provider organisations did not reflect their local experiences of more positive working relationships with providers, and so this did not add value.

*"Provider session was painful...basically felt that they (provider organisation) were bashing us and referring to old school commissioning without understanding council budget pressures or referring to coproduction and*

*"working together...there was no real right to reply or challenge these views...so this session put my back up"*

*"Suggest that rather than lobbying groups, future sessions involve large providers such as Mears etc to share their perspectives and examples of where things worked i.e. good contract relationships, coproduction etc and where they had bad experiences without naming names"*

*"The provider session was a turning point for me as it didn't reflect our local experience...my outlook on the course did change as I wasn't going to spend my time being slated by providers"*

Finally, in terms of topics or areas that participants felt were missing or would further benefit such a programme, they suggested:

- Working in a political environment – navigating and negotiating with senior council leaders.
- Managing fees and budgets (e.g. fee setting and open book exercises).

*"The focus should be upon the rapidly changing role of the commissioners - requiring different set of skills such as financial accounting to deal with fee negotiations for example"*

## 11.5. Impact on practice

Evaluators asked participants whether the programme had any impact on their commissioning practice, and if they could share any specific examples of where they have changed their practice (or at least intend to do so) as a result of attending the programme.

Unfortunately, at this stage, there were only a few examples of practice change or impact offered, which may be related to the short time between the completion of the programme and the final evaluation activities. Examples of impact included having time to reflect on practice, recognising that councils across the country are facing similar challenges, and supporting the creation of links and contacts between the participants ongoing sharing of information and practice

*"A kind of intangible output was just reflective time. I don't have reflection time. I don't have time to think...I think being out of the work environment and have an opportunity to be in a structured programme, meeting other colleagues".*

*"So that's been huge and I think it sounds like a really small thing, but it has such an impact that you can actually have those conversations on everything because you can literally ask anybody anything. And it's just opened the doors up".*

Other impacts included the recognised importance to protect time for strategic thinking in commissioning, the ongoing use of the data hub and the sharing of materials / learning with other colleagues in their organisations:

*"I've been putting that time aside being a bit more of a strategic thinker and you're trying to, you know, not do as much of the firefighting which is... hard to do, isn't it, because of how busy things are. But you know, if you don't kind of try and work in that (way), you're never going to move away from that way of working - it's always going to be dealing with the next crisis – which you don't want else it will be like that forever "*

*"The material and presentation on EDI was very high quality which I shared with my team in development sessions...we have monthly development sessions with the adult commissioning team and shared the material on market shaping in these sessions"*

#### 11.5.1. Specific examples of practice offered

Although limited, some participants did offer some specific examples of impact on their practice. Unfortunately, it is too early to be able to demonstrate the impact of these changes, however, the examples are summarised below.

- 1. Example Practice 1:** IPC heard from this participant that they are currently retendering the local sight loss service, and that the programme has helped them to be more proactive and considered in their approach to co-production – including engaging with over 200 people who draw on the service as early as possible to co-design the retendering process, and the outline service specification. In addition, they collaborated with partners such as the voluntary sector, health colleagues and local providers to take a system-based approach and consider the care pathways / linkages for the service effectively, based upon robust data collation and analysis (as supported by the ADASS Data Hub shared within the programme).

*"Without the ignite programme, we would be nowhere near to designing the service in such a coproduced way - it has helped us to become specially*

*focused on coproduction and codesign as an approach and guiding principle. This learning and experience is now being applied to other contract development work and is fully supported by the council's senior management team as a way of future working".*

2. **Example Practice 2:** This person explained that they have initiated a self-awareness survey amongst their team and senior leaders to explore and understand the council's current commissioning practice towards thinking strategically and planning for the future, with a particular focus on their market shaping and influencing activities. The intention is to understand the current resources given between future proofing, and managing the 'here and now' in order to support re-balancing this, if required. This strategic approach was inspired by the programme. In addition, this participant explained they had introduced the 6 hats methodology to their team members to explore how best to respond to a commissioning challenge they are experiencing e.g. how to support and work with providers supporting individuals with behaviours that challenge with mental capacity.
3. **Example Practice 3:** This person advised they were now reviewing their housing support contract as a result of a relationship formed through the programme. This networking opportunity has supported sharing of information, data and practice across the two councils, which has been invaluable to them both. Also, they advised they are now looking at the introduction of artificial intelligence (AI) in their front door services - inspired by an example shared on the programme session on technology. Whilst this is still work in progress and other tools are being considered, the programme allowed the participant to consider the use AI and to draw upon the experience of another council in terms of potential benefits and lessons learned, including ensuring staff are trained and aware of the benefits of AI in their role.
4. **Example Practice 4:** This person advised that they are in the process of writing a new specification for the council's blue badge scheme, and has benefitted from contacting and linking in with the networks made via the programme to inform this. Whilst this was not directly part of the programme delivery / material, this was an impact of the programme related to the opportunity to network and make connections with commissioners across the country.
5. **Example Practice 5:** Similarly to the above, another person said that the programme has allowed them to foster good working relationships with other councils, which has resulted in opportunities to share learning and ideas for mutual benefit. They are currently considering the development of a new domiciliary care tender, and shared learning from another council that has recently updated their tender has, it was reported, saved a lot of development time, promoted better use of national data sources, and raised awareness on latest policy drivers in this area.
6. **Example Practice 6:** Finally, this person reported that the programme had supported them to review their equality impact assessment process. Whilst the review was already in process, they acknowledged that the programme was a helpful prompt to consider good practice examples in recording and monitoring

equality, diversity and inclusion information which was then incorporated into the review.

#### **Practice Example 7 (Level 4: Results)**

*Overview:* The Programme has supported a local authority area to establish a virtual group where commissioners are able to share good practice and learning with each other in a supportive environment.

The virtual group was established that included representation from a number of participants of the programme who had expressed an interest in better utilising Individual Service Funds (ISFs). The host local authority shared their own internal documents and reports, as well as introducing their ISF Commissioning Lead who spoke about their methods for introducing ISFs in the local area, and the lessons learned so far.

*Impact:* Evaluators heard that the virtual group has been well received, is proactive and supportive of working in a collaborative way with other commissioners across the country (and importantly beyond the usual regional networks). It has also allowed the host local authority to gain confidence in their approach to ISFs, and as a result, they are now considering how to further expand its application across a range of services (including day services) to fully realise the potential of ISFs in achieving personalised, and asset-based care and support.

#### **11.6. Opportunity to network and connect with other commissioners via the programme**

As identified throughout this evaluation, the opportunity to network and connect with other commissioners across the country (beyond their local region) has been highlighted as a key benefit and impact of the programme. A common key enabler reported for the networks / relationships was the in-person core module sessions. The applied learning hubs were also mentioned participant as enablers for these connections.

*"The real positive of the programme is being able to talk to colleagues from other councils and the face-to-face contact...however the face-to-face sessions have been rushed and more time is needed for more informal conversations"*

*"Networking has been very beneficial for me - to go beyond boundaries of ADASS regions...there comes a time when you need to look further afield- for example I have connected with a London authority on multigenerational extra care schemes"*

There were mixed views about the sustainability of these networks. There was interest in the Alumni Network being set up by the programme hosts, via LinkedIn, but others were not so sure on this (e.g. some stating they did not have an account on LinkedIn or felt this would not be a useable platform for them). Others explained that some cohorts had set up WhatsApp groups to keep in touch, but once again, there were mixed views on whether this methodology was appropriate for everyone (e.g. regular messages / alerts, and not all colleagues have work phones to partake in this method of communication).

*"There's something there for me about how we make really good use of our commissioning experience and expertise that we hold across all the different local authorities are people doing some bloody good work out there. And I think the ability to kind of have that in a structured way that allows people to connect and make best use of that where people are actually saying, you know, I'm going to give up some of my time."*

Some felt strongly that it will take conscious effort and resource to sustain the networks, and whilst they were unsure who would take on this responsibility, people felt it was or could be important and valuable to commissioners, if co-ordinated well.

*"Now left to our own devices as to whether this network will work going forwards...potential idea is to hold an annual alumni get together event to maintain learning and sharing of ideas"*

### 11.7. Other feedback / final thoughts

Overall, participants supported the idea of an ongoing dedicated programme that was specifically aimed at senior commissioners, including aspiring leaders in commissioning roles. There was a strong call from those interviewed that this programme needs to better tackle the 'wicked issues' relating to strategic commissioning and leadership, and this would be better supported by a programme that is designed and delivered or led by people who have current or recent experience of commissioning. The in-person modules were also frequently cited as the preference for delivery.

*"...we mustn't forget commissioning is a discipline. There's lots of information out there about, you know, commissioning for better outcomes and commissioning for well-being. There's lots of courses. But I think strategic commissioning, for me, is a discipline...Feels like an under-invested area of development so Ignite was a good programme to introduce...My overriding reflection I'd hate for there to be no more investment and this is it, that would be a real shame..."*

*"If this is supposed to be aimed at commissioners, why is it not being led by commissioners, I mean? It just felt a bit like, I think, that they didn't have the depth of understanding. And also, I think people were asking really intelligent questions that I think could have actually sparked really good conversation. But I think because they didn't really understand what people were talking about, they (facilitators) then just quickly moved us on and I think that that was a real detriment to being able to actually really get a bit more from the course".*

There was some interesting feedback that the questions asked in the 'discovery' and 'design' stage of the programme may not have been the right ones, in order to develop a programme aimed at commissioning leaders with strategic responsibility:

*"When they were designing the course, they met with some of us and asked the question "what do you think you need to know about to be a good commissioner?", and we covered a lot of the topics that they then went on to cover in this course. But I think the question should have been "now that you've been working in commissioning for a number of years, what are the issues that you are still grappling with and want to know more about?"*

## 12. Line manager and DASS feedback (Level 3: Behaviours)

### Evaluation questions:

**To what extent do participants feel that the programme has been a valuable experience?**

**To what extent have commissioners improved their knowledge, skills and confidence in the particular areas of focus for the programme including strategic leadership, market shaping, data and intelligence, and meaningful collaboration and engagement?**

**To what extent do participants feel empowered and able to demonstrate that they are embedding / sharing their learning in their local areas?**

Following the conclusion of the programme in March 2025, evaluators contacted participants' line managers and DASSs (where contact details were available and up to date). This included 92 line managers, and 113 DASSs. Every person was offered the opportunity to provide feedback on the programme, with a focus on the difference they believe it has had, or will have, on their colleague's commissioning practice. Line managers and DASSs were offered the chance to complete a short

online survey, partake in an interview or both. The engagement rate in these activities is summarised in the table below:

**Table 6: Programme feedback engagement**

Role	Online Survey	Interview
Line manager	28 responses received (30% return rate)	17 interviewed (18% of identified line managers)
DASS	24 responses received (21% return rate)	18 interviewed (16% of identified DASSs)

Evaluators were able to speak to at least one line manager from each of the eight cohorts via the interviews and, with the exception of cohort 7, we interviewed at least one DASS from each cohort.

## 12.1. Survey feedback

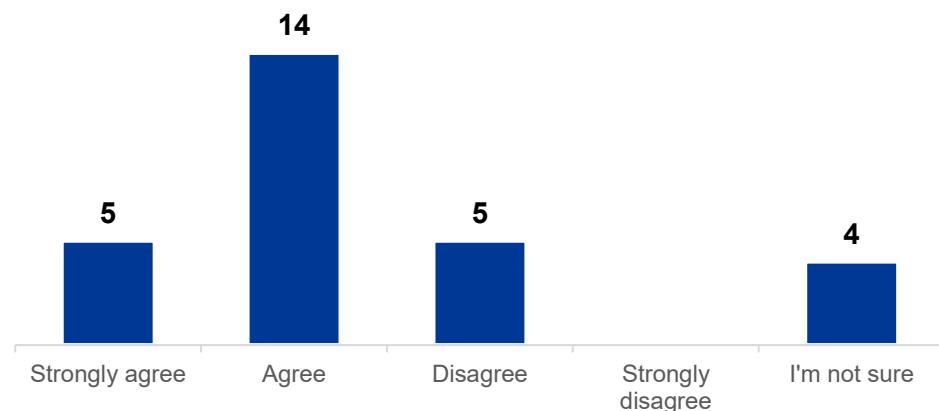
### 12.1.1. Line Managers

The purpose of the survey was to capture the perceptions of line managers of the usefulness of the programme for the colleague(s) they manage, including whether they had noticed changes in their day-to-day role.

The survey asked line managers to rate their agreement or disagreement to statements about whether the programme built their colleague's knowledge, skills and confidence in certain areas of commissioning. Answers were given on a scale of 'Strongly agree' to 'Strongly disagree' and after each statement, respondents were given opportunity to explain their answer in a free text response.

### 12.1.1.1. Being a strategic leader

**Graph 16: “Ignite has supported my colleague(s) to increase their knowledge, skills and confidence in being a strategic leader” (n=28)**



As shown in graph 16, 19 line managers agreed or strongly agreed that Ignite had supported their colleague to increase their knowledge, skills and confidence in being a strategic leader. The other 9 respondents (almost one third of the surveys returned) said they disagreed or were not sure. Some respondents explained their reason(s) with the most common feedback summarised below:

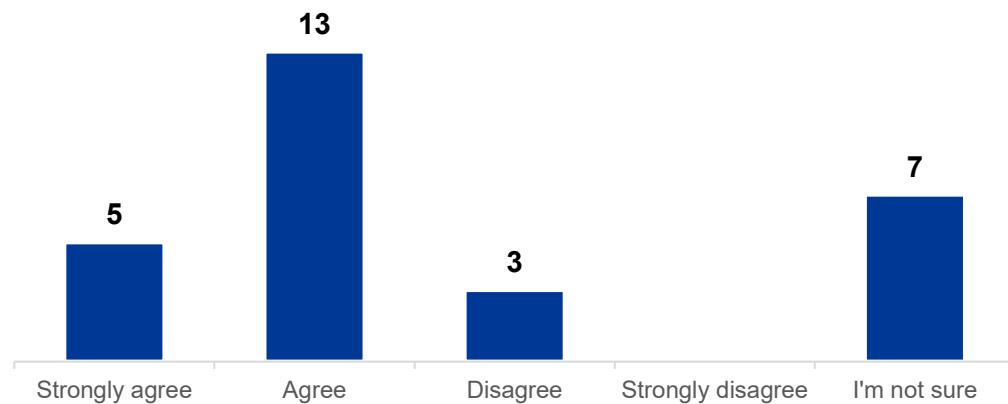
Reason(s) for answer
<b>Benefit of being able to share good practice and ideas across peers</b> <i>E.g. “sharing with peers has had a positive impact”</i> <i>“[colleague] has benefited from being able to compare her thoughts with professionals working in the same space and grappling with similar issues”</i>
<b>Colleague has displayed more confidence/knowledge/new ideas since programme</b> <i>E.g. “I have observed greater confidence and renewed motivation”</i> <i>“Confidence in commissioning leadership”</i>
<b>Usefulness of building professional network</b> <i>E.g. “What the course did provide was opportunities to build networks and contacts with other commissioners”</i>
<b>No evidence seen so far</b> <i>E.g. “Not visibly in terms of the difference between strategic leadership before or after the course”</i>
<b>Parts of course did not lead to this aim</b>

**Reason(s) for answer**

*E.g. “some of the content of the course wasn't necessarily pitched at a senior level”*

#### 12.1.1.2. Innovative market shaping approaches

**Graph 17: “Ignite has supported my colleague(s) to increase their knowledge, skills and confidence in innovative market shaping approaches” (n=28)**



Graph 17 shows that 18 of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that Ignite has supported their colleagues to increase their knowledge, skills and confidence in innovative market shaping approaches. One quarter of respondents (n=7) said they were not sure and the other 3 disagreed.

**Reason(s) for answer****New knowledge/ideas gained in this area**

*E.g. “[participant] has been able to apply the knowledge/skills that he has gained to support his colleagues/team with new ideas and approaches to market shaping - of particular value when considering opportunities to do things differently/consider cost savings opportunities”*

*“This was a useful subject area and provided some learning”*

**Useful to hear examples/approaches from other areas and programme participants**

*E.g. “Some useful approaches gleaned from other areas”*

*“Good discussions with colleagues on the programme to share good practice”*

**No new knowledge gained in this area through programme/ no evidence of impact yet**

*E.g. “nothing new - speakers were already known to us and we use them”*

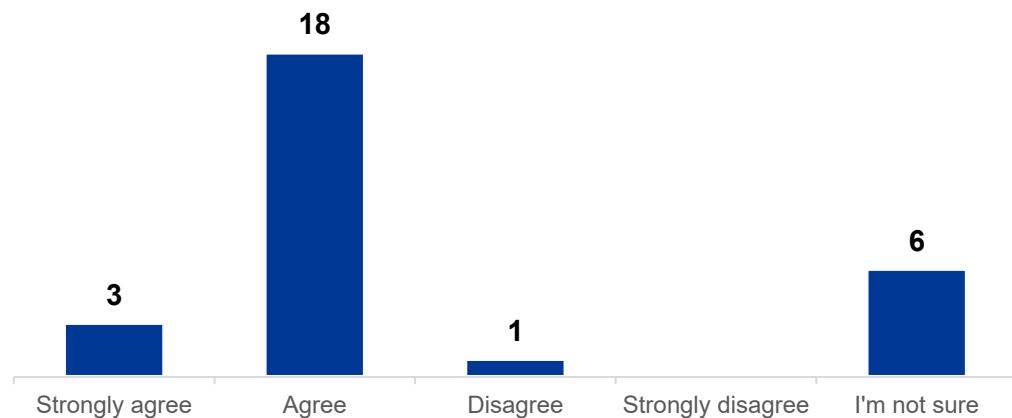
**Reason(s) for answer**

Some extra content would have been useful/ innovative content missing

E.g. "he [participant] was disappointed that the content was not more forward thinking and innovative"

**12.1.1.3. Using data and intelligence**

**Graph 18: "Ignite has supported my colleague(s) to increase their knowledge, skills and confidence in using data and intelligence to inform commissioning decisions now, and start to plan for the future" (n=28)**

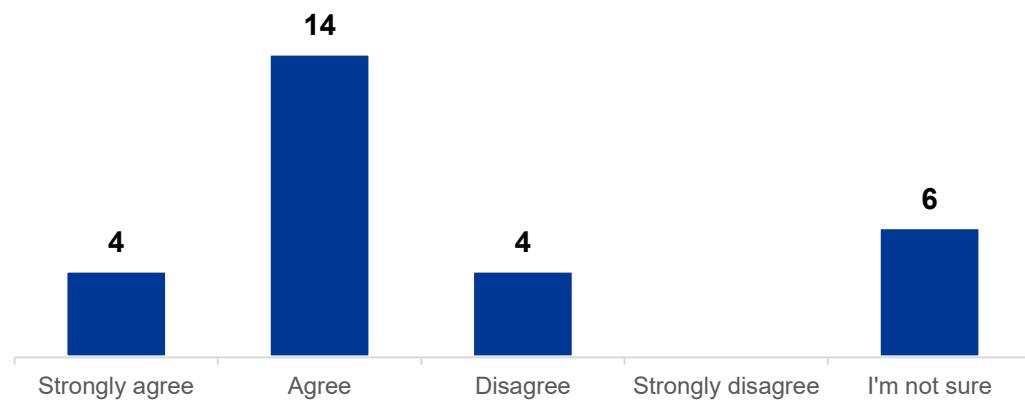


As shown in graph 18, 21 of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that Ignite had supported their colleague(s) to increase skills, knowledge and confidence in using data and intelligence to inform commissioning decisions now and start to plan for the future. The other quarter (n=6) said they were not sure, apart from one respondent who disagreed.

*"[Participant] has a very strong analytical mindset, which he applies in his work. The ability to tap into the national database that the programme has given him access to has been helpful for him to make wider comparisons/investigations into our performance vs other players, and to understand reasons for differences"*

#### 12.1.1.4. Forming effective partnerships with local provider market

**Graph 19: “Ignite has supported my colleague(s) to increase their knowledge, skills and confidence to form effective partnerships with the local provider market” (n=28)**

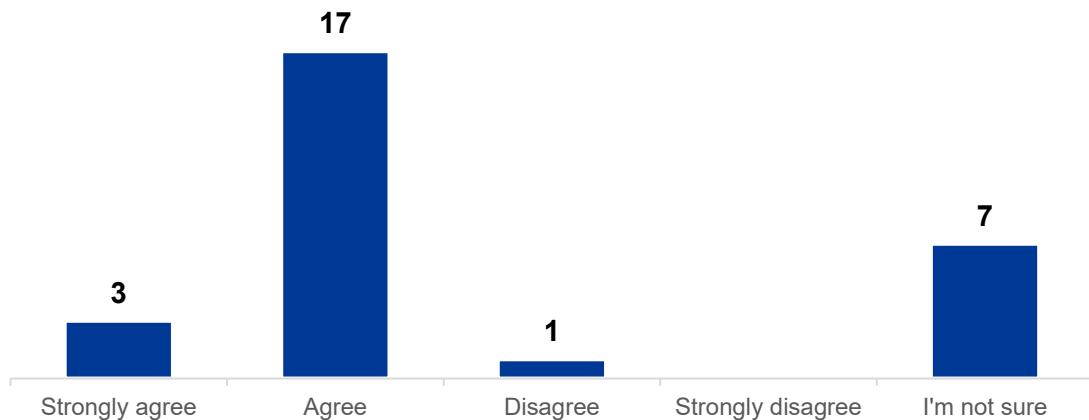


Graph 19 shows that 18 of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the programme had supported their colleague(s) to increase knowledge, skills and confidence to form effective partnerships with the local provider market. 4 of the respondents disagreed that this had been the case, and 6 were not sure.

Reason(s) for answers
<b>Colleague/team already had strength in this area before the programme</b> E.g. “this wasn't really an area where professional development was needed”
<b>Evidence of colleague making changes/thinking differently in this area after programme</b> E.g. “My colleague is taking a more proactive approach to relational commissioning and talks confidently about the value of strategic partnership arrangements”
<b>Content in this area could be improved/was not beneficial</b> E.g. “Two sessions with national provider organisations very negative and not interactive in terms of resulting in improved commissioning arrangements”

#### 12.1.1.5. Collaboration and engagement with local people and communities

**Graph 20: “Ignite has supported my colleague(s) to increase their knowledge, skills and confidence to embed meaningful collaboration and engagement with local people and communities within their commissioning practices” (n=28)**



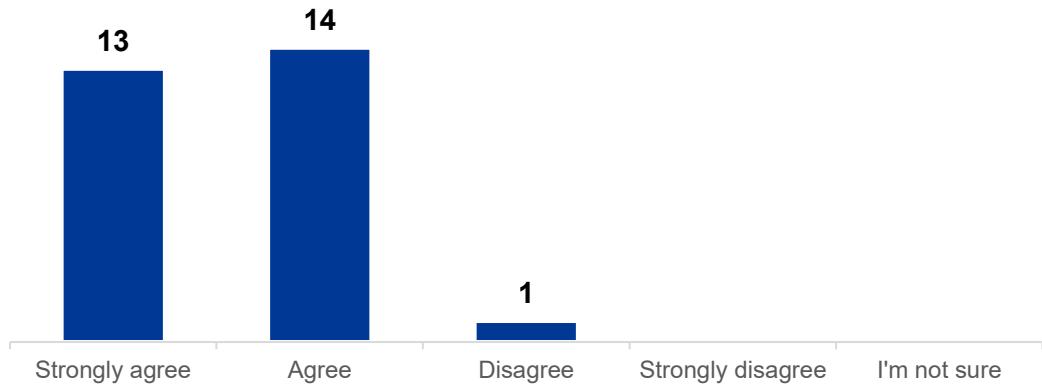
Graph 20 demonstrates that 20 line manager respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the programme had increased their colleague(s) knowledge, skills and confidence to embed meaningful collaboration and engagement with local people and communities. One quarter (n=7) of respondents were not sure, and one disagreed.

*“The participants both build in the voices of people with lived experience into the commissioning cycle. They feel that hearing more about wider good practice and cases studies would have enhanced their skills and knowledge further. They both have confident to take different approaches”*

#### 12.1.1.6. Building networks and learning from others

A key feature of the programme was bringing together senior commissioners from different areas to learn with and from each other. The line manager respondents were asked to reflect on whether this has been achieved, by rating their agreement/disagreement in a statement. The results are shown in graph 21.

**Graph 21: “The Ignite Programme has allowed my colleague(s) to build networks between commissioners and maximise the benefits of learning from and alongside peers” (n=28)**



As shown in graph 21, all but one of the line manager respondents agreed that the programme had allowed their colleague(s) to build networks between commissioners and learn from and alongside peers.

#### Reason(s) for answers

**Network building and learning from peers was a key strength/ standout of programme**

E.g. *“This was the most positive outcome of the course - building networks across LA and sharing practice”*

*“discussions around the key benefits of the programme has focused on the networking, building relationships with different commissioners / colleagues and areas that we would not normally engage with”*

**Evidence of participant usefully taking back ideas from peers/maintaining the networking opportunities beyond the programme**

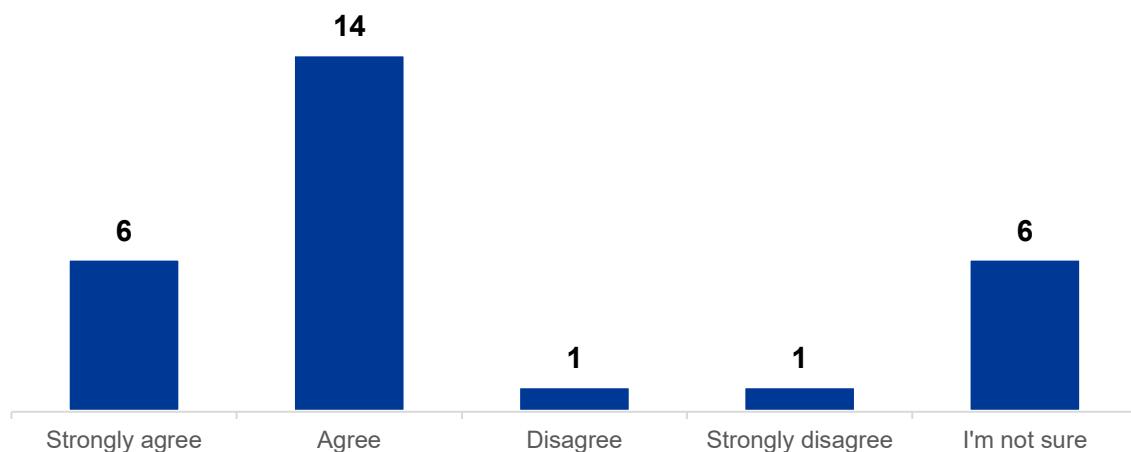
E.g. *“they have made contact with these networks since the events to share and learn”*

*“There have been several occasions when [participant] has reached out to colleagues they met on the course, to share learning”*

### 12.1.1.7. Impact of the programme on commissioning practice

The line manager respondents were asked to consider the longer-term impacts of the programme, particularly in terms of impact on their organisation. To understand their perception, a statement about whether the skills, experience and networks built through the programme had already, or would improve, commissioning practice in their organisation was presented, which respondents could rate their agreement or disagreement in. The results are shown in graph 22.

**Graph 22: “I feel confident that the skills, experience and networks build through the Ignite Programme have improved or will improve commissioning practice from my organisation as a result” (n=28)**



Graph 22 shows that 6 respondents strongly agreed, and another 14 agreed (20 in total), that they were confident that commissioning practice in their organisation would be improved due to the networks, skills and experience built in the programme. For the other 8 respondents, the majority said they were not sure, apart from 2 respondents who disagreed and strongly disagreed.

Reason(s) for answer
<p><b>Course content gaps/weaknesses mean impact on practice across organization unlikely, limited or unclear</b></p> <p>E.g. “Member of staff felt course was set at a basic commissioning entry level” “not pitched at a senior enough level for the participant we sent”</p>
<p><b>Ongoing networking/learning from each other will benefit commissioning practice</b></p> <p>E.g. “Participants have shared that the greatest impact has been through their networking and connections and the ability to now check in on areas of commissioning that colleagues are also undertaking”</p>

Reason(s) for answer
<b>Plans have been made/are in action to share learning more widely in organisation</b> E.g. <i>“my colleague has organised learning sessions to ensure other team members can benefit”</i>
<b>Improvements in practice already observed since programme</b> E.g. <i>“this programme has encouraged him to look outwards more, to bring in knowledge/learning/insight from external partners”</i>

#### 12.1.1.8. Changes observed in colleagues

Line manager respondents were asked in a free text response box to outline any changes they had so far noticed in the colleague(s) they line manage who had taken part in the programme (such as aspirations at work, behaviours and skills). 21 of the 28 line managers answered this question.

Changes observed
<b>Improved confidence in role/practice within organisation</b> E.g. <i>“I have observed more confidence”</i> <i>[participant] is more confident in asserting their views and this adds to their credibility within the organisation”</i>
<b>Appreciation and/or application of learning from peers/networking</b> E.g. <i>“Colleague has got a lot out of the action learning/peer forum groups and is interested in carrying these on”</i> <i>“Enhanced appreciation of networking and engaging with peers and colleagues”</i>
<b>Changes in practice/thinking</b> E.g. <i>“Ability to see the bigger picture and not get embedded in day-to-day issues”</i>
<b>Being proactive/motivated to drive new things forward from learning</b> E.g. <i>“Keen to implement what they have learnt”</i>
<b>No changes observed so far</b> E.g. <i>“too soon to say”</i>

#### 12.1.1.9. Application of learning

The final question in the line manager survey asked the line managers to provide any specific examples of how they had so far observed their colleague(s) applying

what they had learnt in the Ignite programme. 21 out of the 28 line managers (75%) shared at least one area of application, which covered the following themes:

### Specific example of application summary

#### Applying learning to a specific task/project

E.g. *“Learning applied notably within coproduction and bringing service users on board within commissioning work programme”*

*“Learning is already influencing approach to large scale tender being undertaken in 25/26”*

#### Facilitating/engaging in ongoing networking to learn from peers in other areas and/or peer learning

E.g. *“Utilising networks to explore different commissioning approaches”*

#### Using materials/resources shared in course within role

E.g. *“Data hub used to input into written reports”*

#### Using thinking/problem solving techniques learnt in course (Action Learning, six hats)

E.g. *“Use of action learning sets”*

#### Disseminating learning to colleagues in organisation

E.g. *“development of training programme for commissioners”*

#### Change in perspective/thinking about things

E.g. *“greater calmness in tackling tricky issues”*

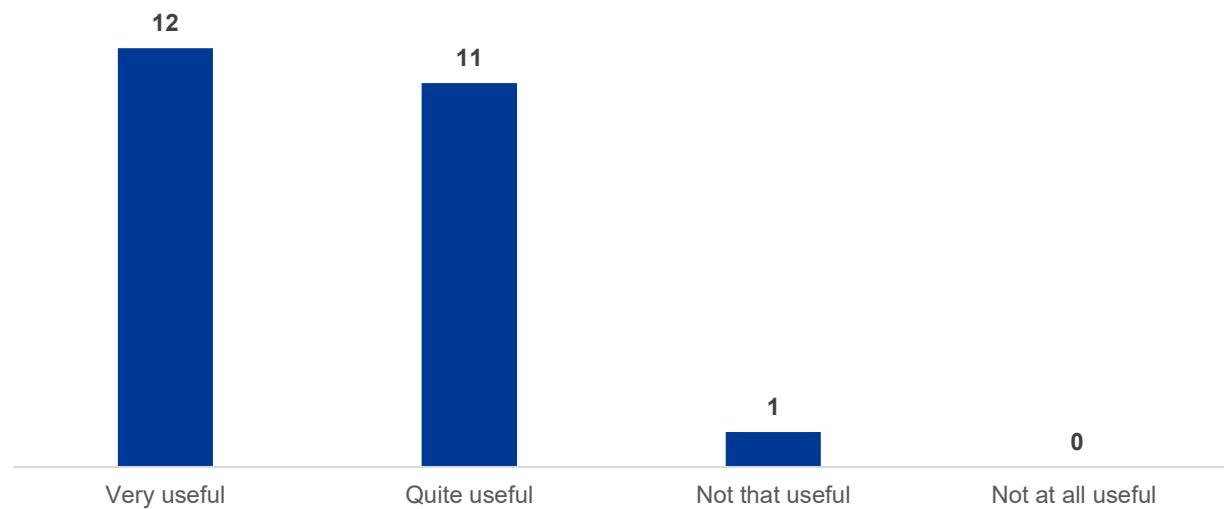
### 12.1.2. Director of adult social services

At the end of the programme in March 2025, participants' Director of Adult Social Services were asked to fill in an online survey giving their perspective of the programme and how their colleague(s) had found it, including any early impacts they had observed.

#### 12.1.2.1. Usefulness

The first question in the survey asked DASSs to rate their perception of how useful Ignite had been for those staff on the programme. The results are displayed in graph 23:

**Graph 23: What is your perception of how useful Ignite has been for your staff who participated in the programme? (n=24)**



Graph 23 shows that 12 DASSs perceived that the programme had been 'Very useful', with all but one of the remaining respondents saying it had been 'Quite useful.'

#### Usefulness of programme

##### Benefit of building relationships/connections with other senior commissioners

E.g. "some good networking opportunities"

"feedback positive, in particular about forming links with colleagues in other LA's"

##### Benefit of sharing and hearing experiences, ideas, good practice from others

E.g. "learnt from other commissioners"

"sharing experiences with other commissioners was useful"

##### Feedback that course (or specific parts of course) interesting/insightful

E.g: "Some sessions were inspiring and engaging, e.g. data analysis in commissioning, innovation, using ISFs"

"Feedback I have received from the participant is they found the course useful, insightful and has learnt a lot"

##### Course promoted/improved/innovative practice/taking a strategic approach

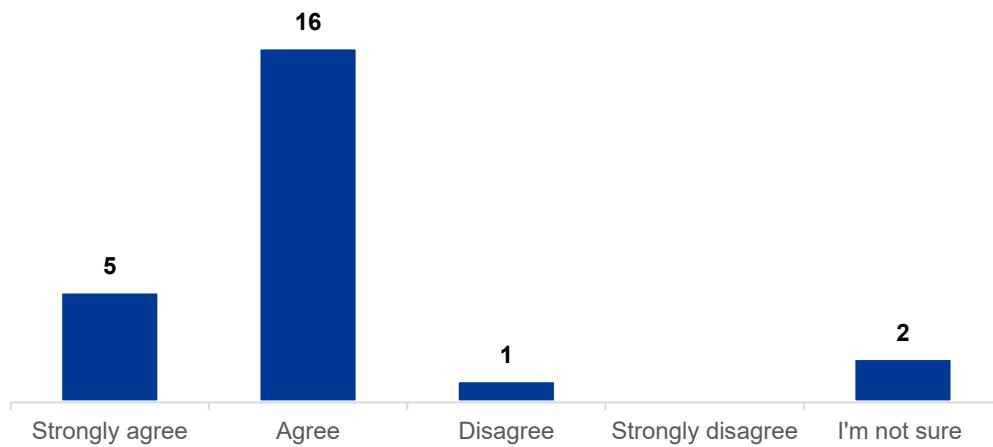
E.g. "the programme really helped the commissioner to think strategically"

#### 12.1.2.2. Knowledge, skills and confidence

The DASSs were asked to consider the impact of the programme on their colleague(s) through a series of statements which they rated from strongly agree to

strongly disagree. The skills/areas in the statements were taken from the stated aims/areas of focus for the programme. There was opportunity after each statement to explain their rating, if they wished to.

**Graph 24: “Ignite has supported my colleague(s) to increase their knowledge, skills and confidence in being a strategic leader” (n=24)**

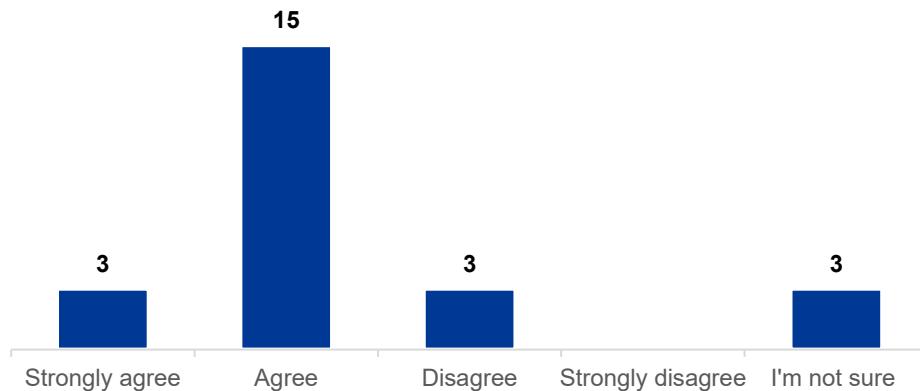


*“The staff described the course has been really good, following an application for a more senior post he has been successful and is now working as the head of commissioning”*

*“Ignite has supported a shift in thinking of how commissioners work with providers on a more open basis, rather than when there is an agenda that needs meeting - building and strengthening relationships”*

*“The colleague stated that he felt for his seniority some of the content was not pitched at the right level, he felt more could have been done on the strategical aspects”*

**Graph 25: “Ignite has supported my colleague(s) to increase their knowledge, skills and confidence in innovative market shaping approaches”**

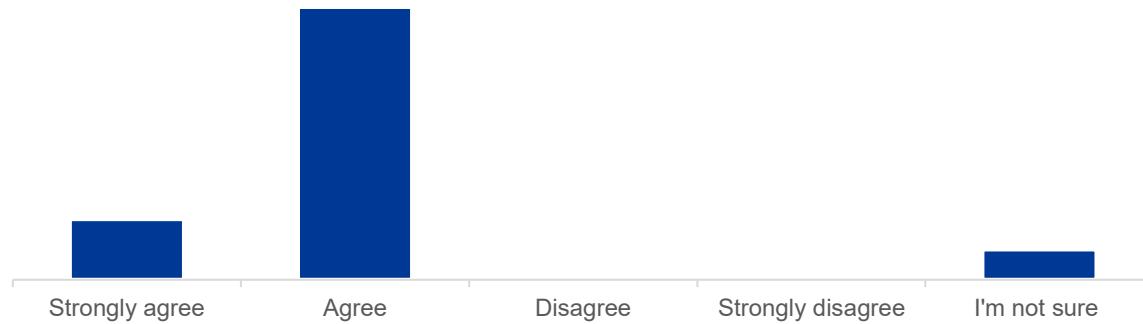


*“We have been through a difficult few years stabilising a high risk market. Both learners have led some really innovative work shaping our local market and driving personalisation at a strategic level.”*

*“I would consider the member of staff to already be quite innovative in this space. Again it increased knowledge of what others had done”*

*“Learning acquired on the programme informed and triggered conversations about local market shaping approaches, e.g. developing MSPs and sufficiency strategies. It also provided benchmarking information and examples from other areas of the country”*

**Graph 26: “Ignite has supported my colleague(s) to increase their knowledge, skills and confidence in using data and intelligence to inform commissioning decisions now, and start to plan for the future”**

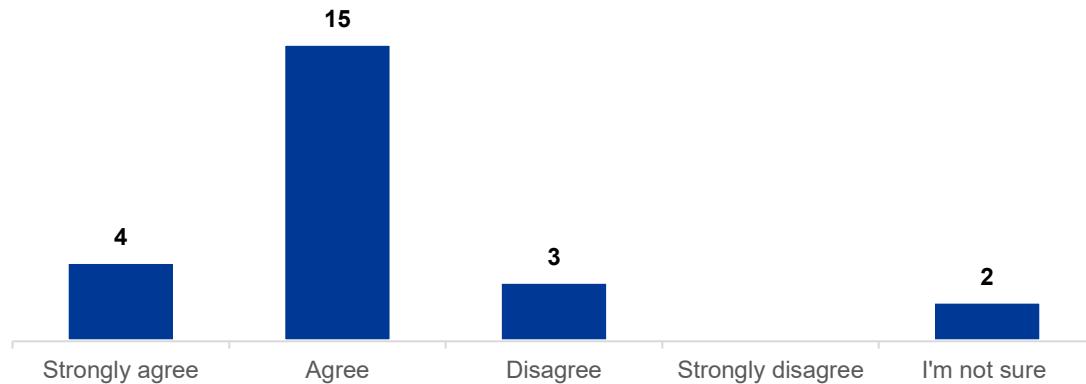


*“We have had several discussions about benefits and disbenefits of planning for short, medium and long term. This triggered a review of our strategic conversations pipeline and procurement pipeline, against the background of immediate priorities/pressures and changing national policy and regulatory context”*

*“Supported critique of current data and intelligence and identified data areas for improvement locally”*

*“They were already v confident on this but a helpful reminder”*

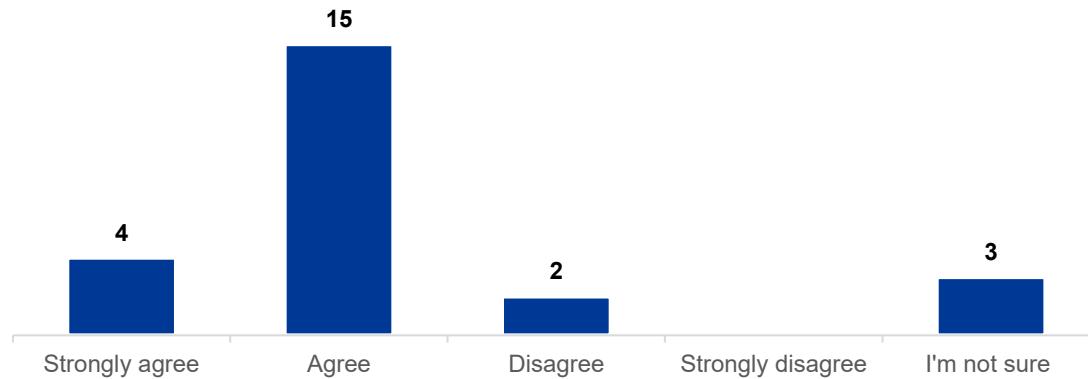
**Graph 27: “Ignite has supported my colleague(s) to increase their knowledge, skills and confidence to form effective partnerships with the local provider market”**



*“The programme endorsed the importance of building strong strategic relationships in commissioning. We are refreshing our provider engagement approaches locally and regionally, and are reviewing the role of provider care associations in the area”*

*“There were concerns about the provider information shared”*

**Graph 28: “Ignite has supported my colleague(s) to increase their knowledge, skills and confidence to embed meaningful collaboration and engagement with local people and communities within their commissioning practices”**



*“This is an area of development across the organisation and the programme has helped shape the approach”*

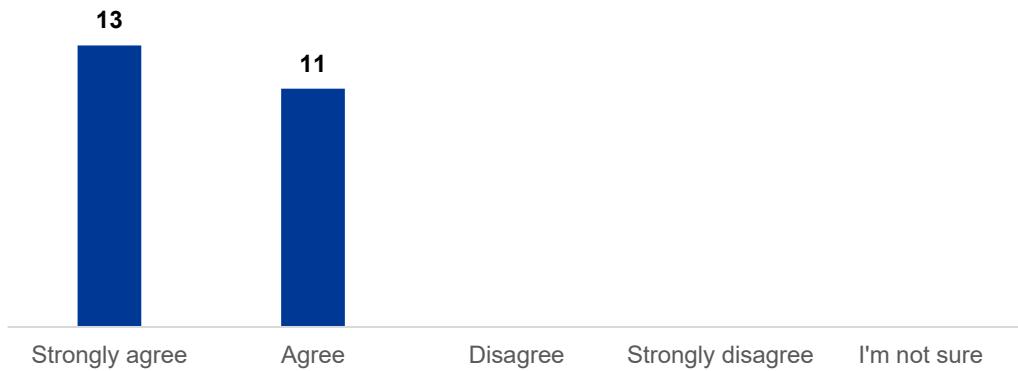
*“there wasn't sufficient content on co-production and how to do it really well to do this”*

Overall, looking at graphs 24 to 28, the DASS respondents had a high level of agreement for each of the statements. The area that DASSs most commonly agreed or strongly agreed with was that the programme had strengthened participant's knowledge, skills and confidence in using data and intelligence to inform commissioning decisions. The area that the least DASSs agreed with was that Ignite had supported participants in developing skills knowledge and confidence in innovative market shaping approaches.

#### 12.1.2.3. Building networks

Another key aim of the programme was to build networks of commissioners; therefore, the survey asked the DASSs whether they perceived that this had been achieved, again through asking them to rate if they agreed or disagreed with a statement:

**Graph 29: “The Ignite Programme has allowed my colleague(s) to build networks between commissioners and maximise the benefits of learning from and alongside peers”**



Graph 29 shows that all 24 DASS respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the Ignite programme had helped to build networks between commissioners.

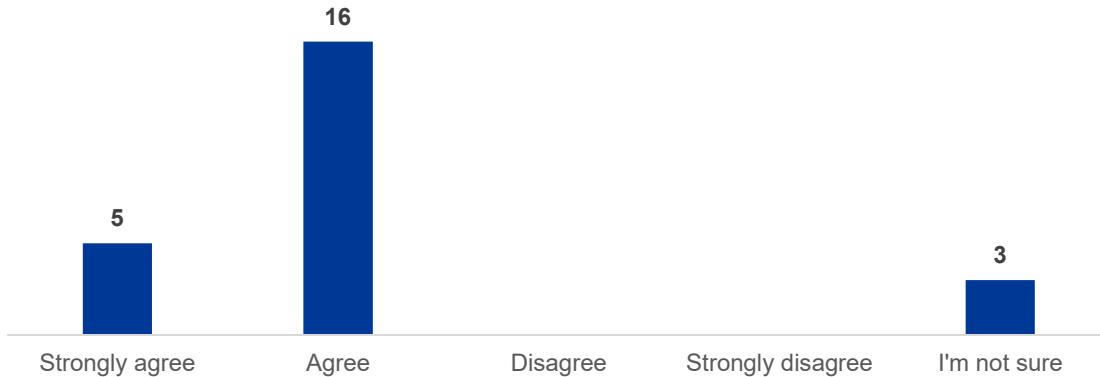
*“Possibly the only level of positive feedback received”*

*This has been the biggest benefit to date. The ability to contact a fellow commissioner from the programme to ask a question, ask for a practical tool, start a focused project around a shared issue has been invaluable. Examples include work on respite care (which accelerated our local work in this space) and sharing best practice in the use of ISFs (again this shaped and accelerated our work locally). There is also greater confidence in knowing that you are not alone with struggling with a particular issue and sharing what works and does not work in a safe space with a group of fellow commissioners”*

#### 12.1.2.4. Impact on organisation

DASS respondents were asked to reflect on their confidence that what was learnt and built during the programme will or has already improved commissioning practices in their organisation. Again, this was through asking them to rate agreement with a statement:

**Graphs 30: “I feel confident that the skills, experience and networks built through the Ignite Programme have improved or will improve commissioning practice for my organisation as a result”**



Graph 30 shows that the majority of respondents (21 out of 24) agreed that they were confident there would be improvement in commissioning practice in their organisation as a result of the programme. Respondents could explain their rating in a free text response. These were as follows:

*“The feedback received is that the programme is not at a high enough level to provide anything more than just reassurance of current practice”*

*“Colleagues indicate to me that they have had a broad benefit, but I did not get the sense that it has been fundamentally transformative”*

*“having access to a national network of senior commissioners will be invaluable in commissioning practice improvements”*

The DASSs were also asked if they had heard of any specific examples so far of how their Ignite participant colleague had implemented good, innovative and strategic commissioning learnt in the programme into their work, through a free text question. The responses were as follows:

- How colleagues are working with providers – such as thinking differently on approaches to uplift discussions, use of market position statements and strategic risk management.
- Links with other council areas and trying new approaches.
- Embedding outcome-based commissioning.
- Reinforced current ways of working.

*“Several examples in progress:*

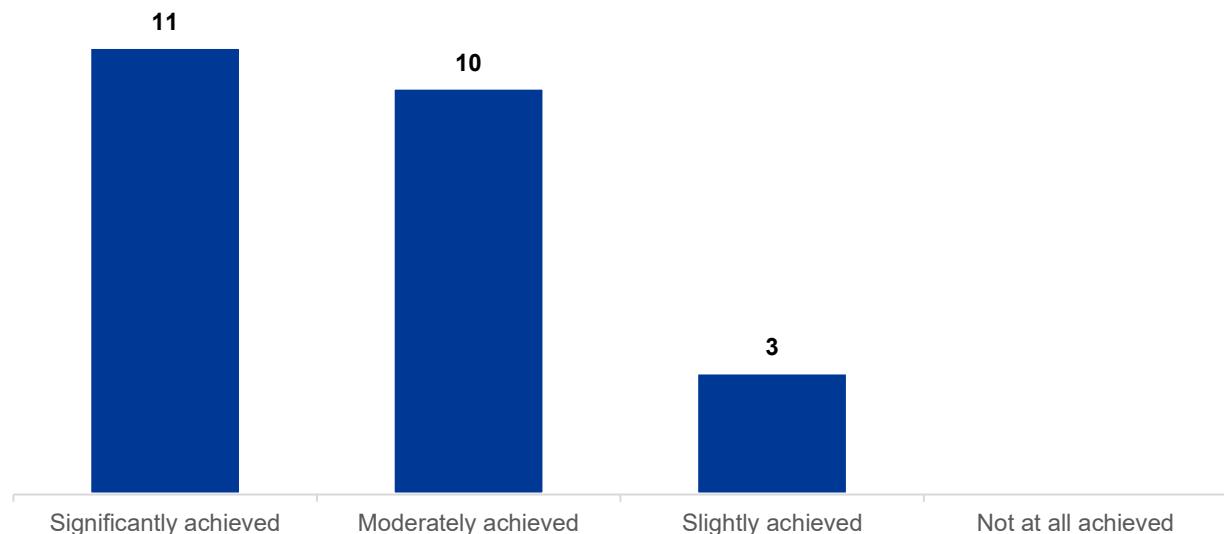
- 1) *Using learning from the network to inform local strategic review of all age respite. Generosity of the commissioner from [name of local authority] in sharing their experience and learning has been greatly appreciated*
- 2) *Learning about the use of ISFs in other areas of the country and using this knowledge to shape work locally with a provider who is leading on ISFs nationally - as a stepping stone to developing a local pilot and then a new model of specialist community based support.*
- 3) *Rethinking our approach to how we quantify, visualise and narrate what commissioners do and difference we make - through strategic use of data, demand and capacity models, and new ways of evidencing and communicating impact to different stakeholders”*

These responses show that around 40% of the DASSs were able to identify at least one specific example of change the participant(s) had made as a result of the programme.

#### 12.1.2.5. Application process

DASSs were responsible for nominating colleagues to take part in the programme. Therefore, the survey asked to what extent they felt the application process had been able to achieve the aim of offering training to senior adult social care commissioners across England:

**Graph 31: The Ignite Programme aimed to offer training for senior adult social care commissioners across England. To what extent do you think the application process achieved this aim?**



#### Reflections about application/selection process of participants for the programme

##### **Felt process helped them put forward most suitable participant**

E.g: *“it enabled me to put forward two very talented senior commissioners”*

*“The selection process did enable me to select the most suitable participant”*

##### **Some parts of training not advanced/innovative enough for their participant(s)**

*E.g. “the course content seemed more tailored to those aspiring to be a Strategic Commissioner rather than experienced commissioners wanting to develop further expertise”*

##### **Positives around course content and/or impact**

E.g. *“it has been broadly beneficial”*

##### **Negatives around course content**

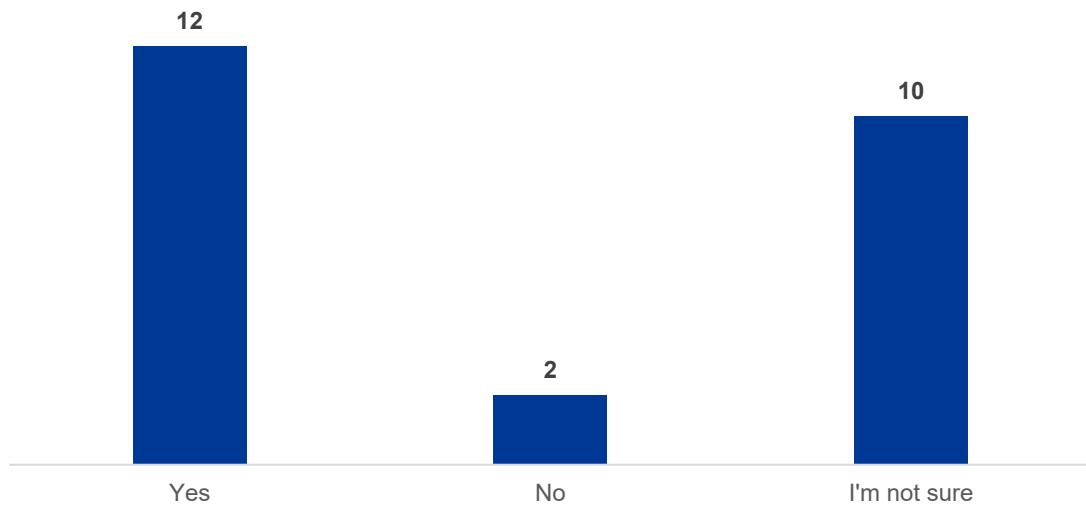
*E.g. “The participant has fed back that in the main they feel that the training was not innovative and offered minimal new thought/approaches”*

##### **The mix of levels of seniority/experience across participants in programme was detrimental**

#### 12.1.2.6. Future financing of the programme

The final questions asked the DASSs to consider the future of the programme, including whether they would be willing to pay for it.

**Graph 32: Would you recommend that your council pay for senior commissioning colleagues to attend Ignite training in the future?**



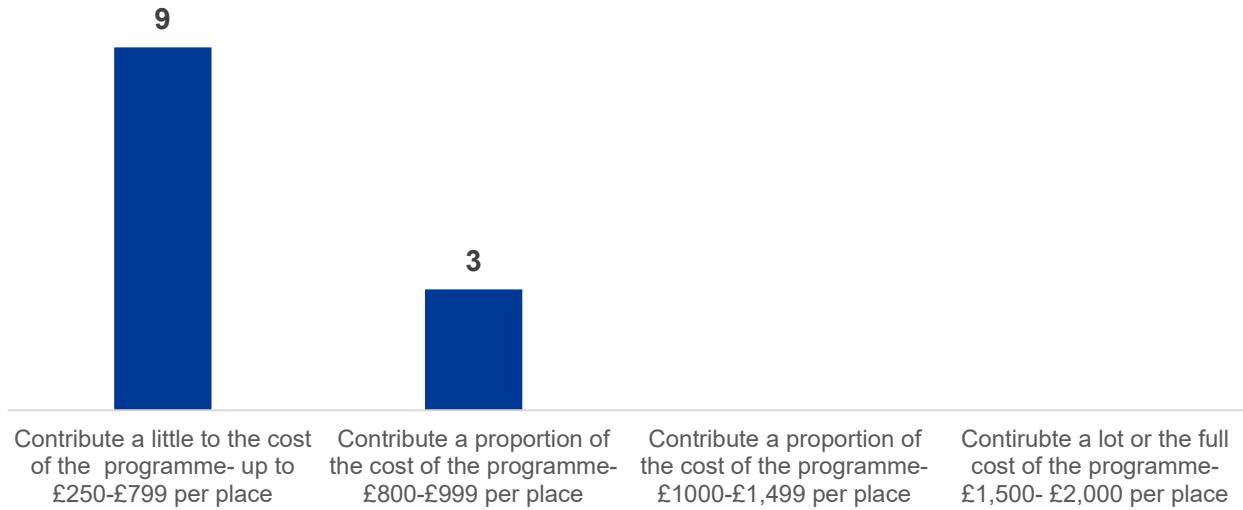
Twelve DASSs (50% of respondents) said 'No' or 'I'm not sure' in regard to recommending their council pay for this training in the future:

*"I would need reassurance that the level of content is relevant to current challenges and offers more than other training we provide"*

*"It would depend on the financial constraints at the time and being able to develop a business case on the ROI of the training"*

*"Feedback has been that it has been broadly beneficial, but not significantly transformational and that it was a large time commitment relative to the benefits"*

The remaining 12 DASSs (50%) said they would recommend their council funding the programme in the future, and therefore were asked to indicate how much they would be willing to contribute towards such a programme:

**Graph 33: Please indicate how much your council would likely to pay for an individual's place on the programme?**

Graph 33 shows that the majority of the 12 respondents who said they would recommend their council paying for the course suggested they would contribute a little to the cost, £250 to £799 per place. The other three respondents selected the next option up, £800-£999 per place.

*“Whilst I recognise that budgets are stressed and councils would need to think long and hard about investing £2,000 to one programme for one officer. It would be based on the VFM (value for money) and ROI (return on investment) and given the financial circumstances the council is in at that time”*

*“The current financial climate would make any larger contribution difficult”*

*“Whilst the programme has been beneficial - and well thought out - I just don't have sufficient training budget to be able to cover the full cost - plus travel and accommodation needed”*

## 12.2. 1:1 Interviews

Evaluators interviewed 17 line managers and 18 DASSs to gather more comprehensive feedback regarding their expectations on the programme, whether they felt these were achieved, and if they have observed any changes in their colleague's practice as a result of the programme. We also asked DASSs whether they would be willing to pay or contribute to this type of programme in the future.

### 12.2.1. Nomination process

IPC asked the DASS and line managers the reasons for nominating the colleague they did for the programme. The main reasons reported were as follows:

- An opportunity for training, that is rarely available and aimed at aspiring leaders in commissioning.
- A way to recognise or endorse talent in the team, and supportive of succession planning for leadership and senior roles.
- Ongoing training and development for colleagues.

### 12.2.2. Programme expectations

We asked about expectations for the programme i.e. hopes for their colleague, and whether they felt this had been achieved. We heard the key expectations for the programme were as follows:

- Enhancing leadership skills in the commissioning environment.
- Broadening the organisation's networks and meeting other commissioners beyond their local region.
- A programme that would inspire innovation and creative curiosity – shifting colleagues from the traditional way of doing things and offering the confidence and knowledge to try new approaches.

There was a mixed reaction across those interviewed as to whether their expectations on the programme had been met.

DASSs and line managers tended to agree with the participants that the programme had offered a valuable opportunity to reflect and think about commissioning practice, refresh and/or cement skills in essential commissioning practice. The ability to build effective networks and relationships with commissioners across the country, and share experiences and learn from each other continued to be a key perceived benefit from the programme.

*"Was interesting and invigorating, and well suited to commissioning officers especially in terms of networking and basic commissioning skills"*

*[the programme] created the space for commissioners to have conversations with each other"*

*"Main benefit was networking and meeting other people from across the country, sharing experiences, sharing challenges. And it's you could immediately see the benefits. So, we were talking about some things around better care fund and we'll be taking some things about the use of the hospital discharge funding."*

*"Networking was valuable and time to think, but overall, the programme was pitched at a more junior level of commissioner rather than an experienced senior commissioner"*

However, as alluded to above, those interviewed shared a concern that the content and pitch of the programme was not aligned with their expectations. It was felt that the content could be too basic for senior aspiring commissioners, and the programme did not offer sufficient time and space to reflect on the current challenges (often referred to as the "wicked issues") in adult social care such as maintaining strategic and systematic relationships, and decommissioning provision in a financially challenging environment.

*"Not very positive feedback...[participant] enjoyed the experience and listening to others but did not take back anything tangible...[they] noted that it didn't stretch me or make me think or learn or make me try new things"*

*" But this is perhaps because it is very hard to deliver commissioning training when the role is hard to understand in terms of the sheer breadth of the skill set required...overall the material was very basic with limited leadership elements and more suited to junior commissioners than senior strategic commissioners"*

### 12.2.3. What worked well?

In terms of perceived key takeaways for their colleague and organisation, line managers and DASSs shared that the opportunity to network and connect with other commissioners was highly valuable, which has led to the establishment of new relationships and networks which are exploring issues and challenges beyond the programme content. Other reported benefits of the networking included an

acknowledgement that most, if not all, local authorities are grappling with similar issues, and some areas felt reassured that they doing well in responding to these challenges compared to other local authorities (and were willing to share this learning).

*"Being enthused / inspired by the programme, particularly by the in-person events"*

*"Making networks, problem solving in groups and reflecting that council's current approach is well aligned to, or ahead of national and regional examples was considered very positive by the participants"*

Secondly, others have observed increased confidence in their colleagues, particularly around willingness to explore doing things differently. The ADASS data hub tool was also mentioned by a number of interviewees as a helpful takeaway.

*"Programme has supported our participant with the additional skills to influence strategic commissioning approaches"*

*" Now not afraid of asking questions when working with senior colleagues"*

*"So, she's new with us as she's been learning on the Ignite programme, I think that's why it's been so perfect because I think it's just helped. Ignite can maybe take the credit for this - She's come on leaps and bounds in that time. And her confidence has grown and her skill set is really good for the time that she's had in the role".*

#### 12.2.4. What did not work so well?

Reflected in other feedback, DASSs and line managers continue to share the concern that the programme was not pitched to the more experienced and senior commissioning colleagues, as advertised. The content appeared to be focussed on the theory of core commissioning skills and practice, which whilst completely appropriate for new colleagues or more junior commissioners, was not supportive of the "stretched thinking" anticipated for the more experienced senior commissioners on the programme who already possess these core commissioning skills and expertise.

*"I think it's probably helpful to share is she said it [the programme] had been pitched to senior managers and complex market management but she felt it was quite basic market management...So there's probably something about how we describe the content of the course, so that in the future, we know the right level of person to send, because I think had I sent somebody a couple of grades down, I think I would absolutely be glowing with praise about it because I think she was saying... it was really well thought out. That the modules made sense...It was just for her it was just pitched too low. So, I think there's that. That's a learning for us. I think not a criticism of the course itself."*

In addition, there was some feedback that the masterclasses and spotlights did not provide the participants with any new information, or help inform innovation in their local organisation.

*"Masterclasses were particularly disappointing as we were not seeing anything new or innovative...material had been around for a few years which anyone could find...(participant) was not taken to next level"*

*"Felt that a lot of the examples pitched as best practice in the masterclasses were either things they were already doing or it wasn't very clear why they were deemed as good practice"*

The interviewees also provided feedback on the care provider organisation involvement, and shared some strong concerns that this part of the programme was not handled or delivered very effectively.

*"Provider session was a car crash... (and left commissioners feeling) very distraught"*

Finally, there was some reflection from the interviewees that the in-person sessions were more successful than the online sessions, which did not support discussions, networking or challenge to what people were hearing.

#### 12.2.5. Observation of changed commissioning practices

DASS and line managers offered some examples of participants being more proactive, confident and starting to think differently with regards to their practice or managing challenges, but there was limited practical examples offered of any plans to strategically and systematically do things differently as a result of the programme at the time of the interviews. Practice change examples shared with evaluators included:

- The participant is now engaging and working with providers proactively to think about the future market needs, rather than only talking about fees. "This is a change in focus"
- Noticeable renewed enthusiasm to commissioning challenges and opportunities.
- Sharing their learning from the programme with others, and demonstrating higher levels of confidence in their knowledge around good commissioning practice.
- Proactively using the networks and connections made to help inform commissioning work – such as developing an extra care provision for all adults, rather than just older people, and supporting the recruitment of Shared Lives carers.
- Being inspired by other councils on the programme and reflection on current practice e.g. revisiting local approach to working with providers in order to strengthen relationships.
- Consideration of the use of technology and AI in social care – such as the use of the Magic Notes app which was influenced by discussions with other participants.
- Consideration of how to build more constructive relationships and utilisation of assets within the voluntary sector, particularly building on the Ignite sessions relating to individual service funds, Community Catalysts and co-production.

#### Practice Example (Level 4: Impact)

Council X was recommissioning its homecare contracts whilst the participants was attending Ignite, and there was an opportunity to refine their approach to more strongly develop collaborative approaches with the provider based on discussion and experiences from other councils shared through the masterclasses sessions and network discussions. As a result of this, the council moved away from a "telephone monitoring / controlling" approach to a more flexible approach - leading to a more strategic and stronger relationship with the provider. This approach was further enhanced by noticeable increased confidence in the participant in how to work strategically with local providers based upon conversations with other participants and acquired learning from the programme. The DASS fully supported this initiative, which is still ongoing.

#### 12.2.6. Suggestions for a future programme

DASSs and line managers tended to agree there was a 'gap' in the training and development market for a commissioning programme focussing on aspiring and current senior strategic commissioners in adult social care, and this would support them in succession planning and talent management of their own teams, particularly in promoting senior commissioners into leadership roles

*"The gap from commissioning officer to strategic commissioner is big in scale and breadth - moving from contracting extra care to whole system working for example"*

*"There is plenty of material out there to support commissioners such as IPC courses but there is a real gap for head of service level and bringing in a more commercial skill set to better understand the provider business model whilst having creative conversations with people to meet their outcomes, and to drive sustainability alongside meeting demand - the programme needs to facilitate sharing of innovation and the evidence base."*

*"I am very sceptical about putting staff onto this programme unless there were big changes made... [the programme] had a real underestimation of the skill set out there and what commissioners actually do..."*

It was felt that a programme that provided more focus on strategic leadership in commissioning would be more beneficial in the future.

*"It is a really valuable programme; we just need to refine it"*

Some felt the programme could be extended beyond adult social care, and could include integrated care board colleagues for example. Others felt children's services would also be a welcome addition to the programme. Finally, there was a comment about the programme being limited to England, and whether more can be done to bring all the home nations together to learn from each other.

*"Ideally you have a programme for health and social care. You don't just have a programme for social care."*

#### 12.2.7. Other key messages

Overall, DASSs and line managers wanted to voice their appreciation for investment in this training programme, as felt it recognised that strategic commissioning is a specific skill and profession that deserves recognition.

In terms of investment in a future programme, DASSs reported a willingness to offer a contribution towards the full cost of the programme, if it was pitched correctly i.e. at the aspiring senior commissioners and leaders. However, many did raise the concern around significant financial pressures on council budgets, including Section 114, that impacts their ability to invest in training. In addition, programmes such as this have additional costs relating to travel, and a significant time commitment, so it needs to be valuable for the organisation.

## 13. Summary of findings

### **Evaluation question 1: To what extent do stakeholders involved in the co-design of the training programme feel they were listened to, and their views were incorporated into the final design of the programme?**

It is not easy to comprehensively answer this evaluation question, as only two responses were received from the stakeholders involved in the design and delivery of the programme. In addition, the experiences of these two organisations differed significantly. However, both reported that being involved in the programme was a valuable experience.

Both organisations felt it important that care provider experience was integral to the success of this programme, and one organisation felt their involvement was more limited than they had hoped. Therefore, it is unlikely that the programme was co-designed by the care provider organisations, although it sounds like they were engaged with the programme developers, and were able to contribute a little to the delivery of the programme as a result of this.

Interestingly, the involvement of the national care organisations in the programme was generally not received positively by participants. Participants acknowledged the importance of hearing the perspectives of provider organisations, but felt the way this was delivered and managed in the programme did not support collaborative and meaningful relationships. The biggest issue with delivery appeared to be a one-way dialogue by the care provider organisations, which did not support healthy challenge, debate or allow the commissioners a platform to explain the realities of their practice, and work with providers to achieve common ground.

### **Evaluation Question 2: What has been the level of interest in the programme?**

The interest in the programme was strong, with an oversubscribed programme and excellent levels of attendance at the launch event and first core module. The excellent return rate and responses of the pre-programme survey also demonstrated good levels of interest and high expectations for the programme. Geographically, there was a fairly good spread of participants from across England that engaged with the programme. In general, the areas that did not engage with the programme reported this was due to local circumstances, rather than an overall lack of interest.

### **Evaluation Question 3: What has been the level of engagement in the Programme? What have been the barriers and enablers?**

Engagement with the programme was fairly good, with an average attendance rate across all the sessions of 80%.

However, engagement rates with the core modules and other sessions decreased as the programme progressed, suggesting some participant's interest and perceived value of the programme had reduced. Evaluators heard from a number of participants that the programme was not pitched correctly to allow them to think innovatively or strategically about the 'wicked issues' in commissioning, which was their expectation of the programme. In addition, others reported their interest in the programme reduced following the involvement of the national care organisations whose contributions generally focussed on poor commissioning practice (and its effect on care providers), rather than a collaborative conversation between the two parties about how best to work together in a challenging world.

IPC have identified some themes that may be helpful to consider for a future programme:

- In person modules appeared to be the preferred method of delivery.
- However, the required travel time and finish time for the in-person sessions (5pm) was a challenge for some participants.
- Participants felt the length of the masterclasses were too short, and therefore limited their overall engagement. For example, limited time to ask questions, contribute to discussions or to work with other participants to hear their experiences of embedding the topic in their local areas.
- Applied Learning Hubs were received well by participants, but this way of working is a discipline and will require more than two sessions for the true benefits to be realised.

#### **Evaluation Question 4: To what extent do participants feel that it has been a valuable experience?**

When responding to feedback forms, the midpoint survey and the post-programme self assessment survey, the majority of respondents reported that the programme had been a worthwhile and valuable experience for them. However, there is a notable minority of participants who do not agree with this.

The most valued element of the programme reported by participants, and their colleagues, was the opportunity to network and connect with other commissioners across the country – either through the in-person modules, hearing examples of good practice through the spotlights or via the applied learning hubs. The in-person sessions, in particular, have allowed organic relationships to form, and we heard examples of participants sharing practice and examples with each other, outside of the formal programme delivery. Participants have suggested this beneficial element of the programme could be further strengthened i.e. increasing the formal opportunities to meet with commissioners across the country to showcase good practice and work together to problem solve common, but complex commissioning challenges.

EY were also praised by a number of participants for a well organised and delivered programme. This was also witnessed by the IPC evaluators during the observations,

with high quality materials and good engagement levels seen in the in-person modules.

A common disappointment voiced by the participants, line managers and DASSs, via the evaluation forms, the online surveys, and within the interviews is that the programme was not pitched correctly or successfully at the senior commissioning level, and the commissioning theory covered was too basic for what they were expecting. Some of the sessions (e.g. the masterclasses and the core modules) did not always allow sufficient time and space for strategic thinking or innovative problem solving. In addition, we heard that the programme did not consistently consider the realities of the contexts and environments commissioners are currently operating in (e.g. within financial constraints and the Integrated Care Board landscapes). IPC agree that the sessions they observed focussed heavily on the theory of core commissioning skills (including why they are deemed good practice), something which we felt senior commissioning officers are likely to already understand.

Evaluators believe this issue is further confounded by the variety of commissioning roles on the programme, which range from junior roles (such as Commissioning Officers) to Directors of Commissioning. As such, further exploration of what specific training or programme will be valuable for more senior commissioning colleagues, as well as an improved participant application process, is recommended for future any programme.

**Evaluation Question 5: To what extent have commissioners improved their knowledge, skills and confidence in the particular areas of focus for the programme including strategic leadership, market shaping, data and intelligence, and meaningful collaboration and engagement?**

Unfortunately, evaluators are unable to answer this question with confidence due to issues with the intelligence shared with IPC, including:

- A significant reduction in respondents in the pre-programme and post-programme self-assessment questionnaire (i.e. from 97% completion rate to a 39% completion rate);
- Disparities in the rating questions asked pre- and post- programme, in particular around confidence levels.

However, of the participants that did complete the post-programme self-assessment survey, a good proportion respondents reported high levels of confidence, skills and knowledge was reported in the following areas:

- Having the skills and knowledge to make changes needed to address the challenges in commissioning adult social care.
- Shaping the local care market and thus drive innovative commissioning practices.
- Ability to develop an insight-and data-led plan for local care markets that addresses population needs for today and the future.

- Ability to place people who draw on care at the core of the commissioned services.
- Ability to have meaningful engagement with people who draw on care.
- Ability to create innovative commissioning models.
- Understanding of examples of commissioning practice outside the local authority area.
- Understanding of innovative care enablers and solutions.
- Understanding of local providers' experience of the commissioning process in local areas.

Line managers and DASSs tended to agree that the programme had supported participants to increase their knowledge, skills and confidence in being a strategic leader, the use of data and intelligence to inform commissioning decisions, effective partnership working with care markets and meaningful collaboration with local people who draw on care. However, this was not consistent with a notable number reporting they had not noticed much or any change in these areas –stating, for example, that the participant was already competent in such areas, or the view that the programme did not stretch their thinking in these areas adequately.

**Evaluation Question 6: To what extent do participants feel empowered and able to demonstrate that they are embedding / sharing their learning in their local areas?**

Evaluators were able to collect some examples of commissioning practice which participants felt were informed by the programme content, or more commonly, informed by the networks and connections with other commissioners across the country. More time and evaluation activities may be required in order to understand the extent to which this question has been achieved. Line managers and DASSs were also able to offer some examples where they have seen a change in behaviours or practice by the participants, but examples of intentions to do things differently that are likely to have systemic and significant impact on the local commissioning arrangements (and therefore the provider market and local communities) was not evident in the timescales of the evaluation.

Some participants reported that the content of the programme did not provide them with anything new or innovative, but worked to re-assure them that their current practice was appropriate.

**Evaluation Question 7: To what extent do commissioners feel connected and have plans for ongoing / long-term relationships with other commissioners in the country?**

This is by far the most successful element of the programme. The ability to meet other commissioners across the country was frequently reported as a key takeaway or benefit of the programme by participants, line managers and DASSs, across all evaluation methodologies. The key enablers of these relationships were the in-person events and the applied learning hubs. Participants felt that further

opportunities to meet others, share experiences and learnings regarding particular topics or challenges would be beneficial. This could include meeting colleagues from across the whole programme, as well as working in the smaller cohorts.

Sustaining these relationships will be the next task for the participants – with many groups organising these themselves, and others joining the formal SCIE alumni network via LinkedIn. Evaluators have heard that participants have set up arrangements to ensure these relationships are long-term, such as WhatsApp groups and virtual meetings.

Some participants are concerned however that without ongoing investment, resource and a dedicated capacity to manage the alumni, these relationships may not be maintained. There are mixed views on using LinkedIn to support this.

## **14. Recommendations from IPC for the Department of Health and Social Care**

The opportunity to attend a training programme dedicated for adult social care senior commissioning officers in England was welcomed. There was a shared recognition that strategic commissioning is a discipline, and the profession may not receive the formal and accredited training and development opportunities it requires, when compared to other roles in the sector (e.g. social workers). Most DASSs we spoke to indicated they would (if able) be willing to contribute a little towards the future of a similar programme, although some felt changes would need to be made in order for the programme to be more valuable for senior commissioners. As such, the Department are recommended to consider the following to support the ongoing success of such a programme:

**1. Decide / agree the specific target audience for any future commissioning training programme(s).**

Participants had different experiences of the Ignite programme and there is evidence to suggest that participants with less commissioning experience, or working within junior commissioning roles, found the programme more valuable and beneficial than those in senior commissioning roles, or with significant commissioning experience. As such, IPC strongly recommends that any future programme carefully considers the target audience, and a programme is designed more precisely around their specific developmental needs. For example, the programme could be for aspiring senior commissioning officers, or it could be a programme that targets people already in senior roles to develop their strategic leadership skills within commissioning (e.g. Heads of Commissioning, Assistant Directors and Directors). These two groups will have different developmental needs and therefore require different approaches from a training programme.

**2. Consider where a future programme(s) sits with other existing commissioning training available in England.**

The knowledge of the already existing accredited commissioning training available across the country was inconsistent in the local authority areas we spoke to. A lack of awareness of the existing national training offer may have resulted in more junior participants being nominated for this programme rather than focussing on the more senior roles as intended (i.e. prioritising those who required training in core commissioning skills).

We heard from participants they are aware of other training programmes that cover the evidence and theory regarding core commissioning skills and behaviours. However, some participants were hoping the Ignite programme would offer leadership training within strategic commissioning, with a more practical focus on managing the realities of the commissioning environment or the 'wicked issues' they are facing on a regular basis.

Therefore, it is recommended the Department fully understands the commissioning training already available in England, including who these are aimed at, and at what stage within their commissioning career. We believe this will support the Department to be more explicit in terms of where the Ignite programme fits within this, and how it differs from other programmes.

### **3. A programme(s) that offers a different approach from a 'traditional' training offer**

As outlined above, we heard strongly from the more senior commissioning participants that they did not need a training programme that covered the core theory behind good commissioning practice (which is available in other existing accredited courses). They did want, however, ongoing development that offered professional recognition, a regular opportunity to reflect and think about their practice, and meet with similar colleagues across the country to work through shared challenges or common problems in a complex system. As such, any future programme(s) should consider a different approach to delivery, rather than the traditional style of presentations on theory / models of practice, followed by scenario-based exercises. This could include some of the following aspects:

- Regular (e.g. every 3 -6 months) events where participants come together to discuss a particular strategic commissioning priority or challenge (the 'wicked issues'). The use of a problem solving or structured thinking methodology for each session could be valuable and support focussed conversations on potential solutions – e.g. learning from the applied learning hub methodology and the use of De Bono's 6 hats exercise in the pilot. If the action learning approach is to be used, it is important to ensure sufficient sessions are offered, so trust is formed between the members, and participants are trained effectively in this problem-solving method using coaching / skilled questioning.
- An annual event to showcase good practice happening across the country, as well as support the ongoing connections and networks for senior commissioners, beyond their regions.
- And a focus on leadership skills required in strategic commissioning (i.e. not generic leadership training which is available elsewhere).

These events / training sessions are recommended to be in-person, and continue to be facilitated by an independent and skilled individual or organisation.

It is strongly recommended that any future programme should be designed and delivered by an organisation with experience in commissioning adult social care to support effective and supportive conversations, that recognise the realities of the current commissioning environment. This should also include care provider representation, as well as representation / involvement with people who have lived experience of adult social care.

#### **4. Ongoing investment in commissioning networks and relationships**

As a significant benefit of the pilot, it is recommended that ongoing investment and funding is offered to support networking and long-term relationships of commissioners across the country. This may include the organisation and facilitation of ongoing in person events, such as workshops or meetings across the country for participants of the pilot, as well as any potential future cohorts.

## 15. Appendices

### 15.1. Appendix A – Theory of Change



Appendix A Final  
Theory of Change -

### 15.2. Appendix B – Evaluation Framework



Evaluation  
Framework Ignite.doc

### 15.3. Evaluation C – Evaluation Plan



Final Delivery  
Plan.docx

### 15.4. Appendix D – Pre-programme self assessment



Pre Programme  
Survey Analysis - Fin

### 15.5. Appendix E – Mid-point survey



Appendix B -  
Midpoint Survey.doc



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