

Inspiring leaders to
improve children's lives



National College
for School Leadership

Schools and academies

The importance of teaching and the role of system leadership

A commentary on the Illuminas research for the National College

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Resource

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1: Introduction

System leadership

In 2009 the National College for School Leadership (National College) commissioned Illuminas¹ to undertake a programme of research among headteachers. The intention was to assist the National College to develop its support for system leaders.

System leaders are school leaders who work beyond their own school to support other schools. The National College defines their role as:

leaders who work within and beyond their individual organisations; sharing and harnessing the best resources that the system can offer to bring about improvement in their own and other organisations; and influencing thinking, policy and practice so as to have a positive impact on the lives and life chances of all children and young people.

National College², 2009

The National College has had a particular responsibility in developing four system leadership roles: professional partners; local leaders of education (LLEs); national leaders of education and national support schools (NLEs/NSSs); and school improvement partners (SIPs).

The SIP role, as this paper goes on overleaf to explain, is being phased out but table 1 describes the respective roles of the other three forms of system leadership. There can be overlaps in the way they operate, but each of the roles has a distinctive core purpose. Please see appendix for more details of these roles.

¹ Illuminas is an international marketing research consultancy – see www.illuminas-global.com.

² Definition used for internal purposes only

Table 1: System leadership roles

	PP	LLE	NLE/ NSS
Main purpose			
To provide intensive support to schools facing challenging circumstances, eg in an Ofsted category or facing closure			✓
To provide peer-to-peer support to headteachers, enabling focus on improvement priorities and to build capacity		✓	
To provide needs-based support to newly appointed first-time headteachers in their designate stage and first two years in post	✓		
Typical time commitment and intensity			
Long-term support including becoming an executive headteacher, leading a team of seconded leaders and specialist staff from an NSS and/or sustained coaching and mentoring support for a leadership team for up to two years			✓
Up to one day a week for between one and three years		✓	
Up to 30 hours over two years per new head supported	✓		

Illuminas research

The Illuminas research on system leadership was carried out between December 2009 and April 2010 and consisted of three phases:

- A qualitative phase of 20 depth interviews which explored attitudes, perceptions and behaviour among current and potential system leaders.
- An initial quantitative phase of 1,092 telephone interviews was undertaken primarily to understand how many headteachers are currently engaged in system leadership, and how many are interested in a future system leadership role.
- A quantitative online survey with 405 headteachers who are currently undertaking a system leadership role or are interested in undertaking one was commissioned primarily to understand perceptions of the skills required to be effective in these roles and current possession of those skills, thus identifying if and where there are skills gaps. This stage also looked at preferred styles of learning.

Purpose of this paper

This commentary on the Illuminas findings relates the results of this work to the schools white paper, [The Importance of Teaching](#) (Department for Education (DfE), 2010), published by the coalition government in November 2010. This document provided a new context for the development of system leadership.

Section 2 describes the government’s revised approach to system leadership and the role of school-to-school improvement.

Section 3 identifies findings from the Illuminas report that relate to this new agenda and to the ways in which system leaders can be better supported and have greater impact.

Section 4 highlights some key conclusions.

2: White paper strategy for school-to-school improvement

White paper strategy

The *Importance of Teaching* (DfE, 2010) draws on the experience of countries that have adopted comprehensive school improvement strategies to put forward proposals for:

- improving teacher quality and leadership development
- granting greater freedom to schools
- streamlining the national curriculum and focusing it on essential knowledge content
- making schools more accountable to parents and communities
- encouraging professional and school-to-school collaboration
- reforming school funding to provide increased resources for pupils from a deprived background
- encouraging schools assessed as ‘good’ or below to team up with those assessed as ‘outstanding’ or ‘good with outstanding features’
- introducing a new role of specialist leader of education, ie excellent professionals in leadership positions below the headteacher (such as deputies, bursars, heads of department) who will support others in similar positions in other schools
- incentivising collaboration through a fund worth £35 million each year that will financially reward schools that help weaker schools
- encouraging local authorities and schools to apply to a new £110 million education endowment fund that will fund innovative projects to raise the attainment of deprived children in underperforming schools

The strong emphasis on greater school autonomy is balanced with measures to promote school-to-school support. School improvement partners (SIPs) are being abolished but other, new system leadership roles, such as specialist leader of education, are being introduced. There is a strong emphasis on good schools and school leaders being the drivers of improvement. The ways in which schools and school leaders will be enabled to support each other include:

- publishing families of schools data on a regional basis to help schools to identify similar schools in their region that are performing differently and from which they can learn
 - doubling the number of NLEs and LLEs
 - introducing a national network of teaching schools that will work with other schools to deliver and quality assure initial teacher training, provide professional development for teachers, offer leadership development for emerging and established leaders and provide school improvement
 - encouraging applications for conversion to academy status from clusters of schools
- School-to-school support is seen as particularly vital in addressing the challenges and problems of primary or secondary schools that are below the new floor standards set by government³, and/or that are assessed by Ofsted as requiring a notice to improve or special measures. The white paper envisages drawing on the resources of other schools to bring about school improvement by:
- designating an education professional, typically a serving or recent headteacher, to provide challenge and make recommendations about the level of support a school will need in order to implement its improvement plan
 - using NLEs, LLEs, academies and other models to provide support and leadership
 - using high-performing schools converting to academy status as a resource to support weaker and struggling schools
 - enabling high-performing school and college providers to take over or replace education provision that fails to meet acceptable standards

³ The government’s new floor standards take account of both attainment and progression. Secondary schools will fall below the floor if fewer than 40 per cent (in 2012 rising to 50 per cent by the end of this parliament) achieve the basic standard of five A*-C grades at GCSE (including English and maths), and if fewer pupils make good progress between Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4 than the national average. Primary schools will fall below the floor if fewer than 60 per cent of pupils achieve the basic standard of Level 4 in both English and maths and fewer pupils than average make expected levels of progress between Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2.

The white paper in a broader context

The white paper is in effect building on the practice of the increased collaboration between schools in England that has developed over the past 15 years through federations, 14-19 partnerships, specialist schools partnership programmes, school improvement initiatives (such as Excellence in Cities, National Challenge and NLEs/NSSs) and chains of academies sharing the same sponsor.

The distinctive twist that the white paper brings is to move the leadership and responsibility for this school-to-school improvement work further towards school leaders themselves. To use the term coined by David Hargreaves in his recent work for the National College (Hargreaves, 2010), the white paper aims to support the development of a 'self-improving school system'.

Hargreaves sees the development of a self-improving school system as resulting in schools being members of two complementary school clusters:

a homogeneous family of schools of the same phase/type (primary, secondary, special, faith etc) to ensure improvement of phase-specific matters; and

a heterogeneous family of mixed phases/types, the most common of which would be a geographically local mix of primary, secondary and special schools, at the heart of which is a secondary school with its feeder primary schools.

Hargreaves, 2010:13

These clusters, which Hargreaves thinks will vary in how formal or 'tight' they are, will provide the basis for shared professional development, school improvement and leadership development.

However, the effectiveness of such clusters and in fact the strategy of creating a self-improving school system at all depends on there being what Hargreaves calls good nodal leaders. It is a concept he has borrowed from the world of business to describe organisations that have the ambition, drive and know-how to effect change within their sector. Nodal firms, or in the context of schools, nodal system leaders sit at the centre of a network or coalition with a large share of influence within it.

This concept takes concrete form in the white paper with the proposal to establish teaching schools which, over time, are seen as taking on the role of brokering and quality assuring improvement support and identifying and supporting teachers with the potential to become heads.

Thus although the white paper does not use the term 'system leadership', the policies inherent in the paper require school leaders to understand and develop roles associated with the concept. The Illuminas research, therefore, provides timely insights for policymakers, school leaders and the National College on how to develop the capability and capacity of school leaders to provide increased levels of school-to-school support.

3: Key lessons from the Illuminas relevant to the white paper agenda

This section draws on the findings from the Illuminas research to highlight 10 findings that will help to inform development and implementation of the agenda set out in *The Importance of Teaching* (DfE, 2010).

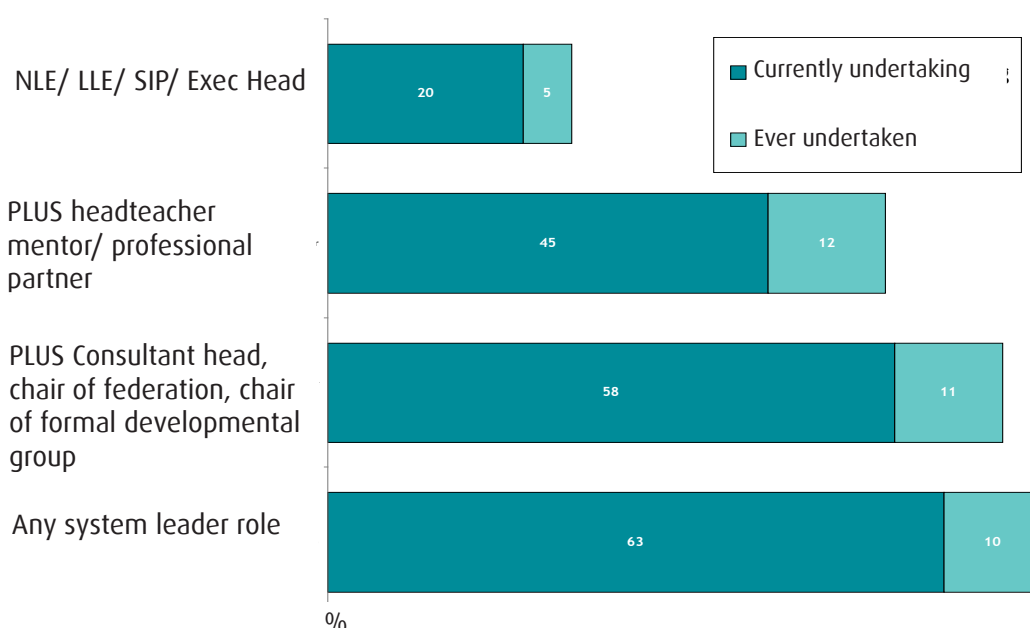
1. Improving and increasing school-to-school support starts from a strong base.

A quarter of the school leaders surveyed said that they were either currently undertaking or had previously undertaken a key system leadership role⁴. In addition, half of headteachers either currently are or have previously been a headteacher mentor. This reflects developments and trends over the past decade to build system leadership. It also indicates that the school system in England has a strong base of expertise on which to draw as schools and school leaders are given greater responsibility for school improvement.

When other, less formal system leadership responsibilities are taken into account, nearly three-quarters (73 per cent) of school leaders are currently undertaking or have ever undertaken a system leadership role. The more informal roles such as mentoring and counselling another headteacher may seem less significant but they can provide important support in their own right and, as highlighted below, engagement in this work can act as the catalyst for starting school leaders on the path to becoming more fully involved in system leadership.

The Illuminas research indicates that 40 per cent of headteachers are currently undertaking at least two system leadership roles. Heads that are engaged in multiple system leadership roles will often have strong and established leadership cover and support within their schools: indeed, their changed leadership role enables the professional development of other senior leaders within their home school (Hill & Matthews, 2010:78-85).

Figure 1: Proportion of headteachers that are undertaking or have undertaken system leadership roles



Source: Illuminas telephone survey (1,092 respondents)

⁴ Key system leadership roles are defined as NLE, LLE, SIP and executive head.

2. There is varying understanding of different system leadership roles.

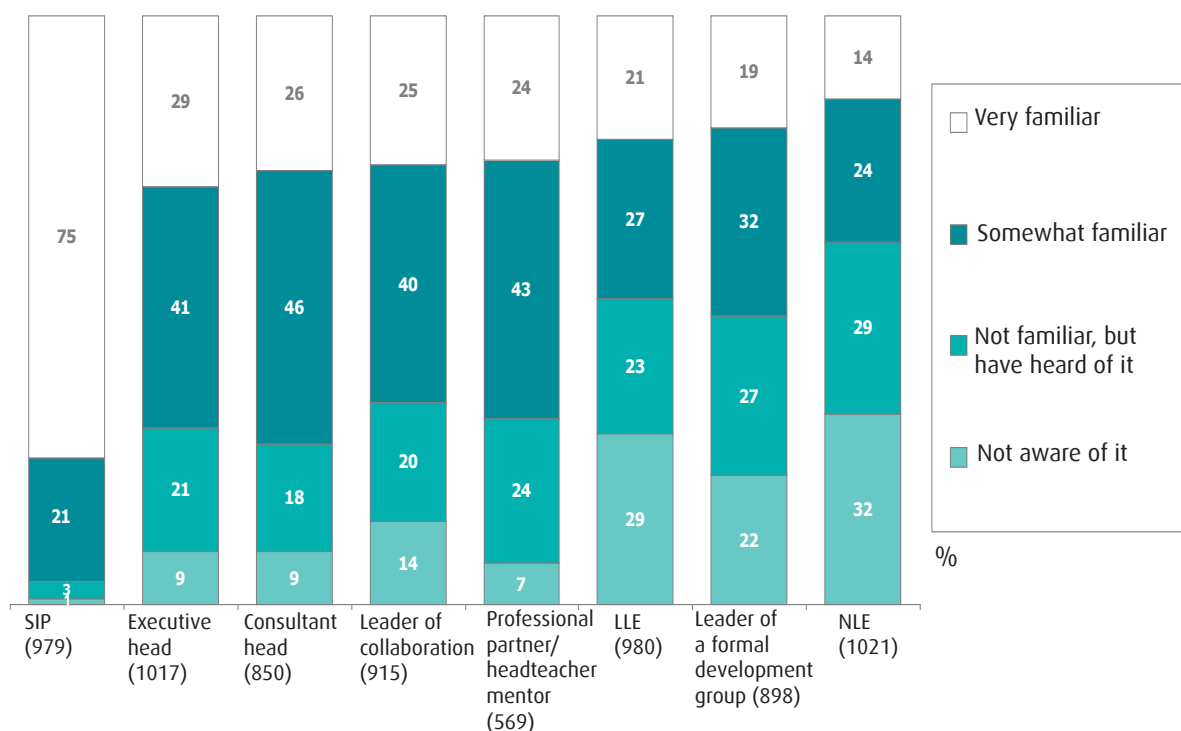
Headteachers that are currently not undertaking or have not undertaken particular system leadership roles in the past were asked about their familiarity with these roles. For example, the 90 per cent of headteachers who have not been an LLE were asked how familiar they were with the LLE role.

As Figure 2 shows, familiarity is highest with the SIP role, with 96 per cent of headteachers (excluding current SIPs) being very or somewhat familiar with this role. This high level of familiarity is not surprising given the direct contact heads maintain with SIPs.

Headteachers are less familiar with the other roles, with 70 per cent being very or somewhat familiar with the executive head role and 72 per cent being very or somewhat familiar with the consultant head role. Familiarity with the LLE and NLE roles is lower with less than half (48 per cent) very or somewhat familiar with the LLE role and only 38 per cent being very or somewhat familiar with the NLE role.

These findings would imply that the DfE and the National College need to work closely together to communicate and explain the purpose and functions of the various roles set out in the white paper. In particular it will be important to consolidate understanding of the work of NLEs and LLEs, and ensure that the remit of new roles, such as the specialist leader of education and teaching school is clear. School leaders will be wanting to see how the various roles relate to each other to provide a supportive and coherent approach.

Figure 2: Familiarity of headteachers with different system leadership roles



Source: Illuminas telephone survey 2010 (1,092 respondents)

Note: The number of respondents listed for each system leadership role reflects the total number of respondents less the number of those who are or who have previously undertaken that particular role.

3. School leaders are motivated to undertake system leadership roles by a strong sense of moral purpose.

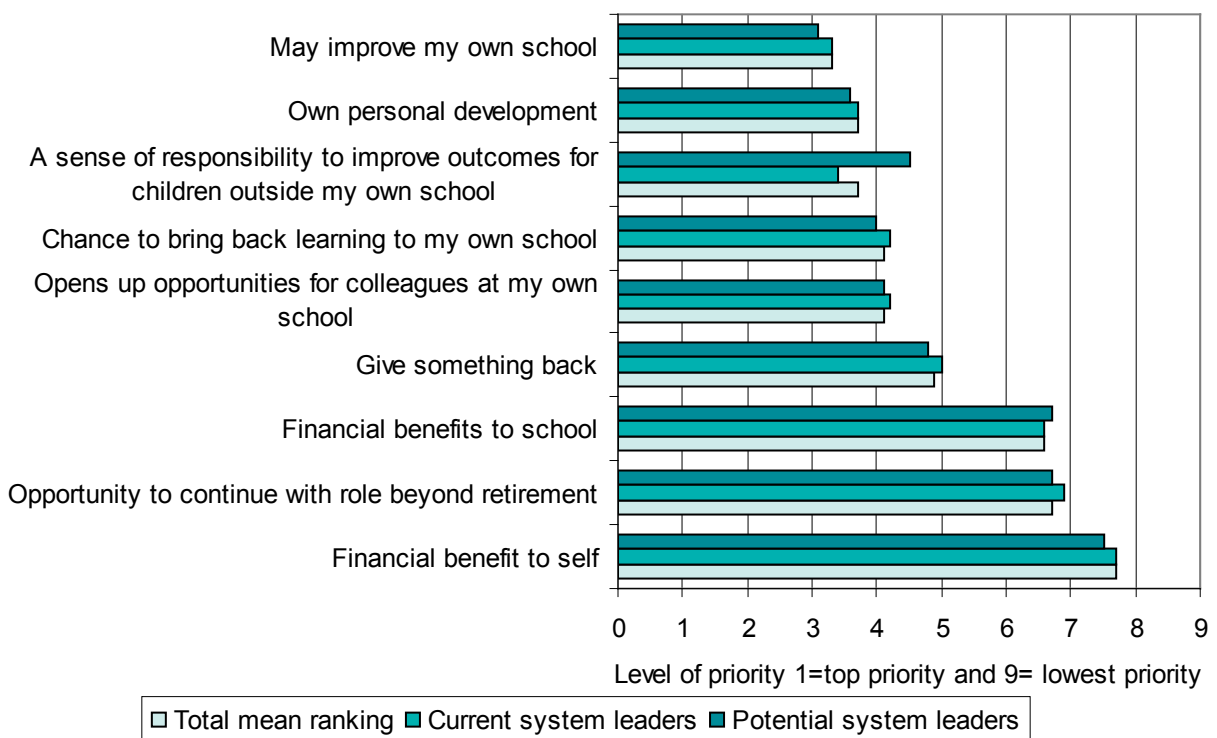
If school improvement is to rely on school leaders playing a greater role then it is important to understand what is likely to motivate them to take on responsibilities beyond the confines of their own particular school. The research (Figure 3) indicates that while personal motivations are strong, the drivers are not selfish in motive – for example, ‘personal development’ ranks much higher than ‘financial benefit to self’ which comes at the bottom of the list of motivating factors. School leaders become engaged or are likely to become engaged in system leadership because they think it will help them to improve their own school, aid their personal development, bring back learning to their school and open up opportunities for colleagues.

There is also a strong sense of moral purpose in their motivation. Factors such as a desire to ‘improve outcomes for children beyond my school’ and ‘give something back’ score highly.

Significantly Figure 3 shows that current system leaders attach great importance to a sense of responsibility to improve the outcomes for children outside their own school. This suggests that as school leaders get experience of and exposure to work beyond their own school, their horizons grow to be more system oriented.

Another finding that will help persuade school leaders to become involved in system leadership is that experience as a system leader correlates well with the motivating factors of personal development, improving outcomes for children and school improvement. The Illuminas research indicates that nearly all current system leaders (98 per cent) agreed they found the role personally rewarding, 88 per cent agreed that their school had improved as a result of their involvement in system leadership and over three-quarters (78 per cent) agreed that they had an impact on the outcomes for children at other schools. These findings support a powerful narrative for school leaders to become involved with wider roles.

Figure 3: Motivation of current system leaders and potential system leaders to become involved in system leadership



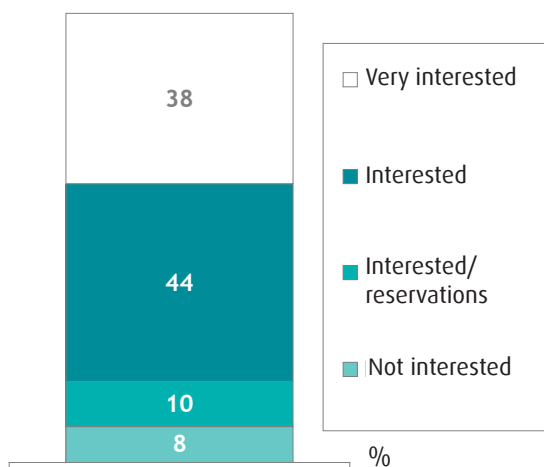
Source: Illuminas online survey 2010 (404 respondents – 216 current system leaders and 188 potential system leaders)

Note: Respondents were asked to rank the motivations listed in priority order to indicate what motivated them to pursue a system leadership role, with 1 = top priority and 9 = lowest priority.

4. Becoming a professional partner is a good way into system leadership.

There is widespread interest in becoming a professional partner among those who were not currently a headteacher mentor/professional partner. As Figure 4 shows, over 8 out of 10 respondents are 'very interested' or 'interested' in taking on this role. The interest may in part reflect the fact that there is a greater familiarity with the professional partner role than some of the other system leadership roles. However, headteachers were also keen to help colleagues on a one-to-one basis and contribute in a meaningful way. Becoming a professional partner appears to them to be accessible, worthwhile and relatively risk-free – a natural extension to the role for current heads once they become established and comfortable in their headship. The role, as noted above, is also seen as the first step on the path to becoming involved in system leadership.

Figure 4: Level of interest in becoming a professional partner among headteachers not current acting as a headteacher mentor/professional partner



Source: Illuminas telephone survey 2010 (717 respondents)

Headteachers are interested in taking on a professional partner role in the short- to medium term, with 45 per cent open to taking it on in the next two years, and 41 per cent preferring to undertake the role within the next two to five years. The remaining 14 per cent were looking at this role in the longer term, ie in more than five years' time. These findings provide the basis for developing and training a comprehensive network of professional partners to support new heads and emerging school leaders.

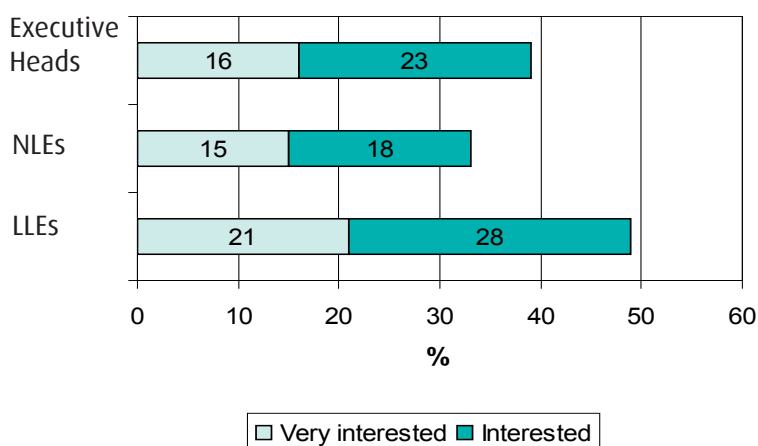
5. There are substantial levels of interest in taking on the more demanding system leadership roles.

The interest in becoming involved in leadership beyond a leader's own school is not confined to becoming a professional partner. As Figure 5 illustrates, there are also significant levels of interest in becoming an LLE, NLE and an executive head with between a third and a half of school leaders not currently engaged in these roles being 'very interested' or 'interested' in taking them on. However, there is one caveat about this finding as it is not clear whether all respondents necessarily understood that the gateway to NLE and LLE status involves meeting stringent quality criteria.

There is a much higher level of interest in taking on the NLE role in the secondary sector than the primary sector. Nearly two-thirds of secondary school headteachers are interested in taking on an NLE role compared with just over a third of their primary counterparts.

The interest in pursuing an executive head role is highest among those school leaders already working in a federation structure, especially within secondary schools. The move to encourage schools to apply for academy status in pairs or clusters could, therefore, reinforce the efforts to develop broader leadership roles.

Figure 5: Level of interest in taking on key system leadership roles among school leaders not currently undertaking the roles



Source: Illuminas telephone survey 2010 (1,017 respondents on executive heads; 1,021 respondents on NLEs; and 980 respondents on LLEs)

It is also important and encouraging to note that the interest being expressed does not seem to be an abstract one. Of all those interested in becoming an NLE or an executive head, nearly a third (29 per cent) wanted to take on the role within the next two years and two-fifths (39 per cent) within two to five years.

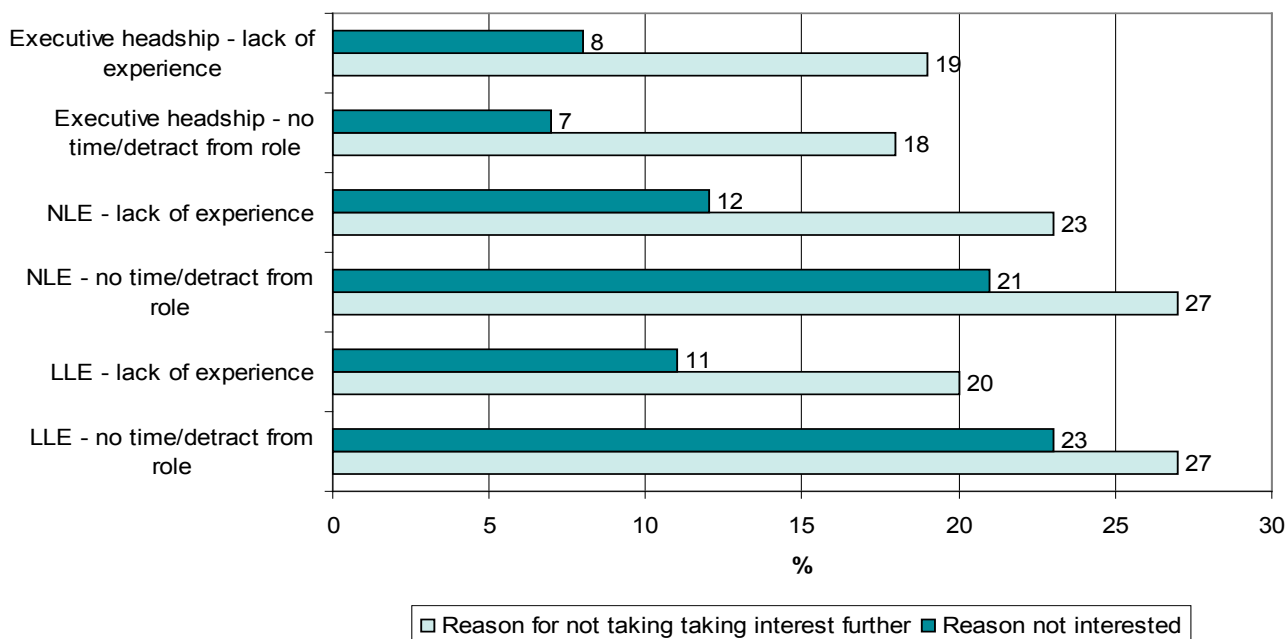
6. The main factors inhibiting school leaders taking on broader roles are a fear that it will detract from their role as head, and a lack of experience.

Up to 10 per cent of those who are not interested in taking on key system leadership roles say they do not know enough about the role, reinforcing the points highlighted earlier about the need for clear explanation and communication. However, as Figure 6 illustrates, the main obstacles to taking on broader responsibilities are:

- time pressure
- a lack of experience

There is some truth in these concerns as evidenced by current system leaders. Two thirds of current system leaders agreed/strongly agreed that the time commitment had 'put pressure on their capacity to do other things' and a third of current system leaders indicated that they would have benefited from more support.

Figure 6: Reasons for not taking up system leadership roles (unprompted to this list)



Source: Illuminas telephone survey – Respondents for 'Reason for not taking interest further' among those who have expressed an interest: executive heads 530; NLEs 452; and LLEs 609; 'Reason not interested': executive heads 518; NLEs 589; and LLEs 409

These findings would point to two conclusions:

- first, given the positive experience of existing system leaders highlighted in point 3 (page 9), it would make sense to use them to champion the various broader system leadership roles and address concerns and reservations
- second, ensure that there is development support for school leaders to encourage and equip them to take on broader responsibilities, including providing opportunities for them to observe and be mentored by other, experienced system leaders

These conclusions reinforce the action of the National College in developing programmes to support professional partners, LLEs, NLEs and executive heads and are discussed in more detail overleaf.

In addition to general factors inhibiting participation in system leadership, there are two specific obstacles related to moving into executive headship. A fifth of respondents said that their governors would not allow them to take on the executive head role, and a slightly lower proportion (17 per cent) reported that executive head positions were not available in their area. These factors will require special consideration but will include the need to work with governors to explain the role and value of system leadership.

7. Experience of being a headteacher, communication, presentation and interpersonal skills and strategic thinking ability are seen as the most important skills to fulfil system leadership responsibilities.

Leading a school is a demanding role. However, moving into system leadership requires the development of an even broader range of skills. This is partly because it involves exercising leadership in more complex contexts and partly because system leadership puts a premium on being able to inspire, persuade and negotiate with other school leaders, challenge the status quo and bring about change quickly and effectively.

Figure 7 shows a remarkable convergence about the nature and relative importance of the skills required to take on professional partner, LLE, NLE and executive headship roles. For example, those undertaking, or interested in undertaking, an NLE or executive head role both identify the same top 10 skills, though the relative priority they attach to each of them varies a little.

In addition to the experience of being a headteacher, communication, presentation and interpersonal skills and strategic thinking ability are seen as the most important skills to fulfil system leadership responsibilities. The majority of these are what might be termed softer rather than more technical skills and this will have implications for the way that development support is designed, as point 8 reinforces.

Figure 7: Relative importance of skills required to take on a range of system leadership roles

System leadership skills	PP	LLE	NLE	Exec head
Experience of being a headteacher	1	1	1	1
Knowledge/experience of policy and education structures including Ofsted and local authorities	10			
Influencing and negotiation skills	9	6	5=	9
Communication/presentation/interpersonal skills	2	3	4	3
Team-building skills			10	5=
Ability to plan, setting goals and objectives	7	5	7	5=
Coaching/mentoring skills	6	8		
Strategic thinking ability (vision, big picture etc)	3	2	3	2
Leading learning in other schools to raise attainment		10		
Leading and managing change in other schools			9	10
Being able to rapidly identify and implement key priorities for school improvement	5	4	2	4
Developing a culture of learning and high expectations within other schools	8	7	5=	8
Motivating and developing other staff	4	9	8	7

Source: Illuminas online survey of those currently undertaking or interested in undertaking specified system leadership roles

Note: Respondents were asked to rank the degree of importance they attached to 19 skills. Figure 7 identifies the top 10 skills ranked for each of the four system leadership roles listed.

Where there are differences in the rankings these can for the most part be explained by the different demands of different system leadership roles. So, as one might expect, professional partners and LLEs identify coaching and mentoring as skills in a way that NLEs and executive headteachers do not, thus reflecting the role that professional partners and LLEs play. Similarly NLEs and executive heads include leading and managing change in other schools, while professional partners and LLEs do not, reflecting the whole-school responsibilities of NLEs and executive headteachers.

Figure 7 in effect provides a very clear specification for the training and development that is required to support school leaders taking on additional roles.

8. School leaders undertaking system leadership roles welcome support to help them to develop the necessary confidence and skills.

Unsurprisingly those headteachers who are already carrying out roles as system leaders are much more confident in their skills than those who are not carrying out such roles. Existing and potential system leaders were asked to score their confidence levels across a range of skills and attributes. Existing system leaders rated themselves more highly on each skill/attribute than potential system leaders.

However, despite their greater levels of confidence, existing system leaders also identified areas of development support that would be of benefit to them. The areas identified would also be of value to potential system leaders.

Figure 8: Relative priority of the value of measures to support system leaders, as identified by existing system leaders



Source: Illuminas online research – all current system leaders (180 respondents)

Existing system leaders were asked to rate how important a number of measures designed to develop their skills/confidence were, and then from this list to identify the three most important measures. The results (Figure 8) showed that over half of them (56 per cent) identified the influence of mentor support, just under half (48 per cent) cited a support network of their peers, and a similar proportion (47 per cent) felt that a formal induction to the role were the most important development measures.

The list of potential support measures also included access to an electronic library of best practice and case studies and an electronic portal or forum for raising questions and receiving advice.

These measures were valued but less highly than other means of support.

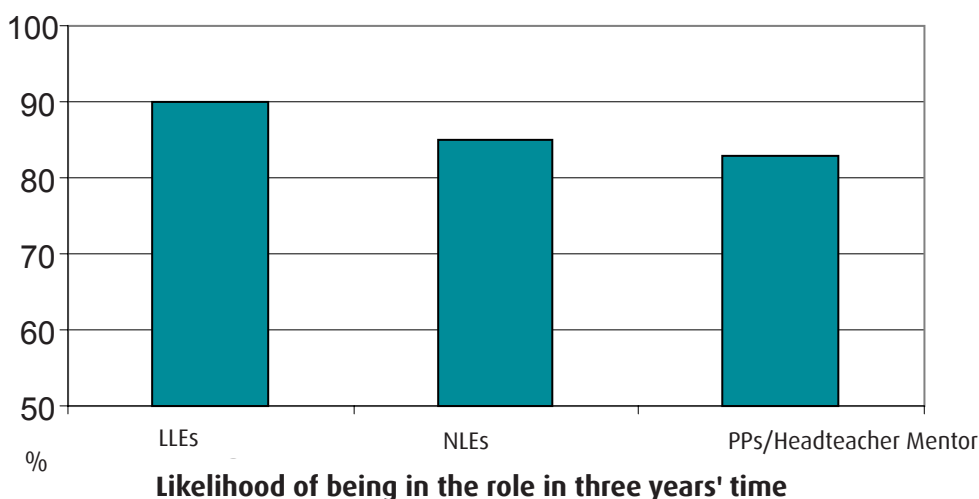
The Illuminas research also reveals that a third of existing system leaders say that they would have benefited from more training and development in the role, and less than half (44 per cent) agree that they had received enough training and development to fulfil their system leadership role effectively from the outset.

These findings, when taken with the results of point 7 overleaf, will help to guide the National College as it decides how best to support the leadership and school-to-school improvement implications of the schools white paper.

9. Once school leaders take on broader roles they are likely to sustain their commitment.

Results from the Illuminas online survey indicate that the overwhelming majority of system leaders envisage that they will still be in their role in three years' time (Figure 9). While the figures need to be treated with a degree of caution (the number of respondents for this particular question is lower than for some of the other questions), it is nonetheless significant and encouraging.

Figure 9: Likelihood of existing system leaders being in their role in three years' time



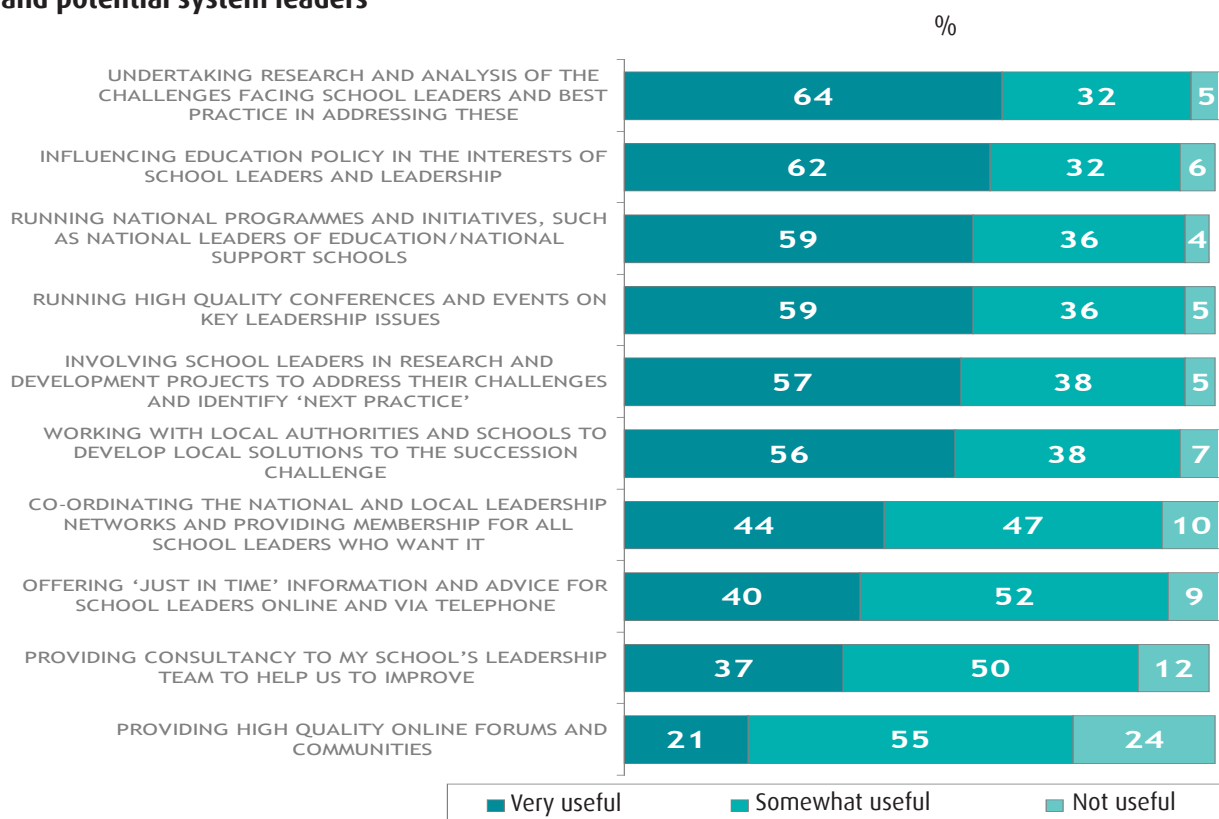
Source: Illuminas online survey – current system leaders (39 NLE respondents; 48 LLE respondents; and 109 professional partner/headteacher mentor respondents)

This both confirms the commitment to the types of role envisaged in the schools white paper and also indicates that it is worth making the investment in development support for system leaders. Over 8 out of 10 system leaders are in this for the long haul, ie they envisage still being in the role in three or more years' time. Resources spent on providing training and support should, therefore, provide a good return.

10. There is a strong awareness and support for the role that the National College is playing in supporting system leadership.

The role that the National College is playing in facilitating the strategic and practical development of system leaders is understood and valued by school leaders. Figure 10 ranks responses from respondents – both serving and potential system leaders – according to the relative value they place on different activities sponsored by the National College.

Figure 10: Relative support for functions carried out by the National College, as assessed by existing and potential system leaders



Source: Illuminas telephone survey – all respondents (1,092)

Nearly 96 per cent of the headteachers interviewed reported that undertaking research and analysis of the challenges facing school leaders and best practice in addressing these was 'very' or 'somewhat useful', with two-thirds stating that it was 'very useful'.

In terms of implementing the white paper agenda, it is significant that 95 per cent of respondents found the National College's work in running programmes to support NLEs and NSSs 'very' or 'somewhat useful', with nearly two-thirds considering them 'very useful'.

There is also a very high level of support (when the 'very useful' and 'somewhat useful' responses are taken together) for the National College's work in running 'high-quality conferences' (95 per cent),

involving school leaders in research projects to identify 'next practice' (95 per cent), working with local authorities on succession planning issues (94 per cent) and co-ordinating national and local leadership networks (91 per cent).

If the school-to-school support agenda set out in the schools white paper is to become a strong driver of school improvement, it will be important for the National College to sustain the way that it is enabling more school leaders to think and operate at a strategic and systemic level. Budget constraints and the emerging role of national teaching schools will no doubt result in the offer and services provided by the National College changing but Figure 10 provides a reference point for the support that system leaders are seeking.

4: Conclusion

A key part of the coalition government's agenda is based on liberating and empowering the best school leaders, and using school-to-school support to drive school improvement. The aim is to create a self-improving school system.

If this agenda is to succeed, it requires a critical mass of school leaders who are willing and able to take on wider system leadership roles.

The Illuminas research for the National College indicates the school system in England starts from a strong base with a quarter of headteachers either serving or having experience of being an NLE, LLE, SIP or executive head. The figure rises to nearly three-quarters when less formal roles such as headteacher mentor are included.

However, although there is a high understanding of some system leadership roles (such as SIPs), there is a lower level of familiarity with NLE and LLE roles. Given that awareness of a role is likely to influence interest in undertaking it, there needs to be clear and effective communication of the scope and purpose of all the main system leadership roles. In addition, new roles such as specialist leader of education and national teaching school will need to be explained to school leaders.

School leaders become engaged, or are likely to become engaged, in system leadership because they think it will help them to improve their own school, aid their personal development, bring back learning to their school, open up opportunities for colleagues and enable them to improve outcomes beyond their own school. Issues relating to personal financial gain come at the bottom of the list of motivating factors. Taking account of this sense of moral purpose will be an important consideration in seeking broader engagement from school leaders in school-to-school support.

Becoming a professional partner provides a good entry into system leadership and there is widespread interest in becoming a professional partner among school leaders that are not already involved in headteacher mentoring.

There are also substantial levels of interest in taking on the more demanding system leadership roles, with secondary school heads being more interested in taking on an NLE role than their primary counterparts. The interest in pursuing an executive

head role is highest among those school leaders already working in a federation structure, especially within secondary schools. The move to encouraging schools to apply for academy status in pairs or clusters could, therefore, reinforce the efforts to develop broader leadership roles.

The main factors inhibiting school leaders taking on broader roles are a fear that it will detract from their role as head and a lack of experience. The positive experience of existing system leaders, as evidenced by the research, and the provision of development support provide the best ways of addressing these concerns.

Experience of being a headteacher, communication, presentation and interpersonal skills and strategic thinking ability are seen as the most important skills to fulfil system leadership responsibilities. Respondents' consensus on this and on other skill requirements provides a very clear specification for the training and development that is required to support school leaders in taking on additional roles.

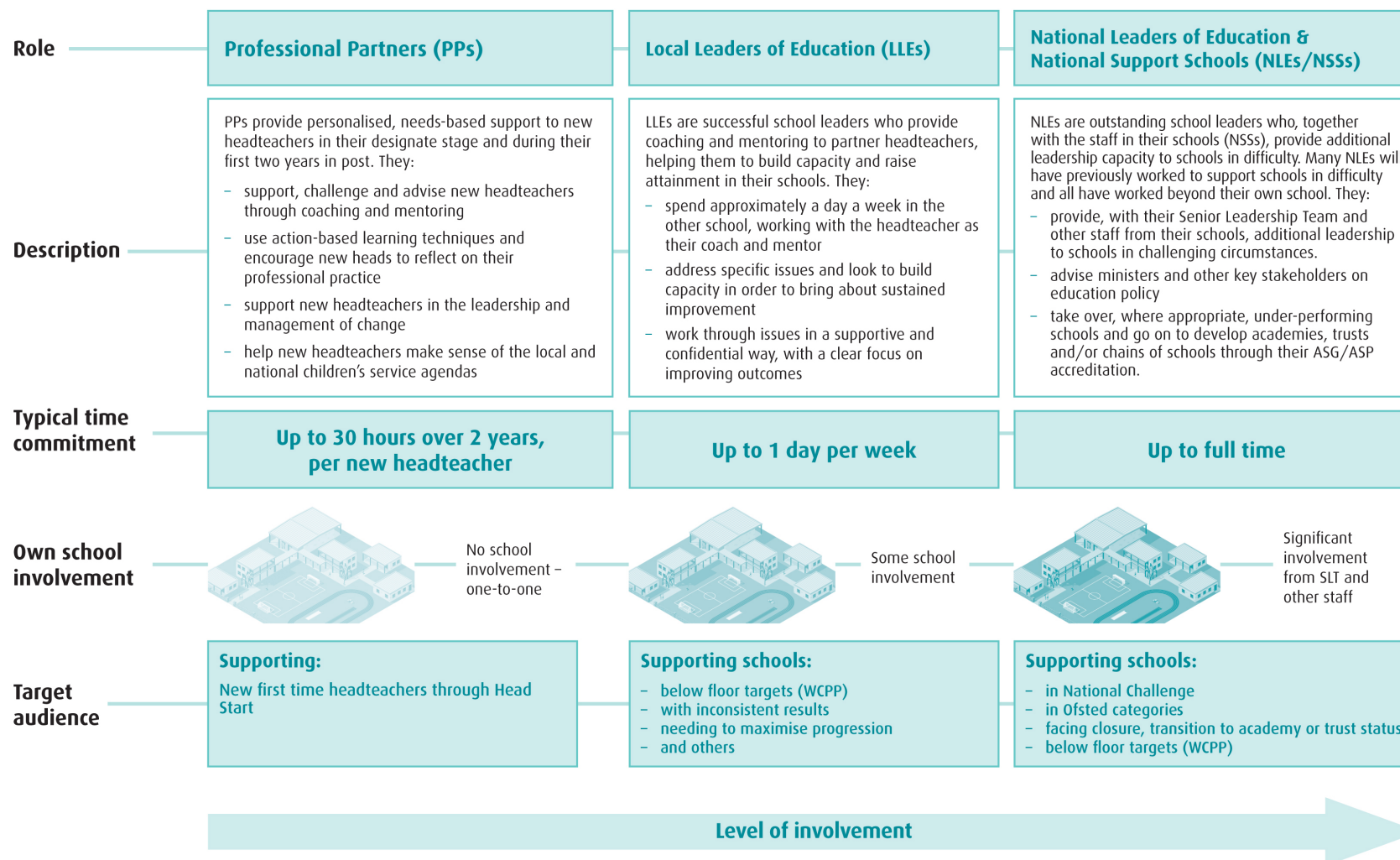
The forms of development support that existing system leaders most value are an experienced coach/mentor, access to support networks of others undertaking similar roles, a formal induction process, and periodic conferences to share trends and best practice. There is also some demand to tailor training to schools being supported by system leaders. These findings also serve to provide a good development blueprint for emerging system leaders.

Once school leaders take on broader roles they are likely to sustain their commitment, with the vast majority of system leaders envisaging that they will still be in their role in three years' time. This both confirms the commitment to the types of roles envisaged in the white paper and indicates that it is worth making the investment in development support for system leaders.

The role that the National College is playing in facilitating the strategic and practical development of system leaders is understood and valued by school leaders. If the school-to-school support agenda set out in the white paper is to become a strong driver of school improvement, it will be important for the National College to sustain the way it is enabling more school leaders to think and operate on a strategic and systemic level.

Appendix

System leaders in practice: work and impact of system leaders



References

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The National College is uniquely dedicated to developing and supporting aspiring and serving leaders in schools, academies and early years settings.

The College gives its members the professional development and recognition they need to build their careers and support those they work with. Members are part of a community of thousands of other leaders - exchanging ideas, sharing good practice and working together to make a bigger difference for children and young people.

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