



National College for
Teaching & Leadership

School business manager learning programmes evaluation

**Technical annex - final evaluation
report of the school business directors
pilot**

September 2014

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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 is 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.

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 – Primary Partnership Data**

High level analysis of the NCTL survey of recipients of primary partnership funding focusing on the understanding the impact of the 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 – 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.

Executive summary

As part of the three-year evaluation of the School Business Management (SBM) programme commissioned by the National College for Teaching and Leadership (NCTL), HOST Policy Research (HOST) has conducted a separate review of the School Business Directors' (SBD) pilot. This summary sets out the findings from the stand-alone evaluation of the last nine months.

The evaluation

HOST commenced the evaluation in September 2010, and has provided two staged (interim) reports. The evaluation has progressed to schedule, and has drawn on NCTL and external documentation, management and monitoring information for the pilot, and enrolment data, as well as the recently concluded (NCTL) end-of-cohort survey of those completing the pilot programme. The evaluation has also been able to draw on a small number of school-based 'early impact' case studies.

The programme context

Nearly a decade ago NCTL was tasked to develop a professional qualification structure to meet the needs of a range of job roles concerned with school business management. Professionalisation of these activities was seen as a crucial step in raising school effectiveness, and also in releasing headteachers and others to focus on teaching and associated improvement issues. Professionalisation of these roles remains a priority for the new coalition government.

From these early developments, a suite of three inter-related qualifications had been developed, trialed and rolled-out - Certificate in School Business Management (SBM), Diploma in School Business Management (DSBM) and Advanced Diploma in School Business Management (ADSBM). NCTL anticipated the need for a higher level award and established a pilot for SBD in 2010. In addition to contributing strategically to the 'remodeling schools' agenda, and to marshalling better use of resources, SBDs were expected to contribute to school development by freeing headteachers to focus on improving teaching and learning and not on the management of school resource and partnerships.

A pilot for SBD commenced in 2011, with two phases of entry, and has recently concluded. This involved substantial in-programme development of content together with an important role for participants in co-construction and in developing practice-based experiences and resources for sharing with other participants. The pilot was delivered by sub-contracting arrangements including delivery and accreditation of the embedded M-level modules by partner universities.¹ The delivery of the programme has since moved in-house but this has only affected the second pilot which started in April 2011, and which is not covered in this review.

Key findings

This summative evaluation of the (first) pilot has identified a number of achievements, early impacts and also areas for development:

- The SBD programme looks to be suitable for purpose set against rising demands on schools' business managers and a changing policy context.
- The model tested by the pilot, of a blended, personalised approach to learning, with proportionally less guided content and embedded enquiry into evolving practice, is well placed to contribute directly to building and disseminating the knowledge and skills likely to be needed for developing professional needs of school business managers at the highest levels.
- Recruitment to the programme has been effective and shows potential for 'progression' demand to continue to be tapped from earlier cohorts in DSBM and ADSBM. This has shown the effectiveness of pro-active marketing by NCTL but the pilot has yet to be able to demonstrate self-directed or open market, 're-active' demand for SBD.
- Although inflated by the way NCTL has counted drop-out, retention rates for the pilot are nonetheless weak with under a half of entrants completing. This reflects a combination of selection challenges with the need for better preparation of recruits for the demands and intensity of the course as well as more consistent early tutor support.

¹ Anglia Ruskin University, Institute of Education (University of London), Leicester University, Manchester Metropolitan University.

- Among 'stayers' there is an endorsement of the effectiveness of the programme in addressing their development needs and this follows earlier mid-pilot evidence of high satisfaction with the programme. However, a third of the completers found that on a number of indicators the arrangements for learning coach support had not met their expectations, with some expressing concerns about the identification of placement opportunities - which a third were unable to take advantage of.
- With very few participants going forward to assessment of the Higher Education element, and with apparent contrasts in participating Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), there is scope to look at the use and utility of the module, and its assessment. In contrast to earlier aspirations, after completing the programme participants appear to have little appetite for or prioritise pursuing progression opportunities to Master Level courses.

As previous evaluation reports have cautioned, understanding the impact of the pilot at this early stage is problematic. However, the evidence that is available is widely positive, with nearly all completers agreeing there was impact on their own professional development (and confidence), their profile within the school, clear 'referred' benefits for colleagues, and also some early efficiency gains for schools achieved within the life of the pilot. Impacts were strongest for understanding policy developments and levers, and an enhanced ability to provide strategic direction within schools. These gains were not quantified but such evidence may become available as the evaluation progresses.

Issues for NCTL

While the evaluation suggests that the pilot has demonstrated an SBD strand within the wider the programme is well placed and timely, it does present some development challenges. Some of these, such as embedding the role of the Development Event in pre-F2F preparation, have been recognised early by NCTL, but other issues remain for NCTL to address. The first concerns the need for additional guidance or support to participants who do not have a higher education background. While this need not preclude them from involvement, it is clear that this higher level programme raises significant challenges for such entrants which need to be addressed early. Other issues for development include the apparent inconsistencies in learning coach engagement. There is a need to raise confidence in this crucial area of support in order to reduce participant isolation - and withdrawal. To this is added a need for clearer guidance and support for in-school mentors. The new pilot might also learn from the experiences of the first in ensuring speedier access to any new resources or guidance to participants in advance of face-to-face inputs.

The evaluation also sets out some residual challenges for the sustainability of SBD and, in particular, how it can tap latent demand. There is a need for more robust demand evidence to inform open marketing and the move from what was effectively a *full costs subsidy* model for the pilot to a *full costs recovery* mode for any roll-out of SBD. A failure to provide for this may see too higher level SBMs unable to access a programme which might substantially benefit them and their schools. Against this background, there may be scope to review the viability of a two-year model for delivery and which would also provide schools with diminishing budgets with the potential to spread costs (and demands on participants) over two years.

Issues arising for the evaluation

To ensure that the evaluation of the wider programme can keep in touch with some of the development needs of the pilot, we suggest some improvements are needed to the embedded monitoring information for the programme. The first is an urgent need within what is essentially an experimental (ie pilot) programme for NCTL to develop more accurate and consistent information about why individuals withdraw from it. The second is more robust equalities evidence - an issue not confined to SBD, and which we have previously drawn attention to for CSBM, DSBM and ADSBM.

The evaluation also suggests there is a need enhance the available evidence of impact on which the evaluation can draw. The successes of SBD will be measured very largely in terms of the returns for their investments (of time and funds) for participants and their schools, and this will lead the perceived 'value' of the programme and its market position and profile. These data are currently very limited and a number of suggestions are made for improving this through an enhanced end of the cohort survey, a post-graduation impact survey, and conducting longitudinal 'high impact' case studies drawn from these sources.

Finally, the new 'in-house' delivery arrangements for the second SBD pilot are an important development and raise some immediate needs for capturing any early implications for participants' experience of the organisation of the programme. We suggest that, subject to data being available, this should be an additional focus for the proposed second interim report of the evaluation (due to be delivered at the end of October 2011).

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 The evaluation

HOST Policy Research (HOST) has been reviewing progress of the School Business Director course, as part of its three year evaluation of the School Business Management (SBM) Programme for the National College for Teaching and Leadership (NCTL). This is the final report of the evaluation of that part of the programme and follows submission and discussion of the draft final report presented in April 2011.

1.2 Evaluation aims

The focus of this part of the evaluation has been on the two entry cohorts to the School Business Directors (SBD) - pilot programme participants. Its focus has been on the progress of this new feature of the professional development programmes for School Business Managers (and Directors), following the goals for the wider evaluation as set by NCTL.² However, NCTL has also set some more specific questions relating to the SBD pilot and in particular:

- The extent to which SBD has the capability of meeting sector demand for a higher level programme.
- The relevance and effectiveness of the SBD competency framework, delivery and learner support.
- The implications for sustainability of the delivery model.

The college has also been keen to draw together any evidence of the realised benefits and impact of the pilot, although it is recognised that such evidence is early and preliminary, and will need to be supplemented by tracking the experiences of SBD graduates as they apply their new knowledge and skills following participation in the pilot.

² These have been set down in the first interim report of the evaluation of the whole programme and for brevity are not repeated here.

1.3 Project context

HOST's previous report acknowledged that the professionalisation of school business management remains an important, if still relatively new, concept affecting schools in England. The SBM initiative was conceived a decade ago and saw an aspiration to train 1,000 School Business Managers and Bursars inside five years as part of the 'remodelling schools' agenda. The context was then of rising resources for individual schools, with an expectation that enhanced professionalism would help optimise the effective use of these resources and also support other policy priorities by freeing up headteachers to focus on the delivery and improvement of teaching and learning.

Tasked with the development challenge, NCTL College has seen the wider programme mature since its early days. The previous HOST evaluation³ suggested that the first professional programme - the 'entry-level' certificate programme was now at a steady state of development and demand and complimented by the later development of the diploma and advanced diploma courses. Policy and practice over this period have not stood still and there has been a trend over the second half of the decade to emphasise resource and related collaborations between schools. This has also seen the emergence of system leadership⁴ as a feature of school management and leadership across formally and less formally 'federated' schools and where this potential extension to roles and responsibility would have a particular impact on the SBM community as well as on headteachers. Subsequently, following the 2010 General Election, there have been further policy developments promoting the potential for collaboration and system leadership including teaching schools and cross-school coaching and support for leadership development.

NCTL anticipated the demands that these trends collectively place on SBMs and also headteachers. With the confidence that the first tiers of professionalisation were becoming well established, NCTL looked towards the development of a higher level programme targeted as SBMs operating in more complex situations, or extended roles. This saw the introduction of the SBD programme launched as at Masters' Level in terms of academic qualifications. The SBD Programme was first piloted in 2010 with two cohorts and with the provision being made by a contracted provider.

³ D J Parsons, A Bloomfield and J Holland (2011), *The Evaluation of the School Business Management Programme: First Interim Report*. HOST Policy Research for the National College, May 2011.

⁴ D Hopkins, *The Emergence of System Leadership* Nottingham, National College, 2009.

The intake for a second SBD Pilot contained 43 participants and the Phase 1 development event for this pilot took place in May 2011. This pilot is being delivered in-house with the SBM team at NCTL. All events are now arranged by the SBM team who contract directly with the facilitators and coaches to deliver the programme.⁵ This entry is not covered by this report, although arrangements are in place to embed further analysis of the extended pilot in the mainstream evaluation from 2011-2012.

1.4 Methodology and progress

The methodology for the wider (SBM) evaluation has been developed progressively and has been set out in the first interim report - and not repeated here. This report builds on the previous draft final report, adopting an incremental and progressive approach to evidence review. This has drawn evidence from:

Baseline review and contextual analysis: Including face-to-face observation and informal discussions with participants at the second programme event and previously reported to NCTL. This provided contextual evidence and also helped inform the shape of this aspect of the evaluation.

Review of monitoring information: This has taken account of the available application information, start and end-of-programme (June 2011) surveys and also available management information (MI) including updated evidence of programme retention.

Case studies: The evaluation has also benefited from four in-depth case studies conducted by HOST earlier in the year. These have been produced separately for NCTL and were the major focus of the April report – and while drawn on in this analysis are not repeated as full case studies here. Each of these were of volunteer SBD participants with interviews conducted and also with other key senior management staff to establish related school experience and early impacts. Further SBD case studies will be conducted in September-October 2011 to contribute to the second interim report for the programme.

The analysis presented here updates and extends the earlier analysis and, in particular, benefits from the end-of-programme analysis from NCTL's participant survey.

⁵ Data from the National College SBM Update June 2011.

1.5 Limitations to the methodology

The evaluation methodology has proceeded to expectations in collating and assessing the evidence set out above. However, the analysis which follows has shown some limitations in the quality of that evidence, which means the evaluation observations and conclusions need to be interpreted with caution.

The pilot has been and was expected to be small scale. It has captured broad evidence across the cohort at the start of the pilot, but high drop out rates (as explored in Chapter 3 below) means the evidence base has shrunk as the evaluation has proceeded and at its conclusion is able only to look at a handful of completers. These small numbers mean it is difficult to make any statistical contrasts or to draw generalisations based on experiences.

In addition, the available evidence can (as yet) offer little insight into impact partly because of the limited numbers completing but also because the embedded arrangements for capturing impact evidence are not yet mature - an issue returned to later. Around a third of those withdrawing from SBD also intend to restart the programme at a later date and it seems likely these, at least, may well have seen some gains from participation. However, we know nothing of what impacts 'part' participation may have had on individuals or their schools.

HOST welcomes the opportunity to review these limitations. While these add up to limitations to this early analysis, understanding these should be seen as part of the staged approach to building a whole programme evidence base over the course of the evaluation.

1.6 The report

This is the second and final differentiated review of the SBD pilot but it also contributes to the progressive assessment of the whole programme in what will be six staged evaluation reports. Following this introduction the stand-alone review of the pilot looks at:

- SBD development and performance - providing a contextual review of the evolution of the pilot, policy background and delivery (Chapter 2).
- Programme participation and experience - looking at recruitment and retention and drawing on the survey evidence to review participants experience and satisfaction (Chapter 3).
- Benefits and impact arising from the pilot - looking at the limited evidence currently available for SBD impact (Chapter 4).

The report concludes (Chapter 5) with a review from the evidence of issues and implications for SBD.

Chapter 2: SBD Development and Performance

Key findings:

- a) The SBD programme looks to be suitable for purpose set against rising demands on school business managers and a changing schools policy context.
- b) The model tested by the pilot of a blended and personalised approach to learning, and embedded enquiry into evolving practice is well placed to contribute directly to building and disseminating the knowledge and skills base likely to be needed for developing professional needs of SBMs at the highest levels.
- c) Further case study evidence is planned for the SBM second pilot with a focus on the SBM Primary Partnerships. This will be the subject of a report in October 2011.

2.1 Introduction

The HOST Interim Report on the SBM programme focused on the Certificate of School Business Management (CSBM), Diploma of School Business Management (DSBM) and Advanced Diploma School Business Management (ADSBM).⁶ The key changes and the context in which these have occurred were discussed in Chapter 2 of that report and not repeated here. This chapter will focus on the SBD programme by looking in greater depth at:

- The policy background and context influencing the programme and its shape.
- How the pilot programme has been delivered and changes in delivery.
- The development of professional practice.
- Delivery and development challenges.

This section draws mainly on a review of programme and wider policy documentation. Chapters 3 and 4, which follow, look more specifically at the participants' profile and experiences.

⁶ D J Parsons, A Bloomfield, and J Holland, *Evaluation of the School Business Management (SBM) Programme: Interim Report to the National College from HOST Policy Research*, HOST Policy Research, June 2011.

2.2 Policy background and context

In early 2010 a major new development within SBM was in the evolution - and subsequent launch, of the SBD programme. At the time of initial development of the pilot, the demand for a higher level role for SMBs was based on the changing agenda for school organisation, improvement and effectiveness but also anticipated the challenges and opportunities of effective system leadership in a variety of partnership and federated models of school leadership. NCTL plans⁷ for SBM developments in 2009 and 2011 consequently anticipated that a major focus would be on extending the evolving SBM career pathway by piloting a Master's level SBD programme.

Professionalising the role of school business management has been at the heart of the wider SBM programme and its evolution. However, the SBD programme was being planned with an eye to change and to equipping SBD participants with higher level skills and where the knowledge base on what constituted effective professional practice in different leadership models was itself in a process of transition, and evolving in its nature and scope. The professionalisation of SBD consequently meant that SBD pilot participants, more so than for the preceding CSBM, DSBM and ADSBM pilots, would be involved in researching their own experience and the nature of the demands placed on them so as to contribute directly to creating a knowledge base for the profession at this higher level.

This context of schools has changed markedly in the last year against the backcloth of the wider economic context, the situation facing public finances in general and financing of public services in particular. The May 2010 general election, and the subsequent coalition government, saw uncertainty for the SBM programme as government re-evaluated priorities and spending commitments and, subsequently, remodelled much of the infrastructure for institutional and professional development in education. Key policy initiatives introduced by the new coalition government have included a time of retrenchment in government finance, with both a direct and indirect impact on schools. Indirect change has come from reductions in local authority funding with some services now being available only through (buy-back) purchasing services from the local authority (LA) or from external consultants.

⁷ National College, *School Business Management Programme: Impact and Evaluation Report, 2007-2009*.

These financial and other challenges mean that across the sector greater expertise is required of senior leadership teams and, to an extent, school governing bodies. For some schools this is likely to have the effect of deepening the contributions of school business managers and in developing their roles to free up the time of headteachers to focus on priority developments and school improvement. In November 2010, the Schools White Paper set a framework within which all schools would have much greater autonomy and specifically promoted self-reliance and ended centralised target setting and ‘...*the requirement for every school to have a local authority school improvement partner (SIP)*’.⁸ The white paper anticipated the role and importance of school business managers in supporting these developments at local level:

Obtaining the services (shared or full-time) of a high quality business manager should be a priority for all governors and headteachers, unless there is someone in the management team with the relevant skills to undertake the role.⁹

The white paper also stressed other opportunities for securing the value and benefits of school autonomy,¹⁰ with different models proposed for school governance and through the expansion of the academies programme, federations of academies and the opening of free schools. These developments have proceeded apace in the sector and are set to have implications within the wider policy direction for demand of school business managers and potentially for higher level roles such as that developed through SBD. In particular, recent government data suggested that demand for schools to convert has been strong, particularly in the secondary sector and with just over a half of the academies now operating, having opened since September 2010.

In this, the role of converting to academies implies a commitment to work with other schools.¹¹ In a recent Department for Education (DfE) review, one secondary head raises the potential for such inter-school collaboration by reporting that:

The additional freedoms open to us as an academy and our commitment to cooperation with other schools and agencies will be important components in the school’s work at the heart of the community.¹²

⁸ Department for Education, *The Importance of Teaching The Schools White Paper 2010*, paragraph 23, page 14 London DfE, 2010.

⁹ Department for Education, *The Importance of Teaching the Schools White Paper 2010*, paragraphs 8.22, 2010.

¹⁰ Department for Education, *The Importance of Teaching The Schools White Paper 2010*, paragraphs 5.1-5.44, 2010.

¹¹ Department for Education, *The Importance of Teaching The Schools White Paper 2010*, paragraph 5.12, 2010.

¹² DfE (2011) <http://www.education.gov.uk/inthenews/inthenews/a0071852/> Accessed 07/06/11 at 1415.

These changes, and others proposed, are set to progressively devolve responsibility to a school level and this in turn will require more of the professional knowledge and skills of school business managers. For many these demands will be expressed with formal federation or looser collaborative arrangements across schools.

Consequently, the focus within the current SBD programme on system leadership, supported by greater personalisation of learning, has proved well-placed and timely.¹³

Collaboration in some aspects of school leadership has particular relevance for primary schools whose resources may be stretched by the demands of greater autonomy and the school management implications. Another feature of the current SBD programme has consequently been an opportunity for those working as SBMs in primary schools to gain experience of system leadership. The primary partnership arrangements arose from the NCTL's demonstration projects which had shown that groups of schools unable to afford a school business manager can do so through forming a cluster. There are 189 SBM partnerships established in every government region across 100 local authorities, equating to, just under, 1,200 schools with access to an SBM for the first time.¹⁴

There are other possible benefits hinted at in the project launch prospectus. Increased workload and complexity are believed to be factors in the difficulty with recruiting and retaining headteachers. Those difficulties are often greater in smaller primary schools where the demands of headship are compounded by the absence of a senior leadership team and made more challenging by the need to teach as well as lead the school. The salary for leadership of small schools means that, despite the additional complexity and challenge, there is not as great a financial incentive to take on the headship of a smaller school. Governors of small schools may, therefore, find it difficult to recruit a headteacher. The project prospectus offering to contribute to the costs of employing a SBM working with a cluster of schools comes at a time when financial pressures also promote the consideration of partnership between schools.

¹³ D J Parsons, A Bloomfield, and J Holland, *Evaluation of the School Business Management (SBM) Programme: Interim Report to the National College from HOST Policy Research*, HOST Policy Research, June 2011.

¹⁴ Data from the National College SBM Update June 2011.

While these are important contextual issues for realising the demand for SBD training, these developments have come too late for consideration in the starting cohort experiences in this report. However, HOST has been asked to conduct case study research involving current SBMs working with formal clusters of primary schools (or within informal collaborative partnerships of schools) and engaged in the latest recruitment (April 2011) to SBD. Interviews for the case studies will take place in September/October 2011 and this work will be reported separately.

In such a period of innovation, it is likely that the greater personalisation and independence of enquiry expected of participants in the Masters' level tasks within the SBD programme will help them to cope with rapid change in their institutional environment. The goals of co-construction of the SBD programme and the intended development of professional knowledge, through participant research based on personal experience as well as knowledge of the literature, might be considered as appropriate to the wider challenge for schools.

2.3 Pilot development and delivery

The SBD programme is following a similar format for its pilot stages as the three established programmes. This involves a blended programme with high levels of personalisation, including a combination of face-to-face residential sessions, on-line interactive materials, guided and independent research (and placement) activities and online communities. Its precise delivery has been separately described within the earlier evaluation report and is not repeated here.

At that early stage within the pilot evaluation, it had only been possible for the evaluation to monitor delivery directly in relation to one set of face-to-face sessions within the SBD programme. However, the evaluators were able to interview writers of the programme, and to discuss pilot programme delivery with four participants in the SBD detailed case studies. From this the previous (draft final) report (April 2011) found that the blended model emerged as well balanced, with re-enforcing content and well-regarded. However, the quality of co-construction was seen as limited - although this not impacting on quality or relevance of content. There were also seen to be some teething troubles with specific aspects particularly in the coherence of the development event built into the programme (now dropped) and with the consistency of learner support.¹⁵

¹⁵ D J Parsons and A Bloomfield, *Evaluation of the SBM/D programme for the National College, 2010-2013: Preliminary HOST Observations on SBD Developments and State of Play*, HOST Policy Research, January 2011.

2.4 Developing professional practice

The assessment above has highlighted the context of rapid policy-driven change for schools and the increase in the need for a business like approach to the management of resources - financial and human. Many of these challenges face participants on all SBM programmes but with particular relevance for those operating, or seeking to operate, at higher levels and undertaking SBD. This was anticipated in HOST's first cross programme review which suggested that the future challenges made explicit in the white paper and through the pressure on schools funding, and cost-effectiveness, meant there was an even greater need for professionalism in school business management.¹⁶

A growing bedrock of mainly academic literature in education and outside sets out the nature and role of professionalism in publicly-funded services. This has not always provided much consistency in an understanding of what constitutes professionalism or professionalised practice. While this is not the place to review that literature, there is sufficient common ground to establish that professionalism in public services implies the existence of a widely recognised locus for a body of professional knowledge as well as a means of accreditation of new entrants as defining features. It also implies the need for those who can apply existing knowledge to new circumstances and recognition of the importance of sharing this developmental activity with their colleagues.

Against this context, the evaluation suggests NCTL is well placed to provide the means of generating a professional knowledge base through its structure and processes for delivering the SBD programme. This will be contributed to, in particular, by the systematic focus on self-reflection built into participants' school-based personalised projects as well as the means of disseminating such experiences (and implications) through the NCTL website.

2.5 Delivery and development challenges

Perhaps the key challenge to the SBD's future development will be the change in the NCTL's emerging 'new' business model. This balances the demands of reducing delivery costs whilst meeting the sector needs by retaining the vision for SBD. In this, the evaluation previously suggested:

¹⁶ D J Parsons, A Bloomfield, and J Holland, *Evaluation of the School Business Management (SBM) Programme: Interim Report to the National College from HOST Policy Research*, HOST Policy Research, June 2011.

- The emerging currency and value of the programme to schools and individuals might make a degree of cost recovery possible within the programme.
- The intensity of the programme may be creating difficulties. If so, running the programme over two years might reduce pressures on participants, give scope for a clearer in-school development engagement, provide the chance to minimise disturbances to participants demanding in-school roles and spread costs across annual budgets at school level.
- If completion of the SBD programme leads to automatic accreditation of say between 30 and 60 credits at Masters Level then the pressure and cost of completing Master Level modules at the same time as undertaking the assessed elements of the SBD programme itself would be reduced.

The earlier report concluded that:

There have been initial challenges largely because of the pace of development and implementation, which may indicate a need to use the next stage of the SBD to fine-tune documentation and assessment with a view to clarifying academic credit value before a large scale roll-out of the programme occurs perhaps involving other providers. This may also provide time to review reasons for withdrawal, critically appraise the cost-base of the programme, assess opportunities for cost-efficiencies, which would not detract from value, and to conduct more robust marketing research to help shape charging practices and establish marketing needs for roll-out.

The challenge for the SBD programme in its second pilot phase is to deliver for participants an effective learning experience that reflects the changes in their status and professional significance in a rapidly evolving context for individual schools and for groups of schools. That this is happening at a time of transition for NCTL itself adds to the complexity of the challenges for those responsible for the administration and delivery of the SBD pilot. It is likely that changes in future will require the SBD programme to retain a degree of planned flexibility to an evolving professional context for school business managers.

Chapter 3: Programme Participation and Experience

Key findings:

- a) Recruitment to the programme has been effective and shows potential for 'progression' demand to continue to be tapped from earlier cohorts in DSBM and ADSBM. This has shown the effectiveness of pro-active marketing by the College but the pilot has yet to be able to demonstrate self-directed or open market 're-active' demand for SBD.
- b) Although this is inflated by the way NCTL has counted drop-out, retention rates for the pilot are nonetheless weak with under a half of entrants completing. This reflects a combination of selection challenges with the need for better preparation of recruits for the demands and intensity of the course and more consistent early tutor support.
- c) The available evidence shows that among 'stayers' there is an endorsement of the effectiveness of the programme in addressing their development needs and this follows earlier mid-pilot evidence of high satisfaction with the programme. However, a third of the completers found that on a number of indicators the arrangements for learning coach support had not met their expectations, with some apparent concerns also about the identification of placement opportunities - which a third were unable to take advantage of.
- d) There is also scope to review the use and utility of the Higher Education (HE) module and particularly its assessment. There are apparent contrasts in delivery of the three Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) who supported this and very few participants went forward to assessment of this element. There also seem to be little appetite or priority given by participants to pursue progression opportunities to Master Level courses.

3.1 Introduction

This chapter looks at engagement across the SBD pilot and participants' expectations of, and experiences with, the programme. It draws on a combination of the NCTL's management and monitoring information for the pilot, early observation and discussions with participants, survey data including the recently concluded end of cohort survey and the four participant case studies to look at:

- Overall programme recruitment and enrolments, and the implications for demand for SBD.
- Programme drop-out and its causes.
- 'Front-line' expectations and experiences on the programme from those completing.
- Parallel experiences of selected elements of the design and delivery of the programme including the role and utility of learning coaches.

The numbers taking part in the pilot are too small to make for any detailed assessment of distribution or demographic profiling of participation. This includes diversity data which, as previous evaluation reports have suggested, is not yet sufficiently robustly collated to provide for a coherent analysis.

3.2 SBD selection and recruitment

The pilot achieved recruitment of 42 entrants to the programme in two entry cohorts. Little can be said of the profile of these entrants due to limitations of numbers and some gaps in monitoring evidence, but the evaluation does show:

- Entry was almost wholly from individuals working in secondary schools and related institutions - and this reflected the initial applications.
- Recruitment was drawn across eight of the nine regions of England. Recruitment clusters seem to have been relatively strong in The Midlands and Yorkshire and Humber (ie entrants against school density) but less evidence in East of England, London and the South East.

Little more can be said of the recruitment profile and, although there is comprehensive diversity data for applicants, this has yet to be matched for entrants or completers and so no diversity profiling is possible.

Demand for the SBD programme was expected to be at a smaller scale than for SBM counterparts, given its higher level focus. In the event, the two entry cohorts for the first pilot were successful in meeting expectations. Within this, the specialist focus was expected to be on high level managers operating at 'strategic' level and with broad responsibilities in schools. The evidence suggests that selection processes were effective in identifying this group, with those on the programme either holding, or aspiring to, senior roles within school business management; and the case study evidence suggests typically in school senior management (SMT) or senior leadership teams (SLT's). A proxy for this is the numbers of staff managed as direct or indirect reports which in two out of three entrants was for over ten personnel - and in most of these over 20.

As the previous chapter has noted, preparation for, or development in, systems leadership has been an important foundation for the design of this higher level programme. Here, selection has been effective in securing around two-thirds of entrants who were leading and managing in (or beyond) a single institution, although arrangements varies from two to over 15 formally or informally federated schools. Where they have system leader roles they typically have held functional responsibility beyond their own school and in what the case studies suggest can be diverse and complicated organisational settings.

The main selection constraint seems to have been the purpose and value of the first face-to-face event - the development event. The rationale for this seems to have been muddled, with the case study and other feedback suggesting some confusion between the expectations of the participants and the programme intent and including issues such as tutor feedback. These issues are returned to under 'delivery' below, but there is little evidence that the event made any significant contribution to selection as had been planned and the second pilot has now ensured that all selection activity is concluded before the first face-to-face event. The use and utility of Hay and other diagnostic tools is not considered as a 'selection' issue here.

In terms of rationale for participation, there seems to be limited systematic 'demand' evidence from the case studies. However, there seems to be some more common features, and in particular:

- Individuals' decisions about SBD engagement were highly personalised in relation to past career as much as to potential for their (and their schools') continuing development. However, within this, the main driver seems to be personal development needs. Although, often rationalised as having anticipated gains for their schools, anticipated synergies were often vague and the evaluation suggests these may simply be too fast moving as motivations for participation.

- The ability to manage, or contribute to, change more generally was a feature in participation. In all but one of the case studies, a stimulus to participation was anticipated needs for individuals and their roles to respond to wider changes. Here there was a recurrent focus for the participants (and their schools) not on specific initiatives but on the wider opportunities caused by changes in education at a national and local authority level. In this, SBD engagement was seen as an unspecified stimulus to networking with other 'change leaders'.
- Individuals who were in schools in, or looking towards, federation or making more effective use of current federal arrangements (eg formalising currently informal arrangements) commonly saw SBD as a timely stimulus for upgrading personal skills and capabilities to drive forward such change. This seems to emphasise the skills and understanding needed of partnership working - and especially systems leadership within collaborative environments.
- The ability to better manage or direct cross-functional teams was also a recurring expectation of the benefits of participation. This seemed to reflect an awareness of needing as individuals to do more than act as a line manager for support staff but as leaders of the 'non-teaching' system. This also emerges as a role which is coherent and valued by headteachers - and perhaps other SMT members.

In terms of entry routes, the overall pattern seemed to be that individuals were engaged because of their own efforts to be aware of SBD opportunities rather than participation being initially stimulated by other senior managers. NCTL's own pro-activity in this respect has also been significant in recruitment (and completion) of DSBM and ADSBM cohorts.

On this evidence, the pilot can tell us little about demand stimulus, beyond the significance of using SBD as a progression opportunity for past participants. The potential for self-directed demand from schools, and especially via other school leaders, is unclear. For the most part, headteachers/principals seem to have played little role in stimulating demand and only a passive role in supporting participation. At the same time, there is no direct case study evidence to suggest any specific levels or thresholds for price sensitivity. Indeed, the case study evidence emphasises other concerns among school leaders about constraints to participation and, in particular, the consequences for cover and release of members of staff is seen as critical for development.

3.3 SBD withdrawal

If recruitment has been a success for the pilot, SBD has faced significant challenges in retention among those applying and starting on the programme. The previous evaluation report commented on some of the difficulties encountered in interpreting withdrawal evidence, but the data shows that drop out rates have been a little over a half of 'starters' (53%).

These figures suggest that the efforts put into selection seem to have produced what may be seen as disappointing returns. They also mean that the pilot evidence is based on very few completers - impairing the depth of the evaluative evidence. However, these are not necessarily wholly 'losses' to the programme and a minority of these do plan to resume the programme at a later date.¹⁷

These rates are also rather inflated by the way withdrawal data has been collated. A third of all the losses withdrew at, or shortly after, the development event. Most others leaving the programme did so after the second face-to-face events and those participating to mid-programme almost always stayed on to complete. Put together, the evidence suggests challenges for either selection, preparation of participants for its intensity, or for more pro-active (or consistent) tutor support early in the programme to help participants through early engagement difficulties.

Nonetheless, while direct comparisons with SBM (when piloted) or other Master Level courses are not appropriate, even on this adjusted drop-out measure these levels appear to be relatively high and, on this evidence, question the cost effectiveness of the NCTL's (and school participants') investment. This is especially the case when taking account of the fact that a majority of the selected participants have existing experience of completing blended NCTL development programmes (ie SBM) and the extensive effort that went into selection against indicative criteria.

As previously indicated, data on reasons for withdrawal do not add much to this assessment, and often combines direct feedback from leavers with 'proxy' evidence from learning coaches commenting on individual drop-out. Much of this evidence is informal and fragmented, but it does suggest that four factors dominate:

- Uncertain relevance of the content to individuals' work situation or development needs (one-in-three of those providing reasons).
- High level of demands of the programme and its assessment on individuals (one-in-three of those providing reasons for leaving).

¹⁷ A total of three withdrawals are classified as 'deferred' but their 'return' arrangements are conjectural and not specified.

- Personal health factors or illness disrupting participation or likely to do so (a quarter of leavers).
- Other personal or family related factors (a fifth).

For around a half, more than one reason for leaving was cited suggesting multiple pressures on individuals. There is some corroborating evidence from case studies and end of cohort comments from those retained participants who had often worked closely as co-participants with subsequent leavers. This suggests that time pressures and other priorities set against the demands of individuals 'day' jobs were key factors. If so, this seems to suggest either lack of preparation for the demands of the programme or some rigidities at the workplace (schools) in Head Teachers/Principals or other Senior Management Team (SMT) colleagues working with the participants in providing sufficient flexibility or otherwise accommodating these demands. One of the SBD case studies suggested that the demands of independent learning, in particular, may have affected the high dropout rates from the pilot - especially for those without a higher education background.

While the evaluators are cautious about reading too much significance into these circumstances, taken at face value it suggests that the programme emerged as either overly demanding or of doubtful relevance for a significant cluster of recruits. This implies some misunderstanding about, or inappropriate briefing for, programme content and focus and attention has been drawn to this in leavers' comments about their withdrawal. While this remains a minority opinion – as shown below, it suggests greater attention may need to be paid to pre-application information exchange about the programme and/or pre-selection briefing before individuals make a commitment to starting.

The evaluation also suggests that these high drop-out rates had implications for those who remained in the programme. The case studies show how withdrawal has become a perverse feature of delivery and has been commented on by participants who see the diminishing numbers as discouraging and reducing the value of knowledge exchange in the programme. One case study participant who remained strongly committed to SBD noted that:

...at low points (of the programme)...you start to look at all those who have dropped out and wonder if you are up to it. It's a confidence issue.

3.4 Participants experience and expectations

Evidence is stronger for 'end-user' experiences about their expectations of SBD and subsequent experiences of the pilot. The evaluation draws on evidence from the participant surveys, the early face-to-face observation and participant discussions

and the four case studies. This suggests that entrants to SBD had often very individualised expectations of the programme but with some recurring themes:

- Expectations of enhanced skills for systems leadership were difficult to unpick from this evidence, perhaps because of the novelty of the concept for many. However, individuals who were in schools in, or looking towards, federation or making more effective use of current federal arrangements (eg formalising currently informal arrangements) commonly saw SBD as a timely stimulus for upgrading personal skills and capabilities to drive forward and manage change agendas. However, one participant did reflect early in the programme that:

...by studying the SBD programme now there is an opportunity for it to shape and influence my development as a system leader...encouraging and supporting me to think conceptually, creatively and to identify new and improved ways of operating and overcoming barriers.

- A related expectation was that participation would provide individuals with a deeper knowledge base and the confidence and skills to direct and shape partnership working, particularly where school(s) leaders recognised this as a strategic direction but did not want to undertake that role. For a minority of participants at least, feedback suggests that this seemed to be about providing the leadership tools and personal confidence to review and make decisions about the options and operational needs for partnership development. For some of the completers, the partnership perspective went much wider and with one case study stating that the programme was expected to:

...enable me to establish networks within the community...allow me to engage in dialogue and critical reflection with other professionals.

- Some expectations were more localised and centred on preparation for better management skills to lead and direct cross-functional teams. One case study reflected on the fact that they needed to do more than act as a line manager for support staff but were placed in an emerging role of leading the 'non-teaching' system in the school. For others there were also change agendas here, with another participant observing that a major expectation of participation was in developing her skills to lead the in-school remodelling of the support workforce.

Not all those interviewed had been previously involved in NCTL programmes but among three quarters that had, this had conditioned their expectations. Here, the case study evidence at least suggested that the pilot seems to have been strongly influenced by participants' previous experience of earlier pilot programmes for CSBM, DSBM and ADSBM. As one summarised this:

The thing with doing a pilot is that you have to be very open-minded because you are dealing with new thought processes, new materials and things can change. With SBD even more so, as it can change at any minute.

Overall, the evidence suggests that individuals' expectations of the programme were well aligned with the vision of SBD. Among the case studies, none of those interviewed were disappointed by their subsequent experiences of the programme against those expectations.

3.5 Content and quality

HOST's earlier assessment of the programme at its mid point had painted a picture of continuing satisfaction with much of the content of the programme. However, at that point many participants had yet to complete important elements of the pilot and notable placements and planned (reciprocal) visits. The end of cohort survey is able to extend that analysis although was able to draw only on feedback from 17 respondents completing the programme and in two specific areas for looking at the content and some aspects of the quality of the programme:

- The overall quality of the learning experience across the programme.
- The participants' experiences of their learning coach interaction and support.

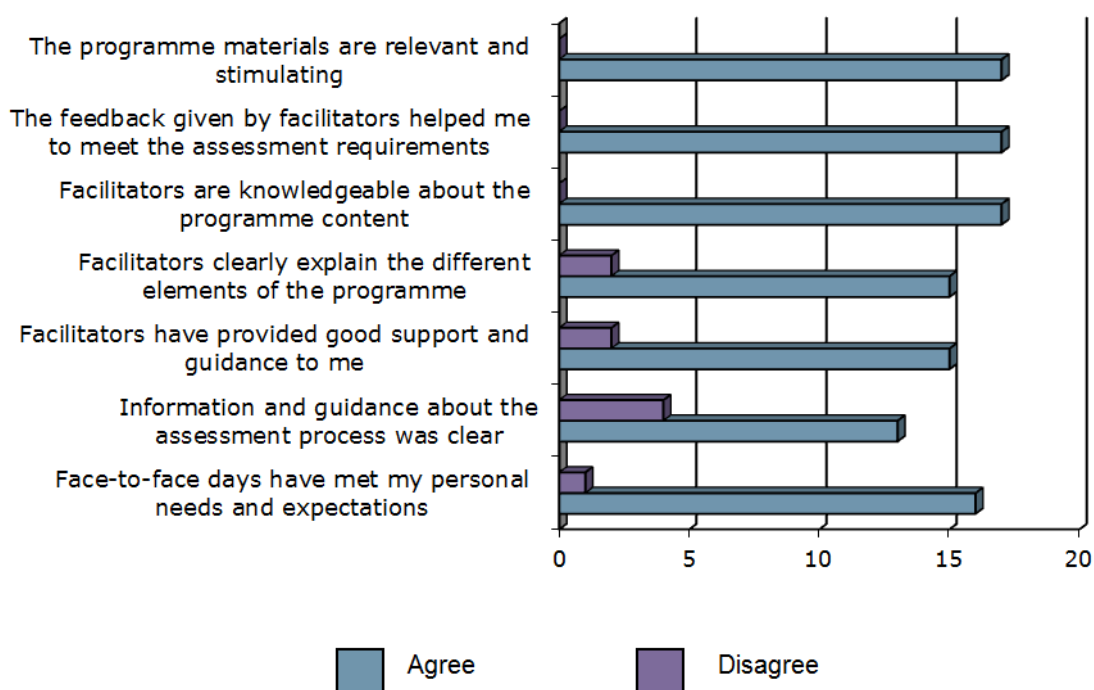
Both tested a number of key variables as set by NCTL.

Learning experience: Figure 1 sets out the findings based on these small numbers. This shows high levels of continuing satisfaction with the content and effectiveness of the pilot and notably for the programme materials, help from facilitators and their level of knowledge as well as the face-to-face days. It is also notable that not only do a very large majority of participants agree that these areas provided high quality experiences, most of these 'strongly agreed' this was the case.

Although it is still not the experience of most, there was some caution about facilitators' explanation of the inter-relationships about the elements of the programme, but also a minority who felt that the experience was less robust for facilitators' support and for the quality of information and guidance about assessment. Numbers are too small here, as elsewhere, to look at any contrasting experiences - and their determinants - in these figures.

This is important evidence of effectiveness in these tested areas. However, this must be interpreted with some caution as there is no feedback against these measures for over a half of entrants who left before the end of cohort analysis was undertaken.

Figure 1 Quality of the learning experience

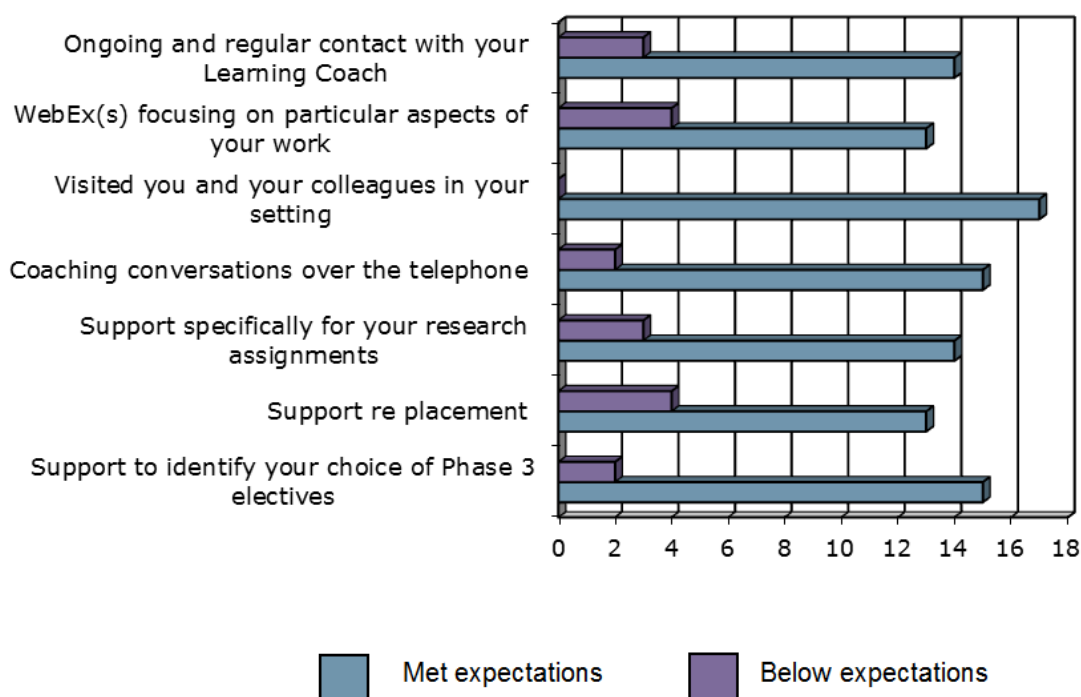


Valid cases = 17 (no of participant completers)

Source: NCTL end of cohort survey, June 2011

Learning coach interaction and support: The completers were asked if they were allocated a learning coach to provide support, direction and challenge and if their expectations were met. Overall, there was satisfaction with how well this important aspect of SBD had worked but it was universal only for arrangements for making site visits. This was also one of three areas attracting the strongest endorsements from participants who assessed the effectiveness of the coach as 'exceeding expectations' - although not rising much above a third of participants for this or any other area of tested effectiveness.

Figure 2 Effectiveness of learning coach support



Valid cases = 17 (no of participant completers)

Source: NCTL end of cohort survey, June 2011

There was some minority dissatisfaction with the support in other areas and further analysis suggests this was clustered in a group of around a third of the respondents. Here dissatisfaction with elements of learning coach support was greater for the WebEx interactions and support in placements, although it must be remembered that even here many more participants felt their expectations were met than not.

This experience was echoed in the case studies where interaction with learning coaches attracted mixed feedback although in general their role in the programme and 'remote' support was welcomed. Half of the case studies regarded this as integral to their ability to continue with the programme, although the evidence suggested that much depended on continuity of support and the 'fit' between coach and participants. Two of the case studies drew attention to the importance of the visits made by the coach to the participant's workplace. This was seen as highly valued in helping individuals to contextualise their learning and choices. However, there was some volatility in learning coaches' engagement with participants and, mid programme, two of the interviewed participants were working with their second coach. This change had been disrupting, although in one case initiated at the participants' request. These interviewees reported others to have had similar experiences and anecdotal evidence suggests one participant was reported to be on her fifth coach.

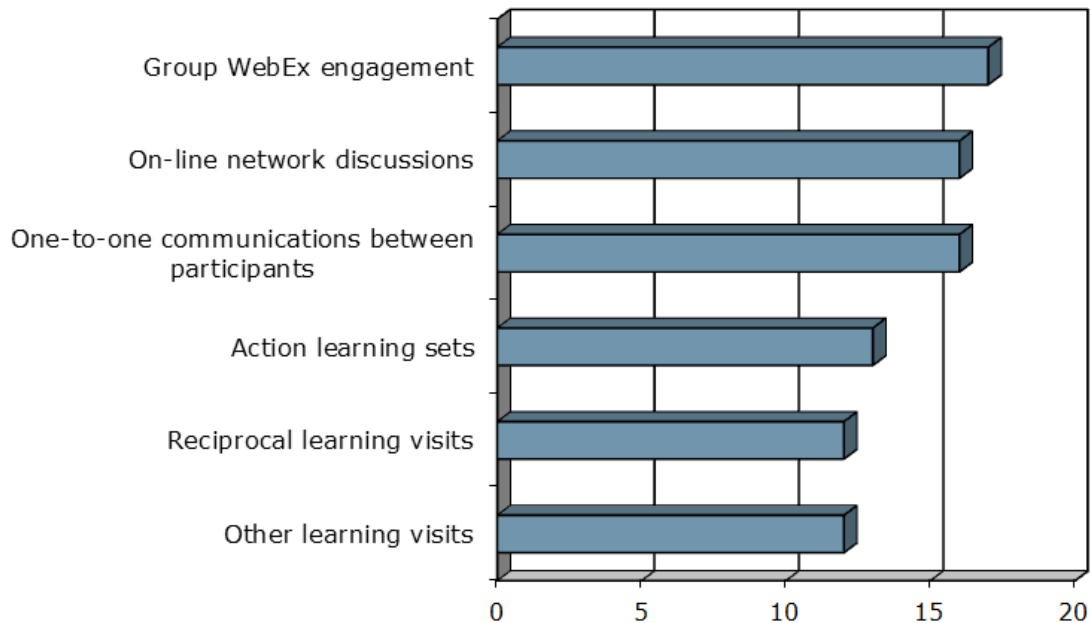
3.6 Delivery model and effectiveness

Participants have consistently shown high levels of satisfaction with the pilot activity, and in particular the blended model emerges as well balanced, re-enforcing and well-regarded, although with some teething troubles with specific aspects. More informal aspects of the learning in this model were also highly valued including, for example, feedback at the face-to-face event where participants reported some relevant discussions on, for example, effects of public sector expenditure cuts. Some of these issues have been picked up in the closing survey of this pilot, specifically for:

- The use and utility of group participation.
- Reciprocal learning visits for sharing better practice.
- HEI modules and proposed Master Level engagement.
- Professional placement activity in the programme.

Group participation: The NCTL survey of completers asked how participants had been encouraged to share their learning experiences through various group participation arrangements. The feedback showed that participants had engaged in been widely involved in the arrangements (Figure 3), but with a contrast between almost universal participation in group WebEx discussions, on-line networks, and one-to-one communications and reciprocal learning visits, other learning visits and action learning sets where around a quarter of completers had not taken part.

Figure 3 Participation in groupwork activities in the pilot



Valid cases = 17 (no of participant completers)

Source: NCTL end of cohort survey, June 2011

Reciprocal learning visits: Just under 70 per cent of those completing the programme and responding to the survey had engaged in a reciprocal learning visit. The aim of these was to provide participants with the opportunity to share experiences and practice. The evidence shows that those who had not done so, were unable to do so because of what were seen by two as short notice for arranging the visits, high work loads and (in two cases) because of a lack of opportunities within a reasonable travelling distance. All of these issues were evidenced in the case studies, although some of those interviewed had been able to overcome the difficulties.

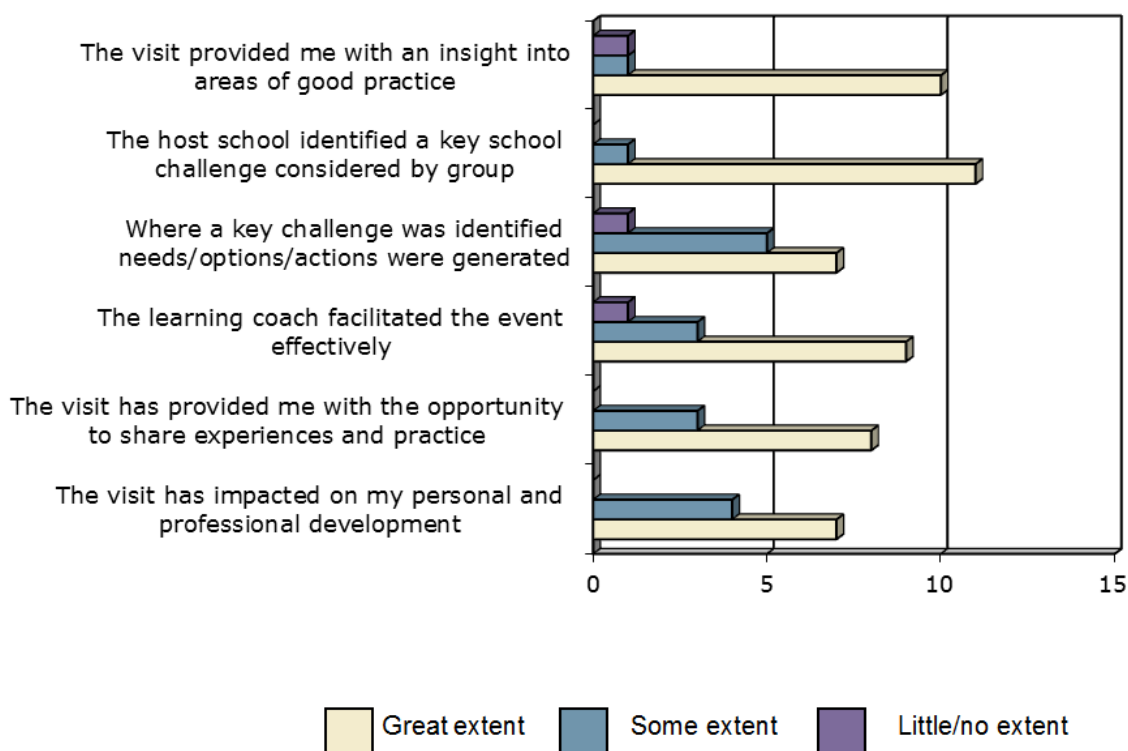
The evidence also shows that many fewer respondents had hosted reciprocal visits (18%). There were various reasons given, with half of those not hosting visits saying this was because of time constraints at school or because they were not asked to do so. The imbalance between completers participating in visits and hosting them suggests that most visits were either clustered in a few host sites or were hosted by people subsequently leaving the programme.

The survey also looked at, to what extent visits had impacted on personal and professional development, and the effect was widely seen as positive. Across a range of measured effects nearly all those completing saw an impact to a 'great extent' or to 'some extent', and Figure 3.4 shows the effect was most substantial for providing insights into areas of good practice. The feedback also suggested that processes for optimising the value of visits, including learning coach facilitation, was also widely seen as working well although with one respondent reporting that their learning coach had failed to facilitate the visit effectively.

HEI modules: Participants had the opportunity to study with one of four HEIs - Anglia Ruskin University, Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU), University of Leicester or at the Institute of Education (IoE) at the University of London. All completers who registered - eight with IoE, six with MMU, three with Leicester and nine with Anglia Ruskin - the registration predominantly led by geographical influences. Of these, just three (18%) progressed to module passes and each of these were registered at IoE. At MMU and Leicester there were no completers. One of the module 'graduates' is keen to progress to Master Level study and one may do so. All other programme completers will not be taking advantage of the opportunity built into the pilot to register with their host HEI for further Master Level study.

Although few were able to accredit their HEI engagement, most (67%) felt that the opportunity to study a module at an HEI was a valuable element of the SBD programme. On a number of tested measures nearly all registrants felt that the module was relevant to their professional development and had added value to their Phase 3 research and leadership development modules, although with a minority stating that it was of little value for the second of these. However, the evaluation also suggests there may be some issues with the consistency of some of the HEI inputs. Although numbers are very small there seems to be some variance across HEIs in this perspective, with all of those registered at IoE agreeing about the value including those which did not progress to assessment, while a third of those at MMU and most of at Leicester disagreed. On this evidence the HEI linkage embedded into the pilot seems to have been a mixed success - and the progression pathway to Master Level study has not been a great success.

Figure 4 Feedback from participants on value and organisation of reciprocal learning visits



Valid cases = 13 (no of participant completers with learning visits)

Source NCTL end of cohort survey, June 2011

This experience seems to contradict the mid programme evidence and notably that from the case studies where the HEI module and the prospect of Master Level study were valued. On this evidence, it seems that the enthusiasm wanes as the module progressed to assessment, with the main reason for not going forward for assessment apparently being time demands at school, although one respondents did observe that: ‘...the assessment needs were made clear to us far too late’.

Professional placement: Conduct and completion of a professional placement was an important part of the SBD programme, and mid-pilot one of which the case study participants had high expectations. The end-of-cohort surveys shows that among responding completers, just under two thirds (64%) were able to complete the placement mostly in other school settings. For those with placements, the great majority (90%) felt that the negotiated placement fell into the category that they had selected. There was some dissatisfaction with the identification process and a half of those with placements (and nearly all of those without) did not feel that identification of an appropriate placement was managed effectively. Other feedback suggested that this mostly centred on concerns about the preparatory arrangements for the placement where a majority felt these were not handled efficiently.

For those with placements, most (83%) felt the placement provided a valuable learning experience and most of these valued this highly. These also generally felt that the placement contributed to the development of the 'host organisation' (75%). Views were more mixed on the role played in contributing to the SBD Phase 3 specialist research and leadership development modules, but most (80%) felt it did complement other areas of study for the SBD programme.

On the available evidence, participants were generally providing positive feedback on the pilot design and with the exception of some evident concerns about the consistency of the learning coach inputs, were also widely positive about delivery. Earlier (mid project) evaluation evidence also pointed to some concerns about the 360° diagnostic process and the use and utility of the learning log¹⁸ where deliverers and users alike felt that the piloted version of the log was too repetitive and arduous.

However, as noted above, this feedback must be treated with some caution since it takes no account of the experiences of participants who failed to complete the programme. Although the completers have provided what might be seen as 'proxy' evidence for this, it suggests a gap in current monitoring arrangements if drop out rates continue to be high.

¹⁸ In the pilot, the learning log was completed initially as participants progressed through the two-day development event and any remodelling of that input (and participant selection) provides an opportunity to recast the role of the log.

Chapter 4: Impact and Benefits of SBD

Key findings:

- a) Impact evidence for the pilot is limited and could be usefully extended to capture partial impacts from those withdrawing from the programme and also for a wider range of measures for completers.
- b) The evidence that is available is widely – and strongly – positive, with nearly all completers agreeing there was impact on their own professional development (and confidence), profile within the school, ‘referred’ benefits for colleagues and efficiency gains for schools achieved within the life of the pilot. These gains were not quantified but such evidence may become available as the evaluation progresses.
- c) Case study and survey evidence combined suggests that assignments and placements were among the most influential aspects of the pilot and that impacts were strongest for understanding policy developments and levers and an enhanced ability to provide strategic direction within schools.

4.1 Introduction

The achieved impact of a pilot programme such as this is an important indicator of its success and potential for wider application. The pilot evaluation has consequently been tasked with looking at what impacts and benefits have been achieved from participation and this chapter looks at:

- The feedback from participants in the end of cohort impact assessment.
- The case study evidence on benefit realisation and added value.

Impact assessment raises special challenges for small scale pilots such as this and the starting point for this review is consequently looking at the quality of the evidence we are able to draw on. This also provides an important context for assessing the implications of the overall assessment of the pilot which follows in the next chapter.

4.2 Impact evidence

This assessment is able to draw on some survey feedback from participants completing the programme, although not for those withdrawing who may also have seen benefits, and the mid-pilot case studies. The first interim evaluation report on the wider programme set out some concerns about the range and quality of impact evidence available to the evaluators. These concerns apply also to the SBD pilot but are added to by the relatively small scale of the pilot - which makes any differentiation of impacts in different school or participant contexts, impractical.

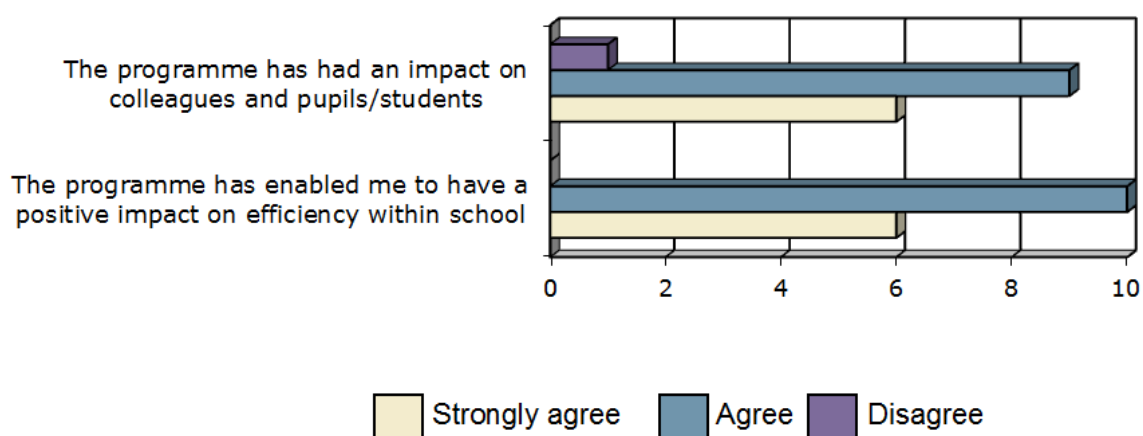
The survey evidence has the value of its currency providing a self assessed picture of impacts shortly after participants concluded SBD. However, the survey format sought a range of participant feedback - as reviewed in the previous chapter, and had a limited focus on impacts.

The case studies have provided evidence to extend this picture. In particular, they provide for contextualised and deeper impact evidence and it is hoped that this can be extended as the evaluation progresses into 2011-2012 and beyond to look at medium term benefits and effects. However, these cases are not without their difficulties in isolating the impacts of the pilot. In particular, they show how participants felt it difficult to unpick benefit directly attributable to the SBD programme itself. For three quarters, this was especially the case because pilot participation had followed often hard-on-the-heels of SBM participation and those interviewed felt it difficult to differentiate what they saw as essentially cumulative impacts from SBM and SBD.

4.3 End-of-cohort impact assessment

Overall, the completers of the pilot are positive about the 'referred' impact the programme has had both on their colleagues and pupils and on efficiency in the school. Figure 4.1 shows that only one of the completers did not agree about positive impact on colleagues/pupils although the reasons for this were unclear from the survey returns. Among those agreeing, just over a third 'strongly agreed'.

Figure 5 Overall assessment of impact of the programme, June 2011



NB. 1 non-respondent

Valid cases = 16

Source: NCTL End of cohort survey, June 2011

For some the effects were substantial. One commented that she was now:

...recognised in the LA as a leading SBM [to]...provide inspiration to other SBMs...I am looking towards working alongside our Head Teacher as an SLE and enhancing the system support we already provide.

Another observed that despite considerable difficulties in participation in the second half of the programme alongside the demands of her school work-load and change agendas arising from these, she recognised that:

The program has provided me with more knowledge of styles, systems and methods to help me address some of the needs in my personal role developing me as a professional...and taking a more sophisticated approach to the way I carry out my role. The issues of research and conceptual thinking have been well publicised throughout the program and finally I am using these tools to a greater degree. I feel that I will benefit immensely as a leader and practitioner from the program....

The survey data provided for a little more insight into some of the specific benefits realised. Here, Figure 4.2 shows that on a number of the measures tested by NCTL, an 'enhanced ability to provide strategic direction' and a 'deeper understanding of (government) policy' were the impact indicators securing strongest support by participants as outcomes from the pilot. However, on a series of tested measures, there was almost a universal agreement that SBD had a professional impact by the end of the pilot. The area of impact which seemed the least strongly supported was for 'extending personal expertise in external consultancy' such as with other schools. This may be a deferred impact for some but even here all but two completers felt this was some impact.

It was notable that in two specific areas close to the rationale for the focus and development of this higher level programme, there was extensive evidence of impact. For 'enhanced understanding of system leadership/ability to work in system leader roles' all respondents agreed there was an achieved personal impact. Also, all similarly felt they had made a 'personal contribution to a wider SBM knowledge base'.

4.4 SBD benefit realisation and added value

The case studies provided for richer evidence of impacts although participants here found it difficult to relate achieved benefits directly to the SBD programme itself. Most of these had only relatively recently completed SBM programmes and found that gains for them as individuals and at schools were mainly cumulative and not specifically attributable to SBM or SBD.

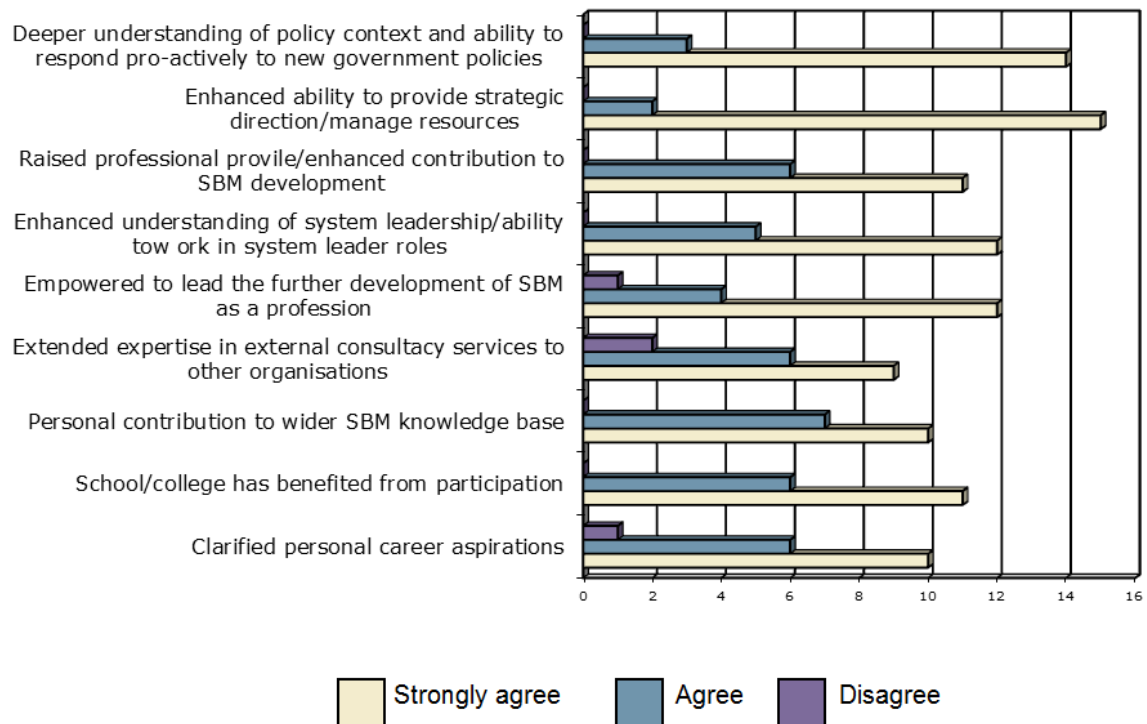
The case studies have been reported in more detail in the draft final report (April 2011) but looking across these there appear to be three early areas where benefits were identified by those interviewed. One is the way in which a participant and their school/college profits from the confidence that success on the programmes brings for the participant. One head commented:

Without any shadow of a doubt the 'courses' she has been on have allowed her to progress at a faster rate...It has had a huge impact on her working life.

This was echoed by other heads involved in these cases and one mentor among other interviewees, with all commenting on greater confidence and an enhanced role or integration within the senior management team (SMT).

A second area of impact, is the early use of, for example, assessment tasks on the programme and, in one case, a completed placement which can lead to innovation as participants try to put theory into practice in their own context. One example is a team building exercise conducted by an SBD participant in her new school after being just in post for a term and who felt she was: ‘...applying theory learnt on the programme and trying to put it into practice’.

Figure 6 Professional impact of the programme, June 2011



Valid cases = 17

Source: NCTL End of cohort survey, June 2011

Another interviewee tasked by the SMT with conducting a systems review in preparation for a likely bid for academy status had deliberately chosen a placement with an Academy Trust and preparation for this had already produced a scoping paper for the SMT described by the head as: ‘...quite exceptional...full of critical judgement...spot on’. Another felt she had been able to make early use of system leadership content to improve her profile and working relationships with partnership schools and felt she now: ‘...had the confidence to get to grips with this as the vital ingredient of my job...what I do on the SMT which no one else does’.

A third area for added value is in terms of the impact on those support staff who will be line managed by the SBD. A number of senior colleagues involved in the case study interviews talk in terms of the role model offered to the school support staff. In this, the commitment of the SBDs to their own professional development provides a very positive example of how quality CPD can be of value to all staff in a school not just to those directly involved in teaching.

Beyond this the case study evidence suggests considerable anticipated potential for future impact.

Chapter 5: Issues and Implications

5.1 Introduction

The wider SBM evaluation, of which this is a part, commenced ten months ago and, within this, looking at the SBD pilot has been an early and continuing priority. This is the third and last of the staged review of the SBD pilot that will be presented as standalone reviews and it provides a comprehensive assessment of the successes of this timely development by NCTL to develop a higher level programme to meet professional and policy needs. Findings are drawn together here to look at early issues and implications arising from the findings set out in the previous chapters for:

- Programme performance and impact.
- Programme design and effectiveness.
- Issues arising for NCTL.
- Issues arising for the evaluation.

It is hoped that discussion on these conclusions will contribute to the continued evolution of the pilot, set against changing circumstances for NCTL and the sector as well as for further enhancing the focus of the evaluation and the evidence it is able to draw on.

5.2 Programme performance and impact

The evaluation concludes that NCTL has shown significant foresight in developing this higher level programme within the SBM suite. Its content and focus, as piloted, looks to be suitable for purpose and is relevant to the specific change pressures and rising demands on school business managers who are operating in a rapidly evolving schools policy context. The findings also suggests that pilot delivery through a personalised and blended approach to learning, with embedded enquiry linked to practice development, is also well placed to meet school and individual needs. Although it remains early days, there is also 'front-line' evidence that this is contributing directly to building (and disseminating) a practical knowledge and skills base for the professional development needs of school business managers at the highest levels.

Early demand for the programme has been stimulated and the achieved recruitment suggests there is potential for 'progression' demand to continue to be tapped from earlier cohorts in DSBM and ADSBM. However, the recruitment strategy for the pilot has emphasised an early start and critical mass of starters over testing wider market and marketing approaches. While this has shown the effectiveness of pro-active marketing by NCTL, it has not demonstrated the level or nature of self-directed 're-active' demand for SBD.

In this crucial area of sustainability for the programme - open market demand - the pilot has, as yet, little to offer NCTL decision makers on the viability of the programme. The levels and nature of latent demand for the programme consequently remain uncertain. In addition, there is some evidence from the evaluation that any such demand might prove to be more price sensitive than current assumptions made by NCTL. While, it seems that some headteachers may have played a passive role in supporting pilot participation, the case studies suggest this might be viewed differently when direct costs to schools rise - especially for any Master level modules. However, there is no direct evidence to suggest any specific levels or thresholds for price sensitivity and the evaluation would need to draw on wider 'demand' evidence from NCTL, when available, to speculate on cost constraints to any future SBD demand.

The evaluation provides cause for concern about one other aspect of SBD sustainability - the retention of recruits on the programme. Put simply, retention rates for the pilot are much weaker than might have been legitimately expected with under a half of entrants completing. Gaps in direct evidence make it difficult to fully understand the nature of this but high drop-out rates seems to reflect some selection challenges and the need for better preparation of recruits for the demands and intensity of the course. High withdrawal rates will also be a constraint to effective marketing of a programme requiring higher levels of future direct funding by schools and individuals and may question future funding models assuming significant levels of demand from the sector.

In addressing retention, there is also apparent scope for more consistent early tutor support to address participation challenges before they become withdrawal issues. With changes in these areas, there is scope to reduce drop-out levels but the evaluation cautions that these may always be higher than for CSBM, DSBM and ADSBM because of the intensity of the programme and its challenging content.

Although the current impact evidence for the pilot is limited and not quantifiable, it is generally positive and with nearly all completers agreeing there was impact on their own professional development. For most, there was a higher profile within the school, early 'referred' benefits for colleagues and efficiency gains for the schools themselves within the life of the pilot. Other evidence suggests that assignments and placements were among the most influential aspects of the pilot and that impacts were strongest for understanding policy developments and levers and an enhanced ability to provide strategic direction within schools.

5.3 Programme design and effectiveness

The evaluation suggests that there is an endorsement of the overall effectiveness of the programme in addressing their development requirements, and with a close fit in most areas to their expectations and needs. There are consistently high levels of satisfaction with the programme among 'stayers' in the pilot, although a lot less is known about leavers. Much of the detailed evidence about programme effectiveness comes, not from the survey evidence, but the evaluation observation and case studies - reported earlier in the evaluation, and this showed:

- The blended model emerges as well balanced, re-enforcing and well-regarded. The personalised elements of the pilot were also recognised as adding value although at times making it challenging for those without an HE background to come to terms with the flexibilities and self-direction.
- The embedded approach to providing participants with a portfolio (ie a selected number of key texts supported by a module guide and units) seems also to have been well received by participants interviewed. This has encouraged participants to engage with a range of literature with non-directional support through an introductory overview of a field (and an annotated indicative bibliography). This is seen to have supported participants well in their preparation for workshop/face-to-face sessions.
- The planning and focus for face-to-face events are regarded highly and these were seen by all (with the exception of the initial development event) as well organised, effective and smoothly run. Interaction at these events in structured learning, such as group-work, was seen to have provided added value to learning, such as through exchange of ideas on new ways of working and problem-solving.
- The SBD programme provides quite a lot of 'scaffolding' for learning and possibly more than might be the case for other Levels 6/7 work. The short development time for the SBD programme seems to have meant that at least some documentation was put together, or approved, relatively intensively with key documentation often available only very close to, for example, face-to-face events (and notably for Phase 2). This emerged as a hindrance, putting an additional and unnecessary pressure on participants. There is no evidence this was seen to have led to lower quality documentation.

- Some aspects of the programme appear to provide a challenge for participants in juggling programme needs and expectations with busy 'day jobs'. Finding time for placements emerged as difficult and seems to have been partly behind the disappointing take up of placements - just two in three of the completers. It may also have made planning for reciprocal visits more difficult although take up here was much stronger. Geographical considerations compounded difficulties in reconciling pilot and work pressures, especially where the small scale and national nature of the programme meant that long journeys were needed for some. Nonetheless, those who had undertaken reciprocal visits and placements found them among the most useful aspects of the programme in influencing change at schools.

One possible concern arising is that, unlike other programmes, SBD does not have a core of common directed activities guiding all participants through the programme. In these, programme responses to activities could be put on-line and shared between participants and reflecting that at this level (Level 7) participants should be at a stage whereby greater independence is expected of them as independent learners. It should be noted, however, that concerns were raised that those without formal and recent experience of higher education might struggle with the approach and including, for example, non-graduates who have previously participated in other NCTL Programmes characterised by a stronger focus on guided content. These participants may need initial support in relation to Level 7 expectations.

The aspect of delivery attracting most concern was (on a number of indicators) the learning coach support which, for around a third of completers (and probably rather more of all participants), had not met their expectations and needs. The evaluation also shows a need to review the use and utility of the HE module and, particularly, its assessment with early evidence of apparent contrast in delivery across the three engaged HEIs. Whatever the situation, very few participants went forward to assessment of this element and, reflecting this, there seems to be little appetite to pursue progression opportunities to Master level courses.

5.4 Issues arising for NCTL

Despite the speed with which the programme has been put together, it has been built on solid foundations of identifying needs and in the demands likely to be placed by education policy nationally on more and more schools. The progressive design and development of the pilot has been a feature of content and resources but the evidence suggests this approach has retained integrity with the vision and values set by NCTL. Overall, the evaluation suggests that the programme is well placed and timely, with NCTL anticipating a potentially crucial area for higher-level capacity building in the sector.

As might be expected for a novel and ambitious programme, there have been some teething troubles. Some of these were recognised early by NCTL, and have been

responded to, including the development event and the demands of combining coursework and preparation with often 'remote' placements. These issues seem to have been identified speedily by in-programme monitoring and have been effectively addressed for the start of the 'new' pilot. However, other issues which may remain for NCTL to address include:

- The apparent volatility of engagement with (some) learning coaches - and the need to raise confidence and consistency in this crucial area of support in reducing the isolation of participants and reducing withdrawal.
- The progressive development of the programme has created some uncertainties for participants and especially in late or deferred availability of documentation. While these issues may be reduced for the new pilot, the development and sign-off processes for new content and resources emerge as hindering effective preparation for face-to-face events and the quality of learning.
- There is some evidence to suggest that the quality of mentoring seems patchy and a clearer role for internal mentors - and guidance to them - may add significant value to the programme.
- Content, while generally seen as relevant, emerges as especially demanding for participants without a university education and this may need to be reflected either in selection arrangements or pre-programme (or segmented) support to those likely to need it.

To these issues needs to be added the greater concern about just why so many people have withdrawn from SBD. While there is some evidence that selection processes have exacerbated the drop-out, leavers mostly seem to be concerned about the high levels of demands of the programme set against the pressures of their 'day jobs' in schools. We are not yet in a position to speculate further on such causes, but it would seem prudent for NCTL to look again at this issue and its causes.

The sustainability of SBD will depend on more than its responsiveness and effectiveness as a higher level programme, but also on how it can tap latent demand. This in turn will be influenced by changes arising from NCTL's emerging 'new' business model and in particular a movement away from what was effectively a full costs subsidy model to a full costs recovery model. NCTL recognises that this places pressure on the programme delivery model to retain its utility but reduce costs - while preserving the vision of the SBD Programme. Tackling this will present significant challenges and in particular:

- The emerging currency and value of the programme to schools and individuals might make a degree of cost recovery possible but the evaluation cannot yet reach any conclusion on the levels or sector affordability. However, we draw attention to the evidence from one experienced headteacher from one of England's most improved schools and who suggested a ceiling of '...maybe £900 or up to £1,000 (pa) would not put off those persuaded of its value'. An element of cost recovery might ensure the full commitment of individuals and their school leaders to the programme, and reduce drop-out, but may not be welcomed by schools with small or hard pressed staff development budgets. This would mean that the programme would not be available to all those who might benefit from it.
- The intensity of the programme may be creating difficulties and the evaluation has suggested that running the programme over two years might reduce pressures on participants. This would also give scope for a clearer in-school development engagement and also the chance to minimise disturbances to participants demanding in-school roles. Such an approach would also help to spread costs across annual budgets at school level - alleviating some of the cost pressures on schools.
- If completion of the SBD programme leads to automatic accreditation, of say between 30 and 60 credits at Masters Level, then the pressure and cost of completing Masters Level modules at the same time as undertaking the assessed elements of the SBD programme itself would be reduced.

While much has been achieved, the pilot has seen initial challenges largely related to the pace of development and implementation. However, other problems may be deeper seated and the evaluation suggests that the new pilot provides opportunities to review reasons for withdrawal, critically appraise the cost-base of the programme and assess opportunities for cost-efficiencies which would not detract from value. We also commend the need for more robust market research to help shape charging practices and establish 'open' marketing needs for roll-out.

5.5 Issues arising for the evaluation

This is the first summative output from the evaluation and it suggests a number of issues that need to be addressed if NCTL is to secure maximum value from future outputs.

More consistent information about withdrawal determinants: The evaluation has previously drawn attention to the fact that while withdrawal rates are high, the available information from leavers is not comprehensive and lacks consistency in sourcing and quality. This would seem to continue to be a significant omission for a pilot programme of this, essentially, experimental nature. We commend a review of the way that withdrawal events are captured, how reasons for withdrawal are assessed and consistently reported.

More robust equalities evidence: Again, the evaluation has previously set out (for SBM) concerns that we are unable to look at the diversity successes of the programme. These issues apply also to SBD and we commend the college in looking at how to align its robust application data for diversity characteristics with the weak capability to relate this to subsequent in-programme experiences and achievements.

Enhancing impact evidence: Capturing impact evidence provides challenges for a programme of this nature and where post-programme effects can be difficult to identify. However, we are conscious that the successes of SBD will be measured very largely in terms of the returns for school - and this in turn will affect the perceived 'value' of the programme and returns on school (and individual) investments in it. These data are currently very limited and there is scope to enhance the content and classification of such effects in the end of the cohort survey, where qualitative evaluation evidence set out here can contribute to design of more robust indicators. We would also commend a post-graduation impact survey to be conducted by NCTL at six months after completion and a review of opportunities for conducting more longitudinal case studies to provide contextualised examples of impacts achieved. This approach has already proven its value for the evaluation and could be extended to provide material for subsequent marketing. Finally we would draw attention to the fact that, with high dropout, the evaluation may be undercounting achieved effects, since the available evidence on impact does not capture partial impacts from those withdrawing from the programme.

Finally, the delivery arrangements for the second SBD pilot (which commenced in April 2011) have been intensified and moved wholly in-house by NCTL. This is an important development and while it provides an opportunity for even closer monitoring of activity and outputs, it also raises some immediate needs for capturing any early implications for participants' experience of the organisation of the programme. We suggest that, subject to data being available, this should be an additional focus for the proposed second interim report of the evaluation (end October 2011).

We look forward to the opportunity of exploring the scope for these changes to enhance the evaluation, and how it can best support the evolving programme.



National College for
Teaching & Leadership

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Reference: DFE-RR335H

ISBN: 978-178105-347-8

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