

Aurora Women's Leadership Development Programme

What is Aurora?

[Aurora](#) is the Advance HE's leadership development programme for women. It aims to enable a wider range of women in academic and professional roles to think of themselves as future leaders, to develop the skills they will need and to help their institutions to maximise the use of the skills they acquire.

Whilst most leadership programmes are aimed at leaders and managers already in role, Aurora is designed to enable a wide range of women, in academic and professional roles in higher education, to engage with leadership development at an earlier stage in their careers. Aurora was designed to help address the issue of the reducing numbers of women in senior posts in higher education as outlined in the Leadership Foundation's Stimulus Paper 'Women and Higher Education: Absences and Aspiration' by Professor Louise Morley (January 2013).

What does Aurora cover?

Aurora addresses core areas associated with leadership success:

- Understanding organisations and the sector
- Developing leadership behaviours, skills, and knowledge
- Identifying and overcoming barriers and obstacles
- Growing confidence and a leadership identity
- Building networks, coalitions and support processes

Aurora will address these areas by using a combination of development days; self-directed learning that follows the interests, needs and time constraints of participants; St Mary's will provide in-house mentoring.

What is the commitment?

Aurora consists of eight interlinked days – six development days and two action learning set days. You and your line manager will also be invited to an internal Welcome Lunch on campus.

Dates for 2025

Title	Date
Welcome Lunch	4 September 2025
Introduction and Guest Speaker	19 September 2025
Identity, Impact and Voice	26 September 2025
Core Leadership Skills	10 October 2025
Action Learning Set 1	7 November 2025
Politics and Influence	28 November 2025
Adaptive Leadership Skills	9 January 2026
Your Future in Higher Education	30 January 2026
Action Learning Set 2	13 February 2026

Each participant must attend each of the required days – it is essential that you can commit to all of these.

Eligibility criteria

Aurora is open to academic and professional services women who meet the following criteria:

- You have successfully completed your probation
- You are on a permanent or fixed term contract (FTC) and the FTC covers the length of the programme and the one-year repayment period.
- You are not currently being supported with qualification funding from the University.
- You and your School//Department can commit and release you for all of the dates for the programme.

- A need for leadership development has been identified on your most recent appraisal.
- You fall into one or more of the following categories:
 - Show visible capacity and ability for progression into a leadership role in the next 5 years.
 - Are new to a leadership role and would benefit from joining the programme and learning from lived experiences.
 - Supports the university's ambition to diversify its talent pipeline into leadership roles.

We are committed to increasing the representation of women from ethnic minority backgrounds in leadership development opportunities. As part of this commitment, we are actively encouraging and supporting their participation.

Your eligibility will be assessed through the application form.

Selection criteria

Participants on Aurora will experience education, mentoring and project work providing them with a learning experience with more enduring impact. Aurora provides a positive experience of leadership and encourages participants to recognise their talent and capabilities and 'step-up' to promoted posts.

St Mary's University have a limited number of places. In addition to the eligibility criteria specified above, when selecting individuals for the programme we will take into consideration the following:

- Does the applicant show a clear commitment to demonstrating the university values?

- Has the applicant received formal leadership or management development previously?
- Will attendance on the programme contribute to the local Department plan and/or the University Vision?
- Is there a clear link between the programme content and the applicant's personal leadership and development goals?
- Will the applicant commit to a mentoring relationship with an assigned mentor for the duration of the programme?
- Will the applicant commit to serving as a mentor for next year's Aurora cohort?
- Does the applicant show a clear commitment to taking an active part in furthering the 'Aurora' community of women leaders in the future?

You must clearly explain how you meet the selection criteria in your supporting statement.

How to apply for the programme?

1. Fill out the [Aurora Application Form](#) on DocuSign during the application window.
2. You will need approval from your line manager as well as the Head of School or Director of Department. You are responsible for ensuring both levels of approval are completed before the application window closes. You can track this on your DocuSign account.
3. Once all parties have signed, the L&PD Team will review your application and will notify you of its outcome 10 working days after the closing date for applications.

Further information

Please contact learninganddevelopment@stmarys.ac.uk if you have any questions.