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National College
for Leadership of Schools
and Children's Services

Schools and academies

What are we learning about... effective local solutions to support succession planning?

Succession planning Evidence into practice guide

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About this guide

This guide focuses on school leadership succession planning at a local level. It looks at how authorities and dioceses have developed their own local solutions to common challenges and implemented strategies tailored to their own context.

The guide examines the characteristics of successful local solutions based on real practice. It suggests that effective local solutions:

- are founded on a shared understanding of the challenge based on data
- often build from existing good practice
- contribute to a coherent local strategy
- drive continuous self improvement

The guide explores each of these characteristics and identifies factors which could improve the implementation of local solutions in the future.

A range of additional online resources, which include more case studies and practical tools, are available at:

www.nationalcollege.org.uk/successionplanning

Evidence Into Practice Guides

This is one in a series of guides that share intelligence and insights into the leadership succession challenge facing schools. All the What are we learning about... guides can be downloaded from:

www.nationalcollege.org.uk/publications-atoz

What are local solutions?

The reasons for seeking rapid improvements in school leadership succession planning are well documented. Put simply, too few suitable candidates were putting themselves forward for headship at a time when significant numbers of serving headteachers were reaching retirement. As a result, an increasing number of schools (especially in the primary phase) were experiencing difficulty in recruiting headteachers.

Focusing attention on this challenge in 2005, planners at national level quickly realised that a solution was unlikely to come through a single over-arching strategy. The precise nature of the challenge varied from one part of the country to another. The complexity of issues required commitment from a wide range of organisations in each area. In short, any response would need to be driven locally rather than nationally.

This was how the local solutions strategy was born.

Local succession planning was developed around a common framework rather than a centrally prescribed blueprint. The framework was based on the premise that effective succession planning takes place across systems of schools – for example through a local authority, diocese or cluster of schools - with each system tailoring an approach which is responsive to local circumstance.

It encouraged local authorities and dioceses to develop their own action plans, co-ordinating the effort of many players, recognising that short-term tactical initiatives were required alongside long-term strategic plans.

In this way, 'local solutions' has come to describe a way of working.

- It is bottom-up rather than top down. Plans are based on local needs rather than being required to follow a national blueprint.
- Local authorities and dioceses identify their own objectives, are self-evaluative and learn from each other, rather than being subject to externally imposed of national targets.
- Plans are evidence based, using local and national data, and are shaped to reflect local context.
- Working relationships are forged on openness and trust based on the pursuit of shared goals. Robust challenge is combined with professional support.
- Effort and resources are targeted on those areas requiring greatest support.
- Builds on the best existing local practice.

Local solutions are as much about creating a culture which encourages engagement and creativity as it is about the processes which underpin it.

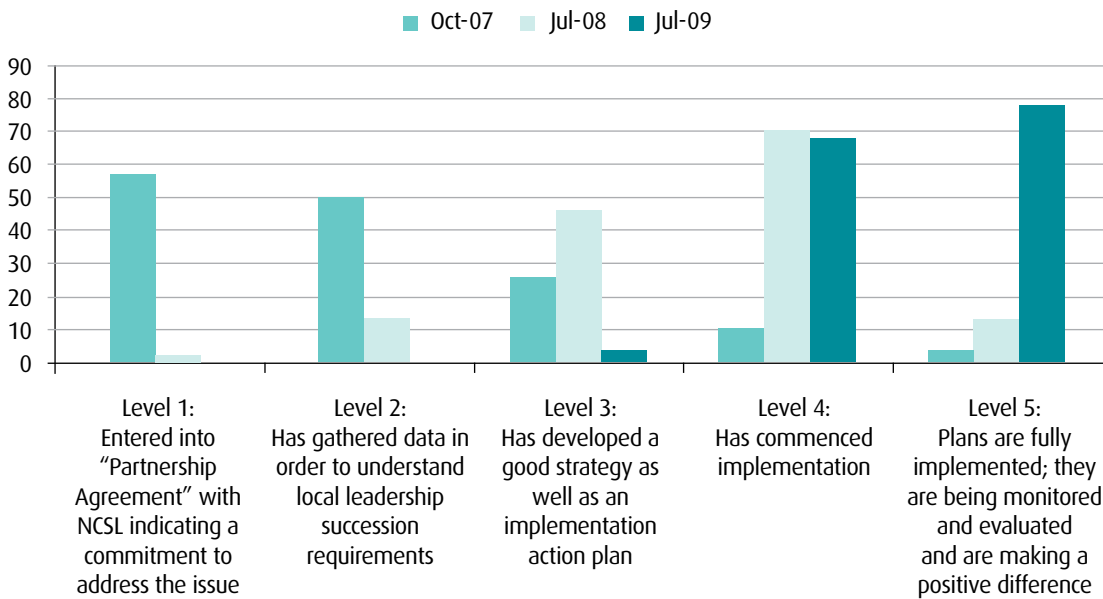
As an approach to a major policy priority, local solutions is a new way of working. And its emerging success in promoting effective succession planning at a local level suggests that it works.

Succession planning is a long-term endeavour. Impact is more likely to be measured over years rather than months. However, early indications suggest that the local solutions being put in place are beginning to make an impact.

Feedback from the College’s National Succession Consultants (NSCs), who work directly with local authorities to support planning, suggest that almost all authorities now have a good level of engagement with schools and other local stakeholders. The vast majority have a school leadership succession planning strategy in place which is being implemented and monitored by a local partnership forum – described as Level 4 engagement in the chart below.

In addition to existing succession planning initiatives (some of which are highlighted in case studies featured in this guide), NSCs are reporting a greater range of alternative leadership models being deployed at local level, including job sharing and executive headships, and that these are contributing to addressing the succession challenge.

Assessment of local authority engagement with succession planning initiatives, by Level of Engagement, 2007-2009¹

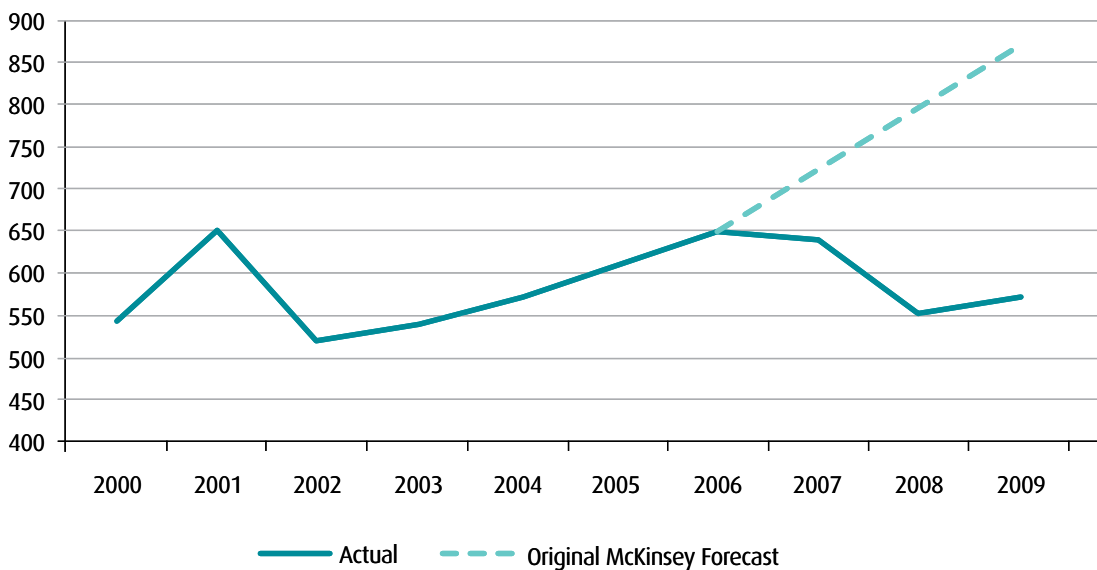


There are indications, too, of movement in national headline indicators which suggests that local succession planning is making an impact.

The number of temporarily filled headteacher vacancies has declined since 2006, reversing a five year trend of annual increases². This contrasts sharply with an original forecast made by McKinsey before recent succession planning activity was initiated. (See chart).

In addition, appetite for headship appears to have increased. The proportion of teachers who identify headship as an aspiration increased from 32 per cent in 2007 to 35 per cent in 2008³.

Number of temporarily filled headteacher posts (2000-2009)² vs original McKinsey Forecast



Sources:

1. The National College, *Succession Planning: Local Authority Self Assessment*, September 2009, unpublished
2. DCSF (Department for Children, Schools and Families), January 2009, *School Workforce in England (Provisional)*, London, DCSF
3. ICM for NCSL, *Headship Index*, 2008, Nottingham, NCSL

Effective local solutions... rest on a shared understanding of the challenge

The local solutions approach to succession planning is based on a clear diagnosis of the challenge. At the outset, considerable effort was invested to map the succession planning landscape fully – from labour market movements to the perceptions of future leaders.

Critically, this diagnostic process was objective. It highlighted weaknesses to address as well as strengths to build on. It provided a solid platform on which to establish a common understanding of the challenge.

It also gave rise to an evidence-based framework for action⁴. This enabled local authorities, dioceses and groups of schools to create their own local solutions based on consistent objectives: consistent, but not uniform.

Taking the diagnostic process further, local authorities and dioceses refined the evidence base by collecting local data and contextual information.

As a result, local objectives reflect local requirements and provide a rallying point for bringing together those with a role to play in developing future leaders. In particular, current headteachers have become champions for succession planning with their colleagues and with governors.

Through this process, nationally and locally, the succession planning agenda is being addressed from a common understanding of the challenge.

Local planners have developed a variety of tactics to establish effective local solutions, including:

- embedding succession planning within their core leadership development agenda
- bringing together multi-disciplinary teams to shape planning – school leaders, workforce planners and HR professionals, school improvement advisers and capital planning teams

Source:

4. The framework for action is available to download from www.nationalcollege.org.uk/framework-for-action

What has worked well in general...	What we find where local solutions are most advanced...
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The national framework for action has held up well as a guide for local planning.• Most local authorities and dioceses have succeeded in creating broad-based succession plans which engage schools directly.• Planning has been informed by evidence – for example from online resources and Evidence Into Practice guides.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Succession planning has been linked into wider policy considerations – for example BSF, ECM etc.• Local processes for collecting data are sophisticated, sustainable and able to measure change effectively.• Complex local challenges have been addressed – such as securing sufficient leaders for small primary schools and diversifying leadership.



Case Study

East Riding of Yorkshire Local Authority

East Riding Local Authority serves a rural area in Yorkshire. The local authority had become concerned about both the sustainability of its smaller primary schools, caused by falling rolls, and the difficulty in recruiting headteachers. With relatively few funded leadership positions across East Riding primary schools, it was becoming more difficult for potential candidates to gain substantial leadership experience prior to application for the new NPQH and headship.

The authority set about building a shared commitment to address this challenge. Using funding from the National College's Partnership Grant, the authority built a broad-based Strategy Group which brought together headteachers, local authority officers, governors and representatives of the local diocese. Following a workshop held in 2007, the East Riding Leadership Development Centre for schools was established.

The Centre's initial priority was the identification of aspiring heads – initially by online nomination by current headteachers. To widen access to the Centre, participants are now also able to self nominate and apply via the local CPD prospectus and online booking system.

The full Partnership Grant has been focused on the development and delivery of the centres, at a cost of £500 per participant. This funding enables five centres per year to support sixty-four participants. Further funding has been provided by the TDA to develop the online training element.

In response to recent local leadership issues the role of the Centre has broadened to:

- support leaders from schools in special measures
- provide a diagnostic tool for individuals applying for headship
- deliver learning reviews for recently appointed/acting heads
- discuss opportunities to build leadership capacity in individual schools and across schools

Thirty-two participants are currently participating in peer development and school improvement projects leading to Masters' accreditation.

The original Strategy Group has been a tangible expression of the benefits of collaborative working. As a result support has grown amongst the local authority, diocese, local headteachers and governing bodies for the formation of a range of school federations. Consequently, leadership opportunities in the form of executive headships and co-headships have grown too, as both learning, services and the 14-19 curriculum are increasingly delivered across schools.

The Strategy Group has also recognised the need to expand leadership development opportunities beyond the Leadership Centre. Schools and new federations are now involved in developing bespoke school-based models.

The inclusive, collaborative approach to succession planning has created a sustainable strategy to meet local requirements.

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Further Resources

Succession Planning Self-Evaluation Form
www.nationalcollege.org.uk/getting-started-on-succession-planning.pdf

Effective local solutions... often build from existing good practice

The local solutions approach recognises that in many cases the **capability** to respond to challenges already exists at local level. The starting assumption is that local authorities and dioceses have it within themselves to devise effective strategies to match local circumstances.

Faced with competing priorities, however, not all local organisations may feel they have the **capacity**.

The local solutions approach recognises this dilemma. The role of central bodies is to be the catalyst to release local talent and innovation to meet local needs. This may be achieved by facilitating collaborations to achieve economies of scale, sharing ideas for alternative ways of working, or through the injection of start-up resources.

To support effective succession planning, all of these approaches were important. The National College supported local solutions by:

- providing modest grants to local authorities as start-up funding
- creating a targeted support programme to provide assistance to emerging leaders in those authorities facing greatest challenge
- establishing a network of expert National Succession Consultants to support knowledge transfer between local planners

- bringing local succession planners together to share thinking – for example through the National College’s Leading Practice seminars
- delivering high quality web-based and printed materials as part of an overall communications strategy
- providing focused expertise for diversifying leadership

Local authorities and dioceses have developed a range of responses to deliver effective local solutions. They have generated capacity and released capability by:

- building on existing strengths, for example in CPD provision, to link succession planning into current work programmes rather than approaching it as a stand-alone issue
- engaging school leaders directly in developing a local solution, for example by seconding individual school leaders to add capacity, or by forming school-led planning groups
- forming alliances with other organisations where increased scale would aid effectiveness (for example in planning for the collective succession requirements of widely dispersed special schools)

The flexible local solutions approach has released creativity and innovation at local level.

What has worked well in general...

- Local authorities and dioceses have demonstrated that they have the capability to devise creative and innovative solutions to plan for the future.
- Succession planning has been made the business of the whole school system.
- Centrally provided priming budgets (with relatively few strings attached) have been used effectively.

What we find where local solutions are most advanced...

- Alternative structures have emerged as an engine for succession planning – based, for example, around groups of schools.
- Local authorities and dioceses have found effective ways to engage governors in succession planning at an early stage.
- Sustainable strategies have been established, recognising that succession planning requires long lead-in times.



Case Study

South Gloucestershire Leadership Academy

In 2004 South Gloucestershire Council identified that 50 per cent of its headteachers were over the age of 50 and 35 per cent were over the age of 55. The council was aware that it needed to both grow new leaders to address the inevitable succession challenge and also create leadership development structures that would develop leaders at all levels and make headship an attractive career path.

Building on an induction programme for new heads which was already well regarded, a group of headteachers worked collaboratively to create a Leaders of Learning hub which supported the sharing of knowledge and practice in the areas of personalisation, transformational leadership and leading schools in challenging circumstances.

The early success of this work led the Director of Children's Services and the Head of School Improvement to appoint a Leadership, Management and Governance Strategy Manager. This manager's role was to establish the South Gloucestershire Leadership Academy and further develop the Leaders of Learning hub to promote effective leadership whilst growing leaders for the future. A stewardship group, comprising leaders from across children's services, schools and supported by the Dean of Education, University of the West of England as a critical friend, underpinned the success of the academy.

Supported by funding from the National College's Early Headship Provision grant and through the awarding of Beacon Status for School Improvement, the Leadership Academy established a mentor and coaching model for all headteachers and deputy headteachers within the authority.

The Leadership, Management and Governance Strategy Manager researched mentoring and coaching models in use in other sectors to gain a wide view of effective coaching models.

The Headteachers in Industry programme (HTI) also contributed to the work of the Leadership Academy through the training and accreditation of a cadre of Mentor Headteachers who wanted to become Advanced Leadership Coaches. This cadre of Leadership Coaches is leading the training and development of aspiring headteachers as part of the Leadership Programme -Tomorrows Leaders Today.

The University of the West of England has been actively involved in supporting the work of the academy through the provision of a critical friendship; providing academic support for academy research and development activities; carrying out leadership related research in South Gloucestershire schools; and facilitating research and knowledge exchange activities.

The focus on developing leadership at all levels across schools has now been extended across children's services with the establishment of the Integrated Working Group which includes elected members, heads of services, local authority advisers, headteachers and a facilitator from the National College. The aim of the group is to utilise the experience gained from developing leadership in schools and extend it across services with the aim of improving outcomes for children and young people.

The Leadership Academy continues to provide a high-quality forum for leadership debate, research and enquiry both nationally and internationally through the extension of its coaching model to school principals in Indonesia.

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Further Resources

NAHT Secondary Leadership Papers – 27
www.leadersoflearning.net

Effective local solutions... contribute to coherent local strategy

The greatest strength of local solutions is their flexibility. They enable local authorities and dioceses to integrate succession planning into wider local strategy. Where this has been achieved, succession planning is at its most effective, contributing directly to the goal of improving outcomes for children and young people.

Effective organisations have shaped their local solution for succession planning around the requirements of local priorities, whether that is the standards agenda, workforce reform, the need to address diversity, children's service integration, school re-organisation or another strategic objective.

In these cases, succession planning has been seen as essential to build capacity to achieve wider system change. The emphasis on creating a local solution for succession planning has been seized as an opportunity to develop a more systematic process for capacity building.

Succession planning established in this way is also likely to be more sustainable.

What has worked well in general...

- Local planners have shaped their approach to succession planning to support local priorities and achieve measureable improvements in outcomes.
- Experienced National Succession Consultants have been able to support local planners by bringing a wider strategic perspective to the table.
- Expertise in effective succession planning is being strengthened at a local level.

What we find where local solutions are most advanced...

- Progress is being made to embed succession planning into policy development.
- Evidence of the impact of effective succession planning is being shared systematically.
- Lessons from succession planning for school leaders are being extended to the wider children's services workforce.



Case Study

Lambeth: Succession planning to support improving standards

Developing their own local solutions, leaders in Lambeth have developed succession planning as an integral part of the drive to improve school standards in the London borough. Succession planning links directly to the local authority's Education Achievement Plan and the Children and Young People's Plan.

Spurred by publication of national data by the National College, the team in Lambeth collated its own data on the age profile of local school leaders. It discovered that 60 per cent of Lambeth headteachers were over the age of 50, with a third planning to retire by 2011. Left unaddressed, this would be a significant barrier to the borough's Achievement Plan.

The authority's response has been developed through a steering group led by the Assistant Director of Standards. This became the New and Future Leaders Group, established with representatives from the authority, headteachers, school improvement consultants, and governor training and workforce and development officers. This group articulated a powerful strategy, 'Future Leaders for Future Schools: an approach to succession planning' which not only aimed to address the potential shortage of headteachers, but also to improve leadership and educational outcomes across Lambeth schools.

A portfolio of leadership development opportunities designed to complement national leadership programmes is now in operation across Lambeth. These include the Headteacher Apprentice Programme which enables senior leaders to work alongside an experienced headteacher from another school in the local authority; the Aspiring Headteachers Programme, which prepares deputy headteachers for urban headship; Future Leaders for Future Schools, a leadership programme for the primary phase which identifies those with the ability to move into headship and a programme of active talent spotting where headteachers and

school improvement partners work together to encourage teachers with leadership potential to join Learning Leaders – a programme to support middle leaders in their roles and beyond.

In addition, a range of induction and mentoring opportunities aimed at attracting and retaining headteachers is offered to new and serving heads.

The Lambeth succession strategy with its twin aims of increasing leadership capacity whilst raising standards is bearing fruit. Lambeth's Best for all our Children partner school programme exceeded its target of raising 12 schools results above floor targets. Pairs of federated schools have had their work praised by Ofsted and results have risen for all parties in the majority of federations. There are currently 6 federations of schools of which one involves three schools (two community primary schools and a recently established Muslim school).

Evaluations from the wide variety of leadership programmes have indicated that the role of headship is viewed positively by participants. There have been recent improvements in the number of applications for headship with the newly created pool of leaders well prepared to face the challenge. In the next phase this work will include an explicit focus on diversifying leadership. The commitment of the Director of Children's Services, the local authority and headteachers to the setting up of the steering group and the subsequent integration of the succession strategy with the agenda to raise standards in schools and with the overall work of the Education Achievement Plan has been key to the success of this work.

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Further Resources

Succession Planning Self-Evaluation Form
www.nationalcollege.org.uk/getting-started-on-succession-planning.pdf

Effective local solutions... drive continuous self improvement

By definition, local solutions are not derived from centrally prescribed blueprints for action. Nor are they managed via externally imposed national targets. But they are built on a clear vision of what success looks like locally and clarity about how such success can be measured.

That is why the concept of rigorous self-evaluation is fundamental to the local solutions approach. It enables authorities and dioceses to establish a culture of continuous improvement and to discover better ways of working for themselves.

To meet the succession planning challenge, the College's NSCs have worked with local authorities to help them assess their performance against common criteria three times a year. This provides a local measure of progress which authorities can use to benchmark their activity against others, as well as generating a national indication of progress.

Targets set locally are relevant to local need – but they are also informed by wider perspectives. Architects of effective local solutions welcome external challenge. This has been provided by the College's NSCs.

NSCs have:

- challenged local planners to set stretching targets and evaluate their progress based on their knowledge of what has been achieved elsewhere, combining challenge with ideas and support to enhance effectiveness
- facilitated learning across organisational boundaries, enabling planners to benchmark their own performance against others
- encouraged local planners to share experiences of initiatives which have failed, as well as those which have succeeded, promoting honesty and openness in evaluation

Recognising that succession planning is a long-term endeavour, effective local solutions are built on a commitment to ongoing appraisal. Future evaluation will enable planners to learn more about the long-term impact of local strategies and the causal relationships between specific initiatives.

What has worked well in general...

- Effective organisations have developed local data in order to shape their plan and to measure changes.
- The absence of top down targets has enabled greater trust to be established between NSCs and local planners.
- Focus on locally relevant outcomes (rather than distant national targets) has helped to establish positive local relationships between key players.

What we find where local solutions are most advanced...

- Results are shared to enable local authorities and dioceses to benchmark themselves and learn from one another.
- Evidence of impact data is being sought to support more effective planning.
- Inputs and resources from a range of national and local agencies have been aligned within a co-ordinated local strategy.



Case Study

Salford Diocese and the North West Catholic Training Partnership

Since 2004, Salford Diocese has been working to increase the recruitment pool of talented catholic school leaders to meet local need. Over a period of five years, the diocese has developed and facilitated a development programme for local leaders, constantly refining their approach in light of evaluation and participant feedback.

The initiative was first triggered when the Catholic Education Service in partnership with the diocese identified a shortage of catholic teachers aspiring to headship. As a result, a working group of former catholic headteachers from primary and secondary phases was brought together to develop a succession strategy. Each headteacher had been judged 'outstanding' by Ofsted for leadership and management in their schools. They were joined in this work by the Assistant Director of Childrens' Services of Manchester Local Authority who also committed a proportion of the National College Partnership Grant to add to funds sourced by the diocese.

The commitment of headteachers was vital. Fifteen serving primary headteachers and thirteen serving secondary headteachers from high-performing catholic schools agreed to act as individual mentors to programme participants from across the diocese. Participants either self selected or were nominated by their schools as having the capability for headship. Schools contribute £700 (secondary) or £500 (primary) in order to make the programme self-financing.

Participants use a self-evaluation tool structured around the National Standards for Headteachers to audit their knowledge, skills and experience in the context of leadership of a catholic school. From this they develop a personal development plan.

Programme inputs include a combination of residential weekends, experiential learning placements at other catholic schools, shadowing of successful headteachers and access to a headteacher mentor.

Ongoing evaluation has been used to shape the programme, building on those features which are seen as most attractive by participants. Individuals value the opportunity to learn from experienced and effective headteachers, for example, and are attracted by the external accreditation of learning which is offered; those completing the programme gain one third of a Master's degree in Education and a Post Graduate Diploma in Christian School Leadership.

Since the inception of the programme in 2004, 109 teachers have taken part in the programme. Fifty have since gained leadership positions and 18 have gained headships.

Recruitment pressures have eased dramatically. In 2004, 33 per cent of headship vacancies in catholic schools had to be re-advertised. In 2008, none were re-advertised.

The programme is now offered more widely across the North West, involving the dioceses of Lancaster, Liverpool, Shrewsbury and Wrexham working in partnership. There is a considerable waiting list to access the course across all five North West dioceses.

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Further Resources

Catholic leadership programme – overview
Catholic leadership programme – mentor process
Leadership in catholic schools – standards for catholic leaders

Local solutions...

...next steps in succession planning

This guide has described how local succession planners are responding to the challenge of developing and recruiting enough talented school leaders to meet local need.

Much has been achieved, but there is still much to do.

Significant challenges remain. The rate at which serving headteachers are retiring is still at a high level and is likely to remain so until at least 2012. Too many primary schools are still experiencing difficulties when recruiting headteachers. Small schools and faith schools continue to face particular challenges in finding new heads. And School leadership remains some way off reflecting the diversity of the pupil population in schools.

However, the local solutions approach has enabled schools, local authorities and dioceses to begin to address these challenges successfully. While there is more work to be done to embed these achievements at school level and to share ideas for effective practice, local succession planners have been successful in establishing a solid foundation on which to build.

The challenge is to sustain and extend this progress.

By definition, succession planning is never complete. Successful organisations share a commitment to develop current and future leaders on a continuous basis. They see succession planning as part of their core business, developing a supply of flexible leaders able to meet the needs of a changing world.

Local solutions enable local authorities and diocese to focus effort on their own specific requirements, encouraging local ownership of local strategy. On the basis of current evidence, local solutions offer an effective way to create a sustainable approach to succession planning.

Acknowledgement: The College would like to acknowledge the contribution made by Professor David Hargreaves, a Fellow of Wolfson College, Cambridge, to the thinking that has informed this guide and our approach to local solutions across the Children's Services sector more broadly.

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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