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National College
for Leadership of Schools
and Children's Services

Schools and academies

National teaching schools

Findings from phase one of the consultation, January – March 2011



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About the consultation

The National College and Training and Development Agency for Schools (TDA) are very clear about the importance of involving professionals from schools and other interested parties in the development of the teaching school approach. Following an initial discussion forum on the College's website in December 2010, we began a formal consultation on aspects of the teaching school model and designation process in January 2011.

The findings from the consultation are directly informing the development of thinking and the practical implementation of the teaching schools approach throughout this process. For example, many aspects of the designation and prioritisation approach outlined in the prospectus for teaching schools (due for publication in March 2011) reflect the consultation findings.

In order to support the aim of designating the first tranche of teaching schools by September 2011 – which requires the first application round to open in April 2011 – the consultation is being run in two phases.

Phase one (January–early March 2011)

Consultation with school leaders and other stakeholders with a primary focus on the evidence required to evaluate the designation criteria and whether particular groups or areas should be prioritised as we develop the approach.

This phase included an online questionnaire as well as face-to-face and online discussions, focus groups and a range of other activities involving both school leaders and other stakeholders. Formal responses have also been received from two professional associations.

Phase two (March–May 2011)

Wider consultation on how the various elements of the model can be implemented in different contexts, including more in-depth discussions on aspects such as specialist leaders of education.

This phase will include 12 regional events involving school and local authority leaders as well as other activities.

About this report

This report summarises the findings from phase one of the consultation. A further report will be published at the end of phase two which brings together the overall findings.

This report reflects the views of over 2700 leaders and other stakeholders¹. It is structured in two sections:

- section one provides a synthesis of the key messages we have heard from phase one of the consultation
- section two provides a more detailed summary of the responses relating to the individual evaluation criteria and prioritisation questions

1. 1,066 leaders and other stakeholders completed the online survey. Approximately 800 leaders and stakeholders were engaged through the other activities. In addition, 842 headteachers were asked how appealing they find the idea of teaching schools in the College's annual survey.

Section one: key messages overall from phase one of the consultation

There is strong support for the concept of teaching schools and a clear belief that they should be drawn from the very best schools in the country. There is a strong view that teaching schools should be motivated by a desire to improve teaching and learning in schools, rather than finance or the perceived status.

The expectation that teaching schools should work in partnership with other schools is widely welcomed, although the challenges of assessing a school's commitment and capability in this area are recognised. Responses indicated that successful teaching schools will need to be able to work collaboratively with a 'helicopter view' in order to recognise and draw on the strengths of all the schools involved in the partnership. However, there is some concern that a two-tier system could emerge between teaching schools and others, for example if teaching schools attract key resources and staff at the expense of other schools.

Despite the overall support for teaching schools being drawn from the very best schools in the country, the use of Ofsted judgements in the designation criteria is seen as problematic by many respondents. The concerns relate to technical issues (such as the changes in the inspection framework and length of time since some schools were last inspected) as well as more fundamental concerns around whether an Ofsted 'outstanding' necessarily indicates that a school will make a great teaching school. There is also a concern that schools in more deprived contexts are proportionately less likely to receive 'outstanding' Ofsteds, yet these schools can often provide the most powerful learning opportunities and are critical for closing the gap in performance.

Respondents were clear that the process for designating and quality assuring teaching schools should be transparent, rigorous and reliable. It will be imperative to designate the right schools (such as those genuinely committed to working with others to improve the whole system), but respondents recognised that the evidence for assessing this commitment will be hard to gather and judge. Therefore there is support for the principle that the assessment of applications should involve professional judgement along with an evaluation of objective and robust evidence.

Respondents recognised that the roles envisaged for teaching schools are considerable and so will demand significant capacity, particularly at middle and senior leadership level. Some felt that this means the role is likely to be attractive to larger schools, with concerns that primaries (in particular small primaries) may not engage. Related concerns raised by some respondents were that: some areas of the country have very few schools which meet the criteria and schools in rural areas face particular challenges when it comes to collaboration and sharing practice.

Some aspects of the teaching school vision still lack clarity. These include areas such as initial teacher training (ITT), where the Department for Education (DfE) review is still underway. The exact role of local authorities in relation to school to school support and improvement is also an evolving area. It is envisaged that these issues will become clearer during phase two of the consultation and so the final report will be able to provide more clarity.

In terms of the prioritisation approach, respondents were clear that the quality of schools should be the overriding consideration. Beyond this a range of factors were raised with the need for a sufficiently broad socio-economic mix of teaching schools being particularly significant.

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Section two: responses relating to the individual evaluation criteria and prioritisation questions

Key findings

How appealing is the idea of teaching schools?

81.3 per cent of the 842 primary, secondary and special school heads from the maintained and independent sectors surveyed by independent researchers as part of the College's annual survey said that they found the idea appealing, of which 37.1 per cent found it very appealing and 4.3 per cent found it very unappealing. Converting academy heads were asked the same question in a survey by PricewaterhouseCoopers (PWC) (as part of a separate study) and 93 per cent found the concept appealing or very appealing.

Focus group participants who discussed the model in depth felt the overall design (with stringent designation criteria that few schools could aspire to) has formality, structure and clout. One participant commented: 'The principles are great. The principles are absolutely spot on.' Having fewer teaching schools with a regional, rather than local, focus will help give prestige and overcome parochialism.

There is a concern expressed by some that the assessment of the criteria could become bureaucratic.

Themes which emerged from the consultation centred on:

- demonstrating a clear moral purpose
- displaying an openness to learning from other schools and from good practice more broadly
- committing to promoting strong networks and acting as a hub for sharing expertise between schools
- having a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of partner schools

What would be the characteristics of an effective teaching school?

- i. **A clear track record of long-standing collaborative relationships with a significant number of partner schools based upon trust and mutual respect, resulting in substantial school improvement across a locality or group of schools.**

This requirement has been widely welcomed and viewed as fundamental to the success of teaching schools. Many consultees stated that it is the quality rather than length of collaboration which is most critical.

Seventy one per cent of respondents to the survey took 'long standing' to relate to a minimum of three years partnership working.

Many consultees acknowledged the difficulties in evidencing relationships of this nature. However, there was seen to be value in seeking the views of a range of organisations on this in order to triangulate assertions from applicant schools. These included: asking a random sample of other local schools to rate the school; and asking other knowledgeable bodies, such as local authorities and diocese, for their view. Written evidence of joint working, such as successful joint bids and evaluations of collaborative projects, were frequently highlighted as helpful in demonstrating a track record of working in this way

- ii. **Ofsted outstanding for [a] overall effectiveness, [b] teaching and learning, and [c] leadership and management.**

While consultees in the main accepted the premise that teaching schools need to be high quality and driven by outstanding practice, the requirement for them to have been assessed as outstanding by Ofsted was viewed as the most problematic of the

proposed eligibility criteria. The following concerns were central to this:

- schools judged outstanding could have been inspected under very different frameworks with differing expectations and rigour
- some schools might have been judged outstanding several years ago but this does not mean they are still outstanding now, while the fact that outstanding schools will not necessarily receive further inspections means it will be hard to monitor quality in future
- a concern that schools in challenging circumstances are proportionately less likely to receive Ofsted outstanding
- the potential that some schools may deliberately have scored themselves down in self-evaluations in order to be aspirational

More broadly, many indicated that being assessed as an outstanding school did not necessarily mean that they would be an outstanding teaching school.

This requirement for outstanding designation was also viewed as a potentially significant disincentive for some potential teaching schools who may be wary of putting themselves forward as leadership beacons.

In response to some of these concerns, 67 per cent of respondents to the survey believed that schools should be able to apply and pay to be reassessed to demonstrate that they were now outstanding.

iii. Consistently high levels of pupil performance or continued improvement over the last three years, and are above floor standards.

While this criteria received some support, concern has been raised as to whether three years was the most appropriate timescale over which this should be evidenced.

iv. Outstanding senior and middle leaders who have demonstrated the capacity to:

- make a significant and high quality contribution to the training of teachers.

Consultees displayed considerable interest in the teaching school responsibilities in relation to ITT, which was viewed by many as core to their role. Being able to evidence sufficient leadership capacity across the school [not just within the Senior Leadership Team] to support this work was a consistent theme in discussions on this criterion.

86 per cent of respondents to the survey indicated that evidence of providing pre-training school experience was a positive indication of a good track record in ITT. The most appropriate evidence of commitment and capacity to provide high quality ITT were:

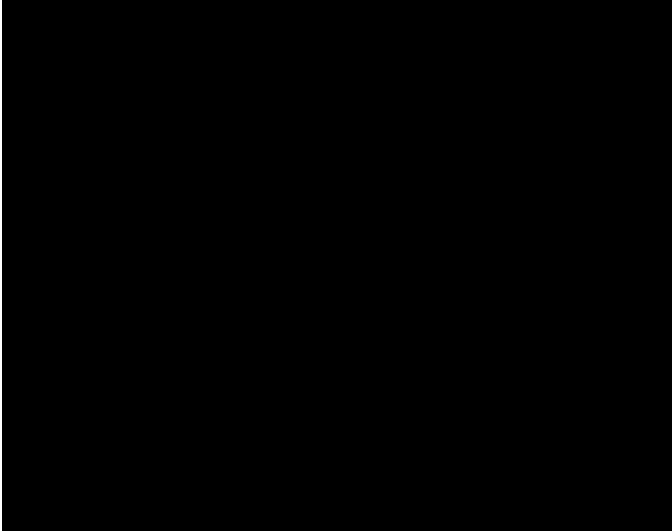
- supporting all trainees with a trained mentor (86 per cent)
- providing a range of ITT programmes (84 per cent)
- offering training programmes in school to support the development of trainees (80 per cent)
- provide highly effective professional development for teaching and/or leadership.

Three potential sources of evidence of this received considerable support from respondents to the survey. These comprised:

- testimonies from trainees/teachers/leaders of other schools or academies (71.9 per cent)
- evaluation or impact evidence from continuing professional development provision (68.6 per cent)
- written evidence from HEI and other partners involved in delivery (56.2 per cent)
- provide significant and successful support to underperforming schools within a school-to-school partnership, federation or chain.

Consultees have broadly supported the notion that teaching schools could play a positive role in brokering support for their peers in challenging circumstances. However there is a desire for clarity as to how this connects with the role of others involved in this activity, most notably local authorities and academies.

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72 per cent of respondents to the survey saw testimonies from leaders of other schools and academies as a key source of evidence of providing support to other schools. A further 64 per cent believed that evaluations and impact evidence from previous instances of school improvement support were also helpful.

v. Evidence of improvement supported by self evaluation, coaching, mentoring, quality assurance and engagement in practitioner-led research with strong links to higher education.

Respondents to the online survey highlighted the following forms of evidence as relevant to this:

- school improvement action plans (72 per cent)
- a significant proportion of staff trained in coaching and mentoring (71.9 per cent)
- most recent self-evaluation form (SEF) (62.1 per cent)

However, views were mixed as to whether potential teaching schools should demonstrate evidence of practitioner research and/or strong links with higher education institutions (HEIs).

The phase-related and geographical spread of teaching schools and their prioritisation

In broad terms most participants in phase one of the consultation have indicated that quality should be the primary consideration for designating teaching schools. This is more important than phase or other characteristics. However many felt that prioritisation should take account of socio-economic context as well as other factors such as phase and locality.

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Conclusion and next steps

Based on this first phase of consultation, there is considerable support for teaching schools in principle and a strong belief that such institutions should work in partnership with other schools to improve the quality of provision for children. The consultation has already begun to illuminate the key characteristics and features of a successful teaching school in practice.

The second phase of consultation will provide further opportunities to test these findings and explore aspects of the model, such as the role of teaching schools in relation to initial teacher training and the role of specialist leaders of education, in more depth.

Despite this overall support for the concept, consultees have highlighted a number of reservations and issues which require further consideration. The College plans to use the first year of its work on teaching schools as a design and development phase and this will provide an important opportunity to test out and evaluate potential responses to these concerns.

There is a strong view that the designation process must be transparent, equitable and fair, but that the imperative is to designate the right schools of the highest possible quality.

The National College for Leadership of Schools and Children's Services is committed to excellence and dedicated to inclusiveness. We exist to develop and inspire great leaders of schools, early years settings and children's services. We share the same ambition – to make a positive difference to the lives of children and young people.

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