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## Research Associate Summary Report

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# Changing times, changing roles:

How primary schools have remodelled for the leadership  
and management of ICT

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## Context

ICT is now likely to be the biggest single area of expense outside staffing for primary schools as its use for school management purposes, as well as for teaching and learning, has developed substantially in recent years, and continues to do so. For headteachers, this has created a need for them to consider how best this area can be led, both strategically and operationally.

This study examined how primary school leaders engaged with the remodelling agenda to consider the leadership and management of ICT in their schools. In the full report, five main areas emerging from a review of the literature are focused upon, namely:

- 24 administrative tasks
- knowledge management
- communication
- planning, preparation and assessment (PPA) time
- extending roles of staffing

In this summary report, the leadership dimension is highlighted with particular reference to how schools have sought to apply remodelling to achieve a better fit between roles and responsibilities.

In reading this summary report, school leaders will be able to reflect on their own school systems and the fitness for purpose of these, as well as considering its implications for leadership in this area and, as the last section puts forward, potentially other areas also.

## Methods

In order to gain as broad a picture as possible, the research focused on:

- semi-structured interviews with 12 Key Stage 1 and 2 schools' headteachers and/or ICT managers in four local education authorities
- in-depth interviews and visits in three of the 12 schools

It also included:

- teacher questionnaires in one school
- headteacher questionnaire to 50 schools
- discussions with two workforce remodelling consultants, an ICT adviser and a member of the National Remodelling Team

## Core findings

In some schools, ICT was initially seen mainly as a useful administrative tool in the day-to-day running of the organisation, as described in the national agreement. This included resource production, speedy communications, effective marketing and improved data analysis. It was also being increasingly taught as a discrete subject, providing PPA time.

However, in many schools, headteachers were making considered decisions about how best the workforce could support the leadership and management of ICT. In doing so, they were reflecting on roles, responsibilities and therefore issues of individual and collective capacity with respect to the context in which they found themselves. Schools' approaches were consequently slightly different from each other due to factors such as school size and levels of existing expertise. However, common threads between a number of the schools were found.

- Headteachers were considering how best to distribute leadership so that their strategic leadership was effectively informed by those with an often higher level of technical expertise. The role of ICT subject leader or manager became of fundamental importance in this as they were able to carry out a pathfinding role and determine options as to how ICT might most effectively support school management and pupil learning.

- Increased use of technician support to, for example, trouble shoot time-consuming faults led to ICT subject leaders being able to take a more strategic role and, in addition to acting in an advisory capacity as highlighted above, focus on their core purpose of raising standards in teaching and learning. Technical support was frequently shared between schools and as such required a collaborative leadership approach to secure such services. In some cases, technician support included providing PPA through teaching groups, providing staff training and researching appropriate software. In many cases, the way in which technicians worked with staff helped promote confidence and reduce anxiety about using ICT.
- Headteachers placed a premium on the professional development of support staff to enable them to support classroom teachers more effectively, eg training in transferable generic skills and programs, and basic hardware maintenance. In one school, teaching assistants were studying for the European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL).
- Headteachers recognised the potential of individual staff members to support the effective use of ICT within the school and created roles through remodelling to secure this. This in turn heightened professional growth within the workforce and in some cases led to further enhanced roles emerging for these individuals. Such talent spotting and development were sometimes opportunistic.
- Different structures were used to support the leadership and management of ICT. Whilst frequently this was a paired arrangement of ICT subject leader and technician, there was evidence also of team-based arrangements. These were sometimes fluid and focused upon the achievement of school-identified objectives. In one instance, the team in a large primary school comprised subject leader, headteacher, advanced skills teacher, deputy head (with an overview of continuing professional development), bursar, teaching assistant and, as appropriate, governor representation.

## Implications for leadership

A number of implications for leadership emerge from these findings.

- There is a need to match roles and responsibilities to the school's own needs and to think creatively about how this might be achieved, including seeking collaborative solutions with other partners.
- School leaders need to consider the extent to which the strategic leadership of ICT can be supported by a range of individuals within the school at different levels.
- There is a need to distribute leadership and the challenge of acknowledging, in the case of school leaders, the limits of one's own personal capacity.
- It is important to establish a culture of trust to support such distributed approaches.
- There is a need to establish role structures that enable individuals to focus on what is most important, eg ICT subject leaders on strategy and improving learning.
- Leaders need to consider the extent to which talent spotting and providing development opportunities for professional growth enable roles to be filled more effectively.
- There needs to be willingness to risk new approaches and put arrangements in place that will have a positive impact.

## Final remarks and a thought for the future

Remodelling for the schools within this study has largely meant placing the right people in the right roles to secure:

- more effective use of individuals' time
- better collective capacity to ensure the effective harnessing of the potential of ICT
- a workforce that extends the professional spectrum of skills beyond the traditional hierarchy of roles and responsibilities

The distribution of leadership is becoming more relevant and prevalent as headteachers in particular recognise that they cannot lead in isolation. In some schools, it might be that considering how best to lead and manage ICT through remodelling has opened eyes and doors to potential solutions in other areas.

As primary schools face in the near future further developments such as the Every Child Matters agenda, extended school provision and the provision of a modern foreign language, it might be that lessons learnt from remodelling in one such area might readily transfer to another context. More creative and collaborative approaches which seek to deploy the skills from those within the school, or between schools, will be not so much a leap of faith as a logical step towards seeking effective solutions.

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