

# **New Perspectives on Middle Level Leadership**

## Post-seminar Pack

This pack provides notes and reflections on the Leading Edge seminar that took place on Tuesday 1 October 2002 in Nottingham. It will be used as the basis for dissemination and development both online and in written/other media. It will also be used to support an additional seminar with a representative group drawn from the delegates who attended this seminar, and to inform a further seminar for senior and middle level leaders taking place in Spring 2003 (see [www.ncsl.org.uk/leadingedge](http://www.ncsl.org.uk/leadingedge) for details of this seminar). The longer term outcome will be practical materials for use in schools to support the development of middle leaders and to enable schools to reflect more widely on the potential and developing role of middle level leaders in secondary schools. These materials will also complement NCSL's Leading from the Middle programme which is currently under development (see [www.ncsl.org.uk/lftm](http://www.ncsl.org.uk/lftm)).

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We welcome your comments and reflections on the seminar, and on other NCSL materials or leadership issues you would like to explore with us. Please email your views to [research@ncsl.org.uk](mailto:research@ncsl.org.uk)

## **Context**

NCSL's Leadership Development Framework (NCSL, 2001) sets out five stages of leadership. In essence, leading schools is about leadership at all levels and the College has a clear role in supporting and promoting leadership development at the early or emergent stages.

This seminar, consequently, was designed to explore current and significant aspects of middle level leadership in secondary schools. Its aim was to share what research tells us about the role of middle level leaders, provide opportunities for practitioners to share good practice and generate a shared understanding of how roles will develop. In particular the seminar:

- explored current research on the role of the middle level leader
- made progress in identifying what middle level leaders can do in schools to develop effective teams and make an impact on learning
- rehearsed and reflected on a futures perspective

## Welcome and Introduction (Chris Williams)

This was the first NCSL Leading Edge seminar to address issues relating to middle level leadership. The event drew together fifty middle level leaders, academics and NCSL staff. In his introduction to the day, Chris Williams, Assistant Director of Research, NCSL referred to the event as being both symbolic and historic in being for and focusing on middle level leaders. He borrowed a health service slogan in hoping that the event would encourage “bringing out the leader in everyone”. In making clear what he hoped the seminar would achieve he offered a number of benchmarks in reminding delegates that:

- the seminar was not about what headteachers and senior leaders think
- teams and not superheads change schools
- Leading Edge is about the voice of practitioners – NCSL is the practitioners’ college, not the government’s
- too often practitioners talk only to other practitioners, and academics only to other academics. The seminar provided an opportunity to broaden the debate
- good ideas come from talented people working together
- there was a need to articulate what remained tacit – what needed to be shared was already in schools
- what was needed was a drive towards more practical outcomes and solutions in dealing with middle level leader issues

Middle level leadership is part of a progression through the school and involved ‘leading from the middle’. NCSL wished to encourage delegates to:

- identify what they regarded the role of a middle level leader to be
- identify what middle level leaders can do
- consider how far middle level leaders working together as a team might drive schools forward
- consider what the future of middle level leadership might be – what might happen, for example, to roles such as subject leader and head of year
- reflect on how senior leaders can help and support middle level leaders in their work
- consider what middle level leaders might be doing in schools in 15 or 20 years time

The seminar intended to inform and support three further stages of development:

1. a seminar in Spring 2003 that would invite senior leaders to think about relationships in school and to respond to what middle level leaders have to say
2. the completion of carefully selected case studies
3. the production of a middle level leadership publication to support schools and recognise that middle level leaders are not only the senior leaders of the future but also important leaders in their own right

## **Presentation – What Research tells us about Middle Level Leaders (Professor Tony Bush)**

In advance of the seminar Professor Tony Bush, Institute of Education, University of Reading had provided delegates with a thinkpiece that he now used as a guide through what amounted to a rich literature on middle level leadership.

### **The significance of middle level leaders for school improvement**

- Middle level leaders are central to the improvement of educational standards.
- In the secondary phase, middle level leaders include not only heads of academic departments but also pastoral heads, key stage co-ordinators, special educational needs co-ordinators (SENCOs) and ICT co-ordinators.
- Wilkinson (2002) estimates there are 250,000 teachers in middle leader roles in England and some 60,000 of these are in secondary schools.
- "...ultimately it's the people in the middle who implement vision" (Planter, cited in Harvey 2002).
- Middle level leaders have to implement the *school* vision but also need to develop their *own*.
- Leadership has become an increasingly important notion in recent years and it is now clear that those key people who occupy the middle ground between senior management and classroom teachers do need to lead as well as manage.
- "Departmental heads have a central role to play in facilitating and managing educational changes" (Earley and Fletcher-Campbell 1989).
- "The real work of the school, delivering the curriculum, is organised and managed through... departments and teams" (Glover et al 1998).
- Pastoral leaders are increasingly taking on curriculum co-ordination roles as well as responsibility for pupil welfare. This is an example of the way in which boundaries between curriculum and pastoral roles have become blurred.

### **The traditional role of middle managers**

- Middle management/leadership has been a role traditionally undertaken by subject leaders who led by example and took on the routine administration of the department or unit, managing resources but with only a limited 'people management' involvement.
- "Most people appointed to HoD posts... were appointed because they were successful teachers, not because they displayed any managerial potential... The HoD saw his/her role as that of a subject specialist" (Adey 2000).

### **Middle level leaders and senior management**

- Middle level leaders are often in the uncomfortable position of being sandwiched between the conflicting requirements of the senior leadership team and their departmental colleagues.
- There is evidence of a significant growth in 'whole school' responsibilities being undertaken by middle level leaders (Brown et al 2000).

- Successfully proactive middle level leaders ensure that they do not merely act as a conduit through which the decisions of the senior management team are communicated (Turner and Bolam 1998).

### **The importance of the departmental team**

- Research clearly shows that most middle level leaders see their primary accountability as being to their teacher colleagues rather than to the senior management team (eg Bennett 1995; Wise 2001).
- This is sensible given the persuasive evidence that departmental effectiveness depends critically on the cohesiveness of the team or group.
- “The major problem was that the teachers in the less effective departments taught in relative isolation from each other and did not function as a teaching team” (Harris 1998).

### **Problems facing middle level leaders**

- A perennial factor in looking at middle level leadership is *lack of time* to carry out the work required by the role. Subject leaders have repeatedly referred to their not having the time that is needed to “‘increase the level of observation and support’, ‘work with other staff to secure improvement’ and ‘develop opportunities to talk and reflect on what we are doing’” (Glover 1998).
- The second main problem may be categorised as *role conflict*, demands from both senior managers and teacher colleagues putting middle level leaders under great pressure (eg Wise 1999; Earley and Fletcher-Campbell 1989). Middle level leaders are often having to subordinate their own *vision* to that of senior staff (Brown 2002).

### **The need for a change in role**

- The pressures on schools to produce year-on-year improvements in examination performance lead to inevitable demands on middle level leaders to ensure that their sections of the school contribute to the achievement of school objectives and externally imposed targets.
- OFSTED and the Teacher Training Agency (TTA) expectations and government initiatives, such as performance management and drives to improve literacy and numeracy are highly dependent on middle level leaders. Legislative, societal and cultural changes also have implications for middle level leadership (Glover 1998; Wilkinson 2002; Brown et al 2000).
- The important and much quoted study of Sammons et al (1997) showed that there are major differences between departments in analysing school performance. Departments are differentially effective with pupils of different abilities and from different social and ethnic backgrounds. Sammons et al’s work suggests the need for “a central focus on teaching and learning, high expectations, clear leadership by the HoD and a pupil-centred approach to the delivery of the curriculum”.
- In promoting leadership development in schools, the work of NCSL has outlined ten leadership propositions (NCSL 2001). Two of these are of particular significance for middle level leaders:
  - “Leadership should be instructionally focused” – this suggests that middle level leaders should place the emphasis on teaching and learning



- “leadership should be dispersed throughout the school community” – this suggests that middle level leadership is a vital part of the wider framework for leadership in the school
- The combination of external pressures, research evidence on differentials in departmental effectiveness and the promotional role of NCSL points to a review of the ways in which middle level leaders operate in secondary schools.

### **Towards middle level leadership**

- The development of the middle level leader’s role during the past 15 years has seen a gradual shift from a focus on heads of department as senior teachers, acting as role models for their colleagues, through an acceptance of the requirement to undertake often routine administrative or managerial responsibilities, then to a wider recognition of the need to lead a professional team of subject specialists.
- There is now a “notion of shared or devolved leadership activity where leadership is not chiefly the preserve of the headteacher” (Busher and Harris 1999).
- Wilkinson (2002) refers to “a tremendous swing towards leading people rather than managing resources”, though Professor Bush would later question how tremendous this swing has been in practice.
- Glover et al (1998) say that “subject leaders recognise that their role is changing” and add that “the most forward looking subject leaders appear to use the department development plan as a visionary process”.
- The most controversial and difficult aspect of the middle leader role relates to monitoring and evaluation.

### **The monitoring and evaluation role of middle level leaders**

- There is widespread recognition of the need for middle level leaders to engage in monitoring and evaluation if external pressures and research evidence on school effectiveness are to produce significant improvements in teaching and learning.
- “External expectations... appear to have produced a transformation in the attitudes and practices of middle managers” (Wise and Bush 1999).
- There is increasing evidence that middle level leaders in England are recognising the need to undertake classroom observation and other forms of monitoring and evaluating the work of their colleagues. However, this does not necessarily mean that these processes actually occur (eg Adey 2000).
- Glover et al (1998) noted that middle level leaders lack of involvement in the process of monitoring and evaluation arises from the nature of professionalism and a reticence by some middle managers to “appear to be judging the work of a colleague”.

### **Conclusion: middle level leadership in transition**

- Middle level leadership in English secondary schools is in a process of transition. The role of department head as senior teacher/administrator has gradually given way to external pressure for middle level leaders to focus more on the quality of teaching and learning. This has led to a widespread recognition by middle level leaders of the need to observe, monitor and evaluate the work of their teams.
- In practice, however, this acceptance has not led to a sea-change in the actions, as opposed to the attitudes, of middle level leaders.

- The next stage, to bring practice in line with expectations, will need three major changes in schools:
  - middle level leaders should be able to focus on teaching and learning and not on routine administration or other school-wide tasks
  - all professionals should acknowledge that middle level leaders are expected to monitor and evaluate the work of colleagues and that this is not construed as threatening or unprofessional
  - both middle level leaders and their colleagues should recognise the need for a programme of continuing professional development to enable the former to remain at the cutting edge in respect of both subject knowledge and team leadership

If schools are to facilitate these significant but achievable changes, the transformation from routine manager to educational leader will be well under way.



## **Workshop 1 – Middle Level Leadership in Schools**

Discussion groups reflecting on and responding to Professor Bush's thinkpiece went on to explore what they did as middle level leaders in school and how they felt the role of the middle level leader needed to change. In considering a range of (their own) successful actions and strategies, common themes emerged.

### **The importance of the middle level leader to school improvement**

- One headteacher was relieved to hear that school improvement was not deemed to be solely the responsibility of headteachers. "People who know what's going on," he said, referring to middle level leaders, "should make decisions".
- Similar views were heard in all groups: that the school vision should come from middle level leaders because they were the people in touch with what happened and were delivering the curriculum; that more responsibility should be devolved to middle level leaders.
- In the same way, the successful middle level leader was a successful delegator encouraging a sense of ownership throughout the team.

### **Teamwork: co-operation not isolation**

- Sharing good practice encourages team building and generates departmental team spirit.
- Sharing and supporting the school/departmental vision was important in the establishment of a successful team, as was a clear vision that prioritised what needed to be done.
- middle level leaders needed to sell the vision, to prioritise and keep the focus, and not allow themselves or others to be deflected.
- Middle level leadership team meetings help break up the isolation middle level leaders can feel.
- Teamwork is an effective way of challenging existing preconceptions and moving on and helps us understand the role an individual can play to support a shared purpose.

### **Clear focus on teaching and learning**

- Departmental meetings should be free from administrative chores.
- Teachers like talking purposefully about what they do in a spirit of co-operation.
- Regular meetings ensure that teachers know their students and the progress being made. Numerous other strategies helped keep the focus on teaching and learning, including 'bright-ideas' booklets, self-assessment booklets covering a whole year cycle of topics, papers on teaching and learning issues presented by members of department.
- Middle level leaders should focus on what is being done well first and should be sensitive to teacher-styles, discussing how teachers like to do things.
- Student voice was important; the need to be sensitive to the ways in which students like to be taught.

### **Seeing others at work**

- The importance of developing a culture of observation.
- Seeing teachers in other departments at work was often more illuminating than watching lessons taught by departmental colleagues.
- Establishing strong links with other departments was an important element in effecting improvement.
- The use of video in evaluating teaching performance was increasing as the benefits became clearer.
- Time needed to be set aside to make observation of lessons possible.
- There is a continuing need for INSET on lesson observation.

### **The fusion of curriculum and pastoral roles**

- The fusion of roles was an important element in helping to break down any residual sense of isolation felt by middle level leaders.
- Year heads were increasingly being drawn on to operate as curriculum co-ordinators, and curriculum heads clearly have to take note of issues relating to pupil welfare.
- This merging of job specifications highlighted the responsibilities that all middle level leaders share and helped to break down barriers between subjects and roles.

## Images of Practice

At this stage in the seminar three practitioners spoke of the work they had been doing in their schools. The aim of this input was to provide an insight into ways in which middle level leaders responded to problems and barriers and how they are enabled to become effective leaders. The focus here was on:

- leading effective teams
- being effective in the school

### 1: Presentation by Neil Cowdy, Brooke Weston City Technology College, Corby

Neil Cowdy had been faced with the problem of having to begin a new school year leading an entirely new team of business studies teachers with OFSTED due in November. The new team comprised two newly qualified teachers, and two teachers with one year's experience. The school was a high-performance Beacon school and he was a long-standing head of department. The challenge lay in making a virtue of necessity, in using the forthcoming OFSTED visitation as both target and motivator. Neil Cowdy achieved this by:

- leading from the front
- implementing new ideas and seizing the opportunity to improve programmes of study
- knowing what *every* business studies lesson in OFSTED week would be like, and
- avoiding visible panic

The week proved a significant success with the department being adjudged very good.

Lessons learned from the week included:

- middle level leaders need to rely on themselves
- staff need to be led
- a threat can be an opportunity
- success brings its own rewards
- life in school goes on... (a reference to members of the department being quickly offered promotion by other schools)

### 2. Presentation by Lisa Wildman, Brooke Weston City Technology College, Corby

The problem facing Lisa Wildman was underperformance at Key Stage 4 in Science. She became co-head of department in an attempt to turn the department's fortunes around. It made sense to have co-heads because the science department is situated in two distinct locations. Science enjoyed a generous curriculum allocation without students being sufficiently challenged at Key Stage 4. Recruitment and retention of staff was a significant and potentially debilitating problem. The co-heads of department were also initially hampered by their own inexperience as middle level leaders. The success of their endeavour may be measured by considering the outcomes:

- A\*-C grades at GCSE up by 20 per cent
- the fashioning of a strong and committed team of teachers
- a clearly defined structure

- the creation of a calm and purposeful learning environment

Reasons for this success were varied, but included:

- a shared vision and belief in success
- delegation and the freedom to negotiate roles and responsibilities
- improved communication
- improved assessment procedures
- commitment to continuing professional development of staff

### **3. Presentation by Les Hall, Head of Art, Mounts Bay School, Penzance**

Les Hall leads and is clearly excited by the possibilities for change and improvement afforded by a Network Learning Community of 17 schools in Cornwall (see [www.ncsl.org.uk/nlc](http://www.ncsl.org.uk/nlc)). Earlier in the day he had spoken enthusiastically about what he saw as a creative approach to improvement. “If you are not an agent for change, what are you doing?” he asked. “You don’t get permission from above unless you want it to happen”. He had been instrumental in his own school in setting up a Learning Forum, a kind of think tank for the generation of ideas and ownership of those ideas. The Learning Forum was a school improvement group and, while attendance was voluntary, there were regularly 20–30 at meetings from a staff of 55. He was keen to recognise such contributions by:

- arranging for publication of interesting papers
- securing accreditation for work successfully completed
- encouraging members to train other members and to deliver INSET sessions in their own schools

One of the major benefits of the Learning Forum was that it helped to break down dictatorial and hierarchical approaches through constant consultation and analysis. Peer coaching and mentoring proved and continue to prove that boundaries can be broken down. Professor Bush had reminded delegates that they were commonly regarded as “the meat in the sandwich”, having to deal with conflicting pressures from senior managers above and departmental colleagues below. Les Hall pointed to networked learning communities and learning forums as means to alleviating and even eliminating such conflict.

## Workshop 2 – Effective Middle Level Leadership

Groups discussed specific instances in their schools that led to their being effective middle level leaders and the barriers that threatened their success. Discussions and instances were varied but, again, some common themes began to emerge. Nevertheless, it might be best here to concentrate on the discussion from one of the groups.

### Monitoring what's been understood

Lee Mortiboys gave an account of the procedures he introduced to his school in monitoring students' work. He instituted fortnightly pupil progress checks, randomly selecting five pupils and sitting down with them and their books. This process had several advantages over the more usual procedure of collecting in the books for perusal:

- he was able to check pupils' understanding of the work in which they had been engaged, rather than simply whether the work was up to date
- he made contact with pupils he might otherwise never meet. This was particularly true of high-achievers and those he termed the 'silent, middle pupils'
- his own profile as a curriculum co-ordinator was raised. His experience was another example of the blurring of curriculum and pastoral roles
- he was able to gain an overview of pupil progress

He was conscious of the time involved in operating such a procedure but the outcomes justified the time he was putting in. This account was further evidence for Ann Raynor's assertion (see below) that the role of a middle leader was not so much a job as a way of life. This, of course, raises questions about the demands made on middle level leaders.

### "To be the best in the LEA"

Ann Raynor's detailed account of her experience at a Fresh Start school amounted, in effect, to a fourth presentation to complement those heard in the lecture theatre. As head of modern foreign languages (2% GCSE grades A\*–C) in a challenging school that had been failing for thirteen years and that struggled to recruit and to retain those it did recruit, she was faced with what looked like insuperable difficulties. But she was determined to turn things round. She referred to Neil Cowdy's notion of turning a threat into an opportunity. She settled on her *vision* for the department and set about transforming failure and despair into success and hope. The department was, she said, simply going to become "the best in the LEA". What was required was:

- to take on new ideas
- to challenge not only the senior management team but also, where necessary, OFSTED
- to have the courage of her and her team's convictions, and
- to refuse to be deflected from their goals

Meetings were held every morning for the whole team, even when this meant rescuing teachers from the car park and tears of dread at the prospect of another disastrous day. It was imperative that, as a middle level leader, she led from the front and by example, and that she empowered those in her department to overcome the difficulties with which they were faced. Like Neil Cowdy, Ann Raynor also reported that success generates success.



## **The excitement of vision**

For another delegate, middle level leaders need:

- to listen to their colleagues
- to concretise ideas
- to establish SMART targets
- to turn (as Ann Raynor memorably put it) one's vision into an operational plan

There was, he further suggested, excitement in the word 'vision' in that it stimulated action and a shared sense of purpose, and it communicated enthusiasm in providing reasons for doing things. The focus on clarity of intention was echoed in the contributions of others. One delegate, new to middle level leadership, began with trial and error before eventually deciding on and presenting his vision using PowerPoint at a meeting after school. The presentation and subsequent action concentrated on clear, achievable targets, such as improving A\*-C GCSE grades to 50 per cent and aiming at persuading a target number of Year 9 students to continue the subject at Key Stage 4.

## **Courageous conversations**

A third delegate told of teachers opening up to facilitators from the world of industry in ways they found difficult when talking to colleagues or line managers. These one-to-one encounters, far from constituting a 'soft' approach to self-analysis – indeed, some teachers remained entrenched in approaches that were failing to succeed – persuaded teachers to challenge their preconceptions. The success of these encounters may be readily contrasted to the response of one senior manager in the school who, when asked why he did not challenge poor performance, said, "I find courageous conversations difficult".

## **Common themes**

Other groups covered comparable ground. The common themes included:

- having (insufficient) time to do the job of middle level leader effectively
- the importance of a clear and focused vision
- the importance of teamwork and a shared sense of purpose
- the importance of good communication
- the importance of clear, achievable targets
- the importance of empowering teachers to improve
- encouraging teachers to question their preconceptions, to be open to change

Chris Williams offered an overview at the end of this phase of the day, pointing to the significance of:

- whole school policies
- creation of a collective culture which will help in securing the services of the right staff
- vision
- acres and acres of time that have to be devoted to issues of improvement in order to be properly effective



- communication with both colleagues and pupils
- how we operate as interpersonal leaders, in particular when coping with difficult people in our teams
- coaching and supporting each other
- leading development rather than managing the status quo
- being imaginative and flexible
- dealing with role conflict
- evolving creative solutions based on research
- being practical and pragmatic
- being clear about learning

It was clear, beyond all else, that teams are the unit of change, of school improvement; that departments are the engine-room of change. Middle level leaders are critically important to this change and improvement.

## **Middle Level Leadership – A Futures Perspective: an introduction to Workshop 3 (Paul Hammond and Chris Williams)**

Paul Hammond, Senior Consultant, Leadership Programmes, NCSL talked of middle level leadership past, present and future. He dealt first with the way we were:

- middle level leaders' role evolved in grammar schools where heads of department grew accustomed to:
  - a relatively homogenous group of pupils
  - clear subject definition
  - an academic orientation
- department meetings were rare because there was no need for them. Curricula and pedagogy were traditional, relatively static and unquestioned
- heads of department were the gatekeepers of subject knowledge
- motivation and discipline were regarded as external to departments
- heads of department were responsible for the 'stock and syllabus'
- teachers became heads of department as a result of their classroom expertise; they were the leading classroom practitioners

The present situation might be characterised as follows:

- subject knowledge defined in the national curriculum
- head of department as team leader and line manager
- move from managing *resources* to managing *people*
- subject leaders becoming more pastoral
- pastoral leaders becoming more standards-focused

In considering what the future might hold, Paul Hammond wondered whether the role of head of faculty would reappear in the guise of a learning manager. At the moment, deputy headteachers sometimes have to line-manage a prohibitive number of heads of department. A learning manager would be responsible for more than one subject, particularly as it is *pedagogic* knowledge (ie knowledge about teaching and learning) that is now considered central. The primacy of pedagogic knowledge allows for promotion of the more radical idea of rotating heads of faculty/learning managers. The *Times Educational Supplement*, however, still carries row after row of advertisements for heads of year and subject leaders, suggesting that change in schools remains gradual and incremental rather than revolutionary.

Taking up the mantle from Paul Hammond, Chris Williams suggested that we should be courting change that was neither incremental nor revolutionary but transformational. He began by asking how we might go about spending £100K to improve the learning in our school, before reminding us that £100K is about the annual cost of a secondary school's middle level leaders. He also invited us to consider what our schools would be worth were they to be sold on the open market. He presented three models that corresponded roughly with Paul Hammond's Past, Present and Future. Nineteenth-century schools were models of industrialisation. We know now that learning is a more complex than this model allowed. The improving school of the present is characterised by sharing good practice, evaluating learning and carrying on a continuing dialogue about learning. The transforming school would be one in which:

- things are done differently
- improvement comes from within the school
- improvement is based on research (much of which is carried out by those within)
- improvement is not imposed from without
- middle level leaders, knowing the most about learning, will be responsible for managing, creating and networking learning
- middle level leaders will draw knowledge from across the school, ensure that good practice is shared and create knowledge about teaching and learning based on research

Noting that we are continually learning more about matters such as brain-function, the brain-friendly school, the science of learning, the technology of learning, and returning to his earlier What's it Worth theme by drawing on a recent NCSL future schools seminar led by Professor Brian Caldwell, Chris Williams asked why companies like Microsoft were considered to be worth hundreds of times the sum of their assets. The answer lay in their intellectual capital and knowledge management. In schools much of this intellectual capital resides in pedagogic knowledge. Good teachers have such knowledge and might in the future be supported, in much the same way as barristers are today, by knowledge managers. The barrister's job lies in the courtroom, the teacher's in the classroom. Knowledge managers could prepare lessons for teachers in much the same way as they prepare cases for barristers.

As a result of these and other developments, middle level leaders could look forward to a future in which they will be regarded as:

- the learning heart of the school – managing, creating and networking learning
- a key component of the school's intellectual capacity
- knowledge managers – facilitating the work of pedagogic practitioners
- leaders of multi-disciplinary teams – involved with knowledge creation, working in an enquiry-based way, producing research on which the rest of the school will act
- an important element in the intelligent school

Recalling Michael Barber's suggestion that we were moving into an age of 'informed professional judgement', Chris Williams welcomed the "fantastic challenges" the future held for us.

### Workshop 3 – Middle Level Leadership of the Future

Delegates were asked to discuss in their groups what middle level leadership would look like were a new school to be created from scratch, and to consider how such a role would make a difference to learning. Given the wide ranging nature of such questions, it is unsurprising that no single model or solution emerged from what proved notably lively discussions.

At the more conservative end of the scale, common themes included:

- the need for coherence amongst and across middle level leader roles so that examples of best pedagogical practice could be identified, along with cross-departmental initiatives
- reduced administrative responsibilities for middle level leaders
- the need for more time in which to perform middle level leader duties, but also for time to develop *teaching* expertise
- development and clarification of the knowledge management role
- the monitoring and assessment aspects of being a middle level leader
- the need for middle level leaders to see themselves as leaders not managers
- the development of middle level leaders as team leaders
- the development of middle level leaders' involvement in cross-curricular and inter-disciplinary initiatives
- the development of a culture of collegiate decision-making in a supportive environment
- moving away from subject leadership to leadership of teaching and learning

There were more radical projections, which foresaw the end of subjects and, indeed, the end of middle level leaders. Interestingly, the talk in these groups and subgroups of giving education back to teachers and giving children an education, not getting them through exams arose from a recognition of the need for change. The traditional role of teachers was changing. Paul Hirst's work from the 1970s on areas of knowledge and categorial concepts appeared to be underpinning projected curricula that did not have recourse to subject disciplines, referring instead, for example, to themed learning experiences. In such schools of the future teachers would need to be qualified in teaching.

## **Key Learning Points: a review of the day (Professor Tony Bush)**

In attempting to sum up the day's event, Professor Tony Bush acknowledged that he had only been able to sample the group discussions. Nevertheless, he felt that a number of observations could be made with some confidence:

- middle level leadership was in good hands!
- appointments to posts of responsibility are still being made on the basis of teaching ability
- senior management teams continue to demand too much of middle level leaders. This led to questions about how far middle level leaders were able to focus on issues of teaching and learning
- there was a general recognition of the importance of teamwork. Research evidence in this area is strong: teamwork leads to effective departments. Failing department are characterised by lack of teamwork
- middle level leaders need time for professional interaction
- somewhat surprisingly, middle level leaders seem to be less concerned with issues arising from role-conflict
- there was no great sense through the day of changes to school hierarchies, partly, perhaps, because of accountability pressures
- most importantly, it has been recognised, as research tells us, that variations in performance between departments *within* schools can be greater than variations from school to school
- whilst the monitoring and evaluation aspect of the role of the middle level leader is recognised, there is more work to be done here to ensure that action is brought in line with expectations
- there was a thorough recognition of the need for continuing professional development

## **Next Steps: concluding remarks (Chris Williams)**

The way forward involved three strands:

1. to challenge senior leaders with the informed and thought-provoking views expressed today by middle level leaders
2. to commission case studies, which would enable us to look into and explore the issues raised in greater depth and detail
3. to produce an NCSL publication to support schools and middle level leaders

It had been “a brilliant day’s discussion”. A similar seminar had been planned for senior leaders in the spring of 2003. It now seemed appropriate to ask today’s delegates to return for that second seminar so that middle level leaders and senior leaders can explore the issues together. It would also be helpful if a representative group drawn from today’s delegates could be convened in order to develop the day’s ideas further and to sharpen the focus of the spring seminar.



## **With Thanks**

We should like to thank all the delegates who attended this Leading Edge seminar and, in particular, the following for their work in preparing materials for and delivering presentations on the day:

<b>Professor Tony Bush</b>	Institute of Education, University of Reading
<b>Neil Cowdy</b>	Brooke Weston City Technology College, Corby
<b>Lisa Wildman</b>	Brooke Weston City Technology College, Corby
<b>Les Hall</b>	Mounts Bay School, Penzance
<b>Paul Hammond</b>	Senior Consultant, Leadership Programmes, NCSL
<b>Paul McLoughlin</b>	Rapporteur
<b>Andy Martin</b>	Project Leader, NCSL
<b>Chris Williams</b>	Assistant Director, NCSL

