



WSLA Impact Survey report

Dr Jordan Matthews

04 November 2020

Contents

Executive summary	3
Introduction	4
Method	5
The impact of WSLA <i>on the graduate as a person</i>	9
New employment and/or non-paid leadership roles	12
The impact of WSLA <i>on the graduate as a leader</i>	14
The impact of WSLA <i>by the graduate on their organisation</i>	17
The impact of WSLA <i>by the graduate on women in sport</i>	20
The impact of and by <i>the WSLA Network</i>	23
Conclusions	26
Recommendations	26

Executive summary

The Women's Sport Leadership Academy (WSLA) provides unique development opportunities for women leaders around the world to step up, take the lead and make an impact. In June 2020, 262 graduates of WSLA programmes were emailed a survey to determine the impact of WSLA. Despite the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, eight weeks later, 38% (n=99) had responded. The overwhelming majority of responses positively indicated the impact of WSLA. For example:

- 90% of graduates said WSLA had a life-changing or significant impact on them as a person
- Over 80% of graduates said WSLA had a life-changing or significant impact upon them as a leader
- Nearly two-thirds of graduates (59%) stated WSLA was significantly or completely attributable for them getting a new job/role. This figure rose to 82% when considered for non-paid leadership roles
- Over two-thirds of graduates said that they had an influential or significant impact on their organisation since attending WSLA
- Over half of graduates said that they had an influential or significant impact on women in sport since attending WSLA
- Over 60% of graduates said that the WSLA Network has had a life-changing or significant impact on them

This report explores the responses by graduates regarding: the impact of WSLA on them as a person and as a leader, the graduates' impact on their organisation and on women in sport, and the impact of the WSLA Network. Each of these topics was afforded an open- and closed-answer question, meaning the report is benefitted by statistical and qualitative data. The thoughts and opinions of the graduates, through their responses, are used to illuminate the reporting of the analysis. Conclusions and recommendations are provided on p.26 at the end of the report.

'Honestly, this is difficult to put into words, but I feel like WSLA gave me a rebirth I did not know (or believed) I needed' (60 Asia)

Introduction

The Women's Sport Leadership Academy (WSLA) is a programme of the Anita White Foundation (AWF) at the University of Chichester that has been developed and delivered in partnership with Females Achieving Brilliance (FAB) and the University of Hertfordshire. The mission of WSLA is to provide unique development opportunities for women leaders around the world to step up, take the lead and make an impact. It comprises a residential programme which has been held annually at the University of Chichester since 2014, facilitator training and support, graduate support, networking and mentoring, research, and other programmes delivered under license around the world. Since 2014, 360 women identified as future leaders (decision-makers or elite coaches) at senior management level by their organisations based in 62 countries have 'graduated' from WSLA.

In December 2019, the AWF Strategy Group stressed the need to demonstrate the impact of WSLA. An impact framework was created and the content of this report contributes to the monitoring strand of this framework. Previous contact by WSLA with graduates has included (i) evaluative surveys of session-by-session programme content and delivery during the WSLA programmes; (ii) reaction surveys asking for evaluation of the whole programme within a few weeks of finishing their programme; (iii) evaluation surveys six and twelve months after referring to the subsequent impact of programme content on the work of the graduates; and (iv) an evaluation of the WSLA programme conducted in 2017. Graduates are invited to a WSLA LinkedIn group and are also on cohort-specific social messaging groups. This survey is the first to canvass the opinions of graduates since the 2017 evaluation.

A survey of WSLA graduates was undertaken from June-August 2020. It was circulated to 262 graduates¹ and 99 completed surveys were received, meaning a 38% response rate. After explaining the methodological process for the survey, this document explores the responses by graduates across the following sections:

- the impact of WSLA on them
- the impact of WSLA on their leadership
- their impact on their organisation
- their impact on women in sport
- the impact of the WSLA Network

The document has been written so that as many responses are included. Conclusions and recommendations are drawn from the data in the final section of the document.

¹ Participants or graduates of five programmes delivered under license were not asked to participate in the survey because their programmes were ongoing or had very recently been completed, including: Netball Scotland WSLA High Performance Coaches (2020), New Zealand Olympic WSLA (2019-2021) with the New Zealand Olympic Committee, WSLA South Africa (2020) with the South African Women and Sport Foundation, WSLA High Performance Coaches at the University of Hertfordshire (2019-2021), and WSLA Zimbabwe (2020) with the Zimbabwe Olympic Committee.

Method

We wanted to hear of the experiences of graduates in response to questions about the impact WSLA has had on them. Due to the volume of graduates around the world, and the influence of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, an online survey was determined as the most suitable method of generating data.

The survey was administered using the JISC online survey tool by the lead researcher. It was comprised of closed- and open-answer questions. Introductory demographic questions began the survey, before participants were encouraged to reflect on the impact of WSLA on them and their leadership, and their own impact on their organisation and women in sport.

For example, in response to the question “What impact has WSLA had on you as a person?”, respondents could select one of the following options: life-changing, significant, moderate, insignificant, none at all. After this question, they were presented with the following: “Please explain what impact WSLA has had on you as a person. You may wish to consider your confidence and behaviour; relationships with people around you; your intercultural understanding.” As such, respondents were afforded the opportunity to justify their answer. The survey comprised a maximum of 25 questions, inclusive of conditional branching, and offered the opportunity to withdraw without providing reason at any time.

Ethical clearance was granted by the University of Chichester in May 2020 ² and the survey was distributed in June 2020 via email to all graduates of the programmes stated in Table I. Reminders were sent to graduates via email at the end of June and the start of July 2020 and the survey was closed at the beginning of August 2020. Participants had until two weeks after the close of the survey to veto/withdraw their data, though none decided to do so. Graduates were made aware that their responses may be identifiable to the lead researcher since they were required to state their WSLA programme and organisation for contextual purposes. However, in this report, all data from the survey has been anonymised and replaced with a number followed by the continent in which the graduate is based.

Table I. Distribution and response to WSLA Impact Survey per WSLA programme.

Programme	Graduates	Responses	Response rate
WSLA 2014 residential week	36	15	42%
WSLA 2015 residential week	40	12	30%
WSLA 2016 residential week	32	7	22%
WSLA 2017 residential week	30	7	23%
WSLA New Zealand (2017-2019) <i>Partner: New Zealand Olympic Committee</i>	18	4	22%
WSLA Botswana (2018) <i>Partner: Women and Sport Botswana</i>	37	14	38%
WSLA 2018 residential week	35	23	66%
WSLA 2019 residential week	34	17	50%
<i>Total</i>	262	99	38%

² Some of the graduates do not have English as a first language. However, in order to participate on the WSLA residential week programme, the women had to suit WSLA’s standard IELTS requirements (Academic: 6.5 overall; no individual band less than 5.5).

Overall, 262 graduates were contacted to participate in the survey and 99 completed surveys were received, meaning a 38% response rate. The highest response rates were from the most recent programmes (WSLA 2018 and WSLA 2019). It should be noted that these cohorts also had active WhatsApp messaging groups and the link to the survey was posted to both groups. The survey link was also posted on the WSLA LinkedIn group. The lowest response rates were from WSLA 2016, WSLA 2017 and WSLA New Zealand. Unfortunately, out-of-office emails were received owing to annual leave and furloughing because of COVID-19 and approximately ten email addresses hard-bounced.

The composition of survey data resulting from the responses per programme is illustrated in Figure 1. WSLA 2018 and WSLA 2019 comprise the majority of the responses (41%) whereas the combined total of responses from graduates of WSLA 2016, WSLA 2017 and WSLA New Zealand is 18% of the data set.

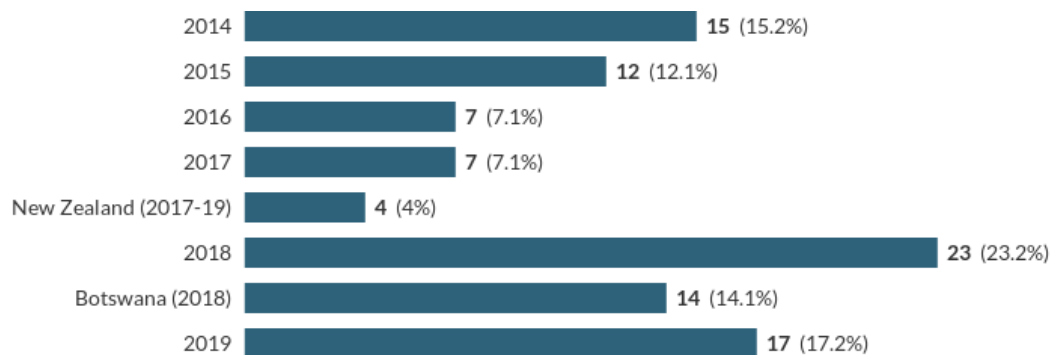


Figure 1. Composition of survey data resulting from the responses per programme

The composition of survey data resulting from the responses per continent is illustrated in Figure 2. Europe (n=39) and Africa (n=33) accounted for two-thirds of the total responses. North and South America saw the fewest respondents with four each.

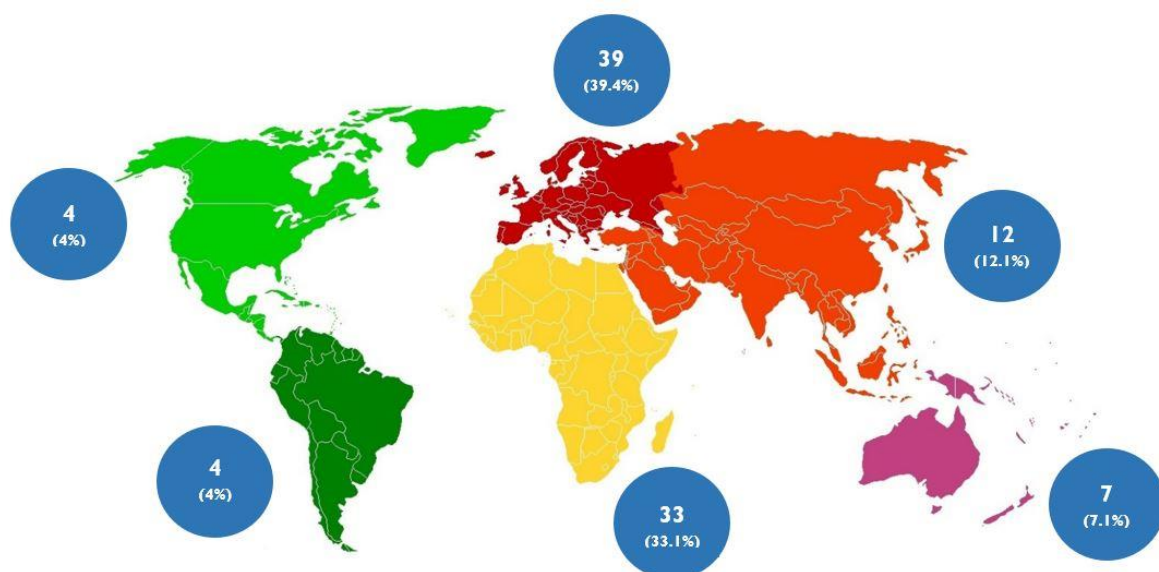


Figure 2. Composition of survey data resulting from the responses per continent

Extending this, the first three columns of Table 2 show the total number of graduates per continent and the percentage breakdown of their representation. The final two columns demonstrate how many graduates responded to the survey and the percentage of responses to the total number of graduates per continent. Thus, even though Europe had the highest number of survey responses (39), it had one of the lowest percentages of total graduates responding (33%). Over half of Asian, North American and South American graduates responded. Nearly half of all African graduates responded, whereas only a fifth of Oceanic graduates answered the survey.

Table 2. Percentage of responses to the total number of graduates per continent

	Total number of graduates	% of total	Responses to survey	% of responses to total number of graduates
Africa	75	28.6%	33	44%
Asia	23	8.8%	12	52%
Europe	120	45.8%	39	33%
Oceania	32	12.2%	7	22%
North America	5	1.9%	4	80%
South America	7	2.7%	4	57%
<i>Total</i>	262	100%	99	<i>n/a</i>

Regarding the age ranges of those responding to the survey, 40% were between 30-39 years of age and over a third were between 40-49 years old. Further information about age ranges can be seen in Figure 3.

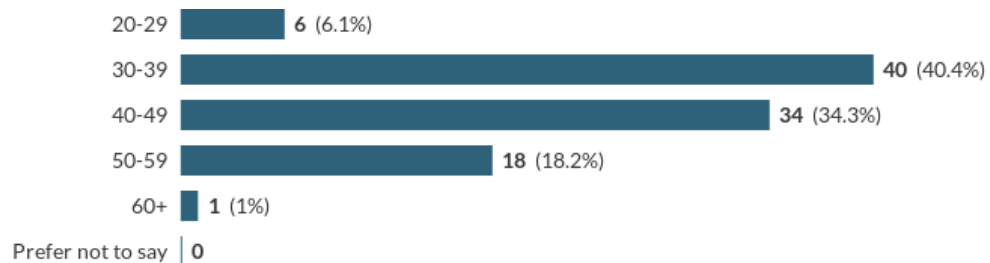


Figure 3. Composition of survey data resulting from the responses per age group

Analysis of quantitative data was undertaken using the JISC online survey platform. Nonetheless, all data was transferred to Excel for further analysis and cross-tabulations.

Open-ended questions encouraged respondents to write as much or as little as they wished. Data from the open-ended questions was analysed using Sparkes and Smith's (2014) six phases of hierarchical content analysis³:

1. Data was transferred to an Excel master spreadsheet. Each question (data set) was copied and pasted into separate spreadsheets and read thoroughly by the researcher who became *immersed with the data*.
2. *Initial themes were searched for* through reading and re-reading each data set. For example, when asked to explain what impact WSLA had on them as a person, there were many

³ Sparkes, A. & Smith B. (2014). *Qualitative research methods in sport, exercise and health*. London: Routledge.

references and articulations to heightened self-confidence and belief in themselves. These formed initial raw data themes.

3. The themes were then *connected and ordered*. Continuing the example from stage 2, these themes were clustered into more specific themes. Thus, 'general improvement in confidence', 'confidence in a particular skill/item' and 'self-belief and self-awareness' formed an overall dimension titled 'Self-confidence and self-belief'.
4. The clusters of themes and general dimensions were then *cross-checked against the data set* and reviewed with regard to their representation of the answers provided.
5. The analysis was *confirmed* through meetings with the AWF Operational Management Group and advisors to the WSLA Impact project.
6. *Final diagrams were produced* and informed the production of this report.

For each of the following sections, the closed-questions are presented first. The open-ended questions are explained using the general dimensions and themes identified in the stages above and are complemented with extracts from the data set to illustrate each dimension.

The impact of WSLA on the graduate as a person

WSLA is predominantly about the development of the participant. WSLA programmes challenge female leaders to think about who they are and what they stand for, to construct a personal development plan outlining steps toward an achievable future, to focus what and how they communicate, to break out of their comfort zone, and to experience different cultures and ways of working from around the world, amongst many other elements. As such, this section demonstrates the impact of WSLA on the graduate as a person.

90% of graduates said WSLA had a life-changing or significant impact on them as a person

Graduates were asked ‘What impact has WSLA had on you as a person?’ and, as can be seen in Figure 4, could respond with one of five options. Eighty-nine respondents (90%) stated that WSLA had a life-changing or significant impact on them as a person.

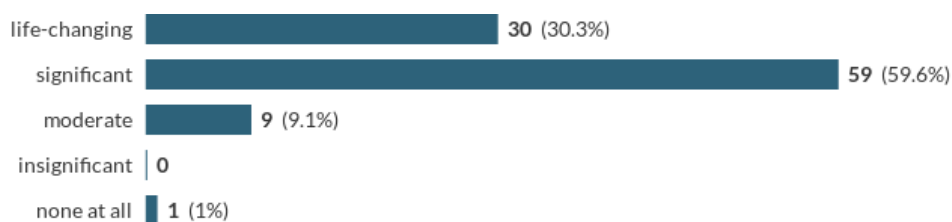


Figure 4. Attribution of impact of WSLA on graduates. ⁴

Graduates were then asked to explain the impact WSLA had on them. After analysis, four general dimensions of WSLA’s impact on graduates are apparent: self-confidence and self-belief, competencies, the influence of others, and future direction (see appendix I).

Self-confidence and self-belief

Most responses to this question referred to an increase in self-confidence and self-belief as a person and as a leader. There were three themes that contributed to this general dimension. Firstly, there is an *improvement in the general confidence* of the graduate. Here, many responses provided a non-descript statement about their confidence, for example: ‘I am more confident than I was before attending WSLA’ (64 Africa). Secondly, when graduates provided more depth to their comments about confidence, it was often regarding *a particular skill or behaviour*. This included comments such as ‘Increased confidence within larger groups’ (80 Europe), and, ‘My confidence improved significantly and I can now make good presentations’ (11 Africa). The final theme to form this dimension was an

⁴ The ‘none at all’ response was followed by very positive comments about the impact of WSLA on the individual so appears to be an anomaly but has not been included in the totals for ‘significant’ or ‘life-changing’.

awareness and valuing of oneself. This is different to self-confidence because though 'confidence' may have been included in their comment, there is a clear focus on their self-worth and self-belief. For example:

WSLA came for me at the right time in my life. It made me realise how far I have come having been through a traumatic personal experience and what I had achieved. It made me regain my confidence and reassess what is important to me. It helped me to understand the need to be true to my values. It has helped me in how I deal with people and has helped me to better understand myself as a person about what I will and won't accept from both myself and others. It reminded me of my best qualities and that I am a good, kind person who had lost herself for a period of time but who has come back stronger, more determined and healthier (91 Europe).

Competencies

For this dimension, there were also three nuanced themes relating to the skills, values and behaviours of graduates taught and developed at WSLA and the impact of these: learning something new, improvement, and change. Responses that were coded as *learning something new* referred to taking something original from the WSLA programme. This is different to having the confidence to undertake the action, as explained in the previous dimension. One graduate identified the change management process, and 'how I came to WSLA very deflated and felt beaten, but after completing the programme I had found my passion again, I understood what I needed to change but more importantly I was given the skills to know HOW to make these changes' (65 Europe). In other words, they learned something new and the resultant actioning of it is the impact upon them.

The second theme, *improvement*, relates to an existing skill, tool or technique being improved upon because of a WSLA programme, as seen in the following example: 'My relationships, especially with women, have improved by the fact that my communication styles have become more thoughtful and intentional. Additionally I use the concept of "listening and asking questions" versus "listening and telling the answers" on a daily level' (59 North America). Here, the graduate reflects upon the communication tools that were improved at WSLA.

The final theme surrounds *a change in behaviour or outlooks* because of the WSLA programme. This is different to an improvement of a competency or learning something new because it represents a shift or departure from what the graduate was doing before attending WSLA, as seen in the following example:

It allowed me to take a real look at myself and dial back on always needing to be perfect, the best, or "win". It allowed me to understand and accept that I cannot be 'Ms. Makes the World Perfect'. Perfection is impossible. Helping every single person, without helping myself, is impossible. It allowed me to truly understand that if I am going to help others, I must help myself first in order to make a great impact' (60 Asia).

The influence of others

The dimension surrounds the impact of others on the graduates. Firstly, it was clear that there was an *extension and development of a network* that formed after their WSLA programme. This is not to say that the network was solely with WSLA graduates, for it appears to reach much wider.

Aside from a 'wider and more diverse network' (1 Europe) and 'extended relationships' (3 Africa), there is an emotional tone to other responses, including:

‘It came at a time I was struggling with both work and personal issues. It helped me form a new network of people I could share these things with and from whom I could gain experience, understanding and friendship’ (33 Europe)

‘I had made many connections through WSLA and that made me believe I had support in other parts of the world should I need it. That is a great feeling!’ (23 Africa)

‘Attending WSLA was very enriching for me both personally and professionally. There was something special about connecting like-minded women with similar goals, challenges, and aspirations. I also walked away with new relationships and tools to use in my everyday work life’ (29 North America)

Aside from a network, the influence of others can also be seen in *learning from others* – the second theme here. The following quote summarises how graduates expressed the benefit of learning from a cohort of other female leaders and facilitators with a wealth of different experiences, skills and knowledge: ‘It has given me the opportunity to interact with different realities’ (40 South America). The final theme is an extension of this because it has a particular focus on the *intercultural understanding* generated amongst WSLA programmes. For example, European graduates identified the impact of ‘the increased cultural understanding and the white British privilege that I have’ (1 Europe) and how ‘the other delegates on the course raised my awareness of the cultural differences being faced by women across the world in similar roles to me and the barriers that they face on a daily basis’ (39 Europe). Therefore, the influence of others on the graduates is an important dimension.

Future direction

The final dimension from this question refers to the impact of WSLA upon the futures of the graduates. This was separated into two themes: goals and achievements. For *goals*, graduates stated how WSLA ‘made me re-think my personal focus and pathway’ (18 Europe), ‘to have more clarity on the things I need to further develop myself’ (45 South America), and, ‘have a sense of direction and better energy to serve’ (11 Africa). Others celebrated their *achievements* since WSLA and credited the programme with giving them the push to be able to do so:

‘Since WSLA, I have taken on more roles within my organisation and started on a Master’s degree which I always wanted to do and the personal planning on WSLA meant I have taken the plunge because I made a pledge to do just that’ (85 Europe)

Following this, elsewhere in the survey graduates were asked whether they had found new employment and non-paid leadership roles since WSLA.

New employment and/or non-paid leadership roles

Table 3 illustrates the responses to whether graduates had found new employment and non-paid leadership roles since WSLA. Over half (57%) of respondents stated they had changed their job since WSLA. When considered per programme, a general trend is that the older the WSLA programme, the more likelihood that the graduate had changed job. For example, thirteen of the fifteen WSLA 2014 graduates had changed their job compared to four of the thirteen WSLA 2019 graduates.

Over half of graduates said they had a new job/role since WSLA and over two-thirds of graduates had taken on a non-paid leadership role since WSLA

Over two-thirds (68%) of graduates told us they had taken on a non-paid leadership role since WSLA. Each programme apart from WSLA 2014 and WSLA 2018 sees a strong weighting towards graduates taking on non-paid leadership roles. It is noticeable that all respondents from WSLA New Zealand and WSLA Botswana stated they had taken on a non-paid leadership role.

Table 3. Number of graduates per programme who have changed job or taken on a non-paid leadership role since WSLA.

WSLA Programme	Has your job/role changed since attending your WSLA programme?		Have you taken on a non-paid leadership role(s) since attending your WSLA programme?	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
2014	13	2	8	7
2015	10	2	8	4
2016	3	4	6	1
2017	5	2	5	2
NZ	3	1	4	0
2018	10	13	11	12
Botswana	8	6	14	0
2019	4	13	11	6
Total	56 (57%)	43 (43%)	67 (68%)	32 (32%)

Graduates who stated that they had taken on a non-paid leadership role since WSLA were afforded the opportunity to select what type of role this was. More than one option could be selected, and the percentage of responses to each option are demonstrated in Figure 5. Over a third of responses (34%) were for being a board member. Descending thereafter, graduates selected meeting/event organiser (21%), advisor (17%), trustee (12%) and patron (1%). 'Other' accounted for 15% of responses and over half of these referred to becoming a mentor, coach, manager or educator.

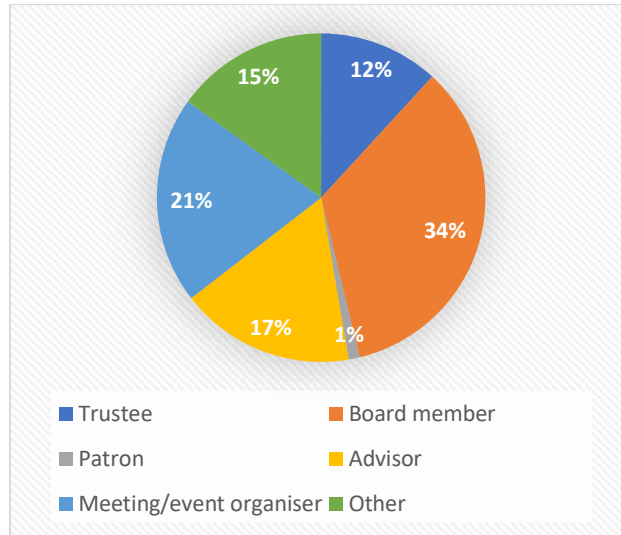


Figure 5. Types of non-leadership role undertaken since WSLA.

Figure 6 and Figure 7 show the extent that graduates attributed their job/role changes and non-paid leadership role(s) to their involvement in WSLA. **Nearly two-thirds of graduates (59%) stated WSLA was significantly or completely attributable for them getting a new job/role. The total was much higher (82%) when considered for the non-paid leadership roles.** It is clear from these responses that WSLA is a significant contributing factor to graduates successfully obtaining new paid and non-paid roles.

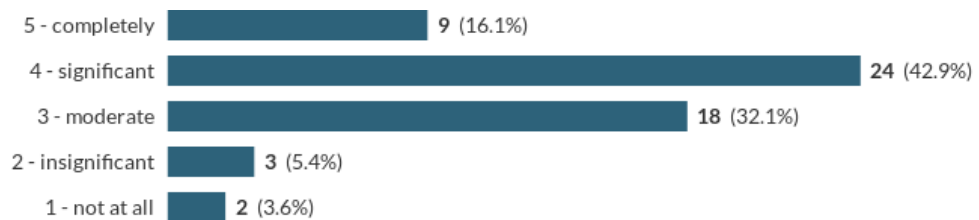


Figure 6. Attribution of job/role change(s) to involvement in WSLA.

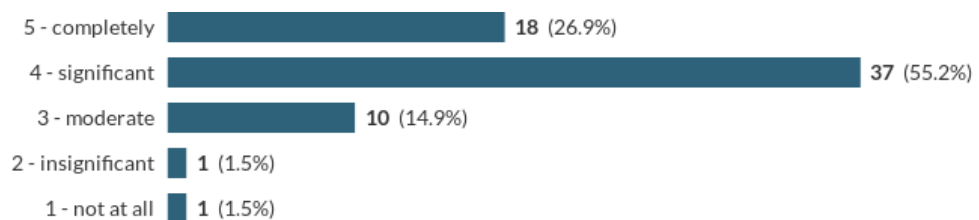


Figure 7. Attribution of non-paid leadership role(s) to involvement in WSLA.

The impact of WSLA on the graduate as a leader

This section focuses on the impact of WSLA on the graduate as a leader. WSLA provides a unique learning environment that supports each participant to further develop their leadership behaviours that research has shown to be critical to becoming an outstanding leader.

Over 80% of graduates said WSLA had a life-changing or significant impact upon them as a leader

Graduates were asked 'What impact has WSLA had on you as a leader?' and 83% responded that it had a life-changing or significant impact. Figure 8 provides a breakdown of all responses. Graduates were given the opportunity to explain the impact WSLA had on them as a leader and, after analysis, there are four general dimensions: confidence; a shift in how they 'do' leadership; a shift in perceptions about leadership; and networks and contacts.

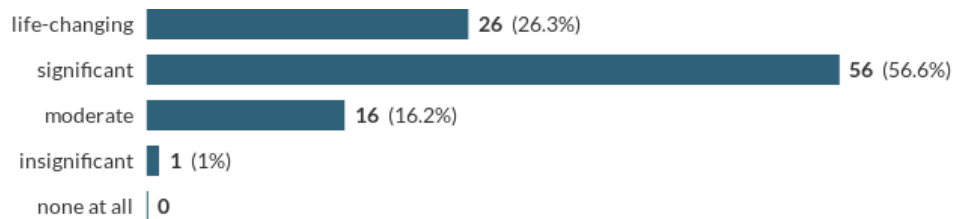


Figure 8. Attribution of impact of WSLA on graduates as leaders.

Confidence

Similar to responses for the impact WSLA had on them as a person, confidence was a recurrent trend throughout the answers here. This dimension was separated into two themes: *a general improvement in confidence* (i.e. a non-descript application of 'confidence') and *confidence in themselves as leaders and/or their leadership*. The former can be evidenced through examples such as 'my confidence and belief in my ability has improved' (31 Europe), 'it has improved on my confidence' (44 Africa) and 'increase confidence' (72 Europe). The latter saw answers refer to an enhanced self-belief by the graduate that they are deserving of their role and are a competent leader, as seen in the following examples from European graduates:

'Gave me back my confidence that I can be a good leader/manager' (14 Europe)

'Massively increased confidence in myself as a leader to do the right things and be guided by the correct values' (79 Europe)

'I am more confident in my ability to contribute to the business at a strategic level and have moved into a Senior Management role for [organisation] leading a team' (82 Europe)

A shift in how they 'do' leadership

Many graduates indicated that they had shifted how they lead due to WSLA. The themes for this dimension include becoming a more reflective/compassionate leader; the development of their leadership competencies; the application of competencies; and relations with their colleagues.

Graduates were *a more reflective/compassionate leader* when they noted how they were 'more aware of my blind spots and reinforced my strengths' (74 Oceania), are 'more approachable, learnt to be vulnerable, learnt to really listen, helped me let go - don't need to be the one in control all of the time' (7 Europe), and, that 'I have also become creative in the way I delegate duties so much that I find so many are inspired by this and are willing to follow up with very positive and constructive questions. It's been amazing' (92 Africa).

Graduates also focused on the development of particular skills, tools and behaviours during their WSLA programme. This formed the second theme – *the development of their leadership competencies* – and is evidenced with the following example: 'I always had a problem with controlling my emotions to ensure that issues are addressed with a level-head. WSLA taught me to take things in my stride and ensure that my voice is heard and respected. The tools that WSLA provides for personal growth came in very handy and I use them all the time' (37 Africa). Here, the answers focus on learning new tools or techniques.

The third theme centres on *the application of competencies* and, arguably, most demonstrates the impact of WSLA on the graduates as leaders. This is because the responses provide examples of how their leadership practice has changed due to their WSLA programme, as the following attest:

'I take lessons learned from WSLA and apply them daily. I am a better listener. I am very aware of my impact on other people's lives—business and personal. I am accountable for all of my actions and how I show up for the people in my life. As a sports leader, WSLA has inspired me to 'walk the talk.' I live my training on a daily basis. And not just during the good times. My WSLA training shines during the difficult times and decisions that come with being a leader' (6 South America).

'My leadership style has changed and I am more a people's person than an authoritative. I am more analytic of situations in order to address issues from an informed position' (83 Africa).

'I can now lead meetings, go to meetings on behalf of my line manager of which I could not do before WSLA' (61 Africa).

It is very clear from the data that graduates valued richer *relationships with work colleagues* since returning from their WSLA programme. This included having 'more confidence in my team, allowing them more responsibilities and providing more support when failing rather than just fixing a problem or preventing it from happening by doing it myself' (19 Africa). Other graduates noted how they were supporting colleagues by 'providing leadership opportunities to them to develop and supporting them when they are doing it' (39 Europe). Colleagues were more valued, listened to, and had roles delegated to them rather than the graduate taking on the extra burdens which were negatively impacting their working relationships.

A shift in perceptions about leadership

Whereas the previous dimension focused on the 'doing' of leadership, this dimension looks at perceptions of leadership and is split into two themes: *the education and knowledge about 'leadership'* and *a chance to reflect on what leadership means* to the graduates.

For some graduates, their programme was perhaps the first time that the term 'leadership' had been explored. As such, 'WSLA helped me to unpack the misconceptions I had about being a leader and what I thought I should do, how I should behave, and the work I needed to do before I could consider a leadership role' (77 Oceania). For others, 'it gave me insight into leadership theory and how to put it into practice which I still reflect on five years after the course' (33 Europe) and 'increased my understanding and knowledge of leadership tactics and techniques' (5 Europe).

There is much content covered during a WSLA programme and so once graduates return home, a period of reflection often follows. From the second theme in this dimension, a series of responses identified how, after reflection, WSLA impacted upon what leadership means to them.

'Before WSLA I was easily intimidated by CEOs and always felt nervous about approaching them and shied away from it where I could. WSLA gave me the opportunity to reflect on the leader I want to be and that I don't need to be a CEO to be a leader' (81 Europe)

'It opened my eyes to a realm of women leaders, not just in sports, but also in other domains. It inspired me to be a better leader and had a deeper understanding of building an army of leaders to make lasting and meaningful changes in the world' (20 Asia)

'It also provided an opportunity to take a week for myself to reflect on my goals and what I want to achieve or contribute to in my area of work, what kind of a leader I want to be and what can I do to "leave the jersey in a better place"' (96 Europe)

Networks and contacts

The final dimension refers to the impact WSLA had on the development and extension of networks of leaders and the introduction of new leadership contacts. Graduates commended their peers that had 'inspired me a lot' (24 Asia) and 'are all willing to help each other' (25 Europe). The shared experiences on the programme led one respondent to answer that 'the topics learnt were resourceful and added significant value as a leader as well as a mentor' (43 Africa). However, it was not just networks at WSLA that were built, for graduates stated that 'I expanded my local network' (8 Asia) and how 'thanks to passing WSLA, I was able to gain important contacts that allow me to open another door' (80 Europe).

The impact of WSLA *by the graduate on their organisation*

WSLA recognises that supporting and developing the individual can only go so far as to influencing broader cultural change. Thus, graduates need to impact upon their organisation to help to instigate change. Figure 9 illustrates that 69% of graduates stated that they had an influential or significant impact on their organisation since attending WSLA. The remaining 31% was split across having a moderate or insignificant impact, or none at all. The qualitative data from the subsequent question asking graduates to explain their answer was separated between influential/significant and moderate/insignificant/none at all and are explained below.

Over two-thirds of graduates said that they had an influential or significant impact on their organisation since attending WSLA

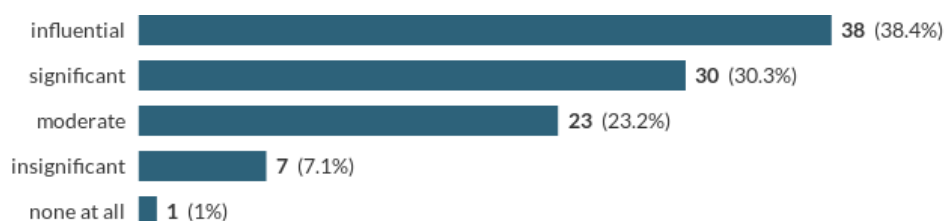


Figure 9. Attribution of graduate impact on their organisation since attending WSLA.

An influential and significant impact

There were four dimensions from analysis: culture change; organisational input; influencing others; and, other.

The *culture change* dimension was comprised of two themes: challenging the status quo and changing workplace practices. For example, graduates explained how they were able to 'push through that glass ceiling or at least keep banging on it; changing the way we do things, taking initiative at crucial times [and] revamping an entire approach to what we do in the business' (55 Asia). Others acknowledged a greater commitment to equality and diversity within meetings (11 Africa), 'embracing feminist principles' (12 Africa) and being able to challenge workplace malpractice with their own good practice (6 South America; 50 Europe).

The *organisational input* dimension included governance, and strategic and operational input by graduates into their organisations. The levelness of responses varied, with some responses referring to their teams whereas others referred to the broader organisation. Nonetheless, it was clear that they were influencing the work of their employers. The extracts below all relate to how graduates have strategically impacted upon their organisation.

'I have contributed significantly to the strategic direction of the business, undertaken review of the organisational needs, recommending and implementing change as necessary. Our Senior Management Team works collaboratively and we all bring different complimentary strengths to the organisation' (82 Europe)

'I had a clearer vision of the direction of the organization. I was able to implement initiatives and policies that predicted the culture of our team. We are also in the process of restructuring that will empower more people in the organization' (20 Africa)

'I have been heavily involved in shaping and delivering the strategic vision of the organisation over the last 5 years since attending WSLA' (2 Europe)

The *influencing others* dimension relates to how graduates impacted upon colleagues, teams, managers, stakeholders and those external to their organisation. The themes included: advocacy, support, sharing knowledge, and empowering others. Advocacy predominantly referred to women in the organisation or women leaders. For example, 'through advocating for more women, a female employee was employed as a result of my recommendation on gender equality' (86 Africa), 'I have been able to influence changes for women's [sport] through lobbying and advocating for increased support from the union' (88 Africa), and 'I am trying to advocate for more women in leadership positions within my organisation and for more inclusion in general' (49 Europe). Support, the second theme in this dimension, was a non-descript account of helping others in the organisation. Sharing knowledge, the third theme, related to allocating the materials and understanding learned at WSLA to other colleagues. There was a subtle difference here to empowering others, the fourth theme, because graduates had internalised and applied their WSLA knowledge with their own passion for change in others:

'Instead of taking over and trying to make everything perfect when someone else in the org has issues or needs assistance, I have taken a step back, given small prompts, asked simple questions and allowed them to learn and make their own choices to help themselves' (60 Asia)

'I understand the importance of empowering others and developing their skills so that they are equipped with the right tools to lead. I am confidently teaching women that they can be in the forefront and contribute to building sport. WSLA created a burn in me to uplift other women and encourage them to step up and challenge barriers which are entrenched in our patriarchal society' (37 Africa)

The final dimension is titled *Other* because, even though the graduate stated that they had an influential or significant impact on their organisation since attending WSLA, their explanation appeared to indicate the opposite. Some graduates stated that they had since changed their job or that the organisation had not changed:

'It made others who were sceptical sit up and take notice. However, it also led to some feeling threatened by my progress and some rather unpleasant behaviour by them leading to me leaving the organisation. I am in a better position now though so it wasn't a bad move' (25 Europe)

'I had the confidence to influence up and belief in myself to make the 'big' changes. Unfortunately I didn't achieve the org structural change I'd hoped to after WSLA and took the decision to change roles' (54 Europe).

The remaining responses in this dimension were solely focused on the progress made by the graduate in the organisation (e.g. a new position) and not their impact upon the organisation. Therefore, even

though the graduate stated that they had an influential or significant impact, their explanation can be queried.

More understanding is needed of the role of WSLA in influencing organisational change.

Moderate, insignificant or no impact at all

Graduates (n=31) who answered that they had a moderate or insignificant impact, or even none at all, on their organisation because of WSLA gave responses that were themed similarly to those who stated they had an influential or significant impact. Culture change, organisational input and influencing others all appeared from analysis. There is no discernible explanation as to why those who answered moderate chose this as opposed to the two more positive answers available, given that some of the qualitative responses were similar in tone and content to the 'significant/influential' responses. Elsewhere, some graduates had left their organisation or had recently started somewhere new, so were unclear on the extent of their impact. There were very few comments reporting to a lack of organisational support to the graduate once they returned from WSLA, though the below at least demonstrates the continued need for programmes like WSLA because of 'poor cultures':

'On returning from WSLA is realised my organisation was not serving me in the way I wanted - I therefore looked for other opportunities which would allow me to lead. Sadly the leadership role didn't work out as I found myself in an organisation which had a poor culture - and one that was so embedded I wasn't able to support and change for the better. What I learnt about myself and others has significantly impacted on how I now approach the role I am currently in' (31 Europe).

The impact of WSLA *by the graduate on women in sport*

Advocacy for women's access to and participation in all facets of sport has a long history. During their programmes, graduates are made aware of some of the challenges that women encounter and are afforded opportunities to discuss how they can make a difference and add to existing advocacy efforts. This section focuses on the impact by the graduate upon women in sport after their WSLA programme.

Over half of graduates said that they had an influential or significant impact on women in sport since attending WSLA

Sixty per cent of graduates said that they had an influential or significant impact on women in sport since attending WSLA. Conversely, as can be seen in figure 10, 40% of graduates stated they had had a moderate or insignificant impact, or none at all.

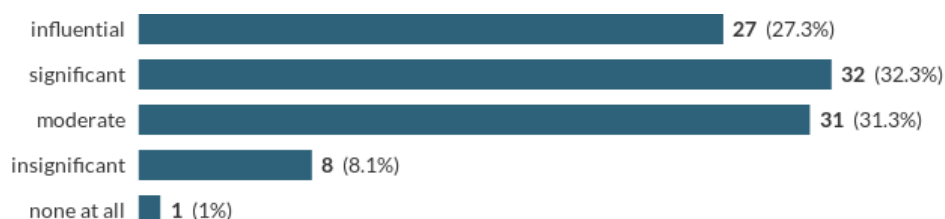


Figure 10. Attribution of graduate impact on women in sport.

An influential and significant impact

After analysis, there were three general dimensions from the explanations by graduates: women's participation in sport; women leaders in sport, and mentoring.

For the *women's participation in sport* dimension, graduates explained how they were increasing the opportunities for women's sport/women in sport – the first theme in this dimension. This included creating new opportunities, events and clubs, meeting with key stakeholders and organisations to improve access, and volunteering. One graduate stated that, 'as a result of WSLA, I started a girls football team (from rural areas of [African country]) that will be participating in Norway cup and this has encouraged and motivated a lot of young women to participate in sport' (42 Africa). The second theme in this dimension centres upon awareness-raising. This included a variety of advocacy efforts, including education, workshops, conference presentations, media work and involvement in women

and sport committees. The following examples demonstrate the breadth of work here, whether that be by networks or individuals:

‘Creating the first community for women in sports in [European country], which aims at changing structures substantial and has influence also on a political level’ (50 Europe)

‘Personally I have the tools and confidence to challenge conventional wisdom towards women in sport, encourage others in my organization to explore alternatives and push others (and myself) outside of their comfort zone—that’s where the growth happens!’ (6 South America)

The second dimension was to do with responses that focused specially on *women leaders in sport*. Most of the responses here focused on women in decision-making roles, but others included coaching, captains and refereeing too. The first theme was about increasing the capacity for/number of female leaders. Here, graduates may have utilised their position as a leader to push for other women leaders, for example: ‘I am now leading a sport in [country], I have increased the number of women in senior leadership positions’ (9 Europe); ‘after my experience with WSLA I have worked to include more women in the national [sport] and increase the number of women in competitions and working as coaches and umpires’ (94 South America); and ‘further to hosting a sports leadership forum for grassroots women, I went further and implemented a project on training women sports leaders on refereeing, first aid, sports and development and football coaching’ (43 Africa). Similar to the first dimension, there was also a theme regarding awareness-raising, this time for women leaders in sport. Responses here included organising women and sport leadership workshops, sharing their experiences to forums and hosting media platforms. The final theme in this dimension was an encouragement of other women leaders to attend WSLA or similar leadership programmes.

The final dimension amongst responses who answered with ‘influential’ or ‘significant’ was mentoring. The following example summarises the majority of these responses:

‘I have been trained as a mentor since the course and have worked internally and externally with female leaders or those developing their leadership roles. These mentees usually approach me or are recommended to me and so I am pleased that I am viewed as a positive person to engage with in this way. I work closely with women in my organisation and have supported several (in my team) through significant mental health issues. In these cases the relationship with the work environment has become more positive due to the approaches I used’ (33 Europe)

Moderate, insignificant or no impact at all

WSLA predominantly focuses on the individual, rather than their organisation or women’s sport more generally. This may be a reason for why this question saw the highest incidence in the survey of responses that were ‘moderate’, ‘insignificant’ or ‘no impact at all’.

Two dimensions mentioned for the ‘influential’ and ‘significant’ responses (*women’s participation in sport* and *women leaders in sport*) appeared here too. The other dimension, mentoring, was incorporated as part of a broader *network and supporting others* dimension, signifying less affirmative actions and more non-descript examples of supporting colleagues and offering guidance on women and sport or women and sport leaders.

Despite answering with ‘moderate’, there was a small cluster of responses that all mentioned *advocacy*, including the following: ‘I have a greater understanding of advocacy and what that

entails. This has enabled me to highlight the importance of female role models, visibility within my sport' (22 Europe).

However, there was a larger group of responses that referred to *no progress, no impact or generally being unsure*. Some graduates focused on themselves here, for example: 'not alot as what i took [from WSLA] was really about me as a person' (91 Europe), 'haven't done anything to influence women's sport' (67 Europe), and 'I am not sure of any impact' (65 Europe). Others explained the reason for their answer was because they do not work directly with women and sport.

The impact of and by the WSLA Network

At the end of their WSLA programme, every graduate becomes part of the WSLA Network. Operationally, the Network services itself – the graduates are encouraged to communicate and explore connections with each other. WhatsApp groups have, since 2017, been created for each cohort and irregular communication is undertaken by WSLA personnel. There are also over one hundred graduates on the WSLA LinkedIn private group.

Over 60% of graduates said that the WSLA Network has had a life-changing or significant impact on them



Figure 11. Attribution of impact of WSLA Network on graduates.

Figure 11 shows the responses of graduates to the question: “What impact do you think the WSLA Network has had on you?”. ‘Life-changing’ and ‘significant’ was selected by 62% of graduates, leaving 38% to choose ‘moderate’, ‘insignificant’ or ‘none at all’.

Table 4. Attribution of impact of WSLA Network on graduates per programme and response.

	Life-changing	Significant	Moderate	Insignificant	None at all	Total
2014	3	4	6	1	1	15
2015	3	6	2	1	0	12
2016	2	5	0	0	0	7
2017	2	2	2	1	0	7
NZ	0	2	2	0	0	4
Bots	6	2	5	1	0	14
2018	7	7	9	0	0	23
2019	1	9	5	2	0	17
Total	24	37	31	6	1	99

Table 4 provides an overview of the responses per cohort. When the 'life-changing' and 'significant' responses are combined and then tallied as a percentage of the programme, only WSLA 2014 (47%) has a percentage below half. WSLA 2015 (75%) and WSLA 2016 (100%) have the highest totals, with the other programmes totalling between 50-61%. This demonstrates that the WSLA Network is positively impacting the graduates.

An influential and significant impact

There were three dimensions from the analysis of the qualitative data: support network, increased use of social media and self-belief/motivation. The majority of answers to this question fall within the *support network* dimension, which is comprised of the following themes: seeking help from others and being mentored; a sense of community; friendships; and, correspondence. Graduates identified how the Network was most impactful when they could ask for help, seek guidance or be mentored by other graduates, as the following examples attest:

'I know people are there when I need them' (31 Europe)

'The support network and ability to always reach out to like-minded individuals is the greatest value that you could hope for through a programme. Knowing you have support in difficult times and a safe platform to discuss it and most importantly find solutions. I also think these conversations has provided me with knowledge and appropriate language to feel comfortable to articulate it publicly' (51 Africa)

'It's a network that has helped me grow and develop but has also helped me out of a nasty work situation, providing support and advice' (25 Europe)

Others noted how the Network exuded 'this feeling of sisterhood, a sense of community' (4 Asia), whereas there were many responses identifying smaller friendship groups that had emerged, some of which appear very strong: 'made some friends for life and love following everyone's progress' (5 Europe), 'have made friends for life' (2 Europe), and 'the personal friendships formed during WSLA are really special' (30 Oceania). A few responses pointed to increased correspondence but stopped short of providing further detail. Graduates also identified how being part of the Network meant their use of social media had increased, which had positively impacted their work, and how the conversations and shared stories in the Network had enhanced their own self-belief and motivation.

Moderate, insignificant or no impact at all

Over a third of graduates chose 'moderate', 'insignificant' or 'none at all' as their response to what impact the Network had on them. The responses were broadly split across three dimensions. The first was a support network. Similar to those who answered 'influential' and 'significant', graduates praised the support offered and received through communication with the Network.

The second dimension centred upon how some graduates acknowledged to only communicating with a couple of others, rather than the wider Network. Nevertheless, some of these relationships are 'hugely valued' (18 Europe) and have led to 'really good friendships' (91 Europe). Another graduate wrote about how 'the follow-up to the course has had most impact through the 121s and small group meet ups. In some cases I have formed long-lasting and incredibly positive relationships. This has been more successful than some of the other networking opportunities offered' (33 Europe).

The third dimension covers a dysfunctional Network, and is broken down into three themes. Some graduates stated that the Network was not active enough, with 'networking rather limited' (11 Africa),

a lack of 'deep' connections (58 Africa), and its activity 'not being well aligned and distributed' (87 Africa). It is noteworthy that almost all of the responses in this theme originate from African graduates and half of these from those who attended WSLA Botswana. The second theme was how communication had generally weakened since their programme. The final theme was graduates acknowledging that their own lack of activity and engagement was the reason for their answer with the following being a typical example: 'I have sadly not connected with the network as much as I could or should have' (39 Europe).

Conclusions

The results of this survey clearly indicate that WSLA has had a life-changing, influential and significant impact upon the majority of its graduates. In particular, graduates acknowledged the impact of WSLA on them as a person and as a leader, and also their impact on their organisation and on women and sport more generally.

Graduates from the WSLA residential weeks 2014-2019 as well as licensed programmes in Botswana and New Zealand praised the confidence and self-belief manifested from their experiences in WSLA. For many, this had led to new paid and non-paid employment opportunities. They also celebrated their peers for their inspiration, affirmation, stories, support and cohesiveness. Graduates acknowledged how their leadership practice, and their understanding of leadership more generally, had shifted due to their involvement in WSLA. Some of the responses show a deep emotional connection to their programme and individuals who are counted as dear friends and confidants, whereas others demonstrate a passion and determination to continue their leadership journey. As such, WSLA achieves its mission of 'providing unique development opportunities for women leaders around the world to step up, take the lead and make an impact'.

Notwithstanding this very positive feedback, there are areas of concern to highlight. Nearly two-thirds of graduates did not respond to the survey and, barring minor anomalies, the data provides little insight from those who have not had a positive experience since attending WSLA, for whatever reason. Therefore, it is challenging to determine what new/revised components can be recommended for inclusion to the programme and delivery team. However, it is notable that the two areas that received the least positive responses are those that are not featured as prominently in the WSLA programme: the role of graduates in influencing organisational change, and, the role of graduates in impacting upon women and sport. Thus, the role of WSLA in impacting these two elements requires further consideration and investigation. In hindsight, the survey would have been benefitted by asking a question similar to the following: "What can WSLA do to become more impactful?" In this sense, the responses would have been useful in the future design of programmes.

Recommendations

- More understanding is needed of the role of WSLA in influencing organisational change
- Programme leaders and facilitators should consider the greater inclusion of advocacy and support for women in sport as elements when developing the programme
- The WSLA Network has not been successful for all. Thus, there should be consideration for how to ensure all graduates can benefit from it
- A longitudinal analysis of WSLA graduate journeys would enable an understanding of the impact of WSLA over time
- The next Impact Survey should work to include more responses, in order to heighten the chances of learning from the experiences of any graduates who were dissatisfied with the programme
- 77 graduates positively responded when asked about participating in the creation of digital stories. This is something that should be explored when wishing to develop WSLA
- This report should be edited and formatted accordingly, dependent on the intended audience (e.g. condensed into a one-page infographic)