

# Keep your head

## Governor perspectives on co-headship as part of succession planning

SCHOOL LEADERS

Report

**Nicola Allan**

Headteacher, Colleton Primary School, Twyford

## Contents

<a href="#">Introduction</a>	3
<a href="#">Methodology</a>	6
<a href="#">How the co-headships arose</a>	9
<a href="#">Key features of the selected schools</a>	11
<a href="#">Key findings</a>	14
<a href="#">Ten lessons learned</a>	28
<a href="#">Conclusions</a>	30
<a href="#">References</a>	33
<a href="#">Appendix: additional resources</a>	34

## Introduction

Co-headship is a relatively new phenomenon in school leadership. At the time of writing, the National College for School Leadership (NCSL) estimated that there were only around 30 schools across the country with either two full-time or two job share heads. Although small in number, these schools have created significant interest. This is partly because, paradoxically, co-headship may help address the shortfall of school leaders anticipated in the next few years.

NCSL's own research predicts that large numbers of headteachers are due to retire in the next decade and there are insufficient numbers of potential leaders in the 35–45 year age group to replace them. Difficulties are currently being experienced in attracting headteachers in to post, and high numbers of schools have to re-advertise for the role of headteacher. The pressure points at present are found in London and in Catholic schools where the most significant difficulty exists in attracting candidates for headship. The annual survey of staff appointments published in January 2007 by Education Data Surveys, shows that London schools face the largest bills for re-advertisement, with 57% of headship posts being re-advertised. The prediction is that this situation could be replicated nationally in the coming decade and a significant shortage of school leaders could ensue.

In NCSL's formal advice to the Secretary of State for Education on succession planning it was stated that:

Overall, we see a need to ensure that talented potential leaders are developed earlier.... Currently, it takes an average of 20 years to reach headship, with only 10% of middle leaders becoming headteachers. (Paterson 2006: 4)

Not only is the pathway to headship long, but it is also challenging; almost half of NPQH (National Professional Qualification for Headship) graduates report that they do not wish to go on to become school leaders. Many who choose not to go on to headship state that they see the role as unattractive and too complex.

One of the key challenges facing schools at the moment is to retain more good heads to full retirement age and attract potential leaders to headship more quickly by making the role more appealing. Co-headship offers the possibility of addressing both of these issues by:

- encouraging headteachers who are close to retirement to 'stay the course' and share their expertise and experience;
- offering improved work–life balance to potential heads with young families;
- retaining heads who may need to commit time to studying or caring for family members;
- encouraging potential heads into a headship role earlier than the average 20 years, therefore growing new leaders.

Co-headship may therefore be one possible solution to the leadership crisis emerging in schools as part of a succession planning strategy.

## Background

In the PricewaterhouseCoopers and Department for Education and Skills' (DfES) *Independent Study into School Leadership* it was noted that:

When asked for their views on the future of school leadership, many respondents spontaneously mentioned shared leadership as a means of making the role of headteacher more "doable". (PWC & DfES 2007: 59)

The study then goes on to deal specifically with co-headship, stating:

This type of model may therefore provide an opportunity to encourage greater diversity in the senior leadership team by introducing more flexible ways of working for, for example, women with young families who would like to progress to headship. It may also assist in succession planning, easing the burden on older heads, and freeing up time for experienced heads to take on wider system leadership roles. According to the NCSL (2006), heads cite the emergence of this phenomenon as a response to “a recognition that the requirements of headship are so complex that two people are better able to offer the appropriate skills, knowledge and expertise to fulfil the demands of the role”. (PWC & DfES 2007: 58)

In order to understand whether co-headship can be part of a solution to a shortfall in headteachers there needs to be evidence about whether it is an effective and sustainable style of school leadership. There has, to date, been little research into co-headship.

Marion Court’s international research associate’s report, *Different Approaches to Sharing School Leadership* (2003), considered co-headship and its international application using schools in New Zealand as case studies. Her work focused on the views of the school leaders themselves.

Dr Fred Paterson of NCSL has contributed the main research into co-headship in the UK. He established the database held at NCSL that provides an understanding of the current models in operation and emerging around the country. His research, *New Models of Headship: Co-headship* (2006), examined the potential benefits and pitfalls of co-headship and made recommendations regarding possible next steps for creating the right conditions for co-headship.

PricewaterhouseCoopers carried out an independent study for the DfES to examine the roles, responsibilities, structures and reward systems for school leaders in England and Wales following the publication of the School Teachers’ Review Body’s (STRB) fifteenth report. The report looked at a variety of existing and new models of leadership. It focused on co-headship as one of the ‘managed models’ of headship.

Glatter and Harvey undertook a review of existing research about co-headship in *Varieties of Shared Headship: A preliminary exploration* (2006). They made recommendations regarding further research that should be carried out:

It has become evident to us that introducing new models of headship, winning consent for them, and monitoring them involves major issues of governance, yet little of the work we have seen gives any attention to this dimension. Research into this area should focus as much on governance (including local authorities) as on the leadership of the heads and senior operational teams and should look closely at the interaction between them. As a next step, therefore, NCSL might commission a more detailed evaluation of different models of shared headship, paying particular regard to:

- factors related to the sustainability of partnerships, possibly using retrospective studies
- local dynamics of specific contexts and transferable lessons
- views of stakeholder groups including staff, students, their families and the wider local community
- a range of measures of impact and outcomes, including independent assessments such as those of Ofsted
- effects of different approaches to governance, including the role of local authorities. (Glatter & Harvey 2006: 59)

This study is designed to respond to some of the issues raised by Glatter and Harvey and to add to the small existing body of knowledge. The research is based on the

views of governors, as recommended by Glatter and Harvey. It also utilises judgements relating to leadership and management made by Ofsted at the schools selected for the study.

One of the purposes of this study was to consider the possible success factors in co-headship and the counter indicators that would predict an unsuccessful outcome. This information could then be used to inform key stakeholders such as governors and local authorities when considering appointing co-heads.

### **My role as a co-head**

I have operated as a co-head for the past five years. In this role I have developed an understanding of the interest that co-headship has generated and have become used to other school leaders wanting to know more about this model of school leadership.

My motivation for this project grew out of a desire to contribute to the body of knowledge about co-headship and to create a better understanding of this model of school leadership.

My own school is part of the sample in this study, partly because the potential study group was very small and partly because this allowed me to develop my understanding of the research process through carrying out practitioner research in my own setting. The governor interviewed from my school had a very different perspective from my own about the period at the start of the co-headship. For me, this was an important lesson in the research process. Everybody has their own story and views events from their own perspective. It made me keenly aware that the information that I gathered from governors only represented a personal version of events.

### **Definition of co-headship**

This report utilises the definition of co-headship stated by Glatter and Harvey:

The term co-headship is intended to refer to a situation in which two heads share the headship of a school. (Glatter & Harvey 2006: 50)

All of the eight schools involved in the study had two headteachers; none of them had more than two.

In seven of the eight schools selected for this study the co-heads worked for part of the week. In one school the two headteachers were employed on a full-time basis to lead the school together. This arrangement has been termed 'joint headship' by Paterson (2006: 2) and is more commonly found in the secondary sector.

In six of the schools there was an overlap period where both heads were present in school, simultaneously leading the school. There was evidence of a variety of different approaches to liaison time for the two co-heads. There were examples of:

- paid liaison time in order to communicate information and develop strategy;
- unpaid liaison time where each co-head 'gave' half a day a week to the school to communicate information;
- co-heads who took on both the role of deputy as well as co-head and were therefore present in school throughout the week;
- co-heads with no agreed liaison time.

## **Methodology**

### **Selection of schools**

Schools were selected for this study on the basis that they had operated some form of co-headship either recently or were still currently operating this model of leadership. In addition to this they were also selected on the basis that they had been inspected by Ofsted in and around the time of co-headship. Glatter and Harvey (2006) suggested Ofsted assessments, particularly its judgements about leadership and managements, to be a useful source of evidence about co-headship.

From the original database of more than 30 schools that had or were still operating a co-headship model, only eight schools in the primary sector had been inspected in or around the time of co-headship. Having identified the study group, each of the eight schools was contacted and governors from the school were invited to be part of the study. Governors from all eight of the schools that were identified agreed to take part in the study.

### **Quantifying success**

One of the aims of this project was to attempt to discover whether co-headship was beginning to generate the evidence that it might be a successful and sustainable model of school leadership. Due to the very small numbers of schools involved, this study cannot arrive at a definitive answer; however, an early indication of the emerging picture is possible.

In order to understand whether co-headship has been successful it has been necessary to find a method of making a judgement about whether co-headship was a successful model for the schools involved in the study. Two factors were taken into account to arrive at this judgement:

- If the governors indicated that they felt co-headship had been a successful option for the leadership of their school, then it has been deemed a success within the context of this study.
- In addition to this, the judgements made by Ofsted about the leadership and management of the school were also considered and included.

This study encompasses two different styles of Ofsted inspection. Six of the schools were inspected under the new Ofsted framework and consequently received a number grading from Ofsted:

- 1 = Outstanding
- 2 = Good
- 3 = Satisfactory
- 4 = Unsatisfactory

For the two schools that were inspected under the old Ofsted framework the judgement made about leadership and management was made from the following list:

- Excellent
- Very good
- Good
- Satisfactory
- Unsatisfactory
- Poor

Very poor

It should be noted that all of the schools involved in this study were judged as satisfactory or better in terms of their leadership and management. In the five schools inspected while the co-headship was still active, the leadership and management of the school was judged to be at least good if not better:

The headteachers work extremely well together. (Ofsted report)

I think the school is extremely well run and the system of having two different headteachers is working well. (letter to pupils, Ofsted)

In the instances where the governors felt that co-headship had not provided the leadership solution for their school which they had initially hoped for, these schools were inspected shortly after the period of co-headship had ended. The text of the reports referred to the turbulence and upheaval in leadership during the time preceding inspection:

The school has experienced changes in leadership since the last inspection. The school has been led and managed by a number of heads and acting heads. (Ofsted report)

The schools where the governors stated that co-headship had not been a successful model for their school were inspected by Ofsted *after* the period of co-headship had ceased. Consequently there is currently no Ofsted-based evidence of an active co-headship not operating effectively.

## **Structure and design of the interviews**

Much of the previous research in this area has focused on interviewing the co-heads themselves. In order to move away from the views of the main participants in compiling this report, the decision was taken to focus on the views of governors. This study aimed to gather and examine the governors' opinions about operating a co-headship model of school leadership.

As the eight schools identified had been pioneers in choosing co-headship as a leadership model for their school it seemed particularly pertinent to ascertain what lessons these governors had learnt and what they felt could be contributed to next practice for future governing bodies operating this model.

The research was conducted using semi-structured telephone interviews in seven of the schools (including my own) and a face-to-face interview in one of the schools. I conducted one interview face to face as the governors of the school requested this in preference to a telephone interview.

## **Questions explored**

The interview questions surrounded these key areas:

- Governors' initial expectations of co-headship.
- What support had been received from external sources regarding the appointment and operation of a co-headship.
- How accountability between the co-heads was managed.
- How the experience of working with a co-head partnership compared with governors' initial expectations.
- What lessons they had learned from their experience of co-headship.

## **Interviewees selected**

The interviewees were selected on the basis that they were members of the governing body who had worked closely with co-heads. The governors who were identified for interview varied widely in their roles. The interview group consisted of chairs of governing bodies, vice chairs, chairs of staff and finance committees, chairs of curriculum, chairs of public relations committees and staff representatives on governing bodies.

## **Limitations of the study**

Due to the size of the study group this report has its limitations. Those schools who met the criteria were selected for the study. There were an insufficient number of schools to choose from the sample group in order to obtain a representative sample of schools.

Co-headship is a new phenomenon; there were only four schools where the experience of co-headship was longer than two years. This makes it more difficult to assess the success of co-headships over a prolonged period of time. Only three of the schools are still operating a co-headship model at the time of writing this report; it therefore seems that there is little prospect of ensuring a robust study of the longitudinal data surrounding co-headship in the foreseeable future.

This study only gathered evidence from one stakeholder group, the governors. In a study of this size it would have been difficult to incorporate the views of other groups. Further research therefore needs to be undertaken to gather views from other groups of stakeholders.



## How the co-headships arose

Co headship has emerged as a phenomenon in response to the requirements of leading schools without it being legislated for by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES). It was evident from this study that there was not one set of circumstances which created the right conditions for co-headship. The eight schools had various reasons for choosing co-headship. There were, however, certain factors that seemed to make co-headship more likely to emerge.

### Work–life balance

Work–life balance was a common factor, although this was present for a number of different reasons. This study found headteachers needing to address work–life balance issues for a variety of reasons. For some it was a sudden and unexpected change in personal circumstances; for others, it was in order to meet the needs of a young family or as a result of a desire to complete further study.

### Succession planning

Succession planning also emerged as a common theme, with governors reporting that they had chosen a co-headship model as part of the succession planning strategy for the school. They believed that co-headship allowed them to retain expertise and grow new leaders.

The idea of co-headship arose in a number of different ways in each of the eight schools who took part in this study. Two of the schools advertised for a headteacher and through the normal process of interview a co-headship arrangement emerged. For one school this was clear at the point of application; for another co-headship was suggested at interview:

‘It was first raised when the two of them turned up at interview for the post. We advertised for a head of school, the two of them turned up as candidates.’ (governor)

For three of the schools the move towards co-headship was in response to wanting to achieve a better work–life balance, having more time to spend with family or devoted to further study:

‘The head initiated, with full approval of the governing body, a Master’s study in another subject.’ (governor)

For two of the schools consideration of a co-headship came about as a response to an unforeseen crisis in the personal life of the headteacher. The need to act swiftly to secure the future leadership of the school was paramount in these cases.

For one school a co-headship arose when a school was about to undergo a period of upheaval due to major building work. Building work was scheduled to begin as the substantive headteacher was leaving. The co-headship model utilised two experienced members of the leadership team to lead the school through a period of significant change.

There was no one set of circumstances more likely to lead to a successful outcome than others. One of these schools reported that this was a successful outcome for their school; the other reported it as unsuccessful.

## **A unique solution for unique circumstances**

The governors interviewed who had been involved with co-headship were fully aware of the fact that they had chosen 'the road less travelled' in terms of their leadership choice for their school.

Some governors had a perception that their school was unusual either because of its small size or its organisation. They felt that these unique circumstances warranted a unique response to the challenge of finding a leader for the school:

'Because of the uniqueness of the school this seemed like a good road for us to go down.' (governor)

## **Key features of the selected schools**

The schools selected varied widely in many aspects; they were geographically spread out although most were located in the southern part of England. They varied in size from those with a roll of less than 100 children to those with a roll of in excess of 500. The size of the school did not appear to be a factor in the success or otherwise of the co-headship. Socioeconomic factors differed across the study; some schools were located in urban areas and some in more rural areas. Once again, the location of a school in a rural or urban area appeared to have no bearing on the likely success of the co-headship.

There were, however, some factors which did seem to have a bearing on the success or otherwise of the co-headship. In order to compare the eight schools, the key conditions and their outcomes, a descriptive matrix was compiled.

As is evident from the matrix there were five schools where co-headship was perceived to be a successful model, two where co-headship was not considered to be successful and one school which never moved beyond a period of acting co-headship.

## Descriptive matrix

	Successful model					Unsuccessful model		Partially successful model
Positive governors' expectation	Y	N	Y	Y	N	N	N	Y
Perceived support from the local authority	Supportive but limited experience	Y	Y	Supportive but limited experience	Y	N	Partially supportive – but limited advice	N
External support	N	Y	N	Y	N	N	N	Y
Stakeholder buy-in	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	Never progressed to that point
Choice for governors	Y	N	N	Y	Y	N	N	Effectuated by local authority
Recruitment process	Advert + interview	Advert + interview	Direct appointment	Advert + interview	Advert + interview	Direct appointment – candidate suggested by local authority	Direct appointment – co-head chosen by substantive head	Advert + interview
Previous relationship for co-heads	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	Y
Accountability	Joint	Joint	Joint	Separate	Joint	Separate	Separate	Never reached that stage
Co-headship still in operation	No Moved on as co-head partnership	Y	Y	No Temporary until retirement	Y	N	N	N
Ofsted leadership + management judgement	Good	2	2	2	1	Good Post co-headship	3 Post co-headship	3 Post co-headship
Model	3 day/2 days rolling	3 days + 2 days (head 2 retains deputy role)	Both full time Share role of deputy and head	3 days + 2 days job share	3 days each job share	2.5 days each job share	3 day + 2 days job share	2 full-time headteachers (joint headship)
Liaison time	No	Yes – deputy and head role overlap	Yes – deputy and head role overlap	Yes – paid overlap time	Yes – one day overlap	Yes – half a day 'given' to school by each partner	No	Yes – both full-time contract
Contract	Permanent	Trial period – temporary contract	Temporary until two years elapsed	Temporary – fixed term contract	Permanent	Trial period – temporary contract	Temporary – fixed term	Acting

### **Figure 1 Analysis of characteristics of the case study schools**

The descriptive matrix sets out the key conditions that emerged during the interview and analysis process. There are some notable differences between the schools where co-headship was rated as a success and the schools where it was not. These differences and their relationship to the eventual success or otherwise of the co-headship will be explored in the next section of the report.

## Key findings

The key findings of this study are summarised below:

- The views of the stakeholders, particularly the staff, were related to the outcome of co-headship. The key stakeholders were committed to the idea of co-headship in schools with a successful outcome.
- The initial expectation of the governors and the success or otherwise of the co-headship were not linked. Positive expectation on behalf of the governors was not necessary for a successful outcome.
- Indeed, governors in those schools where co-headship arrangements were viewed to be successful expressed surprise over the success of their arrangement and indicated that they believed they had been “lucky” in their appointment. However a number of common factors connected these schools (see below).
- Perceptions of lack of experience and support on the part of the local authority caused significant difficulty but this was not necessarily a deal breaker. Successful co-headships were still appointed without the local authority providing experienced support.
- Finding a source of support for the governing body was important when appointing co-heads. All eight schools found a source of support from somewhere; either their local authority or an external body, for example, the National Association of Governors and Managers (NAGM).
- A variety of contractual arrangements was evident. Temporary contracts and trial periods were commonly used when appointing co-heads. These were a counter indicator of success if a temporary contract was used to mask uncertainty about co-headship.
- Previous relationships were common across the successful and unsuccessful models. A previous successful relationship between the co-head partners did not necessarily indicate a successful co-headship.
- The recruitment process and contractual issues caused difficulty for governors due to lack of regulation and a resultant lack of advice.
- Lack of choice regarding the members of the co-head partnership caused difficulties for governors. Only some of the governors felt they had a genuine choice about whether or not to appoint a co-head.
- Ofsted judged all of the schools in this study to be at least satisfactory. Judgements on leadership and management were strongest in the schools where co-headship was considered successful by governors.
- Governing bodies managed accountability in two distinctly different ways. They either held co-heads jointly or separately accountable. Joint accountability was more common in the successful models.
- Governors perceived benefits and pitfalls in line with the findings of previous studies.

- Only three of the eight schools were still utilising the model at the time of writing the report. This may indicate that co-headship may be favoured as a short-term or transitional option for the leadership of a school.
- It could be construed from this study that co-headship is not a long-term leadership model. It will only be possible to assess whether co-headship is, in general, utilised as a leadership model for a transitional period or as a long-term option for schools if further studies are conducted of schools adopting this leadership model.

### **Stakeholder commitment to co-headship**

Many of the governors interviewed for this study reported that they initially had some concerns about how their stakeholders may respond to the idea of co-headship.

Four of the five schools where co-headship had a successful outcome reported that the school community were committed to the idea. The remaining school reported that the key members of the school community were happy with the situation, but only reported strong commitment from the governing body. Importantly, there was no significant opposition from stakeholder groups. 'Buy-in' from key members of the school community seems to be one of the potential factors for a successful co-headship:

'If the staff aren't fully behind it; if they don't want to make it work, they can make it not work. We had all the staff fully behind it and the governors fully behind it. Everybody wanted to make it work including the LA [local authority] of course. There wasn't any one out to wreck it. If the staff had not wanted it to work it would have failed in the first six months. I am convinced of it. In the event it was incredible.'  
(governor)

Where the governing body viewed that co-headship had not been a successful model for their school they also reported that some of the key stakeholders had expressed discontent with the arrangement:

'Teaching staff in particular felt that decisions were made between the heads without consulting the teachers.'  
(governor)

In schools where the outcome of co-headship was rated as successful, the governors had made an effort to pre-empt concerns from stakeholder groups and address any possible fears early on. They used a variety of methods to achieve this, for example, letters and meetings. This group felt that they had made considerable effort to communicate with their stakeholders in order to secure commitment to the idea of co-headship:

'I was adamant that we should tell the parents before term started so that it wouldn't be a shock.'  
(governor)

### **Governors' initial expectations**

The governors interviewed were asked to recall their initial thoughts about co-headship in the days and weeks after it was introduced to them as a possible leadership model for their school. Half of the governors interviewed reported that they felt broadly positive about the possibility and the other half admitted to feeling concerned or sceptical about the idea.

Where governors had a positive expectation, the outcome of the co-headship was generally positive. There was one exception where expectation was positive but the outcome was only partially successful. Positive expectation was therefore found

mostly in schools where co-headship operated as a successful model in the view of the governing body.

It could be construed that in order for a co-headship arrangement to be a success then the governing body must have a positive expectation at the outset. However, it should be considered that these governors also reported that they viewed co-headship as a successful leadership model in their context. It is possible that they were looking back through 'rose-coloured spectacles' and recalled their initial expectation as positive because the outcome had been positive.

Where governors were broadly positive about the idea of co-headship they reported that they wanted it to work. They had identified themselves with making it a success. Commitment to the idea and a desire to make it work could therefore be seen as possible indicators of potential success:

'I think we all felt that we had to prove it was going to work. We wanted it to work for the sake of the school and the sake of the rest of the staff.' (governor)

The governing body having trust in the professionals in school was also a recurring theme in schools where governors had initial positive expectations. These governors were frequently influenced by what the professionals who worked in education told them. Perhaps this is unsurprising as the majority of governors are not experts in the field of education and may place their trust in employed professionals to guide them through difficult situations:

'I was prepared to support it because I trusted the two people involved.' (governor)

Initial negative expectations from the governing body occurred more frequently where co-headship was not viewed as a successful leadership model for their school. It should be noted that where governors reported a negative expectation after a negative outcome their experience could have altered or strengthened their perception of their initial expectations.

However, even where co-headship endured and was considered by the governing body to be a successful outcome for the school, there was still evidence of initial negative expectations and expression of concerns. It would therefore seem that a positive outlook on the part of the governing body is not a pre-requisite for a successful co-headship:

'I would lie if I said I was 110% behind it.' (governor)

'I could see hellish problems.' (governor)

The governors interviewed cited similar factors that influenced their initial expectations and caused them concern:

- the novelty of a co-headship arrangement;
- effective communication between co-heads and stakeholders;
- views of the stakeholders;
- lack of choice over the members of the partnership; co-heads frequently choose each other;
- a lack of regulation or guidance regarding this arrangement.

Governors reported that they were initially cautious because co-headship is an unusual arrangement and generally they could find very few people who knew anything about it:

'They were cautious and rightly so, especially as they [the local authority] hadn't got one [co-head] at that stage. It was a very new thing.' (governor)



In addition to this, effective handover of information was a key concern for the governors:

'I thought there would be terrible problems with things falling down the middle. Whenever it went wrong we would never know whose fault it was. I thought we would have interminable enquiries as to whose fault it was.' (governor)

Governors also expressed concern about what stakeholder groups would think of co-headship. Addressing the views of the stakeholders was an important factor in ensuring the success of a co-headship:

'Parents are likely to be anxious about little Johnny and how it's going to impact on him.' (governor)

Lack of choice for the governing body over the members of the co-headship gave rise to concern and initial negative expectations. There were only three schools where the governors reported that they felt that they had a genuine choice about whether or not they should appoint the partnership at interview. The descriptive matrix (see Figure 1) indicates that in seven of the eight schools the co-head partners were previously known to each other and in some senses had chosen each other as a pairing. The issue of the impact of lack of choice is explored further later in this section.

Due to the novelty of the situation the governors found themselves in and the lack of guidance available, governors had to make decisions based on the best information they had at the time. There was evidence of protracted discussion and difference of opinion on the governing body:

'We spent plenty of hours debating the "what ifs".' (governor)

Although there was evidence of considerable negative expectation at the outset, where co-headship had been a success governors were keen to talk about the fact that these expectations had been dealt with or never come to fruition. They were keen to impress on future groups of governors considering this model of leadership that initial scepticism may be a healthy way of airing and addressing concerns.

### **Perception of the local authority's view**

It was not within the scope of this study to interview local authority staff involved with schools operating co-headship arrangements. One of the recommendations of this study is that further work is done to study the local authority's role in co-headship.

Governors' perceptions of the local authority role in the appointment of co-heads fell into three categories:

- Governors who perceived that their local authority was opposed to the idea of co-headship.
- Governors who perceived that their local authority lacked experience of this model of headship and consequently were unsure when it came to giving advice.
- Governors who perceived that their local authority was supportive and gave them advice.

One school reported that they believed that their local authority was opposed to the idea of co-headship. This school did not proceed beyond a period of acting co-headship and a substantive appointment was never made:

'It seemed that everything we wanted the LA [local authority] was saying you can't do it this way, you can't do it that way; even down to the way we advertised the post.' (governor)

Five of the eight schools reported that they believed that the local authority lacked prior experience of co-headship and were uncertain when giving advice. Some governors reported that they received contradictory advice from different members of their local authority. This is perhaps unsurprising as there is no current legislation surrounding the appointment of a co-headteacher. The PricewaterhouseCoopers and DfES study states:

Our research has also highlighted the fact that many of the new models exist within a regulatory framework that was defined for an earlier period, and hence find themselves operating at the limit of current legal and statutory guidance and sometimes beyond, or at least in an area of ambiguity. (PWC & DfES 2007: 145)

In the absence of legislation, local authorities may have created their own procedures and working practices. There was evidence of a variety of advice offered to governing bodies surrounding appointment and contractual issues. However, lack of prior experience of the local authority was not necessarily a barrier to success:

'It was a job to know where to go.... I don't think there was anyone in our area to go to who'd done the same thing.' (governor)

'We were the first in the county; they had no experience of this.' (governor)

Three of the governors interviewed reported that their local authority offered advice on contracts and legal issues:

'It was very much their expertise with regards to contracts. I think they were supportive.' (governor)

Only five of the eight schools went through any sort of recruitment process. The remaining three had no advertisement or interview. These were direct appointments made by the governing body. The five schools who did go through an appointment process received at least some advice about recruitment from the local authority.

Where the governing body felt that the local authority were supportive and gave good advice the final outcome was positive and the governors viewed the co-headship as a success for their school. However, there were also instances where the governing body felt that the local authority recruitment advice was unhelpful but the final outcome was still positive and they viewed co-headship as a success in their context. The quality of the local authority recruitment advice seems not to be fundamental to a successful outcome for co-headship.

Three out of the five schools, where the governors viewed co-headship as a successful model, felt that the local authority had offered them moral support at the outset:

'Had they not been supportive I'm not sure we'd have been quite so keen to go ahead with it; their involvement was absolutely key.' (governor)

## **External opinion**

In addition to stakeholders and the school community, the governors were aware of the opinions of the wider community and external experts.

For schools where the governors perceived a lack of support from their local authority it was important to them to find an external group who would support their choice of co-headship as a model of leadership in their school prior to appointment:

'If they [NAGM] had been unsupportive we'd have said what are we doing here? They weren't against us.... If everyone was telling us no, as a governing body we would listen to that. We were getting support in other quarters.' (governor)

In the five schools where the governors reported that co-headship was a successful model in their context, they also reported that external opinion from agencies such as Ofsted had been very positive. They felt that their decision to operate an unusual model of headship had been vindicated by external opinion:

‘It was new to them [Ofsted] I think the inspector was a bit surprised it worked so well.’ (governor)

‘It’s been fabulous, just read the Ofsted report.’ (governor)

## **Co-head appointments**

Only two out of the eight schools appointed their co-head partners to a permanent contract at the outset, with no further recourse to the governing body. The other six schools operated either with:

- acting co-headship
- fixed period temporary co-headship
- trial period temporary co-headship.

In the schools where co-headship operated as a successful and viable model in their context, temporary arrangements were a positive response to circumstances. For example, one school operated a temporary fixed period co-headship leading up to the retirement of the original headteacher. Another school operated an acting co-headship after the previous headteacher left in the period preceding a substantive appointment.

In two schools temporary arrangements were made because the governing body felt uncertain that co-headship was a viable model. In these instances the co-headship did not operate until the end of the contracted period:

‘They were doubtful and because of that they made it a two-year contract.’ (governor)

The governors who had used a temporary contract or trial period to ‘bridge’ a period of uncertainty while they ascertained whether co-headship was a viable model for their school regretted their decision:

‘Going for a temporary [contract] is something I wouldn’t consider again.’ (governor)

These governors were keen to impress on future groups of governors that it was important not to use a temporary contract as a way of masking uncertainty about the idea. They felt they should have listened to their instincts and not agreed to the co-headship.

## **Relationship between the co-heads**

Many of the governors interviewed for this project placed a high emphasis on a strong relationship between the co-heads and this was a major deciding factor when appointing a co-head partnership.

The views of these two governors were representative of the group interviewed:

‘Get a personal relationship established preferably before appointment.’ (governor)

‘One of the important factors was that they knew each other already and they already had a reputation for getting on well together.’ (governor)

The research previously carried out on the subject of co-headship also aligns with this view by suggesting that the relationship between the co-heads is an important factor in success.

Paterson (2006) states that:

The relationship between co-heads is clearly crucial to the success of the arrangements. Many co-headships spring from a previous collaboration or job-share arrangements – such as job-sharing a deputy headship position. Although there are examples of both more or less successful “arranged marriage” co-headships in which incumbent heads have been paired with an unknown partner. These arrangements have been brokered either by the LA [local authority] or come about as part of a full appointment process. In some cases quite different personalities have been paired successfully under the guidance of governors or LA staff. A key factor, however, appears to be fully involving the incumbent head in this process. Situations in which the new co-head has been “imposed” are unlikely to be sustainable. (2006: 6)

PricewaterhouseCoopers and DfES' *Independent Study into School Leadership* (2007) tells us that: ‘the success of the co-headship model is inextricably linked to the quality and sustainability of the personal relationships between those involved’ (2007: xi).

It is evident in the descriptive matrix (see Figure 1) that in seven out of the eight schools involved in this study the co-heads had a previous relationship. This condition was present across both the successful and unsuccessful co-headships. Therefore the evidence from this study suggests that although a previous relationship is a common starting point for a co-headship, having a successful track record of working well together is not necessarily an indicator of success.

Governors who deemed that co-headship was not a successful model for their school said that the problems that led to the demise of the co-headship were not related to the quality or the sustainability of the relationship between the co-heads. The reasons cited for the breakdown of the co-headship were linked to relationships with other stakeholders, for example, the staff and governing body:

‘The teachers weren’t consulted and decisions were made between two job share heads instead of involving the staff.’ (governor)

It would therefore seem that too much emphasis may have been placed on the quality of the relationship between the two co-heads where an additional focus may be the quality of the relationship between the co-heads and the stakeholder groups.

In addition to the perception of the importance of an existing relationship between the co-heads, governors reported nervousness about the idea of being asked to select two people to work together in a co-head partnership. Three of the governors interviewed stated that they did not believe that the governors could successfully put two people together and expect the co-headship to work:

‘I can’t say that the two people who were strangers to one another would be able to work together.’ (governor)

‘I don’t believe you can just create it, through advertising for people with a view to a job share.’ (governor)

Conversely, one school, where the co-headship was viewed as a success, cited the fact that they had chosen the two partners who were previously unknown to each other as an important factor in that success:

‘Appointing from within is not a good thing to do, in organisations where personal loyalty and integrity are critical ie the army, if you promote someone to officer status from being a non-commissioned officer they always put you in another battalion, because you are going to have to make decisions about people and it’s best not to know them.’ (governor)

This study suggests that an existing relationship is not a pre-requisite for success. However, it is worth investing time during the recruitment process considering

whether the co-head teachers can work successfully with each other and perhaps more importantly can communicate and work successfully with their key stakeholders.

## **Benefits**

The benefits of co-headship were, perhaps unsurprisingly, mostly reported by schools where co-headship was viewed as a successful model of school leadership by the governors. However, there were instances of schools where the co-headship did not endure and yet some benefits were reported.

The benefits of co-headship have been researched previously through interviewing the co-head partners themselves.

The interviews with governing bodies seem to reflect a similar view of the benefits of co-headship and support the findings of previous research.

The most frequently reported benefit of co-headship was the fact that it allowed both partners a greater chance to achieve a work–life balance and that it was a mutually supportive arrangement.

The PricewaterhouseCoopers and DfES *Independent Study into School Leadership* states:

The support which comes from having someone to work alongside is a key advantage of this model of headship. (PWC & DfES 2007: 59)

The governors interviewed for this project frequently concurred with this point of view:

'It's a tremendous opportunity, if you get it right they support each other. It's a lonely old job; it's quite a luxury to have a second internal opinion.' (governor)

Even where the governors did not view the co-headship as a successful model for their school they were aware of its potential benefits:

'In theory it should have worked quite well and been less stressful than one headteacher coping with everything.' (governor)

In addition to work–life balance another perceived benefit was having two people to cope with the complexities of modern headship. As Paterson tells us:

Many co-heads say that this phenomenon has emerged because the requirements of headship are so complex that two people are better able to offer the appropriate skills, knowledge and expertise to fulfil the demands of the role. They argue that these arrangements offer schools greater flexibility to arrange their leadership patterns and develop creative solutions to problems. (Paterson 2006: 3)

The governors who reported that co-headship had been a successful leadership model for their school felt strongly that they were getting a "good deal" as a governing body. They reported feeling that they achieved value for money and that it made issues such as absence easier rather than more complex:

'What we're going to get is six days full 100% instead of five days which may be four days at 100% and one day a knackered 40%.' (governor)

Governors recognised the complementary skills in both headteachers and valued them. They saw this as a positive benefit of their choice:

'They have different skills that complement one another.' (governor)

Another benefit which was recognised was the power of having two different brains focusing on the issues of headship:

‘What we were getting was a bonus because we were getting two brains!’ (governor)

Other perceived benefits were the opportunities to grow and bring new leaders into the system, allowing the chance to grow tomorrow’s leaders today:

‘When the fixed period came to an end, it worked well for everyone. Head 2 wanted to go to a bigger school. You had someone who had been in a particular part of the educational spectrum who was able to move into a bigger part of the educational spectrum.’ (governor)

Some governors interviewed also saw greater opportunities for strategic thinking. They felt that co-headship allowed time to talk about the vision and strategy for the school.

Smooth transition from one leader to another was also a benefit cited by the governors interviewed. These governors felt it helped them reduce and minimise risk in the appointment of a new school leader. As Paterson states:

As a head approaches retirement, co-headship offers the opportunity of smooth transitions between current and new headteachers. Governors can see how an aspiring head “reacts under fire” whilst sharing the headship with the outgoing or retiring head. (Paterson 2006: 4)

Governors who had rated co-headship as a successful model in their context were keen that others understand the potential benefits that such an arrangement may deliver. All of these schools said that they would consider a co-headship arrangement in the future as they felt the school had gained significantly as a result of this arrangement.

## **Difficulties experienced or pitfalls**

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the difficulties of co-headship were largely reported by schools where the governors did not view co-headship as a successful model for their context. Paterson (2006) explores the issue of potential pitfalls and challenges of co-headship and lists them as:

- perceptions of governors and local authority staff
- accountability and decision making
- appointment process
- relationships and brokerage
- meeting the needs of the school.

The findings of this study support the previous research. The most frequently reported difficulty from the governors’ perspective surrounded relationships with stakeholder groups, particularly staff. Governors cited problems with communication of decisions and not involving others in the decision-making process.

One school experienced significant difficulty in dealing with local authority perceptions of co-headship. This was a barrier to co-headship in this instance:

‘They were almost trying to drive a wedge into it and say it stops here and we’re going to do it our way.’ (governor)

The co-headships that were rated as unsuccessful by the governors were appointed under a temporary contract. Interestingly these co-headships ceased operating prior to the end of the fixed term contract period. This was not as a result of the

breakdown of the relationship between the two co-heads but difficulties in the relationship with stakeholder groups.

'It was a very turbulent time.... I was very worried about the school. The staff were demoralised.... There was an effect on the behaviour of the children; their behaviour had deteriorated.' (governor)

PricewaterhouseCoopers and DfES' *Independent Study into School Leadership* (2007) makes reference to the importance of personality in a job share. There was only one instance where the governors felt that different personality styles had been fundamental to the demise of a job share. Interestingly, the co-head partnership had no particular differences with each other; rather other people saw differences between them and found it difficult to deal with the different styles of leadership.

In one school where the co-headship was viewed as successful the governor reported an increased workload for the deputy who became the one half of the job share as a negative impact of co-headship:

'It's sorting itself out now but it's been very hard for her. I think she added to her load and the other one lost from hers.' (governor)

The governors who had experienced difficulties associated with a co-headship arrangement were keen to ensure that others were aware of the potential pitfalls in order that they could be properly prepared for any challenges that may arise.

## **Accountability**

The question was raised during the interviews with governors about how the governing body had managed accountability during the period of co-headship. This revealed two different approaches by governing bodies:

- One group treated their two headteachers as one and held them jointly accountable.
- The other group divided up aspects of the role of headteacher and held the two headteachers accountable for different aspects of the school development plan and the work of the school.

In four out of the five schools, where co-headship was judged to be a successful model by the governors, it was reported that the co-heads were held jointly accountable and treated as one:

'The view taken by the head teachers is that we are one ... the concept of "we are one" takes a bit of swallowing at first ... however, responsibilities are genuinely shared.' (governor)

Although these headteachers were held jointly accountable they sometimes had separate performance management targets or divided responsibilities between them where it was appropriate to do so.

In one school, where the co-headship was viewed as a success by the governing body, the headteachers had clearly delineated and separate responsibilities. This system worked successfully for this school in its context:

'There was a phenomenal amount of work put in by these two professionals prior to the initiation of the job share itself; during which time they divided the activities so as to cover all bases and still maintain communication.' (governor)

Of the remaining three schools, one school never progressed beyond a period of acting co-headship; one school's period of co-headship was short (only six months) and therefore the governors felt they had never been given sufficient opportunity to

hold the two headteachers properly accountable due to the brevity of the arrangement; and in the last school one headteacher remained as substantive head and therefore only one headteacher retained accountability.

All five of the schools who considered co-headship to be successful in their context had clearly decided how their headteachers would be held accountable.

The type of accountability, that is, joint or separate, seemed less important than the fact that the governing body had discussed it and arrived at an agreement that suited their circumstances.

## **Recruitment process**

One of the main difficulties reported by the governing bodies involved in the project was a lack of guidance about how to recruit co-heads. They acknowledged that they were working in a novel area of school leadership but were unable to find guidance to help them with the practical aspects surrounding appointment, contracts and the day-to-day operation of a co-headship:

Governors considering co-headship want greater clarity from the DfES about regulations applying to co-headship appointment, particularly in cases where schools have identified someone to join an incumbent head in a job-share without recourse to a competitive application process. (Paterson 2006: 6)

Where governors reported that they felt confident and empowered to make decisions about their school, they were not perturbed by lack of guidance and uncertainty from the local authority:

'We had a governing body that was adventurous, competent and confident; it was not risk-taking mad men.' (governor)

In the absence of any nationally recognised guidance about the appointment of co-headteachers it is unsurprising that there was evidence of a variety of approaches to making a co-headship appointment. Four schools went through the full appointment process, advertising and interviewing. There were three schools where a direct appointment was made; there was no advertisement or interview. The remaining school had advertised for a headteacher and two of the candidates suggested the idea during the interview process.

Two of the schools who advertised were strong proponents of following the due process irrespective of the fact that the model of leadership was unusual. They believed strongly that this ensured they made a robust appointment:

'We advertised in the knowledge we may have to advertise again.' (governor)

In two of the schools the job was advertised but there was an internal candidate interested in becoming the job share partner of the existing head. Although there were applications for these jobs none of the external candidates attended for interview. This raises a question about how a suitably qualified candidate can find a co-headship to apply for. Co-headships are rarely advertised, although a growing number of school leaders are contacting the NAHT (National Association of Head Teachers) and NCSL to find out more about how to introduce and operate this model. Currently the prospects for co-headship only seem likely where there are two partners who have a previous relationship and come to a private agreement to apply for a job or approach a governing body together. For those school leaders who are interested in the idea of co-headship but do not have a prospective partner the outlook is currently bleak. They are unlikely to be able to respond to a genuinely open advertisement where there is not already a candidate 'waiting in the wings' as



the preferred job share partner of the incumbent head. In Paterson (2006) possible next steps are listed as:

- promoting job share as a useful option within a local leadership succession planning strategy
- developing local databases of those willing to job share. (Paterson 2006: 8)

It would seem that these are sensible ways forward to change the balance of co-headship from a private arrangement to one that reflects a fair and transparent process with equal opportunity for all. One of the main findings of this study is that a previous relationship between the two co-head partners is not necessarily an indicator of success; it therefore seems timely that other ways of establishing co-head partnerships are explored.

There was only one school in the study where the head had no prospective job share partner. Normal procedure dictates that the head should not be involved in the appointment of their successor. However, the head was assisting in choosing a partner and not a successor, therefore the governing body felt it was appropriate for the head to be involved in selection, but not in the interview process. The governors were clear that the choice of the co-head partner would rest with the governors and that the head did not have power of veto over their choice:

'The standing head had a meeting with each candidate and prepared a confidential objective summary for the governing body.' (governor)

The issue of competence was important to governors. Those who felt they had the opportunity to choose a competent partnership were most satisfied with the outcome:

'The starting point is that both headteachers need to be fully able to do the whole job before appointment.' (governor)

In the instances where governors felt they lacked choice about choosing the co-head partnership the outcome was, on occasion, viewed by the governing body as less successful for the school:

'The impression I was given was if you don't agree to this job share I'm going to leave anyway and she was a good head.' (governor)

The findings of this study support the findings of the PricewaterhouseCoopers and DfES' *Independent Study of School Leadership*, which states:

These models were a response to an increasing shortage of suitable candidates for headship and to attempts to reduce the workload. The results were mixed: where schools and local authorities were actively involved in the decision making associated with the implementation of co-headship, the results were positive. (PWC & DfES 2007: 59)

In schools where the governors felt empowered and enabled to make a genuine choice at interview, they felt that they had been able to make a decision that they were completely happy with and that they could support:

'I came away thinking I wouldn't change that decision.' (governor)

## **Lack of choice**

Lack of choice for the governing body was a recurring theme throughout the interviews. The descriptive matrix indicates that in seven of the eight schools the co-head partners were previously known to each other and in some senses had chosen each other as a pairing. In three of the schools the governors reported that they felt that they had a genuine choice about whether or not they should appoint the partnership at interview. In the remaining schools the choice for the governing body

was limited either by the fact that they had to act quickly in difficult circumstances to secure the leadership of the school, or because the existing headteacher requested a change in their contracted hours and suggested the co-head partner leaving the governing body limited scope for choosing who was to lead the school.

'I was open minded but concerned that we might not be seeing the what else was available.' (governor)

Where a governing body felt strongly that they had no choice over the co-head partnership they expressed considerable uncertainty prior to interview. However, even where this was the case some of these schools then went on to be considered by the governing body to be successful co-headships.

## **Contractual issues**

The governors who took part in this project seemed generally unsure about how to resolve contractual issues regarding co-headship. They felt that there was a scarcity of advice from local authority and other agencies.

There are no specific regulations surrounding co-headship from the DfES and as a result little guidance exists.

There is some guidance available from the NAHT (2005) on job share headship, which states that:

Provided that the headship is not left vacant for part of the week, this requirement can be met by job-share headship ... job-share can occur on a 50-50 basis, with both partners carrying equal responsibility. However, it is possible for the substantive head ... to retain ultimate responsibility and accountability. The remaining vacancy is covered by an acting head in accordance with legislation.

The governors interviewed for this project managed accountability as part of the headteachers' contracts in a way that best suited their local circumstances.

One of the major expressions of concern among the governors interviewed was what would happen at the end of a co-headship as far as the contractual rights of both partners were concerned. For those who opted for a fixed term contract they had considered what would happen at the end of the co-headship. For those schools where the arrangement was not for a fixed term there was less certainty surrounding what would happen if one partner chose to leave:

'We've just sort of vaguely agreed what we'd like to do when the time comes.'  
(governor)

'What happens when one of our head decides to leave what is the status of the other one?' (governor)

Four out of the eight schools opted for a temporary contract with a fixed period. One chose this route because their personnel provider informed them that it was not possible to make the appointment permanent. This governing body were committed to the idea of co-headship and allowed a two-year period to elapse; this meant that the appointment automatically became permanent. One school had chosen a co-headship route in the period leading up to the retirement of the original headteacher. They chose to appoint on a temporary basis as they felt it gave them some protection and they could start again at the end of the two-year period. They felt this approach would not be necessary if they were to use this model of leadership again in the future:

'The whole thing was fixed to come to a conclusion and was set up before we started. If you appoint a job share head under normal conditions and one goes away you have to find another half. At the time we felt that was going to be a problem, I'm not

sure we'd feel the same way now. But at the time we took the sensible risk management position and opted for a fixed term.' (governor)

The remaining two schools felt uncertain about whether co-headship was appropriate for their circumstances and chose a fixed period so that they could review the success of this leadership model. Neither of these schools reached the end of the fixed period. In each case one headteacher left the school before the end of the fixed period.

## **Luck**

The notion of luck was a recurring theme in five of the schools where the outcome had been successful. This suggested that, at a deeper level, maybe the governors had not really expected co-headship to work, but thought that they had 'struck lucky' with their partnership. From the analysis of the data, it seems clear that it was more than luck that resulted in the positive outcome for these schools. However, the comments below were typical of those made where governors rated the outcome of co-headship as positive in their setting:

'I suppose we're very lucky we've got a very hard working team.'

'We were very lucky.'

'It was clearly either luck ... but I don't think it was; I think our machine works very well.'

'We were very lucky; you couldn't pick a hole in it.'

'We've been lucky in one sense because one of the anxieties at the beginning was well what happens when the relationship goes sour, well that happens with any job share, it can also happen with a single head and a group of governors. You deal with those things as they arise.' (governors)

## Ten lessons learned

The governors interviewed were asked what they felt had been learnt from their experience which would be useful to other schools who might consider co-headship in the future. They felt it was important for their lessons, as the early pioneers of co-headship, to be available for other governors.

Collectively, respondents identified 10 lessons that influenced the degree to which co-headship could be viewed as a success.

### **Lesson 1: Gain commitment and 'buy-in'**

- Key stakeholders, particularly the staff and local authority, should be committed to the idea of co-headship.

There was a strong link between stakeholder 'buy-in' to the co-headship (or lack of it) and success (or lack of it). It seems that commitment to the idea of co-headship from all the key stakeholders, particularly the staff and local authority, is crucial to ensuring that co-headship operates effectively and successfully.

### **Lesson 2: Seek moral support**

- Seek support and advice from a trusted external body.

Governors felt that finding a source of support from an external body, for example, the NAGM or local authority, was important in this relatively 'uncharted' area of school leadership. The unsuccessful co-headships in this study were poorly supported and advised by their local authorities.

### **Lesson 3: Guidance would help**

- Guidance from the Department for Children, Schools and Families surrounding appointment and contractual issues would ensure governors felt confident when opting for a co-headship model.

Governors interviewed felt that one of their challenges was a lack of regulation, advice and guidance surrounding co-headship. Half of the schools involved in this study suggested that some form of guidance would have been extremely useful to help them through the process of recruiting, appointing and working with a co-head partnership.

### **Lesson 4: Keep an open mind**

- Have an open mind, an honest debate and try to find a way to resolve issues and perceived problems.

Two of the schools where co-headship was a successful model started the process with negative expectations. They felt it was important that governors kept an open mind; co-headship can be a success even if governors have initial concerns about the prospect.

### **Lesson 5: Don't be railroaded into a decision**

- Have the courage of your convictions: if the governing body has significant misgivings about the partnership or feels unable to commit to this leadership model then an appointment should not be made.

Governors had no choice about the co-headship partners in both unsuccessful arrangements and for two of the schools where co-headship had not endured, the governors felt the lesson that they had learned was to trust their initial instincts about the candidates.

### **Lesson 6: Co-headship requires particular skills**

- A previous successful relationship is not necessarily an indicator of a successful co-headship.
- Competent headteachers do not always make good co-heads; the skills required are different.

In the schools where co-headship was not successful, governors felt it was important that others understood that co-headship could go wrong. It does not offer a viable leadership solution for every school.

### **Lesson 7: Communication skills are crucial**

- Communicate, communicate, communicate!

Governors placed high importance on the ability of the co-heads to communicate effectively not only with each other but also with all the stakeholder groups.

Governors also felt that they had a significant role to play in communicating with the stakeholder groups prior to the commencement of a co-headship. This gave governors the opportunity to allay any fears or misunderstanding about a co-headship arrangement. When questioned about the lessons learned, good communication was cited as being fundamental to success.

### **Lesson 8: Ensure there is time for liaison**

- In order to achieve effective communication a clear investment of liaison time is required.

Contracted, liaison time in school was also a common factor in successful co-headships. Governors considered that a mutual commitment to liaison time was important so that the two headteachers would have the opportunity to complete an effective handover.

### **Lesson 9: Two heads can be better than one**

- Co-headship can bring benefits particularly in terms of work–life balance and strategic thinking.

Governors in the successful co-headship schools felt that opting for this model allowed their school to access new ideas and experience.

### **Lesson 10: Consider the contractual issues**

- A temporary contract or trial period should not be used to mask uncertainty about whether co-headship is a viable leadership model for a school. Governors must be confident that both heads are capable to lead alone.

Consider the contractual position of the co-heads and possible future scenarios with care.

## Conclusions

### Co-headship: a sustainable leadership model?

Only three of the original eight schools are still operating a co-headship model at the time of writing this report. Of the five schools which are no longer under co-headship, one co-head pair has moved to lead and manage another school, again using the co-headship model, one school never progressed beyond a period of acting co-headship, and for one school the co-headship model was designed to be a short-term measure in the lead up to the retirement of the original headteacher. For the remaining two schools the co-headship did not continue to the end of the fixed contract period and the partners no longer work together.

It could be construed from this study that co-headship is not a long-term leadership model. There is certainly evidence of co-headship being used as a short-term/transitional leadership model, for example in the period leading up to the retirement of a substantive head. For some schools involved in the study there was evidence that co-headship was viewed as a long-term leadership option; however, due to the fact that most co-headship arrangements have been in place for less than five years it is not yet possible to say whether they will be ultimately sustainable. Co-headship has certainly proved to be a long-term choice for one set of co-heads who after six years leading one school moved on to a second headship using a co-headship model once again.

It will only be possible to assess whether co-headship is, in general, utilised as a leadership model for a transitional period or as a long-term option for schools if further studies are conducted of schools adopting this leadership model.

### Governors' views

The governors were asked to talk about their overall view of co-headship as an experience from a governing body perspective. The schools who felt that co-headship had been successful for their school were happy with the outcome and felt that they would try this approach to school leadership again if the right candidates could be found. The comments below were typical of those made by the schools where they considered co-headship a successful model:

'My expectations were exceeded.'

'It was a fairly universally positive experience.'

For those governors where co-headship was not a success in their context there was considerable reservation about the idea and an unwillingness to ever consider it as a leadership model again:

'Two heads are better than one! I can't entirely agree with that. The whole thing ended in disaster.' (governor)

### Overview of the study

This study was intended to contribute to the small existing body of knowledge and to gather evidence about the emerging picture of co-headships in England from sources other than the co-heads themselves.

It set out to explore the possibility that one of the barriers to co-headship may be the opinion of governing bodies.

The focus of this research was to explore the views of governing bodies in schools that had operated a co-headship and then to utilise the knowledge to support governing bodies who were contemplating co-headship in the future.

One of the most interesting findings surrounded the previous relationship between co-heads. A previous successful relationship between the co-heads was not a necessary condition for success even though most of the governors had felt that a previous relationship was an important starting point.

There was only one occasion where the heads had no previous relationship. This school had a successful outcome. On the basis of only one incidence it is impossible to say whether matching potential co-heads with no previous relationship would, as a general rule, lead to a successful outcome.

It had been expected at the outset of this project that governors' initial expectations and the outcome of co-headship would be linked. Where governors expressed concerns about the viability of co-headship it was expected that a 'self-fulfilling prophecy' would be found and the co-headship would not be successful. The evidence from this study indicates that a negative expectation on behalf of the governors does not preclude success. It is, however, important that governors communicate their concerns, have a thorough debate to explore the issues raised and have the opportunity to have any fears allayed.

The commitment of the key stakeholders to the idea of co-headship had, however, more relevance than had been expected. In this study there was a strong correlation between key stakeholder commitment to the idea of co-headship and a successful outcome, in the view of the governing body.

## **Implications and recommendations**

The intended audience for this study is school leaders and governors. There are some key messages for these groups as a result of this research in addition to some implications for both local authorities and policy makers.

### ***Governors***

For governors the main implications are:

- ensuring stakeholder commitment through effective communication;
- embracing initial negative reaction to the idea of co-headship and debating it fully;
- not assuming that a previous successful relationship is an indicator of a successful co-headship;
- ensuring accountability is agreed;
- acting with the courage of your convictions. If, after thorough debate, there are still significant misgivings about the idea of co-headship it is advisable not to proceed with the idea.

### ***Potential co-heads***

For school leaders who may consider the idea of co-headship at some point in their career, the main implications are:

- ensuring highly effective communication not only with a co-head partner but also with the key stakeholder groups. The evidence of this study would

- suggest that communicating successfully with, and ensuring the commitment of the staff is an important success indicator;
- ensuring how accountability is managed between potential co-heads is successfully established;
  - reliance on a previously successful relationship with a potential co-head partner may not be an indicator of future success.

### ***Local authorities***

For local authorities the main implications are:

- establishing a local policy, guidelines and advice on co-headship to support governing bodies through the process;
- establishing a list of potential co-head partners. This could be a useful resource for future succession planning.

### ***Policy makers***

For policy makers the main implications are:

- ensuring that legislation and regulations address current practice surrounding co-headship in order that governors have clarity surrounding the legal status of co-headship;
- establishing national guidelines about co-headship which governing bodies can utilise to resolve issues surrounding appointment, contracts and accountability;
- ensuring more open access and promoting equal opportunity to job share a headship role. Advice and guidance surrounding appointment may clarify this issue;
- if co-headship is to be frequently used as a strategy to retain experienced heads nearing retirement, consideration should be given to how pension rights could be affected by part-time work at the end of a headteacher's career.

The early evidence suggests that co-headship has proved to be a viable leadership model for a small number of pioneering schools. The evidence from this report indicates that co-headship is a model that can be used by large numbers of schools to progress potential leaders more quickly to a headship role and to make the role of headteacher more appealing.

However, it was not an effective or sustainable model for all of the schools studied. Other factors, such as levels of commitment from the stakeholders, skill in communication and contractual issues affected the eventual outcome for each of the schools.

The evidence gathered for this report should enable schools who wish to utilise this model of leadership in the future to benefit from the lessons learned and to help them 'keep their head'.

Clearly, further study into co-headship is required to understand its role in leadership succession and also whether it is a sustainable leadership approach for the long term as the model emerges over the next few years.



## References

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## Appendix: additional resources

NCSL publications are available to download from [www.ncsl.org.uk/publications](http://www.ncsl.org.uk/publications)

A list of current co-headship arrangements and other resources can be found at [www.ncsl.org.uk/modelsofleadership](http://www.ncsl.org.uk/modelsofleadership)

NCSL is recruiting research associates to enquire further into the nature, impact, benefits and risks of new models of leadership. Further information can be found at [www.ncsl.org.uk/researchassociates](http://www.ncsl.org.uk/researchassociates)

Education Data Surveys: the full report can be found at [www.educationaldatasurveys.org.uk/22report.htm](http://www.educationaldatasurveys.org.uk/22report.htm)

Flexexecutive ([www.flexexecutiveclient.co.uk/education](http://www.flexexecutiveclient.co.uk/education)) offer an online advertising facility specifically for job share posts, a national job share register bringing together education professionals interested in forming a job share partnership and extensive information about effective flexible working. The service is free of charge to education professionals seeking flexible working opportunities and job share partners.

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