



National College for
Teaching & Leadership

Middle Leadership Development Programme Evaluation

Research Report

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**Adam Wilson & Claire Purchase -
FreshMinds**

Contents

Table of figures	3
Introduction to this report	4
Background: What was the Middle Leadership Development Programme?	5
Methodology: How was the evaluation conducted?	8
Findings: What impact did the programme have?	10
Reflections: What were the main lessons from the programme?	18
Annex A: The Programme Model	25

Table of figures

Figure 1: Extent to which the programme improved the leadership skills of middle leaders	11
Figure 2: Extent to which the programme helped middle leaders identify their own personal effectiveness and how it can continue to be developed	12
Figure 3: Extent to which the programme helped middle leaders develop their skills	12
Figure 4: Extent to which the programme helped middle leaders develop their skills	15
Figure 5: Extent to which the programme helped middle leaders develop their skills	23

Introduction to this report

This report summarises what the Middle Leadership Development Programme (MLDP) was, how it was evaluated, what impact it had and key learnings it provided. This summary report is based on fieldwork undertaken throughout the duration of the evaluation of the programme conducted by both the National College for School Leadership (NCSL) and FreshMinds (2011-2013).

During the fieldwork phase NCSL was replaced with the National College for Teaching and Leadership (NCTL) in 2012. Since the completion of the evaluation, MLDP has closed and been replaced with the National Professional Qualification for Middle Leadership (NPQML). This new qualification is part of the licensed delivery of NCTL's leadership curriculum. While MLDP was developed to appeal to a broad audience and to cover a range of topics in a generic way, NPQML offers a more rigorous programme of study that explores the role of middle leaders in greater depth and responds to the significant changes that have taken place in schools since MLDP was first launched. With this in mind, not all the findings or learnings in this report will be directly relevant to those delivering NPQML. However, the reader may find that reflections on these findings can translate to NPQML and that there are applicable ideas for best practice in delivering leadership development in clusters or alliances of schools.

Background: What was the Middle Leadership Development Programme?

MLDP was a very different programme from NPQML and may not be familiar to all readers. This section provides an overview of the programme: its history, aims and benefits, and design and delivery model.

Programme history

MLDP enabled groups (clusters) of schools, academies and children's centres to deliver professional development to their own middle leaders, developing effective leadership of teaching and learning. The programme was tailored by facilitators working within clusters to meet their individual needs and context, with the benefit of sharing expertise and best practice with others. These facilitators were trained and supported by NCTL and its predecessor NCSL.

MLDP was piloted with 38 school-based clusters in 2009 (Intake 1). The pilot was expanded to a further 138 clusters (Intake 2) in 2010. In the next two years, a further 366 clusters were recruited, bringing the total to 542 clusters recruited to MLDP by the time the programme closed.

MLDP represented a step change for NCSL in the delivery of its leadership development provision. The cluster-based delivery of MLDP marked a significant departure from the traditional commissioned provider model of its predecessor (Leading from the Middle). The aims of MLDP reflected NCSL's goal to provide a more personalised and contextualised offering that was cost-effective, self-sustaining and capable of vastly expanding its reach.

Programme aims

MLDP focused on:

- developing effective leadership of high-quality teaching and learning in order to close gaps in achievement and variation within schools
- developing a learning culture within and across schools
- giving middle leaders opportunities to learn with others, drawing on a wide range of expertise and support
- gaining experience working in new contexts, with time for reflection and change

Please refer to Annex A for the programme model.

Programme design and delivery

The programme was shaped by an internal review of provision in 2008. MLDP had three strands of delivery. The first provided upfront quality assurance of potential lead schools and involved attracting and setting up clusters. The second strand involved NCSL training, preparing and assessing cluster-based facilitators. The third strand involved clusters delivering the programme to their middle leaders. This was supported by NCSL which had a responsibility for providing high quality programme materials and for ongoing quality assurance. Each of these strands are briefly summarised below.

Strand one: Attracting and setting up clusters

NCSL had responsibility for marketing the programme and ensuring clusters met programme criteria. Clusters were made up of three or more schools that identified a lead school which had to have a good or outstanding Ofsted rating in leadership and management and a good or outstanding rating overall.

Senior staff in cluster schools identified two facilitators who were senior or experienced middle leaders from within these schools. In addition, each cluster was required to identify a learning coach for each participant. Usually this was a more senior staff member to the middle leader who was able to act as a critical friend throughout the programme. Course participants themselves were either selected by senior staff or volunteered for the programme. Not all participants were in middle leadership positions when they were selected for the programme. Some were selected because they were seen as potential middle leaders.

Facilitators had to commit to deliver the programme to two cohorts of middle leaders within their cluster.

Strand two: Training and assessment of facilitators

NCSL had direct responsibility for preparing and assessing cluster facilitators. Cluster facilitators were selected from within their cluster as highly credible teaching professionals. The facilitator training process aimed to prepare cluster facilitators to deliver the programme model and to develop competencies, skills, knowledge and understanding for the facilitation of adult learning.

Within the first year of delivery, facilitators were assessed against a Facilitation Competency Framework and were deemed as either (1) demonstrating excellent practice, (2) ready or (3) not ready for the role. Cluster facilitators were required to successfully complete the assessment before progressing to deliver a second programme cohort.

The facilitator preparation and continuous assessment process took place over the course of a four-day residential programme which was completed before the cluster facilitator began delivery and was concluded by a further two-day residential six months

later. This period provided an opportunity for facilitators to learn through practice and self-reflection. The two-day residential that completed the process incorporated feedback from a 360 degree diagnostic tool which aimed to generate self-awareness.

Strand three: Cluster-based programme delivery

Clusters were responsible for delivering the programme to their middle leaders. NCSL provided national programme materials, but clusters also developed their own. NCSL also carried out quality assurance on a sampling basis to ensure that the integrity of the programme was maintained by the cluster and that the quality of facilitation was high.

It was recommended that the programme should be delivered over a ten month period. During the programme, participants were expected to engage in the following activities:

- Tailored face-to-face sessions with facilitators and middle leaders (approximately 18–20 hours)
- Reading online content, think-pieces and materials
- A 360 diagnostic tool measuring leadership competencies
- Online discussions within the cluster network
- A leadership challenge e.g. project work on developing the skills needed to lead the closure of a gap in achievement within their own school
- Working with a learning coach who supported the participants throughout the programme
- Reflective journal of leadership learning

Methodology: How was the evaluation conducted?

Two phases of evaluation were carried out to evaluate MLDP. The first was carried out by NCSL and the second by FreshMinds. During the second phase of evaluation, the main focus of the evaluation changed from the cluster delivery method to the content of the programme itself.

Phase 1 evaluation (Pilot)

NCSL's Quality and Evaluation Team conducted an initial evaluation of the pilot programme of 38 MLDP clusters (Intake 1).

The original evaluation focussed on exploring the merits and effectiveness of the cluster-based model during the pilot ahead of a national rollout.

Phase 2 evaluation (Longer-term)

Following the pilot, FreshMinds were commissioned to conduct a further long-term evaluation to inform continued development and improvement, to test whether the project's objectives were being met, and to establish whether the outcomes (for individuals, schools, clusters and the system) and expected benefits were being realised. At the beginning, the evaluation sought to examine the efficacy of the cluster-based model. However, in order to support NCSL in its move to a licensed model, the evaluation later became more focussed on the programme's content.

FreshMinds evaluated the experience of clusters on Intakes 2 and 3, who undertook the programme between January 2011 and July 2013.

Quantitative measures

Two online surveys were conducted during the evaluation process: one when participants began the programme and one when they had completed the programme.

All participants (middle leaders, facilitators and learning coaches) were invited to take part in these online surveys.

Respondent numbers	Facilitators	Learning coaches	Middle leaders
Start of programme survey	67	79	147
End of programme survey	15	20	138
Total population	143	437	942

Qualitative insight

The main activity of the evaluation was to conduct interviews with representatives of 14 clusters: at least one facilitator, two middle leaders and two learning coaches. These participants were interviewed as close to the start of the programme as possible, then again six months into the programme, again once they had completed the programme and finally six to 12 months after completing. One headteacher per cluster was also contacted six to 12 months after the programme had completed.

The timing of each of these interviews was designed to capture a particular kind of feedback; those at the start of the programme captured baseline data, expectations and first impressions, whilst the end of programme interviews captured experiences and suggestions for improvement and the final interview captured how learning had been put into practice.

Respondent numbers	Facilitators	Learning coaches	Middle leaders	Headteachers
Start of programme interviews	16	15	23	-
End of programme interviews	8	1	14	-
Post-programme interviews (six to 12 months after completing)	8	5	16	7

Findings: What impact did the programme have?

MLDP primarily had an impact on those who participated in the programme, but did have some impact on the wider participating schools.

The impact on middle leaders

The programme had a positive impact on participants, with middle leaders frequently saying their confidence had increased, they had greater self-awareness and that their own leadership skills had improved. Some middle leaders had also been promoted, and most had gained additional responsibility since completing the programme.

The greatest impact of MLDP on middle leaders was improved confidence

Throughout the evaluation middle leaders frequently said they felt much more confident in their role as a result of the programme. Of the middle leaders surveyed at the end of the programme, unprompted, 30% said that what they had gained most from the programme was confidence.

Middle leaders who were interviewed in detail felt the programme increased their confidence in a number of ways. Firstly, they said the content of the programme helped them recognise and develop their existing leadership skills: the 360 diagnostic, modules on different leadership styles, and modules on the differences between leadership and management were felt to be particularly useful to middle leaders. Secondly, the programme's content helped middle leaders acquire new skills which made them feel more confident in being able to undertake their role. Gaining data management and analysis skills were mentioned most often. Thirdly the practical element of the programme – the leadership challenge – allowed middle leaders to demonstrate to themselves, and their schools, that they had the ability to operate at the middle leader level.

I wouldn't have applied for a leadership role if I hadn't completed the [programme]. It gave me the confidence to apply and a good insight into leadership which meant I was well informed for the interview.

Middle leader

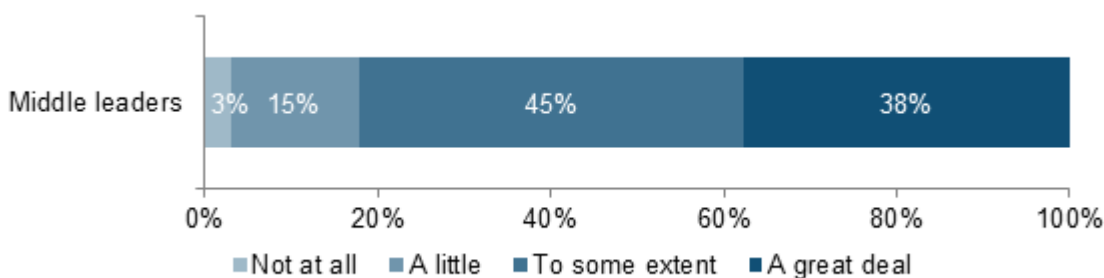
It certainly gave me more confidence in dealing with the more thorny issues of management, i.e. those team members who are reluctant to embrace change etc.

Middle leader

The programme increased middle leaders' leadership skills and their ability to delegate

Almost all middle leaders interviewed by telephone and surveyed online said that the programme had increased their effectiveness as leaders. Interviewees often attributed this to the opportunity the leadership challenge gave them to consolidate their learning and gain practical experience of leadership by taking ownership of specific projects within a school.

Figure 1: Extent to which the programme improved the leadership skills of middle leaders



Source: End of programme online survey. Base: 138 middle leaders

In particular, the middle leaders interviewed specified that they felt more comfortable letting others work independently on projects without close oversight. Middle leaders were able to delegate tasks more appropriately because they were better able to recognise the skills and abilities of others as a result of the modules on leadership styles. One middle leader said that as a result of MLDP, when faced with a project or task at school “rather than purely doing it all myself I now delegate [tasks] without the fear of failure. I have confidence in letting go”.

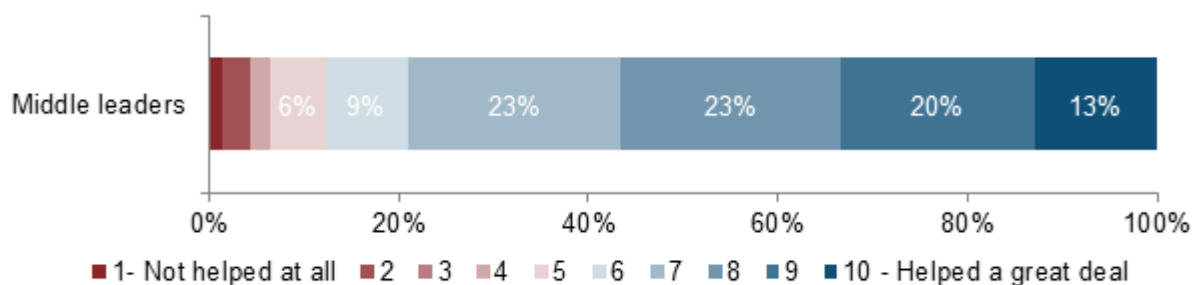
However, not all middle leaders felt the programme helped them to develop their leadership skills. Middle leaders interviewed who had been in a middle leadership role for some time or were more developed in their careers said that they gained less from the programme than their more junior counterparts may have done. More junior middle leaders or those not yet in a leadership role, appear to have gained most from the programme, especially as the programme required them to take ownership of a leadership project.

The programme increased middle leaders' self-awareness

A large focus of the programme was on self-reflection and self-understanding, requiring middle leaders to use various tools to help identify the type of leader they were. This was felt to be very useful, as it helped participants to feel more comfortable with who they were and understand how to play to their strengths and build on their weaknesses.

Over a half (56%) of middle leaders rated the programme as 8, 9 or 10 in terms of the extent it had helped them to identify their own personal effectiveness (see figure 2).

Figure 2: Extent to which the programme helped middle leaders identify their own personal effectiveness and how it can continue to be developed



Source: End of programme online survey. Base: 138 middle leaders

The opportunity to reflect upon your own practice and know what other people think you are good at gave me confidence in myself ... I suddenly realised, I manage other teachers and assistants and get them to move forward with their ideas. I do a lot more managing than I realised and I'm good at it!

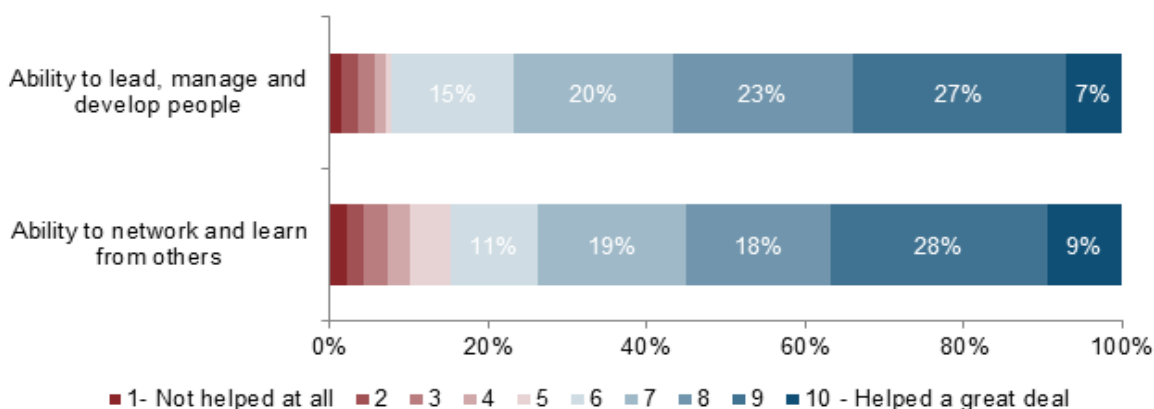
Middle leader

The programme increased middle leaders' inter-personal and people development skills

Middle leaders typically felt they were better able to recognise and accommodate the different leadership and working styles of their co-workers.

Over half of middle leaders rated the programme as 8, 9 or 10 in how effective it had been in helping them to lead, manage and develop others, and to network and learn from others (see figure 3).

Figure 3: Extent to which the programme helped middle leaders develop their skills



Source: End of programme online survey. Base: 138 middle leaders

The programme's modules on different leadership styles, and the differences between leadership and management made some middle leaders feel more able to understand and develop strategies to accommodate colleagues' behaviour, particularly colleagues

who were seen as 'difficult' or resistant to change. One middle leader said the programme had taught her "about working with a diverse range of people and not trying to box somebody [in]" but to "empower other people and make them grow professionally." Another middle leader dedicated their leadership challenge to supporting their colleague's handling of pastoral issues. By successfully delivering their project, the middle leader improved the relationships between their staff and the student body.

I know myself better and I am able to judge people within school more effectively and reflect critically on why they behave the way they do. I am able to see myself in certain situations and deal with issues that before I might not have felt comfortable with.

Middle leader

The programme increased middle leaders' communication skills

Some middle leaders interviewed said that they better recognised the importance of good communication and communicated their goals and plans more clearly now they had completed the programme. These middle leaders specified that their ability to communicate vertically, as well as horizontally, had improved. The opportunity the programme gave to work with multiple stakeholders across their school, interact with other middle leaders in the face-to-face training sessions and meet with their learning coach enabled middle leaders to improve their communication skills. Interviewees said that meetings with learning coaches were particularly helpful because they allowed middle leaders to articulate their plans, and typically allowed them to speak with an experienced, senior stakeholder about their experience on the programme.

The programme helped some middle leaders to further their careers

Many middle leaders progressed in their career during and after completing the programme, helping to meet the aim of creating people who wanted middle and senior leadership roles.

At the end of the programme 22% of middle leaders surveyed online said they had gained a promotion since beginning and 13% that they had been given a new role, but not a promotion.

Of the middle leaders who took part in the post-programme interviews the majority had either been promoted or taken on more responsibility since completing MLDP. For example, one middle leader's role was widened to incorporate pastoral and progress monitoring responsibilities, while another had been promoted from a class teacher to head of house. In addition, a small minority of middle leaders had specific new roles created for them within their schools based upon the work they did as part of their

leadership challenge. For example, a position of Free School Meals Co-ordinator was created for one middle leader.

The middle leaders interviewed typically attributed their career progression to the increased confidence, skills and experience they had acquired through participation in MLDP. MLDP also helped middle leaders to talk meaningfully about leadership and gain practical experience of leadership through the leadership challenge.

For internal promotions, the middle leaders interviewed commonly felt that participation in MLDP had increased their profile among their school's senior leadership team. This was largely due to the wider remit afforded to them by the leadership challenge and the power and authority that had conferred.

I'm head of year 12 now. I think that this [promotion] is related to being on the programme as at the interview I had a lot to talk about. [The programme] also gave me quite a lot of insight into management.

Middle leader

The impact on schools

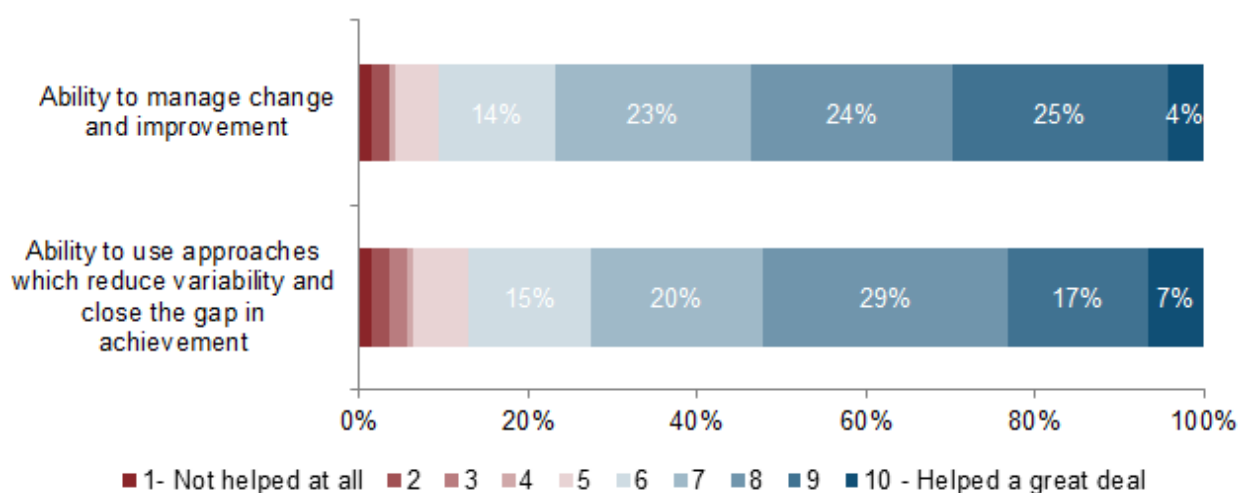
Most middle leaders, facilitators and headteachers interviewed said that the programme had had a positive impact on schools, reducing performance gaps, changing practice and changing school cultures.

Because the impact of the programme on the school was closely connected to a middle leader's choice of leadership challenge, the extent of MLDP's impact on schools was highly variable and often limited. The evidence for impact is based on participants' responses.

Closing the performance gap in schools

At the end of the programme the majority of middle leaders surveyed indicated the programme had helped them to manage change and improvement and that they had learnt to use approaches which reduce variability and close the gap in achievement (see figure 4).

Figure 4: Extent to which the programme helped middle leaders develop their skills



Source: End of programme online survey. Base: 138 middle leaders

While the end of programme survey data does not prove that performance gaps were closed, most middle leaders interviewed as part of the post-programme interviews (six to 12 months after finishing the programme) said that their leadership challenge had helped close or narrow the gaps within their schools.

Those who did not state that the gap had closed said that the impact of the leadership challenge could not be shown within the timeframe of MLDP because of the need to wait for further attainment data. Some said that the specific impact of their leadership challenge could not be measured due to other school activity affecting the same focus area.

Making better use of data

All middle leaders interviewed said that they were more aware of what data they could use and felt more comfortable in using it in identifying and measuring performance gaps.

Some headteachers interviewed explicitly said that as a result of participating in MLDP, the whole school had increased their data awareness and their use of data. They said that this was partly due to the improved knowledge of the middle leaders on the programme from their school being disseminated to other members of staff.

I know a lot more now [I've done the programme]. I know why we track children's progress and what the use of it is. On the programme it was the first time I'd understood about RAISEonline. Now I know, I use it!

Middle leader

Building relationships and sharing best practice across schools

Throughout the evaluation MLDP participants interviewed said it was very important for teachers to have networks outside of their school to support their development. Participants said that the cluster-based model of the programme offered them a network of other middle leaders. This provided them with an insight into the issues affecting other schools and an opportunity to share information and best practice. One middle leader said it can also help prevent teachers developing "one think" where everyone in a particular school or department thinks in a particular institutional way.

However, middle leaders are unlikely to remain in contact with those from other schools. At the end of the programme, just under half (48%) of the middle leaders surveyed said they were likely to remain in contact. Middle leaders interviewed said that they formed the strongest relationships with teachers who were based in the same school and as a result of the programme said they worked better with each other.

We have made good links and would be able to work together on some projects in the future. It has been beneficial to create a 'human resources bank' particularly with the other participants who work in my year group or subject lead the same subjects.

Middle leader

Fostering a more collaborative culture in schools

Many of the participants and most headteachers interviewed noted a more collaborative working environment at the end of MLDP, specifying that more ideas were being

generated at a middle leadership level and that staff communicated more with one another.

Again, these cultural changes were primarily driven by the leadership challenge. The leadership challenge typically required collaboration and some degree of cross-school working from different levels in the school hierarchy. For example, one middle leader focused on the performance gap between core and non-core subjects. The middle leader had to work with department heads from across their school to ensure the success of their project.

[Middle leaders] are far more open in the way they work with other staff members. They don't dictate, but look at what the needs are, how they need to achieve it and collect everyone's ideas together.

Headteacher

Reflections: What were the main lessons from the programme?

The main learnings from the programme relate to the leadership challenge and to the cluster-based model. Towards the close of the evaluation participants were also asked about the content of the delivered sessions and how this could be added to if necessary.

The leadership challenge

At the end of the programme, nine in ten (89%) middle leaders surveyed said the leadership challenge was 'quite' or 'very helpful' in developing their leadership skills. Described by one middle leader as "the first thing that you [as a middle leader] take ownership of", the leadership challenge performed a crucial andragogical role in MLDP and primarily drove the impact of MLDP on middle leaders and in schools. This was because, apart from enabling them to address a specific 'gap', it allowed middle leaders to consolidate what they had learnt by putting the programme's theory of leadership into practice.

The leadership challenge also required participants to work with other staff in their school, often outside of their department or at a senior management level, fostering a collaborative culture.

It puts [everything] into practice. When you do courses that are three days over a year there is a chance you do a day and then forget about it. With the leadership challenge it makes you use your knowledge daily in the classroom.

Middle leader

Middle leaders want guidance on defining a leadership challenge

The leadership challenge was referenced in interviews as a key driver of MLDP's impact on middle leaders and on schools. However, though freedom of choice supports middle leaders' learning, some middle leaders interviewed felt that they lacked adequate support to deliver an effective leadership challenge. For example, some middle leaders struggled to identify a gap; there was a perceived lack of parity between different leadership challenges both within and between clusters; and some middle leaders gave themselves unnecessary burdens by taking on projects that were too ambitious.

When asked what they would change about the leadership challenge, the middle leaders interviewed wanted more guidance on what they could do for their leadership challenge and how to get the most positive benefit from it. However, it is important that any guidance on leadership challenge content and design would not compel middle leaders

to take a certain course of action. This is because a key benefit of MLDP to middle leaders, and the central driver of MLDP's success, rested on the freedom of middle leaders to identify opportunities, and drive and direct change.

Aligning the leadership challenge to schools' existing development plans increased its impact.

Most middle leaders identified performance gaps in their immediate area of work, such as the department they worked in, and designed their leadership around this. Those who designed a leadership challenge which also tied into their school's overall aims felt that this made the day-to-day running of their leadership challenge easier and enabled them to increase both the buy-in and on-going support from the school's senior leadership team. It was also felt that middle leaders could maximise the chances of success for a leadership challenge by choosing something that is relevant to their day-to-day work within their school.

However, the impact of the leadership challenge can be harder to measure if it is closely aligned to a school's development. When asked about the impact of the leadership challenge on their school, one headteacher said a middle leader's leadership challenge "is what we are focused on as a school. It contributed to our core purpose, but I couldn't pull out [its specific contribution]."

Leadership challenges should be both substantive and meaningful

A diverse range of achievement gaps were addressed by middle leaders on MLDP. Interviewed participants felt that some were more substantive than others. Both facilitators and middle leaders said that the leadership challenge should not be a "tick box" exercise and that middle leaders must "not just pay lip service" to its goals.

Choosing an "easy" leadership challenge did not just diminish the impact of the programme on the school, it also meant that the impact of the leadership challenge and MLDP on the middle leader was limited as they did not develop their skills or stretch their abilities as leaders as much as they might otherwise have done. Highlighting the importance of the leadership challenge to middle leaders' own learning, as well as the benefit to the school, should encourage middle leaders to make robust choices when deciding on a leadership challenge.

Middle leaders require a suitable length of time to run their leadership challenge

Facilitators typically chose to run MLDP for 12 months, beginning at different times in the school year. Some participants and headteachers felt that MLDP would have had more of an impact and been easier to measure if middle leaders had more time to run their

leadership challenge. They suggested that it runs for between 18 months and two years, feeling this would allow leadership challenges to run across a full academic cycle, demonstrate their impact and value, and increasing the likelihood that they would be continued.

The cluster-based delivery model

Central to the design of MLDP was its cluster-based delivery model, allowing training to take place at a local level, using local staff. Clusters were made up of a handful of local schools, often from different phases, with one or two middle leaders taking part from each school.

Sharing struggles and ideas with other middle leaders was the most valued aspect of the programme

Meeting with others in the profession, especially from other schools in a local area, gave middle leaders the opportunity to build personal relationships, exchange ideas and learn from each other. Half (51%) of middle leaders surveyed said that the opportunity to share ideas and experiences with others was the most positive aspect of the programme.

Interviewed participants said that they often operated in isolation, or only within their direct subject team, and so did not have many opportunities to talk to other teachers in a way that was constructive. These participants said that meeting teachers from different types of schools, for example special schools or from other phases, was especially useful in helping consider issues they had not previously been aware of.

Face-to-face sessions were particularly popular

A fifth of middle leaders (21%) said that the most positive aspect of the programme was the face-to-face sessions. The face-to-face element of cluster sessions was felt to be very important as it formed trust between all participants, allowing them to be more willing to share their struggles and ideas. Building trust between participants was something that facilitators focussed on in the early stages of the programme because participants came from many different schools.

The face-to-face sessions were illuminating. [It was] always excellent to have opportunity to speak with other professionals about their thinking and their own challenges, in a positive framework that was so well structured by the facilitators

Middle leader

[The most positive aspect was] the opportunity to do something out of the classroom which would allow me to interact with external colleagues and meet new people and try new things in a safe environment.

Middle leader

The experience of having middle leaders regularly learning together built inter-school relationships

Some of the clusters interviewed had close formal links with other schools in the area prior to forming a cluster for this programme. However, it was mostly senior managers who actually met each other under those arrangements. Facilitators and learning coaches, perhaps because of their whole-school view, said that the experience of middle leaders learning and sharing together strengthens these networks. The cluster model was also felt to build bridges with other schools that are not in existing networks.

All facilitators tried to make participants feel that the *cluster* delivered the training, not a particular school. This was achieved by making sure the second facilitator was from another school, hosting sessions at a neutral setting if possible and involving staff from across the schools in delivering training. From the interviews and observed sessions there is no evidence to suggest that any issues around inter-school politics arose in these clusters.

However, while 48% of middle leaders surveyed expected to maintain links with other participants after the programme ended, a small minority of those interviewed six to 12 months after the programme had ended said that the links they had made on MLDP remained in any substantial way.

Middle leaders valued the school-based support they received from learning coaches

Three-quarters (77%) of middle leaders said they were 'satisfied' (39%) or 'highly satisfied' (38%) with their learning coach. Having a learning coach with whom they could meet and discuss the programme and their leadership challenge was beneficial to middle leaders. As a more senior staff member, the learning coach was able to offer advice, help link staff members together and provide a whole school viewpoint to discussions.

However, the role of the learning coach was not clear at the start of the programme. Some facilitators and middle leaders thought the learning coach was only to be involved in helping with the leadership challenge or a person to go to for advice when needed, rather than a regular coaching and mentoring relationship.

Some facilitators and learning coaches interviewed said that more training should be given to learning coaches in order to better prepare them for the programme, and especially to understand its aims. It was suggested that learning coaches attend the initial training for facilitators.

Facilitators were key in shaping the programme for their clusters

Facilitators were central to the success of the programme, as might be expected given the level of flexibility of the programme and the ability for them to shape the delivery of the programme. Key factors that they influenced included the expectations placed on middle leaders and learning colleagues (e.g. the level of reading they were expected to have done) and the level of commitment to the programme from senior school leadership (e.g. how willing headteachers were to let staff out of lessons and incur costs for supply teachers).

Overall, middle leaders were extremely happy with their facilitators. Two-thirds (66%) were 'highly satisfied' with their facilitator, with a further 30% 'satisfied'. Middle leaders were primarily satisfied with facilitators because of their role in the face-to-face sessions. During these sessions facilitators were felt to be supportive, approachable, experienced and knowledgeable. The minority of middle leaders who were not satisfied with their facilitator said their facilitators seemed unprepared for leading the programme and appeared unsure of their role, seemed uninterested in the middle leaders and were difficult to contact outside of face-to-face sessions.

Facilitators themselves said the training they had received before beginning the programme in their cluster was vital, despite being challenging. Three-fifths of facilitators (60%) spontaneously said that the four day training had helped them most in preparing for the programme. The most useful aspect of the training was in developing facilitators' understanding of the programme and the ethos behind it, rather than developing skills.

Some facilitators interviewed would have appreciated more on-going facilitation training or opportunities to meet other facilitators. One of these said on-going training would have been preferable to a two-day course. Others felt that providing a course book or longer term support, preferably in an online format, for sharing resources and advice would have been helpful.

The tools and content of the programme

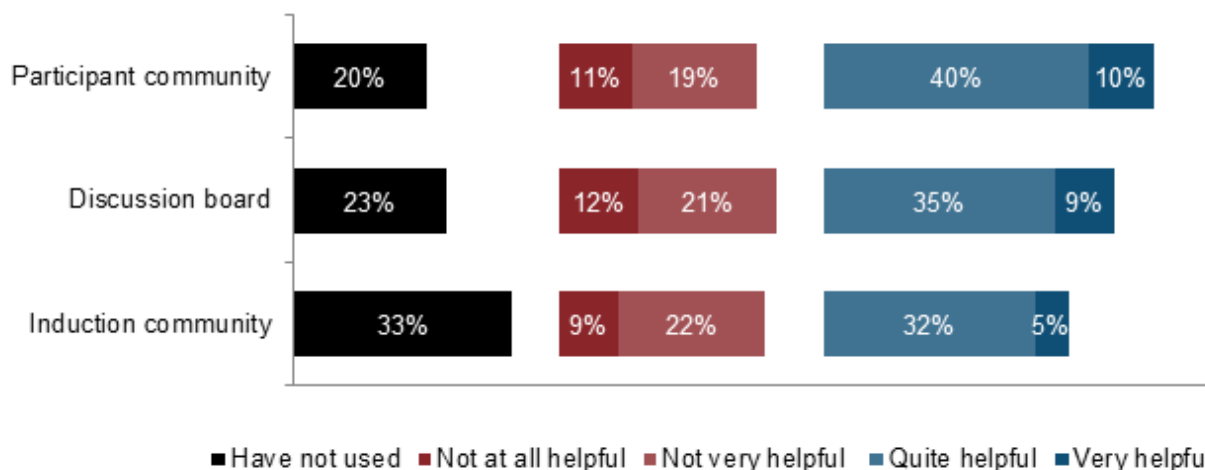
For the majority of the evaluation, the programme structure and tools were evaluated, but not the content of programme. Participants were asked about content in the end of programme interviews. Most respondents were unable to suggest extra subjects that they would have wanted to cover, but would simply have wanted some extra time on each of the areas they had covered in their cluster’s sessions and prescribed reading.

Overall, the structure of the programme worked well

Overall middle leaders and facilitators thought the programme structure, in terms of the mix of online participation, reflective sessions and face-to-face sessions, worked well. Almost nine in ten (89%) of surveyed middle leaders and 80% of facilitators said the programme structure worked ‘quite well’ or ‘very well’.

As noted previously, participants were especially favourable towards the reflective sessions with learning coaches and face-to-face sessions with other middle leaders. Throughout the programme there was frustration with the online elements of the programme, especially early on. Middle leaders found it difficult to find information on the programme website and there was limited appeal to engage with online communities of other middle leaders. As figure 5 shows, around half of middle leaders or more did not use the online community functionality or did not think it was helpful.

Figure 5: Extent to which the programme helped middle leaders develop their skills



Source: End of programme online survey. Base: 138 middle leaders

Content and tools which facilitated self-reflection and developed data analysis skills were most valued

The opportunity MLDP provided for self-reflection on their day-to-day role was commented on by all participant types. Middle leaders typically valued programme content which facilitated this self-reflection.

Of the tools included in MLDP, the 360 diagnostic was the most helpful. Four in five (81%) middle leaders said the 360 diagnostic was helpful in reviewing their progress. The 360 diagnostic initially allowed participants to identify their strengths and weaknesses and leadership style, and once repeated at the end of the programme “the distance they had travelled” in terms of their own professional development. Almost three quarters (73%) of middle leaders said the learning logs were helpful for reflecting on what they had learnt and for identifying areas for development, however not all middle leaders completed their learning logs and were unable to use them effectively for measuring their change in practice.

I think that the diagnostic is the most valuable [part of the programme. Middle leaders] can reflect on themselves and see how others perceive them.

Facilitator

Modules that were felt to help with reflection were: planning and managing change, thinking strategically, different leadership styles and the difference between management and leadership. This reflection drove the impact of the programme for middle leaders.

It drove home the idea that there is no recipe to being the perfect leader and that different people achieve results in different ways. Recognising these traits in myself and others has been very useful.

Middle leader

Middle leaders interviewed typically considered the next most valuable area of the programme to be its modules on data. Middle leaders felt that they had gained a greater understanding of data and how to use tools such as RAISEonline. This was one of the main areas in which middle leaders wanted provision to be increased.

Some middle leaders would like additional training on career progression

Career advancement and increased responsibilities are key outcomes of MLDP. Some of the middle leaders interviewed want additional training on career progression within MLDP.

Middle leaders suggested topics on what were the appropriate next steps for their careers, how to apply for a more senior role and interview technique. This was potentially a result of some participants not yet being in middle leadership roles.

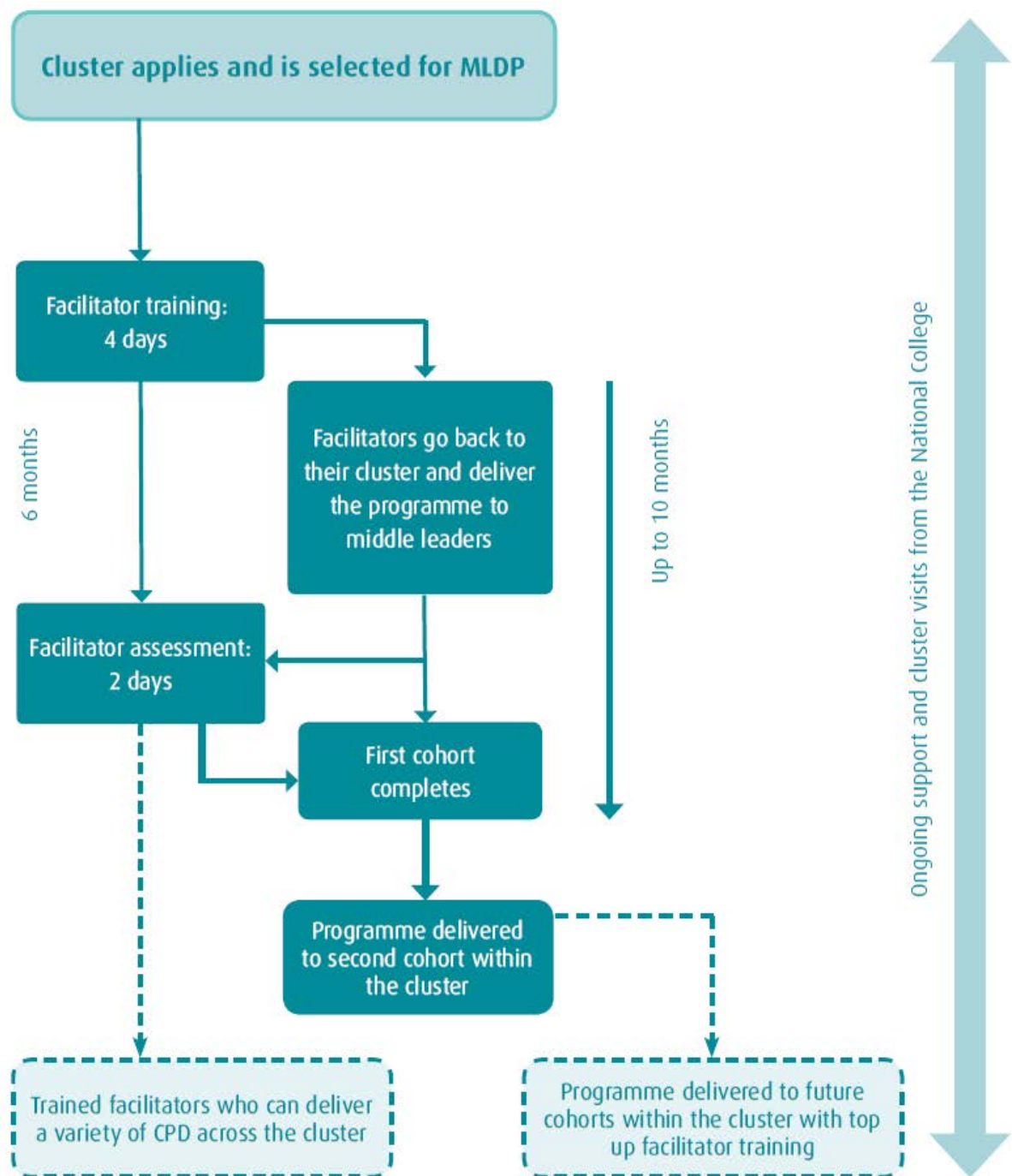
[I think having] a more explicit focus on next steps would be useful. We were all at slightly different stages in the cluster and I would have liked more on [how to further my career].

Middle leader

Annex A: The Programme Model

Programme model: Middle Leadership Development Programme

www.nationalcollege.org.uk/mldp





National College for
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Any enquiries regarding this publication should be sent to us at:

Ben.Turner@education.gsi.gov.uk or www.education.gov.uk/contactus

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