

2023-24

UK Fellowship Impact Report



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About UK Acumen Academy

UK Acumen Academy identifies extraordinary social entrepreneurs and leaders in the United Kingdom and equips them with the transformative leadership practices, skills and community needed to scale their impact.

Through our **UK Fellows Programme**, since 2020 we have provided catalytic support to 65 Founders, CEOs, and senior leaders, whose innovations have positively impacted over 2.3 million lives across the United Kingdom.

Each year we select a diverse cohort of Founders, CEOs, and senior leaders from across issues, places, and backgrounds who have demonstrated the character, capacity, and commitment to deliver lasting change in the United Kingdom.

Over a 9-month programme, through a series of in-person residencies, online workshops, and group practice, participants develop the tools to turbocharge their leadership, deepen their organisation's impact, and address systemic problems of poverty.

Upon completing the programme, Fellows join the **"Foundry"**, Acumen's global community of 1,600 social innovators and gain lifelong access to resources, support, and opportunities designed to sustain their impact.

We are eager to see what lies ahead – learning, challenges, and achievements alike – and we are continuously grateful for your support and belief that we can build a future where everyone can lead a dignified life.

Acumen Fellows

Acumen Fellows are building solutions that redefine the future of education, employment, health & well-being; celebrating potential, fostering choice, and cultivating dignity for those trapped by systems of poverty.



Marcellus Baz BEM
Founder, Switch Up

Empowering young people, children and young adults to break the cycle of offending and reoffending.



Jess Thompson
Founder, Migrateful

Supporting migrants, refugees and asylum seekers in their journey to integration through cookery classes.



Jadwiga Leigh
CEO, New Beginnings Foundation CIO

Working holistically with parents who are involved with children's services to develop their strength, knowledge and power.

Why focus on leadership?

Across the United Kingdom, persistent poverty and deepening inequality mean many communities face daily barriers to education, healthcare and employment. Without urgent change, we risk a growing population that is undervalued and left behind, and we will continue to fail to reach our true potential as a society.

Across the United Kingdom, we also see extraordinary social entrepreneurs and leaders creating innovative solutions to break down barriers and uplift our communities. Yet, their determination alone isn't enough to address our challenges. To drive lasting change, we must equip these leaders with the robust and sustained support they need:

Enabling underserved leaders to access support: People are the foundation for any effective, impactful and resilient organisation. However, social organisations suffer from chronic underinvestment in their most valuable assets - their people.

UK Acumen Academy invests in the ongoing learning and development of leaders solving problems of poverty.

Developing new models of leadership:

The problems we face are deep-rooted, interconnected, and complex. They require more than quick fixes or a single approach - it demands leadership that thinks systemically and mobilises collective action.

UK Acumen Academy fosters transformative leadership that engages diverse communities to overcome entrenched issues.

Building with community: Breaking down the barriers and driving meaningful change is a long, difficult, and often isolating journey.

UK Acumen Academy cultivates a community of leaders who accompany one another throughout the lifelong journey of change, driving connection, collaboration and collective impact.

In summary, solving our entrenched social issues will require a deep investment in leadership; one grounded in the moral imperative to reimagine the goals, structures, and rules of existing systems to build a world where everyone has an opportunity to live a life of dignity. Fortunately, we see this leadership emerging everywhere.



Measuring our impact

At its core, the Fellowship focuses on building the capacity to address long-standing issues of poverty. Success is Fellows developing the competencies, character, and community to stretch to new levels, build moral imagination, listen deeply, reckon with their sense of identity,

and open up to understanding the layered inconsistencies and differing perspectives of others. Success is building role models and business models that challenge the status quo and tackle entrenched poverty. Success is a world based on dignity.

Goal of Fellows Selection

1) Diversity of reach

Identify builders from across sector, place, and background who share determination and vision.

17

Fellows from all walks of life selected for the 2024 Cohort.

Goal of Fellows Programme & Foundry

2) Depth of leadership

Create a learning environment to develop and apply leadership tools that address issues of poverty.

100%

deepened their leadership capacity to create change

3) Depth of community

Connect Fellows with a community that accompanies over a lifetime.

100%

built a trusted community to support their work

Impact of Fellows & Foundry

4) Amplifying leadership

So that together, we can reimagine existing systems and role model a new definition of success.

2,500

people recieved Fellowship content from UK Foundry

5) Scaling Impact

To build solutions that solve problems of poverty and create a world based on dignity.

2.3m

lives positively impacted by UK Foundry

“

The Fellowship has enhanced my approach to achieving Tempo's goals, encouraging adaptive strategies and collaboration. The community support allows me to draw on diverse insights, fostering solutions and shared momentum toward our mission. ”



Rachel Gegeshidze,
CEO, Tempo Time Credits
Acumen UK Fellow

Meet the 2024 UK cohort



Andrew Wallis
Co-Founder & CEO
Unseen

Eliminating modern slavery



Cecilia Brezmes Alonso
Senior Program Manager
Amazon

Leveraging corporate innovation as a force for good



Emmanuel Akpan-Inwang
Founder & Director
Lighthouse Pedagogy Trust

Improving life outcomes and opportunities for care-experienced young people



Faith Johnson
Founder & CEO
Caramel Rock

Enabling young people and bringing cultural diversity into the fashion industry



Graham Whitham
Founder and CEO
Resolve Poverty

Empowering localities to tackle poverty across the UK



Kannan Ganga
Founder & CEO
YellowNest

Improving access to quality early years education



Kat Agar
CEO, Oasis Community Partnerships

Strengthening communities based on local-level need



Louise McVey
Team Leader
Inverclyde Council

Mitigating poverty through a local authority lens



Lucy Bearn,
CEO
FareShare South West

Addressing the double dilemma of food waste and food insecurity



Marsha Powell
Co-Founder & CEO
BelEve UK

Empowering the next generation of female leaders



Michaela Collins
CEO, Possibilities for Each and Every Kid (PEEK)

Using creativity and play as a tool for aspiration for children and families



Michelle Hill
CEO, TLC: Talk, Listen, Change

Building a holistic approach to foster safe and healthy relationships



Rachel Gegeshidze
CEO
Tempo

Uniting public, private and community sectors to uplift communities



Rachael Hutchinson
Co-Founder
Able2B

Enriching the lives of people with disabilities



Robert Posner
Deputy CEO
ThinkForward UK

Breaking down barriers and broadening horizons for young people



Serrena Tanna
Senior Involvement Manager, Crisis UK

Advocating for financial inclusion with marginalised communities



Shaninga Marasha
Founder & CEO
BIGKID Foundation

Working to end youth violence

1 Diversity of reach

Identify leaders from across sector, place, and background who share determination and vision.

Diversity of 2024 Fellowship applicants

60%

Women

50%

Black, Asian and minority ethnic

76%

with lived experience

20%

with a disability

15%

North of England

4%

Northern Ireland

5%

Wales



11%

Scotland

14%

Midlands

40%

Greater London

10%

South of England

**UK FELLOWSHIP
SELECTION
FESTIVAL 24**

“I loved being in a room of social leaders, it enabled me to feel the passion I bring to my role again. I feel energised by the depth of conversation.”

- 2024 Selection Festival Finalist

2 Depth of leadership

Create a learning environment that enables Fellows to develop and apply leadership tools that address long-standing issues of poverty.

Level: Fellow

100% of Fellows state that their **leadership has strengthened**

“The programme has enabled me, a person with no experience in leading a business, to understand what drives others to change, how my own perceptions and experiences might be limiting my impact as a leader and give me the confidence to take Able2B forward to the next level of impact.”

Rachael Hutchinson
Co-Founder, Able2B

Level: Fellow's organisation

94% of Fellows state that their **ability to achieve organisational goals has improved**

“One of the key takeaways for me was learning to step back and “stand on the balcony” to ensure I had a clear perspective on what I wanted to achieve as a leader, rather than being directly involved in the drama of day-to-day tasks. As a result, I’ve been able to work with my senior team to develop a longer-term strategic plan.”

Emmanuel Akpan-Inwang
Founder, Lighthouse Pedagogy Trust

Level: Society

88% of Fellows state that their **capacity to create social impact has deepened**

“I’ve gained frameworks and tools that help navigate complex, often systemic, social challenges, allowing me to better understand the intersection of our work with broader social issues like poverty, inequality, and social injustice.”

Michelle Hill
CEO, TLC: Talk, Listen, Change

Strengthening leadership capacity

100%

state the programme has **significantly increased** their ability to have **courageous conversations** that bridge across lines of difference such as politics, class, and race

94%

state the programme has **significantly increased** their ability to lead others to create **collective action** & long-term change

88%

state the programme has **significantly increased** their ability to **influence key stakeholders** through complex challenges

“Becoming an Acumen Fellow gave me the time and space to evaluate my role and my calling. It has led me to be even more determined to tackle the systemic issues that cause modern slavery. The course has enabled me to rethink how that can be most effectively achieved, now with the incredible support of this movement.”

Andrew Wallis

Co-Founder & CEO, Unseen

“As a leader, it’s about taking time out to reflect on my own development needs.”

Graham Whitham

Founder, Resolve Poverty
Acumen UK Fellow



Increasing organisational effectiveness

81% of Fellows nurtured existing partnership(s) to **expand impact or financial sustainability** during the programme

75% of Fellows secured **new funding** from new sources during the programme

50% of Fellows achieved a **new 'win' or 'breakthrough'** during the programme

"I've learned to listen more deeply, ask better questions, and prioritize empathy in my interactions. These shifts have allowed me to foster stronger relationships with my team and create a more open, communicative, and supportive work environment."

Faith Johnson,
Founder of Caramel Rock

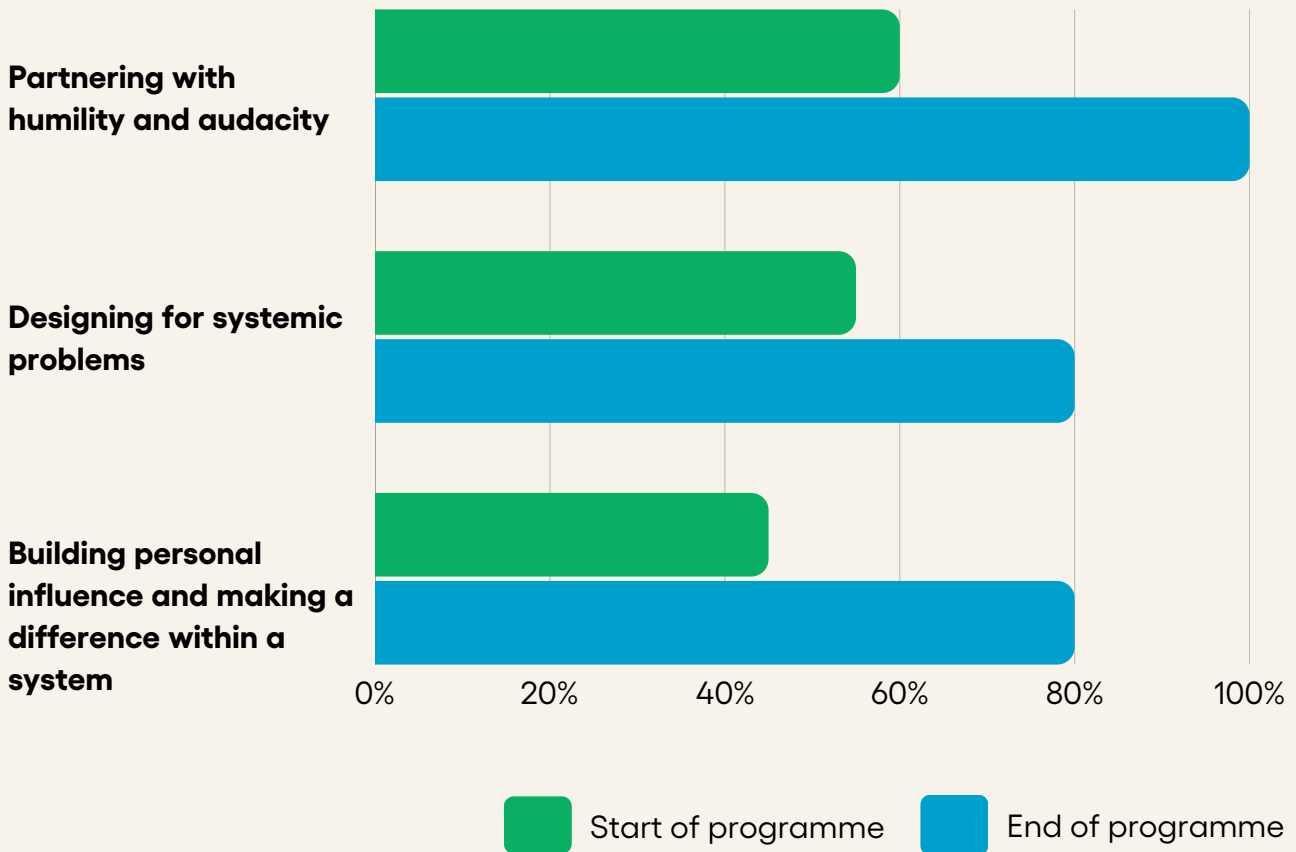
"It's not just about me, it's about other people's growth."

Marsha Powell
Co- Founder, BelEve
Acumen UK Fellow



Deepening social impact

% of Fellows who reported they are highly competent in this area:



"I've realized leadership isn't just about direction; it's about enabling others to step up and grow alongside me. I am now more adaptive and collaborative, focusing on listening, creating space for others, and navigating challenges with resilience.

Being on the programme has deepened my impact by helping me address root causes over symptoms, making our work more sustainable and focused, amplifying our mission to end youth violence."

Shaniga Marasha,
CEO of BIGKID Foundation

3 Depth of community

Connect Fellows with a community that accompanies them over a lifetime - enabling them to work together to access resources & relationships, support & expertise, opportunities & collaborations that deepen & sustain their impact.

100% of Fellows state the programme has provided them with a trusted community where they are able to give and receive support

Increasing social capital

On average, over the programme, each Fellow has:

Shared or received **knowledge and expertise** with each other

9x

Shared or received **funding and talent opportunities**

3x

Provided or received support during **personal challenges**

6x

Partnered or collaborated with other Fellows

2x



“Applying for the Fellowship is the best decision I’ve made in the last 10 years. I was in search of something I couldn’t quite articulate, and found it in the Fellowship: community, a greater belief in myself and what we are trying to achieve, and people to learn from and with. When I started the programme, I was just beginning as a first-time CEO. I now feel more established, particularly with better guardrails in place.”

Kannan Ganga,
Founder of YellowNest

“

Leadership positions can often be a really lonely place. The opportunity to reflect and learn from a cohort of peers has been so important and beneficial. The Fellowship process has given me time to step back and to breathe.

I've also been connecting with Fellows around practical areas such as fundraising connections, and a cohort member has joined my Board to help deepen our impact in Glasgow. ”

Michaela Collins

CEO, Possibilities for Each
and Every Kid (PEEK)





The UK Foundry

The UK Foundry is a diverse community of 65 Fellows working to catalyse the practices of Moral Leadership within their organisations and build a United Kingdom based on dignity. This year we continued to partner to deliver initiatives tailored to the needs of the Foundry.

Communities of accompaniment

Initiatives to support and foster collaboration between Fellows, including peer groups, event partnerships and skills-sharing.

Resources and knowledge

Bespoke training and development offers led by the needs of the Foundry, from technical workshops to leadership mentoring.

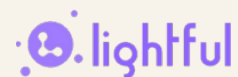
Access to funding opportunities

Invitations to apply for Acumen Angels and tailored introductions to potential funders and partners.

Amplification and visibility

Campaigns to showcase Fellows' impact, from blogs to speaking engagements with Acumen and our partners.

Partners include:



“There is so much good energy and solidarity to feed the soul.”

“A beautiful staging point in our individual and collective journey as impact change makers.”

- UK Fellows, at the 2024 Foundry Gathering in Edinburgh

4 Amplifying leadership

Fellows are the 'critical yeast' in a growing movement that reimagines existing systems and role models a new definition of success - grounded in dignity and human flourishing - which embeds the ethos of moral leadership across our communities, organisations and institutions.

Embedding moral leadership

+2,500

people outside the Foundry have **received the Fellowship tools** from UK Fellows

50%

of Fellows are **providing mentorship** to future leaders in their community

30%

of Fellows **facilitate learning discussions** based on Fellowship content with their organisation or community

Partnering for systemic change

75%

of Fellows **partner with schools or universities**

66%

of Fellows are **influencing public policy**

50%

are encouraging **open-sourcing or replication** of their initiatives



Charlotte Carson was selected to join the 2021-22 UK Fellowship as the Director of **Look UK** - a charity supporting young, visually impaired people and their families to thrive.

Since starting the Fellowship:

- Increased revenue from £150k to £450k
- Grown from a team of 4 to 8
- Volunteers have doubled from 75 to 150

"I hugely benefited from the Fellowship's reflective processes. The frameworks and support helped me consider my role as leader and deepen my capacity to drive the charity forward."

5 Scaling impact

Fellows are at the heart of building organisations that are scaling solutions to problems of poverty and creating a world based on dignity.

Our Fellows community has impacted

2.3m

lives in the United Kingdom

155k Youth educated

137k Individuals trained

39k Patients served

9k Jobs created

6k Partnerships built



Duro Oye was selected to join the 2020-21 UK Fellowship as the Founder of **20/20 Levels** - dedicated to building new pathways that enable racially minoritised young people to fulfil their career potential.

Since starting the Fellowship:

- Increased revenue from £100k to £1m
- Grown from a team of 3 to 15
- Scaled from impacting 500 young people to 2,500

“The Fellowship supported me to step back, look at things holistically and build my capacity to lead others. Three years later, I continue to meet with cohort members to share experiences and develop leadership. This Acumen community has enabled 20/20 Levels to access game-changing grant capital and opportunities.”

Shared learning

Collective leadership

We are committed to fostering collective impact by building collaborative ecosystems for leaders at the forefront of transformational change. We have spearheaded a variety of initiatives alongside our peers, culminating in the creation of the **Collective Leadership Group (CLG)** - a project which unites 50 capacity-building and support providers across the UK’s social sector, including Hatch Enterprise, UnLtd, Ashoka, The School for Social Entrepreneurs, and Fair Education Alliance.

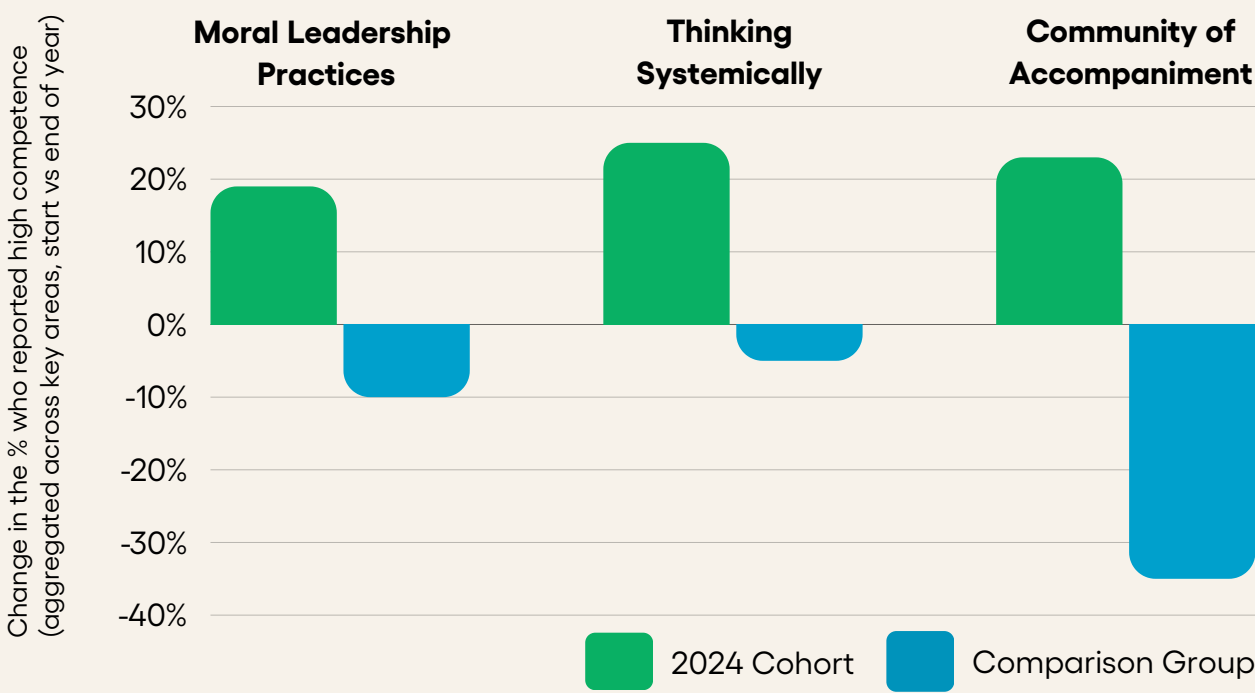
Our belief in the power of collective action stems from the understanding that the challenges we face are too vast and complex for any single organisation to tackle alone. As a founding member of the CLG, we are proud to help cultivate a more connected, collaborative, and innovative support ecosystem for underrepresented social leaders who are addressing some of the UK’s most pressing social challenges.

Comparison surveying

This year, we introduced and carried out surveys with leaders who applied but did not participate in the Fellows Programme.

The 2024 Cohort reported a ~20% increase in high levels of competence in systemic leadership practices.

In contrast, the comparison group - comprising of non-participants - experienced a decrease of 5 to 15% over the same period. Similarly, the 2024 Cohort reported a ~20% increase in high levels of community accompaniment, while the comparison group saw a decline of approximately 35%.



Evaluation approach

How we measured our impact

Quantitative data was collected through evaluation surveys conducted during the Fellows Programme and at the point of entry into the Foundry. Qualitative data was gathered through 1-on-1 calls with Fellows and session feedback surveys.

The Fellows Programme data includes 16 of the 17 Fellows who completed the 2024 programme. Comparison group data consists of insights from five leaders who applied but did not participate in the Fellows Programme.

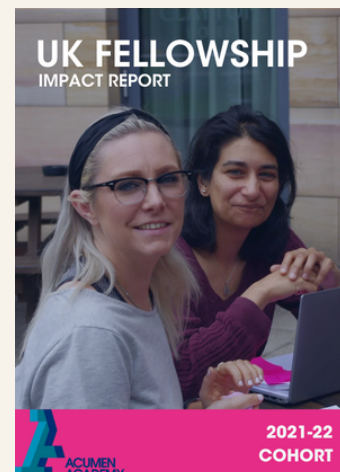
As part of our impact evaluation efforts, we aggregate this data to better understand the broader effects of the Fellowship and the contributions of our Fellows worldwide. This data is not used at the individual level and is not intended for direct comparison across Fellows.

We recognise that measuring the impact of leadership development and complex change is inherently challenging. Moreover, we understand that “bigger” is not always better. By prioritising only what is easily measurable, we risk perpetuating systems that fail to fully reflect the values we hold most dear.

Continuous learning

Each year brings new challenges and opportunities, and we are grateful to have our UK cohorts, faculty and Acumen’s global team as our learning partners. While the Fellows Programme has been refined over 12 years of data and feedback across 8 global regions, every cohort offers unique and powerful insights. In 2022–23, we made a range of changes to the UK programme, and we look forward to continuing to adapt to create the best possible Fellowship.

Past UK impact reports





UK partners

Thank you to our funding partners for believing in this team and enabling us to do our work. None of this would have been possible without the generous support from our UK funding partners and friends.



Segelman Trust



And individual supporters

UK Acumen Academy is a registered charity (1185457), and an affiliate partner of Acumen Academy. For any questions or requests, please contact uk@acumenacademy.org.