



# EVALUATION REPORT: LIBER EMERGING LEADERS PROGRAMME

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## Executive Summary

The LIBER Emerging Leaders Programme (the LIBER Programme), initiated by the LIBER Leadership Programmes Working Group, and conceived as a set of activities designed to train and prepare the next generation of leaders in European research libraries, has been running since 2011. It was decided that the LIBER Programme has reached a point where it should be evaluated, especially with a view to adapting, fine-tuning, and possibly redesigning the LIBER Programme.

The evaluation consists of 3 parts:

- A review outlining other European library leadership programmes.
- A survey conducted among LIBER Programme Graduates.
- In addition, four library directors were interviewed, to assess the potential future challenges facing library leadership, which could be relevant for the LIBER Programme.

Here is a short summary of the outcomes of the study:

- 1) **The Review:** The LIBER programme is a unique leadership programme, both in terms of its scope and content, as well as its transnational nature. At the present, there is no similar programme offered, although several programmes are in development.
- 2) **The Survey:** There is a high level of satisfaction with the LIBER Programme among graduates. *Networking* and *self-awareness* are mentioned as the most important parts of the LIBER Programme. The importance of maintaining a high level of quality of the seminar from year to year can be deduced; opposite evaluations of the *mentorship* element point to the need for a better definition and some uniformity for this aspect, with its individual context and set-up. The LIBER Programme is mentioned by some participants as a key-defining moment of their career; several respondents recommend the LIBER Programme warmly; the LIBER Programme is recognized for its contribution to bringing European professionals closer together. Graduates point to the quality of the seminar on leadership in general and not strictly on library leadership, as being important; more practice and active participation are requested. When asked about the future of the LIBER Programme, participants pointed to several different aspects that could be important and crucial, indicating the complex reality in which both library sectors and each participant find themselves.
- 3) **The Interviews:** Interviews with four library directors echo the graduates' responses. All four describe leadership as a journey; a journey in which self-awareness, networking and continuous learning are key factors. They point to the complex and ever-changing circumstances in which libraries find themselves, with a constant need to negotiate, define and redefine, even defend the roles that libraries have and play. Attention to cultural diversity, Artificial Intelligence (AI), further digitization, lobbying, relation skills and competences such as being in alignment with other institutions were mentioned as important issues in this context of leadership development. Several specific suggestions for improving the LIBER Programme were made in the interviews.



## Introduction

LIBER is working with different leadership development initiatives through LIBER Leadership Programmes Working Group.<sup>1</sup> One of these initiatives is the *LIBER Emerging Leaders Program*, “a high-level seminar is aimed at the next generation of senior leaders at European research libraries.”<sup>2</sup>

During the period 2011-2023, 132 library professionals were admitted to the seminar. The first cohort was completed in 2012; a call for Cohort 7 will open in summer 2024 and the first seminar will take place in summer 2025.

Before the first seminar of Cohort 7, The LIBER Leadership Programmes Working Group wishes to evaluate the LIBER Programme in order to an eventual restructure. Thus, an evaluation of the LIBER Programme has been carried out by university Librarian Kira Stine Hansen, a member of the LIBER Leadership Programmes Working Group, supported by her institution of origin, The Danish Royal Library. The evaluation is presented in this report.

The initiative to conduct a comprehensive evaluation was taken on basis of a LIBER Leadership Programmes Working Group workshop held in December 2022, where participants gave feedback, perspectives and input to leadership challenges and insights on the LIBER Programme. Summarized, the workshop highlighted the following:

- **Organisational challenges**

The workshop participants highlighted leader’s challenges to make libraries relevant and sustainable in the current environment, to be liaising and advocating partners at especially university management level, to re-build trust, providing relevant services and understand the needs of 21st century library users. On the internal side, the participants mentioned a variety of organizational development issues such as up-skilling library staff, breaking down strategy to activities, team building, as well as strategic dilemmas such as collection or service/user focus and networking or partnering with other libraries.

- **Personal leadership struggles**

Regarding the role as manager/leader, the workshop participants focused primarily on organizational issues such as change management, how to hire adequate workforce, manage agile teams etc. Furthermore, the participants addressed issues regarding leadership styles and roles, e.g. how to balance library professionalism with a leadership role, micromanagement vs. strategic management, as well as the loneliness, resilience, and psychological safety of leaders.

- **Retrospective focus on the LIBER Programme**

The workshop participants saw the LIBER Programme as a unique offer, bringing international colleagues together. Furthermore, the blend of in-person seminars, online mentoring and action learning sets add up to a comprehensive and tailored experience. The participants felt the first meeting too intense, and some group setups too fixed. On the other hand, the participants wanted more

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<sup>1</sup> <https://libereurope.eu/working-group/liber-leadership-programmes-working-group/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://libereurope.eu/event/emerging-leaders-programme-2022/>



interaction, more meetings in person, more connection and exchange of information.

After analyzing the feedback, the study was constructed into three parts:

1. A brief review that outlines other European library leadership programs that are like the *LIBER Emerging Leaders Program* and benchmarks them accordingly.
2. A questionnaire with questions about structure and content of the LIBER Programme sent to 1-3 selected cohort members from each of the six former cohorts.
3. Open interviews with 4 selected library directors about the future challenges for library leaders.

This whole report thus constitutes an interpretative process. Establishing an overview of the field in a review. Measuring participants' experience and input in a survey. And finally, reflecting upon this, asking four executive library directors of their experience with leadership development, opinions, and their ideas.

The evaluation report ends with a joint conclusion, which recapitulates the conclusions from the three parts.



## The LIBER Emerging Leaders Programme: A Description

The LIBER Programme reflects the overall aims of LIBER, which at the time were defined as "to give European research libraries, national and university, a distinctive and compelling voice in the international library community"<sup>3</sup>. The same level of aspirations is reflected in the brief description of the LIBER Programme: "Ambitious and international. Designed to shape the next generation of leaders in European research libraries"<sup>4</sup>.

The LIBER Programme is part of LIBER's *Leadership and Skills Building* activities that also include:

An Annual Conference, the LIBER Journées (a tailored scientific programme designed for 20-25 library directors who are already in leadership positions) as well as webinars.

Here is a brief overview of the LIBER Programme, its structure, objectives and details:

### Participants

LIBER Emerging Leaders programme declares its target group as "the next generation of senior leaders: people who are already in positions of senior management but who wish to do more to enhance their leadership qualities in preparation for a step up to the next big challenge [... ..]".<sup>5</sup>

The participation in the LIBER Programme has to be applied for, and candidates have to meet certain criteria, among those:

- At least three years' experience in a middle management level post.
- Evidence of motivation to move to a senior management post within next three years.
- Evidence of strong commitment to professional advancement.
- Recommendation from Director of employing library.
- Evidence of willingness and ability to undertake a short placement in a library in another LIBER library in a different country.

The LIBER Programme's cycle is biennial, with a new intake every two year; each group of participants is referred to as a cohort. Beside strictly practical reasons, calling these groups cohorts indicates that the participants are moving through the same shared learning experiences.

Also, though, the LIBER Programme desires to create a bond, a network, among the participants.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://libereurope.eu/history-of-liber/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://libereurope.eu/topic/leadership-2/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://libereurope.eu/event/liber-emerging-leaders-programme-cohort-6/>



A total of 132 library professionals participated in cohort 1-6, distributed respectively as below:

Cohort 1	2011-2012	16
Cohort 2	2013-2014	18
Cohort 3	2015-2016	22
Cohort 4	2017-2018	27
Cohort 5	2020-2022	25
Cohort 6	2022-2023	24

Apparently, there is no shortage of applicants; a 2017 article in *SCONUL Focus*, giving an overview of the LIBER Programme, states that: “So far the programme has been oversubscribed and selection has had to be made with ever tightening criteria.”<sup>6</sup>

### The LIBER Programmes’s Components

The LIBER Programme consists of four main components:

- A first two and a half day’s seminar at a LIBER conference.
- One year of mentorship, including a professional training placement at the mentor’s library (one week).
- Action Learning during the year between the two courses. Delegates will ‘meet’ the members of their action-learning sets regularly by conference.
- A second seminar at a LIBER conference.

### Focus Areas

The LIBER Programme focuses on these aspects:

- Self-awareness; personal authenticity with a strong sense of values and identity.
- Strategy; with a strong sense of purpose and direction.
- Leading others; by inspiring and sustaining a high-performing team.
- Getting the best from others; by developing the individual performance of colleagues.
- Your future; through self-development, professional development and work/life balance.

### Costs

There is a participation fee: the last time it was €1,500, plus traveling costs.

### Goals

Throughout the statements describing its aims, it is clear that the LIBER Programme insists on the individual and institutional benefits of completing. The LIBER Programme focuses on future challenges and the ever-changing circumstances in which libraries fulfil their roles is also evident, for example in this quote:

“Completing the programme will be a benefit not only to you, as an individual, but also to your library. Research libraries are subject to constant change and transformation,

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<sup>6</sup> [https://www.sconul.ac.uk/sites/default/files/documents/4\\_17.pdf](https://www.sconul.ac.uk/sites/default/files/documents/4_17.pdf)”



and this programme helps library staff to be well-equipped to deal with whatever new challenges are on their way whether digital, financial or social.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> <https://libereurope.eu/event/liber-emerging-leaders-programme-cohort-6/>





## Part 1: Review That Outlines and Benchmarks European Library Leadership Programmes

In the following, a brief but thorough scoping review of similar pan-European programmes for academic libraries is presented to compare and benchmark the current LIBER Programme.

### Methodology

Both manual and mixed AI-augmented search<sup>8</sup> for agents providing emerging leadership development programmes has been carried out.

### Findings

The results are unequivocal: There are, at the moment, no European equivalent to the LIBER Programme in terms of comprehensive scope, internationalism, and mentorship emphasis.

However, several programmes are in development in Europe, plus existing in the US and Canada. Those programmes are described on the following pages.

### Germany: Freie Universität and International Library Management

In Europe, the German Freie Universität has an upcoming offer called International Library Management (ILM). If its programme turns out as planned, it appears to have international scope and targets library executives with 10-20 participants per round. As such, it will be an alternative to the LIBER Programme.

Below, we have outlined the differences.

	<i>The LIBER Programme</i>	<i>Freie Universität ILM</i>
<i>Geography:</i>	European	European, potentially global
<i>Management level:</i>	Senior management	Senior and middle management
<i>Duration:</i>	More than 12 months in total	Six months
<i>Mentoring:</i>	Mentorship and outplacement	No mentorship
<i>Organization:</i>	Cohort-style	–
<i>Library types:</i>	Academic libraries only	Academic and public libraries
<i>Focus:</i>	Leadership development and strategy focus	Focus on libraries' role in society

### International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA)

IFLA does not offer any similar programmes currently, since a previous programme called International Leaders' Programme was terminated.

### National Programmes

Several countries, e.g. Sweden, has a national programme for leadership development. Research Libraries UK is starting a new national Emerging Leaders Programme<sup>9</sup> (in 2024) with strong focus on diversity and inclusion. This programme is in development,

<sup>8</sup>We used mixed search to widen the scope. We applied classic search and LLM AI models (ChatGPT and Claude) in structured dialogues followed by thorough control.

<sup>9</sup> Report is still pending: <https://www.rluk.ac.uk/emerging-leaders-prog-study/>



however, and will not be as comprehensive in time and at a lower level of library management compared to the LIBER Programme. It may include public libraries, too.

### **US: Association of Research Libraries (ARL)**

Looking beyond Europe, there are several programmes for emerging leaders in the US. One is ARL's Leadership and Career Development Program<sup>10</sup>, which is designed to prepare future library leaders from underrepresented racial and ethnic groups for positions of increasing responsibility and influence. This programme consists of six events over one year.

The major ARL programme is The Leadership Fellows Program<sup>11</sup> that prepares the next generation of senior and executive leaders in research libraries, and is more similar to the LIBER Programme, though not specifically targeted at emerging leaders. The Leadership Fellows Program takes 13 months and includes a broad curriculum and a big focus on coaching, mentoring and assessment. Furthermore, it has a format of the participants being organized in alumni network. This programme has been running since 2004.

### **Other US Programmes**

The US field is sprawling. Some programmes are similar to the LIBER Programme but not only for librarians, e.g. Leading Change Institute's programmes<sup>12</sup>, the Smithsonian Leadership Development Program and Getty Leadership Institute's programmes. Other programmes are not for academic libraries as such, e.g. the American Library Association's CORE Library Leadership and Management programmes<sup>13</sup>.

Furthermore, major universities have open programmes, such as University of California's long-running Library Senior Fellows<sup>14</sup>, which is comprehensive but compressed and has emphasis on cohorts.

The American academic libraries themselves offer key programmes for emerging leaders. Harvard Graduate School of Education Leadership Institute for Academic Librarians<sup>15</sup> runs a weeklong, comprehensive, yet again compressed programme. This is the case for many of the programmes in US found in this review.

### **Canadian Association of Research Libraries**

Circling further away from Europe, Canadian Association of Research Libraries<sup>16</sup> has recently started (2022) a weeklong cohort-style training programme and plans to strengthen its offers even more. The aim is to build strong networks. This might be one to watch.

### **Conclusions**

In short, no pan-European equivalent to the LIBER Programme was found, and the programmes mentioned above, are not comparable in several ways:

- They are focused on a subject, for example diversity.
- They are non-academic.

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<sup>10</sup> <https://www.arl.org/category/our-priorities/diversity-equity-inclusion/leadership-and-career-development-program/>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.arl.org/category/our-priorities/learning-at-arl/arl-leadership-fellows-program/>

<sup>12</sup> <https://leadingchangeinstitute.org/>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.ala.org/core/>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.library.ucla.edu/about/programs/ucla-library-senior-fellows/>

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.gse.harvard.edu/professional-education/program/leadership-institute-academic-librarians/>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.carl-abrc.ca/academic-librarians-leadership-institute/>



- They are significantly more compressed in time or without a full-fledged mentoring process.

It is worth noting that the actual cohort-style programmes put very much emphasis on the coaching element, just as the LIBER Programme does.

That the LIBER Programme is unique is based on LIBER's organizational strength and breadth (400+ academic libraries in almost every European country), which makes it an obvious, self-reinforcing centre for leadership development in its field. This scoping review confirms this.

This has several implications for the analysis. European benchmarking is not meaningful for now. The LIBER Programme is important and has impact since it is the only one of its kind in Europe that lifts academic library leadership development above national agendas. Accordingly, continued quality-assessment and development of the LIBER Programme and its components, especially mentorship and networks, are important due to the unique role it plays in Europe.



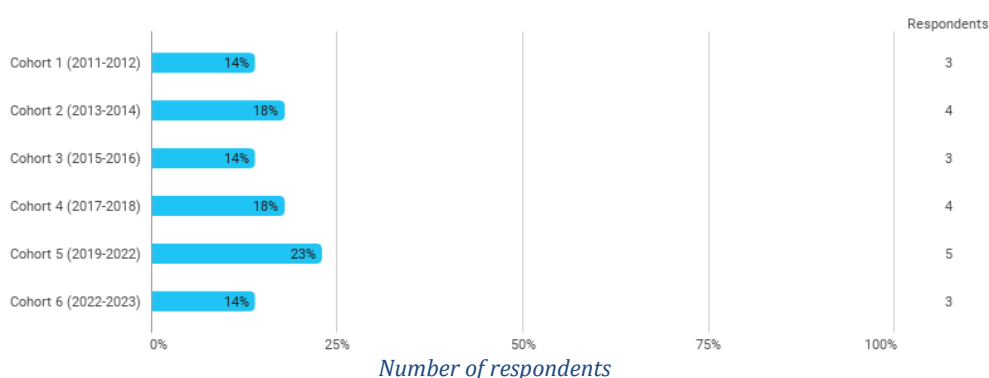
## Part 2: Survey Report – Structure and Content from Cohort Members

A survey has been carried out to evaluate the structure and content of the LIBER Programme based on answers from respondents from each cohort. In the following, the methodology and findings are presented:

### Methodology

An initial selection of four randomly chosen respondents from each cohort was made. Additional non-random selections were made because some of the initial chosen respondents were unreachable or did not complete the LIBER Programme. In the selections, geographical considerations were made to ensure a diverse selection of respondents.

As shown in the bar chart below, three to five respondents from each cohort have completed the survey. In total, 22 respondents have completed the survey.



The survey was a questionnaire containing a mixture of quantitative and qualitative questions about a variation of topics regarding the LIBER Programme: self-awareness, strategy, leading others, getting the best from others, your future and ambitions, mentorship, and networking.

The quantitative part, aiming to assess the participants' satisfaction with specific aspects of the LIBER Programme, gave an opportunity to rate those on a scale from 1 to 10, 1 being the poorest, 10 the best grade. The possibilities to add comments to each rating constitute the qualitative part of the questionnaire. Identified in advance as the most interesting, the questions regarding the mentorship and networking aspects as well as the future of the LIBER Programme were given an extra comment field.

The survey was conducted using SurveyXact.<sup>17</sup> To be able to follow up on initial non-response, the collection process was not anonymous. All further processing of the response has been conducted completely anonymously. An important detail to bear in mind is the temporal dimension: some of the respondents attended the LIBER Programme for more than ten years ago. That temporal inhomogeneity among the respondents may have played a role, simply because the impressions from the LIBER Programme were more or less fresh; it is, though, not possible to say to what extent this is the case.

Answers to the quantitative questions are presented below in tables and graphs, stratified by cohort, showing the mean for all questions. Due to the limited sample size, no statistical analysis or inferences were made. Answers to the qualitative questions

<sup>17</sup> SurveyXact is a proprietary product from a major Danish consulting house.



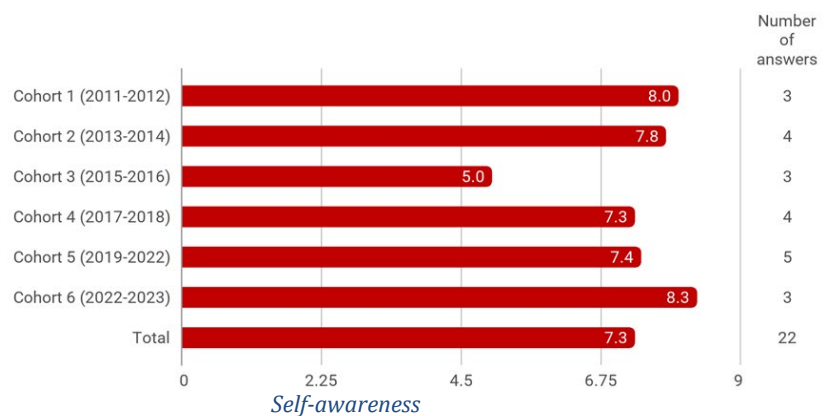
were analysed using close reading and text coding and are occasionally visualized or paraphrased.

### Findings

In the following, the quantitative and qualitative findings within the topics mentioned above are presented and analysed.

#### **Self-awareness: To what extent has the LIBER Programme helped you realise who you are as a leader, and what your blind spots are?**

The mean quantitative assessment of this aspect of the LIBER Programme is shown below. The satisfaction is similar for all cohorts, being close to the overall satisfaction, with only Cohort 3 differing. The small number of answers makes it impossible to draw statistically sound conclusions.



The pattern of Cohort 3 deviating from the answers of the other cohorts repeats itself throughout the survey. It was not possible to identify why from the written comments, so it could be an individual dissatisfaction of a single graduate not being able to implement the content of the LIBER Programme in their own organization, as their comment to other questions suggests.

Nine respondents used the possibility to add comments to the question. The comments suggest that the program was effective in enhancing self-awareness among participants, with variation in degree of impact based on individual experiences and prior levels of self-awareness.

A large share of the respondents commenting viewed the LIBER Programme as a significant contributor to their self-awareness. One respondent wrote, “Self-awareness is one of the main takeovers from the course. 9/10 does not mean I have no blind spot, but it means that I remember the course as a real game-changer on that matter.”

Of course, respondents' ratings not only indicate the quality of the LIBER Programme, but also reflect their individual starting points; thus, one writes: “the score is in the middle because I feel that I had a level of self-awareness before, and it didn't increase dramatically.”

#### **Strategy: To what extent has the LIBER Programme helped you set the goals, create strategies in your organisation, and heighten your sense of purpose and direction as a leader?**

The mean quantitative assessment of this aspect of the LIBER Programme is shown below. The highest satisfaction is in Cohort 6, the lowest in Cohort 3. The other cohorts



are close to the overall average of 6.7. No statistically significant differences can be inferred, however the pattern resembles the pattern observed in the qualitative answers, where earlier cohorts are less satisfied than later cohorts. A reason could be, that the most recent graduates have the freshest impressions, or that the LIBER Programme has improved over the years.

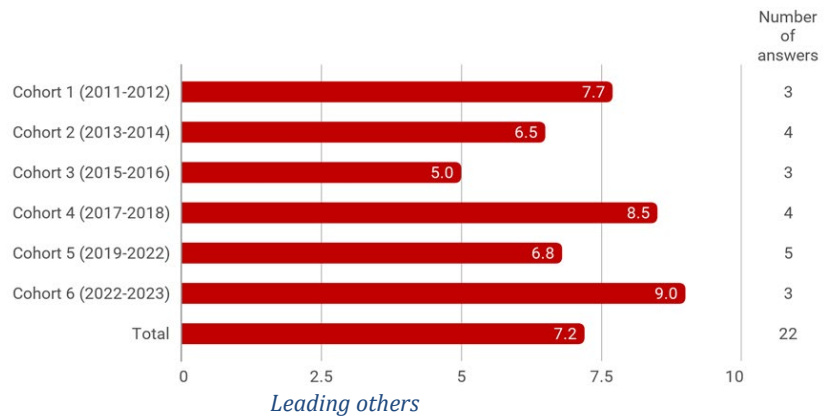


Eight respondents, primarily from Cohort 5, commented this question. Respondents from the early cohorts wrote that they had no recollection of strategy playing a significant role in the LIBER Programme. This is worth reflecting upon, if it is due to the strategy aspect playing a smaller part in the first cohorts. The comments indicate that in the later cohorts, the LIBER Programme provides valuable insights and tools for strategic planning and career goal setting.

The respondents generally appreciate the strategy focus of the LIBER Programme. One remarks that it helped them to decide whether to pursue a career as a library director, allowing them to focus on career goals. Several respondents note that the LIBER Programme overall provided opportunities to share experiences and techniques for building strategies and setting goals, especially regarding change-management. One respondent suggests that the LIBER Programme could benefit from follow-up sessions, where participants could make the strategic planning more practical, and take it beyond theory.

### **Leading others: To what extent has the LIBER Programme helped you become better in leading others, by creating, motivating, and sustaining a high-performing team?**

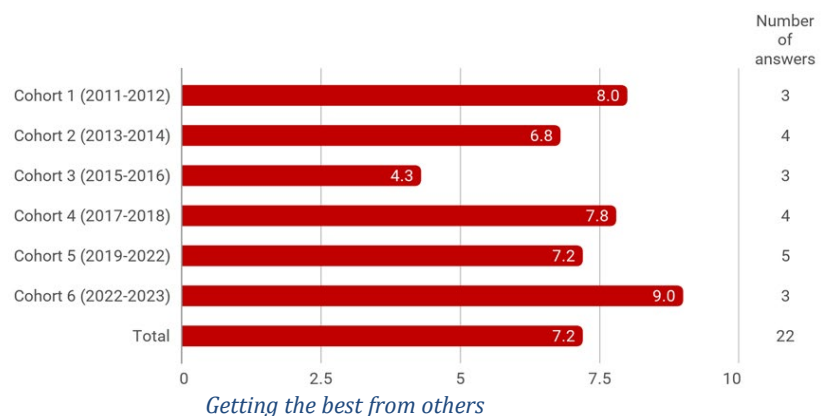
The mean quantitative assessment of this aspect of the LIBER Programme is shown below. The highest satisfaction is in Cohort 6, the lowest in Cohort 3. Except for Cohort 3 the answers are close to the overall evaluation. The pattern of Cohort 3 giving the lowest evaluation repeats, again without the possibility of drawing statistically significant conclusions.



Five respondents – one from each cohort except Cohort 4 – had written comments to this question. The comments suggest that the primary value of this topic has been discussing it and to exchange ideas with others. One respondent reported facing challenges in using the lessons learned due to local organizational and cultural barriers. In relation to leading others, the LIBER Programme is seen as a starting point that has opened doors for further leadership development.

### Getting the Best from Others: To what extent has the LIBER Programme made you better in helping members of your team to develop and perform their best?

Once again, the pattern of Cohort 6 being the most, and cohort 3 the least satisfied is observed.



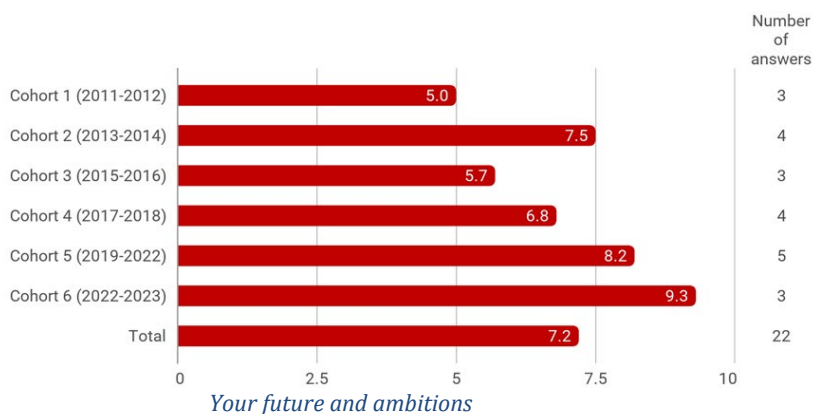
As only two respondents from Cohort 3 and 5 respectively had comments to this question, it is difficult to gain insights into this pattern. However, it matches that the respondent from Cohort 3 noted that the specific situations, in which they had to support team members, had been so specific that the tools learned in the LIBER Programme had not been applicable. The other respondent found the GROW model<sup>18</sup> useful.

### Your Future and Ambitions: To what extent does the LIBER Programme still help you develop and achieve your personal ambitions?

<sup>18</sup> Widely influential model for framing coaching conversations - created by Sir John Whitmore in 1992: *Coaching for Performance : A Practical Guide to Growing Your Own Skills*. London: Nicholas Brealey.



The overall average response for the 6 cohorts is shown below. The trend is increasing satisfaction as the LIBER Programme progresses in time, with cohort 2 being an outlier.

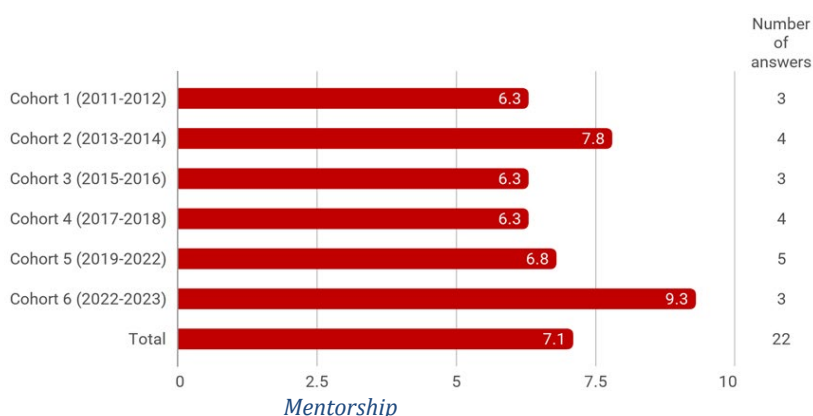


Nine respondents added comments to this question, and the comments are quite diverse.

Respondents attending the early cohorts report that later experiences are now, not surprisingly, more important than the influence of the LIBER Programme. Half the respondents from the early cohorts report a certain level of disillusionment with their career, noting that the LIBER Programme had not led to fulfilment of their ambitions. Respondents attending the later cohorts emphasize the value of the network established in the individual cohorts. These networks are particularly important in supporting their participants in keeping ambitions up and inspiring them in their leadership.

### **Mentorship: To what extent have you found the ‘mentorship’ aspect of the LIBER Programme valuable? How could it be improved?**

The overall average estimations for each cohort are shown below. The highest score is given by Cohort 6, where the rest are close to the total average estimation.



16 respondents commented on this question and the follow-up question regarding improvements. The feedback was mixed, with a tendency for more positive feedback in the later cohorts. Respondents valued the concept and report that they had insightful conversations and valuable learning experiences.

However, some mentor-mentee relationships were not as successful. Suggested improvements include a more personalized mentor-mentee matching, and a more

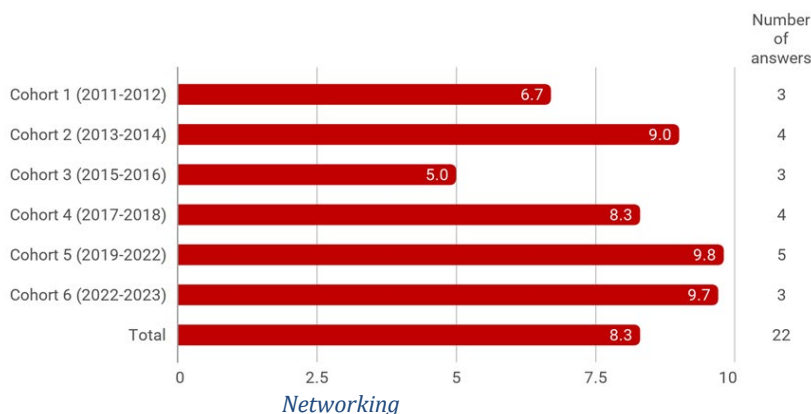




structured approach to the post-visit/shadowing engagement. The generosity of the mentors and the concept of mentorship received high praise by the respondents.

### Networking: To what extent have you found the networking part of the LIBER Programme valuable? How could it be improved?

The average estimations are shown below. Again Cohort 3 is the least satisfied, and the pattern of higher estimation in the later cohorts also repeats. It is interesting that the networking part of the LIBER Programme is the highest ranked (8.3) aspect.



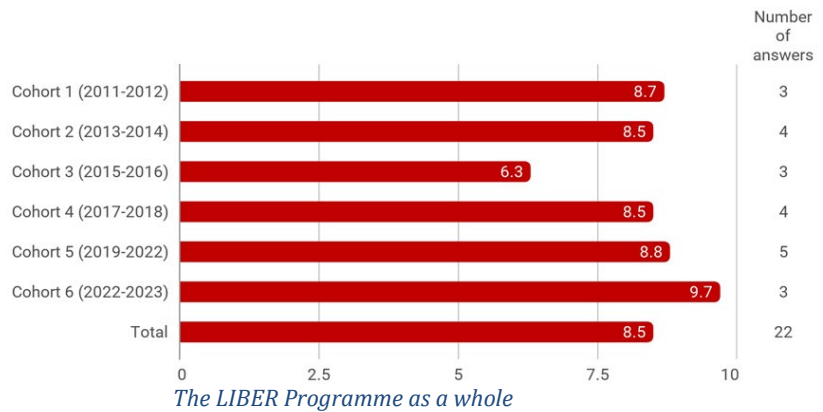
12 respondents commented this question and the follow-up question regarding improvements. The networking part of the LIBER Programme is uniformly described as the most valuable part of the entire LIBER Programme. As one participant puts it, “Meeting and learning from colleagues across Europe is the key benefit of this programme.”

The connections persist with very few exceptions, where time constraints have limited the possibilities of the respondents to keep the connections alive, especially in the early cohorts. Interestingly, the cohort during the COVID pandemic appears to have had the most continued value of the networking part. However, this might be because the network has not had time to deteriorate.

The primary challenge for this part of the LIBER Programme lies in the difficulty of justifying travel expenses and coordinating meet ups. It was suggested that this part could be improved by providing some stimulus to respectively visit each other's libraries.

### How would you rate the LIBER Programme as a whole?

The overall average rating for all cohorts is shown below. The overall impression is that the large majority rates the LIBER Programme very high, with, again, a tendency for higher evaluations in the later cohorts. The pattern for Cohort 3 naturally repeats. Satisfaction with the LIBER Programme outweighs satisfaction with specific aspects, which indicates positive, synergistic effect of the LIBER Programme.



9 respondents commented this question. The majority of respondents answering this question highlights the significant positive impact of the LIBER Programme on their personal and professional development. One participant credits the LIBER Programme for their confidence in securing a position as library director. Another participant writes, “I thoroughly enjoyed the Programme, and it remains one of the best and most influential personal development activities I have ever undertaken.”

The LIBER Programme is praised for supporting a network of leaders in European research libraries. It is described as a key moment of participants’ careers, and several respondents recommend the LIBER Programme to colleagues. The LIBER Programme is recognized for bringing European professionals closer together, contributing to a sense of unity.

Suggestions for improvement include updating the content and reflecting on and adjusting certain aspects like mentorships and visits. Imbalances in participant diversity are addressed, particularly over representation of UK participants in certain cohorts.

### **Inclusion of New Important or Crucial Topics in the LIBER Programme**

In the end of the survey, respondents were encouraged to put forward ideas to new topics, which were important or even crucial to include.

Among the important topics mentioned by the respondents, the four most prominent themes were:

- Leadership beyond libraries. There is an emphasis on broad leadership principles rather than library-specific leadership. The need for strategic thinking and adaptability in complex situations is mentioned specifically.
- Digital and data driven services. There is a focus on the need for integration of digital services in every aspect of the library, as well as a transformation of the libraries into knowledge producing entities.
- Skills and career development is highlighted as an important topic to include especially digital and negotiation skills.
- The need for cultural sensitivity and an understanding of international leadership differences were also identified as important.



The main themes considered by the graduates to be crucial to include in the LIBER Programme are:

- Values and organizational culture with an emphasis on their foundational roles in leading digital transformations and fostering inclusive and open environments.
- Operational and technical challenges, especially in relation to the libraries' engagement in data driven services, with a view to transparency and shared data infrastructures.
- Finally, it is considered crucial to include practical applications in the LIBER Programme. Case studies, simulations and interactive methods are suggested.

### **Additional Comments**

In the end of the questionnaire, the respondents had an opportunity to deliver additional final comments. Overall, several respondents use the opportunity to express their gratitude. As one puts it: "Once again, thank you very much for this program and the opportunity to take part in. Please continue the program in any case because it reflects a unique vision. And I am sure that there will always be persons and future leaders benefiting from this program."

Several respondents also highlight the LIBER Programme's ability to be transformative and to remain a source for the respondents' self-reflection and learning. Finally, several respondents once more highlight the strong networks that the LIBER Programme provides.

### **Conclusions**

This is a summary of some of the conclusions already made in this section. First, there is a general satisfaction with the LIBER Programme, which, in fact, respondents rated higher (8,5 in average) than any of its individual elements. The variation in satisfaction between different cohorts, for reasons that this survey could not explain could be due to differences among the respondents' individual contexts. This emphasizes the importance of making efforts to secure that the quality of the LIBER Programme remains high and consistent, from year to year. When asked about the future of the LIBER Programme, the participants pointed to several different aspects that could be important and crucial, indicating the complex and different reality each participant find themselves in.



## Part 3: Summary of Open Interviews – Four Selected Library Directors: Future Challenges for Library Leaders

Following the comprehensive review of similar academic library leadership programmes and the survey, we chose to make and include four interviews with library directors to gain further insight into the value of the LIBER Programme and its future potential.

### Methodology

This whole report constitutes an interpretative process. Establishing an overview of the field in a review. Measuring participants' experience and input in the survey. And finally, reflecting upon this, asking four executive library directors of their experience with leadership development, opinions, and their ideas.

Four interviewees are a wide enough canvas for different ideas. We balanced the interviewees for gender, age, and country. All four are experienced top-level research library leaders with variety in seniority.

The interviews took 45-60 minutes each and followed an interview guide with ample room for open input. The themes of the guide were:

- Experience with the LIBER Programme.
- Personal reflections on leadership, incl. own development.
- Focus areas of the LIBER Programme.
- Network, and mentorship as a format in the LIBER Programme.
- Needs for future leaders.

The guide makes comparison and conclusion possible while keeping the interviews themselves open for reflections outside the themes.

The interviews were recorded, then transcribed using Open AI's "Whisper" for clarity and reference. The participation and process are fully anonymous.

This constitutes a balanced and informative process as the last of three interrelated steps of the report.

### Interviews and Findings

The key finding of the four interviews was the value of self-awareness as a leader. Self-awareness and 'self-knowledge' constitute the foundation for being a good and effective leader. The self-awareness aspect is emphasized repeatedly as integral part of leadership development. When advancing to a top leader "one makes a path where one was used to following a path". The reflection upon self and new roles are fundamental in setting out as a new executive leader. The self-awareness aspect is where many learned the most about themselves as leaders, and thus is important for the LIBER Programme.

Other skills can be built on this foundation: the ability to 'read the room' - to observe and identify changes and need for adaptation locally and in the wider context. Importance of resilience and ability to adapt to change, or even to have the courage or resilience to work against change when necessary.

Before being able to execute strategies, a top leader must be clear about "who one is" and role and responsibility. Also, as a basis for good leaders are the competences to understand the culture and the surroundings that they are in. Both internal and external. And in a given situation or relation being able to adapt accordingly. Following this, the interviewees recommended strengthening relational or diplomacy skills in the LIBER Programme further. They are seen as key to leadership development and building valuable networks and navigating who gets what done. Academic libraries



interact with many actors, many of whom are quite different. To paraphrase: Speaking with IT, with research leaders and with publishers is quite different and must be handled differently. This applies both internally in the organization and with external partners. "You always have to be a diplomat – you have to negotiate all the time."

Relationship skills are seen as a requisite for executing strategically.

In the same vein, teamwork and co-leadership skills are extremely valuable. The pay-off of mastering these skills early on as a leader is high. The LIBER Programme is a well-suited space to further honing these skills.

Next are strategic skills that are more complex than they may first appear. There are both personal strategies, the organization's strategy as well as strategy in a broader perspective that deals with external actors and trends and "the outside world."

Navigating the strategic level demands self-awareness.

A key takeaway is the value of networking with the participants in each cohort.

"Networks are extremely powerful!" The interviewees mention the importance of the LIBER Programme remaining explicit about this. The success of the LIBER Programme may be measured in how well it teaches and set up a framework for networking.

Physical meetings and addition to the conferences have noteworthy value for the participants and should be prioritized by the LIBER Programme, coupled with online networking.

- Idea I: Inspirational talks from top leaders about how networks have benefited them and how they keep them alive or grow new networks.
- Idea II: Smaller reflection groups.
- Idea III: Podcasts (or similar) from top leaders about the topic which the networks can reflect on collectively.
- Broad wish: More events to maintain networks – even after several years.

Everyone believe mentorship is an important aspect of the LIBER Programme.

Experiences show that good mentors are remembered for the rest of a career. If a

mentorship is great, it is both beneficial for the mentor and the mentee. A great mentorship propels the mentee to become mentor herself/himself later in career.

Mentorship requires focus. It is suggested to make clear expectations for both mentor and mentee early on or in the LIBER Programme, so that no one is disappointed or overburdened.

- Idea I: Making an agreement that is completely clear about frequency of meetings and who contributes with what.
- Idea II: Evaluate what mentors think of the process. Currently it is only mentees who evaluate the LIBER Programme.
- Idea III: Have a session in the beginning of the LIBER Programme for mentors, to point out the importance of the above.

When top leaders train and develop their own leaders, it is unanimously said that giving them space is key. Setting a framework but letting emerging leaders work freely within it. Successful leaders have become successful from being set free. In leadership development this is an important part of the self-awareness theme for both the top-leader and the emerging leader.



When looking into the future, our interviewees have several thoughts.

- Diversity and inclusion. "It is everywhere." Competencies to handle this are important for leaders of the future.
- Security or vis-à-vis open science. Libraries and our ideology may be impaired by security threats.
- A top leader must be curious and able to navigate digital transformation and AI and technologies emerging in the periphery of academic libraries – and be able to hire the right specialists.
- Accordingly, it is important for leaders at the same time to balance, or moderate, agility and resilience and focus.
- Spotlighting the democratic value. Proactivity is important – pushing and standing up for the library. "A future leader must be positioned to uphold the library's relevance and ensure that the library is not absorbed into other organizations and devalued."
- When lobbying this or that partner, it is important to remember not just to lobby on behalf of our organizations or our institutions, but also to lobby on behalf of the greater cause: Owning that agenda is increasingly important for future leaders.

As for general thoughts on the LIBER Programme it is stated that the LIBER Programme must always be aware and open to the fact that there are vastly different library realities in Europe.

Quality assessment is extremely important in the LIBER Programme. Time is short and "because there are so many talents in the room," a high level of the LIBER Programme instructors is important. A high training level furthers involvement – a good circle. The same dynamic goes for mentorship assessment.

Programmes like the LIBER Programme and leadership development in general are unbelievably valuable for leaders. Here you are "free of your daily responsibilities, and just learning", becoming a better leader.

### Conclusions

Based on the findings from the interviews, several conclusions can be drawn regarding the importance of self-awareness, relational skills, mentorship, network, and future leadership requirements:

- 1) Self-awareness is key: The interviews emphasize that self-awareness forms the bedrock of effective leadership. Leaders must deeply understand themselves, their roles, and their responsibilities before executing strategies or navigating complex situations.
- 2) Relational skills are critical: Building strong networks and diplomatic abilities are highlighted as essential for leadership success in settings with interactions with diverse stakeholders. The ability to 'read the room' and understanding the culture are important for emerging leaders to succeed.
- 3) Mentorship is invaluable: Mentorship plays a significant role in leadership development, providing both mentors and mentees with long-lasting benefits. Clear expectations and evaluation mechanisms are suggested to enhance the mentorship process.
- 4) Leadership development should focus on giving space: Effective leaders empower emerging leaders by providing them with frameworks while allowing



them the freedom to work independently, fostering growth and development in both parties.

- 5) Future leadership demands diverse competencies: Future leaders must possess a diverse skill set, including the ability to handle diversity and inclusion, navigate digital transformation, balance agility with resilience, and advocate for democratic values and the broader mission of their organizations.

The interviews underscore the multifaceted nature of leadership, emphasizing the importance of self-awareness, relational skills, mentorship, and adaptability in navigating the complexities of leadership roles, both now and in the future. An effective leadership development programme should prioritize these aspects to cultivate well-rounded leaders capable of driving positive change in their organizations and communities.



## Joint Conclusion

This report tries to analyse the LIBER Emerging Leaders Programme thoroughly with the clear aims of attesting to its value, hopefully, and developing it further. The LIBER Leadership Programmes Working Group wanted to evaluate the LIBER Programme that has been running since 2011, involving a lot of executive leaders in a cohort model. Does the LIBER Programme work? How does it compare? What improvements are interesting?

To answer and evaluate, the authors designed a report that consists of three main elements, measuring different important aspects of the LIBER Programme.

### The Present

First, we made a comparative review of academic library executive leadership programmes – Part 1. The review showed two things. The LIBER Programme model is unique in Europe. There is no equivalent to the LIBER Programme with its breadth of subjects (comprehensiveness), time span in every sense, combined with a clearly defined target audience – emerging executive leaders from academic libraries only. Also, the LIBER Programme does not have an explicit, overarching political or organisational goal or theme, such as diversity and inclusion, unlike many of the other programmes. The LIBER Programme aims to train and strengthen executive leaders, without headlines, so to speak. The other thing, we did find, was that some programmes will be of interest to the LIBER Programme development. Freie Universität Berlin will be starting an International Library Management programme that LIBER should watch. In addition, Canadian Association of Research Libraries (CARL) Academic Libraries' brand new Leadership Institute should be of interest of LIBER.

### The Past

Secondly, we polled members of six cohorts thoroughly to analyse what works and what does not – Part 2. How do the actual participants view the LIBER Programme? The number one finding was an exceedingly high general satisfaction with the overall LIBER Programme – higher than some of the subthemes, interestingly. There seems a crucial connection between what The LIBER Programme offers and what participants feel they need. Self-awareness aspects scored highly, while Strategy scored lowest. Coaching and networking are an integral part of the LIBER Programme. Here Mentorship scored solidly, if not highly, whereas Networking scored highest in satisfaction. "Meeting and learning from colleagues across Europe are the key benefit of this Programme," to quote a participant.

One less positive finding was that one cohort was not as satisfied as the others. While there may be practical reasons for this, the LIBER Programme must aim for consistency across time. Mechanisms of quality assessments must be in place, and not restricted to the end of the LIBER Programme.

Navigating a rapidly developing digital and data-driven field as well as inclusion were themes that could be strengthened according to participants. Finally, it is considered crucial to include practical applications in the LIBER Programme. Case studies, simulations and interactive methods are suggested.

### The Future

Finally, the authors made four interviews with executive leaders to gauge leadership development and how to improve this in the academic library sector – Part 3. Where do you think we should go?

One takeaway is *sequence* in leadership development: First, develop and train self-awareness and 'people skills,' and be good at those. Know your inner platform and how to move yourself as a leader. Then a developing leader must think about responsibility





and role and be clear and reflected about those. Ideally, only then move on to mastering of strategy and tackling organisational and external challenges. According to the interviewees, executive leadership may be seen as a pyramid, where top strategic and executory skills rest on a clearness of role and responsibility and leadership awareness. People skills such as negotiation, teamwork and relationship-building are seen as important to the complex realities of academic libraries.

Recommendations on the LIBER Programme circle about networking and mentorship, in line with the similar focus from the survey. The interviewees are very vocal about this. “Networks are extremely powerful.” Also, good mentors may be career-defining. For both mentoring and the network format in the LIBER Programme priority on practical organization and mutual expectations are highlighted. LIBER is recommended to prioritise or facilitate physical network meetings, even several years after each cohort programme.

Other key takeaways for the LIBER Programme are inclusion and diversity. These are prominent issues that you need to have competence to handle. Also, openness in the LIBER Programme to the different realities of European libraries and their leaders. Library security and resilience – it is not all about openness. Curiosity about technology, even in the periphery of our field. Putting the libraries in play much more proactively. A consistently high professional level of the LIBER Programme teachers.

In the end, this report validates the qualities and emphasis on reflection and networking of the LIBER Programme, plus it is, for now, unique role in pan-European development of senior-level leaders. At the same time, it highlights nuances – not all cohorts had the same experience – and serves suggestions for improvement and more quality control. The report took a three-pronged approach – review, survey, interviews – that informed each other in the process. The authors hope this report gives the Working Group, LIBER members and future participants and all stakeholders insight into the LIBER Programme, its value and way ahead.

### Joint Suggestions

- Since the LIBER Programme is both unique and well regarded by its graduates, its continued existence should be unquestioned.
- It is important to keep a high quality of the consultants of the LIBER Programme.
- There could be an element of individualization in the LIBER Programme, involving:
  - A screening of graduates to assess their prior familiarity with the specific concepts of the LIBER Programme
  - Finding out what the graduates’ personal, institutional, and national context mean regarding specific elements of the LIBER Programme.
  - Follow-up sessions with individual graduates
- Focus on the role as a leader and the importance of the leader being able to read the room and understanding culture & surroundings wherever the situation or relation. It should be checked how present it is in the syllabus.
- As negotiating – in all its forms – and awareness of relationship skills within and outside the library organization, is mentioned as an important part of executive library management, it should be checked how present it is in the LIBER Programme.
- The mentorship aspect could be better defined and uniformed; some agreement on the format and goals of the relationship should be made between mentor and mentee.
  - Ask the mentor to also evaluate.
  - Session for mentors also.



- The mentoring aspect could be supported by companionship arrangements, where graduates make study visits to each other. Or smaller reflections groups could be set up throughout the LIBER Programme.
- Being the strong part of the LIBER Programme, the networking aspect could be further developed. Rethinking the frames for networking within each cohort and as alumni.
  - Combination of online setup and physical events.
  - Inspirational talks or podcast from top-leaders on the topic of networking.
- Various aspects of the LIBER Programme could be better linked to each other. For instance, the strategy part could be strengthened by highlighting its relevance and sequency in relationship to the self-awareness aspect.
- The format could involve more dialogue, more study-cases, more exercises.
- The different contexts of academic libraries in Europe make it necessary to either incorporate that aspect in the LIBER Programme outright, or to include topics that are broad and relevant for all.



## Appendix 1 Evaluation of the LIBER Emerging Leaders Program

### Brief introduction

LIBER are working with different leadership development initiatives through LIBER Leadership Programmes Working Group<sup>[1]</sup>, one of these initiatives is *LIBER Emerging Leaders Program*, a program that aims at people who are already in positions of senior management but who wish to do more to enhance their leadership qualities in preparation for the step up to the next big challenge.

*LIBER Emerging Leaders Program* is completed six times (with more than 80 participants) during the period 2011-2023, a call for Cohort 7 will open in summer 2024.

Before a new call LIBER wish to evaluate both the structure and the content of the program, to make sure it still is a program with high impact for both the participants, their institution origins and the library community.

### Proposal

Time is essential, if a call for Cohort 7 will open in summer 2024, the LIBER Leadership Programmes Working Group needs time after the evaluation to potentially restructure the program before start-up and implementation (summer 2025 -summer 2026).

Therefore, the evaluation is proposed carried out by Kira Stine Hansen, a member of the LIBER Leadership Programmes Working Group, supported by her institution origin, The Danish Royal Library.

The evaluation will consist of different parts:

- Feedback from a LIBER Leadership Programmes Working Group workshop held at the LIBER Winter Event in Amsterdam the 2.th of December 2022, where the participants gave perceptive inputs to leadership challenges and specifically insights on the *LIBER Emerging Leaders Program*.
- A brief review that outlines other European library leadership programs that is similar to the *LIBER Emerging Leaders Program* and benchmarks them accordingly.
- A questionnaire with questions about structure and content to 1-3 selected cohort members from the six former cohorts (briefly comparing them to all the cohorts feedback if there is a difference))
- Open interviews with 3 selected library directors about the future challenges for library leaders.

The findings are presented in a collected report and if requested, a recommendation can be included.

### Timeline

The evaluation report must be delivered by the end of January 2024.

### Responsibility

A steering group with Martine Pronk, executive director of LIBER and Catriona Cannon, Head of LIBER Leadership Programmes Working Group will overlook this evaluation and make sure LIBERs interest is taken care of during and after the evaluation. Martine Pronk is responsible for reporting back to the LIBER board. Furthermore LIBER is in charge of a financial setup evaluation, so the financial aspect can be included in the collected report.

<sup>[1]</sup> <https://libereurope.eu/working-group/liber-leadership-programmes-working-group/>