



National College for  
Teaching & Leadership

# **School business manager learning programmes evaluation**

**Technical annex - primary partnership data**

**September 2014**

**Dorothy Berry-Lound - HOST Policy Research**

# Contents

List of figures	3
List of tables	3
Preface	4
Structure of reports	4
1. Executive Summary	6
1.1 Introduction	6
1.2 Background details of respondents	6
1.3 Impact of SBM deployment	7
1.4 Working methods and lessons learnt	7
1.5 Financial impact (Figure 4, page 27)	8
1.6 Sustainability of the SBM/SBD role	10
1.7 Conclusion	10
2 Introduction	13
3 Background details of respondents	15
4 Impact of SBM deployment	16
5 Working methods and lessons learnt	20
6 Financial impact	26
7 Sustainability of the SBM/SBD role	31
8 Conclusion	34
8.1 Recommendation about the structure of future funding	34
8.2 Recommendations for future research	35

## List of figures

Figure 1 Following receipt of funding please indicate the time period that your SBM/D commenced working across the partnership	15
Figure 2 How is the SBM/D resource allocated across the partnership	20
Figure 3 What is the engagement and support for the project?	21
Figure 4 Financial impact	27
Figure 5 Are you on track to sustaining the SBM/D role across the partnership	31
Figure 6 Do you think your current model of working across the partnership may lead to	32

## List of tables

Table 1 Breakdown by month of funding	14
Table 2 What impact has the deployment of the SBM/D across the partnership of schools had in the following areas (per cent)	16
Table 3 What have been the three most important benefits for your partnership as a result of the SBM/D resource? (please tick three that apply)	22
Table 4 What, if any, have been the top three barriers to the effective deployment of the SBM/D across the partnership? (please tick three that apply)	23

## Preface

Since this research was completed and the reports finalised, proposals for how school business management (SBM) programmes will run in the future have changed. They will not move to a licensed approach as set out previously.

This new approach brings the SBM programmes into line with the ambition to create a self-improving, school-led system. It represents an exciting opportunity for the profession to take ownership of its leadership development and ensure that the role of school business managers remains as a critical element of effective school leadership and school improvement.

Content from the Certificate of School Business Management (CSBM), Diploma of School Business Management (DSBM) and Advanced Diploma of School Business Management (ADSBM) will be made freely available with the expectation that a number of training providers will run the programmes independently. NCTL will no longer manage the programmes and accreditation will be overseen by the Institute of Leadership and Management.

NCTL used the findings of the evaluation to further develop the school business manager programmes prior to the decision to make the materials freely available. The reports are now being published in order to share the findings with potential training providers.

## Structure of reports

This document is one of a set of reports from the school business manager learning programmes evaluation.

This report gives a high level analysis of the NCTL survey of recipients of primary partnership funding focusing on the understanding the impact of the primary partnership grants.

We recommend that you read all the reports to understand the research fully. These documents are available from gov.uk. The complete set of reports includes the following:

- **Final summary report**

Reviews the evidence from all the research in the light of 3 key questions: the impact on participant development; the impact on participants' schools, and the delivery strengths and weaknesses.

- **Case study report - School Business Manager Programme**

Three case studies focused on the impact of the programmes upon the participants and their role in school or college.
- **Case study report – School Business Director (SBD) Pilot Programme**

Four case studies aimed at providing a cross-section of early experiences in the pilot SBD programme.
- **Case study report - School Business Directors (SBD) in Schools/ Federations in Receipt of a Primary Partnership Grant**

Four case studies aimed at supplementing the early case studies by focussing on those undergoing development as SBDs but also within school collaborations awarded primary partnership grants.
- **Technical Annexe - Review of SBM/D end of programme satisfaction surveys**

Overview of the end of programme satisfaction surveys administered by NCTL and training providers, completed by participants of the Diploma of School Business Management (DSBM), the Advanced Diploma of School Business Management (ADSBM) and the School Business Director (SBD) programmes.
- **Technical Annexe – Interim report on the evaluation of the school business management (SBM) programme**

The first of the interim analyses from the research, originally written in 2011 and published now to provide supporting information to the final report.
- **Technical Annexe – Final evaluation report of the school business directors pilot**

The final evaluation of the school business directors pilot, written in 2011, focusing on the experience of the two entry cohorts of the SBD pilot programme.
- **Technical Annexe – Impact Assessment**

An assessment of the impact of the Certificate (CSBM), Diploma (DSBM) and Advanced Diploma for School Business Managers (ADSBM) and the School Business Directors (SBD) Programme on the individuals that had undertaken the learning and on their employing institutions.

# 1. Executive Summary

## 1.1 Introduction

In November 2011, the National College for Teaching and Leadership (NCTL) issued an e-survey to all recipients of primary partnership funding. The survey was open until the end of January 2012 and three reminders were issued. 213 responses were received from 236 partnerships which is a 90 per cent completed response rate. HOST Policy Research (HOST) was asked by NCTL to conduct a high level analysis of the survey which focused on understanding the impact of the primary partnerships grants and to produce a report of findings.

The grants were issued in three bands, £15,000, £20,000 and £25,000. It should be noted that at the time the survey was issued in November 2011, 44 schools (19%) of the 236 schools for which NCTL had provided funding (Table 1, page 14) had been in receipt of their funding for less than six months but fifteen per cent had been in receipt for approximately 12 months.

## 1.2 Background details of respondents

Just under two thirds of survey respondents (63%) are headteachers/principals and just under a quarter of respondents (24%) are school business managers (SBMs).

Nearly two fifths of respondents (38%) had received £15,000 in funding, just over a half (51%) received £20,000 and 11 per cent received £25,000.

Twelve per cent of respondents had commenced working in the autumn term 2010, over half (55%) in the spring or summer terms 2011, but a third of respondent's had only commenced working in the autumn term 2011 and a small number (2%) have not yet commenced. (Figure 1, page 15)

## 1.3 Impact of SBM deployment

The majority of respondents (90%) had seen either some or high impact in relation to financial benefits examples provided included successfully bidding for funding and improving school budgets. 83 per cent had seen impact in relation to headteacher time (including freeing them for activities such as teaching and learning), 82 per cent had seen either some or high impact in relation to management and leadership of the school and 75 per cent the same in relation to staffing improvements. The development of teaching and learning was the area with the least apparent impact, with over half of respondents (58%) seeing little or no impact (Table 2, page 16). It is important to bear in mind that where little or no impact is reported, there are significant numbers of respondents (as reported above) who were in the early stages of their partnership at the time the survey took place.

Whilst for many it is as yet 'early days', it is clear from the responses that the act of gathering information and sharing between schools has encouraged some reflection on internal processes and procedures but also identified possible areas for cost savings as many respondents stress the benefits of adopting common approaches.

## 1.4 Working methods and lessons learnt

The two main methods by which school business manager/director (SBM/D) resource is allocated across the partnership are where all schools contribute to a central fund and SBM/D is shared equally (45%) or where one school 'owns' the SBM/D and the other schools buy the services (35%) of the SBM/D (Figure 2, page 20).

More than three quarters of respondents (79%) indicated that the majority of schools in the partnership/cluster are engaged in the primary partnership project. For just over a quarter of respondents (29%) one school is driving the project. Increasing interest from beyond the cluster is reported by over a quarter of respondents (27%). No respondents indicated lack of engagement or support for the project (Figure 3, page 21).

Respondents were asked to indicate the three most important benefits from a list of benefits for their partnership as a result of the SBM/D resource. Around two fifths of respondents indicated the most important benefits as being strategic planning/vision (43%), saving headteacher/senior leadership team (SLT) time (41%), improved value for money (40%) and sharing knowledge/best practice (39%). Around a fifth indicated effective use of resources (19%). The least indicated benefits were building stronger links with schools outside of cluster (8%) and improved legal and financial compliance (9%) (Table 3, page 22).

Respondents were also asked to indicate the top three barriers to the effective deployment of SBM/D across the partnership. Just under a half of respondents (45%) indicated the lack of understanding as to what benefits a SBM/D can bring as a barrier. Two fifths (40%) indicated culture and change, just under a third (30%) the sustainability of the SBM/D role and just under a quarter (24%) indicated financial cuts/budget reductions (Table 4, page 22).

The vast majority of respondents (99%) would recommend the SBM partnership arrangement to schools that do not currently work in a partnership.

Respondents were asked what advice they would give a school entering into a new partnership agreement. The advice given can be summarised under the following headings:

- Don't underestimate the time it takes to get things up and running.
- Ensure measurable targets are set so early impact can be seen.
- Take care to ensure there is commitment at all levels and understanding from all at the beginning.
- Work to reassure existing staff/SBMs who may feel threatened.
- Be clear on expectations at the outset and have a memorandum of understanding in place.
- Invest time in getting the right person in post.
- Have a clear job description.
- The importance of having a strategic vision that you can return to.
- Regular open communications - be honest with each other.

## 1.5 Financial impact<sup>1</sup> (Figure 4, page 27)

- a) **Improved contract negotiation and management** - Two fifths of respondents indicate savings in excess of £5,000. Of the 60 per cent who indicated 0-£5,000, at least 25 respondents (12%) clearly indicate in their open responses in support of their answer that they have no savings yet, so

---

<sup>1</sup> In reviewing the responses in relation to financial impact it is important to note that the questionnaire did not allow the option of 'no impact' and therefore if a respondent ticked £0-5,000 it is impossible to know if they are recording 'zero' or an actual figure. The open questions in support of responses provided allow some estimation of the minimum showing no impact.



this figure has to be treated with caution. Again from the open questions, some report considerable savings, in one case £70,000.

- b) **IT related enablement/efficiencies** - It is clear that IT has been less of an emphasis for the majority in terms of cost savings, with only 12 per cent indicating savings in excess of £5,000 with the remainder under £5,000. From the open questions at least 21 respondents (10%) clearly indicate no savings yet, but that is likely to be an underestimate as the open responses were much fewer for this category.
- c) **Approved grant applications** - Over a quarter of respondents (26%) indicate successful grant applications in excess of £5,000 with the remainder under £5,000. According to the open question responses, at least 28 respondents (13%) have none yet.
- d) **Increased effectiveness through reconfigured staff structure** - Just over a quarter of respondents (26%) has seen savings in excess of £5,000 with the remainder under £5,000. Nineteen (9%) report through the open question response that they have seen nothing yet or that it is not part of the plan for their cluster to target staffing. Most find it difficult to be specific on figures in this area, mainly because they say it is too early in the process to be clear.
- e) **More efficient management of building utility costs** - Just under a fifth of respondents (19%) have seen savings in excess of £5,000 with the remainder under £5,000. Whilst from the open question responses it is clear that the majority have been very active in this area, 15 (7%) have not done anything in this area yet or not seen any savings and a further 13 (6%) are only just getting started and so can't identify savings as yet.
- f) **Improved insurance costs** - Sixteen per cent of respondents have seen savings here in excess of £5,000 with the remainder under £5,000. In responding to the open question, 19 respondents (9%) state they have not looked at this yet and 12 (6%) are in the process of doing so.
- g) **Other savings and increased income** - Just under a quarter of respondents (23%) indicate savings in excess of £5,000 with the remainder under £5,000. Thirteen respondents (6%) say it is too early to see other benefits. There have been some considerable successes here, one respondent mentions more efficient management of budget and personnel contracts and letters of appointment and variations in hours undertaken in-house. Others talk of increased income generation through lettings and other business-related activities, organising courses, bringing CPD in-house, shared minibus arrangements, etc.

## 1.6 Sustainability of the SBM/SBD role

Almost a third of respondents (30%) have indicated that they are definitely on track to sustaining the SBM/D role across the partnership. A further third (34%) say that indications at this stage are positive. A further quarter (26%) of respondents indicates that it is too early to tell. Only ten per cent suggest the post is not sustainable. (Figure 5, page 31)

Almost three quarters of respondents (72%) see their informal working relationships continuing. Fifteen per cent anticipate forming a federation and 16 per cent changing to academy status. (Figure 6, page 32)

In terms of aspirations for the partnership, in response to an open question, the majority of respondents indicate they want to see the collaboration, partnership working and sharing of best practice to continue, some in more formal ways than others. Some aspire towards being able to sustain the role of SBM. One respondent mentions 'the development of a professional learning network for business support staff to develop their skills as the primary function and shared resources as the secondary function'. Another respondent stated that:

As the Trust of 11 schools we are hoping to develop a model of business leadership that will be developed over time that will enable growth of the trust and that this model can be shared across the county. Ideas and Structures we have implemented already have been rolled out across the county and we hope that this will develop further.

And another:

We want to continue to work as a learning cluster to create a centre of excellence for education in our area. We are committed to sustainability and high quality learning opportunities for our community.

## 1.7 Conclusion

It is clear that the overall findings in relation to primary partnerships are generally positive, that the programme is having an impact and the key benefits are being realised by the majority of participants. It is clearly worth the investment from NCTL.

Considering how the programme should continue, HOST recommends that the goals of future funding would be to focus on accelerating existing partnerships as well as encouraging new partnerships. The funding might therefore be in stages here to reflect the variety of existing arrangements.

HOST suggests this could be in three stages:

#### Stage 1: working with formative/evolving primary partnerships

- Developing a structured self-assessment to demonstrate (and generate) partnership commitment and identify goals for the second stage of funding. This would be especially important for new or expanded partnerships. The self-assessment would not necessarily have to be completed by the SBM but could be co-ordinated by the lead school headteacher or partnership committee where one exists. The funding would help free up headteacher time to work on proposals ... which may also be attractive to new academies working with academy sponsors (either larger schools or companies such as Academies Enterprise Trust (AET)).
- Developing a community of practice (online and/or face-to-face) for SBM/Ds in primary partnerships, and appropriate opportunities for knowledge generation about what works, how success can be leveraged, synergies, shared successes, etc. This will also enable individuals to download the guidance documentation mentioned earlier.
- Initiating a mentoring capability, that can help during the early stages of primary partnership development or those individuals struggling with deeper seated barriers.

#### Stage 2: Maturing primary partnerships

- A second stage of funding for established partnerships or for those who have gone through Stage 1 above. This would be similar to the current scheme but would be building on demonstrated foundations including a cross-partnership working group and development plan, for example, building upon existing proposed and on-going activities. It might include, for example, primary partnerships that have built foundations with existing partners and are also looking to expand to include other schools. Mentor support could be provided by those exemplars in Stage 3 (below) to encourage the development of best practice in these maturing partnerships.
- There may be scope for fast-tracking some mature primary partnerships straight through to Stage 3 (below) – but only where they could demonstrate significant partnership practice and leadership commitment across all partners and can evidence best practice activities. It should be recognised, however, that a partnership can be demonstrating exemplary practice in one area whilst still in the early stages of development of another so any potential fast tracking would need to be reviewed against criteria, established by the

College, that indicates a partnership has matured sufficiently to move to Stage 3.

### Stage 3: Exemplars

- An extended funding stage for those primary partnerships able to demonstrate substantial progress to date (given that the survey findings suggest that timing is difficult to indicate progress/impact to date in many partnerships).
- Stage 3 might alternatively be a 'best practice' funding stage – and a motivator for all primary partnerships to make robust progress towards this through the formative and maturing stages.

In general (all stages):

- Follow up/adapted monitoring by NCTL – focused on using self-assessment tools – specifically to provide for a better understanding of early and subsequent impact (conditions, added-value, additionality, etc).
- Make provision for independently assessed 'best practice' case studies of high impact from selected primary partnerships.

## 2 Introduction

In November 2011, the National College for Teaching and Leadership (NCTL) issued an e-survey to all recipients of primary partnership grant funding. The survey was open until the end of January 2012 and three reminders were used to encourage response. 213 responses were received from 236 partnerships which is a 90 per cent completed response rate. HOST Policy Research (HOST) was asked by NCTL to conduct a high level analysis of the survey which focused on understanding the impact of the primary partnerships grants and to produce a report of findings. That is the subject of this report.

As part of the survey analysis, HOST looked at the results by job role of respondent and also by value of grant. For the job roles there are only two main ones, headteachers and School Business Managers (SBMs)/School Business Directors (SBDs). There are no significant differences in response between these job roles. In addition the responses by value of grant do not give sufficiently robust evidence by grant band because of the different start times, with a third only recently started and a small number who have yet to commence skewing the response.

The grants were issued in three bands, £15,000, £20,000 and £25,000 and the dates of award are set out below in Table 1.

**Table 1 Breakdown by month of funding**

<b>Month of Funding</b>	<b>Total Number of Schools</b>
<b>2010:</b>	
October	6
November	18
December	12
<b>Total 2010</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>2011:</b>	
January	14
February	43
March	96
May	2
June	1
July	34
August	3
September	5
October	2
<b>Total 2011</b>	<b>200</b>
<b>Overall Total to end of December 2011</b>	<b>236</b>

The survey was issued in November 2011 which suggests that 44 schools of the 236 in Table 1 (19%) had been in receipt of their funding for less than six months but fifteen per cent had been in receipt for approximately 12 months.

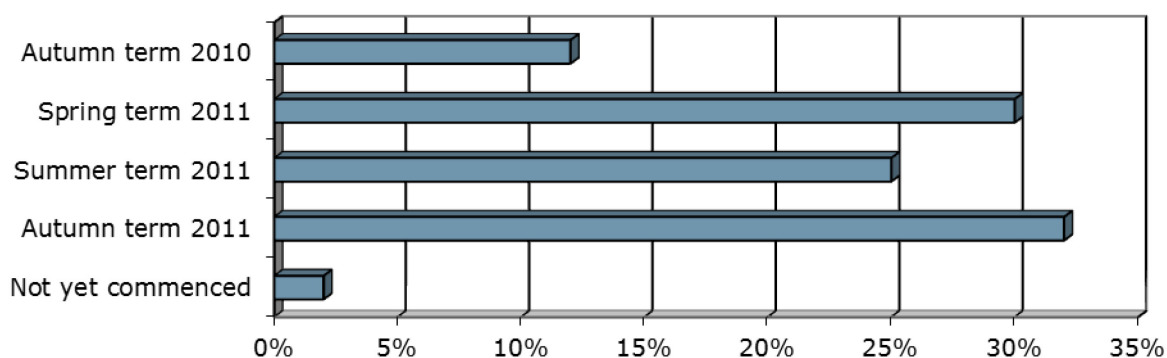
The report structure follows the headings from questionnaire.

### 3 Background details of respondents

Just under two thirds of respondents (63%) are headteachers/principals and just under a quarter of respondents (24%) are school business managers (SBMs)/school business directors (SBDs). Nearly two fifths (38%) had received £15,000 in funding, just over a half (51%) received £20,000 and 11 per cent received £25,000.

Respondents were asked to indicate the time period that their SBM/D commenced working across the partnership following receipt of funding. Figure 1 shows 12 per cent had commenced working in the autumn term 2010, over half (55%) in spring or summer terms 2011, but a third of respondent's had only commenced working in the autumn term 2011 and a small number (2%) have not yet commenced. This is consistent with the evidence in Table 1 on when the schools received their funding.

**Figure 1 Following receipt of funding please indicate the time period that your SBM/D commenced working across the partnership**



Total number of responses: 213

*Source: HOST Policy Research analysis of primary partnerships survey data collected by NCTL, July 2012*

## 4 Impact of SBM deployment

Respondents were asked what impact the deployment of the SBM/D across the partnership of schools has had in certain areas. The majority of respondents (90%) had seen either some or high impact in relation to financial benefits, open questions responses (reported in more detail below) suggesting in the areas of successfully bidding for funding and improving school budgets. Eighty three per cent had seen either some or high impact in relation to saving headteacher time, 82 per cent the same in relation to management and leadership of the school and 75 per cent the same in relation to staffing improvements. The development of teaching and learning as the area with the least apparent impact, with over half of respondents (58%) seeing little or no impact (Figure 1) though it should be borne in mind that Table 1 suggested that 44 schools out of 236 (19%) had been in receipt of their funding for less than six months so the survey would probably have been too early to pick up any real evidence of impact from them.

**Table 2 What impact has the deployment of the SBM/D across the partnership of schools had in the following areas (per cent)**

<b>Benefits</b>	<b>High or Some Impact (combined)</b>	<b>High impact</b>	<b>Some impact</b>	<b>Little impact</b>	<b>No impact</b>
Financial benefits	90	33	57	7	4
Staffing improvements	75	22	53	19	7
Development of teaching and learning	53	11	42	38	10
Management and leadership of the school	82	33	49	13	5
Head teacher time	83	39	44	15	2

Total number of responses: 213

*Source: HOST Policy Research analysis of primary partnerships survey data collected by NCTL, July 2012*

Of the many that report 'high impact', in open responses most report significant financial benefits, the most popular being in either cost saving through review of budget and practices within each school and across the partnership or combined bidding and negotiation of contracts across groups of schools, for example:



The SBM has made significant bids for funding which have brought in a substantial amount of money to the school. She has researched and implemented a number of joint initiatives which have saved money for the six schools she works across.

Each school in the partnership was asked to complete a tracking sheet to ensure that any savings were captured and reported. Between December 2010 and October 2011, figures show that collectively the partnership had managed to save over £120,000. By benchmarking the financial data from each school, we were able to identify variations in income and expenditure as well as potential collective spending power. Any areas of particular high spend were identified and reasons for this explored. As a result, savings have been made in relation to photocopy costs and lunchtime staffing amongst others. One primary school was able to significantly increase the number of pupils registered for free school meals. We have also shared contacts and supplier details for best value and used this information to generate further savings.

The second most popular benefit mentioned is the indirect benefit of freeing up headteacher time to enable them to focus on teaching and learning or on strategic leadership and development, staffing issues etc. For example:

Having a competent school business manager has freed up headteacher time to focus back on the teaching and learning. The SBM has recouped significant savings for the school in a number of areas which again has enabled us to target more resources towards staffing and teaching and learning.

The financial benefits have been tremendous in terms of turning round a school budget which has impacted on staffing improvements at the school we are supporting. This has in turn impacted on the development of teaching and learning through enabling money to be available for high quality teachers and enabled me to be freed up to develop the teaching and learning and management and leadership of coaches as well as middle leaders.

The business manager is managing the trust financial affairs and working hard to achieve economies within the trust through collective procurement and this leaves the headteachers of the trust to work on strategy for the trust and within their schools. Headteachers are formulating traded teaching services to provide CPD to each other and outside the trust, with the SBM coordinating this.

Some report a range of benefits, for example:

High Impact - Appointment of SBM has been an excellent opportunity to support the working of locality headteachers, freeing up time and creating opportunities. SBM works with locality bursars to exploit opportunities for more efficient joint purchasing, and cost savings. Teaching and learning has been significantly improved with targeted CPD opportunities for a range of staff including, teachers, teaching assistants and learning mentors. A wide range of learning opportunities has been provided for curriculum enhancement/gift [sic] and talented student.

One respondent specifically commented that it is the high quality of skills of the person appointed that manifests the high impact.

Those indicating 'no impact' vary in their reasons from those whose activities are yet to get underway (including those who received their funding only six months prior to the survey taking place) to those who have met with issues to be resolved. For example:

There seems to still be a view that as a non-teacher a SBM has no valued input. This is an area that I have found the most difficult to breach. One school has asked me to be on a panel to look at top to bottom funding. I am hoping that this will give me a doorway through which to make some impact on teaching and learning.

The SBM has only been in post for one term and has made tremendous progress. However the measure of their impact will be evident over the next two terms.

The Partnership has not yet commenced in formal terms which is why I have answered 'No impact'. However, an active cluster group of bursars and SBMs is now well established with excellent networking links. I actively help other bursars with queries or with training when needed. Through NSS work the schools we have supported have benefited from 'our best practice' which we pass on to all schools we support.

In the final section of the report looking at conclusions and recommendations, we return to the issue of needing to establish the progress a partnership has made in establishing itself prior to receipt of funding. This would enable a more accurate assessment of impact to be made (ie to be able to clearly identify the additionality of NCTL funding).

Whilst for many it is as yet 'early days', it is clear that the act of gathering information and sharing between schools has encouraged some reflection on internal processes and procedures but also identified possible areas for cost savings. For example:

So far the SBM has been gathering information from the four schools to compare costs and find out where costs/time saving can be achieved. The comparisons have raised interesting questions and we are looking at for example, possible premises and contracts cost savings. We are arranging training for the Finance Committees of all the governing bodies to increase their understanding of funding streams.

Working with other schools has given us cause to reflect on our processes and procedures, and learn from the other schools which we are supporting.

It has facilitated two-way dissemination of good practice within the Local Authority and beyond, via consultancy with other organisations. It has additionally highlighted our awareness of the strengths of our own in-school systems. It has promoted efficient working relationships within our school cluster, enhancing its overall effectiveness. It has provided a link with another Business Partnership led by a local secondary school, which under previous circumstances we would not have been aware of.

Many respondents stress the benefits of adopting common approaches, for example:

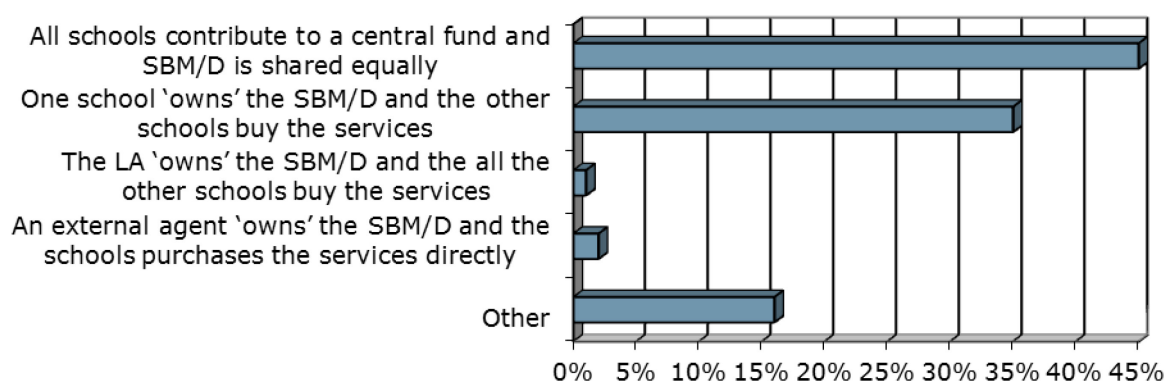
Developing common approaches to shared matters such as safeguarding and staff appointments is very useful.

The deployment of the SBM across the partnership has immense benefits in terms of bringing the cluster of schools together and forming a shared vision. Schools tend to work in isolation and it is a real benefit to have the opportunity to work together. The funding and the project affords the SBM's that time.

## 5 Working methods and lessons learnt

The two main methods by which SBM/D resource is allocated across the partnership are where all schools contribute to a central fund and SBM/D is shared equally (45%) and where one school 'owns' the SBM/D and the other schools buy the services (35%) (Table 2). Sixteen per cent use other models of which the most mentioned being the SBM being employed by a lead school with resources being freely available to partnership members (some using the grant to back fill, one stipulating free up to a cap of £15,000), the SBM being employed by a cluster and taking a strategic view, the cost of salary split across schools on a pro rata basis and a group of SBMs shared across several schools.

**Figure 2 How is the SBM/D resource allocated across the partnership**

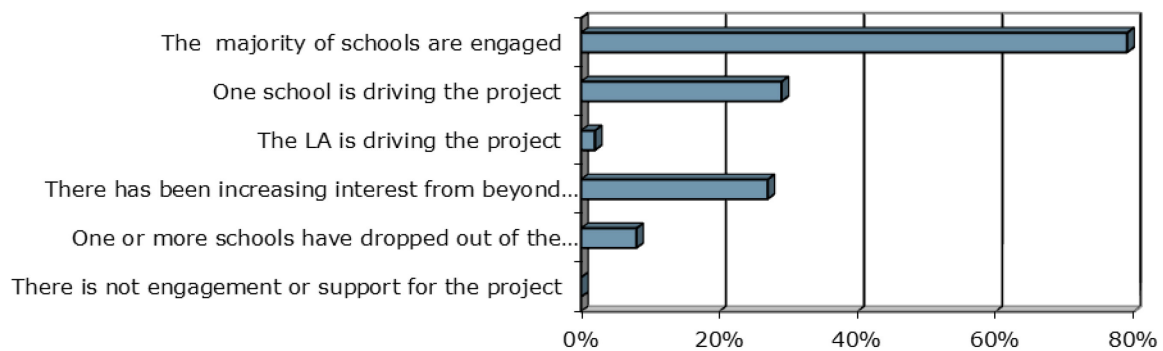


Total number of responses: 213

*Source: HOST Policy Research analysis of Primary Partnerships survey data collected by NCTL, July 2012*

More than three quarters of respondents (79%) indicated that the majority of schools within the partnership are engaged in the project<sup>2</sup>. For just over a quarter of respondents (29%) one school is driving the project. That there has been increasing interest from beyond the cluster is reported by over a quarter of respondents (27%). No respondents indicated lack of engagement or support for the project (Figure 1).

**Figure 3 What is the engagement and support for the project? (please tick all that apply)**



NB Multiple responses

Total number of responses: 213

*Source: HOST Policy Research analysis of Primary Partnerships survey data collected by NCTL, July 2012*

Respondents were asked to indicate from a predetermined list the three most important benefits for their partnership as a result of the SBM/D resource. It should be noted that 23 respondents (11%) ticked more than three responses and several respondents made it clear they could have ticked more than three (in one case the respondent indicated that they could have ticked all of them).<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> The questionnaire did not explore the depth of engagement or if they were equally engaged.

<sup>3</sup> For the next survey the questionnaire needs to be 'locked' so that only three entries can be made.

Around two fifths of respondents indicated the most important benefits as being strategic planning/vision (43%), headteacher/SLT time (41%), improved value for money (40%) and sharing knowledge/best practice (39%). Around a fifth indicated effective use of resources (19%). The least indicated benefits were building stronger links with schools outside of cluster (8%) and improved legal and financial compliance (9%) (Table 2).

**Table 3 What have been the three most important benefits for your partnership as a result of the SBM/D resource? (please tick three that apply)**

<b>Most important benefits for your partnership</b>	<b>Per cent</b>
Strategic planning/vision	43
Headteacher/SLT time	41
Improved value for money	40
Sharing knowledge/best practice	39
Better collaboration	31
Networking at a local level	24
Effective use of resources	19
Cost savings	18
More formal partnerships as a result of the project eg federations, academies, charities, trusts	14
Improving outcomes for learners and the community	11
Streamlined policies and procedures across cluster	11
Income generation	10
Improved legal and financial compliance	9
Building stronger links with schools outside of cluster	8
Competitive bidding	8
Human Resources improvements	6
Other	2

NB. Multiple responses

23 respondents ticked more than three boxes

Total number of responses: 213

*Source: HOST Policy Research analysis of primary partnerships survey data collected by NCTL, July 2012.*

Respondents were asked to indicate from a predetermined list the top three barriers to the effective deployment of SBM/D across the partnership.<sup>4</sup>

Just under a half of respondents (45%) indicated as a barrier the lack of understanding as to what benefits an SBM/D can bring. This is reported by both responding headteachers and SBMs. Two fifths (40%) indicated culture and change<sup>5</sup>, just under a third (30%) the sustainability of the SBM/D role and just under a quarter (24%) indicated financial cuts/budget reductions (Table 3).

**Table 4 What, if any, have been the top three barriers to the effective deployment of the SBM/D across the partnership? (please tick three that apply)**

<b>Barriers to the effective deployment of the SBM/D</b>	<b>Per cent</b>
Lack of understanding as to what benefits an SBM/D can bring	45
Culture and change	40
Sustainability of the SBM/D role	30
Financial cuts/budget reductions	24
Communication issues throughout the partnership	13
Lack of engagement within the partnership	12
SBM/D recruitment issues	9
LA support	8
Local job evaluation process	7
Proximity of the schools in the partnership	6
Relationship with the other schools in the partnership	5
Too many schools in the partnership	3
Other	24

NB Multiple responses

Five respondents ticked more than three boxes

Total number of responses: 213

*Source: HOST Policy Research analysis of Primary Partnerships survey data collected NCTL, July 2012*

---

<sup>4</sup> For the next survey the questionnaire needs to be 'locked' so that only three entries can be made.

<sup>5</sup> A definition of this was not given in the questionnaire.

Other barriers indicated through open questions include the time required to get things in place, difficulties in staff cover, and staff attitudes towards the SBM. For example:

The only real problem we have had from some of the primary schools we approached is their lack of appreciation of what an additional SBM can provide. Some schools had old style administrators and could not see beyond that point.

Again very early days. We are growing in understanding of what a SBM can bring to the school, but some heads see staff still in a very low level office role. We hope the regular training events will upskill staff so they can raise their profile.

It should be noted that when reviewing the open questions it is clear that 20 respondents (9%) clearly indicate there are no barriers,<sup>6</sup> for example:

We haven't found any barriers. We are all pleased with the progress of the work.

I could not say there are any barriers to the effective deployment. The FBM (sic) role that is in place is well structured across the Federation and provides support and advice to other schools locally and nationally, through systems, structures and procedures that have been implemented.

The vast majority of respondents (99%) would recommend the SBM partnership arrangement to schools that do not currently work in a partnership.

Respondents were asked what advice they would give a school entering into a new partnership agreement. The advice given can be summarised under the following headings:

- Don't underestimate the time it takes to get things up and running.
- Ensure measurable targets are set so early impact can be seen.
- Take care to ensure there is commitment at all levels and understanding from all at the beginning:

To ensure governor terms of reference enable heads and business managers to make decisions without having to go back individually to each governing body. Ensuring everyone understands that decisions have to be made for the common good and that you may gain in one

---

<sup>6</sup> For the next survey, there needs to be a clear option to tick 'no barriers'.



contract but lose slightly in another, but there will be saving to the cluster and individual schools overall - compromise is necessary. All Heads and Governors must be committed to attending meetings and ensure staff attend events arranged, fully prepared and committed, for full benefits to be experienced.

- Work to reassure existing staff/SBMs who may feel threatened, for example:

It is important that the Office Managers/SBMs understand this is not a threat, but a supportive and developmental opportunity to help them deepen their knowledge and understanding of school business management and become more effective in their role. Headteachers need to understand the role, provide support and opportunities for their Office Managers/SBMs to take on wider responsibilities.
- Be clear on expectations at the outset and have a memorandum of understanding in place.
- Invest time in getting the right person in post.
- Have a clear job description.
- The importance of having a strategic vision that you can return to.
- Regular open communications - be honest with each other, for example:

I would advise any schools to be as open and honest about their situations as possible, as our collaborative approach has really impacted on all learners, and the air of secrecy between schools no longer exists, and leaders are well aware of the common areas for development and what each school can offer in terms of strengths.

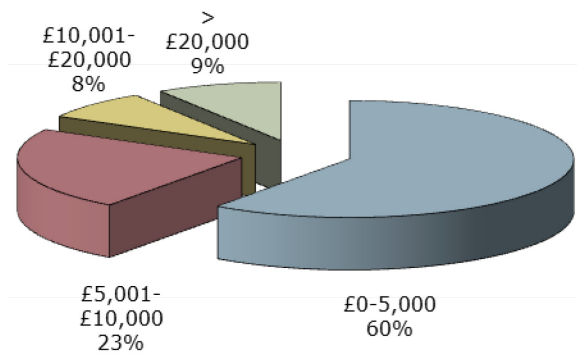
## 6 Financial impact

Respondents supplied a great deal of financial detail whilst responding to an earlier question on impact. The financial section of the questionnaire focused specifically on individual areas of impact, and the following set of pie charts set out the findings for each.

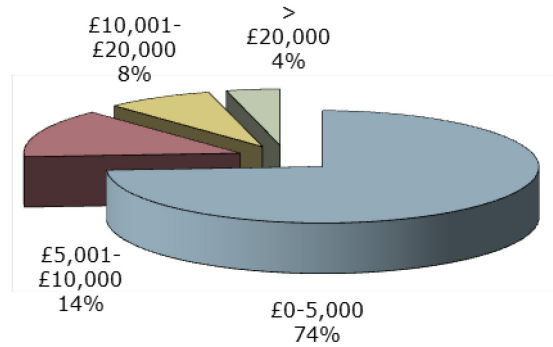
It should be noted that the questionnaire did not allow for a 'zero' or 'none' response so the short commentary on each of the figures given below provides an implication of how that might impact on the results.

**Figure 4 Financial impact**

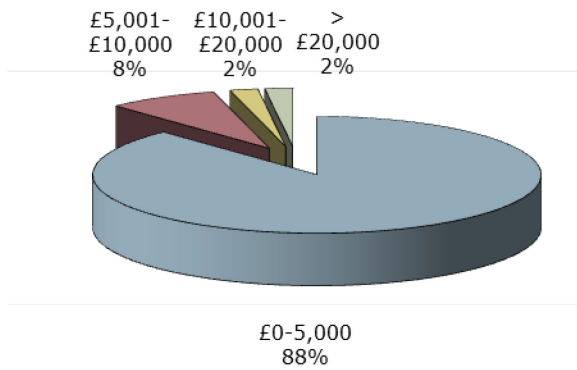
**a) Improved contract negotiation and efficiencies**



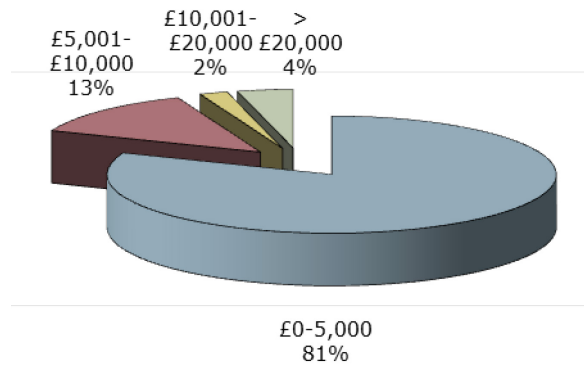
**d) Increased effectiveness through reconfigured staff structure**



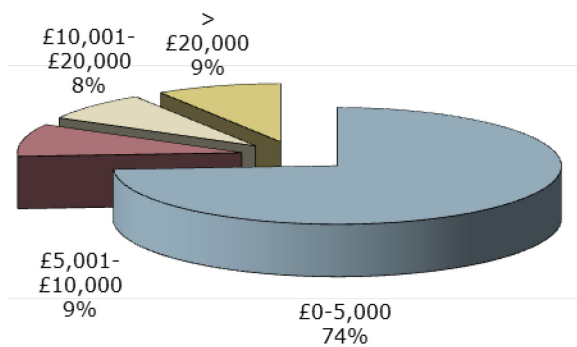
**b) IT related enablement/ management**



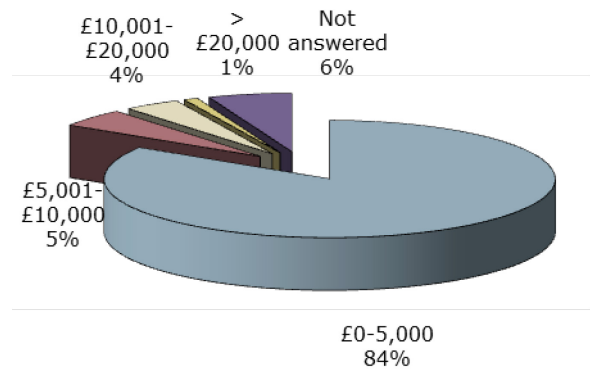
**e) More efficient management of building utility costs**



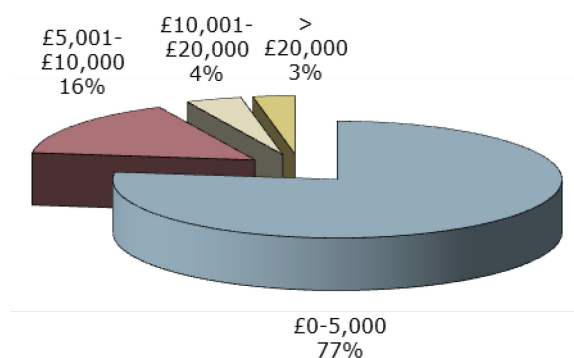
**c) Approved grant applications**



**f) Improved insurance contracts**



### g) Other savings and increased income



NB the results for each of the categories £0-5,000 have to be treated with some caution as the additional information provided suggests significant numbers have seen no benefit.<sup>7</sup>

Total number of responses: 213

*Source: HOST Policy Research analysis of Primary Partnerships survey data collected by NCTL, July 2012*

Considering each of these figures in turn:

- a) **Improved contract negotiation and management** - Two fifths of respondents indicate savings in excess of £5,000. Of the 60 per cent who indicated 0-£5,000, at least 25 (12%) respondents clearly indicate in their open responses that they have no savings yet, so this figure has to be treated with caution. Some have seen considerable savings, in one case £70,000. Most savings have been through savings in procurement (ranging from office supplies to contracting cleaners), renewable energy such as solar power and through staff CPD.
- b) **IT related enablement/efficiencies** - It is clear that IT has been less of an emphasis for the majority, with only 12 per cent indicating savings in excess of £5,000 and the remainder less than £5,000. From the open questions at least 21 (10%) respondents clearly indicate no savings yet, but that is likely to be an underestimate as the open responses were much fewer for this category. Where respondents have been active is in shared contract negotiation and shared systems and procedures. One respondent reported:

---

<sup>7</sup> For the next survey, respondents need to have the option to tick a box that indicates no impact or zero.

We are paying more out, but will get a more efficient service and better value for money. We will secure savings on equipment, but most valuable is that ICT coordinators will be free to concentrate on teaching and learning, equipment will be future proofed so will last longer and staff will have ICT equipment that works saving time and stress.

- c) **Approved grant applications** - Over a quarter of respondents (26%) indicate successful grant applications in excess of £5,000 with the remainder less than £5,000. According to the open question responses, at least 28 responses have none yet, some have submitted unsuccessful bids, some are yet to do anything and at least eleven (5%) have bids in for consideration. One respondent reports a successful bid for £100,000 to pay for solar panels at one school. One of the bids in for consideration is for £200,000 to Sport England for capital investment into sports facilities.
- d) **Increased effectiveness through reconfigured staff structure** - Just over a quarter of respondents (26%) have seen savings in excess of £5,000 and the remainder less than £5,000. Most found it difficult to quantify precisely the savings in this area. As one respondent stated:

You cannot put a price on this as the programmes that have been organised by the SBM have impacted on all schools' ability to share staff, and each school has made significant savings based on the possible costs of using individual staff per school to run individual programmes.

Nineteen respondents (9%) report through the open question response that they have seen no savings yet in this area, or that it is not part of the plan for their cluster to target staffing. Most find it difficult to be specific on figures in this area, mainly because they say it is too early in the process to be clear.

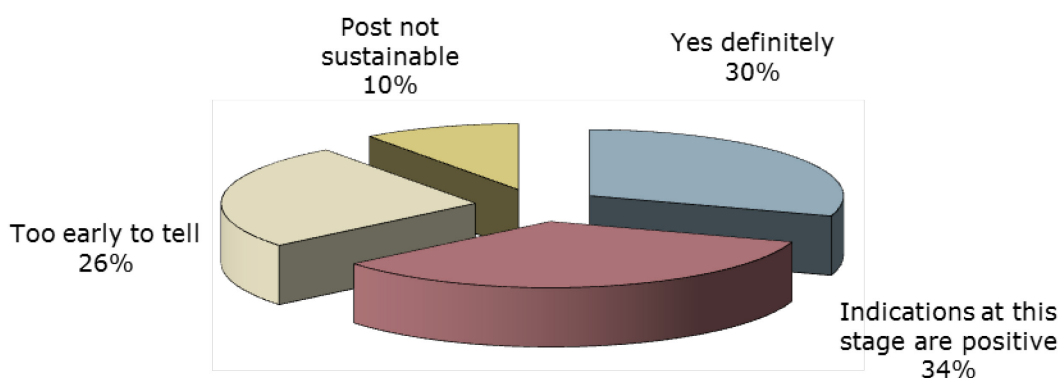
- e) **More efficient management of building utility costs** - Just under a fifth of respondents (19%) have seen savings in excess of £5,000 and the remainder less than £5,000. Whilst from the open question responses it is clear that the majority have been very active in this area, 15 (7%) have not done anything in this area yet or not seen any savings and a further 13 (6%) are only just getting started and so can't identify savings as yet. Areas of activity include grounds maintenance, energy monitoring software, introducing Voice Over Internet Protocol (VOIP) to save the cost of telephone calls, purchase of the services of a builder across the partnership and contract negotiation with waste and water suppliers, etc. One respondent reports that their school alone is due to make savings of £9,000 in caretaking and they expect something similar in catering.

- f) **Improved insurance costs** - Sixteen per cent of respondents have seen savings here in excess of £5,000 and the remainder less than £5,000. In responding to the open question, 19 respondents (9%) state they have not looked at this yet and 12 (6%) are in the process of doing so. The key activity is in negotiating absence and supply cover insurance.
- g) **Other savings and increased income** - Just under a quarter of respondents (23%) indicate savings in excess of £5,000 and the remainder less than £5,000. Thirteen respondents (6%) say it is too early to see other benefits. There have been some considerable successes here, one respondent mentions more efficient management of budget and personnel contracts and letters of appointment and variations in hours undertaken in-house. Others talk of increased income generation through lettings and other business-related activities, organising courses, bringing CPD in-house, shared minibus arrangements, etc.

## 7 Sustainability of the SBM/SBD role

Almost a third of respondents (30%) have indicated that they are definitely on track to sustaining the SBM/D role across the partnership. A third (34%) felt that indications at this stage are positive. A further quarter (26%) reports it is too early to tell, which is consistent with the responses seen to the open questions so far. Only ten per cent suggest the post is not sustainable (Table 3). A few respondents state that this is because they have not seen any significant financial benefits to date that would allow them to continue to fund the post. Lack of information about future funding and changing finances also appear to have played a role with some not wanting to continue with the role. However, for the majority of respondents the signs on sustainability are positive.

**Figure 5 Are you on track to sustaining the SBM/D role across the partnership**

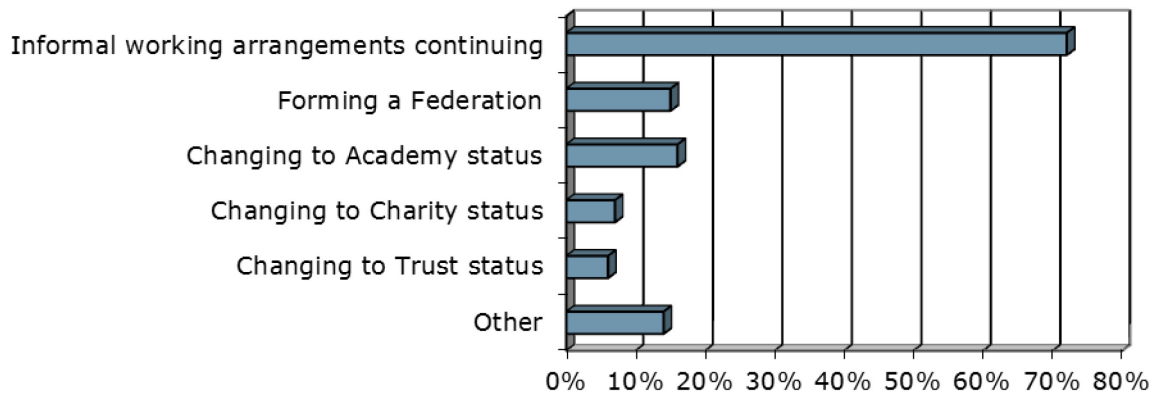


Total number of responses: 213

*Source: HOST Policy Research analysis of Primary Partnerships survey data collected by NCTL, July 2012*

Almost three quarters of respondents (72%) see their informal working relationships continuing. Fifteen per cent anticipate forming a federation and 16 per cent changing to academy status (Table 4). While some respondents are not sure how things will develop for the future, one respondent reports having just formed a charitable trust comprising 28 schools.

**Figure 6 Do you think your current model of working across the partnership may lead to: (please tick all that apply)**



**NB Multiple response**

Total number of responses: 213

*Source: HOST Policy Research analysis of primary partnerships survey data collected by NCTL, July 2012*

In terms of aspirations for the partnership, the majority of respondents indicate they want to see the collaboration, partnership working and sharing of best practice to continue, some in more formal ways than others. Some aspire towards being able to sustain the role of SBM. One respondent mentions ‘the development of a professional learning network for business support staff to develop their skills as the primary function and shared resources as the secondary function’. Another respondent stated that:

As the Trust of 11 schools we are hoping to develop a model of business leadership that will be developed over time that will enable growth of the trust and that this model can be shared across the county. Ideas and Structures we have implemented already have been rolled out across the county and we hope that this will develop further.

And another:

We want to continue to work as a learning cluster to create a centre of excellence for education in our area. We are committed to sustainability and high quality learning opportunities for our community.



Another respondent explained that they would be continuing with their plan to rotate lead partner:

As the lead school in the partnership, we are now withdrawing to enable the remaining two schools to recruit a new partner for the future. The plan is designed so that each year the lead school changes and at the end of the year the lead school withdraws enabling the partnership to involve a new school.

Finally, respondents were asked if there were any other comments they would like to make. A few asked questions about whether the grant will continue or if there will be further funding available. Many commented that they had found quantification for the questionnaire difficult at times as it was too early in the development of their partnership for them to really comment. Others commented that with the right person, the SBM role was a great success. Clearly, the project and the funding have provided many with the opportunity to work together and to make the potential of financial gains.

## 8 Conclusion

It is clear that the overall findings in relation to primary partnerships are generally positive, that the programme is having an impact and the key benefits are being realised by the majority of participants. It is clearly worth the investment from NCTL.

This final section of the report sets out reflections on the evidence available from the evaluation of the primary partnerships programme so far and sets out some recommendations for NCTL. It draws on the survey data contained in this report but also the evidence from four case studies with school business managers and their colleagues conducted in the mainstream evaluation (Sept-Oct 2011). These case study interviews took place at an early stage in the primary partnership process for these SBM participants.

### 8.1 Recommendation about the structure of future funding

**Considering how the programme should continue, HOST recommends that the goals of future funding would be to accelerate existing partnership as well as encouraging new partnerships. The funding might therefore be in stages here to reflect the variety of existing arrangements.**

HOST suggests this could be in three stages:

#### **Stage 1: working with formative/evolving primary partnerships**

- Developing a structured self-assessment to demonstrate (and generate) partnership commitment and identify goals for the second stage of funding. This would be especially important for new or expanded partnerships. The self-assessment would not necessarily have to be completed by the SBM but could be co-ordinated by the lead school headteacher or partnership committee where one exists. The funding would help free up headteacher time to work on proposals ... this might also be attractive to new academies working with academy sponsors (either larger schools or companies such as Academies Enterprise Trust (AET)).
- Developing a community of practice (online and/or face-to-face) for SBM/Ds in primary partnerships, and appropriate opportunities for knowledge generation about what works, how success can be leveraged, synergies, shared successes, etc. This will also enable individuals to download the guidance documentation mentioned earlier
- Initiating a mentoring capability, that can help during the early stages of primary partnership development or those individuals struggling with deeper seated barriers.

## **Stage 2: Maturing primary partnerships**

- A second stage of funding for established partnerships or for those who have gone through Stage 1 above. This would be similar to the current scheme but would be building on demonstrated foundations including a cross-partnership working group and development plan, for example, building upon existing proposed and on-going activities. It might include, for example, primary partnerships that have built foundations with existing partners and are also looking to expand to include other schools. Mentor support could be provided by those exemplars in Stage 3 (below) to encourage the development of best practice in these maturing partnerships.
- There may be scope for fast-tracking some mature primary partnerships straight through to Stage 3 (below) – but only where they could demonstrate significant partnership practice and leadership commitment across all partners and can evidence best practice activities. It should be recognised, however, that a partnership can be demonstrating exemplary practice in one area whilst still in the early stages of development of another so any potential fast tracking would need to be reviewed against criteria, established by NCTL, that indicates a partnership has matured sufficiently to move to Stage 3.

## **Stage 3: Exemplars**

- An extended funding stage for those primary partnerships able to demonstrate substantial progress to date (given that the survey findings suggest that timing is difficult to indicate progress/impact to date in many partnerships).
- Stage 3 might alternatively be a ‘best practice’ funding stage – and a motivator for all primary partnerships to make robust progress towards this through the formative and maturing stages.

In general (all stages):

- Follow up/adapted monitoring by NCTL – focused on using self-assessment tools – specifically to provide for a better understanding of early and subsequent impact (conditions, added-value, additionality, etc).
- Make provision for independently assessed ‘best practice’ case studies of high impact from selected primary partnerships.

## **8.2 Recommendations for future research**

The survey analysed for this report has not generated very clear evidence on issues such as added value and additionality (ie the net result, taking account of deadweight, leakage, displacement, substitution and economic multipliers – what difference the funding has made that would not have been achieved without it). So we are unable to say whether some of the evidence of success gathered by the survey is because of the grant received or would have been achieved in spite of it. This suggests additional

questions for the next survey (see the section on recommendations relating to questionnaire design below) but also that some useful follow up work could be done to obtain further information to supplement the existing survey evidence.

**HOST recommends a simple, light touch approach of a telephone call to each of the recipient schools who responded to the survey, asking them a supplementary question about the state of formation and activities of the partnership prior to receiving the grant. This would be retrospective but would allow further more informed judgements to be taken on additionality.**

It is clear, however, that NCTL needs more systematic and broadly-based evidence of impact – ie survey findings which can say more from conditioning variables and additional questioning on: success factors; constraints and their effects; how constraints are overcome; specific added-value of primary partnership investments; additionality of primary partnership related activity (ie from what would otherwise have occurred) etc.

There are also issues to be addressed identified from HOST's review of the survey findings, and mentioned in the report, such as the need for respondents to be able to answer no barriers, no benefits etc so that actual impact can be determined. Another issue raised is the need to 'lock' the questionnaire so that individuals can only tick three responses if that is a requirement of a question. HOST would also suggest that to aid analysis a question should be included asking respondents to indicate their type of school. Furthermore, a large amount of open question responses was gathered which is difficult to analyse. Expanding some of the tick box options on the questionnaire building on what has been learnt from the open questions will make the questionnaire easier for respondents to complete and the results easier to analyse.

The questionnaire could also include sub-questions answered by those who answer a particular question in order to get more detailed information from those individuals and clarify their responses.

**Therefore HOST recommends a full review of the questionnaire that will be used for the next primary partnerships survey in order to take on board these points.**

The HOST primary partnership case studies conducted as part of the wider evaluation were focused upon school business managers involved in substantial existing external collaborations. These are able to add context and process evidence that allows us to see a more round picture of constraints and enablers to partnership working. These cases are due to be followed up this Sept/Oct were of school business directors. The partnerships were also at an early stage so conclusions on impact were cautious at that stage of interview.

**HOST recommends that consideration be given to conducting further case study research with a range of primary partnerships who responded to the survey (those that have been in existence for some time, those that are relatively new,**

**representative case studies by type of school etc). This would also provide evidence to link to our recommendation on ‘sharing the learning’ set out later in this section.**

The wider body of evidence from the main HOST evaluation is that the SBM/D has impact on finance and in freeing headteacher time, both clear high impact areas according to the survey responses. A concern for schools prior to engaging with primary partnership is the sustainability of such arrangements, yet the evidence from the survey is encouraging with the majority of respondents indicating they want to see the collaboration, partnership working and sharing of best practice to continue. How they do that is not clear and the College has a role to play in providing guidance in this area.

**HOST recommends that building upon the survey results and the recommended additional case study activity, a set of guidance documents could be produced that take schools through the cycle of establishing a partnership, clearly identifying the role and benefits of the SBM/SBD role, ensuring good communications and working practices, maximising benefits, overcoming barriers and sustaining partnerships for the future.**

This should also aim to overcome the stated barrier from 45 per cent of survey respondents of the lack of understanding as to what benefits an SBM/D can bring.

A good starting point for the guidance documentation would be the advice survey respondents would give a school entering into a new partnership agreement which was summarised in the report as:

- Don't underestimate the time it takes to get things up and running.
- Ensure measurable targets are set so early impact can be seen.
- Take care to ensure there is commitment at all levels and understanding from all at the beginning.
- Work to reassure existing staff/SBMs who may feel threatened. Be clear on expectations at the outset and have a memorandum of understanding in place.
- Invest time in getting the right person in post.
- Have a clear job description.
- The importance of having a strategic vision that you can return to.
- Regular open communications - be honest with each other.

The survey, in the context of the wider HOST evaluation, has shown a picture of success but without an ability to demonstrate clear additional impact of NCTL funding. There are lots of positive messages contained in this report and some useful areas for development to enable NCTL to take the primary partnerships programme forward, including the promotion of the key benefits of these partnerships and the role of SBM/D.



National College for  
Teaching & Leadership

© HOST Policy Research 2014

**Reference: DFE-RR335F**

**ISBN: 978-1-78105-345-4**

The views expressed in this report are the authors' and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department for Education.

Any enquiries regarding this publication should be sent to us  
at: [college.evaluation@education.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:college.evaluation@education.gsi.gov.uk) or [www.education.gov.uk/contactus](http://www.education.gov.uk/contactus)

This document is available for download at [www.gov.uk/government/publications](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications)