National College
for Leadership of Schools
and Children's Services

Schools and academies

Achieving excellence in academy leadership

Resource

Achieving excellence in academy leadership: qualities and behaviours

Purpose

This resource considers the distinctiveness of leading in academies, both for sponsored and conversion academies. It offers a set of qualities and behaviours which can be used flexibly in a range of ways by:

— individuals at various stages of their leadership journey

— academies as they develop themselves and their staff and teams

— schools converting to academies

— groups of academies, working together to improve leadership

— the National College as it considers future leadership activities and programmes, including targeted support for academy leaders

— others in the system working with academy leaders

The qualities and behaviours are generic and transferable, in that they could be demonstrated by all skilled school leaders. However, they are set in the context of preparing leaders for an increasingly diverse system. They recognise that there are distinctive features of academy leadership which need a greater degree of focus and emphasis. Specific qualities and behaviours may also need different degrees of weighting when leading academies in different contexts. The work acknowledges that transformational leadership requires creative and innovative approaches which build on individual strengths. This resource was developed in consultation with existing leaders in academies and builds on and reflects the National Standards for Headteachers. This is not a definitive framework, but rather a flexile and versatile resource. Suggestions for its use are included later in this guidance.

Context

In preparing this resource, guidance from several key sources was used. This includes:

— consultations, research and interviews with a wide range of academy leaders and members of executive boards

— National Standards for Headteachers

— National College succession planning materials

— National Leadership Qualities Framework for Directors of Children's Services

— studies of academy leadership and school leadership more widely, including *Leading academies* by Professor Brent Davies, with Dr Hilary Macaulay (SSAT, 2006) and *Twelve outstanding secondary schools: Excelling against the odds* (Ofsted, 2009)

— other succession planning projects supported by the National College, for example Hampshire's Leadership Development Framework

— Government policy documents

The National College has commissioned further research into the distinctiveness of academy leadership and in particular the leadership implications of converting to academy status. This resource will be revised and updated as a result.

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Qualities and behaviours

1. Securing and maintaining transformational change

1.1. Demonstrating commitment to the ideology of academies; extending the horizons of what is possible and securing step change in the standards of learning and teaching, including readiness to work in the most challenging contexts or with less successful partner schools.

1.2. Expressing with conviction and clarity the aspirational aims and purposes of the academy; constantly mediating the thinking and practice of staff and students to raise standards; releasing the inherent capacity of staff and students to improve.

1.3. Having a passion for learning, excellence and equity in order to close the achievement gap; driving forward improvement in performance, where necessary, via fundamental changes to learning and organisational cultures.

1.4. Demonstrating high levels of creativity and innovation and being at the leading edge of transformational practice.

1.5. Possessing the leadership and management skills to build strong relationships with parents/carers and the local community and to develop an appropriate range of external links, including business, voluntary organisations and other agencies, in order to enable or maintain the highest standards.

1.6. Demonstrating the ability to combine operational action with strategic planning, securing short term improvements at the same time as building sustainable change.

1.7. Building capacity and growing future leaders through an effective programme of staff development, talent management, distributive leadership, research and innovation, including in partner schools.

1.8. Developing high performing teams where everyone feels valued and secure, including staff and pupils in partner schools.

1.9. Reflecting on progress constantly and effectively use self review to inform future priorities and being prepared to change plans, if necessary, in order to secure more rapid improvement.

2. Demonstrating excellent political and entrepreneurial leadership

2.1. Demonstrating high levels of political acumen and cultural awareness; the ability to anticipate and influence change, make judicious decisions in a complex and diverse environment and manage negatively charged situations.

2.2. Engaging effectively with the local community for the benefit of children, young people and families and being visible and persuasive with a wide range of stakeholders.

2.3. Embracing and making the best use of academy freedoms to improve standards rapidly and to build on and share outstanding practice (freedoms include curricular, staffing, governance, physical resources, pay and conditions and organisation of school day and year).

2.4. Being strongly entrepreneurial; seeing challenges as opportunities and being willing to take and manage risks imaginatively and constructively, including reputational risks; seeing the potential for change and transformation in the most unpromising situations.

2.5. Having the appetite to work autonomously, combined with the ability to form highly effective partnerships and collaborate to achieve greater impact.

2.6. Understanding and celebrating diversity as a key focus for leadership and learning.

3. Establishing sustainable and accountable systems of organisation and governance

3.1. Devising and assuring rigorous systems and structures of accountability.

3.2. Understanding and working with new leadership and governance structures including sponsors and executive structures.

3.3. Having a confident grasp of financial planning, budgeting and business acumen in the context of an independent state school.

3.4. Using data confidently and effectively to secure and sustain improving standards; developing these skills in all senior and middle leaders.

3.5. Attracting, recruiting, inducting, developing and retaining high quality staff; ensuring that all staff are challenged, supported and developed to operate consistently in raising standards, be flexible and thrive in either outstanding and/or adverse circumstances.

3.6. Creating an effective approach to talent management that builds leadership capacity and capability; planning to distribute leadership as the confidence of the academy, and its partner school(s), grows and standards improve.

3.7. Maximising the efficient and sustainable use of all available resources for the benefit of the whole community, including buildings, human and financial resources and where appropriate working in collaboration with others to secure improved value for money.

3.8. Fostering system leadership including the development of partnerships with other schools and promoting school-to-school support.

4. Personal characteristics

Successful academy leaders will demonstrate:

4.1. Passion for the needs of all children and young people to create high aspirations and engender hope for the future.

4.2. Clear vision for excellence in education.

4.3. Excellent cognitive and analytical skills combined with a high level of emotional intelligence; ability to model, apply and develop emotional intelligence in extremely sensitive and complex situations.

4.4. Authenticity and integrity that will generate trust within the academy, with partner schools and across the wider community.

4.5. Courage, the ability to think and act independently and to take difficult decisions.

4.6. Humility that recognises the need to build strong teams and partnerships with a collective responsibility for transformation.

4.7. Patience, tenacity and resilience, particularly when leading aspects of sustained organisational and cultural change.

4.8. Having the personal energy, stamina and optimism to maintain a positive outlook even in the most demanding situations.

4.9. Heightened ability to manage conflict and vulnerability; to mediate and secure positive and sustainable outcomes.

4.10 Strong desire to work towards a balanced life, recognising the need for personal and professional development, in the context of the additional pressures of greater autonomy.

Three levels of performance

These qualities and behaviours could be demonstrated at three levels:

— Emergent and early academy leadership – understanding excellence.
  Target groups: aspirant academy leaders/ principals; new academy principals

— Established academy leadership - developing excellence.
  Target group: serving principals leading a single academy; serving heads of outstanding schools moving to academies

— Extended academy leadership – extending excellence.
  Target group: experienced principals leading a group of academies; advanced/system leaders, including those working in partnership with less successful schools

Two examples of possible level descriptors are given in the annex to this document. Those wishing to use the materials may wish to extend these and develop their own descriptors, for example to take account of the distinctive values and context of individual academies and groups.

Using this resource

It is suggested that the academy leadership qualities and behaviours resources might prove useful in the following contexts:

Visioning – when an academy is seeking to develop a clear expression of core values and beliefs, particularly in terms of the leadership of learning. (Sections 1.1-1.4, 2.1-2.6)

Leadership auditing – in circumstances where a robust analysis of current strengths and future development areas is required. (1.1-1.5, 2.1-2.4)

Governing body development and training – executive groups, chairs of governors and the overall governance of academies might find it useful to consider the guidance as part of an approach to leadership development issues. (3.1-3.8)

Recruitment procedures - especially formulation of job descriptions (JD), person specifications (PS) and the formulation of interview schedules. As one of the formative purposes of the guidance, it is proposed that JD, PS and interview formats might be constructed with reference to the resources. (3.5-3.8)

In particular, it is felt that the organisation of Assessment and Development Centres might be based upon the overview represented by the resource. (1.5-1.9, 3.5-3.8)

The resources might also prove useful as a scaffold for leadership policy work.

This may in turn provide the underpinning for a process of leadership identification, management and development. (3.5-3.8)

As a framework for prioritised leadership development programmes. As another of the formative purposes of the guidance, it is suggested that within-academy and system-wide planning for the development of senior academy leadership teams might be enhanced by reference to the framework. Where appropriate, the resources may assist in the formulation of schemes of accelerated leadership work. (3.5-3.8)

In all of the above instances it is hoped that the resources may lead to a shared language concerning the development of team building and transferable skills across academies. (1.7, 1.8)

It has also been the intention that these resources might be used to enrich the performance management process, both during the negotiating of challenging 'stretch' objectives for the individual and during the review/debriefing stage.

It is hoped that, at the individual level, there is scope for using the resources for planning career progression; this might include using the materials for self-review and personal-professional assessment. (1.7, 1.8, 3.1)

There is also the option of the resources providing the basis for well-structured coaching, as a source of 'critical friend' analysis and as guidance for a range of supportive peer review activities and evaluation. (Section 4)

In all of these inter-personal contexts, the use of the resources might lead to the development of coherent individualised leadership programmes or the devising of well-focussed action research proposals (all sections).

Qualities and behaviours: three levels

Two examples of level descriptors are given below, for 2.3 and 4.6. Users of the document may want to develop these further for their own context.

Qualities and behaviours	Emergent and early academy leadership – understanding excellence	Established academy leadership – developing excellence	Extending academy leadership – extending excellence
1. Securing and maintaining transnsformational change			
2. Demonstrating excellent political and entrepreneurial leadership **2.3 Making the best use of academy freedoms** to improve standards rapidly and/or to maintain and share outstanding practice	Able to interpret and use information to establish an appropriate strategic direction likely to secure improvement (use of information)	Able to assess future challenges within the organisation by generating high quality information and using additional indicators to make sound judgements about a strategic direction that will secure improvement (use of information)	Able to use a wide range of high integrity information to identify future challenges/direction with precision, to secure and sustain in depth transformational change within and across the organisations and to coach others in developing these skills (use of information)
	Has a clear understanding of how to raise achievement and standards, share good practice and create systems to secure improvement (raising standards)	Has a sound understanding of the necessary components within the academy context to secure a learning-focused organisation and uses them proficiently and to positive advantage to secure improvement for all (raising standards)	Has a creative approach and uses innovation and development to raise and extend achievement and to secure the highest possible standards for all across a range of contexts (raising standards)
	Has an understanding of, and uses a number of academy freedoms with appropriate responsibility and a degree of creativity in a way that secures clarity of direction and good practice (freedoms)	Has an increasing repertoire of academy freedoms and uses these to inform and enrich strategic direction and improved practice/standards (freedoms)	Has an acute awareness of all the freedoms allowed by academy status and uses these tactically and strategically to raise standards and disseminate excellent practice across the system (freedoms)
	Able to recognise good practice and disseminate it through appropriate routes to effect and sustain agreed improvements (dissemination)	Able to utilise good and outstanding practice in a highly effective way to assure consistency across the academy by embedding this practice into infrastructure, CPD and teamwork (dissemination)	Able to share outstanding practice in a controlled and imaginative way which will bring about sustained transformation to a number of schools/ settings (dissemination)

Qualities and behaviours: three levels

Qualities and behaviours	Emergent and early academy leadership – understanding excellence	Established academy leadership – developing excellence	Extending academy leadership – extending excellence
3. Establishing sustainable and accountable systems of organisation and governance			
4. Personal characteristics **4.6 Humility** that recognises the need to build strong teams and partnerships with a collective	Able to create and articulate a vision that has the potential to inspire, engage and align a range of stakeholders (shared vision) Has the capacity to recognise and seek to secure appropriate partnerships to enrich practice and raise standards (collective responsibility)	Able to articulate a high quality vision that secures the commitment and engagement of stakeholders and/or partners across the academy (shared vision) Has the capacity to gain the commitment and engagement of an increasingly dynamic and diverse range of partnerships and ensure these are apt and of high quality to support the next phase of transformation (collective responsibility)	Able to embody and model a highly compelling vision across a number of organisations and/or partners that is widely recognised as transformational and secures the sustained commitment of all (shared vision) Has the capacity to create a self-sustaining network of high quality partnerships which share an agreed vision and have a deeply rooted commitment to the transformational and system leadership agendas (collective responsibility)

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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