



Accelerated Progress Programme (APP)

Guidance for Member Firms

Selecting Participants, Sponsors and Mentors

APP is designed as a progression ecosystem. Its success depends not only on selecting the right participants, but also on engaging sponsors, mentors and line managers who are committed to supporting talent development and leadership progression.

This guidance is intended to help member firms identify individuals who will benefit most from, and contribute most effectively to, the programme.

Cohort Participation

Member firms may nominate between **one and ten participants**, depending on organisational size, talent pipeline and appetite for involvement.

There is no minimum threshold for meaningful participation.

A firm nominating a single participant will still benefit from the full programme experience, including sponsor and mentor development, cross-firm learning, diagnostic insight and access to wider programme outputs.

The cross-firm design is one of APP's greatest strengths. Participants, mentors and sponsors engage alongside peers from across UK financial services, gaining exposure to different organisations, leadership approaches, career journeys and perspectives that would be difficult to replicate through an internal programme alone.

Whether a firm nominates one participant or ten, every participant becomes part of the same sector-wide progression ecosystem. The value comes not only from the development experience itself, but from the relationships, visibility, insight and opportunities created through participation in a diverse cross-firm cohort.



For larger firms, APP offers an opportunity to accelerate multiple high-potential colleagues simultaneously. For smaller firms, it provides access to a level of cross-sector leadership development, mentoring, sponsorship and networking that may be difficult to create independently.

Nominating Participants, Sponsors and Mentors

Participants, sponsors and mentors are all nominated by member firms, but they do not operate as firm-based cohorts.

APP is intentionally designed as a cross-firm programme. Participants, mentors and sponsors engage with peers from across UK financial services, creating opportunities for broader learning, challenge and relationship-building beyond organisational boundaries.

There is no requirement to nominate an equal number of sponsors or mentors to participants.

For example, a firm may nominate three participants and one sponsor, or several participants supported by a smaller number of sponsors and mentors. The programme has been designed to accommodate different organisational sizes and levels of participation.

Sponsors and mentors contribute to the wider cohort experience rather than supporting only individuals from their own organisation. This cross-firm approach is central to the programme's design and one of the ways APP creates value that cannot easily be replicated through an internal programme alone.

The objective is not to create firm-based sponsorship or mentoring relationships. It is to create a sector-wide progression ecosystem in which participants benefit from diverse perspectives, broader networks and exposure to leaders from across financial services.

Selecting Participants

Who is APP designed for?



APP is designed for high-performing middle managers and emerging leaders from lower socio-economic backgrounds who are ready to progress towards senior leadership.

Participants should demonstrate strong potential and ambition but may not yet have had access to the visibility, networks, sponsorship or opportunities that often support progression into senior roles.

APP is not a remedial intervention or a general leadership development programme.

It is designed for individuals who are already performing strongly and are ready to accelerate their leadership journey.

What good looks like

Participants will typically:

- Be operating at middle-management level or equivalent
- Have a strong performance record
- Demonstrate leadership potential and aspiration for more senior roles
- Be open to challenge, reflection and personal development
- Be willing to learn alongside peers from other firms
- Have the capacity to commit approximately 3–5 hours per month throughout the programme
- Be motivated to actively engage with mentoring, sponsorship and cross-firm project work
- Be comfortable stepping into new environments and taking on visible opportunities

Questions for firms to consider

- Would we consider this individual a potential future senior leader?



- Has this individual demonstrated strong capability but may benefit from increased visibility, advocacy or access to opportunities?
- Could sponsorship, mentoring and cross-firm exposure accelerate their progression?
- Is this individual likely to contribute positively to a cross-firm learning environment?
- Is this someone we want to actively invest in as part of our future leadership pipeline?

The role of line managers

APP is most effective when participants have active support from their line manager.

Line managers play an important role in helping participants apply learning, create space for development and identify opportunities to build visibility, influence and leadership experience throughout the programme.

When nominating participants, firms should consider whether the individual's line manager:

- Supports their participation in the programme
- Recognises their leadership potential
- Is willing to create opportunities to apply learning in practice
- Will engage with programme touchpoints throughout the year
- Is committed to supporting progression conversations and development planning

APP includes three structured touchpoints for line managers, helping them understand programme objectives, reinforce learning and maintain momentum throughout the participant's journey. Line managers will also be invited to attend the graduation event, recognising their role in supporting participant success.



Progression rarely happens through individual effort alone. The strongest outcomes are achieved when participants, sponsors, mentors and line managers work together to support development and progression.

An example participant journey:

A member firm may identify a high-performing middle manager from a lower socio-economic background who has consistently delivered strong results and demonstrated clear leadership potential, but who has had limited exposure beyond their immediate business area.

Through APP, they would take part in cross-firm learning, mentoring and sponsorship activity designed to build confidence, broaden networks and increase visibility. Their mentor may help them reflect on leadership challenges and progression goals, while sponsors and line managers help identify opportunities to apply learning, access stretch assignments and build influence.

Over time, the participant gains broader sector perspective, stronger progression confidence and greater visibility as part of the firm's future leadership pipeline. The firm benefits not only from the participant's development but also from improved insight into what supports progression and how sponsorship can be used more intentionally to accelerate talent.

Selecting Sponsors

Why sponsors matter

APP treats sponsorship as a progression mechanism, not simply a relationship.

Sponsors play an active role in helping participants gain visibility, access opportunities and navigate progression pathways. They also contribute to the programme's wider ambition of strengthening sponsorship practices across the sector.



The programme encourages sponsors to move from passive support to intentional advocacy, helping organisations strengthen the mechanisms that shape progression and leadership pipeline development.

Sponsors contribute to the wider cohort and may support participants from organisations other than their own, helping create broader networks, fresh perspectives and more objective challenge.

What good looks like

Sponsors will typically:

- Hold a senior leadership role
- Have influence, credibility and visibility within their organisation
- Be committed to developing future talent
- Be willing to advocate for others and create opportunities
- Be open to reflecting on their own sponsorship practices
- Have the capacity to engage at key points throughout the programme
- Be interested in strengthening leadership pipelines within their organisation

Sponsors do not need to be experts in socio-economic diversity or talent development.

What matters most is a genuine commitment to supporting progression and a willingness to engage intentionally with the programme.

Questions for firms to consider

- Does this individual actively champion talent within the organisation?
- Do they have sufficient influence to create visibility and opportunity?
- Are they open to learning about sponsorship and progression?
- Will they engage consistently throughout the programme?



- Can they model the behaviours we want to see in future leaders?

Selecting Mentors

Why mentors matter

Mentors provide a different but equally important form of support.

While sponsors help create opportunity, mentors help participants make sense of challenges, build confidence, develop self-awareness and translate learning into action.

The mentoring relationship provides a confidential space for reflection, challenge and growth.

Mentors are matched across firms wherever possible, creating opportunities for participants to benefit from independent guidance and perspectives beyond their immediate organisational environment.

What good looks like

Mentors will typically:

- Have experience of leadership and career progression
- Be skilled listeners and effective questioners
- Be willing to share experience while encouraging independent thinking
- Be comfortable providing constructive challenge
- Be committed to supporting participant growth
- Have capacity for six mentoring conversations across the programme
- Be open to learning from someone with different experiences and perspectives

Mentors do not need to be subject matter experts in participants' functional areas.



The most effective mentors are often those who can offer perspective, challenge assumptions and support broader leadership development.

Mentors contribute through

- Six structured mentoring conversations scheduled directly between mentor and participant
- Development-focused challenge and support
- Cross-firm insight and perspective
- Supporting progression planning and leadership growth
- Helping participants translate learning into action

Questions for firms to consider

- Does this individual demonstrate strong coaching or mentoring behaviours?
- Can they create trust and psychological safety?
- Will they provide challenge as well as encouragement?
- Are they committed to supporting another person's development over a sustained period?
- Can they contribute positively to a cross-firm learning environment?

Building a Strong Cohort

The strongest APP cohorts will include participants, sponsors and mentors with different experiences, business backgrounds, perspectives and career journeys.

The programme is intentionally designed to create value through cross-firm interaction. Participants benefit from exposure to different organisations, mentors gain broader sector



perspectives, and sponsors contribute to a wider conversation about progression and leadership pipeline development across financial services.

When selecting individuals, firms are encouraged to think beyond capability alone and consider how each person can contribute to a rich cross-firm learning environment.

APP is designed to strengthen leadership pipelines across UK financial services. The quality of the experience depends on the quality of the people who take part.

Selection should be based on demonstrated potential, readiness and commitment to development - not simply on who is most visible or already receiving development opportunities.

Leadership potential exists across every background. APP is designed to ensure that potential is recognised, supported and realised.

To have a detailed discussion on nomination and participation, please reach out to app@progresstogether.co.uk