

Remodelling School Leadership

NCSL Leading Practice Seminar, November 2006

Post-seminar report

About Leading Practice seminars

NCSL's Leading Practice seminar series is designed to tackle issues at the forefront of school leadership and leadership development. The seminars bring together forward-thinking school leaders with policy-makers, researchers and other key stakeholders and, through interactive and innovative approaches, challenge them to articulate what they do, how they do it and how policy could support them more effectively.

Context

This seminar brought together over eighty school leaders and policy-makers to explore the role of the school leader, against the backdrop of the major changes that have taken place in schools over the past 20 years and that are continuing today, including through new accountability arrangements, workforce reform, 14-19 and ECM. New leadership models are already emerging to meet these challenges and the seminar took place in the context of the current Independent Review of School Leadership being conducted by PriceWaterhouseCoopers on behalf of the Department of Education and Skills (DfES), which will inform the work and recommendations of the School Teachers Review Body (STRB) next year. NCSL is also working closely in this area, through its work on succession planning, its research on models of leadership, the Next Practice in System Leadership project, and a current study looking at headteachers' well-being. The seminar posed the question: How might school leadership be configured to meet current challenges and future opportunities most effectively?

Keynote presentations

The Independent Review of School Leadership: where are we and where might we get to? John Singh

The seminar opened with a presentation by John Singh from the STRB which explained the background to the review on school leadership. It raised the following points:

- The origins of the review lie in the declining number of applications for headship and ageing profile of headteachers and deputies.
- PriceWaterhouseCoopers has been commissioned to carry out an in-depth study to provide an evidence base and ideas based on best practice. DfES is expected to remit the STRB to look at this during 2007.
- The STRB looks at pay and conditions; its remit extends only to school teachers.

New models of school leadership: leading for continuity, change and well-being. Geoff Southworth

Geoff Southworth, Deputy Chief Executive at NCSL, outlined the current knowledge base on school leadership. Seven sets of insights into this knowledge base were explained:

1. **Context matters** – the context of England's schools is unique and distinct, as is the context of each individual school. We need solutions fit for our purposes and we need to be cautious of cross-cultural borrowing.
2. **Leaders of learning** – the core purpose of the school is teaching and learning. This requires learning-centred leadership and leaders who lead by example eg who talk the walk. It also requires leaders at all levels to be able to influence beyond their own classroom.
3. **Core tasks**. Key tasks of leaders include setting a direction, developing people and the organisation as well as responding productively to accountability. Core personal qualities of leaders include optimism, a positive outlook, agreeableness, emotional stability and motivation.
4. **Distributed leadership** – there has been much advocacy of sharing leadership and it has been shown to support school improvement more often than not. NCSL sees distributed leadership and system leadership as two sides to the same coin. The former builds leadership capacity within a school and the latter allows established leaders to work beyond the school.
5. **Leadership succession**. There are several issues to this area, one is the demographic time bomb and another is the negative perceptions amongst teachers about headship, despite most headteachers being

professionally happy in their role. There is also the current time span it takes to grow a leader from NQT status to headteacher, currently about 20 years. There are issues for the system regarding local solutions to succession planning and talent management strategies.

6. **Hard work** – it is clear that the current nature of headship is complex, relentless, with high levels of accountability. How sustainable is the lone head model in this environment?
7. **Polyphonic** – the nature of headship is varied and involves much juggling and plate spinning. However, good headteachers can also make one thing lead to another. There is a challenge in keeping all the balls in the air, which is seen as a positive aspect of the job by some headteachers.

Next Practice in System Leadership. Valerie Hannon, Director, Innovation Unit

Valerie Hannon outlined the joint NCSL and Innovation Unit Next Practice in System Leadership project. A definition of next practice was explored with best practice asking what is working and next practice asking what could work more powerfully. Next practice is aware of conventional good practice and its strengths and limitations. It seeks to take it to a new level; it is directed at serious, contemporary issues and as it is not yet officially sanctioned does entail some risk.

The 17 field trials run until March 2008 and will be supported in a variety of ways including through access to a wider ideas pool, creative space to incubate ideas, obstacle removal through the Power to Innovate, and a gateway to departmental teams and real time learning and enquiry support.

Overview of workshops

Co-headship – effective, accountable and balanced?

In this workshop two sets of co-heads discussed their experiences of co-headship. There are two main types of co-headship: two full-time headteachers and two job-share headteachers. There are currently about 30 examples in England. The benefits outlined included the opportunity to balance work with family commitments, retaining experienced teachers as heads and allowing new teachers to enter headship in a supportive environment. It was also stated that risk-taking is easier and there is greater time for reflection and creativity.

Barriers to headship included problems with statutory regulations, national agencies such as Ofsted not catering for co-headship and a lack of clear advice promoting this model to governing bodies. It was also noted that peers can be doubtful of this model and good communication was the key to making it work.

Federations – a Local Authority perspective

Representatives from two local authorities, Leeds and Cumbria, discussed their experiences of federated models and its implications for 14-19 delivery.

It was noted by the local authority staff that the best change programmes are co-constructed, working with schools rather than doing things to them. The local authority staff explained that any change agenda places huge demands on leaders and there is an increasing expectation for local authorities to encourage collaboration and debate around new models of leadership. It was debated whether collaboration should be written into contracts and whether accountability needs to be re-defined to recognise system leadership. The key issue for both local authorities was whether these new models of leadership actually enable schools to deliver better outcomes.

Next Practice for Federations

This workshop looked at a federated group of academies in London. One of the chief executives of the federation and a principal talked about the benefits and challenges of working in a federation. The main benefits outlined were financial considerations from economies of scale, a wider pool of resources, using a brand concept to help struggling schools and brand recognition securing trust and buy-in from the community. This model was seen to increase opportunities for leadership while reducing the risk for new leaders. Challenges which have come to light are a lack of understanding about federations by other organisations. It has also needed work to help the schools to view each other as partners rather than competitors and ensure staff are fully on-board.

Next Practice for ECM and Inclusion

This workshop explored the unique context of an education village, which is a new building housing a federation of a primary, secondary and special school. The village is led by a chief executive and a leadership team built around the five ECM outcomes. There are directors of business, teaching and learning, community, inclusion as well as pupil engagement and well-being. The business director does not hold qualified teacher status (QTS) and the village sees it feasible that a business director without QTS could eventually become the chief executive.

Many issues were brought to light in relation to non teaching staff holding leadership positions. This included the need for greater flexibility in regulations to attract staff from a non-teaching background, an acceptance of innovative models, a review of the statutory role of the headteacher and a review of performance management systems which currently focus on the needs of teaching staff.

Next Practice – issues and scenarios for governance

In this workshop, a new development tool was used to explore a range of governance scenarios. Implications drawn from the exercise included the need to explore what form of governance is needed and what the purpose of governance actually is. It was also noted that the context influences governance and will need regular review.

Extended schools – a full-service model

An extended school manager who does not hold QTS spoke of her experiences in this workshop. She has taken on an innovative role to directly engage community stakeholders and involve parents more fully. The school has benefited from having a professional to focus solely on this aspect of their development. There have been some issues from the system, such as being line managed by the headteacher yet the head is unable to reward her due to placement on the Soulbury scale. Training issues were also raised; there is a need for non QTS staff to be fully familiar with ECM, however QTS status is a pre-requisite for most training courses.

Key messages emerging from the day

Throughout the day, three overall themes which emerged:

The changing nature of school leadership

It was widely accepted that the nature of school leadership is in a state of change. There are several system drivers for this such as ECM, personalisation, the 14-19 curriculum, and greater accountability for headteachers. It was observed that the current headship accountabilities and responsibilities are very challenging for one person to fulfil and this is why new leadership models are emerging. The new models explored during the day were all created by practitioners, working with and shaping new policies such as around federations.

The need for form to fit function and need

In the same way that the ground is responding to the changes in the system, each new leadership model explored in the day had been created to be fit for purpose. It was agreed that there could be no prescriptive models, there was no one-size fits all approach. For new leadership models to be effective they needed to suit the local context's needs. For example, the Darlington model created a leadership structure to suit the new building and federation's needs, employing a business manager to allow other professionals to concentrate on leading teaching and learning.

Challenging the status quo

Leaders discussed being able to take risks and challenge the status quo in order to be creative with leadership forms. Collective risk-taking as part of a federation or collaborative was seen to minimise the risk for individuals. Being able to challenge also meant acknowledging the local expertise and having the confidence to find a solution to suit their needs. One model could have many variants, for example no two models of co-headship are the same. So it was recognised that it was important to have the confidence to break out of the mould and create a model according to a school's context, function and local need.

Implications and considerations

In conclusion, the day provided a number of issues and questions to consider about the future of leadership models. This is a summary of the points raised for the STRB review and for the wider system to consider.

Issues for the STRB review of school leadership

- The name and remit of the School Teachers Review Body was questioned by some delegates. There is an increasing need for non-teaching staff to be recognised.
- If system leadership needs to be a feature of the 21st century environment, how can it be recognised, rewarded and developed?
- How can we open up a debate to allow new governance arrangements which are fit for purpose?
- Is the current system of remuneration fair? At the moment, the larger the school the more the headteacher is paid. However, headteachers in small schools bear the same accountability burden but have less capacity due to smaller leadership teams.
- Should chief executives or executive headteachers of a group of schools be paid more than individual headteachers? How can leaders of learning and system leaders both be rewarded appropriately?
- How can co-headship and other new models be promoted and accepted widely? Co-headship for example offers a number of benefits, including improving work-life balance. How can these benefits be communicated to local authorities and governing bodies? What training and guidance do governing bodies need about the practicalities of these models?
- What could the symbolic equivalent to Planning, Preparation and Assessment (PPA) time be for headteachers, to enable them to play an increasingly important strategic role?
- Can incentives be offered to encourage schools to develop succession planning, for example by allowing deputies to 'step up' while existing heads work beyond the school?
- Can there be a greater flexibility on statutory requirements to allow new models of leadership to occur more easily? Can there be a clear statutory statement to allow two headteachers not just one?
- There is a tension between equal opportunities and succession planning – is it helpful that all headteacher positions are advertised nationally?
- How can we get schools to collaborate more and compete less? Can collaboration be written into employment contracts?

Questions for the system

- How can we find ways of involving bursars and other non QTS staff to share accountability and make the headteacher's role more realistic?
- Do performance management systems need to be reviewed to include the needs of non QTS staff? How can there be equality between QTS and non-QTS pay structures?
- How can the system foster and create sustainable succession planning models?
- How can governance be fit for purpose and enable, not block, innovation?
- How do you pin down accountability in a collaborative? Could Ofsted inspect system leadership and achievement across a group of schools?
- The role of the local authority is changing, should part of their role be to broker collaborative arrangements?
- What training can be offered to non-QTS staff? Should all staff regardless of teacher status have training on ECM?
- Is the current training for school governors adequate to enable them to fulfil their role fully?

Thanks

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