

Senior Leader Executive Programme

Learner insights
and experiences

Become a better leader

Case studies

ced Cranfield
Executive
Development

“I think it is a brilliant opportunity to learn and develop your skills and knowledge in leadership. It’s really helped me to become a better coach and be more self-aware of personal opportunities.”

Kirsty Simpson

Spirits Senior Buying Manager, Asda.

Learner insights and experiences

Become a better leader

Are you considering using an apprenticeship to enhance your existing knowledge, skills and behaviours? Do you want to develop strong strategic leadership capability that will help you to navigate through challenging times? If so, a senior leader apprenticeship will provide you with the perfect opportunity to combine new learning with workplace experience.

The learning environment Cranfield creates for our apprentices is stimulating, facilitative and inclusive, led by our high-quality teaching staff who bring expertise from both business and academia. Whilst on the programme you will experience the benefits of having time and space to learn, to reflect, and to apply your newly found competencies in your workplace. This builds individual and collective confidence within the apprentice learning community and helps each individual to grow professionally and develop strong strategic, negotiation, teamworking and leadership skills.

Cranfield's senior leader apprenticeship programmes have been specifically co-designed with industry to enhance existing and future workplace practice. We are committed to working in tandem with our clients to deliver curriculum content that directly aligns with the essential knowledge, skills and behaviours required by the leaders and innovators of the future, and which enables you to contribute to your sector-specific business needs. Employers recognise the value of apprenticeships as individuals return to the workplace with powerful new ideas which have the capacity to unlock solutions to address current and future challenges.

One of the most significant contributions that apprenticeship study provides is the opportunity to think and act differently. Apprentices are encouraged to be disruptive thinkers and to view business practice through an alternative lens. This collection of case studies provides an insight into what you can expect as an apprenticeship learner and how, as an apprentice, you can bring fresh perspectives to your organisation.

Dr Stephanie Russell

Head of Apprenticeships Development

Cranfield Executive Development | Cranfield School of Management

Hannah Carter

Associate Partner,
Business Development,
Wealth Solutions, AON



The strategic nature of the Senior Leader Executive Programme has encouraged me to think more holistically. I've changed how I approach the next phase of an important strategic project, embedding client management procedures more strategically into our practice.

Much of what I've been working on day-to-day translates across from the programme - from articulating the value we add to clients to communicating this out through our practice. My boss can see I've got that network and that I'm able to influence people to work with me, and that crucially people want to work with me.

Working in a business that's very focused on the markets, I found the Economics module really interesting. I'm around markets day-to-day but my role means I don't need to know the broader detail, so having the space to learn and reflect on the impact economics has on our business and its people has been really rich.

I've found the reflective element of the programme really helpful. I don't think I'd ever really sat down and thought a lot about myself. The Impact, Influence and Identity module enabled me to see that a lot of what I do is helping others make themselves better, but this whole programme is a big investment in me.

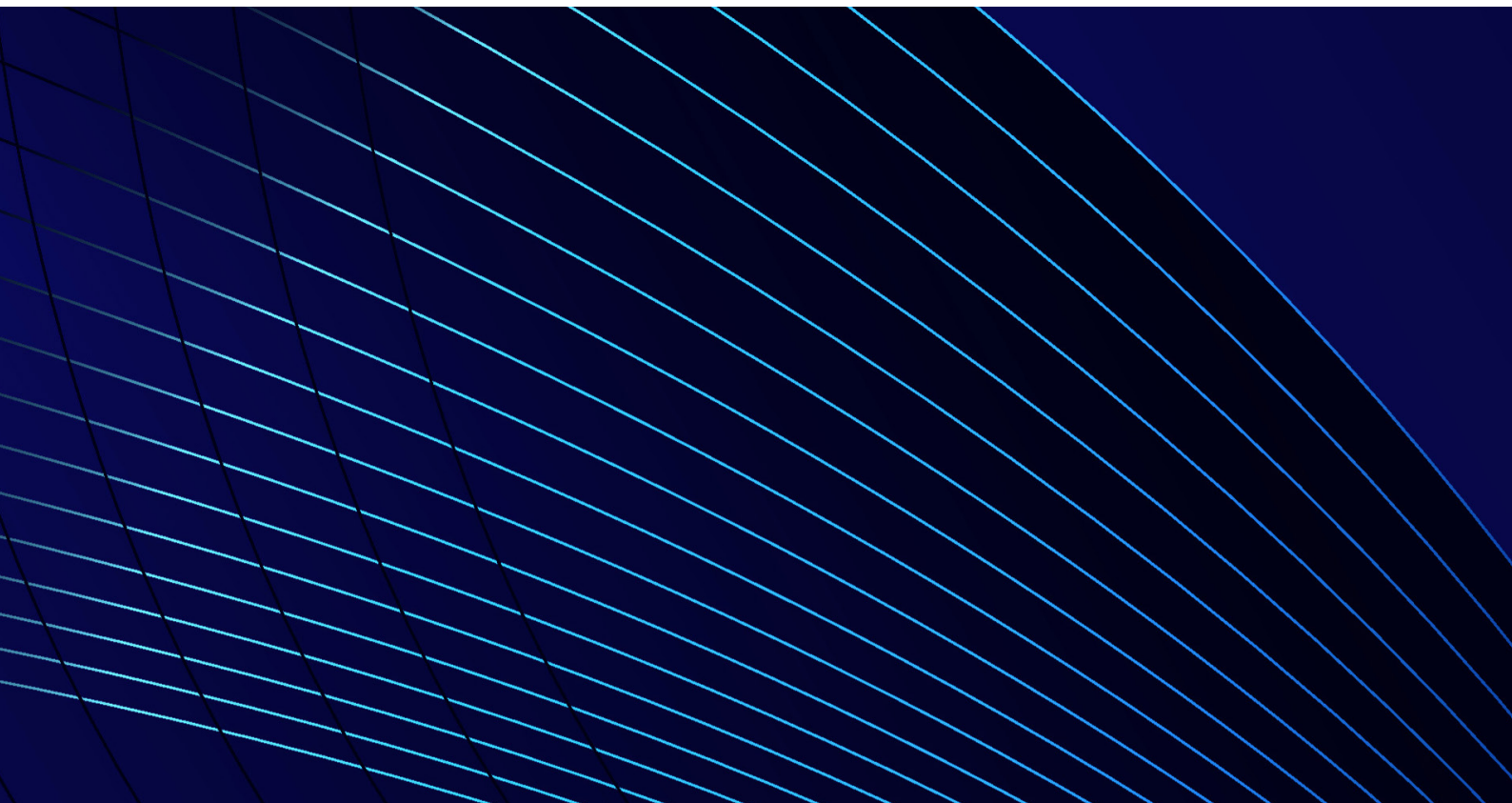
I wanted to be able to give the programme the time that it deserved. I've found focusing on my development has enhanced my mentoring capability and team management now that I can draw from what I'm learning and my career experience.

Investing time and effort into the programme to do it properly is important – it will take more time than you think – but investing in yourself with this programme is massively rewarding. Thinking about how I handle situations like those 'can I get your opinion on' requests from

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colleagues or where others would like your involvement in a day-to-day working group or operations, and to prioritise my leadership activity and put my own needs first.

The first wearable technology assessment experience perfectly described the week I’d had – how I felt and my stress levels. In the debrief with the performance coach he commented that I was doing a lot of the right things, but it was just little tweaks such as hydration and building up better hydration over time. I now very consciously have a bottle of water with me throughout the day, take more breaks than I would before and try to manage stress more proactively.



Sam McPherson

Supply Chain Senior
Manager, Asda



I've not done a degree before or anything like this, I pretty much left school and joined Asda, so this is all new to me. The bit that I think is absolutely brilliant, especially when I talk to people around the business that have done other courses, is that it ties in with your day job. The subject matter and what you're talking about with your peers on the programme are all things that you're doing day to day.

My cohort is a real mix - we've got retail general store managers and retail regional managers, we've got depot managers and we've got people from across the head offices. When we do breakout sessions and talk about our own personal questions or problems that we're trying to grapple with, it's just really interesting because you know you can bring it back to the day job, think about the skills you're learning and how you can improve what you're doing.

I think the fact that it's a really mixed group is good. My cohort all said how well we gelled really quickly, and bearing in mind we've done all our sessions in Zoom and a lot of us didn't know each other it's a very warm group. We set up a WhatsApp and we all talk to each other on that and ask the daft questions that we were too embarrassed to ask anybody else and that's been really, really good.

The tutors have all been brilliant. I can imagine doing Zooms must be really difficult as a presenter and I think they've all done a sterling job on that, bringing things to life, with the right amount of breaks and the right amount of breakouts as well. My tutor Mohammed is great at reminding me that this is the job I do anyway, and keeps bringing it back to that when I'm getting a bit worried about something and want to talk to him.

There are some things that caught me out. The structure is really alien to me not having worked in academia before, it was quite difficult to get my head around exactly what some of the

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course meant, and it’s only been once I’ve done the module that I’ve understood. Something that I did not anticipate was the time that the programme needs. You think the eight hours a week will be easy and it’s actually quite tough, you have to be quite ruthless.

So, if I was going to give some tips to future participants:

1. WhatsApp group is the best thing ever.
2. Check-ins with the people on your course. I have a coffee with a couple of guys in my course every few weeks just to catch up with each other, check you are alright, find out how you’re finding this module and how you’re doing with the action plan.
3. Talk to your teams about what you’re going to do. I’m really lucky that I’ve got four really experienced managers that work for me, and this has given them the opportunity to step up because I need them to cover when I’m not there, and they’re doing a brilliant job of it. You need your team to understand that you’re going to have to give time and commitment to other places.
4. Your line manager is really important as well. You could be doing a module four or five days in one week and you’re just not going to be there for the day job, so having their support and understanding is really important. My line manager recently did an MBA so he’s been through some of this. I feel lucky that he was so supportive and encouraged me to do the programme.

Paul Crayford
CRE Executive Director
UK & EMEA, AON



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My role and my outlook have changed significantly and the programme is giving me the confidence to step away from the team. I feel very comfortable having built a framework within my team and with my clients that means I can step back to plan and focus my thinking in a more strategic way, and not feel like I'm needed all the time.

Others have noticed that I've taken a step back from a lot of tactical work that I was engaged with. As the course has honed in on strategic leadership, organisational strategy, organisational design and different teamwork frameworks I've been absorbing it and people are sensing the change in me already.

The team has noticed that they're seeing less of me, but that when I am engaging with them it's really adding more value with better questioning and a seed change to put the team in the driving seat and empower them. With what is a geographically dispersed, diverse team coping with post-pandemic working it's a very different world and yet I am very comfortable with it all. My team have been empowered by both my boss and me, and they know what outputs are needed.

Despite it probably being the busiest year since I've been at Aon, the very clear sponsorship at the start of the programme hasn't wavered. The job is still getting done to a high quality

and it's recognised that to get the maximum value out of the course it takes time. This has meant I need to manage differently, and my sponsor has seen that.

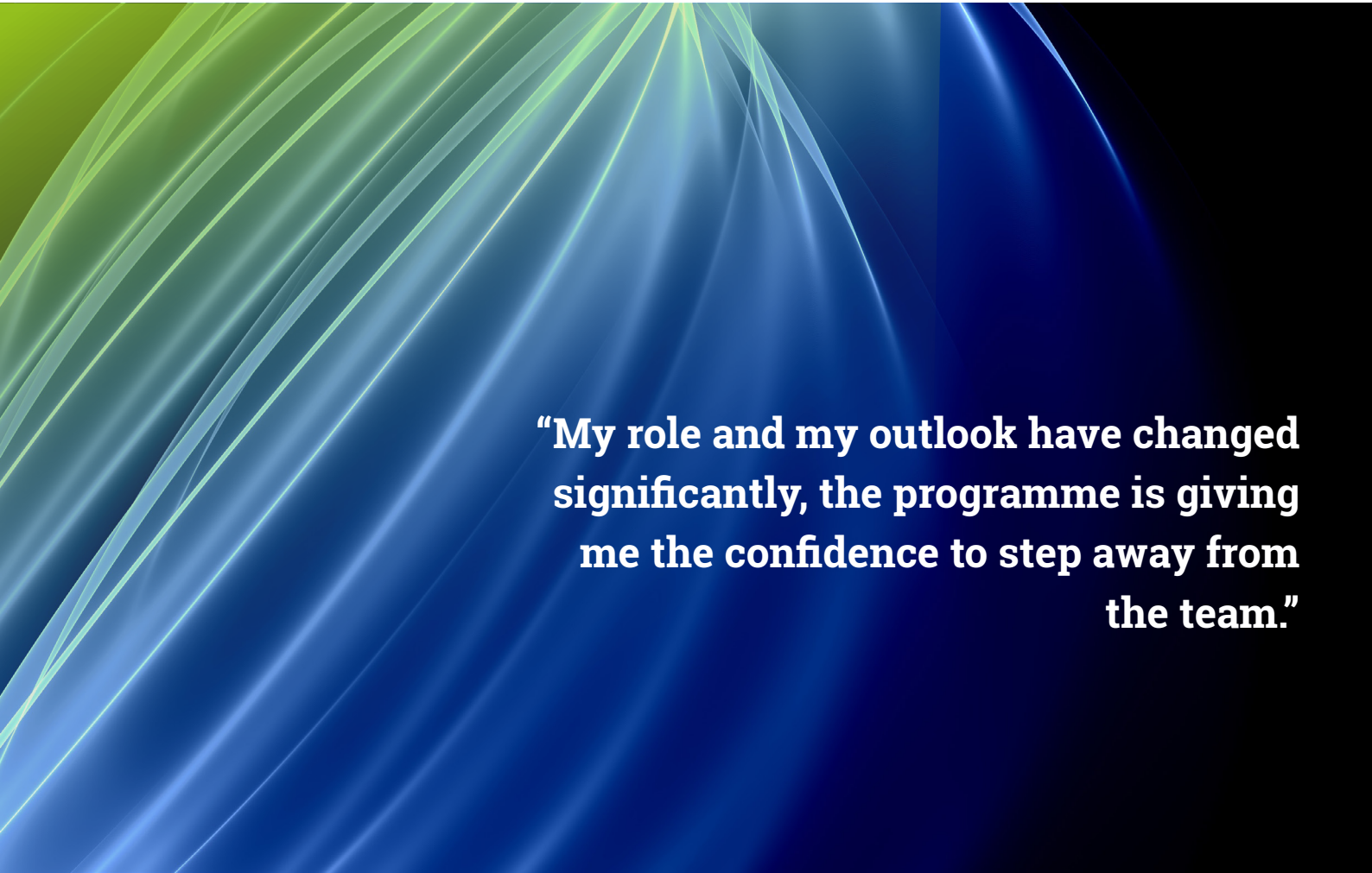
If you're willing to be open-minded and throw yourself into it then I think it's a wonderful experience. It's important that you're open to lots of different experiences, to being challenged in different ways, and to being challenged to do your day job whilst taking this on.

It's a very practical course – a lot of the cohort have recognised that I've seeded the learning and taken it directly into the workplace – it's allowed me to try some things out and take some risks.

The course has helped clarify so many things for me in terms of my skills and my strengths, my weaknesses and where the gaps are in my learning. The quality of the teaching and facilitation has been stellar and has given much food for thought.

The wearable technology experiment threw up a load of interesting insights – I stuck to the assessment pretty religiously, and journaled in quite a detailed fashion. Some of the big impacts have been noticing the lifespan of caffeine intake, getting up and moving regularly, smaller breaks instead of locking in for six hours, reinforcing good sleep practices and keeping cognitively on the ball.

I'm quite passionate about the team's autonomy – it's made me realise that I can do more in terms of the wellbeing of others and I'm looking forward to the second assessment and actively going deeper in supporting the wellbeing of the team on their practices.



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Chris Gilmartin
General Store Manager
Asda




I'm finding the Senior Leader Executive Programme very enjoyable and a fantastic networking opportunity. We have a range of different people on the Asda programme, obviously we have people from retail, and we've also got an engineer from depot who offers an incredibly different insight into how our business runs. I've met people from all sorts of functions across our head offices, clothing and grocery businesses which has grown my network.

The in-person module was absolutely fantastic, it doesn't feel like you're being taught, but you are being engaged. Many, many years ago I spent three years in university lecture halls being talked at, but this is a very different experience - it is as much peer-led coaching as it is led by the tutors.

As well as the academic side of it you also have a personal tutor who guides you through the programme. After 15 years of never needing to write an assignment or use Harvard referencing that has been incredibly helpful. The tutors are people who have been very successful and understand academia so they offer a really good touch point when you feel like things might be going slightly awry.

We've found the programme does require understanding line manager support. The eight hours a week is probably a good average but it's not eight hours every week, some weeks it's an hour and a half and others you're out for four days of the week. That flexibility to be able to take that time with the support of your line manager is absolutely critical.



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There is also an element of self-discipline needed with the journalling and particularly documenting the work that you do such as reading, listening to podcasts and watching YouTube videos. It doesn’t sound like a big task to document that, but it is 15-20 minutes every week of just jotting down everything that you’ve done in a formal way that you then submit.

So if you’ve got the self-discipline and a supportive line manager it’s a fantastic opportunity. It’s a great networking tool and you achieve a postgraduate qualification. There aren’t many employers like Asda who are saying, we will invest this much money in you and give you the time off to study for a qualification that makes you stand out against people who’ve just got a regular degree. The programme is offering us all fantastic career development, and I’m sure the business will see the benefits as we bring what we’re learning back to the workplace.

Learning and courses for the decade ahead.

Our business development team is waiting to talk to you.

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