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Internships: leadership learning through placements

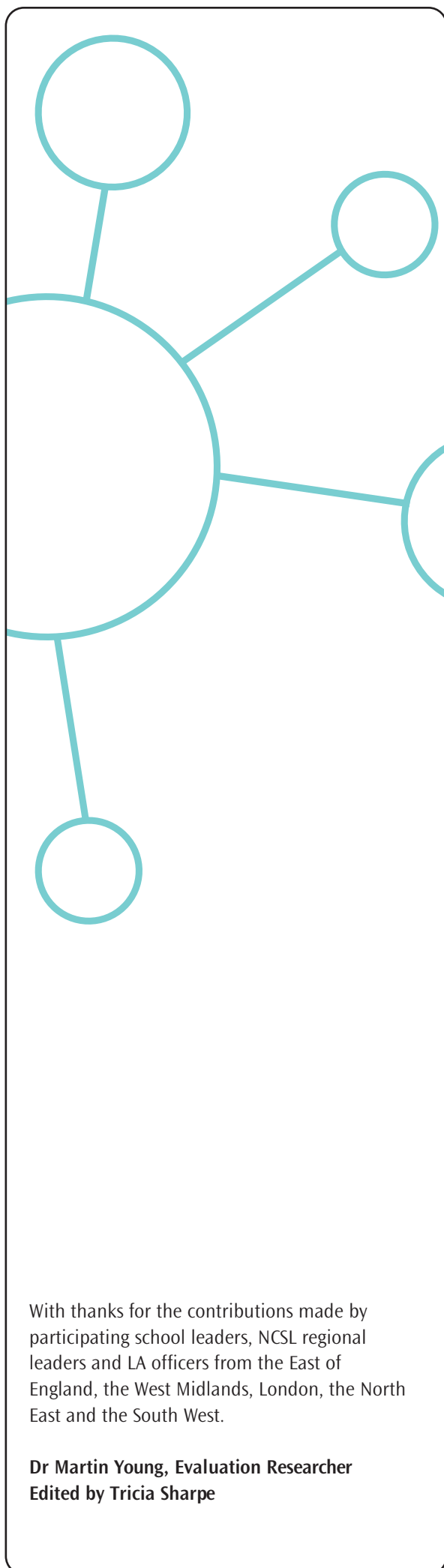
Leaders learning from practice

NCSL's Leadership Network
Led by the voice of practice

Regional initiatives 2006-07

EDUCATIONAL
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Special initiative



Leaders learning from practice

The National College for School Leadership's (NCSL) Leadership Network exists to support school leaders in finding local solutions to national issues. This series of booklets aims to share what leaders working in regional networks have learnt through some specific initiatives.

NCSL's Leadership Network

The Leadership Network aims to represent school leaders from all phases, as active members of the College, contributing to leadership learning and drawing policy issues from professional practice. Building on its ability to link policy and practice, the Network's aspiration is to bring the best of school leadership into local, regional and national debate. Full membership is open to all school leaders. In addition, others involved in education-related roles such as local authority (LA) officers, education consultants, higher education institution (HEI) staff and those working in an international context are able to join the Network as associate members. Two regional leaders in each region lead the Network. They are serving headteachers who work part time for two years, promoting the Network and engaging other school leaders.

The Network was established four years ago. Membership has grown dramatically over the past 18 months, rising from 488 to 9,000 between June 2006 and March 2008.

Regional initiatives

Regional initiatives are planned by regional leaders with other school leaders, to explore particular issues or to develop specific approaches on locally relevant themes.

With thanks for the contributions made by participating school leaders, NCSL regional leaders and LA officers from the East of England, the West Midlands, London, the North East and the South West.

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This booklet presents a digest of the experiences and perspectives of those involved in internship programmes in 2006–07 and the implications for practice. Given current issues of succession planning and leadership learning, its aim is to help you to consider the benefits of this approach and to implement your own programme.

Internships: leadership learning through placements

The regional initiatives that ran from 2006–07 included five programmes designed to enable middle and senior leaders to sample leadership in other schools. These were referred to as ‘internships’ and were summarised in the spring 2008 Leadership Network publication, *Expanding Leadership Horizons*. Their key purposes were to address the issue of headteacher succession and to facilitate a unique approach to leadership learning.

Successes have stimulated a high level of interest and action. In 2007–08, several regional networks are drawing on this model as the basis for the next round of regional initiatives. The experience has also seeded a number of local authority initiatives, many supported by NCSL’s campaign, ‘Tomorrow’s Leaders Today’. The new National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH) includes a placement within another context.

The purpose of this booklet is to disseminate the findings of research undertaken in the five regions in autumn 2007 and spring 2008 and the implications for practice. The research sought to evaluate the internship programmes from the perspectives of all stakeholders: the intern and their school, the host school, the local authority where it had an interest and the regional leaders. Lessons were identified and these are presented here as a contribution to current and future development.

The booklet starts with two overviews:

- of internships, outlining the aims and the process generally adopted
- of the method used for the research studies

The remaining sections are structured around the experiences of three stakeholders:

- the interns: primary, secondary and special school teachers and leaders
- the schools: those sending or receiving or both
- the organisers: local authorities and Leadership Network regional leaders

Each of these sections presents the findings emerging from the evidence base and implications for practice. Each concludes with some questions addressed to those considering or in the process of offering internships or placements.

You might use this booklet in different ways:

- Browse through all the text to give you a sense of the value of placements and how they work for each of the stakeholders involved.
- Dip into specific sections to learn about the experience of someone in a role like yours.
- Focus on implications for practice to see how you might improve your own placement planning and delivery.

For a copy of the full evaluation report, see: www.ncsl.org.uk/LNinitiatives

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The internship: purpose and process

During the spring and summer terms 2007, NCSL's Leadership Network in five of the nine regions of England organised internship programmes for middle and senior leaders. The diversity in participation reflected different regional intentions. The regions were the East of England, London, the North East, the South West and the West Midlands. NCSL's Leadership Network regions provided funding to help with associated costs, especially cover.

The key purpose of the programme was to address imminent succession planning difficulties in England, forecast to begin in 2009. The intention of the programme was to provide school leaders with personalised leadership development experiences in other schools or, in a very small number of instances, other education settings, such as an LA department. The internship normally lasted a week. As a result of the programme, it was hoped that interns would be better leaders, and leaders more likely to apply in the future for more senior positions, including headship.

The programmes were aimed at all school sectors: primary, secondary and special. Over 100 school leaders took part. A similar number of schools participated, either sending interns, receiving interns, or doing both. The vast majority of the participating schools were state schools.

Interviews with regional leaders in all five areas indicated that most used a similar process model. The concept was initially developed in the South West from experience of job swaps and then further elaborated through debate by the regional leaders with support from NCSL.

At the end of the process, all schools expressed an interest in taking part in a similar programme again, and those who were only involved in either sending or receiving were keen to expand their participation to include both experiences.

The internship process

- 1 Regional leaders contacted schools to gauge interest or used intermediaries as advocates, such as regional leadership centres or headteacher groups.
- 2 Regional leaders responded to interested heads and asked them to identify a potential intern based on criteria. Some heads also offered to act as hosts.
- 3 Regional leaders planned by writing protocols, designing an introductory or launch session, sourcing host schools and matching interns with hosts.
- 4 Regional leaders held a workshop to launch the initiative with the prospective interns and heads. In several regions, use of the National Standards for Headship was proposed to help shape interns' research foci. Some used a self-evaluation tool to help interns prepare. Many placements were to operate on a 'swap' basis so pairs of interns met each other and agreed next steps.
- 5 Interns visited their host school to talk to the head and/or their 'partner' about their aims and aspirations for the project, to discuss programme options and meet key contacts.
- 6 Dates and a programme were agreed. For the majority, learning was framed at three levels: for the individual intern, for the host school and for the intern's school. Programmes sought to reflect these intentions.
- 7 Interns prepared by reading key documents, constructing enquiry questions and, in some cases, drafting an information sheet or intranet page for staff in their host school.
- 8 Internships were generally 4–5 days, mostly consecutive. Interns kept reflective notes and some had report writing time incorporated. At the end of the placement, some interns gave feedback or presentations to their hosts.
- 9 In most regions, there was a final conference for interns and heads to share their experience and learning outcomes.
- 10 Interns followed up on individual and school-level actions. Some cross-school relationships have prompted similar programmes for other staff.



The research: aims and method

The evaluation study had four overriding aims:

- To evaluate the impact of the internship programme on interns and, in light of this, provide recommendations for similar future projects.
- To evaluate the impact of the internship programme on participating schools and, in light of this, to provide recommendations for similar future projects.
- To a lesser extent, to evaluate the organisational efficiency and effectiveness of the programme.
- Also to a lesser extent, to collect the views of participating LAs.

Two studies were conducted, each separately commissioned: the first by NCSL's London Regional Network as part of the initiative and the second by NCSL's Stakeholders and Networks Group of the remaining four regions. The research questions were broadly similar for both studies. The evaluation process used three research tools: questionnaires, semi-structured interviews (telephone and face-to-face) and focus groups. The evaluation report also drew on a study commissioned by NCSL's North East Leadership Network.

Research study 1 was conducted in London during autumn 2007 and was primarily a questionnaire survey of interns and schools involved in the capital's programme. The extensive questionnaire data were complemented by limited data collected through follow-up interviews with four participants.

Research study 2 took place in spring 2008 and was focused on internship programmes in the other four participating regions (the East of England, the North East, the South West and the West Midlands). Interview and focus group research methods were used.

The evaluation captured the perspectives of a number of key groups: the interns themselves (primary, secondary and special school leaders), participating schools (sending or receiving or both), participating local authorities and NCSL regional leaders who organised the five similar but not identical programmes. Through the two linked studies, over 40 participants from the five regions expressed their views.

Being an intern

Why were the interns interested?

Senior leadership team (SLT) interns were commonly on or coming to the end of NPQH but were unsure about their readiness to take the next step or wished to test out if their skills were transferable. All wanted to experience how another school's leadership worked and the impact of a different vision and school community on practice. Most were also seeking ideas on specific themes they could evaluate for their own school context. Middle leaders were more likely to be interested in leadership of a particular initiative or strand of work at whole-school and departmental levels.

For the research, interns were asked to think back to the time when they first heard they had been selected for the project, and comment on how they felt. The majority of responses were very positive, although there was a degree of trepidation. Interns also emphasised the attraction of visiting another school and seeing another headteacher in action. For some participants in both research studies there was a sense of recognition: a feeling that their performance and potential were appreciated by their headteachers or LA.

Interns' responses to being selected

'It was an opportunity I've been looking for. I knew there was potential in me and I needed to try and see how ready I was.' London primary intern

'Can I hack it somewhere else?' North East secondary intern

'Opportunity to reflect on what I was doing at my own school.... Chance to reflect on where I was at now and where I want to be.' London primary intern

'I was keen to experience "school life" in a different school and to spend time examining the role of the headteacher.' London primary intern

'Very flattered.... It gave me a buzz.' North East secondary intern

How did the interns prepare?

To prepare, interns generally took part in a three-stage process:

- 1 A launch meeting.
- 2 Completing a self-evaluation or other preparation to identify an enquiry focus.
- 3 A pre-internship visit to the host school.

Both studies asked interns for their views on the value of these aspects and most gave positive responses. There were more mixed evaluations of the pre-internship visits with several interns making suggestions for improvement:

'I think fortunately I wore a "big suit" to the (launch) meeting and I felt that I went in not filling it and I came out almost filling it. I think by the end of the project I could wear it confidently in the street.' West Midlands primary intern

'(The self-evaluation form)...was useful in posing the enquiry...I was able to detail everything I believed I was doing and then look at the gaps and what I wanted to go and learn.' North East secondary intern

'The meetings with the head didn't really happen until we were there and I felt this was a gap in the system. We needed to be meeting and discussing beforehand and establishing that relationship...the involvement of the head at a very early stage is vital.' North East secondary intern

What type of school should I choose?

The decision about the type of school that might offer the richest experience was significant. One regional leader described an intern who wanted to visit a school very similar to his present school. She asked him: “This is the one chance in your life, are you really sure you want to do that? You can go anywhere”.

Eventually the intern tried out a very different school from his own and he reported back that it was fantastic that he had been encouraged to do that.

What was the most valuable part of the internship?

Common activities undertaken during the internships were: reflective discussions with the head and accompanying her/him on duties, to meetings with parents and to external meetings; attending SLT and staff meetings; participating in any staff strategy events; and interviewing key staff. Some programmes included observations and discussions related to a specific enquiry focus, for example the introduction of a particular initiative or the leadership of special educational needs (SEN). Some interns made time to complete records or a learning journal. A critical contributor, appreciated in research responses, was the effort made by individual host schools to make the project happen and happen well.

A large number of interns emphasised the value of spending time with senior leaders from the host school, including the headteacher. Witnessing other leaders ‘in action’ and ‘in context’ was key to the success of many internships:

‘Observed how [the headteacher] dealt with parents who were unhappy.’ London primary intern

‘Speaking to another headteacher as an equal... I had a relationship with her that I could ask her anything.’ West Midlands primary intern

‘I was able to have quality conversations and spend time with a number of different leaders within the school.’ London primary intern

A secondary intern from the North East mentioned that the internship allowed one to “float above” one’s own role and not be “emotionally tied to being part of a team”. A primary intern noted something similar: she commented that within your own school you get drawn into the daily realities of running an organisation but an internship in a host school allows you to take a more strategic view of leadership. Linked to the theme of time away from teaching and children was the sense that the internship enabled colleagues to reflect more.

Comparisons with other leadership development

When asked to consider the internship and compare it with other forms of leadership development, such as school-based events or LA courses, interns identified a number of differences. Interestingly, two of the five interns spoken to could not compare the internship with other leadership training because it was the first they had ever experienced. One of these reported that the senior team in her school had now realised that leadership development should start earlier.

Factors noted were that it was “real” and hands on, that learning was context-based and it was “self-driven, once we’d had our first day we were in charge of what the learning was about ... in terms of quality of learning I was in charge of that and if I hadn’t a good experience there was no-one to blame but myself”

North East secondary intern

What was the impact of the internship?

The five-region internship programmes were predicated on the power of personalised leadership learning. As one of the interviewees stated, it was her “own learning”: she was in the driving seat; she was defining her own needs. However, some common themes emerged.

When asked to identify the key leadership lessons from the week, frequently noted were leadership styles and leadership roles. There was also an emphasis on individual school context and transferability of skills:

‘Acknowledge that leadership roles come in different packages and that there is not one fit for all schools.’
London primary intern

A secondary intern from the South West questioned whether it was easy to dress yourself in a leadership style simply because a context may require it. Equating a leadership style with a piece of clothing, her critique was: “You can’t just put on a hat”.

A North East secondary intern commented how, on returning from the internship, she was now more self-aware: “Very much more conscious of what I was doing in terms of leadership where prior to that it was all automatic pilot”.

In listing personal learning, a boost to confidence and self-belief came through in a number of responses:

‘That I can do it! Seeing leadership in action helped me to gain a knowledge and understanding of how to lead, and a confidence that it can be achieved within my own career.’ London primary intern

When asked if they were better leaders following the internship programme, 12 out of 14 (86 per cent) of the London interns believed they had improved. Responses from respondents in research study 2 were similarly strong. Interns involved in both studies were asked to define in what ways they had improved. Again, increased confidence was noted and there was a sense that new ideas and leadership strategies had been learned and could be trialled. One London intern mentioned how her headteacher was treating her differently since her return: “My head has involved me more in management decisions and I believe this is because in my internship school I was in discussion with the head on many different management decisions”. Two middle leader interns were more doubtful. One felt little had been transferable and she would find it difficult to make changes without more management time.

The experience convinced many that they were able to take more steps up the career ladder. When asked in the London research study whether following the internship they were more likely to apply for a more senior post, 10 out of 14 (71 per cent) replied yes. Moreover, when asked whether the internship had made them more likely to apply for headship, nearly 50 per cent (6 out of 14) agreed.

Implications for practice: being an intern

To help optimise the benefits of this experience, the interns suggested that the following should be in place:

- Encouragement to interns to challenge themselves and move out of their comfort zone. It would be beneficial for internships to be in a contrasting school to their own (for example, size, intake, leadership style).
- A launch event for all stakeholders that explains the programme aims and format, and facilitates preparation and relationship building between prospective partners.
- Clear guidelines about the terms of the internship. Interns and host schools (including headteachers) need to understand their roles and the required or desired outcomes.
- Mechanisms and/or tools to help the intern prepare, for example use of a self-evaluation form, a meeting with the headteacher or senior management of their own school to identify possible foci that combine school and individual needs and interests, or use of the Headteacher Standards as a framework for developing an enquiry focus.
- Recognition that time must be invested by the host headteacher and her/his commitment gained to contribute from the pre-internship meeting onwards.
- Joint design of the internship programme to ensure that the opportunities offered enable the focus to be achieved.
- Communication to introduce the intern and the programme to all host staff.
- Regular recording and reflection by the intern and at best reviews with the headteacher.
- Structured feedback built in, such as from the host school to the intern about his or her performance and suggested development points, from the intern to his or her own school about the internship and to the host school to report on how the internship has influenced his or her own school.

Options proposed included:

- Visiting more than one host school.
- Spending two days in their own school investigating 'home' leadership and then three days in the host school comparing and contrasting the two institutions.
- Follow-up sessions and/or continuation of the relationship at school and/or individual levels after the internship ends.



Pause for thought: being an intern

- 1 What benefits would an experience like this offer you in your role and/or to help your career thinking?
- 2 What would be your specific objectives?
- 3 What three key points would you use to make a case to your headteacher?
- 4 What ideas do you have to make it feasible?
- 5 If you are already involved, which aspects of practice described here might you adopt to help you and your school get the most out of the experience?

The schools' perspectives

How did schools react to being invited to participate?

When schools were informed about their inclusion in the scheme, they were positive:

'Very, very excited – and also felt it was just desserts for a teacher who is wholly committed to the school.'
West Midlands primary headteacher

'We welcome professional opportunities and the sharing of professional dialogue at all times and in many ways. This appeared to be a more exciting prospect in that it offered colleagues here, as well as our visitors, a more focused and concentrated period of time to work together.'
London primary headteacher

Taking a different perspective, a secondary headteacher from the South West emphasised how his school would ensure the experience for the visiting intern reflected reality: "You're going to come in and see the inner sanctum – the inner workings of a school. We're not going to play games. We're not going to keep you away from things".

Four schools noted the benefits for the host school. Some headteachers contrasted the intern's approach with the 'baggage' brought by most visitors:

'Within five minutes of meeting this person (the intern) I really thought – quite frankly as heads do – we can use this person. We can really use her critical brain so we ought to make the most of this opportunity.'
West Midlands primary headteacher

However, unsurprisingly with a new programme, some caution was mixed with the enthusiasm. An East of England special school headteacher commented: "(The interns are) going to be watching me".

How did schools select interns?

A number of selection processes and criteria were used to choose an intern, ranging from open to targeted. Some heads would have appreciated more information about the programme to help them make an appropriate choice.

- Some schools advertised the internship opportunity internally with an application form and selection process.
- There were volunteers from curriculum leaders and the leadership team, who were then nominated.
- Specific staff were targeted, such as colleagues recently appointed to the senior team; those who had completed 'Leading from the Middle' (NCSL programme for middle leaders); longest serving staff who deserved the opportunity; those who would benefit from the programme; and those who were keen to move into a senior leadership role or who would be enthusiastic.
- Senior leaders used their knowledge of colleagues to select. At least one headteacher used performance management information as part of this process.
- The LA identified a suitable candidate and then approached the school.

How well did the internship work?

All of the schools responding found the launch useful and most host schools arranged a pre-internship visit that they ranked as very useful. A primary headteacher in the North East thought the session at his school went “very well” due to a number of reasons: the school was well organised for the visit; the visiting intern was well prepared; the people involved got on well at a personal level; and the visiting intern wanted to give something to the host school and not just be on the receiving end of development.

The only common problem in the London schools was covering classes: eight schools noted this subject. Generally, the programme seemed straightforward. NCSL funding may have helped here.

However, a number of questionnaire respondents in research study 1 noted increases in workload experienced by the host schools. During the interview, a secondary deputy headteacher explained this was due to use of deputy headteacher time and preparing “full on” leadership experiences for a week. Schools spoken to in research study 2 expressed far less concern about workload. A secondary headteacher from the South West said the workload was “negligible because...the person was expected to join and work alongside us”. A North East primary headteacher said he simply deferred certain things because of it.

London schools were asked to comment on the effort made by interns to fit in with the school and get the most from the experience. This was similar to a question asked of interns about their host school’s investment to provide a successful experience. The answer from the schools was entirely positive. Responses to research in the other regions were similar:

‘When the intern came here...there was no edge to what she wanted and what we could deliver. There was no conflict of interest. There was a real sense that we both knew what we were talking about.’
South West secondary headteacher

In retrospect, school respondents judged the internship programme to be “more profound” than other forms of leadership learning. The main differences emphasised were the personalised and self-directed nature of the programme, the depth and length of engagement and the reality and practicality of the experience. A special school headteacher from the East of England, for example, highlighted the significance of the experience being

for a whole week. She believed a week enabled interns to switch off from their day-to-day responsibilities and that traditional courses did not allow this to happen.

What was the impact of the internship for the host school?

A number of host schools noted the usefulness of having feedback from the intern. Several commented on the self-reflection this stimulated:

‘What was a great thing here was that everybody in the team benefited, I think ... and that for them (senior team members) it made them think (about) what they were doing.’

South West secondary headteacher

Several headteachers commented on specific benefits:

- A North East primary headteacher reported that the partnership between his school and the intern’s school is continuing and involving a number of other staff.
- A West Midlands primary headteacher explained that an intern to her school had concluded that the amount of support offered by teaching assistants was having an adverse effect on the pupils’ independence. As a consequence of this assessment, staff from the mainstream host school visited the intern’s special school. This partnership continues.
- A primary headteacher from the North East asked the visiting intern to feed back on a development point made at the last Ofsted inspection and found the resulting view useful. He candidly reported: “I found out things I did not know”.
- A London primary headteacher noted the opportunities it provided for the host school’s middle leaders: “It gave (them) a chance to articulate in a very focused sense the nuts and bolts of the demands and expectations of their role and also led to some deeper discussion about the curriculum and its delivery...It was an affirming experience for the middle leaders in that their ideas, aspirations and indeed current practice were made public, discussed and shared with colleagues beyond their own school community”.

What was the impact of the internship for the intern's own school?

A large proportion of the schools considered the interns to be better leaders as a result of the internship. The reasons given highlighted increased confidence and a broadening of experience and perspectives:

'More confident to take a lead in meetings and discussions.' London primary headteacher

'Greater awareness of whole-school issues and how decisions are made and why.'

London secondary deputy

Furthermore, increases in imagination, creativity and teamwork were noted, as were a greater appreciation of the work of their own schools and a better understanding of leadership and management.

With regard to career planning, in London six out of 11 (55 per cent) responding schools thought their interns were more likely to apply for a more senior position. Less than a third judged that the interns from their schools were more likely to apply for headship. In both cases, this is fewer than the positive responses by interns themselves. During one of the London interviews it was clear that a school's succession planning had benefited from the programme. The deputy headteacher in charge of the internship process in his school reported that the returning intern had applied for and secured a more senior post, involving whole-school responsibilities. He said he was not convinced she would have ever applied for this post if it had not been for the internship experience. Her promotion has led to benefits for a number of staff, four including the intern.

In research study 2 the vast majority of headteachers thought their colleagues were more likely to apply for more senior positions. One secondary head in the South West had noted: "It has whetted her appetite, she will go for headship".



Implications for practice: the schools' perspectives

It was clear from responses that best practice for schools should include:

- An understanding of programme expectations and format so that appropriate choices could be made and the demands on headteacher and senior staff properly anticipated.
- For schools sending interns, a selection process that has a clear rationale in relation to the school's aims for the programme, as well as a desire to meet an individual's aspirations; support for generating the intern's enquiry focus; and a feedback and review process for returning interns to enable them to share reflections, their new professional development objectives and any potential for future school links.
- For schools receiving interns, a pre-visit to understand the intern's objectives and to plan; a programme that includes reflective time with the headteacher and/or senior school leaders; and an openness to responding to the intern's questions and to the potential of learning from them.

There was no consensus about the optimal structure of an internship with some championing the whole-week model and others proposing a change to five intern days split across two weeks with reflection time in between. Neither was there agreement on best choice of context. A small minority thought that the internship should be located in a similar education establishment so that there would be greater opportunities for the sharing of good practice, and the continuing of links with the establishment.

Suggestions for the future were:

- Only fund schools if they are willing to send and receive interns.
- Recruit interns with a high level of commitment to make it work.
- Do not make it too bureaucratic.
- Think about the timing of internships.
- Check on the quality of the internships.
- More focus and exploration of leadership styles.
- Use the experience to follow up the initial internship with another visit but this time with a narrower focus.

One of the respondents, a primary school headteacher, described a linked programme that she is considering in her school: "As the hosting headteacher it has provided an already successful model to replicate an in-house internship programme. It has given me the confidence to develop middle leaders with a view to 'stepping up' and me 'letting go'".



Pause for thought: the schools' perspectives

- 1 What might be the purpose and benefits of a programme like this in your own school?
- 2 What three key points might you use to make the case to gain governor support?
- 3 How would you stimulate and manage staff interest?
- 4 How could you make it feasible? Who might help?
- 5 If you are already involved or at the planning stage, which aspects of practice described here might you adopt to help individuals and the school get the most out of the experience?

Strategy and organisation

Regional leaders

All 2006–07 regional initiatives had to be arranged very quickly because of funding availability. The regional leader for the East of England explained the reason he chose internships for his regional programme: “The succession planning challenge did seem to be – and continues to be – the national headline”. With other regional leaders taking a similar view, colleagues across five regions developed a “common core approach to it with regional differences”.

Aims in the North East

NCSL’s Leadership Network evaluation in the North East described a key aim of their programme: “The internship programme created with NCSL’s Leadership Network in the North East was designed to enable the participants to spend a week in another school, working alongside staff, contributing to the life of the school and in doing so consciously enquiring into the practice of another school”.

Because of the time constraints, regional leaders adopted similar methods for recruiting schools:

- In the East of England, the regional leader targeted communication to already established contacts to get the message out to school leaders. He identified four hubs: the Eastern Leadership Centre, a private consultant who works with the secondary headteachers in an LA, an ad hoc group within an LA which eventually became strongly, although not exclusively, a network of special schools, and an LA secondary school leadership academy.
- The North East regional leader also used his established contacts to rapidly organise the internship programme including a diocese and an LA he was already in partnership with.
- The West Midlands regional leader used existing contacts, such as consultant leader colleagues. However, one key contact was relatively new to her: an LA officer in a neighbouring authority. She had recently joined the NCSL Leadership Network, on behalf of her LA. This contact had a significant and very positive impact on the West Midlands programme.

All regional leaders set up launch events and produced tools to help shape the interns’ thinking and preparation. In the North East, for example, the framework was based on three guiding questions:

- What do I want to learn from this school (host school) that will help the development of my own school (home school)?
- What would I like to learn from this school, which will develop my understanding of leadership and leadership learning and the possible role of being a headteacher in the future?
- What expertise can I bring to this school as an external eye and learn something on behalf of them that I can play back to the leadership of the school?

At post-internship conferences or celebrations, interns shared their learning with leaders from their own and host schools. Some regions used evaluation forms to get feedback and some asked for short reports that included learning outcomes. The West Midlands leader decided to link the internship programme with the Teacher Learning Academy (TLA) of the General Teaching Council of England. The TLA enables teachers to achieve formal recognition for continuing professional development (CPD) work they are involved with through writing up CPD activities.

Learning in the East of England

'Headlines from the learning' presented in the East of England mentioned:

- Time for reflection and an opportunity to refocus.
- An ability to articulate their own vision.
- Experience of a different LA. When you go out of county (LA) interns could be a little "braver and bolder".
- To experience the influence of someone else rather than just their own headteacher (this was not that they did not want the influence of their own headteachers but another perspective was useful).
- "The ability to really be far more honest than they would be with their 'home head'" (regional leader paraphrasing interns' views).
- Being in another school allowed some interns to be bolder in what they said because there was not the understandable "politics" you get in your "home school". Lack of "politics" led to a much more open agenda.
- Host headteachers appreciated the honesty of interns who were "energetic, aspiring people who just gave a different perspective".
- The school was continuing the partnership beyond the formal conclusion of the internship.

Local authorities

The LA officers involved were extremely positive about the internships, although there were linked concerns about continuing funding and sustainability. In broad terms, it fitted well with their overall ambitions for leadership development in their respective areas and their present needs that included succession planning. The LA officer from the North East explained why she was interested in her LA taking part in the programme:

'Because it's my responsibility to develop leadership in the Authority and you're always looking for new routes to do it and this sounded like a great opportunity.'

With regard to selection of schools, she explained that because there was very short notice of the programme she had used her knowledge and the knowledge of LA advisers to identify people, rather than her preferred approach, which is to invite all schools to nominate colleagues:

"We looked at people who we were aware of were on the cusp of or already looking for move to headship...so actually what we did was very, very quickly...come on let's think who do we know at that level, who's applying already but, equally, who do we think might possibly need a nudge".

In the West Midlands, the officer from one LA explained her approach to selection: "I decided to whiz a letter out to heads...wrote out to heads explained, you know, what we were doing and asked them to send back nominations". She was "pretty overwhelmed" by the response from headteachers in the LA: far more nominations than she was expecting. This is evidence that the notion of internship, a relatively new concept in English schools, immediately resonated with colleagues. The key target audience in the West Midlands was middle leaders.

The conditions for 'growing leaders'

The officer from the West Midlands spoke about the type of programme they provided in 2006/07:

'I think the interesting thing was the risk factor... We were very conscious we're working with people who had been nominated by their heads as potential school leaders ... that was a real virtue the fact that we didn't spoon-feed and the project was called "growing leaders" and we watched them grow.'

When asked about the response of interns to the programme, an LA officer in the East of England region said it was “overwhelmingly positive” and that some of the comments on evaluation sheets were very powerful. In his view it provided interns with opportunities for “getting close to leadership”. He remarked on the openness of some of the headteachers during the process and that the shadowing of the headteachers had been a key aspect of the programme. He also commented on the significance of spending a sustained period of time in another school. Participating schools had been similarly positive about the programme. They welcomed the interns providing new perspectives on the work of their schools.

The programme thus provided a practical and positive example of LAs and NCSL working hand-in-hand. There were real synergies at play. For example, the on-the-ground intelligence of local needs held by LAs and their skilled officers was combined with the practitioner-led verve of the NCSL Leadership Network. Moreover, the Leadership Network linked directly to the NCSL, a strategically focused organisation with a budget that could be deployed to support regional initiatives, within the frame of the national challenges to be addressed. There was a real sense of ‘joined-up’ activity. The criss-crossing of relationships across LA boundaries marked the ‘networking of networks’, formal and statutory LA networks hooking up with informal and member-led NCSL networks.



Implications for practice: strategy and organisation

Clearly regional leaders and the LA have the potential to play powerful and combined roles to shape local leadership learning strategy in response to local needs. For the foreseeable future, leadership succession planning will be a priority. All of the local authorities involved in this research are running programmes in 2007–08. There is some use of a combination of NCSL funding and an LA succession planning grant. Other LAs are funding programmes entirely themselves.

Listed below are the key features that respondents felt would characterise successful internship programmes:

- Explicit linkage to local and regional strategy and leadership learning needs.
- A rationale governing invitations to schools, whether open or targeted.
- Clear articulation of expectations of schools and interns, sent out to schools in plenty of time to allow for robust selection of interns.
- Guidance for intern selection: for example, from a member of the North East LA internship working party: “One of those criteria was that they had to show commitment to leadership training of some sort because we felt that if you were not thinking about leadership and had [not] actively sought some professional development in that area, then this was just going to be a week out of school”.
- The effective involvement of headteachers from the earliest stages of the internship, for example, headteachers invited to the launch event.
- Thoughtful matching of intern to host school, preferably to one with a different context, such as pupil intake or school size.
- A demanding programme: “we took them way out of the comfort zone ... right from day one”. Terms like “edgy”, “risk” and “excitement” were watchwords (West Midlands LA). There was a real sense of creativity and experimentation about the programme.
- Clear direction that the focus is on learning about leadership, rather than teaching and learning.
- Prompting interns who are not senior leaders to make sure they understand their own school’s leadership structure and workings first. This provides a benchmark.
- Monitoring and evaluation tools and processes.
- Emphasis on feedback: from the host school to the intern, from the intern to the host school and/or from the intern to her/his own school.
- A final event for all participants to capture and disseminate learning and to identify lessons for future programmes.
- Encouragement to interns and schools to identify next stage learning and further related opportunities, including maintaining links with the host school.

Best use of funding

One officer in the North East had chosen to use the present succession planning funding in a dynamic way:

‘Let’s really get good quality teachers in our authority some high quality CPD at high level leadership and encourage them to start to look for headship. So I decided actually that what we’d do for the programme, what I’d use the money for – and I’ve used the bulk of the money – for supporting interns.’



Pause for thought: strategy and organisation

For those not yet involved...

- 1 How would placements like this help you to meet the challenges of succession planning and leadership learning?
- 2 What opportunities already exist or could be tweaked to support and/or accommodate a programme?
- 3 If you wanted to go ahead, what would be your first step?

For those already involved...

- 4 How well does your current practice reflect the points made here?
- 5 What aspects might benefit from change or development?
- 6 If you wanted to make changes, what would be your first step?

The Leadership Network brings together the experience and ideas of school leaders across the country to create a powerful focus for change and development in school leadership. www.ncsl.org.uk/leadershipnetwork

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