Local solutions for leadership succession: advice for local areas
Author: Paul Bennett, NCSL

Introduction

This advice aims to support local areas develop their approaches to leadership succession. It is based upon lessons learned from the eleven pilot areas that engaged with NCSL in developing strategies for leadership succession in 2006-7. The principles underpinning the advice are largely applicable to a range of definition and size of local areas: from individual schools through to groups of schools, organisations, dioceses and local authorities.

The advice should not be seen as another additional requirement for schools and local authorities, but a recognition that most schools already see leadership succession as a priority and are engaged in some form of action. The advice seeks to support the development of such local strategy by sharing practice within a framework of national expectations and materials.

An overview from the pilot areas

The eleven local pilot areas were at different stages of development in leadership succession. Many had already engaged in a range of activities though, initially, in few areas were these activities based on an overall strategy which had identified the main leadership succession challenges and key priorities for development.

All the pilot areas recognised the importance of leadership succession planning taking place at different levels: individual schools, groups of schools working together, and at diocesan / local authority level (maybe even geographic areas within large shires or at a regional or sub-regional level, across local authority boundaries).

When beginning to consider the development of a local leadership succession strategy, there seemed to be four key questions to address:

> 1) What data and intelligence do we have (and do we need) in order to identify the key leadership succession challenges in our local area and the priorities for action / development?
> 2) How will this work form part of a wider vision for schooling in the area – future organisation of schools, new models of leadership, Building Schools for the Future and Primary Capital Programme, needs of future leadership development etc?
> 3) What principles and values will underpin the leadership succession strategy?
> 4) What is the local capacity to drive the agenda forward and who are the key stakeholders with whom to engage?

The overarching leadership succession strategy was likely to involve two main strands:

1) Culture and communications: how will the area build on or develop a culture of collective responsibility for growing leaders? How will local communications support this?
2) Strategies and activities: what will really make a difference to leadership development in our area?

The experiences of the eleven pilot areas indicate that the following nine areas of activity are essential elements of a successful local strategic framework for leadership succession:

1. Painting the picture – using data effectively.
2. Gaining the active engagement of stakeholders.
3. Positioning the work.
4. Professional development and approaches to allow for the personalisation and contextualisation of learning.
5. Talent identification.
6. Talent management.
7. Recruitment and appointment processes.
8. Retention strategy.
9. Disseminating and sharing successful practice.

1. **Paint the picture** – **using data effectively**

This is an important stage in the development of strategy – helping to identify the nature of the challenge and ensuring that priorities for action are evidence-based, rather than just worthy ideas for leadership development. Pilot areas found that the process of collating data led to raised awareness of the issue of leadership succession and the engagement of stakeholders who sometimes had not worked closely together eg local authority school improvement teams and HR departments. It was also important to recognise that while different departments may hold very useful data eg age profile of leaders, gender balance of leaders, BME data etc, this was not a guarantee that the data was used or shared.

Some particular advice from the local pilot area fieldworkers is:

- Ensure accurate local data / information is gathered, analysed and used.
- Be open to the range of data that could be collected and intelligent about what is useful and manageable.
- Plan for the regular collation of data – both historical and real-time data.
- Be alert to the need for different data – 'perceptions data' – how staff feel about leadership and headship is really important.

Useful data included:

- Demographic data relating to the local population especially ethnicity and age profiles.
- School organisation planning data including projected numbers on roll and age profile.
- Diversity profile.
- Staff numbers and profile.
- School performance data.

Illustrations:

- Survey of headteachers and senior leaders. Raising awareness and briefings: working across local networks to promote planning for leadership succession.(Birmingham).
- 'Leadership succession planning' and 'leadership succession planning in Birmingham – an overview' on Tomorrow's Leaders Today website.
- 300 plus schools produced data dashboard returns – high validity in production of succession planning package (YST).
- CD strategy includes data to go out to all schools (Rochdale).
- 20 plus presentations using dashboard to all stakeholders (Rochdale).
- Getting behind the data. Leadership data analysis proforma developed for individual headteachers to complete in Blackburn. Followed up with interview/ conversation. Headlines from analysis produced into strategy document for secondary schools (Blackburn).
- Data collection and tracking of aspirant leaders' leadership journey (Hampshire).

2. Gaining the active engagement of stakeholders

All pilot areas found that it was essential to engage with a wide range of stakeholders, in order to promote a collective responsibility for leadership succession across an area. Key stakeholders included:

- headteachers
- other school leaders (ensuring representation from different phases and settings)
- governors
- local authority/diocesan officers
- professional associations
- appropriate elected members
-

The perceived benefits of active engagement of a range of stakeholders are:

- It gives the impetus, drive and moral purpose to the development of strategy, and is often a tipping point to get things done and change people's views.
- It identifies and engages key 'movers and shakers' in an area, especially champions to drive strategy and network with other colleagues. It also provides a critical mass for building the momentum of work.
- It ensures that what is planned and implemented meets local needs and is coherent with wider policy development.
- It encourages and facilitates the identification of possible partnerships and networks operating within and beyond the local authority/existing local area/diocese.
- It engages and values the role of governor in the wider context of leadership succession beyond the individual school. Governors are the key to appointing school leaders. They need to see the reasons for moving from a single school viewpoint to system leadership.

The experience from the pilot areas suggested that the engagement of key stakeholders is best done through existing structures. However, where these were weak, it then gave an important opportunity to strengthen them or to restructure to provide a wider and more effective engagement of stakeholders. Local areas generally found that it was essential to establish a leadership succession steering group that has a wide, transparent and inclusive membership – including governor representatives and good practice practitioners – and therefore has public credibility.

Key questions that a local area might ask when considering stakeholder engagement are:

- Which stakeholders will lead to the greatest level of sustainability – including strategic influence and funding?
- How do we establish collective responsibility?
- How do we identify key stakeholders so that we don't miss one? What are the local protocols and effective channels of communication – especially the ways through the layers of a local authority?
- How can we best gather the perceptions of a wide range of stakeholders, especially what they understand by the terms 'school leadership' and 'succession planning'?
- How do we best link in with futures thinking around school organisation and leadership, the impact of the wider ECM agenda, Building Schools for the Future and the Primary Capital Programme?

Key illustrations:

- Strategic planning group is well developed (Black Country).
- Stakeholder steering group is well organised and influential with headteachers (Birmingham).
- Engaging governors and other partners (Birmingham).
- Raising awareness and briefings – networking succession planning (Birmingham).
- Diocese think tank to ensure follow through of strategy (Hexham and Newcastle).
- Succession planning advocacy pack (CD-rom slip wallet of guidance) produced for all YST networks.(YST).
- Hampshire local authority advisory group well developed and representative of stakeholders (Hampshire).
- Developing membership role of local advisory group (Rochdale).
- Importance of involving key stakeholders in activities – often the 'fun part' as well as policy development eg champion headteachers also involved in mentoring new or trainee headteachers.

3. Positioning the work

Local pilot areas found that it was important to secure an appropriate level of strategic and operational support from whatever level of organisation – individual or groups of schools; dioceses or local authorities. It is important to have ownership of leadership succession at a high strategic level within an organisation as well as the capacity to do something about it. In a local authority it was seen to be important to have the active support of a senior officer eg DCS or deputy with the strategic overview of leadership succession and the influence to give the issue priority within the local area, and to secure resources and time on key agendas, as well as officers with the time and resources to do the work.

In positioning the work, the following issues were considered to be important:

Ownership:
  Ensuring strategic ownership and the engagement and buy-in of key stakeholders (see section two, above).

Developing the strategy:
  - Discuss, share and agree the vision.
  - Challenge and test existing assumptions of where the area is in terms of leadership succession and what the key issues are.
  - Share and discuss data.

- Create the action plan with clear timescales and responsibilities.
- Build on what is going well and stop doing what is not working.
- Adjust the strategy – be open to new solutions – and address the challenges with urgency and pace.
- Monitor and review how well we are doing.

Illustrations:

- Create the action plan with timescales and responsibilities (Sheffield steering group).
- Strap line about leadership succession from DCS on all communications from local authority (Rochdale).
- Positioning the work – succession planning now a key strand in YST – forward planning across 450 schools (YST).
- Guiding coalition group in Blackburn included deputy DCS, SIO link, two influential headteachers (primary and secondary (Blackburn).
- Buy-in from all four DCS in Black Country partnership (Black Country).

4. Professional development and approaches to allow for the personalisation and contextualisation of learning

At the heart of the strategy for leadership succession lies the effective development of leaders at all levels. This includes encouraging individual / school motivation and commitment to leadership and leadership development, as well as building confidence in leaders to step up to even more complex and challenging roles. Personalisation and contextualisation of leadership development were seen to be of fundamental importance in the pilot areas. Development activities needed to be very carefully targeted to meet the needs of individuals and/or groups of aspiring leaders.

Pilot areas indicate that effective leadership development strategies entail engagement at the following levels:

- Individual: a preparedness to take personal ownership of professional and career development; to reflect on personal strengths and leadership development needs using self-assessment and diagnostic tools – and to engage with external support eg leadership coaches or mentors.
- School / groups of schools level: the importance of a culture which promotes and encourages leadership. Leaders who offer inspiration and encouragement to others to step up into leadership roles. Leaders and governors who understand the benefits of growing leaders for the system not just for the individual school.
- Local authority level: the importance of signposting career paths and the provision of appropriate leadership development opportunities to manage leadership talent across the local area.

Illustrations:

- Primary and secondary coaching residentials (Rochdale).
- Use of experienced heads as coaches for aspiring leaders projects Change Makers and Unlocking Potential (Hampshire).
- Stepping up to leadership (Rochdale).
- The self-assessment and diagnostic tool used at the start of the 'Putting Heads Together' programme (Blackburn with Darwen).
- Developing a bespoke programme for aspirant leaders (Birmingham).
- A headteacher organised and ran aspirant headteacher training and subsequent mentoring (Hexham and Newcastle).

- Middle leader development day for 40 leaders, working on self confidence and aspirations (Rochdale).
- Shadowing and internship opportunities (eg Unlocking Potential, Hampshire).
- Primary and secondary deputy headteachers shadowing headteachers – brokered through local authority and accredited through local higher education (Sheffield).
- The bespoke programmes offered to the candidates in Blackburn.
- Use of inspirational speakers to outline and kick-start possibilities / approaches (Raising Aspirations, Hampshire).

5. Talent identification

If local areas are to be active in managing leadership succession and securing high quality leaders for the future, then they need to consider what processes can be deployed to identify leadership talent. Each locality may have their own interpretation of talent identification approaches which reflect context and local needs. Aspirant leaders can be identified early, and their needs and local development opportunities matched together.

Local authorities and dioceses may need to give guidance on how and where talent might be identified by individual or groups of schools, through, for example:

- Data (eg who is on NPQH, LftM, etc).
- Self identification.
- Interview/ selection processes.
- Performance management.
- Assessment centre activities (eg Hampshire, project 2).
- 360 degree appraisals.
- CPD/ toolkit activities.
- Questionnaires.
- Local authority supported school self-evaluation.

Talent identification requires a broad approach – not a single methodology – aiming to be inclusive. Local areas may wish to consider identifying the wider pool of potential leaders eg taking account of the ECM agenda and extended services. It will also be important to consider the diversity of the leadership profile and how different priority groups may be identified and supported.

Illustrations:

- Rochdale examples:
  - Questionnaire to aspirant leaders
  - Self evaluation –'stepping forward'
  - Headteacher recommendation – moving into professional development opportunities provided through the pilot.
  - LA tracking system by school improvement officers of deputy headteachers or other potential leaders under DHT level (criteria used with headteachers in Blackburn when identifying talent, included these below DHT level)
- Talent identification portal (Hackney)
- Clusters identifying their own talent. Developing a bespoke programme for aspirant leaders (Birmingham)
- Trainee Heads programme (Hackney, Birmingham, Sheffield)
- Self evaluation and accredited directory (Black Country)
- Performance management process to identify candidates using Hay web based materials
- Assessment tool and assessment centre (Hampshire)

6. Talent management

When local areas have identified their main leadership succession challenges and priorities for action, it is likely that target groups will be identified for support and development. A key element of the leadership succession strategy will be the way in which the area is able to manage these target groups in terms of leadership development opportunities – in both 'training' and leadership experience. Benefits of such approaches included building a more skilled and confident supply of leaders, with a positive perception of the local area, and also enhancing the image of the local area for external recruits to leadership posts.

Local pilot areas implemented a range of talent management activities targeted at key leadership groups, especially aspirant leaders (below deputy and assistant headteachers) and aspirant headteachers (particularly deputy headteachers and headteachers). These activities comprised events, programmes and experiences and pilot areas identified some useful principles to underpin this work:

- Emphasising the need for personalisation and contextualisation.
- Encouraging a collaborative approach:
    - o A collective responsibility for developing leaders across the system.
    - o Groups of schools providing leadership experience.
    - o A range of experiences of leadership and of different contexts.
- Developing a coherent programme of resources and opportunities and pathways through them, involving local and national programmes:
    - o Encouraging self-responsibility and self advocacy.
    - o Encouraging use of devolvement portfolios and learning journals to capture leadership learning.
    - o Involving governors and gaining governor support for leadership development activity, at individual, whole school and school group levels.

Local pilot areas employed a range of approaches to talent management. These included:

- Events for aspirant leaders to improve perceptions of leadership and encourage 'stepping up'.
- Professional development programmes – developed and delivered locally to target groups.
- Opportunities for aspirant leaders to work / lead in different contexts across clusters or networks of schools.
- Shadowing and 'internships' to give leaders experience of leadership in different contexts.
- Providing aspirant leaders with headteacher coaches.
- Creating champion headteachers to raise expectations and perceptions of leadership.
- Using newsletters, inspirational events and DVDs to maintain communications with aspirant leaders and enhance perceptions of leadership.
- Consider developing 'leadership schools'.

Illustrations:

- 'Putting Heads Together' programme (Blackburn).
- 'Investment in excellence' programme.
- Assessment centre (Hampshire).
- Toolkit to 'grow' school leaders in schools (Hampshire).
- Headteacher coaches (Hampshire and Black Country Consortium).
- Identification of trainee / consultant leaders (Hampshire and Black Country Consortium).

- Internship experience for deputy headteachers (Sheffield).
- 'Women returnees' focus group as part of the strategy coaching residentials (Rochdale).
- Training and coaching for aspirant leaders. Accredited directory of future leaders (Black Country Consortium).

7. Recruitment and appointment processes

The recruitment and appointment process for headteachers' in particular, is a critical phase in the process of leadership succession. It is the point where strategies for talent identification and management can be realised or negated. It is vital that the processes are coherent and based upon principles that are shared and understood. The engagement and education of governors in the process are of paramount importance. The process from recruitment to appointment must be transparent and robust, allowing school leaders to maximise their potential and governors to make the best possible appointment.

Approaches to recruitment and selection in a local area need to address the following issues:

- The local area needs to ensure that it is doing all it can to attract and be attractive to high quality leadership candidates.
- Specific posts need to be advertised in such a way that they attract appropriate candidates.
- The selection and appointment process needs to enable candidates to demonstrate their capabilities – governors to make well-informed decisions – and candidates to be encouraged, not deterred by the process.

Thus, important elements of an effective process might include:

- Positive marketing of the local area as a place to work and be supported – including induction and mentoring for newly appointed headteachers'.
- Agreed principles and practices underpinning recruitment and appointment processes which have been developed with the active engagement of key stakeholders, including governors.
- Engaging HR teams and governor training units to ensure flexible approaches, where appropriate, to new models of leadership.
- Ongoing governor training to develop awareness of all the issues surrounding leadership succession, including changing models of leadership (HR involvement).
- Specific support for governors in preparing for the appointment and during the appointment process.
- Support and professional development to candidates to maximise their potential during the selection and appointment process, particularly at interview.

Illustrations of practice from pilot areas:

- Induction audit of a school for a new headteacher (in Hackney called procedures for school succession planning).
- Trialled a programme of induction, planned and led by experienced headteachers, alongside officers on same model as 'Putting Heads Together' programme for potential heads.

8. Retention strategy

The issue of the retention of leaders, particularly headteachers, has probably received less attention than that of recruitment. Nonetheless, some of the key leadership succession challenges may be alleviated by effective retention strategies. There appear to be three significant areas for consideration:

1) Retaining leaders within an area – how the induction, support and continuing leadership development opportunities encourage leaders to continue to work and develop within an area.
2) Retaining leaders within school-based posts – the ways in which a local area is able to provide leaders with opportunities to lead beyond their own schools and gain wider leadership experience, without moving to non-school based posts eg consultant headteachers, executive headteachers of federations and headteacher mentors.
3) Retaining leaders toward the end of their careers – providing leaders with ways to continue in school-based posts rather than leave earlier than needed eg co-headships, part-time leadership roles and mentoring newly appointed headteachers.

Illustrations from pilot areas:

- A very motivating influence on headteachers is to work with aspiring heads (Birmingham, Sheffield, Rochdale, Black Country).
- Short-term sabbaticals for experienced headteachers (Catholic diocese).
- Developing a bespoke programme for aspirant heads (Birmingham).
- 'Futures conversation' has been developed for those in post for five or more years. Came out of the exit interviews with the 12 outgoing heads (Blackburn with Darwen).
- 'Putting Heads Together' programme planned and delivered by experienced headteachers. The perception studies with them have shown a positive effect on retention (Rochdale).
- Harvesting skills workshops (Rochdale).
- Exit interview as part of a new strategy (Rochdale).
- Local solution has strengthened and developed networks and commitment to school leaders on Rochdale.
- Headteacher mentors for newly appointed headteachers (Hackney).

9. Dissemination and sharing of successful practice

Examples of effective practice in leadership succession exist at the various levels of definition of local area – individual school, groups of schools and large organisations – diocese, local authority, Youth Sports Trust, etc. It is important, for the benefit of the system, that successful practice is shared – not as a blueprint for others to copy but by way of the 'art of the possible' – what others may aspire to, be inspired by and draw from, as appropriate. Such sharing is too important to be left to chance – it needs to be planned. It also needs to be seen as part of a bigger picture of school improvement – not a 'bolt-on' additional requirement.

Some of the important features of such sharing from the pilot areas include:

- This is as important within schools as between schools, groups of schools and across local authorities.
- This affects the whole of children's services and is not just about schools.
- A range of mechanisms for dissemination already exist in most areas – patterns of meetings, newsletters, etc. These need to be used in a planned way rather than create a new layer of communications.

- Sharing successful practice itself can be re-energising and support recruitment and retention within an area.
- Strategies for sharing involve a range of media: newsletters, online communications, CD/DVD, meetings, events, conferences and networks and partnerships. All are about celebrating and creating professional dialogue.

Illustrations from pilot areas:

- DVD for governors on leadership succession and opportunities (in development with Catholic Education Service).
- DVD containing messages form successful heads telling their 'stories' (Hampshire).
- Primary hard federation: governor and headteacher session to explain experiences, Federation website being established (Devon).
- Stepping up poster made available to all teachers detailing leadership development opportunities and strategy CD (Rochdale).
- DVD celebrating leadership (Hackney).
- Termly director's report to governing bodies (Blackburn).
- Regional conferences for Youth Sport Trust networks.
- Regional website development for schools interested in sharing and developing practice (Hallam and north east dioceses).