

# Pushing at an open door

Research into the factors influencing the transfer of education leaders across to senior LA roles and the DCS role.



**AUTUMN 2020**

A study carried out by SDSA, commissioned by the UPON Programme Consortium, supported by the DfE.

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This is an interactive PDF



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## Foreword

Welcome to this report. This study investigated some of the factors that influence senior education leaders to choose or avoid a career path that takes them into local government service. It looked into the rationale behind the career decisions of senior education leaders, LA strategic leaders and Directors of Children's Services (DCSs). The study was commissioned by the UPON Programme Consortium, who have a particular interest to learn how they might attract more education leaders to follow this career route and support them with leadership development programmes to potentially become DCSs.

The study benefited from valuable contributions from a wide range of significant and influential colleagues, to whom we are thankful for their insights and perceptions. The SDSA team members contributing to this report were Rebecca Smith, Kate Drurey, Peter Chilvers and Pauline Smith (Associate).

## The UPON Programme Consortium

The UPON Programme Consortium partners are the Staff College, the Institute for Public Care, Gatenby Sanderson and Skills for Care. They have been commissioned by the DfE to increase the pool of talent able to become Directors of Children's Services, by attracting a diverse range of participants with strong potential to progress to DCS roles and equipping them with the core behaviours, skills and capacities necessary to do so.

### Acronyms and abbreviations used in this report

**AD** Assistant Director  
**CCG** Clinical Commissioning Group  
**CEO** Chief Executive Officer

**DCS** Director of Children's Services  
**EHCP** Education, Health and Care Plan  
**LA** Local Authority

**MAT** Multi-Academy Trust  
**SEND** Special Educational Needs and Disability

# 1. Executive summary

## Research into the factors influencing the transfer of education leaders across to senior LA roles and the DCS role.

This research was commissioned by the UPON Programme Consortium, on behalf of the DfE, into the factors influencing the transfer of education leaders across to senior LA roles and DCS role. It involved a qualitative and quantitative survey, focus group discussions and individual interviews and was conducted by the SDSA from October to December 2020. The key messages identified below are consistent across respondents from both LA and school sectors.

### Key messages from the research

**The desire to make a difference to all children's lives,** especially in the disrupted world of Covid-19, was a key feature of responses from the headteachers of small primary schools or CEOs of large MATs. This positive motivation to make a difference for the wider community beyond school was explored through focus groups and interview discussions. The **enhanced partnership working** on a more equal footing involving LA, schools and other agencies indicates a 'new collective moral consciousness' and increased commitment to civic responsibility and desire to lead improvement across the community.

**There is emergent evidence that relationships between schools and LAs have improved** during the Covid-19 pandemic, enabling headteachers to look outside their professional silos. There is the possibility of a 'new breed of academy heads' who are more open and willing to engage in partnership with the LA and be involved in multi-agency working, especially around the child and family. There is a desire to work together more strategically to find a way of joining up 'experts in education' with 'experts in local authority' on an equal footing. In general, there was a strong desire to be joint 'leaders of place'. The opportunity to build on this closer partnership working and build bridges between LAs and schools more effectively seems to respondents and researchers to be key in attracting talented education leaders into senior LA roles and onto the Aspirant DCS route going forwards.

**However, there are some significant challenges** to this enhanced partnership working between LAs and schools automatically leading into a transfer of education leaders into senior LA roles or DCS role. Researchers pursued these inhibitors with focus groups and interviewees who offered insights based on experience and potential solutions.

Respondents from schools and LA sectors alike provided suggestions of how LAs can build on the recently increased partnership working and can **reach out and communicate more openly with the education sector.** This reaching out would help to address the lack of knowledge and anonymity of the local authority and the DCS role to academy trusts and schools, especially in the primary sector. A more overt valuing of education skills and expertise is seen as important to some respondents with an education background; reference

was made to ensuring marketing and application materials reflected this value.

The bureaucratic working culture and political processes of LA work were referred to negatively by school respondents. The slow pace of change due to the necessity of specialist scrutiny and political approval were compared unfavourably by academy headteachers with the agility and autonomy of MATs to make a difference more immediately.

Respondents proposed that the challenges of LA working processes can only be understood by **education leaders experiencing leadership in a political environment.** The importance of providing opportunities for experiential professional learning was a constant and consistent message for the UPON Programme Consortium. Interviewees provided specific examples of secondments, work placements, shadowing and joint projects where an education leader could experience the culture of the LA in action.

The importance of investing in professional development and having a suitable coach and mentor was proposed by many respondents. Education leaders spoke highly of the **well-developed talent spotting, leadership development and coaching and mentoring culture in schools and academy trusts.** They were generally unaware of the professional and leadership development opportunities available in local authorities.

**Coaching and mentoring in the work place** was generally seen as being the way in which education leaders could be supported with their knowledge gaps related to social care and for addressing the development of skills needed for working with politicians and members. Education leaders could be helped to understand how to cope with the level of risks involved in the social care aspects of the DCS role. Mentoring is needed but this should be structured and personalised.

**The importance of clarifying and developing applicants' strategic and transferable leadership skills** became evident through the focus groups and interviews. Respondents referred to the way in which specific knowledge for example of social care is less important in LA senior leaders than their high order strategic analytical and partnership building skills. Many CEOs of MATs felt that they have developed these transferable strategic leadership skills and several expressed an interest in applying for the DCS career route; perhaps especially after 10 or so years in the CEO role. It is also the case that academy trusts are developing new 'hybrid roles', several of which are focussed on building strategic partnerships. These senior education leaders are suggested as also being suitable candidates for the DCS career route. It is worth noting that education leaders do not see salary, pension and leave issues as being highly significant.

We explored in some depth the **leadership development activities** that would support the transfer of educational leaders into local authorities. Both LA and school respondents spoke about the professional silos that exist at present

## Executive summary continued

inhibiting powerful multi professional learning and leadership development. National policy developments in sector-led leadership, development and accreditation over the past ten years have inhibited multi-professional leadership development taking place across the social care, education and health sectors. However, it can still be seen in other professional leadership development, such as through the Police College.

Respondents spoke about the way in which the **uncertainty of the national political landscape for local authorities is an inhibitor at this point in time**. There is a need for Government to reiterate and recognise the essential role of DCS as leader of place in order for educational leaders to transfer into local authorities. Similarly, the potential **lack of resources** going into local authorities to 'get the job done' is also seen as a potential and growing inhibitor post Covid.

This lack of national government clarity at this point in time is seen as a potential problem in the **design of the future leaders programme**. There appears to be uncertainty in terms of whether the programme designers should focus on a short-term approach, targeting credible senior education people directly into the DCS level. If so, the training requirement is likely to be a short gap filling programme. If however it is a more long-term approach looking to target and grow a pool of professionally interested candidates who can gain experience and develop their leadership over time, some of whom may progress to eventually becoming DCS, then this is seen as potentially far more forward looking, requiring experiential learning, especially in the political dimension and in the civic 'leadership of place'.

Respondents offered **some detailed suggestions on the design of leadership development programmes** to support the transfer of education leaders across to LA and DCS career routes. There was support for the notion of developing **'intermediate step programmes'** for people earlier on in their career journey where they can benefit from significant engagement opportunities of working with LA colleagues. These smaller 'exposure' pre-DCS employment opportunities within the LA environment, need transitional support (e.g. secondment, coaching, task focused, part time). There was considerable support from respondents for short term roles (up to 2 years) where people can try out the role and start to see themselves as leaders who can build the bridges and connections that are required in leading strategic partnerships.

Interesting and practical suggestions for the UPON Programme Consortium and LAs on how to manage this need for experiential professional learning were made. For example that the UPON Programme or LAs start to create **schemes for school leaders to volunteer for experiences** that will strengthen their knowledge and understanding. These voluntary experiences on an organised basis may address the financial challenge of secondments which may possibly be too great, and instead offer a low cost/no cost option. Another suggestion referred to the spare capacity of National Leaders

of Education and Pupil Premium Reviewers to engage in LA strategic work.

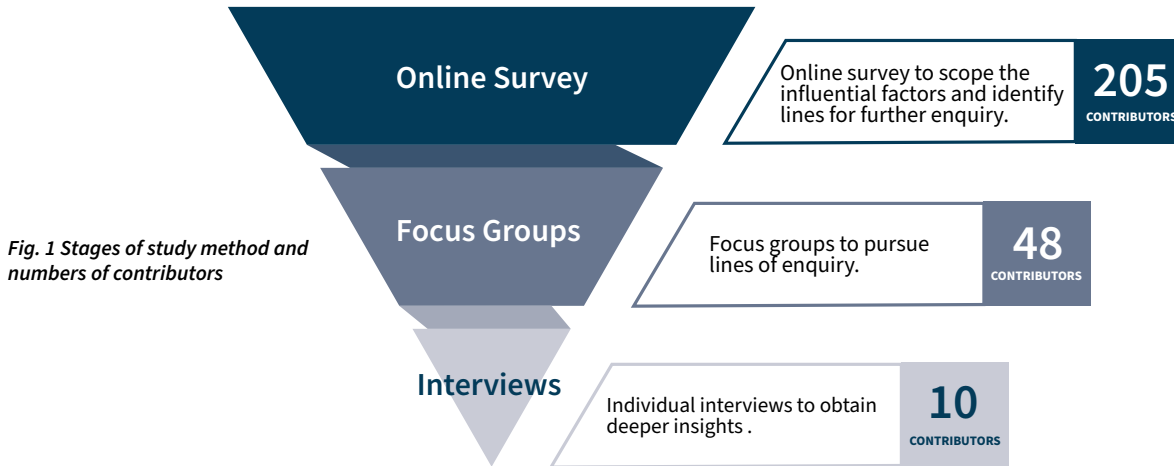
**In sum**, the importance of **work-based experiential learning** dominated interviewees' responses when asked about the type of leadership development activities the UPON Programme should consider. Learning from experience, through partnerships, work placements, secondments, shadowing, mentoring and coaching activities were uppermost in all survey, focus groups and interview responses.

**Finally**, despite the identified inhibitors, it is clear from this research and the enthusiasm of survey, focus group and interview respondents that there is a considerable interest in providing solutions to the challenge of the transfer of talented education leaders into LA senior or DCS roles. There is a real sense that Staff College/DfE will be **'pushing at an open door'** and that quick wins can be achieved through experiential professional learning; and, when role models of successful DCSs with an education background are disseminated more widely.



## 2. Description of methods and participants

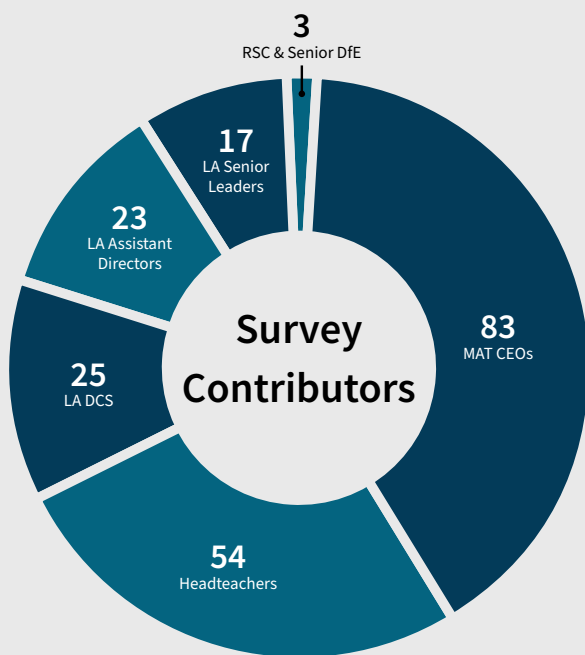
This study was conducted in autumn 2020. The methodology included an initial survey, followed by a series of focus groups and then individual interviews.



The survey explored some of the propositions within literature and common usage about influential factors that attract or inhibit senior education leaders when considering career options that might take them into local authority roles. The purpose of the survey was to establish the significance of these factors and to invite further dialogue.

The survey targeted serving leaders at or around the career point being investigated. Participation was invited both from within the school sector and local government. Invitations reached just over 650 colleagues of whom 31% (205) participated. These contributors held roles as depicted in Fig. 2 and were geographically spread as Fig. 3.

**Fig. 2 Roles of contributors**



**Fig. 3 Employment location of contributors**



## Description of methods continued

The survey was used to test out some initial lines of enquiry and assumptions which were based on an earlier literature review and discussions with Staff College Consortium Leads and potential participants. Questions were formed around the assumption that there are psychological factors (perceptions and motivations), practical/organisational and career related factors which might attract or inhibit talented educational leaders from transferring across to senior LA roles or the aspirant DCS route. The validity of these factors was tested through the survey, which proved to be an effective instrument to elicit views about the factors in question and enabled participants to contribute to the study both within the survey itself and by volunteering for focus groups.

Having identified the main influencing factors that both attract and inhibit career choices, the study then probed these more deeply through a range of focus group discussions. Focus group participants received a summary of the survey findings before their discussions so that the lines of enquiry could build upon this stage of the study and explore the significance of the influencing factors and potential changes that might affect career decisions.

Five separate focus groups were held involving 48 headteachers, CEOs of MATs and LA senior leaders/DCS. The discussions explored the survey's qualitative and quantitative findings, using a solution-focused, questioning approach to find out what participants from school and LA sector thought might be helpful. In particular the focus groups looked at the role of the UPON Programme and other leadership development programmes that might have a part to play at this career nexus.

Focus groups were well attended and the responses of the participating education and LA leaders to probing questions helped to illuminate the issues identified in the earlier survey. They also provided a number of suggestions and examples of the ways senior education leaders have successfully bridged some of the inhibiting factors in order to work in and with LAs at a senior level.

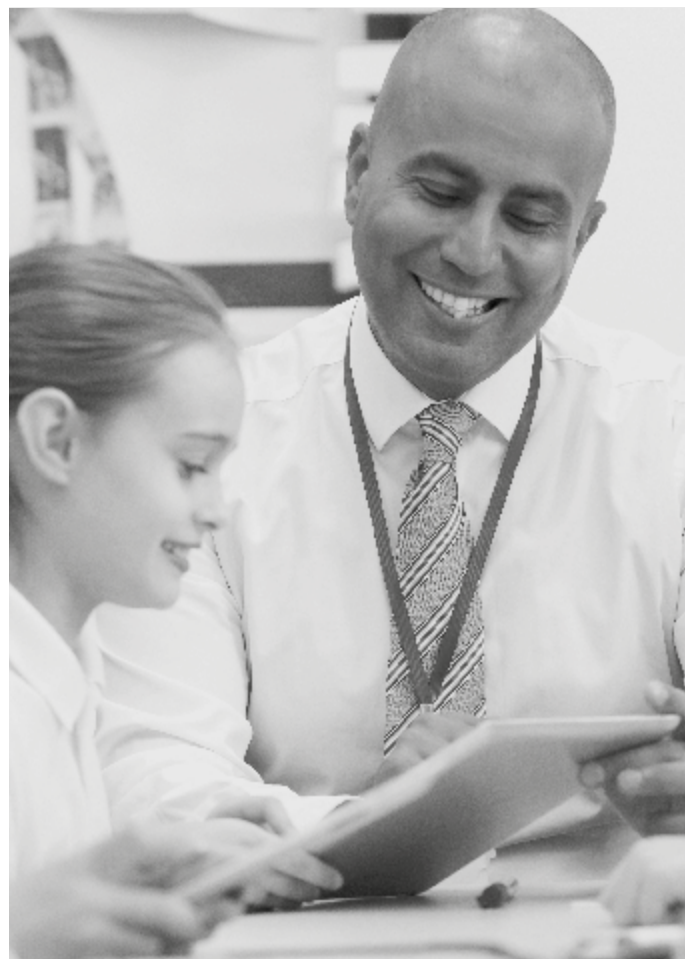
After identifying and examining matters within the focus groups, the study moved on to elicit more specific information through interviews that could be helpful to the commissioners of the study and others who might be developing leadership pathways within the sector. Interviewees were identified from the focus groups as those who offered significant insights that commanded attention or invited further scrutiny. Their personal insights were mostly borne of significant career experiences underpinned by well-reasoned argument and a high level of political awareness.

10 interviews were held with Executive Headteachers, MAT CEOs, DCSs, LA ADs and a high-ranking DfE officer. The interviews explored the significance of some inhibitors, investigated the attributes of potential candidates who Staff College might target in terms of attracting talented education leaders into senior LA/DCS career routes, and how leadership development programmes might help.

### Questions included:

- **Are there some crucial issues that would represent a major inhibitor to the transfer of the talented education leader in to the LA? How might the sector address these inhibitors?**
- **What are the roles, experiences and skills of leaders well-suited for these LA roles?**
- **What sort of leadership/professional development activities are needed to enable the move across sectors?**
- **What kind of leadership development programmes and qualifications are used at earlier stages of education leaders' careers. Is it important to link with these programmes? How? What should Staff College be recommending?**

Overall, the study method served its purpose well. The instruments and schedules enabled participants to articulate their views and engage in high quality discussion. The level of professional interest in the topic was extremely high as participants recognised the relevance and importance of the study. The study reached a range of significant and influential contributors and, although small scale, their views and the findings of this report provide a high level of credibility to inform strategic leadership thinking.



# 3. Factors influencing career decisions

As described, the commissioning of this study was prompted by the observation, evidence and experience that the career pathways into the most strategic positions in education and children’s services have been subject to significant change in recent years. In a period that has seen continuing changes to the role of local government in children’s services and at the same time, the creation of new leadership opportunities within the school sector, there have been fewer leaders than previously from an education background progressing to the most senior roles within Local Authorities. This study was therefore commissioned to examine some of the factors that influence the career decisions of talented leaders in the

education sector who might be well-suited to senior positions in Local Authorities or potentially fill the DCSs role.

The identification of potential factors that influence the career decisions of education leaders was informed by preliminary discussions with potential participants and Staff College Consortium Leads and a previous literature review.

26 discrete factors were identified and tested with participants through the survey. For the sake of this report, a simple categorisation of these factors clustered them into three broad groups:

Fig. 4 Factors influencing career decisions identified by contributors

## Personal motivation



- Opportunity to serve children across a wider area
- Taking a broader perspective on community issues
- Contributing to the needs of the most vulnerable
- The opportunity to play a wide-ranging role influencing communities across an LA area
- Impact and reach of the work/role to make a difference
- Opportunity to broaden my understanding
- Post-Covid commitment to help restore education

## Working environment



- The balance of social care, safeguarding and education responsibilities
- Work with other professionals e.g. social care, youth, early years
- Perception of culture within local authority children’s services
- Levels of innovation
- The role and remit of local government
- Being part of a local democratic politically-led organisation
- The level of responsibility for child protection/managing risks to children
- Being part of a large corporate entity
- Levels of stress and work-life balance
- Flexibility of roles
- The opportunity to oversee multi-million capital and revenue budgets

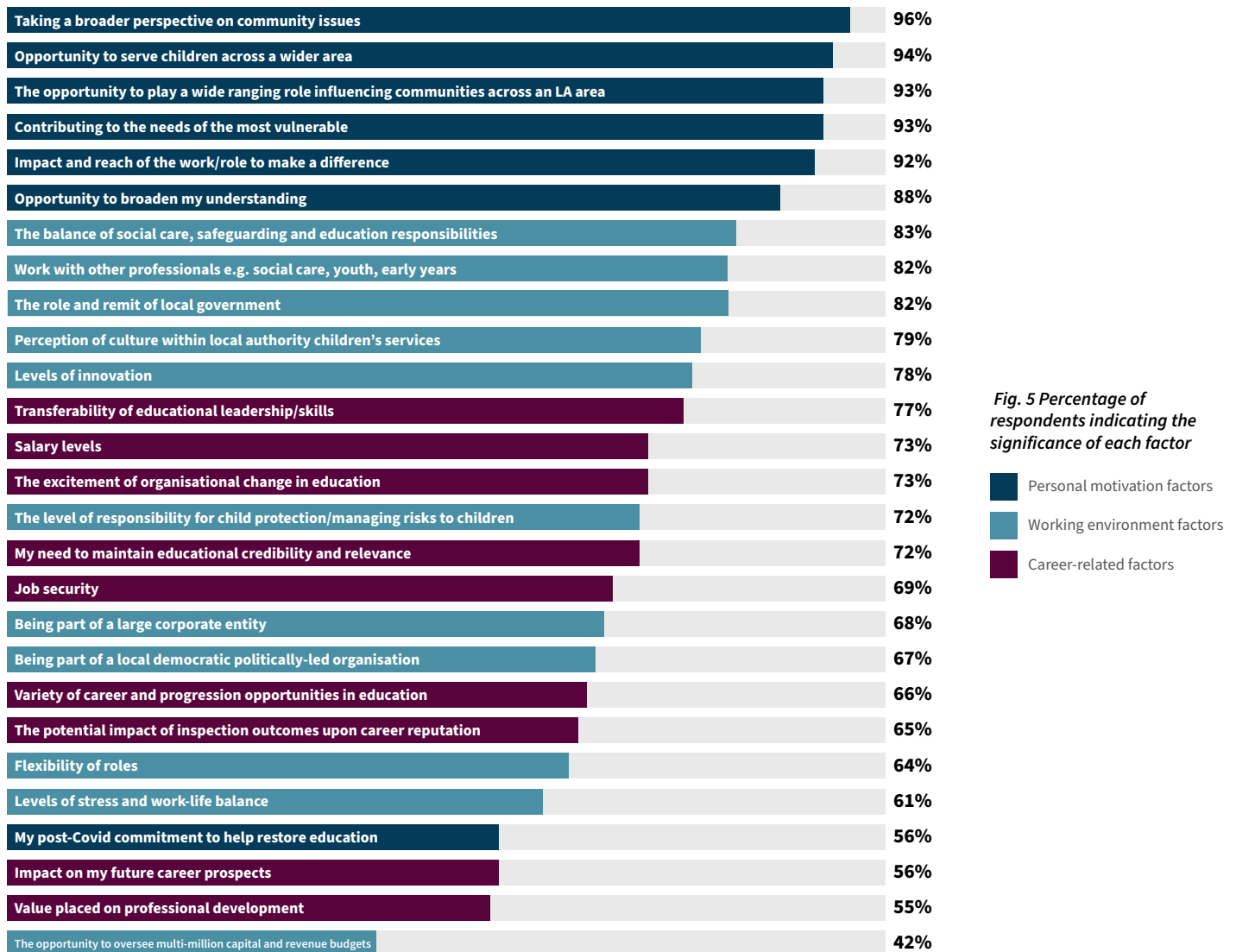
## Career-related matters



- Transferability of educational leadership/skills
- Salary levels
- Job security
- The excitement of organisational change in education
- Personal need to maintain educational credibility and relevance
- The potential impact of inspection outcomes upon career reputation
- Variety of career and progression opportunities in education
- Impact on my future career prospects
- Value placed on professional development

### 3a. What are the most significant factors influencing education leaders transferring to local government to become senior leaders in children's services?

Survey participants were asked to initially indicate whether, in their experience, each factor was significant. Fig 5. below shows the percentage of respondents identifying each of the factors to be significant.



What becomes immediately apparent is that personal motivation factors (blue) are seen as the most significant type, well ahead of any working environment (aqua) or career-related (pink) considerations.

Despite any potential subjectivity in the interpretation of language and the organisation of factors into the three groupings, this observation is also reflected in the overall proportion of participants identifying the significance of factors within these three groupings (Fig. 6).

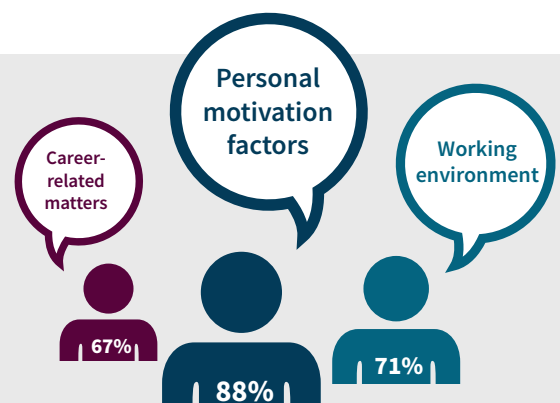


Fig. 6 Proportion of respondents identifying factors in each group to be significant



### 3b. Amongst these factors, what are the biggest attractions and inhibitors?

The survey ascertained whether factors were attractions or inhibitors, and the degree of their significance, by asking respondents to rate whether they considered each of them to be a major or minor attraction or inhibitor. In the results, what is shown once again is the dominating attracting influence of personal motivation, well above considerations of the working environment or career-related issues.

For comparison and presentation purposes, we have applied the following scoring system to illustrate the relative significance of the influencing factors:

- If 100% of participants identified a factor and all said it was a major attraction to working with local government, then a score of +100 is generated.
- Conversely, if 100% of participants identified a factor and all said it was a major inhibitor to working with local government, then a score of -100 is generated.

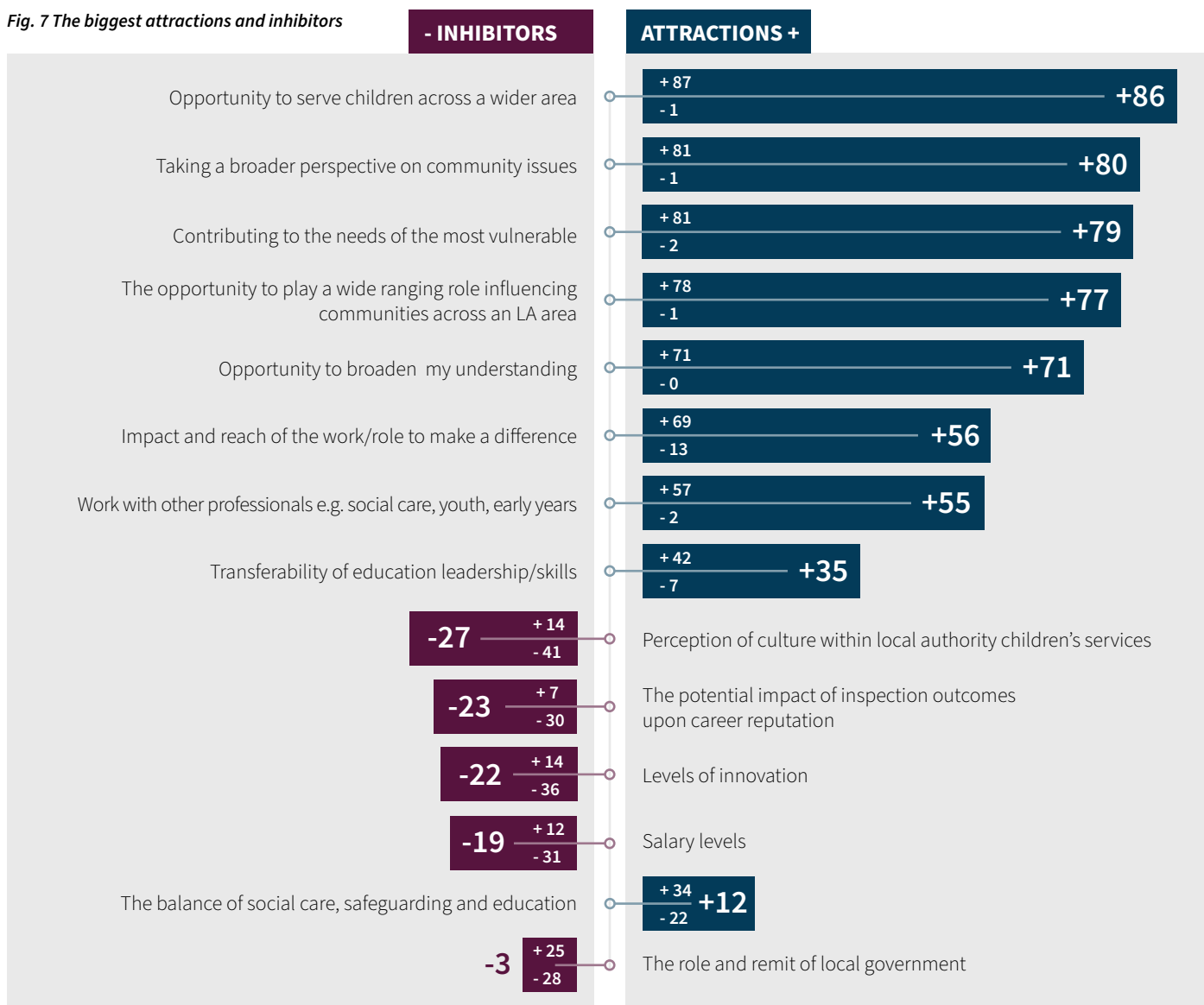
- Minor attractions and inhibitors are scored with half the weighting of the major influences.

**It is significant that the highest attracting scores are far greater than the top measure for any inhibiting factor.**

Eight attractions, almost entirely intrinsic and values-driven motivations, feature with scores well ahead of the highest scoring inhibitor. This strong moral imperative, as evidenced in the survey, continued as a powerful theme through the focus groups and interviews. In short, there is far more positive capital to be built upon than negative barriers to be overcome, hence the title of this report.

Fig. 7 displays the factors that were identified as significant by over three quarters of the survey respondents. The numbers displayed on each item show the balance of the attracting and inhibiting elements of each factor.

Fig. 7 The biggest attractions and inhibitors



## 4. Insights into this leadership nexus

**Despite these results suggesting that there are some very strong attractions for developing a leadership career within local government, the evidence suggests that many talented education leaders still choose not to. Having therefore established this understanding of the factors that can influence career choices when considering a pathway into local authority leadership, the study moved on to investigate them more deeply and consider some possible ameliorating steps.**

Rather than presenting a chronological account of the study process, the following commentary highlights and analyses the dominant themes that emerged. The key messages from the study have been compiled and synthesised within this report to create a reflective narrative on this leadership nexus (Section 4), the characteristics of the potential leaders in scope (Section 5) and some implications for leadership development (Section 6).

### 4a. The interest in serving communities and the desire to make a difference

The desire of leaders in the school sector to make a difference to all children's lives was a very strong and recurring theme throughout this study. Principles of moral purpose, civic and community leadership and public service were key features of responses, whether from headteachers of small primary schools or CEOs of large multi-academy trusts. Participants were keen to affirm their commitment to civic responsibility and being an active part of the community that serves children more widely than those within their own organisation. This aspect that has been magnified in 2020 by the Covid-19 pandemic experience.

*“As an Executive Headteacher who is also an experienced NLE and OFSTED inspector I would relish the opportunity to support local government to better opportunities for all children across many boroughs.”*

Serving education leaders expressed considerable interest in supporting local government to improve opportunities for all children across wider areas, and serving senior LA officers confirmed that a major attraction for them was this contribution to broader improvement. This study suggests that the strength of this desire far outweighs the practical and career considerations that are routinely cited as barriers to a career step to work with local authorities.

A strong line of discussion also emerged throughout the study about the anecdotal reputation of a few current academy leaders whose actions in the interest of their organisation seem to sometimes disregard wider community needs. Several participants expressed the view that this approach is not generally representative of leaders within the sector and should not be taken as a reason to skew or distort efforts to engage constructively with school leaders to serve community

needs. It was suggested that maybe the current phase of the national academisation policy is incentivising pioneer behaviours that tend to grab the headlines, but that these do not reflect the moral perspective of the vast majority of school leaders. Far more MATs are outward-facing and looking to develop strong partnerships that can address the needs of all children.

RECOMMENDATION

Harness the strength of desire of leaders in the school sector to serve all children as the key rationale for looking to develop potential leadership with a local authority; this outweighs any practical and career issues.



RECOMMENDATION

Don't be deflected by occasional incidents where academy leaders appear to prioritise organisational interest above wider community needs. These behaviours are likely to be short-term and are not reflective of the principled leadership that generally prevails across the school sector.



### 4b. Covid-19 and the growth of partnership

It is clear from this study that in recent times, a closer working relationship between schools and LAs has been developing, possibly stimulated by the needs of managing the Covid-19 pandemic and a growing recognition of the distinctive role that the LA plays in accessing and co-ordinating support for families and communities. The focus groups in particular provided a clear consensual view that relationships between schools and LAs have improved. Responding to the pandemic seems to have improved communications, breaking down some silos and improving partnerships between the LA and all schools, irrespective of their organisational status. Several participants also recounted stronger connections between schools, public health and social care.

Covid-19 appears to have brought the LA back into a more central space in the system with the school community and into the awareness of school leaders. Many contributors indicated how LAs have been significantly successful in bringing all key partners around the table, speaking about how the pandemic has provided opportunity to build better partnerships and work together more strategically to find a way of “joining up ‘experts in education’ with ‘experts in local authority’ on an equal footing.”

In the context of this study, it was suggested that the important role that LAs have been playing during Covid-19 should lead to greater confidence in the growth of partnerships and stimulating the interest of school leaders to develop their careers in this space. What has become apparent is that the whole system can't operate without the local layer that LAs provide to hold and carry the entirety of community need.

This enthusiasm was however tempered with a note of caution that LAs should not see Covid-19 as a pretext for any ‘return to the old days’ or any attempt to reinstate a hierarchical

## Insights into this leadership nexus continued

relationship. The structural changes in the sector in recent years mean that the basis of partnerships between school organisations and LAs can only be seen as one between equals. Participants explained that this matter still seems confused in national policy and in some geographical areas where misunderstandings or tensions about the LA role remains. Overall however, the study highlighted a clear desire from school leaders to work with the LA as joint leaders of place.

### RECOMMENDATION

Build upon the experience of the Covid-19 pandemic to strengthen the working relationships and partnerships between the local authority and all schools. Consider how to capitalise upon the recent crisis experience of addressing the needs of all children and families together, especially the most vulnerable, to re-establish a clear understanding with schools of the LA role and the requirement for partnership working.



### RECOMMENDATION

DfE should ensure that the national professional leadership development programmes it commissions from partners include content about, effective partnership work and the role of the LA and within the overall education and children's services system.



### RECOMMENDATION

DfE should consider how it resources and supports talent development programmes. Current uncertainty is reducing leaders' confidence to commit themselves to career pathways or partnerships that they feel might not have a sustainable future.



### 4c. The leadership of place

The study highlighted and underlined the unique role that the local authority plays within the system to co-ordinate public services in an area. In recent years this place-based leadership role seems to have featured far less significantly in the demands and thinking of many school leaders, as so much leadership capacity has been consumed by the creation of new academy organisations that emphasise autonomy and internal effectiveness.

Participants described how the pandemic has re-illustrated to school leaders the LA's essential role within the system to provide a middle tier between themselves and central government. Even though some functions such as school improvement and many aspects of school administration have been allocated to new academy bodies, the pandemic has shown school leaders the key role that LAs provide in leadership of place. Participants related however that, for many new academy leaders, this type of working relationship with the LA was a new experience and for some, the positivity of the Covid-19 encounter with LAs was causing them to reflect on their leadership outlook and their academy's relationships.

### RECOMMENDATION

Programmes that provide leadership development for school leaders should address the role of the LA to provide leadership of place. Working with or for the local authority to lead across a wider area is a strong match with the expressed desire of many school leaders to make a difference.



### 4d. The need for more information

Several schools colleagues reported in the survey and focus groups that a significant inhibitor to attracting talented education leaders into LA career routes and potentially into the Director of Children's Services role was the 'lack of knowledge' or 'anonymity' of the DCSs to the education sector. Some school leaders spoke about wishing DCSs would reach out further towards educational leaders and one CEO of a large Academy Trust recounted how only one of the three DCSs they worked with was keen to partner and discuss openly. The most senior contributor to this study explained that,

*"While this study is really important, there is an even more important piece of work to be done to help DCSs who do not have an education background to gain a better understanding of the school sector. It is more often these DCSs not managing to engage with and mobilise the school sector that is inhibiting partnership work with the school sector... this should, at the very least be a module in their leadership development programmes."*

This uncertainty of the LA role is particularly marked in the primary sector where our study revealed a significant lack of knowledge of how the LA operates. It seems that just the small number of primary headteachers who play representative roles for the sector have a good understanding of the LA role and, beyond this, awareness levels are low.

School leaders' understanding of the LA role is further exacerbated by the nature of their limited encounters with LA colleagues. Individual primary school leaders very rarely get to glimpse the strategic place-leadership role of the LA and their experience is often limited to interactions with individual social workers, SEND officers or administrative staff, most often to tackle problematic or contentious situations.

*"It has never actually occurred to me to pursue a career in Children's Services. I have always believed that my experience in education has meant that my contribution to senior leadership will only be relevant to schools."*  
MAT CEO

*"In all honesty this is not a career move I had considered, probably because I don't know enough about what the role actually covers. I have always considered it a political appointment."* MAT CEO

## Insights into this leadership nexus continued

*"I have never even considered it and had no idea most of these opportunities even existed. I don't have enough knowledge, even though I have a wealth of experience."*

Primary school headteacher

LA colleagues who participated in the study pointed out the benefits of more headteachers gaining an understanding of how an LA works by getting to know the work of their departments and the different LA functions and processes. This would enable more leaders to see the career benefits of cross-sector working with the wider spheres of influence and the ability to make a difference. Some headteachers supported this suggestion and those who had held short term detachments or secondments with LAs remarked on their value to provide a deeper understanding of LA culture and working processes.

There was a strong argument made across the study for leadership opportunities with LAs to be marketed more positively. This was accompanied by recommendations to make better use of those who have experience of working across sectors to inspire and support aspirant leaders as role models, as well as highlighting the challenges.

### RECOMMENDATION

Address the low levels of understanding about career routes and LA leadership pathways through much more positive marketing of the LA role to headteachers. This should include explanation of the qualification route right through to the DCS position and also provide role models of education leaders who have made the move.



### 4e. The perceptions of LA work

The perceptions of individual educational leaders about the working culture of LAs are important to record and need exploring further beyond this study. Whether or not these are accurate or well-founded, these perceptions appear to represent potential psychological inhibitors to transferring from the school sector into the LA sector. School leaders' commented negatively about the working culture of LAs, focussed upon the dominance of LA politics, the bureaucratic organisational culture, levels of innovation and the absence of levers to secure accountability.

*"While the political environment of the LA is often perceived as slow, there is a high value in democracy, scrutiny and accountability that many heads could learn to understand and appreciate."* DCS

*"There seem to be too many opposing views and complex relationships in LA decision-making. I observe lots of meetings with no action, excuses culture, insufficient accountability at every layer. There seems to be a lack of control in the decision-making process and working with councillors who are not trained in education, have limited understanding but large influence. This is a major detractor."* MAT CEO

*As CEO, I am part of the LA's advisory service this year and I am already surprised by the phrase 'as an LA we cannot do that; we cannot challenge our leaders, we can only suggest and ask...' As CEO, I hold my leaders to account. As DCS, this needs to be the same; leadership development is about getting the right people on the bus facing the right way and on the right seats. Accountability is key."* MAT CEO

In contrast, there were views and insights expressed by a small number of study participants who had worked both within the school sector and LA environment that provided counter-arguments to challenge these perceptions. These colleagues suggested that education leaders need to understand and experience leadership in a political environment. They spoke about the different leadership skill set needed compared to when in school and the value of headteachers seeing the LA (lengthy) decision-making processes in practice to aid understanding of the LA working practices and political culture.

One senior education leader interviewee actually spent 18 months on secondment to an LA but was eventually dissuaded from going further along a DCS career route due to the 'slow pace of change because of the (necessary) specialist scrutiny and political approval'. Clearly, the secondment to the LA proved to be an important experiential professional learning opportunity for this individual, but this inhibitor still proved too great.

By contrast, a DCS who had previously worked in primary schools makes the counter-point that, because of the political dimension, many decisions made by LAs can actually be highly significant and have ripples that spread out right across communities. DCS decisions can lead to rapid and significant change, creating whole service transformation in just a few weeks, in contrast to educational improvement that can often take several cycles to embed.

However, the lack of resources made available to LAs is cited as a significant inhibitor or detractor for the DCS career route. Interviewees from both schools and LAs referred to their fears about a potential lack of public funding to do the job, especially post Covid; together with an increased consideration of work life balance. Will there be a true valuing of public service?

As with all matters of perception, whether justified or not, they influence behaviour and, in the context of this study these perceptions of the LA clearly exist in the minds of school leaders as a substantial inhibitor. Where unjustified, these perceptions need addressing; where accurately held, it is suggested that education leaders could benefit from more exposure to local politicians and the processes by which LA officers make the changes needed.

## Insights into this leadership nexus continued

In relation to leadership development programmes it was felt that this aspect of learning needs to be experiential, ‘headteachers need to feel it’. The view was articulated in all focus groups that tackling these perceptions is not about formal or external training, but more about practical experiences through internships, secondments, work-shadowing and projects.

RECOMMENDATION

Leadership development strategies should challenge the significant negative perceptions of school leaders about the nature of LA work, using experiential methods where possible. While some of these perceptions may be exaggerated, others clearly have a validity linked to the distinctive processes of politically-led organisations and it will help school leaders if these aspects become better understood.



### 4f. The transferability of skills

A substantial focus within this study was the importance of the development of leadership skills and knowledge. In each of the focus groups, participants spoke about how many of the leadership skills of LA and school leaders are “transferable... but just nuanced through a different lens.” While the ethos of civic responsibility is the same in both school and LA, nevertheless the context and culture is different. Schools are more autonomous and agile organisations, whilst in the LA, longer-term strategies and goals are constrained by politics.

It was suggested that, in some respects, education leaders are actually very well placed for the DCS role, e.g. due to the prevailing culture within the school sector, headteachers tend to be experienced in handling performance data and strategic analysis. However, while the leadership skills of a talented education leader might transfer well into their work in an LA environment, several questions were raised about the credibility or value being placed on education-specific skills in an LA environment.

What became apparent during the study was a high level of interest in the transfer of leadership between schools and LAs becoming a revolving door or 2-way street i.e. that ‘making the leap’ does not prohibit a future return. There was some concern expressed that this transfer might be a one-way ticket and a fear about how credible a school leader would be back in school after working in an LA. However, the personal career paths of several participants demonstrated that this movement is possible, right up to roles of DCS and MAT CEO.

In relation to leadership development it was suggested that training for transition across sectors should be included as an option within national leadership programmes.

The main analysis was that while leadership ‘skills’ are transferable, this is not true of ‘knowledge’, which is a leap for many headteachers who are education specialists. The issue of knowledge gaps is addressed below, but there was a strong feeling that it would be good to create some means of school

leaders gaining an insight into the knowledge and workings of the LA.

### 4g. Knowledge gaps

Education leaders see themselves largely as education specialists. Their career to senior leadership, headship and CEO of a MAT is clear and supported by National Professional Qualifications (NPQs) in education and leadership and a single subject expertise. Therefore, the breadth and the dominance of social care responsibilities in the DCS role is seen as a disincentive to many education leaders, due to their inevitable lack of social care knowledge and skills and their perceived increased risk to professional reputation. This high status and expectation of social care expertise was reported by one participant to have directly negatively affected their career progress and several participants encountered this as a negative experience that they suggest will mostly deter talented education leaders. This leads to a recommendation that discretionary modules need to be provided within leadership development to allow leaders to address their personal gaps in knowledge.

*“The role can sometimes be so broad that high-quality leaders from education may be put off because of the range of other perceived knowledge that is needed.”* RSC

*“I think that the DCS role is often advertised with a bias to children’s social care experience and this is a hard barrier for someone with education background to overcome.”*  
LA Assistant Director

*“Becoming a senior leader in local government is a very different role, it is not like stepping up from deputy head to headteacher where there is often an overlap. A local government role would take a degree of time to become familiar with and I would be unable to demonstrate impact for some period of time, when immediate impact is probably essential.”*  
Primary headteacher

On the other hand, participants from LAs suggested that ‘the more senior the leader, the less important is their specific knowledge’. DCS contributors to the study all confirmed that view that they have senior leaders who provide the specialist knowledge and the expertise they require about specific areas of service, so what becomes more important are transferable leadership skills and the ‘muscle memory’ acquired through experience of how to act in different situations.

Similarly, other contributors pointed out that there will always be gaps in knowledge, understanding and experience; and, while a leadership programme might address these, the USP should be its multi-agency, cross-sector perspective with a

## Insights into this leadership nexus continued

deep focus upon leadership. This leadership development, argued one LA interviewee, needs to address ‘the core growth of individuals and their ethics, rather than just building knowledge and skills’.

Several other contributors spoke about the need to ‘build the character’ and ‘resilience’ required in this type of strategic work. The priorities for leadership development are related more to ‘working in a political scenario’ and ‘strategic analysis’, utilising higher order skills that are transferable across professional contexts.

### RECOMMENDATION

Leadership development programmes should include discretionary modules, preferably using experiential methods that enable participants to address personal knowledge gaps.



### RECOMMENDATION

The distinctive and essential purpose of leadership development programmes should be to build deep, principled leadership characteristics through multi-agency experience. This approach is more likely to facilitate the transfer of strategic skills and the development of effective cross-sector leadership.



### 4h. Understanding levels of risk

A key difference that was emphasised throughout the study was in the levels of risk held and experienced by DCSs in contrast with education leaders. For example, several DCS respondents referred to the way in which the DCS has ultimate accountability for children’s outcomes overall, not just education results for example. They also have accountability for securing a well-functioning safeguarding system where everyone plays their part in safeguarding. It was felt that the strategic responsibilities of the DCS role and the potential risks involved are not fully understood by education leaders and the public.

In more general terms, there is also a culture of work in LAs that leads to a constancy of pressure linked to performance, politics, regulation and safeguarding that will exceed the experience of most education leaders. Leadership development strategies therefore need to provide insights and experience into this culture of risk-holding and introduce management approaches and leadership skills that can increase the safety of systems that protect the most vulnerable and enhance the outcomes they can achieve.

Participants in this study suggest that leadership development needs to specifically develop school leaders’ awareness of the needs of the most vulnerable children and families. Coming from a school background there is likely to be a gap in their understanding, especially when compared to social workers. Headteachers need to gain insights of just how challenging and serious the role of managing the safeguarding risks can be.

*“Many headteachers I work with seem to think that social work is about creating ‘ideal’ family units, but the role of the LA is so much more fundamental than this. It is more about judging whether the parenting, however poor, is good enough to keep the child safe. Many school leaders just don’t get this! Even when children are facing harm and abuse, most of them still prefer to be in that dangerous home than taken into care.”*

DCS

### RECOMMENDATION

Leadership development should help education leaders to understand how to cope with the level of risks involved in LA work and the DCS role. Mentoring may be helpful, but this needs to be structured and personalised.



### 4i. The attraction of staying in school-based roles

Alongside any consideration that talented school leaders might make to work within a local authority environment, there are a number of factors highlighted in the study that may attract them to remain in the school sector instead.

An overwhelming practical or organisational consideration for school leaders in considering moving from the school sector to senior LA roles is the sense of greater agility and autonomy to make a difference in a school/trust than in a ‘bureaucratic’ LA.

*“I can make an immediate difference currently. I don’t need to have multiple meetings to make decisions. I have autonomy to do what is right for staff and students without having to play a political game. This enables more energy to be directed purely to education, thus making senior work in a MAT more attractive in my opinion. I need to see immediate differences.”*

Secondary Headteacher

Furthermore, the academisation process is creating new leadership roles and opportunities that can hold great attraction for some headteachers. The last few years have seen rapid growth of new MAT teams of executive leaders with a remit across multiple schools. This growth in new leadership roles has created new pathways for talented education leaders that incentivise them to stay in education careers, potentially at the expense of consideration of pathways into LAs.

This may be a short-term phenomenon for the next few years until such time as the MAT landscape has settled into viable and sustainable arrangements but, for the time-being is undoubtedly having an impact within the sector.

## Insights into this leadership nexus continued

Because the academisation of schools is currently a significant party-political policy with high currency, some MAT CEOs also describe a level of access and interaction with MPs and senior policy officers that provides a new experience of political leadership for them. Furthermore, the governance of MATs also provides a channel of accountability directly to government officials through the RSC, adding a further layer of political engagement. These experiences cause one MAT CEO, who previously worked in an LA, to describe their current political engagement as ‘liberated from local politics’ yet still building political skills. This suggests that, to the extent that part of the attraction of leadership roles in local government might be to develop political leadership, talented school leaders may currently see an opportunity to satisfy this aspect within MAT leadership roles rather than by transferring into LA roles.

### 4j. The need for greater political certainty

This study encountered a hesitancy in the attitudes of school leaders due to their uncertainty about the evolving roles of MATs and the LA. Primary headteachers in particular have seen a stuttering in the academisation process and several academy headteachers were reported in the study to actually now see significant advantages of remaining within the LA-maintained sector.

At the same time however, most of the political rhetoric seems to be based on an assumption that the LA role with schools will continue to reduce, at least due to the increasing volume of academies, if not also by (statutory) function.

Whatever the truth or extent of these issues, they combine to create an uncertainty in the minds of talented school leaders that diminishes their confidence to consider leadership roles with LAs. One MAT CEO spoke of her desire to apply for a DCS role, but also her fears of LA job insecurities due to national political changes to the local and regional landscapes and resource allocation. She also referred to the considerable churn in DCS appointments and saw this as a significant risk. One DCS echoed these fears when she said that ‘the security of careers in local government at a time when national policy is uncertain, might be more of an inhibitor than we expect.’

The national political influence on the closer partnership working between school and LAs was highlighted by other interviewees as a potentially significant inhibitor. DfE silo working was referred to by participants as a significant inhibitor to multi-professional leadership development; and the lack of resources available to LAs is also a significant inhibitor or detractor for the DCS role.

One contributor referred to the DfE’s lack of clarity about the role of the LA and the DCS leadership of place and said that ‘the DfE needs to be clearer and to possibly consider redesigning LA roles and responsibilities.’ Another interviewee referred to the growing politically powerful discourse on ‘free school meals’ and ministers urging schools not to become ‘an arm of the welfare state’. This type of political narrative may prove to be an inhibitor to the new Covid-19 partnership that

is being seen between the ‘new breed’ of school leaders and local authorities.

RECOMMENDATION

The DfE and, to a lesser extent LAs, should provide clearer communication about the responsibilities held by the DCS for all children and their role as leader of place, as set out in statutory guidance.



RECOMMENDATION

DfE should ensure that the national professional leadership development programmes it commissions from partners include content about, effective partnership work and the role of the LA and within the overall education and children’s services system.



RECOMMENDATION

DfE should consider how it resources and supports talent development programmes. Current uncertainty is reducing leaders’ confidence to commit themselves to career pathways or partnerships that they feel might not have a sustainable future.



### 4l. The opportunity within the school sector as MATs mature

A significant optimistic message within the study related to the growing maturity of MATs. Several contributors recounted the way many more MAT leaders are now beginning to work to help groups of schools engage more widely with their communities. It was asserted that, as MATs emerge from their initial ‘forming’ stages, their leadership focus is starting to shift towards an outward-facing approach that considers the wider needs within communities and starts to invest in broader outcomes than just educational performance. One such area of common interest held both by MATs and LAs, is addressing the needs of vulnerable children and families, particularly in the stages before statutory thresholds are reached.

Participants suggested, in both the focus groups and interviews, that because the larger MATs are able to carry a level of financial risk that LAs are not (due to the different business and funding models and higher financial margins) then the more ethically-motivated MATs might be approached to consider hosting such services on behalf of partnerships across local areas.

It was also suggested that the larger, well-established MATs might also have the capacity across their organisation and member schools to consider seconding colleagues to work with LAs.

# Insights into this leadership nexus continued

## 4m. Re-fashioning the LA relationship with the school sector

Many contributors referred to the Covid-19 pandemic as a period that signals new opportunities in the relationship between schools and the LA. They highlighted an exposure to new experiences that is making the interface between schools and LA better and stronger, especially through improved communications. Other contributors spoke about political leaders being more helpful on large-scale projects, providing support.

The opportunity to build on this closer partnership working, of 'building bridges' more effectively seems to be key in attracting talented education leaders into LA senior education roles and on to the aspirant DCS route, going forwards. Ways of 'building bridges' that featured in this study included improved communications, LAs 'reaching out' to improve headteachers' awareness and understanding of the LA structure and culture, joint projects, work shadowing and secondments.

The relationship between schools and the LA described was no longer in a traditional hierarchical form, but now much more one of equals, with the LA playing a co-ordinating role to balance needs across communities, and with schools utilising their unique relationships with families to reach deeply into those communities and meet people at their point of need.

This shared view of improved relationships and communications that leads to closer working between school and LA was nicely encapsulated in one headteacher's contribution where he cited how his view of working with the LA changed by being invited to be part of the Covid-19 response group made up of LA, public health, social care and education colleagues.

In his words, "We can change the culture by generating more opportunities for working with the wider workforce and breaking down the barriers. We need to make more local connections, get through the door then hardwire the join up". He spoke of the benefits of more fluid ways of working and some of the boundaries between LAs and schools becoming blurred.

This leads to a recommendation that the opportunity is taken to re-fashion the relationship between LAs and all local schools, where it has not yet gone far enough.

*"Schools want to be part of the community and haven't lost their desire to make a wider difference."* Headteacher

Several focus group members agreed that leading in partnership at this challenging time is especially important.

Leadership skills in a time of complexity are needed right now.

Funded initiatives and commissioned roles were suggested within the study as powerful ways of getting educational partners to the table. Some examples were provided where LAs were working in new and imaginative ways to commission

the school community to fulfil important strategic functions. Examples were also provided where this has happened with the health service e.g. the mental health in schools programme, also providing a great opportunity to work in partnership to achieve common goals.

*"The first task in getting school leaders to work in new ways with LAs is to identify individuals willing to try them; then you would need to persuade them (and possibly their boards) that it is a good move (of course this can mean a variety of things to a variety of people). Then, ask these headteachers to begin small but think big, initially getting things done through short-term projects but then leading on to longer-term commissioning."* Executive headteacher

In general terms, it was recommended that LAs should appeal to school leaders in terms of their potential wider contribution to public service. School leadership has now become so business orientated and focused on outcomes, that participants felt that many headteachers will welcome an approach from LAs that empowers them to focus on societal good.

However, this optimistic tone was occasionally counter-balanced by the voice of hardened experience that, in some areas, there may still be a significant back-story to unravel.

### RECOMMENDATION

The experiences of the Covid-19 pandemic offer a timely opportunity for LAs and schools to review and re-visit the ways in which they work together to serve children, families and their communities. LAs in particular are encouraged to 'reach out' to school leaders in new ways to harness their motivation to contribute to improved public service.



## 4n. Salaries and conditions of service

In preparing to undertake this study, our working assumption and anecdotal advice was that the biggest single influencing factor at this leadership nexus between the school and local government systems was likely to be that of salaries and conditions of service. As one commentator noted, "A headteacher with 100 staff is likely to be as well rewarded financially as a DCS with 1000!"

What has been surprising then, has been the consistent view expressed throughout the fieldwork that, although this is a significant consideration, it need not be over-emphasised. The survey results placed this matter halfway down the list of 26 influencing factors in terms of their significance on career choices and the examples and suggestions provided in focus groups contributed to the view that flexible approaches, circumvent this becoming a barrier.

Interestingly, it is dominantly the LA colleagues in the survey who refer to the importance of the salary differential and they reaffirmed in the focus groups their belief that pay is a



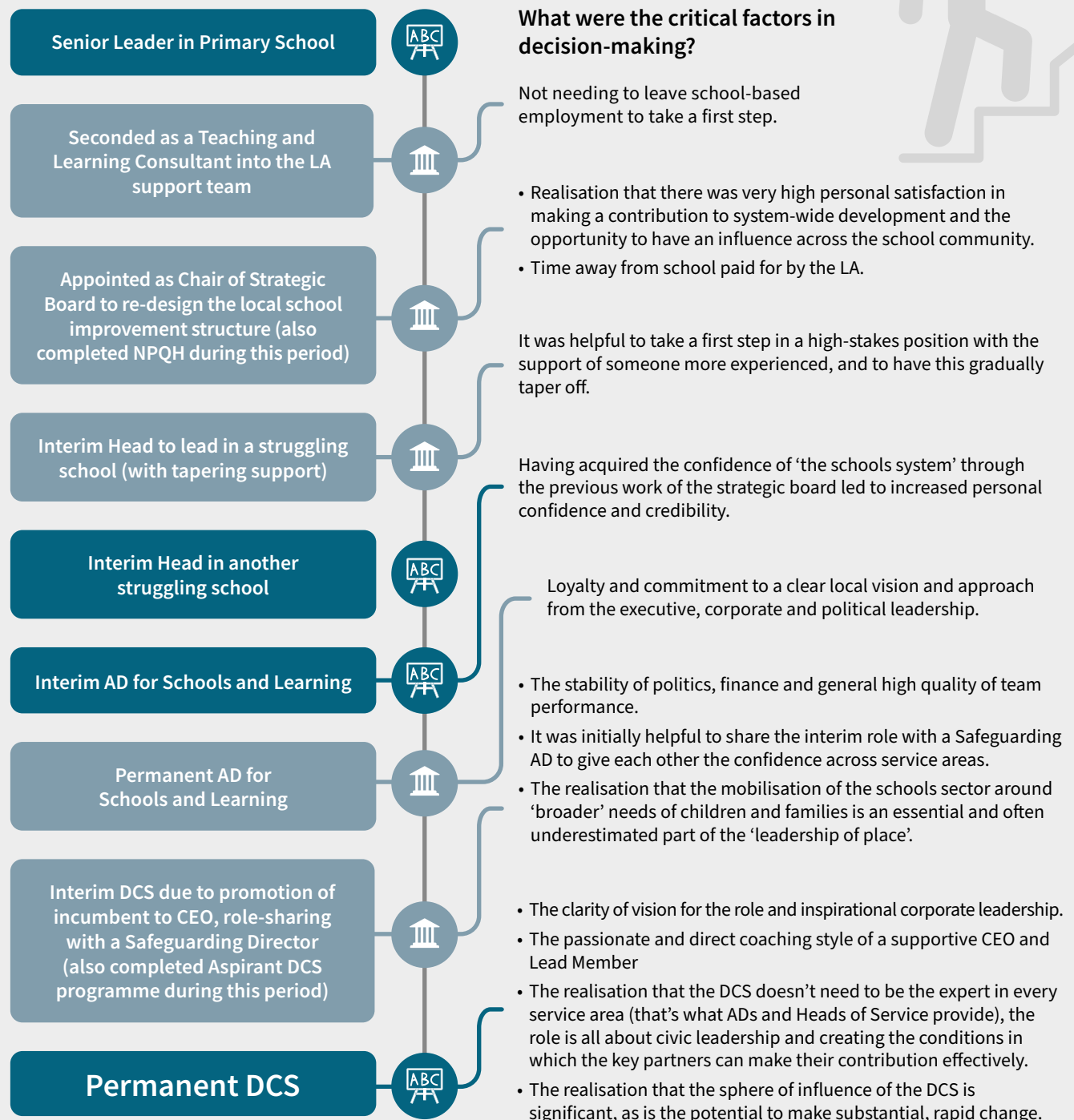
# Insights into this leadership nexus continued

major challenge when recruiting talented education leaders/headteachers. In particular, the difference between salary levels at secondary MAT level were cited, alongside pension and annual leave differences. In contrast, school leaders' voices were notably absent on this topic of pay differentials, however, it would be unrealistic to assume that pay and the loss of school holidays is not a significant issue for school leaders.

**RECOMMENDATION** Don't assume that salary differentials make the transfer of school leaders into LA employment impossible, as creative approaches seem to exist. Take action earlier in the careers of talented school leaders to sow seeds for potential pathways into work with local authorities before salary differentials might become too significant.



**Fig. 8 The recent career journey of one DCS, and the critical factors at each step**



## 5. Characteristics of leaders in scope

The progression of talented education leaders into LA roles was identified within this study as an enduring challenge. The 1990s were referred to as probably the last period in which transferring to work with an LA was seen as a career-pinnacle promotion; ever since this time there has been an on-going challenge to define the roles and recruit appropriate people.

The issue of candidates for the DCS role coming from either a social care or education background has been running since the creation of the role in 2004 onwards, and after the Baby P case in 2007 in particular. Contributors referred to these past two decades as a time where the LA social care risks have come to dominate the work and this has maybe deterred talented senior education leaders from applying or being accepted into the DCS role.

One participant described experiences within their leadership development and within the children's service system more generally, that the people most qualified to become a DCS are those from a social care background. Another contributor recounted their personal experience of their lack of social care experience being used as the final determining selection criteria in a tie-break situation in a DCS interview process.

Some interviewees were keen to point out that this issue is further complicated by the lack of clarity from DfE about the role of DCS, never quite fully promoting their 'leadership of place'; and, therefore, there is ambiguity about who should be targeted for the role and for the Aspirant DCS or Future Leaders programmes.

The consensus view expressed in all focus groups is that, while background is important, strategic ability should be the key focus. DCS should be valued as strategic leaders, and not for their specialism. Therefore, ex-educationalists, ex-social workers and ex-voluntary sector/charity workers can all be appropriate for the role.

Candidates for the leadership pathway through LA children's services should be those who have a strong sense of partnership relationships and can have the skills and attributes to establish networks and a community of trust. They must be people who have a commitment to the role and be willing to stay the course in a 'grinding job'; rather than just getting the job title and not staying around for long.

**RECOMMENDATION** Selection for programmes that attract and develop leaders for senior roles in LA Children's Services should not be skewed in preference of any professional background of candidates. Recruitment should be based on an evaluation of strategic skills, ability and experience.



### 5a. Progression from education roles

Interviewees suggested that the commissioners of this research (the UPON Programme Consortium) need to be clear

about 'why do you want people from the education sector to consider the pathway to becoming a DCS?' The answer will determine the type of leadership development activities to be developed.

If the answer is 'a short-term approach' to recruit credible senior education people directly into the DCS level, then the training requirement is likely to be a shorter 'gap filling' programme. It was suggested that there is probably quite a small field of credible 'DCS-ready' candidates and many of these may have already passed salary thresholds that make the transfer of role problematic.

If, however, the reason is a more long-term approach looking to grow a pool of professionally interested candidates who can gain experience and develop their leadership over time, some of whom may progress to eventually becoming DCSs, then participants were far more excited about the discussion required about their leadership development. These leadership training requirements will need a different (new) set of modules to give them experiential learning, especially in the political dimension and in the civic 'leadership of place'.

The point was made well that all councils need some education leadership thinking near or at the top of their leadership team, not just for their knowledge of the sector, but because they are generally well prepared as strategic leaders with a keen insight into outcomes-focussed policy. They will also know what kinds of approaches will work well in the school sector and what the key drivers and barriers are. They are also more likely to have a secure grasp of matters such as school place planning, SEND and the best ways of working to mobilise the school sector. This is a major factor because the school sector represents the greatest investment in the lives of children and the school workforce makes the largest, often unrecognised contribution to Early Help services.

Generally speaking however, the idea of recruiting from a 'fixed single' target group of education leaders is problematical. Roles in education are now so varied that even within one category that there are major differences of leadership experience. For example, 'headteacher' could be the Executive Headteacher or CEO within a large trust or the teaching-headteacher of a 36 pupil primary school. Job and role labels become less meaningful than the experiences, qualities and ambitions of education leaders. For example, the headteacher of a relatively small children's centre might have more relevant experience than the principal of a large secondary school, as they might bring experience of leading an educational enterprise which covers Children's Services delivery, statutory nursery provision, adult health and social care.

It was commented that it is not simply the status of the education leader that should bring them into scope, but their strong, evidenced-based record as a strategic leader of impactful improvement and their commitment to leadership development. Contributors referred to the importance of not just qualifications but "what you have actually done". Evidence of coaching others was also seen as a useful indicator.

## Characteristics of leaders in scope continued

*"I am nervous about moving into a role with the LA because of my lack of direct experience with social services and health. To date I have had limited opportunity to think strategically, it's a bit like moving from Colonel to Major General with no staff officer training. Moving from combined arms to logistics is not a natural progression and needs development support."* Primary headteacher

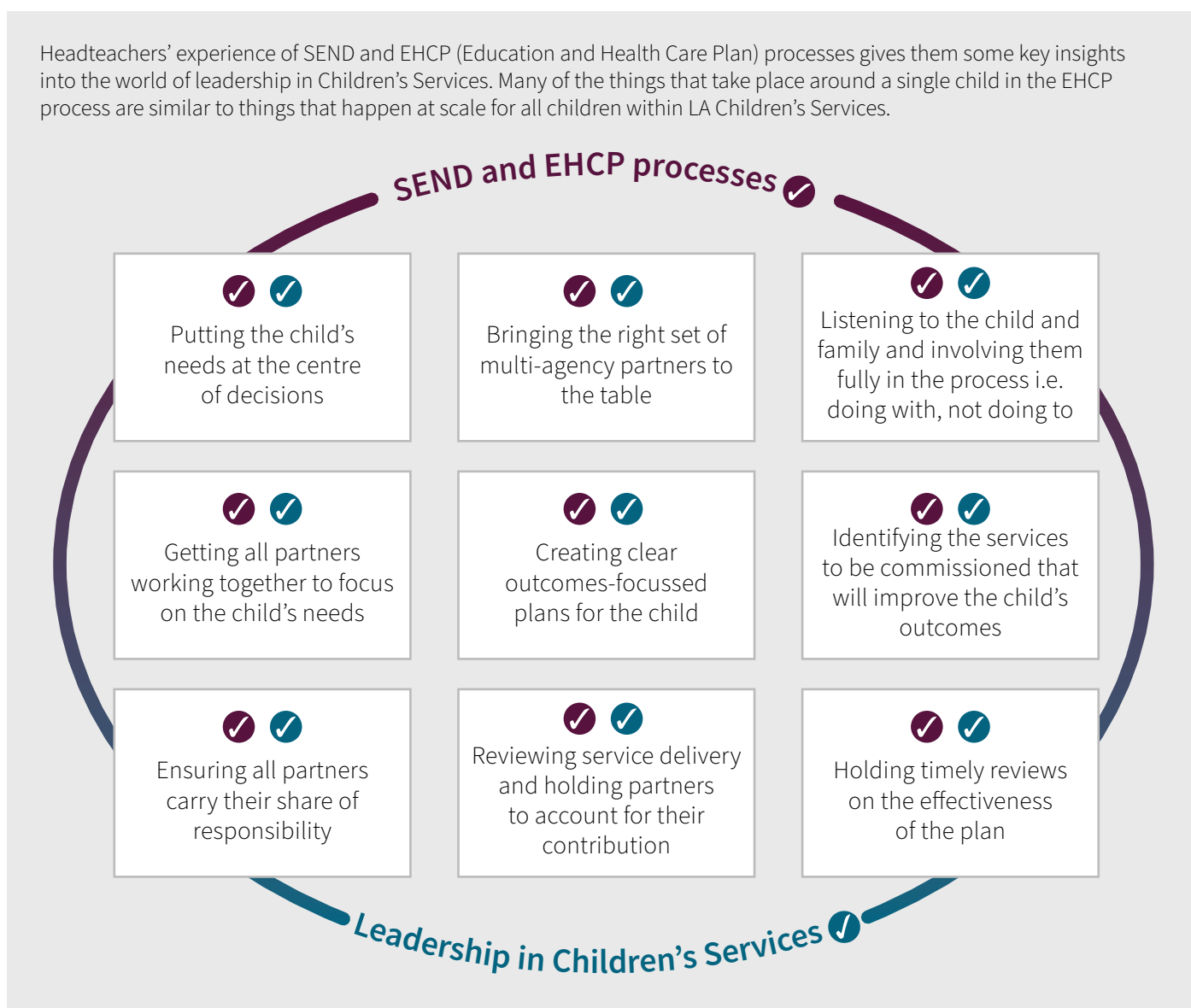
One DCS contributor from a primary school background explained, "very few primary school headteachers have substantial experience as the leader of a team-based organisation, as most primary schools operate as a single team." They went on to describe that this becomes important because in local government the strategic leaders are managing a hierarchy of team arrangements, and not so much the direct management of people. A general lack of knowledge

and experience of system-wide strategic leadership in the primary sector was identified as a significant problem for leadership programme designers to consider.

### EHCP as a microcosm

The multi-agency support of children in the EHCP process is a microcosm of local government's broader role, i.e. get partners working together to address the needs of a child, including partners who are sometimes quick to blame each other or not carry their share of responsibility, get together with the child's situation at the centre to consider their needs and commission the provision they need. Scale this up and we could seize the opportunity to do the same at system level securing 'proper' multi-agency leadership and creating a new environment in which strategic partners are engaged around a shared problem.

Fig. 9 Some similarities between EHCP processes and leadership in children's services



## Characteristics of leaders in scope continued

The study also identified that some of the perceptions held by school leaders that are becoming out-dated. In almost all LAs, the progression route for school-based leaders towards the DCS role is no longer likely to pass through an intermediate role such as school improvement adviser. However, only a few years ago this was commonly the case and this study identified that some headteachers still appear to think that a role with an LA will require them to be an expert in supporting large numbers of schools. If this is actually their attraction to the role and preference, then in most cases they need to seek work with a MAT and not an LA at all. Leadership communications with schools need to emphasise this point. Leadership roles in LAs are no longer 'telling' jobs and they are not about being a leading educational specialist, as they will mostly have been within their schools.

### 5b. Which career stage?

The point has already been made that, by the developmental stage at which an education leader might be considered 'ready' to transfer directly into the DCS role, they may well have already passed a tipping point that makes it difficult for them to move. In addition, it was suggested that the Aspirant DCS programme as it exists might only be suitable for this very small group of education leaders who are 'DCS ready'.

These two issues combine to provide a very clear message from this study that the 'DCS-ready stage' is not where the national focus of leadership development needs to be, if there is a genuine desire and interest to attract more talented education leaders to work with LAs. The leaders that need to be attracted are probably still at an earlier stage of their careers.

The following comments were made within the study about transferring into LA leadership from different stages of an education career:

#### **Executive Leaders and CEOs within a MAT**

CEOs who are already showing a commitment to outcomes across wider communities and engaging well with key partners will be highly suited to the strategic leadership roles within LAs. It is important that they have experience of different settings with different backgrounds. Whereas most heads will not yet have experienced 'thinking at scale' for services bigger than their organisation, most MAT leaders will have. Most MAT CEOs should have the appropriate strategic leadership experience for the DCS career route.

One MAT CEO contributor described how they would be very interested in applying for the DCS role but the insecurities created by the national political changes to the education and LA landscape act as the most significant deterrent. For them it is not the LA culture, the pay or rewards issue, or the social care knowledge issue that inhibits the move, as these are all able to be overcome.

Large MATs also have leadership teams that work across

groups of schools and the leaders in some of these executive roles will have significant transferrable skill and experience. MAT CEOs also provided good detail of the way in which there are hybrid partnership roles being developed in academy trusts. For example, a Director of Partnerships in one large academy trust works with health CCG's, mental health trusts, youth sport trust and schools. Although this type of senior leader in academy chains would be appropriate for the Aspirant DCS programme, they generally tend to undertake the NPQEL programme instead.

#### **System Leaders**

In recent years the English schools system has created a range of formally designated roles for specialist leaders who have expertise in working beyond their own organisation to support others. These system leaders include NLEs, and SLEs, as well as others such as Pupil Premium Reviewers and Teaching School Directors. Some of these roles have protected, funded time specifically for the work to support others. In some areas of the country the activity of these System Leaders is co-ordinated in close partnership with LA colleagues to serve the most significant areas of locally-identified need. These roles provide experience of working with the LA and could lead to interest in the DCS career route.

#### **Headteachers**

The most frequent suggestion in this study about the stage of education leadership from which the potential transfer into work with the LA is most suitable, was that of school headteacher. Contributors spoke in particular about the headteachers who are already showing a commitment to outcomes across wider communities and engaging well with key partners. They identified those who are not only successful in their own arena but also making a contribution at a system-level, not just designated in school improvement terms, but understanding of multi-agency approaches to tackling issues like inclusion and social mobility. Interviewees spoke about headteachers who are active on Local Safeguarding Boards, involved in multi professional partnership work with voluntary sector, social care, health and children's centres, or involved in the current SEND review. As one CEO put it, these headteachers who are working in partnership in this way then "become advocates for working with the LA and their transferable skills, experiences and qualities help to break open the 'secret garden' of child protection work."

While the strategic experience of secondary headteachers and their familiarity with managing distributed leadership across large teams makes them highly suited for LA-based roles, the higher levels of pay in some larger secondary schools might make the first step more difficult. However, there were examples in the study of creative deployments and employment models that still secure the valuable contribution of secondary headteachers within LA-based roles.

For primary headteachers the financial step into LA roles seems much more manageable but, for many of them, their limited

## Characteristics of leaders in scope continued

experience of leading large teams or contributing to system-wide strategy acts as a barrier to make the move.

For different reasons, academy heads were specifically highlighted as potentially becoming interested in LA roles in the future. The rationale provided was that, now that many MATs have become established with a viable number of schools and a strong central team, there are far more academy heads wondering about their next career move than there will be opportunities for them to join their MAT central teams. This is because the consolidation of MATs into larger business units reduces the central numbers required and, in addition, the next generation of MAT executive recruitment may increasingly come from outside education. This could lead to academy heads seeking career progression beyond their MAT organisation.

It was also reported that there are growing levels of disenchantment within some academy heads, leading to their consideration of alternative career paths. This disenchantment is attributed to the centrally prescriptive nature of some MAT organisations that restricts the autonomy of academy heads within the chain. Some LA areas are reporting a large recent influx of applications from academy heads for leadership roles in the maintained sector and it is quite feasible to conceive of similar interest in recruitment into LA roles from this cohort.

One further target group, suggested by a couple of contributors, are highly experienced heads, maybe aged in their 50s who may have 10-20 years of successful headship behind them, and wondering what to do next. At this stage of their life and career, they might ideal candidates to make a contribution at the broader community/system level.

It was generally agreed that headteachers of single schools might not yet have the breadth of experience needed to move straight into the more senior LA roles.

When considering headteachers for a potential role with the LA, it was suggested that a common misconception was to assume that the 'best' headteachers will become the best leaders in a challenging LA environment; it might actually be the opposite. Many great school leaders have achieved excellence in an education system that is established on relatively 'stable' knowledge, where the task is clearly defined, proven pathways to success are known and leadership is broadly a logistical task to organise and mobilise people and resources. In contrast, modern LA-based work is not stable and is often dealing with new problems and partnerships where there is not yet a known solution – and the solutions can often vary from one place to another. LA leaders need to be comfortable to work in an arena of 'dynamic knowledge' where 'wicked issues' are the order of the day and they may not be able to fall back on any prior experience.

### Senior Leaders in schools

If the transfer into LA leadership roles is being considered at an earlier stage, then the study identified that it may be highly worthwhile to engage senior leaders in secondary and, to a

lesser extent in primary schools. The colleagues in question will be in an established leadership role, but may probably best be 'targeted' while they are still in these senior leadership roles, i.e. pre-headship. At this stage many senior leaders are making career decisions about whether or not to aim for headship.

Those school leaders who play pastoral, behaviour, safeguarding or SEND roles may be ideal candidates firstly because of their affinity with the part of the LA role to champion the needs of vulnerable children, but also because they are learning what leadership looks like to get the whole system working around the needs of a child. Additionally, in some school systems, the acceleration to headship tends to prioritise curriculum leaders, so this group of non-curriculum leaders may therefore find their progression routes capped and, as a result, many might not aim for headship. To place a prospect before them of leadership in children's services might be timely and relevant.

#### RECOMMENDATION

The identification of talented education leaders most suited to potential transfer in senior LA roles needs to draw upon a detailed and up-to-date understanding of the variety of leadership experiences that can be involved within similar-sounding roles.



#### RECOMMENDATION

Multiple access points are needed to reflect the key phases and stepping points in a school leader's career when they might look to enter leadership development programmes to support their transfer into senior LA roles.



## 5c. Is there potentially a new type of school leader coming through?

An interesting thesis arose during the study that there may be a new generation of academy headteachers coming through (see Fig 10. p22) that have only known headship in the present arrangements. Having not been part of the academy conversion process, these heads have quite a different perspective from their predecessors who 'led the charge to break away' from LA maintained status, and they carry far less frustration about the LA role than 'converting heads'.

This 'new breed' of academy heads is being reported by MAT CEOs and LA colleagues to be more open and willing to engage in partnership with the LA and to be involved in multi-agency working, especially around the child and family. At least one CEO interviewee felt optimistic that this new relationship will continue to build. Other LA and schools interviewees were more cautious and referred to the fact that although headteachers are more willing to partner these days, they are not still necessarily interested in a career in local authority and ultimately they 'prefer the partnership to take on any risk', rather than the leader/school.

When focus groups and interviews drilled further to investigate these leaders it was suggested that the Ofsted changed criteria

## Characteristics of leaders in scope continued

which now looks more closely at the leadership's contribution to wider community, safeguarding and wider ambitions has created a stronger desire for heads to partner with the LA and many find the LA arena fascinating.

Responding to the Covid-19 pandemic has also seen a sharp increase in requests for support and links from academy heads to the LA. This is because the wider set of services and support that these academy heads need for their families and community are simply not available from MATs and they need access to the Early Help offer of LAs.

This 'new breed' phenomena is still at an early stage and may not develop, but, if it does, then there may be renewed interest in leadership across partnerships, including with the LA. For the time being however, many MATs still exist in the more competitive growth phase and the struggle with standards.

RECOMMENDATION

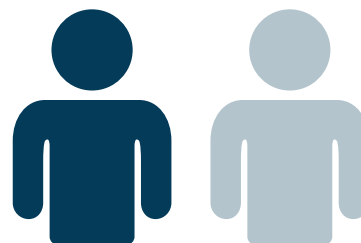
The UPON Programme Consortium needs to remain alert to the rapidly changing cadre of leaders in schools and academies and not be restricted by any perceptions about the first generation of converting academy headteachers.



Fig 10. The perspective of a recently-appointed academy headteacher

“What would you think about working for the local authority?”

The response below is taken directly from comments made by academy headteachers who contributed to the study.



*“I actually might be quite interested in a few years' time. I've only been in this position for a couple of years so, once I've done an effective job here and maybe in another school, this might well be something that interests me. I would need to learn a lot more about what the role of the LA is first. I see the kind of things they are involved with and they seem to match really well with my interest in serving the whole community and making sure we are all working together in an inclusive approach that works for the needs of everybody, especially the most vulnerable. But I'd need to know more.”*

*“In some of the headteachers' meeting I attend, I hear more experienced heads speaking badly of the local authority and they seem to have been prejudiced by some previous experience that I can't relate to. They say that one of the biggest reasons they converted to academy status was to break away from the local authority as they felt this was a negative thing. Also, that first generation of academy heads and the MAT CEOs were often attracted by the idea of blazing a trail and being the first leaders of a new organisation and way of working, but that's not for me.”*

*“As a new head that has only ever known the job in an existing academy, I don't feel any prejudice about the LA. I see them just as another key partner working in the best interest of the community who provide some co-ordination to pull all multi-agency partners together to serve our children more effectively. Yes, I think I would actually be very interested in seeing what kind of opportunity there would be to develop my leadership more in that space. Being*

*the name at the head of a school organisation isn't what particularly motivates me, I'm much more interested in working in partnership with others to make a real difference for children. From the little I see and know about the LA, this is exactly what they seem to do.”*

*“Because I've been recruited into headship by my MAT quite early it means that it could be 30 years until I retire and I don't think I just want to go into school improvement in the MAT. It might well be that, after a couple of headships and all the physical demands of leading a setting, I might be particularly interested in playing a more strategic partnership role in the LA. I'm also already noticing that as an academy head I'm actually getting less autonomy and choice now about how to lead my school and I'm actually being paid to implement the plans of the MAT, so the role is starting to lose attraction.”*

*“I was reflecting recently at an EHCP review meeting how well all of the key partners, who I sometimes hear speaking disrespectfully about each other, were actually gathered together to focus purposefully upon the needs of a child. If this is what leadership in the local authority environment is all about, just working at a bigger scale across the whole system to gather multi-agency partners to serve the needs of children, then that it is something that definitely has an attraction for me. But I guess I would want to be able to experience something of it on a short-term or temporary basis first to find out if I am well suited for a quite different environment before making a career change.”*

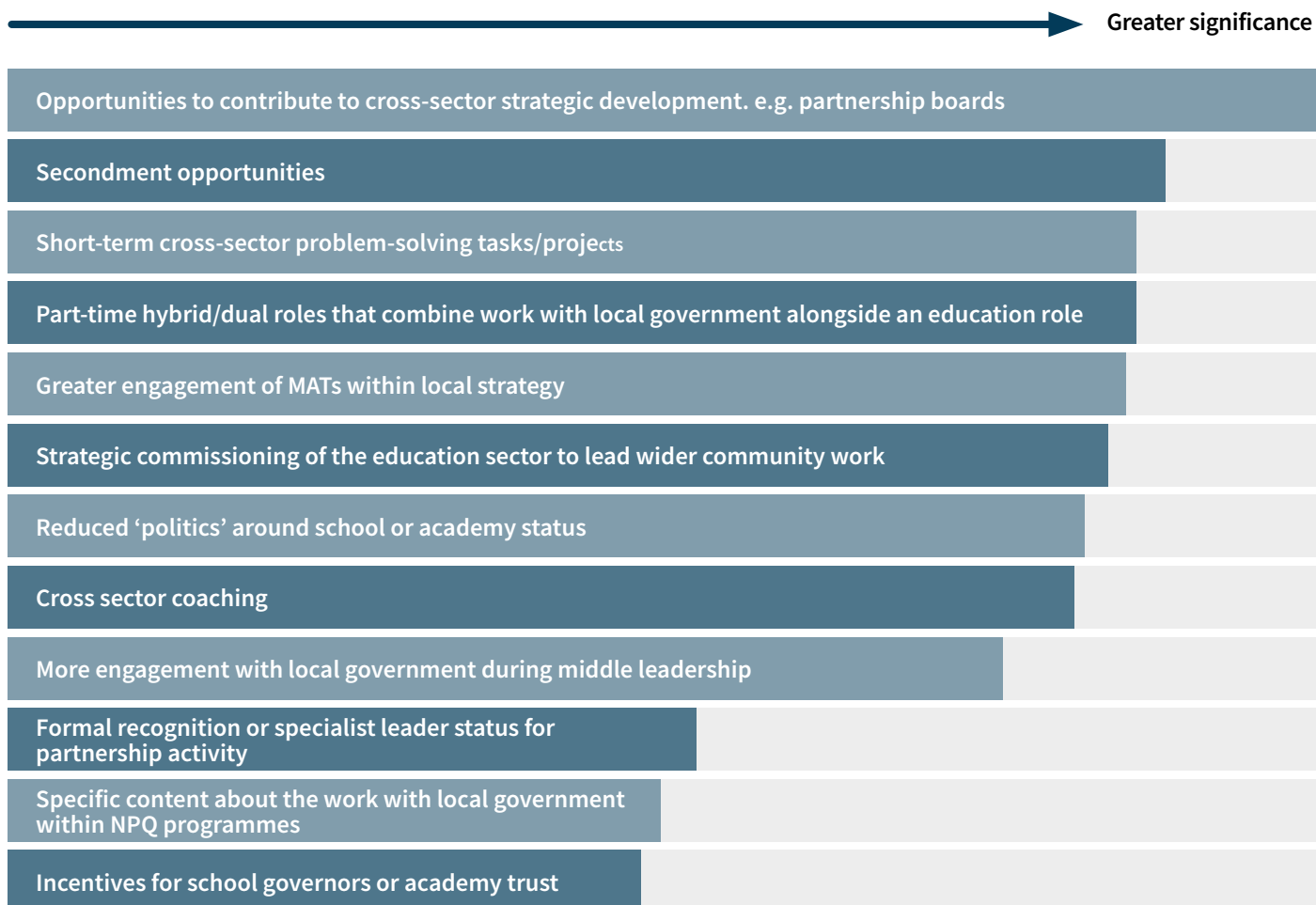
## Characteristics of leaders in scope continued

### 5d. Some additional characteristics of leadership in LAs

As a final part of this section, the following characteristics were offered by participants about the leadership role that is required in LAs:

- The sector needs individuals who are attracted to the concept of leadership of place. The role is now one of being a 'place-based capacity mover' to lever in the support that is required. It's about becoming a specialist in building partnerships, caring about a whole place and 'curating the dance floor' without feeling the need to direct every dance or piece of music.
- Education leaders moving into an LA role will have to learn quickly that their personal voice may be far less significant than in their previous positions. They will also need to step back from any feeling that their personal vision is vital, it becomes a shared vision and approach forged out of debate, consensus and compromise.
- LAs should be looking for leaders with the necessary skills, experiences, qualities and desires to look at children and families holistically, rather than using the sector labels.
- LA leadership requires a readiness to invite and include the contribution of specialist partners, and being comfortable to lead in domains where you are not always the expert.
- The leaders who become brilliant in a local government environment are those who have/develop the skills of influence and coalition-building, rather than the exercise of direct powers. It's all about facilitation, nudge and maintaining relationships.
- Senior leadership in LAs requires a level of self-deprecation and modesty as the success of their personal work is generally credited to the organisation, rather than the individual. Conversely, when things don't go well, the personal scrutiny can be intense.
- These leaders need to be well-focused and highly motivated to become accountable for the outcomes for all children, for example universal education; as well as have particular responsibilities for the most vulnerable children, such as children with SEND conditions and Children in Care.

Fig. 11 The potential significance of developments intended to attract education leaders into LA senior roles (from the survey responses)



## 6. Leadership development matters

**This final section of the report present a summary of the main messages from the study about the nature of leadership development that could lead to a growth of interest from talented education leaders to consider their transfer into working with LAs, and potentially aspire to the DCS position.**

### 6a. Investing earlier in leadership development

For all the reasons introduced within Section 5, the strong recommendation from this study is that we also need to have a key focus well before the step to become DCS, if an increase in the transfer of talented education leaders to develop their careers with LAs is to occur. Individualised approaches, such as coaching and mentoring, are identified by participants as being highly effective in enhancing this phase of leadership development.

Having said this, there will undoubtedly always be a relatively small number of very senior education leaders who have career experience and personal qualities that makes them almost 'DCS-ready' and leadership development programmes can facilitate this transfer. Such programmes are likely to be relatively short preparatory schemes not dissimilar to the existing Aspirant DCS course, complemented by additional, discretionary 'gap filling' modules to support specialist areas. Indications and suggestions about the characteristics of this leadership and the potential areas of specialist knowledge and understanding required have been identified throughout this study and feature within Sections 5 and 6 of this report. However, the Aspirant DCS programme is too big a step for the majority of talented education leaders.

Almost every contributor to this study suggests that an earlier investment in leadership development is required, if transfer between the education sector and work of LAs is desired. This leadership development would aim to increase the knowledge and interest of far greater numbers of talented education leaders well before they would be ready for any step into the DCS role. It would help to create a growing pool of colleagues with insight and experience (see b) below) of what it is like to work with of for LAs and, from this larger pool some might in due course aspire to follow a pathway towards the DCS role. This type of leadership development would be

far more significant to LAs than the potential progression of a few colleagues towards the DCS role, as it would significantly increase the volume of the general contribution of education leaders to the work co-ordinated and delivered by LAs.

Contributors suggested that there is a need to be developing intermediate step programmes for people earlier on in their career journey where they can benefit from significant engagement opportunities of working with LA colleagues. We also need smaller pre-DCS employment opportunities within the LA environment, 'exposure' programmes, maybe with transitional support e.g. secondments, task focused, part time. There were further suggestions for the creation of more short-term roles (up to 2 years) where education leaders can experience the role and start to see themselves as leaders who can make the 'bridges' and connections that are required in the leadership dialogue required across partnerships and between services. Such intermediate step programmes for education leaders earlier on their career journey would offer significant engagement opportunities of working with LA colleagues and enable them to 'try before they buy' without any risks, be they real or perceived, of making the leap.

*"A medium term, supportive role would be helpful in the transition between school senior leadership and LA roles"*  
Primary headteacher

#### RECOMMENDATION

Investment is not only needed in the leadership development of school leaders on the cusp of readiness for the DCS role, but also in the development of well-suited leaders at a much earlier stage. This can avoid some of the potential salary barriers that can make it harder for headteachers and executive leaders to transfer at a later stage.



#### RECOMMENDATION

A suite of leadership development opportunities, including coaching and mentoring, is required to cater for the needs of a range of talented education leaders, from those in senior role who are almost 'DCS ready' to those who are just taking first steps into joint-work with LAs.



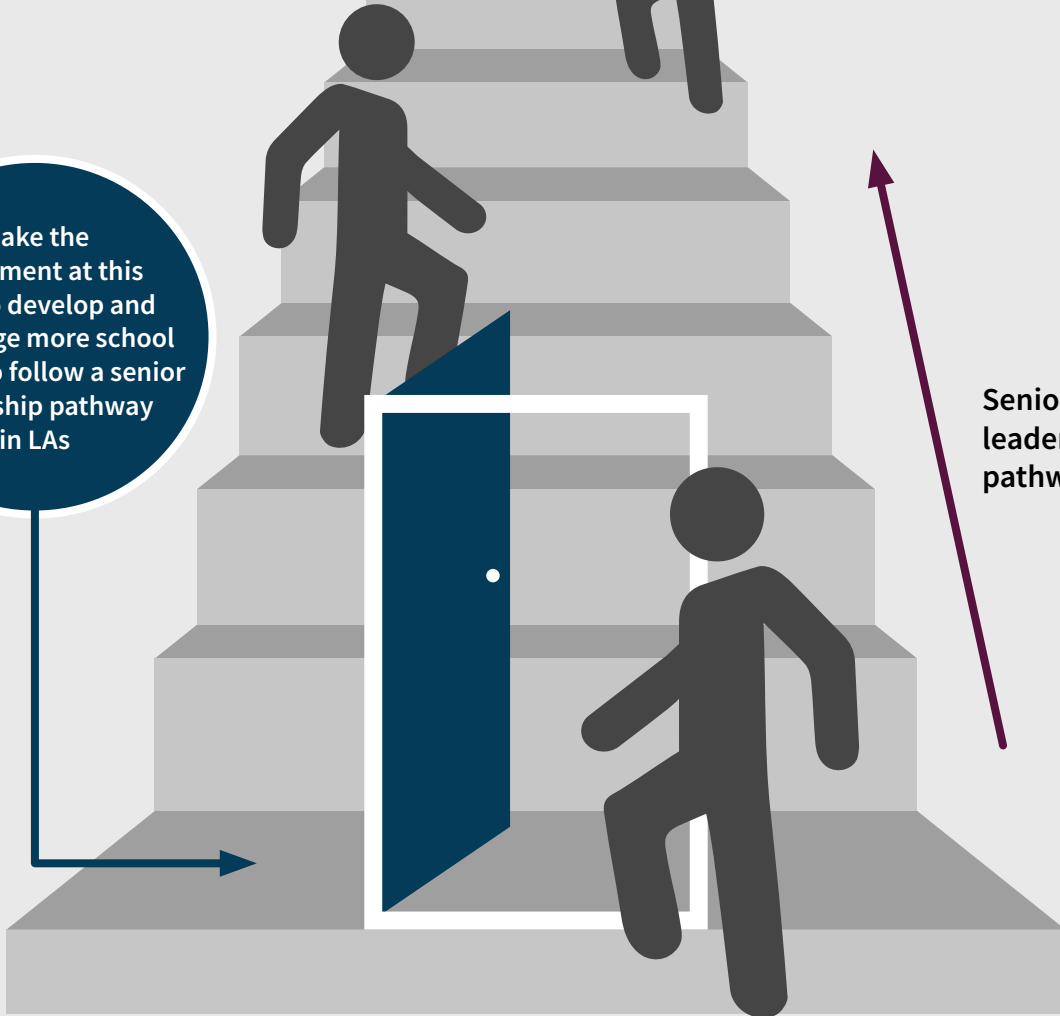


Fig. 12 Growing potential DCSs from a wider pool that receive earlier leadership development support

Very few headteachers and school leaders are suitable and interested to enter at DCS level.



Make the investment at this level to develop and encourage more school leaders to follow a senior leadership pathway in LAs



Senior leadership pathway in LAs

Strategic partnership work involving schools and LAs



Many school leaders are suitable and interested to contribute at this stage



# Leadership development matters continued

## 6b. The case for experiential learning

Focus group members were overwhelmingly clear that what was needed was experiential work-based learning. They discussed at length the value of structured internships, secondments, work shadowing accompanied by ongoing coaching and mentoring. They reiterated the need for colleagues from school to experience the LA, 'to see what it feels like'. Colleagues agreed that many heads are excellent at working with partners, but other experiences are needed.

Many contributors spoke enthusiastically about secondments, referring to structured projects 'on the edge of learning' with attached coaching and mentoring. These could be short full-time or longer part-time projects of a few months allowing education leaders to work more closely with the duration of LA processes, including with politicians. The LA should build on the improved communications with schools that has transpired through Covid-19 response work, in order to bridge the divide and encourage and communicate opportunities to work in and with the LA more effectively. The feeling was that secondments for a fixed time would allow education leaders to dip a toe into LA work, so that they can see how it feels.

Others spoke of the way in which work shadowing was often highly acceptable to school governors. It would be mutually beneficial in opening up ideas; 'but there does not appear to be a way in at present.' The Women into Leadership programme was also cited as an example of the way in which a short term internship is valuable in experiential leadership development.

Some colleagues referred to the way in which the NPQEL would benefit from a module related to LA working in order to bring in this type of thinking and possibilities, see d) below. Finally, the value of coaching and mentoring were discussed in all focus groups, with a heavy stress that this coaching and mentoring needs to be personalised and structured in its approach.

One DCS with an education background provided some interesting and practical suggestions to those seeking to support leadership development about how to manage this need for experiential professional learning. She recommended that:

*"Leadership training providers like Staff College or LAs themselves need to create schemes for school leaders to volunteer for experiences that will strengthen their knowledge and understanding. The financial challenge of secondments is possibly too great, but meaningful voluntary experiences on an organised basis might offer a low-cost or no-cost option. Such a scheme could include experiences such as; shadowing the Emergency Duty Team overnight, spending time with the MASH (multi-agency service hub) to see the daily triage and case/risk analysis process with police etc., seeing the judiciary in action, following frontline safeguarding work and shadowing the political process to highlight the need for democracy."*

In sum, the importance of work-based experiential learning dominated interviewees' responses when asked about the type of leadership development activities Staff College and others should consider. Learning from experience, through partnerships, work placements, secondments, shadowing, mentoring and coaching activities were uppermost in all survey, focus groups and interview responses.

RECOMMENDATION

Leadership development programmes should use experiential work-based learning, supported by coaching and mentoring, that enables talented education leaders to encounter significant learning that is relevant to senior leadership in LAs and a career path leading to the DCS role.



RECOMMENDATION

A range of short-term experiences, such as volunteering, work-shadowing, strategic projects and secondments, should be created for education to support and inform the potential career choices of talented education leaders.



## 6c. Themes to address within leadership development programmes

In general terms there was strong support to move away from 'traditional' training to experiential learning and 'working with people'. This work based learning was seen to be far more important than traditional training and the leadership development framework that underpins it should have children's outcomes at the heart.

However, whether classroom-based or experiential learning, some key themes recurred throughout this study that should inform the content of some of the leadership development programmes for education leaders at this nexus. These recommendations fell into two broad groupings of either the development of leadership characteristics or the acquisition of specific skills, knowledge and understanding. It was also recognised that that as programmes moves further online and include distance learning, they may become more inclusive and attract a wider range of applicants to the programme.

It was suggested that a substantial focus should be on the relevant skills, experience and qualities that a person brings to the table. Programmes need to build the character and resilience of participants. For example, it is not felt by most contributors that the specialist knowledge of social care or working with politicians that should be to the forefront. It is instead the 'resilience' that this type of strategic work requires and the actual skill area is related more to working in a political scenario and strategic analysis. These types of higher order skills are transferable across professional contexts.

The USP of these leadership development programmes should be a multi-agency, cross-sector perspective and a deep focus upon leadership. This leadership development needs to address the core growth of individuals and their ethics, in

## Leadership development matters continued

addition to the building of skills. Some contributors who had previously completed the Aspirant DCS programme described how, for them, it was the personal focus on the deep, profound learning about leadership that was most significant. The technical content was useful, but the ‘out of sector’ leadership thinking and the encounters with people from other walks of life, e.g. artists and poets, often led to the most profound learning. Similarly, another contributor spoke highly of her leadership training as a National Executive Educator throughout an 18 months programme that used inputs from the likes of De Loitte and John Lewis to provide opportunities to think outside the box and make leadership connections more widely than possible in previous courses.

Candidates transferring from the education sector will have gaps in knowledge, understanding and experience and it was the general recommendation within this study that a leadership programme might address these most effectively through a suite of discretionary modules. It was again reiterated that specialist knowledge can be learned, but this learning is always more significant and leads to lasting change when it is learned through mentoring, coaching and work based experiential professional learning. Leadership development programmes need to build in this dimension.

**Cross-sector coaching** was strongly recommended to become an on-going strand of leadership development. This coaching dimension is seen as vital to help participants consolidate and personalise their learning in a reflective manner. The suggestion was made repeatedly that this coaching does not need to be sector-specific and that actually a cross-sector approach is most valuable. This avoids the risk of more senior coaches from within the same professional domain as the coachee slipping into a mentoring role and providing advice based on their prior experience.

Training that is based around scenarios were also cited as being very useful, in particular when looking at leadership in business and other sectors. Within the themes recommended by the participants for specialist training with this cohort of talented education leaders, a few emerged consistently:

- Most education leaders will need exposure to the experience of system-wide strategic leadership. Leadership development programmes will need to help them peel back the layers of governance (onion) so they can begin to see the child/family/community at the centre and the layers of service and decision-making that are built layer on layer around them. It was suggested that experiences like Schools Forum (although often ‘deathly!’) can sometimes be useful in this regard, as are roles for headteachers on partnership strategic groups.
- Leadership development programmes for education leaders need to help participants (ideally from experience rather than in a classroom) to know and understand the political dimension of leadership. While LA political processes are often perceived as slow, there is a high value in democracy, scrutiny and accountability that many heads could learn

to understand and appreciate. They also need to learn to respect the democratic mandate, even when they might disagree with elected politicians or even find them distasteful. In the words of one DCS, they have to learn to ‘suck up to them’ and respect the fact that the communities they serve have elected them.

- There needs to be learning and commitment to the Nolan Principles of Public Life that outline the ethical standards those working in the public sector: Selflessness, Integrity, Objectivity, Accountability, Openness, Honesty and Leadership.
- Handling the media and understanding the judicial system were also seen as key areas of learning and experience that are likely to fall beyond the experience of many education leaders and be of benefit.

### RECOMMENDATION

Leadership development programmes should combine a multi-agency perspective and a deep focus on profound ethical leadership, with discretionary modules that provide learning in priority areas beyond the experience of most education leaders, e.g. political leadership.



## 6d. Making links between different leadership development pathways

This final section of the report makes a strong plea from the contributors to the study that all organisations providing leadership programmes for the strategic levels of leadership should begin to work together to co-ordinate their provision.

In recent years the leadership career journey within the education profession has been organised around a framework of national, professional qualifications (NPQs) and this contributes to a perceived dissonance between the professional leadership development and career routes available in the education sector compared to the LA sector. Many school leaders will have worked their way through a series of NPQ programmes from middle and senior leadership, through preparation for headship and then possibly into executive leadership.

However, when we asked survey respondents to consider the career/professional development opportunities provided in education which mitigate against making a move into a DCS role, several responses referred to the lack of continuous professional development in LAs compared to schools and the lack of leadership development support for transition from school to LA.

*“School leadership pathways are clearer and NPQs support the context-specific, professional learning I require, I can’t see what career and leadership opportunities there are other than the Aspirant DCS course.”*  
Secondary headteacher

## Leadership development matters continued

*“When I previously worked for the LA before moving back into school, the professional development opportunities were very limited and I could see those around me who had been in post for many years were suffering as a result.”*

Senior LA Officer

This framework of NPQs offers education leaders a pathway that draws them increasingly into more specialist education roles, and does not generally tend to open up possibilities into other avenues. Some contributors referred negatively to this rigidity in the delivery of some NPQ programmes, in particular one was disappointed that the programmes are delivered in an education silo and do not include LA, Social Care or Health leaders. He contrasted this with the valuable cross professional work-based learning taking place through the Police Staff College, recommending this to be worthy of further research and dissemination.

All NPQs however, include a personal, work-based project/study and, as suggested by a few contributors, it would not take much of a discussion between programme providers to stimulate some education leaders to study more outward-

facing partnership work in an LA environment within their NPQ. In particular the NPQEL programme for executive school leaders was cited most frequently as the one that could be connected with the UPON Programme to increase this connectivity.

Because there are several transferable components within these different programmes, it was suggested that, in an ideal world, learning from one programme could be recognised and transferred with a level of ‘accreditation’ between them.

More fundamentally it was recognised that almost all of the leadership training happens in professional ‘silos’ and there appears to be no multi-professional leadership development being offered. No contributor to this study could think of any existing leadership development provision that encourages LA and school sector colleagues (and others) to learn together.

### RECOMMENDATION

A coherent and connected scheme is required so that education leaders’ learning and achievements on all leadership development programmes in the school and children’s sector can be recognised and support their potential transfer into new roles.



# 7. Recommendations

This section lists all of the recommendations that have been made throughout the report.



## Recommendations for leadership development:

- 1 Leadership development strategies should challenge the significant negative perceptions of school leaders about the nature of LA work, using experiential methods where possible. While some of these perceptions may be exaggerated, others clearly have a validity linked to the distinctive processes of politically-led organisations and it will help school leaders if these aspects become better understood. **(Page 13)**
- 2 Leadership development programmes should include discretionary modules, preferably using experiential methods that enable participants to address personal knowledge gaps. **(Page 14)**
- 3 The distinctive and essential purpose of leadership development programmes should be to build deep, principled leadership characteristics through multi-agency experience. This approach is more likely to facilitate the transfer of strategic skills and the development of effective cross-sector leadership. **(Page 14)**
- 4 Programmes that provide leadership development for school leaders should address the role of the LA to provide leadership of place. Working with or for the local authority to lead across a wider area is a strong match with the expressed desire of many school leaders to make a difference. **(Page 11)**
- 5 Leadership development should help education leaders to understand how to cope with the level of risks involved in LA work and the DCS role. Mentoring may be helpful, but this needs to be structured and personalised. **(Page 14)**
- 6 Don't assume that salary differentials make the transfer of school leaders into LA employment impossible, as creative approaches seem to exist. Take action earlier in the careers of talented school leaders to sow seeds for potential pathways into work with local authorities before salary differentials might become too significant. **(Page 17)**
- 7 Selection for programmes that attract and develop leaders for senior roles in LA Children's Services should not be skewed in preference of any professional background of candidates. Recruitment should be based on an evaluation of strategic skills, ability and experience. **(Page 18)**
- 8 The UPON Programme Consortium needs to remain alert to the rapidly changing cadre of leaders in schools and academies and not be restricted by any perceptions about the first generation of converting academy headteachers. **(Page 22)**
- 10 The identification of talented education leaders most suited to potential transfer in senior LA roles needs to draw upon a detailed and up-to-date understanding of the variety of leadership experiences that can be involved within similar-sounding roles. **(Page 21)**
- 11 Multiple access points are needed to reflect the key phases and stepping points in a school leader's career when they might look to enter leadership development programmes to support their transfer into senior LA roles. **(Page 21)**
- 12 Investment is not only needed in the leadership development of school leaders on the cusp of readiness for the DCS role, but also in the development of well-suited leaders at a much earlier stage. This can avoid some of the potential salary barriers that that can make it harder for headteachers and executive leaders to transfer at a later stage. **(Page 24)**
- 13 A suite of leadership development opportunities, including coaching and mentoring, is required to cater for the needs of a range of talented education leaders, from those in senior role who are almost 'DCS ready' to those who are just taking first steps into joint-work with LAs. **(Page 24)**
- 14 Leadership development programmes should use experiential work-based learning, supported by coaching and mentoring, that enables talented education leaders to encounter significant learning that is relevant to senior leadership in LAs and a career path leading to the DCS role. **(Page 26)**
- 15 Leadership development programmes should combine a multi-agency perspective and a deep focus on profound ethical leadership, with discretionary modules that provide learning in priority areas beyond the experience of most education leaders, e.g. political leadership. **(Page 27)**
- 16 A coherent and connected scheme is required so that education leaders' learning and achievements on all leadership development programmes in the school and children's sector can be recognised and support their potential transfer into new roles. **(Page 28)**

# 7. Recommendations



## Recommendations for LAs and the school sector

- 1 Harness the strength of desire of leaders in the school sector to serve all children as the key rationale for looking to develop potential leadership with a local authority; this outweighs any practical and career issues. **(Page 10)**
- 2 Don't be deflected by occasional incidents where academy leaders appear to prioritise organisational interest above wider community needs. These behaviours are likely to be short-term and are not reflective of the principled leadership that generally prevails across the school sector. **(Page 10)**
- 3 Build upon the experience of the Covid-19 pandemic to strengthen the working relationships and partnerships between the local authority and all schools. Consider how to capitalise upon the recent crisis experience of addressing the needs of all children and families together, especially the most vulnerable, to re-establish a clear understanding with schools of the LA role and the requirement for partnership working. **(Page 11)**
- 4 The DfE and, to a lesser extent LAs, should provide clearer communication about the responsibilities held by the DCS for all children and their role as leader of place, as set out in statutory guidance. **(Page 15)**
- 5 Address the low levels of understanding about career routes and LA leadership pathways through much more positive marketing of the LA role to headteachers. This should include explanation of the qualification route right through to the DCS position and also provide role models of education leaders who have made the move. **(Page 12)**
- 6 A range of short-term experiences, such as volunteering, work-shadowing, strategic projects and secondments, should be created for education to support and inform the potential career choices of talented education leaders. **(Page 26)**
- 7 The experiences of the Covid-19 pandemic offer a timely opportunity for LAs and schools to review and re-visit the ways in which they work together to serve children, families and their communities. LAs in particular are encouraged to 'reach out' to school leaders in new ways to harness their motivation to contribute to improved public service. **(Page 16)**



## Recommendations for the DfE

- 1 The DfE and, to a lesser extent LAs, should provide clearer communication about the responsibilities held by the DCS for all children and their role as leader of place, as set out in statutory guidance. **(Page 15)**
- 2 DfE should ensure that the national professional leadership development programmes it commissions from partners include content about, effective partnership work and the role of the LA and within the overall education and children's services system. **(Pages 11 & 15)**
- 3 DfE should consider how it resources and supports talent development programmes. Current uncertainty is reducing leaders' confidence to commit themselves to career pathways or partnerships that they feel might not have a sustainable future. **(Pages 11 & 15)**