

# Turning hierarchy on its head: are parallel learning partnerships the solution to creating inclusive cultures in healthcare?

Naomi Clifford ,<sup>1</sup> Martin Clarke ,<sup>1</sup> Catherine Conchar <sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Research and Evidence Department, Nottinghamshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust, Nottingham, UK  
<sup>2</sup>People and Culture, Nottinghamshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust, Nottingham, UK

## Correspondence to

Naomi Clifford, Research and Evidence Department, Nottinghamshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust, Nottingham NG3 6AA, UK; [naomi.clifford@nottshc.nhs.uk](mailto:naomi.clifford@nottshc.nhs.uk)

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## ABSTRACT

**Background** It is important that NHS Trusts create inclusive and compassionate organisational cultures in which black and minority ethnic (BME) staff can progress equitably. Race equality and development initiatives can be implemented to address this. The introduction of reverse and reciprocal mentoring programmes in numerous organisations has had varying levels of success. These programmes can emphasise and perpetuate hierarchical differences in pairs, causing barriers to creating mutually beneficial partnerships. **Objectives** This paper reports the evaluation findings of a race equality and professional development initiative: the Parallel Learning Partnerships (PLP) Programme. Launched in April 2021, 27 of the Trust's Executive and senior leadership team members were paired with 27 BME colleagues for 1 year. The authors aimed to determine the efficacy of the initiative's design and implementation, and partner experiences and outcomes, particularly in relation to learning and any evidence of genuinely equal partnerships.

**Participants** Twenty-six programme participants responded to an online survey. One-to-one semistructured interviews were conducted with 12 programme participants.

**Results** Findings revealed that the majority of participants developed effective and highly valued non-hierarchical learning partnerships. This was despite impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic creating additional pressures and affecting partnership meetings and activities. Partner outcomes included greater understanding and awareness around race equity matters, improved confidence and motivation, and enhanced leadership skills in relation to inclusivity and compassion.

**Conclusion** The pilot programme has been largely successful in providing an effective mechanism for BME staff to engage and connect with the Trust's executive and senior leaders on a reciprocal, equal and mutually beneficial basis. PLP resulted in a variety of beneficial outcomes for both groups of partners which may not have been possible within comparable mentoring models. Additional positive impacts to the wider organisation are anticipated to be evident in time with the programme's continuation.

## INTRODUCTION

Recent public attention has shed light on the numerous inequalities experienced by people of black and minority ethnic (BME) heritage in all areas of life. Particularly evident in relation to health outcomes, and for those employed in healthcare,

## WHAT IS ALREADY KNOWN ON THIS TOPIC

⇒ Racially minoritised staff continue to experience considerable disadvantage and discrimination as healthcare professionals. Mentoring models used to facilitate professional development opportunities and to address equality, diversity and inclusion issues do not always mitigate the hindering impacts of professional hierarchy within pairs.

## WHAT THIS STUDY ADDS

⇒ Findings indicate that equal and reciprocal learning partnerships between senior leaders and black and minority ethnic (BME) staff are possible.

## HOW THIS STUDY MIGHT AFFECT RESEARCH, PRACTICE OR POLICY

⇒ By introducing Parallel Learning Partnerships Programmes to NHS organisations, the development of more inclusive and equitable organisational cultures could be possible, ultimately creating positive workplace experiences and reducing systemic barriers to career progression for BME colleagues.

concerning discrimination incidents and stunted career progression.<sup>1–5</sup> Recognising the need to take positive action to address these issues, colleagues at Nottinghamshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust developed the Parallel Learning Partnerships (PLP) Programme as a combined race equality and leadership development initiative.

The PLP Programme involves BME colleagues and members of the Trust's executive and senior leadership teams paired together to work as equal learning partners engaging in discussions to share experience, knowledge and skills. Based on a foundation of 'reciprocity, equality and mutuality', its aims focus on the holistic development of all participants (box 1).

## Background

Within UK and international healthcare settings, mentoring is identified as a highly effective means to facilitate continuing professional development opportunities.<sup>6–10</sup> However, traditional mentoring relationships are generally hierarchical in nature, with the mentor acting to share professional experience and knowledge with the often younger, less experienced mentee.<sup>11 12</sup> The PLP Programme



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sought to move away from initiatives that highlight and perpetuate status imbalances.

Reverse mentoring models that flip the traditional top-down hierarchy in pairings have now become favourable within organisations.<sup>13 14</sup> They are also used as part of equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) initiatives, and in supporting the development of cultural competency and intelligence in employees.<sup>13–17</sup> Within the National Health Service (NHS), the Reverse Mentoring for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion programme<sup>18</sup> was introduced in Guy's and St Thomas' and Derbyshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trusts in 2018. This successfully enabled BME staff to act as mentors to white senior leader mentees, exposing them to diverse perspectives through insightful conversations, aiming to influence change by probing attitudes, practices and understanding of racial EDI issues.<sup>18–20</sup> Whether reverse mentoring initiatives focus on intergenerational learning, intercultural learning, or otherwise, partners' unequal statuses remain a key feature—both within the mentoring dyad and organisational hierarchy.<sup>15</sup> This presents barriers to inclusion and openness by disproportionately focusing on the mentee's learning outcomes.<sup>20–22</sup>

Recently gaining in popularity, reciprocal mentoring has the potential to offer rich learning experiences by harnessing diversity to encourage inclusive cultures.<sup>23</sup> Piloted programmes have been found to be successful at UK higher education institutions.<sup>24</sup> In UK healthcare settings, such programmes have been running since at least 2013.<sup>25</sup> Since the PLP Programme commenced in April 2021, comparable reciprocal mentoring programmes have been introduced within the NHS.<sup>22 26 27</sup> These vary according to participant eligibility and the area of EDI focus.<sup>22</sup> However, the ultimate goals remain largely the same; to build awareness by enabling colleagues to be heard by senior leaders, encourage compassionate, inclusive and equitable cultures, and to support the professional development of all involved.<sup>22 26 27</sup>

While the literature on more traditional forms of mentoring frequently explores positive outcomes in relation to work-related development, participants' holistic development is often not fully considered or meaningfully captured. Conversely, the PLP Programme was predominantly developed as a means for all participants to develop universally by considering lived experiences of advantage and disadvantage through a racial lens, challenging existing beliefs, and building new diverse networks.

## EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

The evaluation was conducted by the Trust's Research and Evidence Department. An exploratory qualitative narrative approach was taken to evaluate partnership experiences, impacts and programme insights. The programme facilitators and partner attendees at the group check-in sessions contributed to developing the evaluation objectives. Informal observations and notes were made by the authors during these meetings to inform the evaluation and interpretation of the data. Attendees were aware and reminded of this each time.

Data were collected through an online Microsoft Forms survey and virtual one-to-one interviews (online supplemental materials). At the programme's 10-month mark, the survey was open for 33 days, including an extension of 16 days. Reminder emails were sent to encourage a variety of responses. All staff members who were or who had been participants of this initial cohort were invited to respond to the survey and participate in interviews. The interview invitation remained open to all until sufficient representation within respondents was achieved.

Prior to commencing the survey, a participant information sheet was displayed informing respondents that by completing

the survey they were consenting to the use of their data within the evaluation. Interviews were structured using topic guides encompassing key questions and prompts based on the evaluation aims. Written consent was received prior to interview. Interviews were conducted and recorded via Microsoft Teams.

Patterns and themes within both datasets were identified by concentrating on addressing the evaluation aims and drawing on aspects of thematic analysis.<sup>28</sup> Familiarisation of the data commenced during the reviewing and amending of the auto-generated transcripts. The first three transcripts were then coded line-by-line to establish recurring patterns. These codes were subsequently used to identify similar patterns in the remaining transcripts and survey responses. Where interesting and useful pieces of data did not fit into these codes, new codes were applied. Themes were developed using the codes. Although mindful of the questions posed to respondents throughout this process, codes and themes were established through solely examining the data.

### Box 1 Structure and implementation of the PLP Programme

#### Participant eligibility

- ⇒ All members of the Trust's executive and senior leadership teams, that is, those working at associate director level and above.
- ⇒ All staff members from a BME background.

#### Recruitment

- ⇒ The initiative was advertised within EMBRace, the organisation's BME Staff Network, the intranet and the chief executive's regular Trustwide briefing emails.
- ⇒ Prospective participants submitted a short matching profile consisting of three questions or statements to respond to.

#### Matching process

- ⇒ Matching was conducted by the programme facilitators and co-chairs of the EMBRace Network.
- ⇒ Pairs were created using the matching profiles combined with the matchers' personal knowledge of the participants' personalities and interests from prior professional encounters.

#### Implementation and roll-out

- ⇒ Participants received their partner's matching profile to view and a digital 'Guide for Learning Partners' with information, advice and practical resources included to support the development of bespoke parallel learning journeys.
- ⇒ Partnerships were advised to last for a minimum of 12 months and a maximum of 15 months to allow for the formation of meaningful and well-founded relationships.
- ⇒ The launch included two virtual group sessions for participants to meet each other, clarify the objectives and expectations of the programme and troubleshoot any queries or concerns.
- ⇒ Optional quarterly virtual 'check-in' sessions were available which allowed the facilitators to monitor the progress of pairs in the programme and offer input and support where necessary.

BME, black and minority ethnic; PLP, Parallel Learning Partnerships.

**Table 1** Identified themes and subthemes

Theme	Subtheme
Partnership experiences	Building and maintaining relationships
	Partnership activities
Impacts	Holistic development outcomes
	Organisational and wider outcomes
Programme insights	Mechanisms of support
	The originality of the PLP Programme
	The future of the PLP Programme

## RESULTS

### Respondents

Twenty-six participants (49.1%) responded to the survey, including eight pairs. Respondents comprised 34.6% from the senior leaders' group, 53.9% from the BME partner group and 11.5% identified as belonging to both groups, resulting in a total of 65.4% BME respondents (n=17). Six senior leaders and six BME staff (including five pairs) were interviewed at the end of the programme.

We identified three main themes and seven subthemes in the survey and interview responses (table 1).

Reported findings are summarised narratively and supported by data where appropriate, with additional quotes presented in tables according to themes. Executive and senior leader partners are referred to as 'SLT' partners throughout alongside the 'BME' partners.

### Partnership experiences

#### Building and maintaining relationships

Partners identified a range of actions that supported the development and maintenance of mutually beneficial learning partnerships. These consisted of getting to know each other separately from professional roles, prioritising the partnership, agreeing on mutual aims and establishing psychological safety and trust. Helpful behavioural characteristics in partners included being approachable, open to showing vulnerabilities, and willing to actively listen and learn.

I think initially I went in like, 'Ooh! This person's quite senior!'. But you know, she was—she just put me at ease. She just made herself a human being straight away, shared her vulnerabilities, shared lots of lived experiences, and I think that made me just then stop seeing job titles, and saw a person. (BME P3)

All interviewees felt that the matching process had been successful for them, including the few who experienced unimpaired partnerships.

[...] at the end of the day, I couldn't have been matched, to me, with a better person [despite not feeling much benefit]. (BME P5)

Despite apprehensions relating to hierarchy, most established trusting and highly valued relationships in which various development activities were undertaken.

#### Partnership activities

Partnership activities followed two formats: meetings for discussion and those offering mutual professional development opportunities. The former was the most commonly undertaken, involving frank conversations centred on sharing experiences relating to racial inequity and privilege, the seeking and offering of advice and support between partners, reflecting on inclusive language and practices and respectfully challenging assumptions.

Yeah, we had some quite ... in depth conversations about ... I'm going to say unconscious bias—I don't think it is unconscious, I think it's conscious bias, around how [my partner] is sort of viewed by society. (SLT P4)

Scheduling regular protected time designated for meaningful discussion was a particularly valued element. For some BME partners, this allowed for cathartic personal reflection on the lasting impacts of witnessing or experiencing incidents of racial discrimination.

Mismatched expectations and no mutual aims were noted to be barriers in the pair that did not find their activities useful. One respondent felt that their expectations had not been met due to their partner not being sufficiently supportive with their career development aspirations:

But I just ... I didn't feel it was of any benefit. Not really. There was even some positions where ... She could have easily sent me a Teams and I didn't even know they were there until they'd gone. (BME P5)

Having been launched during the COVID-19 pandemic, the resulting restrictions impacted on in-person meetings and profession-related activities to varying degrees. Although lockdown and social distancing restrictions may have fluctuated throughout this period for the general public, restrictions remained in place within the Trust, particularly when outbreaks occurred within services. Those who were able to meet in person and facilitate insight opportunities for each other found this activity helpful for mitigating hierarchical imbalances.

So, actually that—they being on unknown territory and me kind of, showing them new sites, meeting different people, was really beneficial to *them*. And made me feel useful! [laughs]. (BME P2)

It was also acknowledged that the pandemic had affected getting to know fellow participants better and driving forward the programme's collective aims. Nevertheless, the quarterly group check-in sessions were described as an effective enabler for sharing programme experiences more widely, which reportedly instilled confidence in pairs (table 2).

### Impacts

#### Holistic development outcomes

Respondents provided a range of positive personal outcomes felt to be a direct result of involvement. Hearing and exploring lived examples of actions and mechanisms that contribute to perpetuating racial disparities were reported to have significantly broadened the SLT partners' perspectives. Most notably for BME partners, at least five individuals had been successfully promoted during the programme.

I wasn't going to go for it because I didn't feel that I had enough experience and I didn't feel like I had the confidence, but it was having conversations with my parallel partner that sort of made me go, 'Actually, you've, you know—I have got the skills!'. (BME P3)

For those not yet progressing professionally, a renewed determination to succeed or the chance to explore unconsidered career opportunities were valued outcomes. Some participants also reported greater confidence, improved motivation at work and a greater sense of belonging and feeling valued by the Trust.

Participants unable to name any development outcomes recounted not being able to achieve any goals with partners, being unable to continue when a partner left the Trust, and feeling that nothing had changed within or as a result of their partnership.

**Table 2** Additional quotes addressing the theme ‘partnership experiences’

Partnership experiences		
Subtheme	BME partners	SLT partners
Building and maintaining relationships	[...] she was very open because I think she wanted to learn things from a BAME perspective. I think she wanted to learn and understand and then, you know, because again it takes a lot of trust and confidence to just be open with people regarding those type of topics and issues. I wouldn't really [usually] speak to anyone about that. (BME P4)	We're both very busy. There have been times when we've needed to rearrange. But I feel we've both been completely committed to the process. And to each other. (SLT P2)
	I think, sometimes the reason that there isn't psychological safety is because of that hierarchical barrier. Whether it's real or perceived by the individual. It is there and it <i>is</i> real to that person. [...] you need to break down the hierarchy and treat them as an individual and make them feel valued whatever skill set or pay band that they are. (BME P2)	We spent a long time talking about what we both wanted to get out of it, to make sure it was properly joined up. (SLT P3)
Partnership activities	[...] all of them [our meetings] was on MST [Microsoft Teams]. We did plan maybe just to meet up in the cafe one day. But again, because of lockdown, we wasn't able to do that. [...] [However] We talked all we needed to talk about, and we discussed, we challenged, we provoked, and everything else you wanna say. And we did all that and that felt comfortable. (BME P6).	Both of us preferred to meet face to face. And so, we have done that the majority of the time. But obviously we've been through COVID, so we weren't always able to do that. I remember once, we met face to face and we were in like a <i>massive</i> big Board room! She was one end of the table, and I was the other! But we were keen to be face to face. (SLT P2)
	And I guess one of the other things [impacted by COVID-19] was, sort of working with other people in terms of the peers that were also parallel partners and sort of seeing what their experiences were. (BME P3)	[...] in part, there were some good coaching that went on. But it was <i>career</i> coaching. And I was <i>very</i> , very happy to do that. And I mean, one session was all about me preparing her for an interview. So, it wasn't that time was wasted. It wasn't <i>that</i> . But it wasn't what the PLP programme was supposed to be. (SLT P5)

I suppose it's consolidated what I knew, but I don't think that I necessarily learnt anything new. But that doesn't mean to say I'm less—I'm no less engaged in the issues. (SLT P5)

Motives for taking part in the programme were linked to the concept of ‘understanding’. This was in relation to furthering one's own understanding, sharing knowledge to improve the understanding of others, and ultimately harnessing this enhanced collective understanding to positively impact the wider organisation. Findings confirm that these aims were generally accomplished.

### Organisational and wider outcomes

Although anticipated to be difficult to identify, within the survey, some participants acknowledged how initial learning had already translated into wider improvements in patient care.

I have a better understanding of Trust organisational structure and strategy. This helped me in raising issues regarding patient care with the right staff. (BME survey partner)

Greater understanding of issues related to [redacted] patients which has helped to support me in my clinical visits. (SLT survey partner)

Many partners reported being keen to share their learning and information about the PLP experience with colleagues and wider teams, suggesting that wider improvements in race equality within the Trust may emerge in time. BME partners were hopeful when considering how the programme and their inputs may come to influence organisational culture in future (table 3).

### Programme insights Mechanisms of support

Respondents gave their perspectives on the programme's design, implementation and facilitation. Participants felt supported throughout, by partners, programme peers and the facilitators. The main mechanism of support was the check-in sessions, highly valued by the two-thirds of survey respondents, and interviewees, who attended. This included those reporting less positive partnerships.

**Table 3** Additional quotes addressing the theme ‘impacts’

Impacts		
Subtheme	BME partners	SLT partners
Holistic development outcomes	I did give up, but I'm getting my confidence back now and I think I will push forward [with career progression goals]. (BME P6)	I just felt lucky because I have learned a lot about, you know, somebody's experience, but also their career pathway, and more about the services that they work in that I didn't understand. (SLT P3)
	[...] [I've done] a little bit of like, repairing, you know, I've faced lots of challenges in my career and sort of personal life that have been related to my race. It's helped me sort of reflect on those and think about what impact that's had. (BME P3)	For me, as I said, it's just been a really good experience. So, I think it will stick with me and hopefully just be that little bit in my conscience all the time, you know, that, you know, to remind me about things. (SLT P1)
	I mean, let me backpedal on that slightly [their negative viewpoints of the partnership and programme] because we did, whilst this was going on, I think it made me step up a little bit more, in terms of my development, but nothing else came from that. (BME P5)	The course [PLP Programme] has given me some of that strength to do it, rather than sit there and think, 'Well I'm not gonna ask that because I might offend somebody, or I might say something I shouldn't'. So, I say it in a diplomatic way, but if I'm unsure, being really open and transparent. (SLT P7)
Organisational and wider outcomes	So, I know it's early to say, and we haven't got any—it's only anecdotal, we haven't got any evidence to prove that yet. However, I like to think that this has paved the way to make things better for the organisation. (BME P6)	I have a degree of influence and responsibility, and can you know, get things moving! And I can bring <i>that</i> into it instead of, you know, just my, you know, what I've experienced or heard, because I can hear more now. (SLT P3)
	[...] and I hope that what I brought to it will be passed on to people at the top. And to future cohorts of people. Because I think this is the beginning, I think this is a process that will develop. (BME P1)	It's really made me think about, 'Have we got the right stakeholders in the room? Who else do we need?', etc, and bring that to the fore and really make sure that everybody's voice is heard. [...] it <i>does</i> matter. Because there are <i>reasons</i> why it matters. So that's what it's brought home really, that understanding. (SLT P7)



Each time we met it allowed us to learn from each other and see what was happening with other people and so on. So, it was just, it was just a good opportunity to learn and hopefully contribute. So that people could also see what we were doing and how it was working for us and what—and so on. (BME P1)

The 'Guide for Learning Partners' resource pack was also largely found to be helpful by most participants, particularly at the beginning of their PLP journeys.

### The originality of the PLP Programme

Key differences of the PLP Programme in comparison to other initiatives were the largely successful removal of hierarchical imbalances between pairs, the primary focus on personal development with organisational improvement as a secondary outcome, and the programme's flexibility. For some of those who had experienced mentoring previously, participation was seen to be a refreshing and innovative change.

[...] mentoring is fantastic, but ... Parallel Learning Partnership makes you feel valued for *your* individual needs, you don't need to try and be anything else than what you actually are. And *that* is key. (BME P2)

Several respondents mentioned having felt unsure of mutual expectations and apprehensive around how partnerships would function in reality. However, the lack of overly prescriptive structure, and freedom to make the experience their own was a highlight for many, seen to be a key element in fostering psychological safety in partnerships.

These differences in the programme's approach to encouraging inclusive and compassionate leadership skills were appreciated by many participants, but not all.

One BME partner divulged preferring more traditional mentoring approaches as a current mentor to junior colleagues. Interestingly, this perspective was shared by their partner:

Maybe in some ways, in my situation it might have been easier if she'd have had more of a role that this was how she was to mentor me? That would have given her the permission that she needed. Whereas, because I think of my position within the Trust, it's very difficult for her to think she could tell me. (SLT P5)

### The future of the PLP Programme

Most survey respondents (n=23; 88.5%) reported that they would recommend participation to colleagues. Importantly, the majority of those surveyed and all who were interviewed stressed the need for continuation of the programme, with the

potential to open participation more widely to colleagues from other minoritised groups and to more senior leaders in the Trust.

I like to think if people are truly concerned about addressing and tackling racism, I'd like to think that PLP will do that, will help that process. (BME P6)

Further improvement suggestions included offering more group sessions to enhance the shared learning aspect of the programme, facilitating these in person and providing further clarity around the aims of the programme itself to ensure that individuals' expectations are aligned (table 4).

### DISCUSSION

Fostering meaningful inclusivity within organisations involves creating equitable access to development opportunities and resources, enabling contribution to strategic decision-making and ensuring career progression for those from marginalised groups.<sup>29 30</sup> These were key aims of the PLP Programme for its BME participants, and for most partners, appear to have been successfully achieved. Colleagues felt more engaged and valued within the Trust while being their authentic selves.

Race equality initiatives such as this necessitate that senior leaders and junior staff members step outside of their comfort zones, are prepared to confront challenging truths, and commit to engaging in frank discussions about race and racism.<sup>31</sup> Overall, the design and implementation successfully enabled psychological safety and trust within pairs, frequently mentioned in interviews as being imperative for positive outcomes. As with reverse mentoring, partners were required to exhibit vulnerability and build trust via ongoing open dialogues to allow each to make their developmental needs known, and align expectations and goals.<sup>15</sup> Those who felt little or no benefit from programme participation reported having incompatible expectations and aims with their partner. However, whether these factors influenced the development of trust or whether it was a lack of trust that hindered partners' candour in making their needs known is unclear.

Most participants were able to find common ground on which to base their relationships, allowing for the creation of positive and valued equal relationships. It has been suggested that participating in diversified mentoring relationships can be especially challenging due to a lack of common social identities and shared experiences,<sup>23</sup> and for a small number of participants, this appeared to be true. Individuals who experienced little impact from the programme were less likely to have established

**Table 4** Additional quotes addressing the theme 'programme insights'

Programme insights		
Subtheme	BME partners	SLT partners
Mechanisms of support	I think having that pack at the start just helped each of us think about where we were coming from, and what we wanted to get out of the experience, and also how we work and process information as well and what the similarities and differences were. (BME P3)	I don't think our partnership really worked for a number of reasons. But, those sessions were—enabled us, because she went to some different ones, but the messages were the same really, to try and regroup and try and be a bit more structured. Because you heard how other people had been moving things on and, but, yeah ... (SLT P5)
The originality of the PLP Programme	So, it's a level playing field rather than the hierarchy system, which is in other mentoring type of processes. (BME P6)	[...] me attending it as a senior leader in the organisation, I can see the potential for my own teams and their development. I feel it's a really strong leadership skill that perhaps is not tapped into in your 'standard' courses. It's more humanistic, it's more real. (SLT P7)
	[...] if it had been very—more, much more formal, I think it might have stifled some of the discussion because nobody knew what was gonna happen, not really. (BME P1)	[...] what I really liked about it was the fact it was this collaboration rather than coaching or mentoring [...] this wasn't a mentoring thing, it was a partnership thing. (SLT P1)
The future of the PLP Programme	One person at a time! Breaking down barriers! Giving understanding! Yeah, absolutely! This should carry on and on and on and on, because I would love the thought of somebody coming in the next cohort having an experience that I've had. (BME P2)	There's loads of senior people who have a lot of influence. [...] I feel like we need to stop thinking leadership is just the execs and the layer below. Because the people, the layer below that are actually the people who are running the wards, and are actually the ones who provide the experience and, you know. So they're the ones who set the culture in the clinical areas, and [who] the front line staff actually see. So, I feel like we should cast the net a bit wider. (SLT P4)

psychologically safe partnerships, reportedly due in part to having little in common. In addition, these partners divulged meeting less frequently and having no shared goals.

The PLP Programme's ethos of reciprocity, mutuality and equality maximised opportunities for two-way reciprocal benefits. Including regular check-in sessions enhanced experiences by facilitating informal peer support, the wider sharing of lived experiences, and ensured that continuous monitoring methods were employed to assess the integrity of the initiative.<sup>32</sup>

Historically, tackling racism and discrimination in healthcare settings has centred on employees raising concerns, often in the knowledge that complaints would not be upheld or dealt with effectively.<sup>30</sup> However, this strategy has repeatedly failed to result in meaningful changes to root causes or improvements in key indicators of race equality.<sup>5</sup> Introducing programmes where individuals are partnered with senior members of organisations could be an innovative and effective way to make progress via frank and productive discussion rather than blame and accountability. Showing a curiosity for learning, being transparent when mistakes have been made, and championing key qualities of compassionate and inclusive leadership ensured that SLT involvement was not perceived as being merely tokenistic.<sup>29 31</sup>

In effective mentoring relationships, emotional support and encouragement is often a key feature.<sup>17</sup> A much-appreciated aspect included the opportunity for regular reflective discussions. Empowering busy and often pressured employees to reflect in a supportive and open environment can lead to enhanced individual and team performance and high-quality leadership development, ultimately resulting in service improvements that positively impact on patients and colleagues alike.<sup>10 33</sup>

NHS England's recent 'Listening Well Guidance' reinforces the importance of senior leaders regularly hearing from a diverse range of wider colleagues. First-class patient care, improved staff satisfaction, development and retention, and genuinely inclusive cultures are reportedly achievable in organisations that prioritise introducing measures to listen and respond to staff feedback.<sup>34</sup> The overall positivity towards the programme alongside the identified benefits and value described by participants is analogous with findings from comparable initiatives.<sup>19 20 22 26</sup> A similar programme implemented at a higher education institution asserted that while the wider organisational impacts may not be evident immediately, the clear short-term benefits reported by participants served as justification for continuation of the programme in the organisation and for implementation within the wider sector.<sup>24</sup>

### Limitations

Although responses shared within the survey appear to indicate mutually beneficial experiences for both partner groups, these responses account for just under half of all participants remaining in the programme at the time. Programme facilitators received verbal feedback throughout the programme from attendees at the quarterly check-in sessions. However, participation in these and the evaluation was not mandatory. It is possible that there was sample bias in that those in the programme with the strongest views or with something positive to say were more likely to participate in the evaluation. There were fewer respondents to the survey from the SLT group. Although reminders were sent, the survey may not be as representative as it could have been. We were also not able to include the few participants who left the Trust, for reasons not related to the programme, prior to the evaluation.

One author was a participant in the programme. This was unavoidable as the evaluation project was allocated to the research assistant post before the post was appointed to. All partners were aware of the author's participation in the programme and the evaluation. However, this may have influenced others and, while there was no evidence to support this, it is a limitation. To mitigate this, the non-participant authors attended the check-in sessions, survey data were collated by a non-participant author, and the author participant was not interviewed. Analyses were performed collaboratively and under supervision.

### CONCLUSION

This evaluation has investigated the impact of a new initiative based on reciprocity, equality and mutuality—PLP—which paired BME staff with senior leaders. The experiences of learning partners were mainly positive and beneficial for both groups of participants. The impacts identified so far in this first cohort have led to the Trust committing to continue the programme for the foreseeable future. Additionally, although not explicitly captured as part of the evaluation, subsequent anecdotal evidence suggests that learning gained by participants is now being translated into practice and has helped set the pro-equity and antiracist cultural expectations and norms of the Trust.

**Twitter** Naomi Clifford @naoclif

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**Contributors** NC: evaluation design, conducting the interviews, data analysis, writing up the findings, drafting the paper from the internal full evaluation report, and is the guarantor accepting full responsibility for the work. MC: evaluation design, survey data collection, supporting analysis of the interview data, critical commenting and drafting of the paper. CC: implementing the programme, evaluation design and critical commenting on drafts of the paper.

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**Competing interests** NC was also a participant of this programme. An evaluation was planned prior to the author changing substantive roles after beginning the programme. This potential conflict of interest was discussed and agreed to be mitigatable by supervision and guidance from MC. Fellow participants of the programme were informed at the earliest opportunity and enabled to raise queries or concerns. No concerns were noted at the time or expressed afterwards. No other competing interests are declared for the authors.

**Patient consent for publication** Not applicable.

**Ethics approval** This service evaluation was reviewed and approved by Nottinghamshire Healthcare NHS Trust's Research and Evidence Department. It did not require formal ethics approval. Patient and public engagement was not applicable; however, programme facilitators and partners contributed to the development of the evaluation aims and objectives. Participants gave informed consent to participate in the study before taking part.

**Provenance and peer review** Not commissioned; externally peer reviewed.

**Data availability statement** No data are available. This is due to participants not having provided consent for this.

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## ORCID iDs

Naomi Clifford <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-5895-7302>

Martin Clarke <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-8763-5695>

Catherine Conchar <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-0820-8215>

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## Appendix 1: Online survey for all partners

**Please note:** This survey featured branching of questions. I.e., when completing the survey, depending on the response given to a question, respondents would be directed to the most appropriate question after this. For example, at Q.8 'Has your role changed during the PLP Programme?', if the respondent answered 'yes', they would continue and be asked to answer Q.9 – Q.13. However, if the respondent answered 'no', they would immediately continue to Q.14 to eliminate being asked irrelevant questions.

# Parallel Learning Partnership evaluation

We would like to invite you to participate in the evaluation of the Nottinghamshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust's Parallel Learning Partnerships (PLP) Programme by completing a questionnaire. Please refer to the information in Section 1.

\* Required

## Parallel Learning Partnerships (PLP) Programme

1. You are being asked to participate in this service evaluation by completing an online survey because you were, or are, a participant of the PLP Programme. Understanding your unique experiences in the programme is vital to consider how successful this initiative has been in achieving the intended goals.
2. You will have been allocated a single letter reference which you'll be asked to record on the questionnaire. This will allow the evaluation team to analyse the responses you provide with those provided by your partner. It is important for us to be able to do this to determine whether there have been any differences in the experiences of paired partners. The service evaluation team will not be able to identify you using the single letter reference.
3. Although you will not be asked to include your name on the questionnaire, it may be possible to identify you from the responses you provide.
4. Once all the survey responses are returned, they will be analysed by the service evaluation team to capture any themes arising from participants' experiences and thoughts on the PLP Programme. Our findings will be included in a report that will be shared with the Associate Director of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, the Learning and Organisational Development Department, and will be published on Connect for you to read at: <https://connect/service-evaluation-final-reports>. The report won't contain any information that could identify you unless you have given us your permission to include your name.
5. Your survey responses and our analysis will be held in a secure shared area on the Trust's network and will only be accessible to the evaluation team. The data will be retained in pseudonymised form until the final report of the service evaluation has been published, at which point any identifiable information within the survey responses data set will be destroyed. We will not share your personal information without your consent unless we are required to do so by law or



in response to a court order.

6. You don't have to take part in this service evaluation and there won't be any adverse consequences to you if you choose not to participate. If you give consent to participate and then change your mind after you've submitted the questionnaire, you can ask for your personal data to be destroyed up to the point that the data is analysed.

7. You will be asked to provide a 'memorable word'; this will be used to search for your responses if you withdraw your consent after submitting the questionnaire.

8. If you have any questions or if you want to withdraw your consent, please contact the service evaluation lead, Naomi Clifford, at: [naomi.clifford@nottshc.nhs.uk](mailto:naomi.clifford@nottshc.nhs.uk).

9. By completing the questionnaire and submitting your responses, you will be providing your consent to participate in this service evaluation.

1. Please enter your personal code letter below. \*

You and your PLP partner will have been allocated a code letter (e.g., A, B, C, etc) to indicate which respondents were paired together. This is so we can see whether partners report similar experiences. The PLP Programme facilitators are the only people who know which codes are for which pairs.

2. As per point 7 in the information, please provide a "memorable word" in case you wish to withdraw your responses prior to analysis. \*

Please insert your personal code letter below.

3. Which of these describes your role in the PLP? \*

- BME staff member
- Senior Leader / Exec
- Both (BME staff member and Senior Leader)

## Background/Demographics

4. Please indicate how long you have worked for the Trust \*

- Less than 3 years
- 3 years to less than 6 years
- 6 years to less than 9 years
- 9 years or more

5. When you applied to the PLP programme, what level/banding was your role? \*

- Band 2-3
- Band 4-5
- Band 6-7
- Band 8+ (Including Exec level)

6. Was this role...? \*

- Clinical (e.g., involving direct contact with patients either on a ward or in a community setting)?
- Non-clinical (e.g., office-based with no direct patient contact)?

7. Which Division did you work for when you started the PLP programme? \*

Community Health

Mental Health

Forensics

Corporate

8. Has your role has changed during the PLP programme? \*

Yes

No

9. What level/banding is your new role? \*

Band 2-3

Band 4-5

Band 6-7

Band 8+ (Including Exec level)



10. Is this role...? \*

- Clinical (e.g., involving direct contact with patients either on a ward or in a community setting)?
- Non-clinical (e.g., office-based with no direct patient contact)?

11. Which Division do you work for now? \*

- Community Health
- Mental Health
- Forensics
- Corporate

12. Do you view this role change as a direct result of your involvement with the PLP programme? \*

- Yes – I do feel that the PLP programme contributed to the change.
- No – My role has changed but I do not feel that the PLP programme contributed to the change.

13. What do you feel was the main contributing factor to the change?

## 14. How did you first learn about the PLP programme? \*

Select all that apply

- BME Staff Network
- Connect
- Line Managers' Update
- CEO Briefing
- via Line Manager
- via a colleague
- Other

## 15. What were your reasons for applying to the programme? \*

Please select all that apply

- Career development (such as leadership development opportunities or networking opportunities)
- Personal development
- To highlight the experiences of BME staff members
- To learn about the experiences of BME staff members
- To obtain more visibility within the Trust
- Out of curiosity
- Other

16. How easy or difficult did you find the application process for the programme? \*

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

Very difficult Very easy

17. How easily were you able to gain approval from your line manager before applying? \*

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

Not very easily Very easily

18. Have you ever been involved in similar programmes before, for example 'reverse mentoring', 'traditional mentoring', or 'personal development' programmes? \*

- Yes
- No

19. Which type of programmes were you involved in? \*

Please select all that apply

- Reverse mentoring
- Traditional mentoring
- Personal development
- Other

20. Were you able to attend any of the extra briefing or check in sessions relating to the programme? \*

- Yes, I attended one session
- Yes, I attended multiple sessions
- Yes, I attended all sessions
- No

21. What, if anything, did you find helpful in the session(s) that you attended?

22. How, if at all, could the session(s) have been improved?



23. Do you feel that attendance at at least one of these sessions should be a mandatory part of the programme? \*

Yes

No

24. Please state which single answer best applies to you \*

I wanted to attend but was unable to due to the demands of my 'day job'

I did not wish to attend as I did not feel the need to/the sessions did not appeal to me

My partner wasn't able to attend so I decided not to

Other

25. Is there anything that could have been done by the facilitators to make the sessions easier to attend, and/or more attractive?

26. How useful did you find the electronic PLP Information Pack/Guide for Learning Partners distributed at the start of the programme? \*

1

2

3

4

5

Not very useful

Very useful

27. Is there anything else that would have been helpful to have included within the Pack?

28. Did you and your partner develop a contract? \*

Yes

No

29. Do you feel that your partner was a good match for you and your expectations? \*

Yes

No

## 30. Why do you feel this was a good match? \*

Please select all that apply

- We have similar professional interests
- We have similar personal interests
- I felt that my partner prioritised our partnership
- I that feel we share the same values
- I feel that we have compatible personalities
- Other

## 31. Why do you feel this was not a good match? \*

Please select all that apply

- I do not feel that we have similar professional interests
- I do not feel that we have similar personal interests
- I did not feel that my partner prioritised our partnership
- I did not feel that we shared the same values
- I did not feel we had compatible personalities
- Other

32. Did you and your partner experience any personal or professional challenges or difficulties within your partnership? \*

Yes

No

33. Were you and your partner able to resolve these personal or professional challenges successfully between yourselves? \*

Yes

No

34. Did you access support from the programme facilitators to resolve the concerns? \*

Yes

No

35. Did you feel that the support offered was adequate and resolved the issues for you? \*

Yes

No



36. How could the support that you were offered have been improved?

37. How did you and your partner meet during your partnership? \*

Via MS Teams

Via phone calls

In person

38. Roughly how often did you meet up with your partner? \*

More often than fortnightly

Fortnightly

Monthly

Every 6 weeks

Every 2 months

Less often than 2 months

39. Did you and your partner contact each other in between meetings with each other? \*

Yes

No

40. How did you stay in contact with each other in between meetings? \*

Please select all responses that apply

Via email

Via MS Teams calls

Via MS Teams messages

Via phone calls

Via social media such as Twitter or Facebook

Via text messages

In person for social meet ups e.g., meeting up for coffee

Other

41. How easy was it for you and your partner to find mutually convenient times to meet? \*

1

2

3

4

5

Not easy

Very easy

42. Please indicate which of the following statements best represents your situation \*

You may choose more than one statement

- I did not find it difficult to arrange meetings
- I sometimes found it difficult to arrange meetings due to my work responsibilities / busy work schedule.
- I sometimes found it difficult to arrange meetings due to my partner's work responsibilities / busy work schedule.
- I sometimes found it difficult to arrange meetings due to my shift work.
- I sometimes found it difficult to arrange meetings due to my partner's shift work.
- I sometimes found it difficult to arrange meetings due to my personal caring responsibilities.
- I sometimes found it difficult to arrange meetings due to my partner's personal caring responsibilities.
- I sometimes found it difficult to arrange meetings due to a lack of support from my line manager.
- I sometimes found it difficult to arrange meetings due to my partner's line manager's lack of support.
- Other

43. Did you and your partner complete any specific activities or projects together? \*

For example: joint projects, shadowing, networking opportunities, frank discussions, and/or career advice.

- Yes
- No

44. How aware were you of the activities of other partnerships in the programme? \*

- Not aware
- Somewhat aware
- Very aware

45. To what extent do you feel that you and your partner were influenced by the activities of other partnerships in the programme? \*

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

Not influenced by others Influenced by others

46. Overall, how enjoyable did you find the PLP experience with your partner? \*

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

Not at all enjoyable Extremely enjoyable

47. Do you and your partner have any plans to keep in touch following the programme? \*

- Yes
- No
- Not sure / Not discussed



48. How will you stay in touch?

## PLP Programme Impact

49. Overall, do you feel that the programme has been a successful experience for you? \*

- Yes, definitely
- Yes somewhat successful
- Neither successful nor unsuccessful
- No, not particularly successful
- No definitely not

50. Please indicate why you feel that the programme has been a successful experience for you \*

- I was able to achieve all of my intended and expected goals during my time with my partner.
- I was able to achieve some of my intended and expected goals during my time with my partner.
- Although I did not achieve what I intended or expected to, I was able to learn and develop in unexpected ways.
- Other

51. Please indicate why you feel that the programme was not a successful experience for you \*

- I do not feel that I gained anything from my partner.
- I was not able to achieve any goals with my partner.
- I do not feel that I was able to offer anything to my partner
- Other

52. What do you feel could have been improved to enable you to have had a successful experience?

53. Has your experience of the PLP Programme met the initial expectations you had when you applied? \*

- Yes
- Partly
- No

54. In what way(s) did your expectations differ from your actual experience?

55. How, if at all, has the PLP Programme impacted on you? \*

Please select all responses that apply.

- I feel more valued at work.
- I feel more respected at work.
- I feel more confident expressing myself at work when talking to different people.
- I feel more confident in my personal life.
- I find my work more enjoyable.
- I have a clearer idea of my career progression.
- I feel more included and have a greater sense of belonging in the Trust.
- I understand more about the working of the Trust from an operational basis (e.g., how clinicians work or how senior leaders work)
- I have a greater understanding of what working life is like for BME staff in the Trust.
- I have a greater sense of what high-level management encompasses.
- I feel more confident in understanding the challenges faced by staff and patients from a BME background.
- I do not feel that there has been an impact on me.
- Other

56. How do you feel that your motivation at work has been affected by your participation in the programme? \*

Negatively ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ Positively

57. How do you feel that your performance or general practice at work has been affected by your participation in the programme? \*

Negatively ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ Positively

58. How do you feel that your workplace relationships have been affected by your participation in the programme? \*

Negatively ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ Positively

59. All Trust staff roles ultimately have an impact on patient care whether directly or indirectly. How do you feel that your participation in this programme has impacted or will impact on patient care?

60. Overall, how successful do you feel that the programme has been in achieving its intentions of encouraging 'reciprocity, equality and mutuality' between senior leaders and BME colleagues in the Trust? \*

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

Not at all successful

Extremely successful

61. Did you feel supported by your line manager throughout your involvement in the programme? \*

Yes

Not fully

No

62. In what ways did you feel unsupported by your line manager?

63. If you could suggest at least one, but no more than three improvements to the PLP Programme in future, what would they be? \*

64. And finally, how likely are you to recommend participating in this programme with fellow colleagues? \*

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

Definitely not

Definitely yes





Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire.

Your responses are incredibly valuable and will be used to improve the PLP Programme for future participants. We are also interested in hearing from people individually in one-to-one interviews.

We will shortly be sending out an email to all partners within the programme asking for volunteers to register their interest in taking part in these interviews. If you have any questions regarding this, please use the contact details below to get in touch.

If you have any further questions about the evaluation project, please contact Naomi Clifford via email at: [naomi.clifford@nottshc.nhs.uk](mailto:naomi.clifford@nottshc.nhs.uk) or on MS Teams.

If you have questions relating to the PLP Programme itself, please contact Catherine Conchar or Kaye Hunter.

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## Appendix 2: Interview topic guide for BME partners

### Parallel Learning Partnerships Programme: an evaluation of the first cohort

#### Final Interview Topic Guide for BME Partners

*Prior to commencing the interview, participants will have received the Participant Information Sheet for Interviews (version 1.3, dated 05/04/22) via email outlining the purpose of the interview in addition to having completed an electronic Declaration of Interest form. Informed consent will have been captured via the 'PLP SE Consent form for Interviews' (version 1.3, dated 15/06/22), sent via email to Naomi Clifford.*

#### **Interviewer Introduction:**

Thanks again for agreeing to participate in our evaluation project of the PLP programme. We are carrying out these interviews with members of staff who have been involved in the first cohort of the programme to gain an idea of the possible personal and professional impact that this initiative may have had on individuals. We are also keen to capture any benefits to the organisation that people may feel have occurred, particularly when thinking about participants' ability to encourage more inclusive decision making at senior management levels.

Information gathered from this interview will be used in conjunction with data collected from the participant surveys, relevant literature and evidence found, and discussions with the facilitators of the programme to provide an overview of how the programme has progressed and what we might learn from people's experiences moving forwards.

As a reminder, please be assured that all answers given in this interview are confidential. All potentially identifying information will be removed before analysis and inclusion within the report. The interview will be recorded in MS Teams and saved to a secure folder. This is your opportunity to speak openly and honestly about your experiences with your partner and as a participant in the programme as a whole. There are no right or wrong answers, and no judgements will be made on anything you choose to share.

Do you have any questions for me before we start?

Thank you.

I am now going to turn on the recording and transcription function and then we'll start the interview.

**(Commence recording)**

#### **Section A: Background Info**

##### **Questions**

##### **Prompts/Follow Up Questions**

*Ask if not discussed*

<b>1</b>	Can you start by telling me a little bit about yourself, your professional background and your current role?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Clarify if role at beginning of the programme is the same as now.</li> <li><b>If role changed:</b> To what extent, if any, do you attribute this role change to being as a result of your involvement within the PLP programme?</li> </ul>
<b>2</b>	What were your main reasons for applying to take part in the PLP Programme?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How did you feel about taking part in such a programme, did you have any reservations at all?</li> <li>Is there anything that you were especially looking forward to?</li> </ul>
<b>3</b>	Have you taken part in any programmes like this before, for example reverse mentoring or coaching initiatives and if so, could you tell me a little bit about these?	<p>If they <b>have</b>:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Was this a programme that was offered within our Trust or from outside of the organisation?</li> <li>In what ways do you feel that you benefitted from that/those programme(s)?</li> </ul>

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How, if in any way, does the PLP programme differ from [stated programme]?</li> </ul>
4	<p>How easy was it to get support from your line manager before you could apply for the PLP programme?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Have you ever had difficulty in obtaining your line manager's approval for other development opportunities?</li> </ul>
5	<p>What expectations did you have about the programme when you applied?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What did you expect to learn from the partnership?</li> <li>What did you expect to be able to offer your partner?</li> <li>Did your expectations differ from the reality of the experience, and if so, how?</li> </ul>

### Section B: The Partnership

**Interviewer:** Now we're going to move on to talking about your personal experiences within your partnership.

#### Questions

#### Prompts/Follow Up Questions

*Ask if not discussed*

1	<p>Throughout the PLP programme, quarterly check-in sessions were offered for participants to attend. If you did attend any sessions, would you be able to tell me a little bit about your experience of these sessions?</p>	<p>If <b>did</b> attend:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(And if appropriate) Do you feel it would have been worthwhile attending more sessions, and why, or why not?</li> <li>Did you have a preference for attending the sessions with or without your partner, if so, could you explain your reasons for this?</li> <li>Would you recommend attending these sessions to the next cohort of partners?</li> </ul> <p>If <b>did not</b> attend:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Survey respondents indicated that the reason they were unable to attend any sessions was due to the demands of their substantive roles. How did this affect your attendance?</li> <li>To what extent do you feel that you may have missed out on extra information or feedback that could have altered your experience in your partnership?</li> <li>Do you plan to attend any future sessions as a PLP Alumna / us?</li> </ul>
2	<p>Did any awareness that you had of the activities and progress of other partnerships have any impact on how you viewed your partnership and its progress?</p> <p><i>(Still relevant for those that did not attend as they may have received feedback from partners or colleagues.)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>For example: in how other partners were meeting, how often they were meeting, any projects they were involved in together?</li> <li>Did you feel that this awareness was useful in giving you and your partner ideas of how to enhance your partnership?</li> </ul> <p>If <b>not</b> aware:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How might you have expected your partnership to be impacted by any awareness of others' progress and activities together, if at all?</li> </ul>
3	<p><b>If applicable and if not already stated:</b> In what ways do you feel that these sessions enhanced the programme, or not?</p>	

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4a	In the survey, many participants stated that they found the Information Pack/Guide for Learners to be a helpful resource. How useful did you and your partner find this guide?	<p><i>Reminder of contents if necessary:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Reflection Tools/Activities</i></li> <li>• <i>Contracting</i></li> <li>• <i>Notes/Records and Actions</i></li> <li>• <i>Coaching and Mentoring Literature</i></li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How could the pack be improved in future?</li> <li>• How would you advise that future participants use this guide?</li> </ul>
4b	Some partnerships developed contracts, did you and your partner develop a contract?	<p><b>If yes:</b> How did you develop your contract? Were you able to follow the agreement or did it change or need reviewing at all?  <b>If yes:</b> In what ways did the contract change or how was it amended?</p> <p>Finally, would you be willing to share the contract that you developed with your partner to be included in an appendix of the Information Pack for the next cohort of partners to use to guide their contracting?</p> <p><b>If no:</b> What was the main reason that you didn't develop a contract? On reflection, do you feel that you would have found it useful?</p>
5a	Moving on, how successful do you feel that the facilitators were in matching you with your partner?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do you feel that you and your partner complemented each other when thinking about your similarities and differences, both professional and personal?</li> <li>• On reflection, do you feel you have a good understanding of why you were matched?</li> </ul>
6	Were there any specific challenges that you faced in arranging meetings with your partner?	<p><b>If yes:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In your opinion, what were the main barriers/challenges?</li> <li>• How did you feel about the difficulties in arranging meetings with your partner (e.g., understandable or frustrating)?</li> </ul>
7a	How did you and your partner structure your meetings together?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Were you satisfied with the <b>structure and frequency</b> of your meetings?</li> <li>• What was the <b>location</b> of your meetings?</li> <li>• Success of different types of meeting- virtual or in person better or worse?</li> <li>• How did you and your partner tend to keep in contact with each other in between your meetings? Did you find that one person was the <b>main instigator</b> of these contacts?</li> </ul>
7b	To what extent did you feel comfortable, at ease and psychologically safe enough to explore challenging topics and share your honest experiences and opinions?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How enjoyable did you find your meetings with your partner?</li> </ul>



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<p><b>8</b> Did you and your partner decide to undertake any professional projects or activities together during your partnership?</p>	<p><b>If yes:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Could you tell me a little bit about these?</li> </ul> <p><b>If no:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is there any particular reason that you and your partner did not decide to work on a project or activity together?</li> <li>• Lack of similar professional/personal interests?</li> <li>• Lack of time?</li> <li>• Lack of knowledge or suggestions about what you could do?</li> </ul>
<p><b>9</b> The PLP programme was based on the ideas of equality, reciprocity and mutuality. Could you tell me about how you and your partner worked towards these concepts, for example by navigating any perceived hierarchical barriers?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How did you mitigate any tendencies to slip into mentor/mentee roles?</li> <li>• What might have helped with this?</li> <li>• Did you feel valued and respected by your partner as an equal?</li> </ul>
<p><b>10</b> Finally, before we move onto the next section of the interview, have you and your partner made any plans to keep in contact in future, and if so, what do you expect this contact or relationship to be like moving forwards?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Any plans for professional collaborations?</li> <li>• Social plans?</li> <li>• Do you imagine that you will meet with the same frequency and in the same ways as throughout your partnership?</li> </ul> <p><b>If no:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do you plan to suggest continuing your relationship with your partner outside of the PLP programme?</li> <li>• Are there any particular reasons why you have decided not to keep in contact with each other?</li> </ul>

### Section C: Impact and Experiences

**Interviewer:** In the final section of the interview, I'm going to be asking you questions about your experience of the programme and about any impact that your partnership has had on you.

<b>Questions</b>	<b>Prompts/Follow Up Questions</b>
<p><b>1</b> What, if any, overall impact has involvement in the PLP programme had on you?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are there any especially significant or memorable experiences that you have had either alone or with your partner?</li> <li>• Were there any surprising ways in which you have been impacted by taking part in the programme?</li> <li>• To what extent would you say that having a Parallel Learning Partner has been worthwhile to you?</li> <li>• Would you recommend participating to fellow colleagues?</li> </ul>
<p><b>2a</b> How successful do you feel that the programme has been in meeting your expectations and any aims or goals that you had initially set out to achieve?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have there been any surprising or unexpected changes to any aims or goals you initially had?</li> <li>• Could you describe whether or not you felt valued, heard and supported by your partner?</li> </ul>
<p><b>2b</b> To what extent do you feel that your partnership has helped with your professional learning and development, for example if they have acted as an informal sponsor of you and enabled development</p>	

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	opportunities that may not otherwise have been available to you?	
3a	As part of the application process, you were asked to state what you thought you could bring to a partnership in the interests of reciprocity and mutuality. What skills or expertise do you think your partner learned from you in your partnership?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Does this differ from what you expected to share with your partner?</li> </ul>
3b	Do you think your partner now has a better understanding of the unique and diverse needs of people from Black and ethnic minority backgrounds that will enable them to improve equity of experience and career progression where possible?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Have your career plans or aspirations changed as a result of your participation in this programme?</li> </ul>
4	What do you think about the length of the programme?	<i>(NB- Similar programmes tend to be of a shorter length- approx. 6 – 9 months)</i>
5a	Is there any way in which being part of the PLP programme has impacted on your day to day working practices, for example any ways of working that you have now stopped, started or decided to continue?	
5b	Is there any way in which being part of the PLP programme has contributed to your <u>personal</u> learning and development?	
6	Do you feel that your understanding of the role of senior managers and executives in the Trust has changed as a result of your partnership, and if so, could you describe how?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Are there any ways in which this has impacted on or enhanced your work within the Trust?</li> </ul>
7	Have you noticed that your opinions and views of working within the Trust changed because of your involvement in this programme?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>More, or less favourable views?</li> </ul>
8	Has there been any noticeable impact on our organisational culture or any other change to a part or aspect of the organisation that you feel can be attributed to the PLP programme?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Legacy of the programme/wider impact?</li> </ul>
9	What, if anything, will you take forward with you from this whole experience as a kind of personal <b>legacy</b> ?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How will you ensure that you <b>sustain or remember any changes</b> you have made or any learning you have experienced?</li> </ul>
10	And finally, what would you say to fellow colleagues who are thinking about applying for the next cohort? Do you have any helpful tips or guidance that you would share to support them to get the most out the experience?	
11	Do you have anything else that you had wanted to say about the PLP programme that you feel we haven't already covered?	

**Interviewer:** Thank you very much for taking the time to participate in this interview, and for providing such honest answers about your experience. It really is appreciated, and the information collected will be instrumental in the evaluation and recommendations for future cohorts. When the full evaluation report is



finished, we will share this with you if you are happy to receive this? I'll now turn off the recording and transcription function. **(Stop recording)**

As a final reminder, if you do decide that you do not want your answers to be included in the evaluation, you have 14 days to request that your data is withdrawn.

Before we finish this meeting, do you have any final questions or comments for me?

### Appendix 3: Interview topic guide for SLT partners

#### Parallel Learning Partnerships Programme: an evaluation of the first cohort

##### Final Interview Topic Guide for Executive and Senior Leader Partners

Prior to commencing the interview, participants will have received the Participant Information Sheet for Interviews (version 1.3, dated 05/04/22) via email outlining the purpose of the interview in addition to having completed an electronic Declaration of Interest form. Informed consent will have been captured via the 'PLP SE Consent form for Interviews' (version 1.3, dated 15/06/22), sent via email to Naomi Clifford.

#### Interviewer Introduction:

Thanks again for agreeing to participate in our evaluation project of the PLP programme. We are carrying out these interviews with members of staff who have been involved in the first cohort of the programme to gain an idea of the possible personal and professional impacts that this initiative may have had on individuals. We are also keen to capture any benefits to the organisation that people may feel have occurred, particularly when thinking about participants' ability to encourage more inclusive decision making at senior management levels.

Information gathered from this interview will be used in conjunction with data collected from the participant surveys, relevant literature and evidence found, and discussions with the facilitators of the scheme to provide an overview of how the programme has progressed and what we might learn from people's experiences moving forwards.

As a reminder, please be assured that all answers given in this interview are confidential. All potentially identifying information will be removed before analysis and inclusion within the report. The interview will be recorded in MS Teams and saved to a secure folder. This is your opportunity to speak openly and honestly about your experiences with your partner and as a participant in the programme as a whole. There are no right or wrong answers, and no judgements will be made on anything you choose to share.

Do you have any questions for me before we start?

Thank you.

I am now going to turn on the recording and transcription function and then we'll start the interview.

**(Commence recording)**

#### Section A: Background Info

##### Questions

##### Prompts/Follow Up Questions

*Ask if not discussed*

<b>1</b>	Can you start by telling me a little bit about yourself, your professional background, and your current role?	
<b>2</b>	What were your main reasons for deciding to apply to take part in the PLP Programme?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How did you feel about taking part in such a programme, did you have any reservations at all?</li> <li>• Is there anything that you were especially looking forward to?</li> </ul>
<b>3</b>	Have you taken part in any programmes like this before, for example reverse mentoring or coaching initiatives and if so, could you tell me about these?	<p>If they <b>have</b>:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Was this a programme that was offered within our Trust or from outside of the organisation?</li> <li>• In what ways do you feel that you benefitted from that/those programme(s)?</li> <li>• How, if in any way, does the PLP programme differ from [stated programme]?</li> </ul>

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<b>4</b>	What expectations did you have about the PLP Programme when you applied?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What did you expect to learn from the partnership?</li> <li>• What did you expect to be able to offer your partner?</li> <li>• Did your expectations differ from the reality of the experience, and if so, how?</li> </ul>
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### Section B: The Partnership

**Interviewer:** Now we're going to move on to talking about your personal experiences within your partnership.

#### Questions

#### Prompts/Follow Up Questions

*Ask if not discussed*

<b>1</b>	Throughout the PLP programme, quarterly check-in sessions were offered for participants to attend. If you attended any sessions, would you be able to tell me a little bit about your experience of these sessions?	<p><b>If did attend:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• (And if appropriate) Do you feel it would have been worthwhile attending more sessions, and why, or why not?</li> <li>• How do you feel that providing more structure would be more beneficial to future participants?</li> <li>• Did you have a preference for attending the sessions with or without your partner, if so, could you explain your reasons for this?</li> <li>• Would you recommend attending these sessions to the next cohort of partners?</li> </ul> <p><b>If did not attend:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Survey respondents indicated that the reason they were unable to attend any sessions was due to the demands of their substantive roles. How did this affect your attendance?</li> <li>• To what extent do you feel that you may have missed out on extra information or feedback that could have altered your experience in your partnership?</li> <li>• Do you plan to attend any sessions in your next partnership?</li> </ul>
<b>2</b>	<p>Did any awareness that you had of the activities and progress of other partnerships have any impact on how you viewed your partnership and its progress?</p> <p><i>(Still relevant for those that did not attend as they may have received feedback from partners or colleagues.)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• For example: in how other partners were meeting, how often they were meeting, any projects they were involved in together?</li> <li>• Did you feel that this awareness was useful in giving you and your partner ideas of how to enhance your partnership?</li> </ul> <p><b>If not aware:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How might you have expected your partnership to be impacted by any awareness of others' progress and activities together, if at all?</li> </ul>
<b>3</b>	<b>If applicable and if not already stated:</b> In what ways, if any, do you feel that these sessions enhanced the programme, or not?	
<b>4a</b>	In the survey, many participants stated that they found the Information Pack/Guide for Learners to be a helpful resource. How useful did you and your partner find the Information Pack / Guide for Learn?	<p><i>Reminder of contents if necessary:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Reflection Tools/Activities</i></li> <li>• <i>Contracting</i></li> <li>• <i>Notes/Records and Actions</i></li> <li>• <i>Coaching and Mentoring Literature</i></li> </ul>

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How could the pack be improved in future?</li> <li>• How will you use the pack with your next partner, if at all?</li> </ul>
<b>4b</b>	<p>Some partnerships developed contracts, did you and your partner develop a contract?</p> <p><b>If yes:</b> How did you develop your contract? Were you able to follow the agreement or did it change or need reviewing at all? <b>If yes:</b> In what ways did the contract change or how was it amended?</p> <p>Finally, would you be willing to share the contract that you developed with your partner to be included in an appendix of the Information Pack for the next cohort of partners to use to guide their contracting?</p> <p><b>If no:</b> What was the main reason that you didn't develop a contract? On reflection, do you feel that you would have found it useful?</p>
<b>5</b>	<p>Moving on, how successful do you feel that the facilitators were in matching you with your partner?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do you feel that you and your partner complemented each other when thinking about your similarities and differences, both professional and personal?</li> <li>• On reflection, do you feel you have a good understanding of why you were matched?</li> </ul>
<b>6</b>	<p>Were there any specific challenges that you faced in arranging meetings with your partner?</p> <p><b>If yes:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In your opinion, what were the main barriers/challenges?</li> <li>• How did you feel about the difficulties in arranging meetings with your partner (e.g., understandable or frustrating)?</li> </ul>
<b>7a</b>	<p>How did you and your partner decide to structure your meetings together?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Were you satisfied with the <b>structure and frequency</b> of your meetings?</li> <li>• What was the <b>location</b> of your meetings?</li> <li>• Success of different types of meeting- virtual or in person better or worse?</li> <li>• How did you and your partner tend to keep in contact with each other in between your meetings? Did you find that one person was the <b>main instigator</b> of these contacts?</li> <li>• Are there any specific changes that you plan to make with structure and frequency of meetings with your next partner?</li> </ul>
<b>7b</b>	<p>To what extent did you feel comfortable, at ease and psychologically safe enough to explore challenging topics and share your honest experiences and opinions?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How enjoyable did you find your meetings with your partner?</li> </ul>

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<p><b>8</b> Did you and your partner decide to undertake any professional projects or activities together during your partnership?</p>	<p><b>If yes:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Could you tell me a little bit about these?</li> </ul> <p><b>If no:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is there any particular reason that you and your partner did not decide to work on a project or activity together?</li> <li>• Lack of similar professional/personal interests?</li> <li>• Lack of time?</li> <li>• Lack of knowledge or suggestions about what you could do?</li> </ul>
<p><b>9</b> The PLP programme was based on the ideas of equality, reciprocity and mutuality. Could you tell me about how you and your partner worked towards these concepts, for example by navigating any perceived hierarchical barriers?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How did you mitigate any tendencies to slip into mentor/mentee roles?</li> <li>• What might have helped you with this?</li> <li>• Did you feel valued and respected by your partner as an equal?</li> </ul>
<p><b>10</b> Finally, before we move onto the next section of the interview, did you and your partner make any plans to keep in contact in future, and if so, what do you expect this contact or relationship to be like moving forwards?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Any plans for professional collaborations?</li> <li>• Social plans?</li> <li>• Do you imagine that you will meet with the same frequency and in the same ways as throughout your partnership?</li> </ul> <p><b>If no:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do you plan to suggest continuing your relationship with your partner outside of the PLP programme?</li> <li>• Are there any particular reasons why you have decided not to keep in contact with each other?</li> </ul>

### Section C: Impact and Experiences

**Interviewer:** In the final section of the interview, I'm going to be asking you questions about your experience of the programme and about any impact that your partnership has had on you.

#### Questions

#### Prompts/Follow Up Questions

<p><b>1</b> What, if any, overall impact has involvement in the PLP programme had on you?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are there any especially significant or memorable experiences that you have had either alone or with your partner?</li> <li>• Were there any surprising ways in which you have been impacted by taking part in the programme?</li> <li>• To what extent would you say that having a Parallel Learning Partner has been worthwhile to you?</li> <li>• Would you recommend participating to fellow colleagues?</li> </ul>
<p><b>2</b> How successful do you feel that the programme has been in meeting your expectations and any aims or goals that you had initially set out to achieve?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have there been any surprising or unexpected changes to any aims or goals you initially had?</li> <li>• Could you describe whether or not you felt valued, heard and supported by your partner or not?</li> </ul>
<p><b>3</b> As part of the application process, you were asked to state what you thought you could bring to a partnership in the interests of reciprocity and</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does this differ from what you expected to share with your partner?</li> </ul>

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	mutuality. What skills or expertise do you think your partner learned from you in your partnership?	
<b>4</b>	Is there any way in which being part of the PLP programme has contributed to your <u>professional</u> learning and development?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What impact, if any, has there been on your day to day working practices, for example any ways of working that you have now stopped, started or wish to continue?</li> <li>• Have your career plans or aspirations changed as a result of your participation in this programme?</li> </ul>
<b>5</b>	Is there any way in which being part of the PLP programme has contributed to your <u>personal</u> learning and development?	
<b>6</b>	To what extent and how has your awareness and understanding of experiences of staff from a Black or minority ethnic background changed since the beginning of the programme?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thinking professionally, is there anything that you have been able to change or implement in your role to improve ethnic minority staff's experiences or career progression in the Trust?</li> <li>• Is there anything that you have been able to change or implement in your role to improve the outcomes and experiences of patients from a Black or ethnic minority background?</li> <li>• How confident do you feel that you will be able to advocate for the voice of Black and ethnic minority staff to be heard at senior levels of decision making?</li> </ul>
<b>7</b>	Do you feel that your understanding of previously unfamiliar areas of the Trust has improved or changed because of your partnership?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Could you describe how your understanding has been impacted?</li> <li>• Has this increased understanding enhanced your work within the Trust?</li> </ul>
<b>8</b>	Have your opinions and views of working within the Trust changed as a result of your involvement in this programme?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More, or less favourable views?</li> </ul>
<b>9</b>	Has there been any noticeable impact on our organisational culture or any other change to the organisation that you feel can be attributed to the PLP programme?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Legacy of the programme/wider impact?</li> </ul>
<b>10</b>	How do you feel about the length of the programme and the potential future overlap between your first and second partners?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Will you introduce your first partner to your second partner?</li> <li>• Are you happy to continue participating in the programme?</li> <li>• Feelings on the length of the programme?</li> </ul>
<b>11</b>	What, if anything, will you take forward with you from this whole experience as a kind of personal legacy?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How will you ensure that you sustain or remember any changes you have made or any learning you have experienced?</li> </ul>
<b>12a</b>	And finally, what would you say to fellow colleagues who are going to be participating in the next cohort? Do you have any helpful tips or guidance that you would share to support them to get the most out the experience?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How would you feel about participation in this programme being an expected part of the roles for all senior managers at and beyond a certain level?</li> </ul>

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<b>12b</b>	Do you have anything else that you had wanted to say about the PLP programme that you feel we haven't already covered?	
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**Interviewer:** Thank you very much for taking the time to participate in this interview, and for providing such honest answers about your experience. It really is appreciated, and the information collected will be instrumental in the evaluation and recommendations for future cohorts. When the full evaluation report is finished, we will share this with you if you are happy to receive this? I'll now turn off the recording and transcription function. **(Stop recording.)**

As a final reminder, if you do decide that you do not want your answers to be included in the evaluation, you have 14 days to request that your data is withdrawn.

Before we finish this meeting, do you have any final questions or comments for me?