

Realising leadership: children's centre leaders in action

The impact of the National Professional
Qualification in Integrated Centre
Leadership (NPQICL) on children's
centre leaders and their centre.

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Executive Summary

1. Overview

The children's centre initiative is a key part of government policy in supporting its aim to reduce inequity in society and provide the best possible start in life for all children, no matter how disadvantaged. The National Professional Qualification in Integrated Centre Leadership (NPQICL) is a unique programme designed to provide professional development for children's centre leaders so that they can respond positively to the challenges facing them and are better able to lead their centres so that services for children and families are improved.

The programme uses a particular methodology and is a challenging but rewarding programme to facilitate and participate in. It is this transformational nature of the programme that has had considerable impact on participants' attitudes, values and skills as well as on procedures and practices in their centres. It has also had an effect on teamwork and staff development, and on the role that children's centres leaders are able to play in the local policy environment.

Overall, this is a highly successful programme and one that meets the needs of leaders in a turbulent environment of change.

2. Background

Children's centres bring together services in England for children under five and their families in new and radical ways. They offer a range of services that integrate health, childcare, education, parent involvement, family support and employment. They work with all the children and families in the community, in particular with the most vulnerable. In recent years, government policy has actively promoted an expansion of the children's centre initiative and it is planned that children's centres will be open by 2010.

Pen Green Research Centre and the National College for School Leadership (NCSL) were commissioned by the then DfES (now DCSF, Department for Children Schools and Families) to develop a professional qualification programme for leaders of children's centres, NPQICL. NPQICL is now established as the

appropriate leadership qualification for leaders of children's centres and the National Standards for Leaders of Sure Start Children's Centres are used in the assessment process for the qualification. NPQICL is an equivalent qualification to the National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH) for headteachers of maintained nursery schools.

3. Delivery of the NPQICL programme

3.1 Pilot and rollout

Forty-one children's centre leaders from a range of professional backgrounds and from all over England were selected to take part in a pilot of this new programme in 2004. Teachers, social workers, childcare professionals, health professionals and community workers were all represented on the programme. The pilot began in September 2004 and was taught at the Pen Green Research, Development and Training Base in Corby. It lasted for one academic year. Following the success of the pilot programme NPQICL was rolled out throughout England. In the second year of the programme (2005-6) there were 354 participants and in the third year (2006-7) 408 participants.

3.2 Evaluation of the NPQICL

A number of evaluation studies were undertaken over a three-year period to assess different aspects of the impact of the NPQICL programme. Full details of the methodology are given in the main report. The evaluations had two main strands.

An independent and external evaluation of the pilot and of the first year of the rollout undertaken by Henley Management College, using a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods (2004-2006).

A qualitative longitudinal study of a sample of participants undertaken by Professors Joao Formosinho and Julia Oliveira-Formosinho from the University of Minho, Portugal using a case study design, starting in Sept 2004 and finishing in July 2007.

4. Design of the programme

4.1 Nature of the programme

NPQICL was developed for a particular audience at a particular time. It is a response to the government's request for a relevant professional qualification programme for children's centre leaders at a time of rapid policy change and an increasing emphasis on multi-disciplinary teamwork and leadership capability to improve outcomes for vulnerable children and families.

NPQICL takes a particular approach to the challenge posed and is designed to be a programme that responds to individual leaders' needs and works with them to change behaviours and attitudes. It is a very different kind of programme from most other leadership development programmes. Not only does it take an experiential and personal approach, but it is unusual in having a demanding and highly structured framework within that approach. The framework involves group problem-solving of specific tasks in a pre-arranged order, set periods for reflection and journaling, assigned times for mentoring support, formal assignments to be completed, and a rigorous assessment process at the end. It uses conceptual knowledge to interpret and make sense of shared experiences after these have been worked through.

This is in contrast to most leadership development programmes where knowledge input is the first or main activity, and group work or experiential learning comes afterwards.

This is also a Masters level programme. It has a dual assessment process, assessing both academic achievement and leadership capability through separate strands.

4.2 Theoretical considerations

NPQICL is a complex programme underpinned by a variety of theories, concepts, beliefs, traditions and practices. It is this background and theoretical approach that gives NPQICL its unique character and differentiates it from the many other kinds of leadership development programmes available. The two key features of the approach are 'co-construction', where those actively working

in the field as well as those with experience in leadership development and professional learning are involved in the design and development of the programme, and the 'learning community', in which participants draw on the professional experience and understanding represented among the group and learn from each other.

The programme is underpinned by a strong model of leadership. The programme is designed around enabling participants to ask 'what is it like being a leader in an integrated children's centre, and how can I best respond to its particular challenges?' rather than the perhaps more traditional question of 'what is leadership and how does it operate?' Participants explore their own experiences of leadership and examine the assumptions on which their beliefs about leadership are based, through a series of planned exercises and activities.

The programme is aimed at multi-disciplinary groups of participants from different professional backgrounds and heritages, and its processes draw on the different values, understanding and knowledge which each can offer. A key feature of the programme is the attention paid to the distinct features of each profession and how these can be understood and respected, while at the same time, brought together in new and creative collaboration. In the programme, a knowledge of leadership theory is seen as complementary to the key processes of coming to know and understand one's own leadership and how that relates to the context in which one is actually leading. Concepts and theoretical perspectives are introduced and these help participants to place their own understanding in a wider context.

The programme uses a number of tools to enable it to achieve its aims. These include task-based group exercises, reflective journaling, and mentoring support. In addition, a large part of the NPQICL involves practitioner research. This offers a way of developing one's leadership capability through enquiry and investigation and also provides a powerful tool to help children's centre leaders involve their colleagues and partners in managing change.

5. Impact of the programme

The evaluation studies found that the NPQICL programme has high levels of personal impact on participants. Personal impact is shown in terms of increased self-confidence, greater knowledge about leadership, new skills, and changes in attitudes, values and beliefs. These impacts include:

- More confidence in oneself as a leader.
- More self-awareness.
- Better understanding of what motivates colleagues.
- Better ability to communicate with other professionals.
- New ways of relating to senior management teams.
- Greater knowledge about other professions.
- Insight into, and in some cases transformation of, one's leadership style.
- Ability to identify the most appropriate leadership intervention for particular circumstances.
- The skills to use different leadership strategies effectively.

5.2 Impact on leadership behaviours and practices

In addition to impacting on participants' attitudes, confidence and self-awareness, taking part in the NPQICL has led to significant changes in procedures and practice within the children's centres involved. Better communication with staff teams and improved organisational approaches to teamwork are also major areas of impact. Impact on practices and procedures reported by participants fell into three main categories:

- The impact on the way centres were managed and run.
- The impact in the way in which participants related to other members of the staff team.
- The impact on the way the participants related to external bodies and to their local authority.

The evidence showed that:

- Ninety-two per cent of respondents to the survey at the end of the first year of the rollout reported that there had been changes to working practices in their centres as a result of their taking part in the NPQICL programme.
- Different kinds of impact included changes to their own leadership styles, working more confidently with others, greater ability to empower staff and to delegate, more effective meetings, more collaborative staff work and improved team working.
- Journaling, reflection and critical analysis were powerful tools which helped participants to think through what to do next, or work out how things might be done better.
- The academic assignments undertaken during the programme were an important means of working through particular problems and finding solutions.
- Many participants had made major changes to the organisation and training of staff teams within their centres.
- As a result of the programme, leaders spent more time listening to their teams and dedicated more time to team building and team training.

5.3 Impact on multi-disciplinary working

There have been important effects on the way leaders were able to work with those from other disciplines in their centres.

- Seventy-six per cent of respondents to the survey at the end of the first year of the rollout felt more able to communicate with other professionals as a result of the programme.
- Eighty-seven per cent of respondents to the survey at the end of the first year of the rollout reported a better understanding of what motivates their colleagues.
- The impact studies showed that there had been a growth of mutual respect between professions working in children's centres. Increased understanding had generated respect and improved communication.

5.4 Impact on the organisation

There were important changes in participants' attitudes to their own roles as a result of taking part in the programme.

- Many participants reported a real change in attitude towards their roles and felt that they had developed a new kind of leadership based more on the concept of distributed or shared leadership.
- Sixty-eight per cent of respondents to the survey at the end of the first year of the rollout reported that they had learned to delegate more.
- Sixty-two per cent said they managed meetings better and that meetings were more effective.
- Eighty per cent had made some changes to their own working practices as a result of the programme.

5.5 Impact on teams as learning communities

Many participants now saw their centre staff teams' as 'learning communities' in their own right.

- A major theme in the longitudinal interviews was how an enthusiasm for learning generated through participation in NPQICL was transferred to teams.
- Participants talked about building 'learning organisations', 'learning communities', or 'communities of practice' in their workplaces.
- Many participants continued to apply what they had learnt after the end of the programme and sought to infuse their whole organisation with the skills to create a nourishing learning environment.

5.6 Impact on parents/carers and children

Many participants reported that there had been an impact on children and families which they attributed to their participation on the programme. It would be premature to claim substantive and dramatic increases in positive outcomes for children and families, but these findings do suggest that improvements in joint working and practice are likely to have an impact on the effectiveness of services for children and families.

- Seventy-one per cent of respondents to the survey at the end of the first year of the rollout reported a positive effect on services for children and families.
- Impact was mainly seen as indirect and as being a consequence of better team working and improvements in levels of parental involvement.
- Participants felt that their clearer vision, new-found confidence, improved staffing structures and increased autonomy had begun to affect the way they worked with parents and carers and that this was bound to impact positively on families and on children.

5.7 Impact on local authorities and other agencies

Many of the participants in the impact study had undertaken greater responsibilities as a result of taking part in the programme. They reported an increasing influence on local and regional policy making, and increased respect from other agencies for their understanding and knowledge. Many attributed this to the increased confidence, diplomatic skills and ability to deal with complex issues which they had gained from the NPQICL. There were also examples of successful negotiation and greater political acumen which had benefits for centres.

Some of the new roles undertaken by participants included:

- running a centre with extended boundaries
- becoming a tutor or mentor for NPQICL
- coaching and mentoring new leaders
- leading across two or more centres
- increased role within strategic policy and planning groups within the local authority
- being given more strategic responsibilities for shaping the development of other children's centres

5.8 Impact on the universities involved

Many of the university tutors delivering the programme initially found it challenging, both because of its content and its style of delivery. The experiential learning method contrasted sharply for many with the more conventional didactic approach used on many university courses and there were some initial concerns on the part of some university tutors about the content and pedagogical approach. However, as time passed most of the tutors and mentors found the programme rewarding to work with and many reported that it had also had an impact on how they delivered their other courses and that they were starting to use similar experiential techniques and activities in these.

By the end of the programme, most tutors had enjoyed the experience and had observed that the learning outcomes for participants were the same as or better than other programmes they taught. Many also felt that delivering the programme had improved their own leadership skills, that they had observed some very successful learning, that participants gained from learning collaboratively, that the opportunity to observe multidisciplinary working was useful, and that their own initial scepticism had been unfounded.

- All of the tutors delivering the programme who responded to the survey at the end of the first year of the rollout felt the NPQICL was a good programme.
- Seventy-two per cent found it a challenge to deliver.
- Taking tutors and mentors together, 96 per cent thought it an interesting and rewarding programme to work with.

6. Conclusions

NPQICL is a particularly successful programme and has real impact. It is able to change both attitudes and behaviours, as well as to provide for the acquisition of knowledge and skills for participants. NPQICL is a challenging programme to deliver, and requires significant facilitation skills to deliver well. There were some challenges in the roll out phase, particularly in relation to ensuring consistently high quality provision across all regions. The programme's creators worked hard to continue with the principle of co-construction as the programme rolled out and impressive efforts were made to improve and develop the programme in the light of feedback from the evaluations and the quality assurance processes in place.

During 2007, the NPQICL programme was re-shaped. The reshaped programme has retained the ethos of the current programme and remains a Masters level qualification. In response to the request by the DCSF it has focused even more strongly on the leadership of children's centres and integrated services to secure better outcomes for children and families, particularly the most vulnerable. The reshaped programme will be evaluated to assess how effective it has been in securing these outcomes.

The programme remains an important feature of the development of children's centres and has a key role in ensuring and maintaining a flow of competent and effective leaders for these posts in the future. It is tailor-made for their needs, is personalised, and is able to respond to ongoing change and challenge. It is also both practical and relevant in its approach. As a programme, it makes a unique contribution to early years leadership development, more effective children's centres and better outcomes for children and families.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Children's centres bring together services in England for children under five and their families in new and radical ways. They offer a range of services that integrate health, childcare, education, parent involvement, family support and employment and work with all the children and families in the community in particular with the most vulnerable.

What makes children's centres so distinct is the collaboration and co-operation of different professional groups, and the role of parents in shaping and driving children's centre services.

Children's centres need strong and effective leaders. They need leaders who can secure success and improve outcomes for children and families. It was in recognition of the critical role of leaders in children's centres that the government established the National Professional Qualification in Integrated Centre Leadership (NPQICL) as a new and discrete leadership qualification for this professional group. The introduction of NPQICL in 2004 marked a radical and historic shift in the potential career development and training of senior staff working with children under five and their families.

Although integrated centres which provide a wide range of services are by no means a new concept, it is only since 1997 that the government has actively promoted their development, initially as part of the Early Excellence programme and the Sure Start local programmes and now through the comprehensive and ambitious children's centre programme introduced in 2003. It is planned that 2,500 children's centres will be open by 2008 and 3,500 by 2010.

In 2003, Pen Green Research, Development & Training Base & Leadership Centre (Pen Green) and the National College for School Leadership (NCSL) were commissioned by the then Department for Education and Skills (DfES) to develop and run a professional development programme for leaders of children's centres, the NPQICL.

NPQICL is now established as the appropriate leadership qualification for leaders of children's centres and the National Standards for Leaders of Sure Start Children's Centres are used to assess the leadership capability of all participants when they complete the programme.

Introduced in 2006, the Standards set out the key areas of responsibility for leaders and define the knowledge, skills and understanding needed to fulfill them. The Standards have a variety of applications and are used for job descriptions and performance management as well as for NPQICL assessment.

The NPQICL is an equivalent qualification to the National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH) for headteachers of maintained nursery schools.

1.2 Nature and structure of this report

This report was designed to summarise the results of the impact studies undertaken as part of the evaluation of the NPQICL programme. Section 1 gives the background to the report, Section 2 outlines the methodology used in the evaluation, and Section 3 outlines the theoretical considerations underpinning the programme. Sections 4 to 6 present the evidence for the impact of the NPQICL programme. Section 4 deals with impact on the individual, Section 5 with the impact on the organisation and Section 6 with the impact on the wider community. Section 7 summarises the conclusions. Section 8 gives references to the sources used.

1.3 Aims and design of the NPQICL programme

NPQICL aims to give participants a deeper understanding of leadership, an increased awareness of the practical challenges which leaders face in developing integrated services, an opportunity to relate theories about leadership to their own practice and an opportunity to develop lifelong learning skills.

The NPQICL leadership programme is designed to build on leaders' own experiences taking account of the situations and circumstances in which they work.

Participants currently have a choice of two routes through the NPQICL qualification: a study programme or a research project. Both routes share a common core of taught modules at the beginning of the programme before diverging into separate streams. The study route involves participants working with tutors and fellow course members through a range of modules which include exploring the leadership experience, clarifying values, principles and visions and developing an effective learning environment.

The study route covers the following modules:

- Exploring the leadership experience.
- Clarifying values, principles and visions.
- Developing an effective learning environment.
- Exploring leadership styles and approaches.
- Making things happen.
- Leading across professional boundaries.
- Developing professional practice and leading learning.
- Managing change, innovation and development.
- Building community and partnership.
- Creating the future.

The research route, for those with appropriate qualifications and experience, gives participants the opportunity to undertake research focusing on their own leadership role and demonstrating a developing leadership capability within integrated services provision.

Both routes involve participants undertaking a practical leadership challenge in their workplace in addition to face-to-face activities and written outputs.

1.4 Delivery of the programme

1.4.1 The first NPQICL pilot September 2004 – July 2005

Forty one children's centre leaders from a range of professional backgrounds and from all over England were selected to take part in a pilot of this new programme. Teachers, social workers, childcare professionals, health professionals and community workers were all represented. The pilot began in September 2004 and was taught at the Pen Green Research, Development and Training Base in Corby. It lasted for one academic year.

Pen Green was established in 1997 as part of the government's commitment to promote a wider understanding of staff development and research into integrated services in the early years. Since 1997, Pen Green has developed a range of early years leadership programmes. Pen Green also had experience of teaching an MA in Early Education and Care which developed into the MA in Integrated Provision for Children and Families and an advanced module in Early Years Leadership.

NPQICL grew out of these leadership programmes and has been influenced by the work of NCSL, Social Care Institute of Excellence (SCIE), Skills for Care (formerly TOPPS), National College for Health Leadership (NCHL) and children's centre leaders from a variety of professional backgrounds. A key part of the methodology of the development of NPQICL was the element of co-construction – creating the design and structure of the programme in conjunction with professionals actively working in the field rather than solely as an academic exercise.

1.4.2 The roll out: the first two years of the NPQICL programme September 2005 – July 2007

Following the success of the pilot programme NPQICL was rolled out to eight regions throughout England; in the second year (2005–6) the course was run by eight different consortia of universities, affiliated regional leadership centres and children's centres. There were 354 participants studying in 15 learning communities across the country.

In the third year of the NPQICL (2006-7) nine different providers ran the programme for 408 participants, studying in 17 learning communities across the country.

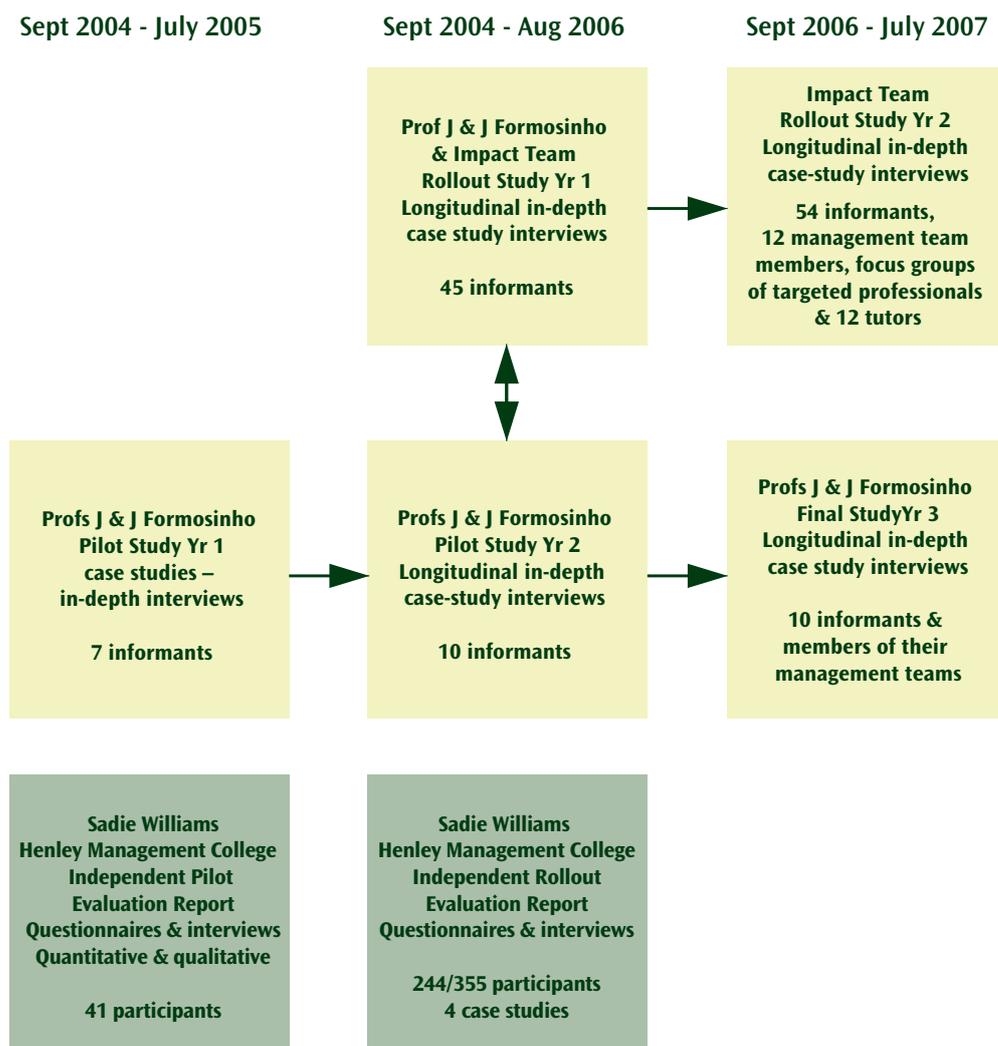
2. Methodology

2.1 Overview

A number of evaluation studies were undertaken over a three-year period to assess different aspects of the impact of the NPQICL programme. This section provides brief descriptions of these

studies, including the number and characteristics of those who took part, and the purpose, design and methods used in each. This information is summarised below in diagram 2.1.

Diagram 2.1. Evaluation studies to assess impact of NPQICL programme.



2.2 Independent evaluations: Henley Management College

Henley Management College was commissioned by NCSL to undertake an independent and external evaluation of the NPQICL programme. The evaluation began in September 2004 and ended in September 2006. It produced a number of outputs, authored by Dr Sadie Williams (2005, 2006).

The aims of the Henley evaluations of both the pilot and rollout were to consider:

- The degree to which the programme met its objectives.
- Which aspects of the programme worked well and which required further development.
- The effectiveness of the programme in addressing the perceived needs of participants and NCSL's objectives (Williams, 2006, p. 4).

The evaluation used a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods and included:

- a survey of all pilot participants

- a survey of all rollout participants
- in-depth interviews with all pilot participants
- in-depth interviews with a sample of rollout participants
- case studies
- a survey of all tutors and mentors on the rollout programme

Response rates to the surveys were 83 per cent for the pilot survey of participants (a total of 34 replies out of 41 participants), 69 per cent for the rollout survey of participants (244 replies out of 355 participants) and 76 per cent to the rollout survey of tutors and mentors (81 replies out of 106).

Table 2.1 shows the characteristics of the 244 participants who completed the first year of the rollout questionnaires as part of the Henley evaluation (Williams 2006, pp. 22-24). The characteristics of this 69 per cent sample were virtually identical to the characteristics of the group as a whole.

Table 2.1. Characteristics of rollout informants 2005-06 (n=244).

Gender n=237	Region n=241	Post held n=235	Professional background n=242
Female = 87%	NorthWest = 21%	Head of children's centre = 22%	Teaching = 24%
Male = 10%	Yorkshire & Humber = 15%	Sure Start programme manager = 21%	Nursery nurse = 22%
No reply = 3%	West Midlands = 13%	Centre manager = 18%	Health = 9%
	South West = 11%	Children's centre deputy = 9%	Management = 9%
	NorthEast = 9%	Nursery head = 6%	Community work = 9%
	London = 20%	Primary head = 3%	Playwork = 1%
	East Midlands = 8%	Joint role ¹ = 3%	Further Education teaching = 1%
	South East = 7%	Manage 2 or more children's centres = 2%	Voluntary work = 1%
	East = 5%	Nursery manager = 2%	Other = 4%
		Teacher = 2%	

¹ Head of children's centre & Headteacher, or Head of children's centre & Sure Start programme manager.

2.3 Longitudinal studies: Formosinhos

Professors Joao Formosinho and Julia Oliveira-Formosinho from the University of Minho, in Braga, Portugal were commissioned by Pen Green to undertake a longitudinal evaluative research study using a case study design to enable a deeper understanding of the course and its impact, through interacting over time with programme participants. Their impact studies started in September 2004 and finished in July 2007 (See diagram 2.1).

2.3.1 Longitudinal NPQICL pilot study, 2004–05, Formosinhos

In 2004–05 the Formosinhos initiated their longitudinal evaluative research study.

During the year of the pilot programme 17 per cent (seven) of the 41 pilot participants were interviewed face-to-face on two occasions and by telephone on two occasions. Table 2.2 presents the characteristics of the seven pilot participants who acted as informants during the pilot year of the programme.

Table 2.2. Characteristics of 2004–05 pilot programme informants (n=7).

Gender	Region	Post held	Professional background
Female = 5	London = 5	Head of children's centre = 2	Teaching = 6
Male = 2	North West = 1	Children's centre deputy = 3	Nursery nurse = 0
	East = 1	Sure Start programme manager = 2	Social work = 0
			Health work = 1

The objectives of the first year of the study of the NPQICL pilot undertaken by the Formosinhos (2005) were:

- To articulate an in-depth understanding of the programme.
- To identify different levels of impact.
- To interpret the learning journeys of programme participants.
- To identify the programme's strengths and weaknesses.
- To support the rollout of the programme.

2.3.2 Longitudinal NPQICL pilot study, 2005–06, Formosinhos

In 2005–06 the Formosinhos followed six of the seven pilot informants who were interviewed in 2004–05, and in order to make their longitudinal sample of pilot informants more representative of the 41 members of the pilot group, they interviewed four additional participants from other regions and professional backgrounds. This made a total of 10 informants. Each informant took part in two face-to-face interviews. Table 2.3 provides a summary of the characteristics of pilot study year 2 informants.

Table 2.3. Characteristics of 2005-06 pilot programme informants (n=10).

Gender	Region	Post held	Professional background
Female = 8	London = 5	Head of children's centre = 6	Teaching = 7
Male = 2	North West = 2	Children's centre deputy = 6	Nursery nurse = 1
	East = 2	Sure Start programme manager = 2	Social work = 2
	South West = 1		Health work = 0

In addition, a focus group was conducted with four additional informants; a deputy head was interviewed about the impact of the pilot course on the head's leadership; a small number of staff meetings were attended and senior management teams were interviewed.

Year 2 (2005–06) objectives were developed by the Formosinhos (2006) from their findings in year 1 of their longitudinal study of the pilot programme:

- To interpret the continued learning journeys of participants.
- To identify different levels of impact.
- To analyse the impact of the course on the style of leadership.
- To identify processes of transfer of learning from participants to staff.
- To identify processes of early transfer of learning from staff to children and families.

2.3.3 Longitudinal NPQICL rollout study, 2005–06, Formosinhos and team

Eighty four per cent (334) of the 398 participants who enrolled on the NPQICL programme in the first year of the rollout satisfactorily completed the programme. The 45 informants in the longitudinal study of the rollout were selected from the 398 who enrolled. The 'purposeful' selection of informants was designed to provide a representative sample across eight regions and 15 learning communities, reflecting the demographic diversity of the course (gender, ethnicity, region) and different professional backgrounds. Table 2.4 provides a summary of their characteristics.

Table 2.4. Characteristics of 2005–06 NPQICL rollout informants (n=45).

Gender	Ethnic background	Region	Post held N=43	Professional background
Female = 84%	White British = 88% Minority ethnic = 12%	North West = 20%	Sure Start programme manager = 28%	Teaching = 27%
Male = 16%		Yorkshire & Humber = 20%	Head of children’s centre = 23%	Health = 22%
		London = 13%	Headteacher = 19%	Nursery nurse = 18%
		West Midlands = 13%	Deputy head = 7%	Community development work = 18%
		South West = 11%	Children’s centre manager/ co-ordinator = 4%	Social work = 13%
		East Midlands = 9%	Child / Day Care manager = 4%	Army = 2%
		East = 7%	Children’s centre co-ordinator = 2%	
		North East = 7%	Sure Start deputy = 2%	
			Other = 7%	

Over the year, each informant took part in two face-to-face interviews and a telephone interview. Research team members (Trevor Chandler, Annie Clouston, Annette James and Sue Webster) interviewed the 45 informants and also abstracted information from their written assignments and documents from their settings. The research objectives paralleled those of the second year of the NPQICL pilot study:

- To interpret the learning journeys of participants.
- To identify different levels of impact.
- To analyse the impact of the course on the style of leadership.
- To identify processes of transfer of learning from participants to staff.
- To identify processes of early transfer of learning from staff to children and families.

2.3.4 Longitudinal NPQICL pilot study, 2006–07, Formosinhos

In 2006–07, the Formosinhos (Formosinho & Oliveira-Formosinho, 2007) interviewed the same 10 pilot programme participants as in the second year of their longitudinal study. In addition, to ‘triangulate’ the evidence gathered from the participant informants, they observed them in their work settings and interviewed members of their senior management teams.

2.3.5 Longitudinal NPQICL rollout study, 2006–07: Impact team

In the second year of the longitudinal study of the rollout, 15 of the 45 informants who took part in year one were unable to continue in the research programme. In order to pursue questions about the experiences of men and minority ethnic participants on the first year of the rollout, 12 additional men or minority ethnic informants were included instead. Table 2.5 shows the characteristics of the 2006–07 rollout study informants.

Table 2.5 Characteristics of 2006–07 NPQICL rollout informants (n=42).

Gender	Ethnic background	Region	Post held N=43	Professional background
Female = 83%	White British = 81% Minority ethnic = 19%	North West = 17%	Sure Start programme manager = 19%	Teaching = 12%
Male = 17%		Yorkshire & Humber = 19%	Head of children's centre = 43%	Health = 28%
		London = 10%	Headteacher = 12%	Nursery nurse = 21%
		West Midlands = 19%	Deputy head = 2%	Community development work = 10%
		South West = 10%	Sure Start deputy = 2%	Social work = 23%
		East Midlands = 10%	Children's centre manager = 5%	Other = 5%
		East = 10%	Day Care manager = 2%	
		North East = 7%	Health team leader = 2%	
			Children's services co-ordinator = 2%	
			Other = 9%	

In this phase of the study each of the NPQICL programme-participant informants were interviewed once in their work settings, and members of their senior management teams were interviewed about their learning from the programme and the impact of the programme on their leadership, the organisation and children and families. The strategy used in the second year of the longitudinal rollout study was that three members of the research team interviewed informants from specific professions, ie Trevor Chandler (2007) interviewed teachers and nursery nurses; Annie Clouston (2007) interviewed social workers; and Annette James (2007) interviewed those from health. Sue Webster (2007a) interviewed the sub-sample of informants who were male and informants from minority ethnic backgrounds.

In addition, each member of the research team convened a series of focus groups with other NPQICL programme participants from similar backgrounds as a means to follow up themes that emerged from their interviews and observations.

The research questions of each of these studies were:

- What are the leadership characteristics of leaders from a particular professional background?
- How is their leadership different from leaders with other professional backgrounds?
- To what extent is the impact of their leadership on their centres different because of that professional background?
- Is there evidence that a new professional identity is emerging supported by NPQICL?

The findings from the 2005–06 longitudinal study of the rollout (Formosinho et al, 2006) had shown that the course was impacting on regional tutor teams and their organisations. Therefore, in addition to focusing on the impact on informants from different professional backgrounds, men, and minority ethnic groups, a purposive sample of 12 NPQICL tutors who had been involved in both years of the rollout were also interviewed (Webster 2007b).

3. Theoretical considerations

3.1 Introduction

The NPQICL is a complex programme underpinned by a variety of theories, concepts, beliefs, traditions and practices. The main theoretical considerations influencing the design of the programme are outlined in this section.

3.2 Co-construction

The design of the programme is built on the belief that if leadership learning is to be effective, those working in the field must be involved in the design and development. This should include educators and practitioners from the various professional traditions represented in children's centre work, as well as those with experience in leadership development and professional learning.

3.3 Communal

The programme is designed for collective participatory learning, so that participants can draw on the wealth of professional experience and understanding that is represented when any group of leaders come together.

3.4 Time

The 10 month duration of the course reflects the need to allow sufficient time for participants to become familiar with the methods and approaches of the programme, and to build the quality of relationships with their colleagues that will facilitate effective learning. The timescale also allows participants to apply their learning in their centres and undertake centre based research as part of their leadership development.

3.5 The model of leadership

Many leadership development programmes are based around answering the question – what is leadership, and how does it operate? The NPQICL programme is designed to respond to a different question – what is it like being a leader in an integrated children's centre, and how can I best respond to its particular challenges?

The NPQICL programme encourages participants to explore their own experiences of leadership – of being led by others, and of being leaders themselves – and to examine the assumptions on which their beliefs about leadership are based. The exercises and activities of the programme provide a wide variety of approaches to this important dimension of leadership learning.

3.6 The learning community

The learning community is a key methodological concept in the NPQICL programme. Not only does it respond to a basic human need to connect and engage with others, but it can also provide the sort of psychological environment in which it is safe for participants to be themselves, to reach out with and to others, and take responsibility for their own learning needs. The learning community contract provides a useful focus for developing the awareness and sensitivity required if this collaborative aspect of the programme is to be successful in providing a climate conducive to successful learning.

3.7 Professional values

The NPQICL adopts an approach to learning which places the needs, feelings, thoughts and experiences of the participants at the heart of the programme. The role of the tutor in this approach involves a very sophisticated form of pedagogical leadership – to help each participant to activate their own learning resources in order to join with others to generate learning that develops their leadership capability. The deepening of understanding of the influence of values in determining leadership behaviour is a key part of the programme.

3.8 Multi-disciplinary working

Each of the disciplines represented in a children's centre – early childhood education, childcare, community work, health and social work – has a distinct history and tradition which influences professional practice in different ways. A key feature of the course is the attention paid to the distinct features of each profession and how these can be understood and respected, while at the same time brought together in new and creative collaboration.

3.9 Guardianship

Guardianship is an underpinning concept that recognises the implicit challenges of integration and asserts the need to ensure that each of the services provided in a children's centre has its champion among the senior staff. It is impossible for a head of centre to be fully capable in the professional practice of all the other agencies, but it is essential that there are senior colleagues who can act as guardians of the professional practice of each of the agencies that support children and families within the public sector. This approach to multi-professional working is a key feature of the programme.

3.10 Andragogy

Andragogy is an approach to learning which places the needs, feelings, thoughts and experiences of the participants at the heart of the programme. The role of the tutors and mentors in this approach involves a very sophisticated form of leadership – to help each participant to activate their own powerful learning resources in order to join with others to generate learning that develops the leadership capability of all. In this approach, tutors, mentors and participants become partners in learning, striving to create learning opportunities that respond to the needs and aspirations of each participant.

3.11 Experiential learning

NPQICL is concerned with developing leader capability and focuses on leadership as a way of being, rather than as a particular role to be carried out. While knowledge of leadership theory has an important contribution to make to this concept of leadership, it is complementary to the key processes of coming to know and understand the sort of leaders we are; how that relates to the context in which we lead; what specific challenges are currently preoccupying us; and those aspects of our leadership work which require deeper understanding and behavioural change.

An experiential approach enables that which has been internalised by participants to be submitted to rigorous examination. It encourages participants to draw on all that they have witnessed, all that they have shaped, experimented with and wondered at. It focuses on the nature of their own being and how they have brought meaning and significance to the incidents and events of their journeys through life.

The experiential approach is still an unusual one in higher education and in professional learning and it is important to realise this approach takes time and practice for comfort and familiarity to be acquired.

3.12 Theory and practice

The relationship between theory and practice is a vital one in leadership learning. The participants on the NPQICL programme are all leaders in children's centres and bring with them to their learning both their experience of leading children's centres and the need to develop their practical leadership capability. It is when they have developed facility in the experiential dimension of the learning that the concepts and theories of leadership come into their own. Concepts and theoretical perspectives help them to place their own understanding in a wider context, and to take account of what has been learnt about leadership by those who have studied it. Theory helps participants to develop the skills of disciplined enquiry and analysis, and to seek evidence of the effects of their leadership on their colleagues.

3.13 Reflexivity

Journaling is the key tool in the reflective process for NPQICL participants. Writing down how they are feeling and what they are currently focusing on in their work and learning is aimed at enabling them to slow down their thinking and to bring some sort of order to their often disparate and chaotic patterns of thought. It is also the main means through which they accumulate evidence of their academic and practical development. Another of the key challenges for tutors is how to help participants to value the continuous and consistent practice that is necessary if a reflective approach to learning is to be fully developed.

3.14 Practitioner research

Practitioner research is becoming an increasingly significant method of enquiry. It extends the reflexive process by offering a dynamic method of learning leadership through enquiry and investigation. It also provides a powerful tool to help children's centre leaders involve their colleagues and partners to manage change. Such participative enquiry helps all staff to engage in planning, operating and reviewing new approaches to practice. Research practitioners are not only helping to build a significant body of literature about the various professions and practices in the early years community, they are also challenging the right of professional academics to be the gatekeepers of professional knowledge and practice.

3.15 Mentoring

Mentoring is key to the philosophical approach to leadership learning adopted by the programme. It is concerned with helping each participant to manage their learning effectively by helping them to see the connections between their learning and their practice as leaders. All participants on the programme were provided with mentoring support, in addition to an academic tutor. Some tutors were also mentors, but many were not. In the programme, mentoring and tutoring are seen as the twin processes of support and encouragement for participants' learning and development. To aid this partnership, mentors need to be seen as vital members of the dedicated provider team in each region. Mentoring remains totally confidential between mentor and mentee, and the tutor-mentor partnership does not mean that mentoring confidentiality will be compromised, but the combination of mentoring and academic tutoring ensures that each participant can be provided with the particular pattern of support appropriate to their individual needs.

4. Impact on the individual

4.1 Overview

The evaluation and impact studies all reveal high levels of personal impact on NPQICL participants. Evidence of personal impact was shown in terms of increased confidence, knowledge, skills and changes in attitudes and leadership behaviour.

4.2 Impact on confidence

Both the Henley evaluation and the Formosinho impact studies reported increased levels of confidence in participants. The impact studies also found that increased confidence and understanding were regarded by informants as crucial foundations for their subsequent development as leaders.

4.2.1 The Henley evaluation

The Henley evaluation showed that 86 per cent of participants at the end of the first year of the roll-out reported a rise in their self-confidence.

Raised self-confidence was also reported as a major factor in helping leaders improve their understanding of both their own behaviours and those of other colleagues. This was expressed by one participant in the pilot programme in this way:

“I think it has helped me feel much more confident about myself as a leader. I definitely do. It is about understanding why I do what I do, and why other people do what they do. A deeper understanding of that.”

(Sure Start Co-ordinator, Williams, 2005).

4.2.2 The impact studies

The Formosinho studies also found that enhanced self-confidence and increased professional recognition by other professionals continue to be a hugely important theme. Confidence initially gained on the programme has developed and matured.

“I feel it is almost like the course gave me licence to be a leader.” (Teacher 4, Formosinho & Oliveira-Formosinho, 2006, p.27).

“The course validated and extended my knowledge, boosted my confidence and developed my willingness to be a leader.” (Researcher’s Field Notes re: Teacher 2, Formosinho & Oliveira-Formosinho, 2006, p.29).

“I think it’s given me confidence as a person, that’s the main thing. If I hadn’t done NPQICL I wouldn’t have even considered coming here to do this job. I am a leader and I have got to believe that.”

(Nursery Nurse 4, Chandler, 2007, p.17).

Increased confidence also promoted greater willingness to relinquish sole control and delegate.

“.....that was a big transformation especially from a finance point of view, letting go of complete authority over the finances for somebody else to control and then report back.”

(Senior Management Team 7, Clouston, 2007, p.14).

“It is a strange feeling, I just feel more effective, less overwhelmed and more as if I am influencing.

I am more confident about what I am contributing.” (Health 9, James, 2007, p.19).

The increased confidence of the informants was seen by their colleagues to filter through their organisations. Two informants expressed the view that confident leaders meant confident staff and that led to confident parents, and confident children.

“I am more confident now, especially with multi agency colleagues at work...other colleagues know about NPQICL and they recognise and respect it...”

I am better at presenting myself, I have got more confidence in myself and I think other people have got more confidence in me. That is self-fulfilling, isn’t it?”

(Headteacher 5, Chandler, 2007, p.18)

Confidence was also generated by leaders’ academic success. Informants in the impact studies understood that the course assignments were not about leadership theory in the abstract but about their own leadership and self-conceptualisation.

“It gave me the confidence to believe in myself as a leader, helped my confidence tremendously knowing that I had actually passed something that was at Masters standard.”

(Social worker 7, Clouston, 2007, p.13).

4.3 Impact on knowledge and skills

4.3.1 The Henley evaluation

Ninety per cent of the respondents from the final Henley evaluation reported greater knowledge about leadership (Williams, 2006).

A comment from the Henley interviews shows an example of a leader displaying her new knowledge and skills to colleagues with obvious success.

“I have known her for quite a while...and I have noticed, when she has been doing presentations at these meetings that she has obviously read up on a lot of things. She has taken information from lots of different sources and has obviously read widely about what is going on. She is obviously up-to-date with initiatives and things from either going to meetings or from reading and I find that the presentations are really clear, to the point and relevant.”
(Headteacher, Williams 2005).

4.3.2 The impact studies

Evidence that participants had gained knowledge and skills is also provided by their academic success. Twenty-one participants from the pilot course have gone on to complete the Masters degree with Middlesex University at Pen Green. This is not only testament to the level of commitment and intellectual tenacity of the leaders involved but could also indicate an enthusiasm for learning generated by the NPQICL programme.

Learning how to be a learner is an integral and fundamental element of the NPQICL approach. The Formosinho impact studies indicate that this element of the programme has been enthusiastically welcomed by participants and has been a particular success. Informants have mentioned this aspect of the programme at every stage of the impact study and have absorbed their relish for research and study into their own centres. Some leaders from the programme are now conducting their own research into their centres or working with colleagues to collect data and evaluate the impact of their individual centre on their children, families and communities.

“It has changed the way that I view the direction the school is going. It is going to have a major impact on the families and on the children.”
(Headteacher 2, Chandler, 2007, p.34).

4.4 Impact on attitudes, values and beliefs

Both the Henley evaluation and the Formosinho impact studies reported changes in attitudes, values and beliefs.

4.4.1 The Henley evaluation

The Henley final survey at the end of the first year of the rollout found that participants had benefited in terms of mixing with others from different professional backgrounds (91 per cent), had a better understanding of what motivates their colleagues (87 per cent), and felt more able to communicate with other professionals now (73 per cent). More than two thirds were relating differently to their senior management teams now (68 per cent). Eighty three per cent expected the networking benefits of the programme to continue beyond the programme's end.

4.4.2 The impact studies

The Formosinho impact studies also indicated that knowledge about other professions and greater awareness of professional status and their legitimate authority were significant learning outcomes that leaders ascribed to the relationships with other professionals established on the programme. The impact studies also revealed some differences between leaders based on their professional background. For teachers the main gains were in a greater understanding of professional diversity rather than in the understanding of integrated practice.

“I think there are some stark differences in what people value... We became aware of what we needed to do, prepare more for this route towards integration.”
(Headteacher 4, Chandler, 2007, p.27).

For the other professions both professional diversity and integration were of equal importance.

“What the course helped me with was to recognise that everybody starts at different points, they have different enthusiasms and passions for what they are doing.”
(Health 2, James, 2007, p.28).

There is evidence that the course has had a particularly strong impact for leaders with nursery nurse backgrounds on their practice in their work settings. They feel more confident and have developed a deeper knowledge and awareness of their own values.

In the interviews with those with social work backgrounds informants talked about the unique contribution of their profession to multi-agency work. Participants with social work backgrounds had a sense of themselves as political activists. The impact study shows that they are more likely than the other professions to see leadership as including political awareness.

I have always known there has been a need to be political in some situations and I suppose I haven't really wanted to before, and I might have avoided those situations [without NPQICL] but I do see my role as a kind of ambassador for children's centres in this community and across [the borough].
(Social Worker 7, Clouston, 2007, p.14)

Participants from health backgrounds were aware of professional bias within all agencies and showed a genuine willingness to learn about other professions. Multi-agency working was an area which motivated health participants. They wanted a greater understanding of other disciplines, their motivation and of the barriers they face.

Informants from community development backgrounds reported experiencing difficulties when participating in multi-agency working and cited this as a motivating factor in joining the programme. Their subsequent leadership gains were in multi-agency work and a new confidence emerged.

4.4.3 Personal impact – transforming leadership style

The Formosinho impact studies indicate that NPQICL has helped informants to develop and in some cases to transform their leadership style. Learning how to identify the most appropriate leadership intervention for particular circumstances and how to use different leadership strategies effectively was identified as a feature of the programme which continues to have a cumulative impact.

“What I have learnt through the course is that you ask the questions, you don't give the answers and that's been a fundamental learning point for me. What I wanted was for people to start asking their own questions not to be answering mine”

(Teacher 3, Formosinho, & Oliveira-Formosinho, 2007, p.63).

“I think the leadership bit has been actually pushing people beyond their comfort level. You are going to think and you are going to think about what the thinking means because that's - what we are all expecting is we are all in this together. The thinking is about how we are making it better for these children”
(Teacher 3, Formosinho, & Oliveira-Formosinho, 2007, p.63).

Some informants described the leadership style they had acquired on NPQICL as more consultative and less directive than their practice prior to the programme.

4.5 Impact on leadership behaviours and practices

4.5.1 The Henley evaluation

The Henley final survey at the end of the first year of the rollout found that nearly all respondents (92 per cent) reported that there had been changes to working practices in their centres as a result of their taking part in NPQICL programme. They reported a range of different kinds of impact of which the most important were changes to their own leadership styles, improvement in confidence, greater ability to empower staff and to delegate, better meetings, more collaborative staff work and improved teamworking.

4.5.2 The impact studies

Journaling and reflection are both elements of the NPQICL that are reported to have continued to have a strong personal impact on leaders and contribute to sustaining their practice.

¹ The Common Assessment Framework is a standardised generic assessment format for children with additional needs

Journaling brings together both personal and professional development. The aim is to use the journal for writing down thoughts, feelings and incidents and then use the act of recording them to reflect and interpret them. Reflection, understanding and critical analysis are then used to help the author think through what to do next or how things might be done differently.

The conscious effort to record some bruising experience or help clear a mental path through the numerous pressures of urgent and competing demands may not only be therapeutic but can also contribute directly to improved understanding and subsequent action.

Leaders reported that the experience of journaling had contributed to the changes in their view of adult learning which were a result of NPQICL and that this in turn had changed their understanding of how to support other adult learners within their centres.

“The ability to reflect on my own learning, both through experience and through theory has transformed my understanding of the learning.”
(Teacher 3, Formosinho & Oliveira-Formosinho, 2006, p64).

Journaling seems to have been the most powerful instrument for reflection. The evidence suggests that many leaders continue to do so and also encourage their staff teams to adopt the practice.

“I do still journal. It was a completely new concept for me. I found it really valuable and still do it when I have got a problem. Just the process of writing it down helps me think it through and having written it down I know that I have placed it somewhere. I know that I have parked it and then that sort of releases me to think of other things. Then I can go back to it with a much more strategic idea rather than being responsive to my emotions.”

(Teacher 1, Formosinho & Oliveira-Formosinho, 2007, p.47)

“I became the ‘journal queen’ of NPQICL. When I turn back to the journals written during the course it is a huge reflection. You can look back and you can think, ‘Goodness me, I was in such a state about that situation and I wouldn’t be now’. It shows your own maturing.”

(Teacher 1, Formosinho, & Oliveira-Formosinho, 2007, p.47)

4.6 Impact on multi-disciplinary understanding and collaboration

Both the Henley evaluation and the impact studies found that the opportunity the programme provides for professionals from different backgrounds to share experiences and find common solutions was one of its greatest strengths.

4.6.1 The Henley evaluation

Eighty seven per cent of the respondents to the survey at the end of the first year of the rollout in the Henley evaluation reported a better understanding of what motivates their colleagues. More than three quarters of interviewees (76 per cent) at the end of the first year of the rollout programme felt that as a result of the programme they were more able to communicate with or to work with other professionals (Williams, 2006).

4.6.2 The impact studies

The impact studies showed that the growth of mutual respect between professions working in children’s centres was reported by most leaders interviewed. Increased understanding generated respect and improved communication.

“There’s one family I’ve been working with since I started. The mother has got mental health issues and we thought that we were the only ones supporting her on a one- to-one basis (social services had been involved in the past but had closed the case). Gradually it emerged that the mother was going to other agencies and complaining to us all that she was receiving insufficient support.

“We convened a meeting of the family support worker, social worker, and health visitor to try and ensure that we had a joint plan and could ensure this family had the most appropriate help.”
(Family Support Worker, Formosinho & Oliveira Formosinho, 2007, p.73)

The Formosinho impact study of leaders from a teaching and nursery nurse background asked the following question: How has the NPQICL programme enhanced the development of multi-agency networking and collaborative skills?

Informants responded that the ways in which this had happened were:

- Three of the headteachers were very involved in multi-agency working through cluster groups and were taking the lead on developing extended schools, strategy groups and advisory/management boards. These headteachers were taking the lead in organising a coherent service between the nursery school, childcare provision and a voluntary organisation offering community education.
- One headteacher was piloting the Common Assessment Framework ¹ in her local authority.
- One headteacher was working closely with other heads of children's centres in her area who had also undertaken the NPQICL programme.
- Leaders from nursery nurse backgrounds too were strong on multi-agency working. Most had experience of working within different agencies such as health or social services. Eighty per cent of those with nursery nurse backgrounds were involved in their local authority strategy groups.
- All leaders showed evidence of increased involvement with other agencies, particularly health. Involving social work was a difficulty for 90 per cent of the informants.

(Chandler, T. 2007, An Analysis of the Impact of NPQICL on the Practice of Participants from a Teaching and Nursery Nurse Background).

Academic assignments were an important means of working through particular problems and finding solutions. One informant used the centre's poor relationship with health professionals as the focus of her study and brought together members of her team and local health visitors in a workshop to promote a more integrated approach. She used some of the exercises from the course and was able to get the whole group to acknowledge and value each other's skills. Further joint training and collaborative work to meet breastfeeding targets were the immediate results.

"I think it has provided a really good vehicle for getting to know each other, to learn how to take on other people's perspectives as well.

"The course itself was structured to bring people together in a multi-disciplinary situation. There aren't many other courses that have got that as a main target and it wouldn't work without that."
(Headteacher 5, Chandler, 2007, p.22)

5. Impact on the organisation

5.1 Overview

Taking part in NPQICL is reported to have led to significant changes in policy and practice within the children's centres involved. Better communication with staff teams and improved organisational approaches to teamwork were major areas of impact.

The Formosinho studies found that the greatest change reported was in the organisation and training of staff teams, and leaders spent more time listening to their teams, team building and developing their teams.

Many informants reported that they had changed their attitude towards their roles as leaders and were using a new style of leadership based on the concept of distributed or shared leadership. The follow-up research indicated that this change was being sustained and was also recognised by other senior members of staff.

In addition, the impact studies found that informants reported the particular importance of creating and maintaining an active learning community within their centres.

5.1.1 The Henley evaluation

Ninety-seven per cent of respondents to the survey of the pilot participants reported that their participation in NPQICL had led to changes in practice at their centre. Participants interviewed as part of the pilot evaluation gave concrete examples of the introduction of new procedures that they attributed directly to their involvement in the programme (Williams, 2005).

In addition, the final survey of rollout participants at the end of the first year of the rollout indicated that 68 per cent reported that they had learned to delegate more and 62 per cent said they managed meetings better. Eighty per cent had made some changes to their own working practices as a result of the programme (Williams, 2006).

Changes reported by the pilot participants fell into three main groups:

- Changes to the way centres were managed and run.
- Changes to the way in which the participants related to other members of the staff team.
- Changes to the way the participants related to external bodies and the local authority.

"I think the sharpening of the leadership and management skills and focusing on those as a specific aspect of children's centre delivery were real changes." (Programme Manager, Williams, 2006, p.59).

Seventy-six per cent of respondents from the rollout felt more able to communicate with other professionals as a result of the programme.

"I think we can find a common language now. We were a group before but we are now becoming more of a team."

(Programme Coordinator, Williams, 2006, p.60).

5.1.2 The impact studies

The impact studies found that leaders continued to attach particular importance to the role of a multi-professional learning community, both to a learning community of other leaders and to the learning community they had established within their centres.

In the final year of the impact study the research team also explored how informants' experience of their learning community on the NPQICL programme had been transferred to their settings.

All the informants believed that their settings were now learning communities and that the way in which they conceived and interpreted their learning communities was a direct result of their experience on NPQICL.

"We are constantly growing and learning together and co-constructing our knowledge." (Nursery Nurse 2, Chandler, 2007, p.24).

"We are definitely a learning community. There is no two ways about it and it is not just going from the staff in the centre to the parents, but from the parents to the staff. It is a partnership, a definite learning community." (Headteacher 4, Chandler, 2007, p.24).

Although the number of informants was small, the impact study did find that 90 per cent of the informants saw the learning community as including staff, parents and children. Leaders and their senior colleagues also saw this as a means of raising aspirations for children and families.

“Most of our parents left school with nothing and feeling learning was not meant for them. So that is a self-esteem issue, a confidence issue and our learning team are excellent at nurturing and mentoring people. We had the ‘learner of the year’ last year, nationally.” (Nursery Nurse 5, SMT, Chandler, 2007, p.25).

A major theme in the impact study informant interviews was how this enthusiasm for learning was transferred to teams. Informants variously talked about building ‘learning organisations’, ‘learning communities’, or ‘communities of practice’. Most informants shared an ambition to use learning opportunities in their widest sense.

“Every day should be a training day; every day should be a learning day.” (Social Worker 9, Clouston, 2007, p.14).

Informants talked about how they continue to apply what they learnt on the programme and how they work to infuse the whole organisation with the skills to create a nourishing learning environment.

“I draw a lot on the course now and I tell people a lot about what I have learned. It has made me aware that we all need to think about our own learning in order to move forward. So in order to move children’s learning forward we need to think about what that means for ourselves. What I now try to do is think back all the time. What was it like for me? Therefore what can it be like for the staff and then get them to think about what is it like for children. This whole model becomes a new model in terms of learning because in order to promote improvement or change we need to be thinking about that all the time.” (Teacher 3, Formosinho & Oliveira-Formosinho, 2007, p.62).

For some participants the loss of the NPQICL learning community they enjoyed on the programme has been significant, particularly in areas where there were few graduates of the programme:

“I have been tutoring on NPQICL so it has kept me connected. I haven’t had that sense of isolation but I can imagine if you are not involved in it and there isn’t a group of people who have a similar experience, it is quite hard to maintain.” (Focus Group, Clouston, 2007 p.31).

5.2 Teams and distributed leadership

The impact studies showed that the greatest change reported by informants in 2005–06, the first year following their NPQICL qualification, was in the organisation and training of their staff teams. Leaders spent more time listening to their teams and dedicated more time to team building and team training.

Informants in the impact studies had reported a real change in attitude towards their roles and felt that they had developed a new style of leadership based on the concept of distributed or shared leadership. The 2007 impact study revealed that this change was being sustained and was recognised by other senior members of staff.

The following group of quotations is from an interview with a deputy headteacher of a children’s centre reflecting on the impact of NPQICL on the head of centre:

“He is obviously putting into practice a lot of the things that he learned on the course. I mean he realises that relationships are the most important thing.”

“We have reorganised the senior management team and we are going to introduce a leadership team which involves people from right across the centre.”

“I think the course has had a huge impact on the way he thinks. He is very, very proactive and if there are any problems he will sort them out straight away, he never lets anything fester. If people are unhappy he will go and talk with them straightaway, if parents are unhappy he will phone them up and find out what the problem is and try and resolve it.”

“That is definitely something that he has learned from his course, the collaborative way of working.” (Deputy Head of Teacher 2’s Centre, Formosinho & Oliveira-Formosinho, 2007, p.108)

All the leadership teams interviewed for the Formosinho impact studies reported changes in their leader that they attributed to the NPQICL.

“We are here to empower this community but our leader empowers us so we empower the team and then hopefully the team go out and empower the parents who then empower the children. So it is a knock-on effect, that role modelling.”

(Senior Management Team 6, Clouston, 2007, p.19)

As a result of her involvement with NPQICL one informant introduced her team to the work of Hargreaves and Fink (2006).

“I bought extra copies of ‘Sustainable Leadership’ for the team leaders to read. Just the process of talking about something that excites you with the team leaders helps. It promotes their learning and their thinking and their ideas and has a ripple effect.”

(Social worker 6, Clouston, 2007, p.19)

In the impact studies one member of a senior management team talked of the underpinning values of the child-centred approach and how it had been shared by all members of the team.

“We have the belief that we are trying to provide a service for the child that will improve their life in the future.”

(Senior Management Team 1, Clouston, 2007, p.17)

Her head of centre talked about how those values for the centre had been originally agreed:

“We did some visioning work. It was very much in the style of NPQICL and I felt it was successful. I had applied it because of what I had learnt from NPQICL, that there is a clear value base about how we treat each other and how we treat children and their parents and the community.”

(Social worker 1, Clouston, 2007, p.17)

Staff at this centre felt that the explicit values adopted had created an atmosphere that had been instrumental in getting the local traveller community involved in activities at her centre.

“I think it is one of her strengths. She has got a vision and she has got the ability to see the wider picture. It was her astuteness to recognise those skills in all of us and to pull us together and also enable us to grow and develop in order that we contribute to the team.”

(Health 10, James, 2007, p.23)

“Everybody in the team is actually taking more responsibility... people are taking responsibility for finding the things that will help them do their own jobs better and understand the overarching responsibility of the job that we do here as a centre. So people who were education-based are looking beyond that now and are seeing it much more as an umbrella sort of approach.”
(Social worker 10, Clouston, 2007, p.23)

5.3 Different professional perspectives

The Formosinho impact studies found that NPQICL’s emphasis on helping leaders to understand their own and others’ professional heritage has had a direct impact on their centre leadership teams and on leaders’ capacity and skill in supporting and organising teams.

Perhaps, unsurprisingly, leaders from social work backgrounds gave high priority to the organisation of family support services. The opportunity to do preventative work with families had been an important motivation for these leaders to become a children’s centre leader.

“Family support touches everything this centre does at any time – this is something I have been trying to get my team to grasp.”

(Social worker 3, Clouston, 2007, p.24)

“I think that the whole ethos around the more consultation, more involvement, has perhaps embedded itself more in the way we deliver services and manage staff teams.”

(Nursery Nurse 5, Chandler, 2007, p.22)

Teams led by those with social work backgrounds were conscious of, and appreciative of the skills, values and knowledge that their leader brought as a social work professional.

“The way that she talks about families is like modelling how you can discuss these really difficult things, how you can show that you’re sympathetic and you’re warm but at the same time keep it all really professional.”

(Senior Management Team 4, Clouston, 2007, p.24)

“Her understanding and knowledge of social work is very evident and her working through the staff, the family support workers in supervision, passing on that knowledge has made our family support very effective, a very smart service.”

(Senior Management Team 1, Clouston, 2007, p.24).

6. Impact on the wider community

6.1 Overview

Both the Henley evaluation and the Formosinho impact studies found that participants reported that there had been an impact on children and families which leaders attributed to their participation on the programme.

It is premature to claim substantive and dramatic increases in the positive outcomes for children and families, but these findings do suggest that improvements in joint working and practice may be having a progressive impact on raising aspirations and achievement.

6.1.1 The Henley evaluation

Of the respondents from the pilot programme, 94 per cent reported an effect on services for children and families, and 71 per cent of respondents from the rollout programme did so. Impact was mainly seen as indirect and as a consequence of better team working and improvements in levels of parental involvement.

Some comments from the rollout survey illustrate this.

“I believe that any input at this level will have a ‘knock-on’ effect for children and families as a result of the changes that have taken place. What I learned about children’s centres in other authorities has enabled me to look at our current provision and plan for improvements.”

(Anonymous comment, Williams, 2006, p.40).

“My team work better together, planning and organisationally. They don’t rely on me so much. They have more confidence and are currently offering better services to families and children because they are willing to learn.”

(Anonymous comment, Williams, 2006, p.40).

6.1.2 The impact studies

As we know from research on children’s attainment the influence of the home learning environment is the single greatest determinant of educational success.

What makes children’s centres so distinct is not only the collaboration of different professional agencies and staff but also the role of parents as partners in their children’s learning and as members of governing or advisory boards.

The Formosinho impact studies found evidence of impact on parents and children. The leaders involved in the research reported tangible and exciting progress. Informants felt that their clearer vision, new-found confidence, improved staffing structures and increased autonomy had begun to affect the way they worked with parents and carers and that this was bound to impact positively on families and on children.

There was also evidence that some of those leaders who completed NPQICL have found new resources of energy and enterprise with which to build new and stronger integrated services.

As one headteacher who took part in the programme explained:

“...because it has changed the way that I view the school, the direction that the school is going in. That is going to have a major impact on the families and on the children. It is beginning to in terms of the extended services that are happening within the school now. It wouldn’t have done that if I hadn’t done the course, because I wouldn’t have been moving in that direction. I would be trailing behind somebody else.”

(Headteacher 2, Chandler, 2007, p.34)

Many of the parents who took part in the interviews for the impact studies experienced services as more coherent and integrated. They reported that parents felt more involved and valued by the centres.

Although it is difficult to attribute the experiences in the following quotations solely to the NPQICL, they do illustrate some of the strengths which informants have developed.

“This area was traditionally a mining area. I am a member of this community and at my daughter’s school they are on their third generation of parents that are on the dole. We have already made a big impact to break that cycle offering volunteering courses, running Maths and English so people can get NVQs, trying to educate parents in the education of their children. We are hoping that children go through school with parents’ help so that they can then come out of that chain and break into society and have a chance of getting a job.”

“I want to ensure that there are opportunities for all adults to engage in whatever level of learning they think is appropriate for their needs and it is not just about learning as an accreditation or receiving a certificate, it is learning about their own qualities and being proud of themselves. I have been very honoured to see adults start with very low self esteem, no self confidence, no pride, no willingness to support and educate their children or to look at their own visions and goals, to see them grow and blossom to where they are now, actively seeking employment and accessing training and doing so positively.”

(Senior Management Team 7, Clouston, 2007, p.36)

Although difficult to attribute directly to the NPQICL, such references are eloquent testimony to the difference good and sensitive support can make to parents.

“It felt like you had got a big arm around you. In really difficult times you knew you had some support, someone you could go to and talk things through with. I think if every family that comes in here feels treated like I was, it’s invaluable.”

(Senior Management Team 6, Clouston, 2007, p.26)

“Well we have had a project recently where we got short-listed for Partners in Excellence for our stories... parents are trained as parent listeners and then they capture the stories of other parents.”

(Headteacher 2, Chandler, 2007, p.32)

Parent informants who were involved in the interviews for this study said that they also wanted to give back something to the community. As two leaders reported:

“The centre has changed immensely and people now know what they are getting out of the service. They didn’t know what to expect and now they have got expectations and they are being met. I’ve been a service user and now I am trying to put something back, trying to volunteer and help. The services now have really improved. No-one is ever too busy to stop and have a word with you. At the end of the day that is what it is all about.”

(Nursery Nurse 2, Chandler, 2007, p.33)

“We have got a number of parents who are now running their own groups. We have got young parents who are facilitating the teenage parent groups, we have got a lone parent group, parent and toddler groups. They run themselves now.” (Nursery Nurse 5, Chandler, 2007, p.34)

Increasing the level and quality of parent involvement is undoubtedly a benefit not only to parents but the whole centre community. For the informant quoted below, NPQICL programme influenced the priority that one leader attaches to parents’ involvement and engagement.

“I think that is one of the main things that I have learned from NPQICL. We filter that through to parents and to discussions with parents around what has worked well, what hasn’t worked well and how would you like something to be delivered differently and would you like to be part of that? So I think that whole ethos around more consultation, more involvement, ownership has perhaps embedded itself in the way that we deliver services and manage staff teams.”

(Nursery Nurse 5, Chandler, 2007, p.32)

Recent Ofsted reports of some of the children’s centres led by NPQICL research study informants, offer another form of evidence of impact and further endorsement of the importance of strong leadership. (All the Ofsted reports quoted are about children’s centres led by participants in the two years since they completed NPQICL.) The leaders of these centres all claim that NPQICL was a major contributory factor in the Ofsted judgement of their leadership qualities.

“Leadership and management are outstanding. The head is passionate about children’s well-being and learning. Her clear vision inspires commitment and enthusiasm from all members of her staff and she is supported by an enthusiastic and knowledgeable leadership team.”

“Leadership and management are excellent. The headteacher’s very clear vision and determined drive to improve are shared by staff and governors. The school lies at the heart of the children’s centre. Staff from the centre, such as family link workers and health workers, bring their considerable and varied expertise to the benefit of children and their families.”

“The leadership and management are excellent. The consistent vision of how children’s learning is most effectively developed, given the wide range of ability and needs, and taking account of the communities’ beliefs and preferences, owes much to the outstanding leadership and experience of the headteacher. Close relationships with other agencies add to the expertise of the high quality staff team.”

Parents who were interviewed by the researcher considering the impact of the programme on leaders with a background in teaching or nursery nursing, provided persuasive evidence of the impact of NPQICL on children and families.

These leaders reported that in their centres:

- Services are now perceived as being provided around the family’s needs rather than the organisation’s needs eg nursery school parent meetings and settling in times.
- Multi-agency referral forums have been set up to co-ordinate more coherent and comprehensive responses to children and families.
- Parents experience services as more joined up and available with easier access to health professionals, childcare and education staff working together.
- Parents feel listened to. Centres respond to expressed needs with honesty about what cannot be done as well as what can be done and consultation with parents is perceived as more authentic.
- The quality of nursery provision has improved.
- Transition between childcare and education provision is smoother with greater sensitivity to children’s needs.
- Parent volunteers are helping to engage families who are not accessing the services they need.

(Chandler, T. 2007)

6.2 Impact on local authorities and other agencies managing children’s centres

Many of the informants in the impact study have undertaken greater responsibilities since they started NPQICL. Sure Start programme managers for example have, in some cases, had to extend their original geographical boundaries and some leaders have had additional centres to run. The distributed leadership

style participants have encouraged in their teams has enabled them to take on other roles, whether as ‘guardians’, tutors and mentors for NPQICL, coaching and mentoring new leaders, or leading across two or more centres.

“In our area tNPQICL has had quite a significant effect because the majority of us have got our team leaders on NPQICL so we are very committed to spreading that way of thinking throughout our teams. Our team leaders are now not just getting posts within this area, they are getting posts within the county.”

(Social worker 8, Clouston, 2007, p.23)

“NPQICL graduates in this borough have formed an action learning group to take forward their learning, to collaborate in the development of services and to support the current participants on NPQICL 2006-07.”

(Formosinho and Oliveira-Formosinho, 2005, p.41)

“In this city we are the only health visitors in a children’s centre. We’re always meeting up with colleagues at different venues and of course you just talk about what you’re doing, informally, chatting. When our children’s centre had a really good Ofsted report that was put on the internet, everybody could see that. Our managers are very, very supportive of us being here. Quite often we’ll be used as an example. There’s already a team in another part of the city who are looking to move into a children’s centre and I went to speak to them on a training day that they had about our experience here.”

(Health visitor, James, A., March 2007)

Social work leaders reported their growing influence within strategic policy and planning groups within their local authorities; some had developed greater political acuity to do so.

“I have always known there has been a need to be political in some situations and I suppose I haven’t really wanted to before. I might have avoided those situations, but I do see my role as a kind of ambassador for children’s centres in this community and across the borough.”

(Social worker 7, Clouston, 2007, p.29)

Informants described their influence in changing policy and increasing respect from the agencies involved in children's services for their understanding, knowledge and direct experience. Many attributed this to their increased confidence, their diplomatic skills and their ability to deal with complex issues—all skills refined by NPQICL.

“I have developed negotiating skills par excellence; the United Nations could do with me. NPQICL has broken down barriers and opened doors to different ways of thinking and different patterns of behaviour. The nursery school headteacher and I have both been on NPQICL and now we have got a completely different understanding of each other and are working together extremely effectively.”

(Social worker 8, Clouston, 2007, p.30)

There were also examples of successful negotiation and which have had benefits for centres.

“I did a whole piece of work on cost effectiveness - how much an infant attachment programme costs per family and how much it would cost if those families hadn't had that service... it was quite staggering ... I had to make Shire Hall understand the importance of these projects and Sure Start funding. Now they have put the money for those projects into my budget for next year so that is quite a big impact...”

(Social worker 10, Clouston, 2007, p.30)

The Formosinho impact studies found that there has been impact at the organisational level, with informants being given more strategic responsibilities for shaping the development of other children's centres. There is also a 'cumulative effect' or the beginning of a sense of a critical mass. One informant had a line manager who was on the pilot of the NPQICL and found that to be hugely beneficial in 'talking the same language' to get things done. Another informant has joined with others in a vigorous action learning group to replicate course processes of dialogue, reflection, containment and challenge.

6.3 Impact on the system: impact on universities

6.3.1 Overview

The impact of NPQICL on universities and tutors involved in the programme has been marked and far reaching.

Initially tutors found the programme challenging both because of its content and its style of delivery.

The experiential learning method contrasted sharply with the more conventional didactic approach used on many university courses. However support for the programme learning methods grew fast and by the end of the rollout, the Henley evaluation had shown that 100 per cent of tutors delivering the programme felt NPQICL was a good programme.

At the same time, 72 per cent found it a challenge to deliver. Taking tutors and mentors together, 96 per cent thought it an interesting and rewarding programme to work with (Williams, S, 2006).

The impact study in 2007 identified a critical mass of tutor support. The 12 tutors involved in the studies observed the successful learning of participants and were now applying the same experiential techniques and activities to their other university teaching (Webster, S. 2007).

6.3.2 Evidence from the impact studies

The 2007 impact study analysed the impact of NPQICL programme on the 13 universities involved. Each NPQICL programme is run by a tutor with an academic background and a tutor with recent experience of leading a children's centre.

The research revealed initial concerns on the part of university tutors about the complexity and content of NPQICL as well as doubt about the value of the pedagogical approach required.

However by the end of the first year of the roll-out, a 'critical mass' of tutor support emerged. Many tutors had enjoyed the experience and had observed the learning outcomes for participants as the same or better than other programmes they taught.

One of the NPQICL graduates who became a tutor reflected on this initial reaction.

“They didn't believe it would work and all I kept saying was, it's OK I'll lead it all, just be there beside me and I promise you it will work and it will be fantastic.’ You could tell that they so didn't think this was going to happen. I'd say, 'it's OK'. Trust the process”

(Tutor 9, Webster, 2007b, p.17)

The tutors from an academic background increasingly adapted their style to that of a facilitator and observed how successfully NPQICL participants took responsibility for their own learning.

“This again was a sharp learning curve for me but the assessed work produced by the research route last year was the best cohort of work I have ever seen produced by any group of students, candidates, participants ever. So that led to some interesting debates sort of in my head... So actually the products were fantastic pieces of work, probably five almost immediately publishable pieces of work. So something, some interaction between the tutor pack and what my co-tutor and I did with the participants had an absolutely brilliant outcome. I have had to reflect on that and in a way I have calmed my critique.”

(Tutor 10, Webster, 2007b, p.21)

All 12 tutors involved in the impact study reported some form of personal gain.

“It has grown me in the sense of my own abilities to work with a group of leaders... it has been a huge process for me, looking into the theory and being able to facilitate learning on different aspects.”

(Tutor 6, Webster, 2007b, p.22)

Forty per cent of the 12 tutors in this study identified an increased level of self awareness and self knowledge. This included tutors who had initially expressed the least satisfaction with the programme.

Over 80 per cent of these 12 tutors stated that the most significant impact for them professionally was an opportunity to widen their knowledge about children’s centres and the relationship between policy and how it is interpreted.

“I’d say that’s the big, big plus for all tutors involved in the programme is that you get the chance to go and visit the children’s centres and really get to learn about the job itself. I think the initial visits are absolutely essential.”

(Tutor 7, Webster, 2007b, p.23)

Of equal importance was the opportunity to discover a wide range of leadership theories and concepts across education, health, social work and community development. Over half of the 12 tutors felt that delivering the programme had improved their own leadership skills.

All of the tutors in this study reported that they felt that they had observed some very successful learning. For over half the informants it had been “the most powerful teaching ever experienced”. All had observed participants making dramatic leaps in their learning; over half of the tutors from academic backgrounds reflected that their initial scepticism

had been unfounded. The opportunity of working in partnership and co-tutoring a programme was also valued.

The tutors also observed the benefits that participants gained from learning collaboratively.

“I mean it is everything I like about community education and about peer education and about leadership development because it is about people learning for themselves instead of being taught. Pointing people in the right direction and giving people resources that maybe they haven’t had before. The joy of this programme is seeing those ‘ah ha!’ moments.”

(Tutor 2, Webster, 2007b, p.24)

The majority of tutors in the study found that the opportunity to observe multidisciplinary working was useful.

“I don’t think I realised how riven with challenge the concept, the integrated centre concept, is with all the challenge of multi-professional working, multi-professional teams. I didn’t realise how it continues to be the burning question for participants.”

(Tutor 5, Webster, 2007b, p.25)

6.4 Institutional impact

Every tutor who participated in the Formosinho impact study has taken elements of the NPQICL programme into their other teaching work. The most transferred concept was that of the learning community.

“I think one of the things that I will take away from the course is about building the learning community from the outset. In some ways I’d quite like to be able to do that with other groups of learners...”

I think some of those ideas about actually setting up the learning contract with the community are really helpful and I have considered thinking about how I might use that with other groups.”

(Tutor 1, Webster, 2007b, p.25)

Those tutor informants who were themselves NPQICL graduates were experiencing the programme for a second time, this time as tutors. They reported that this opportunity had developed their understanding further giving them confidence to embed the learning community approach into their other work with adult learners both in the university and in children’s centres.

A number of academic tutors had adopted small but significant practices into other areas of their teaching.

“If I was doing a three hour lecture on somebody else’s course and that was the only input I would have with those students, in the past I would have made no effort at all to even find out what these people were called. But now, the first thing I do, even if I’ve only got those three hours is go round and say, ‘just tell me what your name is and how did you get, you know, in, in three sentences or four, how did you get to be on this course, what are, you know, what are your aspirations?’”
(Tutor 9, Webster, 2007b, p.27)

Three tutors identified the effectiveness of the peer learning that they had witnessed on the programme:

“I have become less needy for them to give the answer that I think I want, and much more comfortable with people coming up with their own answers ... I suppose I am gradually increasingly comfortable with not knowing the answer to everything.”
(Tutor 12, Webster, 2007b, p.27)

6.5 Wider impact

The tutors from academic institutions who were interviewed for the impact studies suggested that their experience with NPQICL had developed their role as advocates for the children’s centre initiative. The assessment process on NPQICL had also offered them an insight into children’s centres and they now understood the complexities and wide diversity of children’s centre models in operation and development. Informants were applying their new learning to other programmes and initiatives such as:

- Early years professional qualification.
- Local authority – continuous professional development
- Children’s centre and extended schools development programmes in local authorities.
- Voluntary sector training programme – multi-disciplinary working.
- Undergraduate teaching – initial teacher training and Early Childhood programmes.
- Post-graduate – certificates and Masters programmes.
- PhD supervision and mentoring

7. Conclusions

7.1 Value of the NPQICL

NPQICL is a unique programme, developed for a particular audience at a particular time. It is a response to the government's request for a relevant professional qualification programme for children's centre leaders at a time when the children's centre programme was being rapidly expanded. Leaders of children's centres were facing a rapidly changing policy and financial landscape and needed new skills to develop the multi-disciplinary teamwork and leadership capability that were required in the new situations in which they found themselves.

NPQICL takes a particular approach to this challenge and is designed to be a programme that responds to individual leaders' needs and challenges and works with them to change behaviours and attitudes. It is a very different kind of programme from most other leadership development programmes. Not only does it take an experiential and personal approach, but it is unusual in having a demanding and highly structured framework within that approach. The framework involves group problem-solving of specific tasks in a prearranged order, set periods for reflection and journaling, assigned times for mentoring support, formal assignments to be completed, and a rigorous assessment process at the end. It uses conceptual knowledge to interpret and make sense of shared experiences after these have been worked through, in contrast to most leadership development programmes where knowledge input is the first or main activity, and groupwork or experiential learning comes afterwards. This is also a Masters level programme. It has a two-fold assessment process, assessing both academic achievement and leadership capability through separate strands.

7.2 Uniqueness of the programme's approach

NPQICL was founded on a number of key principles, the main one being the primacy of experience. This experience includes both the experiences gained during the programme itself also and the past experiences which leaders bring with them to the programme. While it acknowledges the role of

conceptual and abstract understanding in learning, the programme is based on an appreciation that behaviour is not changed by the simple acquisition of knowledge. People's own feelings, backgrounds and personal journeys need to be brought into the picture if meaningful behaviour change is to be achieved.

The programme therefore takes a particular focus, drawing on shared experience within the participant groups. Rather than the groupwork being based on the discussion of texts or of knowledge-based PowerPoint inputs, the experiential nature of the programme focuses around the completion of particular pre-designed set tasks. These tasks are relevant, reflect the real life challenges facing leaders of children's centres, have to be completed through group interaction, and are seen as meaningful by participants. They are therefore quite distinct from the kind of discussion-based groupwork which is often used in leadership programmes.

7.3 Theoretical underpinning to the programme

NPQICL is a complex programme underpinned by a range of theories, concepts, beliefs, traditions and practices. It is this background and theoretical approach that gives NPQICL its unique character and differentiates it from the many other kinds of leadership development programmes available.

The two key features of the approach are 'co-construction', where those actively working in the field as well as those with experience in leadership development and professional learning are involved in design and development of the programme, and the 'learning community', in which participants draw on the professional experience and understanding represented among the group and learn from each other.

The programme is underpinned by a strong model of leadership. The programme is designed around enabling participants to ask ‘what is it like being a leader in an integrated children’s centre, and how can I best respond to its particular challenges?’ rather than the perhaps more traditional question of ‘what is leadership and how does it operate?’ Participants explore their own experiences of leadership and examine the assumptions on which their beliefs about leadership are based through a series of planned exercises and activities.

The programme is designed for a multi-disciplinary group of participants from different professional backgrounds and heritages, and its processes draw on the different values, understanding and knowledge which each can offer. A key feature of the programme is the attention paid to the distinct features of each profession and how these can be understood and respected, while at the same time brought together in new and creative collaboration.

In the programme, a knowledge of leadership theory is seen as complementary to the key processes of coming to know and understand one’s own leadership and how that relates to the context in which one is actually leading. Concepts and theoretical perspectives are introduced and these help participants to place their own understanding in a wider context.

The programme uses a number of tools to enable it to achieve its aims. These include task-based group exercises, reflective journaling, and mentoring support. In addition, a large part of the NPQICL involves practitioner research. This offers a way of developing one’s leadership capability through enquiry and investigation and also provides a powerful tool to help children’s centre leaders involve their colleagues and partners in managing change.

7.4 Overall impact of the programme

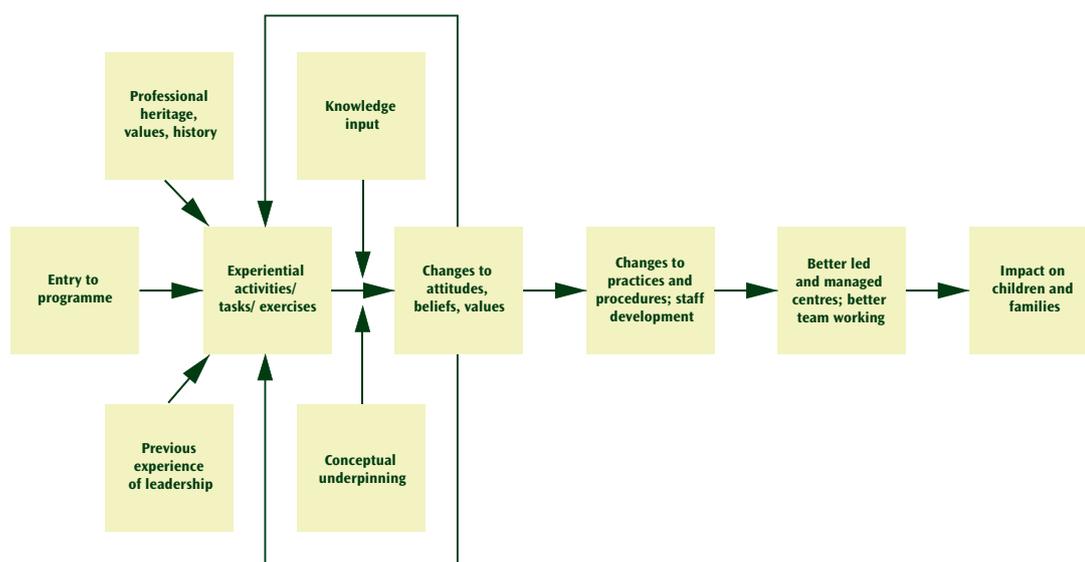
The data presented in this report has been drawn from a variety of sources, gathered over three years. They include quantitative data provided by surveys as well as more qualitative data from in-depth interviews. All the sources show the same overall findings and this triangulation of data from different sources provides strong evidence that the results of the evaluations are reliable and that the programme has indeed had considerable impact. The evidence indicates that the NPQICL is a worthwhile programme and taken overall the data supports the hypothesis that the programme is being effective in developing leaders of children’s centres as outlined in the aims and objectives of the programme.

The findings outlined in the report also illustrate some of the impacts which the programme is having. Overall the picture presented is one of a programme which has wide-reaching and important effects over a range of behaviours, skills and attitudes. The data provides evidence not only of participants’ satisfaction with the programme and their greater confidence, self-awareness and insight, but also of significant changes made to procedures and practices in children’s centres. Participants have improved their understanding of others, their ability to relate across professional boundaries, their respect for others from different disciplines, the way in which their centres are run, their teamwork and their staff development.

Diagram 7.4 shows how the elements of the programme impact upon these changes and affect not only participants but lead also to changes eventually for children and families. While the first few links in the chain can be strongly supported from the evidence provided in this report, the final link, the benefits for children and families, must be inferred rather than being actively demonstrated at this early stage. The research literature in the field

supports the general notion that better leadership and better-run organisations do have better outcomes, and this therefore supports the inference that the impact of the programme on participants and on their centres must lead to improved outcomes for children and families. This will continue to be tested as NPQICL graduates continue their leadership practice.

Diagram 7.4: The causal chain



7.5 Future of the programme

The NPQICL is a challenging programme to deliver, and requires significant facilitation skills to deliver well. There were some challenges in the roll out phase particularly in relation to ensuring consistently high quality provision across all regions. The programme’s creators continued with the principle of co-construction which had been a key feature of the original design, and during the first two years of rollout considerable effort was made by the programme team to improve and develop the programme in the light of ongoing feedback and the quality assurance processes in place. NPQICL programme is now currently being further re-shaped. The reshaped programme will retain the ethos of the current programme and will remain a Masters level qualification. In addition, DCSF has asked that it focus even more strongly on the leadership of children’s centres and integrated services to secure better outcomes for children and families, particularly the most vulnerable.

The reshaped programme will be evaluated to assess how effective it is in meeting these outcomes.

The political and social landscape within which children’s centres operate continues to change and it is important that the programme is adaptable and keeps up with these changes. On the other hand, it is also important that the unique features of the programme, as outlined above, which are what give it its strength and make it such a powerful tool, are not lost in the re-fashioning. The evidence presented here suggests that the key elements of the programme, in particular its experiential nature and personalised approach, can be a real force for change. Given the challenges facing children’s centre leaders in seeking to reduce inequity and give every child good life chances, it remains of key importance that competent leaders are being developed and will be available to run the children’s centres of the future. NPQICL can play a key role in this endeavour.

8. References

8. References

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