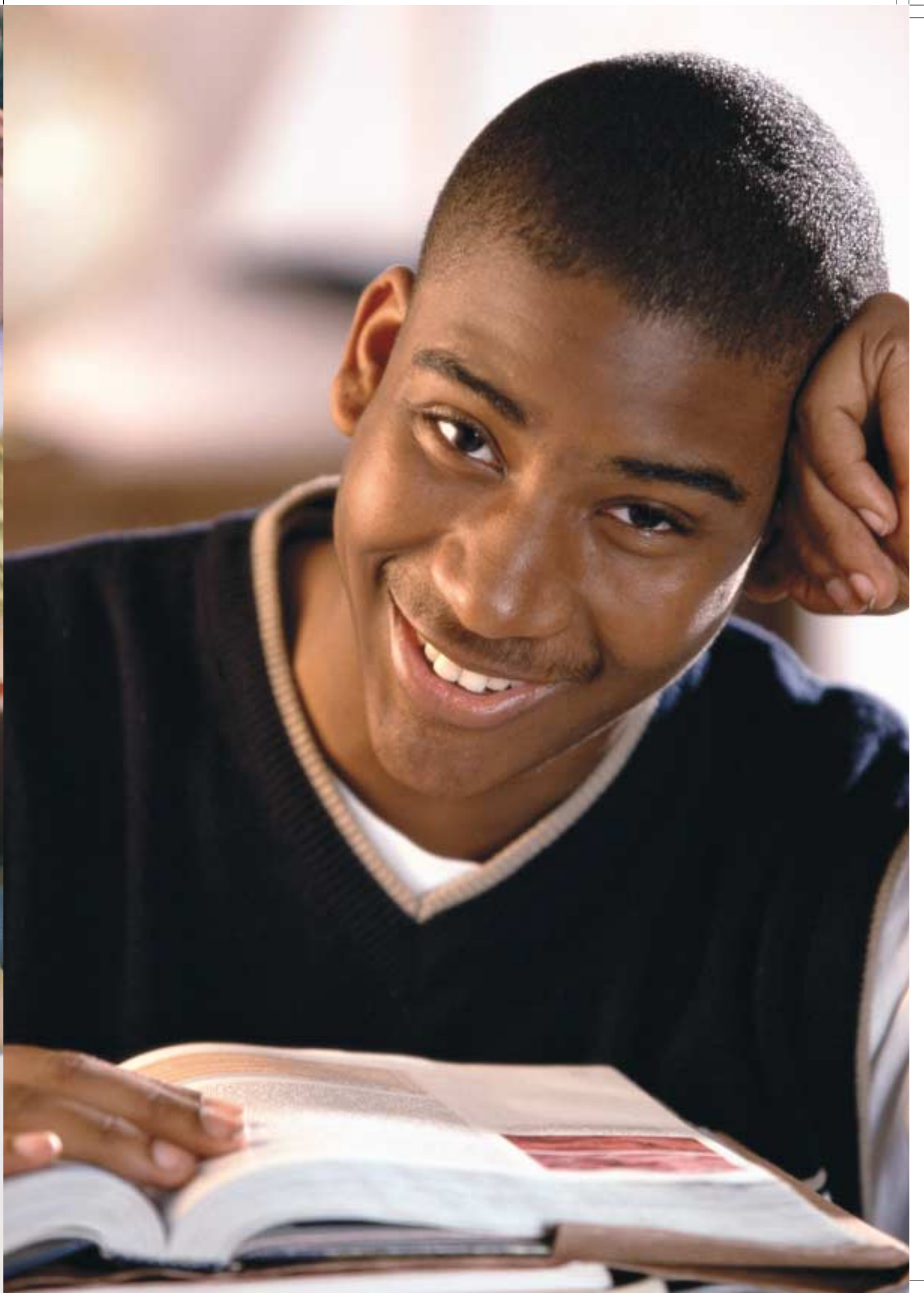




innovation

**THE LEADING  
EDGE PARTNERSHIP  
PROGRAMME**

Learning through sharing practice  
The Cohort Two Innovation  
Exchanges June/July 2004







## Leading Edge Partnership Programme: Cohort 2

The **Leading Edge Partnership programme** supports the development of school partnerships that inspire, design, test and adapt leading edge practices in teaching and learning. Partnerships are focused on working collectively to solve learning challenges faced by underperforming schools and /or particular groups of poorly performing pupils. The programme seeks to identify, extend and share innovation and excellence in ways that contribute to system-wide improvement.

The programme was launched in July 2003 with 103 partnerships involving over 700 schools in England. It has grown with the addition of Cohort 2 in September 2004 encompassing a further 102 partnerships involving over 400 schools.

The programme is underpinned by three key principles:

- Reducing the attainment gap
- Building capacity through informed professionalism in practice
- System-wide high equity/high excellence

Information on these principles and on the programme is available on the Leading Edge Partnership programme website: [www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/leadingedge](http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/leadingedge)



## Next Steps

Cohort 2 Partnerships shared their plans with the Department for Education and Skills in July. These will be codified as a means of sharing emerging lessons and examples of effective practice, and tracking the overall shape and development of the programme.

The plans also provide a starting point for conversations and visits between partnerships and between partnerships and the Department for Education and Skills. The Innovation Unit will be facilitating workshops and/or exchanges on themes that have already emerged as being of particular interest.

As a means of continuing to build the informed professionalism that the programme is generating, practitioners reading this document are encouraged to provide feedback. In particular please let us know:

- Which aspects of the document are most useful?
- What practical use the document might have in your school/ partnership?
- What further kind of publication you would like to use to support your Leading Edge Partnership work?

The Innovation Unit is also keen to disseminate the knowledge gathered from Cohort 1 and 2 practitioners thus far through case studies of the most innovative and exciting practice within the programme.

If you have feedback on this report, or you think there is practice in your partnership that others could learn from, please contact [dania.spier@dfes.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:dania.spier@dfes.gsi.gov.uk).





The language of target-setting can be off-putting; teachers do not always find the concept of 'targets' easy. Nevertheless, shared targets, sensitively handled, are seen as a key element in building a common strategic approach and culture of expectation across partnerships.

Examples of current thinking and planning include:

- Some partnerships would prefer to have collective targets for their area rather than a set of individual targets.
- Group targets should be used to eliminate competition, not accountability.
- Some partnerships have already set shared targets that are enhanced rather than aggregated, which take into account the expected performance of particular subgroups.
- One urban area is divided into zones, with shared targets for attendance and exclusions, but also school targets to which other zone partners can contribute; for example, schools with less than 25% of 5 A\*-Cs will be supported by the others, so that although exam targets are not collective, the responsibility for meeting them is shared by partners working collaboratively.
- *"Be clear about the difference between a prediction and a target – and ensure that this difference is upheld and respected!"*

### Observations on the use of data

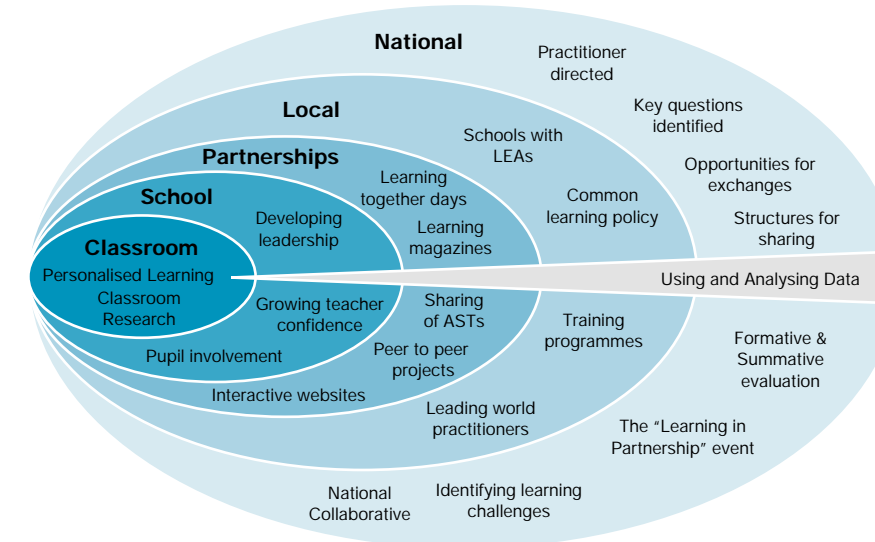
- *"Where schools are data rich but information poor, the challenge for leaders is to get rid of the mess and clarify it for everybody else."*
- It is important to share data with pupils and to use it to underpin conversations about potential, aspirations and expectations rather than as evidence of insufficient effort or progress.
- Data can help inform and even drive effective programmes of assessment for learning.
- Great benefits are reaped from using data to inform conversations with parents, not least because it ensures staff are engaged and fully understand how to use the data!
- *"Data generates questions, but you need something to generate actions" – preferably self evaluation.*

### And finally:

*"Data is a tool, not a philosophy!"*

## Building On Outcomes: How the programme has already made a difference

The following summary was presented to the Cohort 2 Partnerships at this summer's five exchanges. It shows the range and levels of activity in which Cohort 1 Partnerships have been engaged. This diagram is intended to show how the use and analysis of data permeates all layers of Leading Edge Partnership activity, always with the sharpest focus penetrating to classroom level, i.e. the heart of the programme.



By putting classroom practice at the centre of their Leading Edge Partnership work, and supporting the development, implementation and evaluation of projects through the careful analysis of data, partnerships have already generated a wide range of important outcomes. These include significant gains in the achievements, attendance and levels of engagement of pupils, and in practitioner knowledge and expertise. Data is being gathered about the impact of their activities on pupil attainment.

Further information on the activities of Cohort 1 Partnerships in these categories is available in a database accessible via the website:

[www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/leadingedge/](http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/leadingedge/)



## Testing New Ways Of Working

The Leading Edge Partnership programme has given a large number of schools and teachers working within them opportunities to test out both innovative structures for collaboration between schools and innovative strategies for raising standards within classrooms.

### A range of partnerships

Cohort 2 of the programme includes a wide range of partnerships, led by a variety of different kinds of schools:

- 71 partnerships are led by specialist schools
- 7 partnerships are led by special schools
- 5 partnerships are led by 2 lead schools jointly
- 22 partnerships consist of just 2 schools
- 24 partnerships consist of 3 schools
- 23 partnerships consist of 4 schools
- 32 partnerships consist of between 5 and 8 schools
- 1 (highly unusual!) partnership consists of 19 schools
- 70 partnerships include schools in difficult circumstances
- 107 lead partners belong to 69 different LEAs



### What data is most effective?

- *"The challenge is to pare down the data, to find what is most useful and get that used in the classroom. We need to use it as an agenda for changing the way the students learn and the way we teach."*
- Individual pupil level data is the most important to analyse in order to explore within school variation.
- Departmental residual values can reveal unexpected pockets of strength in 'weak' schools: *"we are looking for positive data within our schools as well as using data to challenge under-performance"*.
- Juxtaposing quantitative with qualitative data can lead to the identification of new groups of underachievers. Current attitudes to school, levels of engagement with learning and future aspirations are all useful qualitative indicators.
- One school has data on attitudes to learning for each pupil by department going back eight years; this has greatly influenced their development.
- *"Data is only as good as the questions you ask of it...Use data to raise questions, not to limit aspirations...Data doesn't raise standards, teaching and learning does."*

### How best can data be shared within partnerships?

- The management and dissemination of data across a partnership can be a specific role for a single person. One partnership's data is managed on an extranet with a common format by a member of staff accountable for it. In other cases a non-teaching statistician has been employed for this role.
- One partnership has timetabled in four data experts from two schools to work on the data from across the schools, focusing on the value added within sub-groups and targets for post 16, joint GCSEs and staff recruitment and retention. Elsewhere, a newly appointed deputy head has been responsible for developing a data strategy.
- One network of partnerships is establishing a data group that will manage the collation and analysis of pupil level data across all schools; this will facilitate the identification of target groups of pupils, and the implementation and tracking of interventions.
- It is important to establish protocols for sharing data at the outset, and in particular to establish the boundaries of confidentiality.

### How might partnerships move towards shared targets?

The majority of partnerships expressed a willingness to explore collective target-setting. (On the basis that trust, sharing and honesty are the key underpinnings of successful collaboration, partnerships that are unwilling to share data should perhaps explore the reasons why prior to embarking on partnership working.)

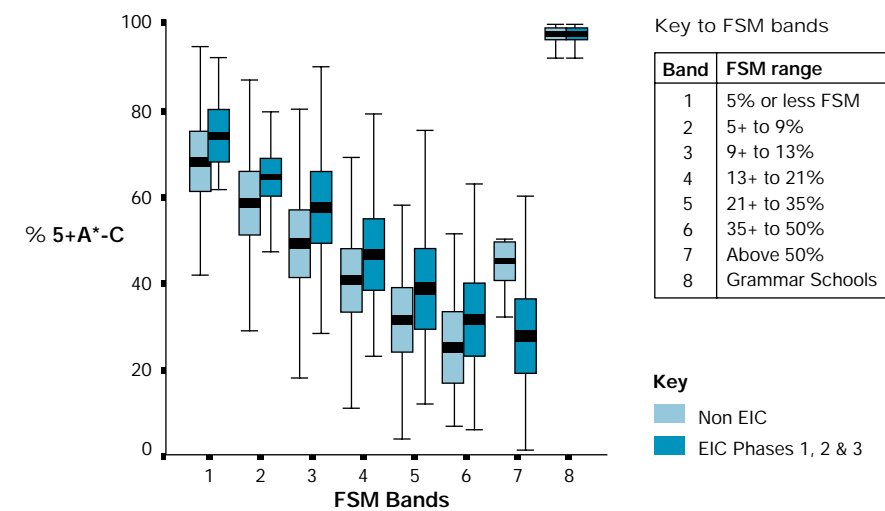


## Using Data To Develop Successful Collaboration

This summer's innovation exchanges included a presentation on the use of data to enhance teaching and learning. This summarised the nature of the socio-economic achievement gap in the UK, which is significantly worse than in most other comparable countries, and which stubbornly refuses to narrow despite the efforts of successive Governments.

However, the chart below gives considerable hope; the 'whisker' lines extending from each bar show that even in those schools with high proportions of students on free school meals, it is possible for students to achieve well above the norm for that group. The challenge facing the programme is to identify, distil and replicate the successful strategies and practice of the schools currently achieving these exceptional outcomes.

2003 GCSE: % gaining 5 + A\*-C by FSM Band and EIC areas Provisional data



The Leading Edge partnerships in Cohort 2 spent some time at the exchanges exploring the role that data has to play in successful school-to-school collaboration.

Practitioners used the following questions as a starting point for their discussions:

- What data do you find most effective in identifying your school's strengths and areas of underperformance?
- How could data best be shared across your partnership?
- How might your partnership move towards shared targets?

## The National Collaborative

The National Collaborative is a group of 23 lead partner schools whose key objectives are as follows:

- to identify successful strategies to close the underachievement gap of pupils in their schools
- to illuminate and develop effective strategies for the rapid dissemination and embedding of successful practice

The schools work by sharing effective practice with each other and testing new ways of working in the context of their own schools, using the principles of appreciative inquiry and rapid cycle improvement. The practices tested and the outcomes achieved are captured in a regularly updated handbook.

The schools in the National Collaborative meet every few months to share progress and map the next steps for the project. Their methodology is characterised by a number of features:

- Co-construction of the framework
- Co-authorship of the handbook
- A solid research and evidence base
- Teacher-led governance
- Joint delivery of interventions by teachers
- Network support
- Dissemination

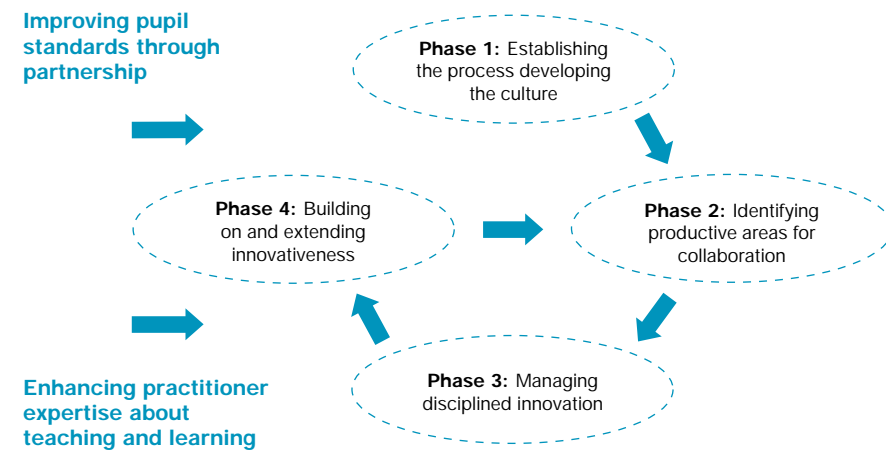
A second National Collaborative will be developed with Cohort 2 partnerships, and over 140 practitioners from Cohort 2 have expressed an interest in being involved in this way of working.



## Emerging Learning: A model for building collaborative practice

From the wide range of innovative and collaborative practices being developed and tested in Leading Edge Partnerships, a number of common elements and themes have emerged over the past year.

These elements and themes have been drawn together into a model intended to provide a starting point for schools wishing to build innovative practice in collaboration with others. It draws on work in progress in many different partnerships and is offered in the spirit of sharing emerging learning.



### Phase One: Establishing the process – developing the culture

Headteachers and senior leaders establish the partnership and model collaborative behaviours and values. In particular they will seek to:

- clarify the focus of the improvement work and set success criteria
- share pupil data within and across schools
- share curriculum models between schools
- share staff structures within and across schools
- build up trust and establish effective relationships
- create time, space and the opportunity for a collaborative culture to develop.

### Involve governors to maximise support for collaboration

- The governors of one partner school attended a governors' meeting at their lead partner school in order to develop their understanding of the partnership strategy. The governors of both schools gave full support to the plans and have offered their own expertise to support the partnership.
- Another partnership has created a single committee of governors from two schools, with responsibility for overseeing the partnership action plan.
- Incorporation of innovation into the school development plan may also be useful. One such plan has prescribed sections on standards, innovation, community and business and each member of staff has to set their own targets under these headings.

### And finally:

*"A really good way to raise aspirations and achievement is by developing student leadership in schools."*







### What style of leadership do you find best promotes and supports innovative practice within and between schools?

*"Leadership is certainly about creating vision and direction but then it is about empowering people. It is about letting go. It is about risk-taking with staff and being prepared to pick up the pieces if things go wrong without blaming, but then deciding where the good practice is and sharing that."*

#### Devolve and distribute leadership

A wide range of leadership models is being used across Cohort 2 partnerships to support their collaborative activities. Examples include:

- A Strategy and Innovation team – made up of senior leaders, with responsibility for strands filtered through the school, and staff at every level taking responsibility for areas of the strategy.
- Appointment of a director of independent learning and a director of transforming learning, who are responsible for taking holistic views of the school's policy and practice in a non-traditional way.
- Reflecting the school context is critical; one partnership talked about the need for leaders to self-identify their own school's position on the continuum from strategic/consultative/autocratic.
- Leadership training is critical – in one school middle managers are involved in action research projects designed to develop their leadership skills, in partnership with the University of Cambridge.

Whatever model of leadership is adopted, leaders need to structure the processes for monitoring and evaluation, demonstrating the importance of these elements by their active involvement and leadership of them. It is also essential that an infrastructure and a learning culture based on the twin strands of distributed leadership and delegated autonomy are soundly embedded so that they remain sustainable beyond the tenure of any particular individual or team.

#### Focus on the 'micro communication'

- Innovation must be shared diligently and actively throughout the school to sustain progress, especially where turnover of staff is high.
- Leadership can come from anywhere; it can be refreshing and stimulating for an experienced teacher to work with an NQT.
- Ongoing professional dialogue, formal and informal, about teaching and learning helps senior leaders to identify potential leaders and champions of innovation from across the staff.
- Get the language right – language can be a powerful tool to reinforce the breaking down of hierarchical barriers and can aid the shift in mindset from seeing schools as islands to taking on collective responsibilities.

### Phase Two: Identifying productive areas for collaboration

Headteachers and senior leaders establish organisational structures to support and facilitate partnership working, e.g. a 'change team' of assistant heads and middle leaders. Their initial priorities will be to:

- identify and explain the effectiveness of current systems and structures and their impact on pupil data – what's the variation between pupil outcomes in different subjects/key stages?
- develop a greater understanding between practitioners about the effectiveness of teaching and learning in relation to pupil outcomes – where are the success stories, which subjects/key stages demonstrate high pupil performance?
- identify areas for collaboration where practice can be shared on the basis of what's worked for the benefit of pupils and staff
- involve pupils in developing an understanding of their learning and of the schools' strategies to help them build their capacity to learn.

### Phase Three: Managing disciplined innovation

The new change team is resourced to continue to develop a culture and grow capacity for innovation. Its most important and fundamental tasks are now to:

- identify which pupils face the greatest learning challenges
- determine the baseline for this group
- set targets for their progress in terms of timescale and aspects of achievement
- assess the likely barriers to progress and plan how to overcome them
- decide how to involve the pupils actively in the change process.

Besides maintaining clear communications with schools' senior management teams (who in turn will be planning their strategy for embedding) the change team is also responsible for growing capacity with middle leaders and expert teachers.

This can be done by creating a single 'action team' of key practitioners across the partnership focussed on solving the learning challenge and making the greatest gains. The plans made at this stage will determine the distribution of funds between the partner schools.

This team's responsibilities are to:

- identify key learning principles and processes for practitioners
- agree timetabled opportunities for classroom coaching
- regularly track the impact of classroom interventions on identified pupil groups in order to profile pupil progress
- evaluate process and outcomes with pupils and practitioners.

#### Phase Four: Building on and extending 'innovativeness'

The action team is responsible for sharing creative classroom practice with the change team whose role is then to ensure knowledge development within schools and across and beyond the partnership. In order to achieve this, both teams will:

- create manageable and sustainable opportunities for exchange between staff
- identify and share cultural and technical change elements
- share qualitative exploration of raised levels of pupil engagement
- systematise the learning principles being developed, ensuring sustainability in individual schools and across the partnership
- maintain a focus on pupil outcome data as a tool to prompt refinement of strategies.



#### Develop pupil voice and involvement

Significant benefits were reported by partnerships using the development of pupil voice by engaging pupils across partnerships in a variety of ways. Examples include:

- Schools looking at ways to see if the students have noted a difference as a result of the programme – if they feel there have been positive outcomes. Some are attempting to measure pupil perceptions and attitudes before, during and after the work.
- A partnership holding joint training sessions with the pupils of its three school councils. Another partnership is planning inset days where staff and students work together on learning styles and culture.
- Extending student involvement in the partnership by visits to each others' school – the cultural barriers and differences can prove challenging. One partnership has found it more successful as a first step to switch the staff between schools, to get an understanding of the different expectations and attitudes of the students.
- Using student voice as a route to addressing problems: in one partnership an online survey of bullying has yielded useful information.
- Students observing lessons and providing feedback on teacher performance: this has proved to be a useful input into staff performance management and departmental reviews, and the pupil response to this involvement is very positive.
- Exit surveys from leaving pupils – these can be a source of useful feedback.

#### And finally:

*"Nothing builds a relationship like helping a partner school prepare for Ofsted!"*



### Pool resources and exploit each other's strengths

*"One of the things that came out very strongly is this desire to add coherence to the pockets of excellence that do exist, and to make the most creative use of the resources that exist within schools."*

- Move away from the strong/weak school partnership model towards an appreciation of the strengths and weaknesses in every school: in one partnership, the school that is regarded as being in the most challenging circumstances has the English department that produces the best Key Stage 3 results.
- Use a leading practitioner or department from one school, identified through comparative analysis of data, to lead teaching and learning development projects in their subject area for staff from all the schools.
- Share the planning and delivery of training sessions and closure days: geographical proximity makes this easier and there are examples of whole city school closure for joint INSET, and of heads of department meetings and common timetabling being used to reinforce collaborative working.
- One partnership does not schedule normal lessons for one and a half hours on every other Tuesday, to free staff for professional development eg subject teachers working together on lesson plans, and sharing across the partnership: an e-learning programme is set up for pupils during this time.
- One partnership runs common parent information evenings across its three schools with rotation of venues.
- Some partnerships have established joint bank accounts.
- Some partnerships have agreed to act as critical friends for each other in an external evaluation role.

### Develop the right role for the LEA

- Explore the potential roles of the LEA – brokering relationships within and between partnerships is a particularly powerful one.
- Some LEAs are also strongly placed to broker a multi-agency approach to common problems, eg poor attendance. One example offered was of a shared extranet for pupil data managed by the LEA.
- Benefits have been derived from heads and LEAs establishing a joint database of good practice in lead schools.
- One partnership has a strategic group, with heads and officers on it, funded by the LEA, which also funds a University to support the work. The group includes students from primary and secondary schools and has an operational as well as a strategic role.

## Practitioner Perspectives: Cohort 2

*"Instead of having an initiative overload everything is coming together and we are finding excitement in directing and generating this sort of work, rather than having to go through hoops."*

Practitioner

The first 103 Leading Edge Partnerships ('Cohort 1') were brought together in a series of five Leading Edge Innovation Exchanges in 2003. These exchanges were an opportunity for 396 teachers and practitioners to enter into a dialogue with each other and with policy makers about policy and practice. The views expressed at these events were summarised in a document called 'Practitioner Perspectives on Successful Whole School Innovation, Collaboration and Leadership'.

The report set out a summary of personal perspectives and experiences, offered to support discussion and reflection rather than as a definitive set of principles for practice. They were structured as responses to three questions:

- How do you create and sustain a culture of innovation in your own school?
- What has been the key to successful collaboration within and between schools?
- What style of leadership best promotes and supports innovative practice in schools?

The full report is available at [www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/leadingedge/](http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/leadingedge/)

The first group discussion at the five Innovation Exchanges run for Cohort 2 in 2004 gave 445 practitioners from over 340 schools in 58 LEAs a chance to review the views expressed by Cohort 1 and to build upon them. They were asked to respond to the following questions about the Practitioner Perspectives document:

- Building on your own experience, which of these points would you reinforce?
- Are any more significant than others?
- Would you add anything?

The general view across all five Cohort 2 exchanges was that the existing document provided a valuable summary of key principles underpinning successful collaboration and innovation. A number of direct quotes are reproduced in this section; individuals reinforced some areas rather than others, but the most interesting responses were to the third question. The following sections focus therefore on the new territory explored by Cohort 2 using their responses to the original 3 questions.





### How do you create and sustain a culture of innovation in your school?

*"The richness of working with other schools who may well be equally, if not more, effective but working in different ways means that we have that professional dialogue and challenge, which is the spark to innovation and to introducing new ideas in all schools. This is the seedbed which continues to improve teaching and learning."*

#### Support innovation through the allocation of resources

- *"Innovation requires resourced freedom."* One way is to make modest amounts of funding available to staff and pupils to encourage the submission of 'innovation bids', which must be contextualised within the school improvement plan.
- Create and resource a 'teachers' learning group' to generate and develop ideas: *"teachers like to learn from other teachers"*.
- Include innovation in the performance management system to ensure that involvement in new practice/innovative ideas becomes a criterion for any discretionary promotions up the pay spine.
- Appoint a 'learning development officer' with expertise in thinking skills and learning styles, able to work with students and staff, perhaps intensively with one department at a time.
- Exploit the benefits of 'home grown' CPD presented as a programme of 'professional learning opportunities'.

#### Develop a research base

- Develop a 'critical friend' relationship with an institution of higher education. Many partnerships are developing powerful links with universities to support programmes of classroom action research.
- Break down any barriers that may exist to building on good practice within the partnership, e.g. by encouraging the videoing of classroom practice *"to help others, not to check up on you"*.
- Coach from good practice identified by analysis of evidence. One partnership runs 'toolbox sessions' based on approaches to colleagues such as *"judging by the performance of x pupils in y activity, you are doing that really well, could you do a session for staff voluntarily to try that out?"*

#### And finally:

*"Innovation is a tool, not an end in itself."*

### What has been the key to successful collaboration within your school and between schools?

*"Each of the schools has a slightly different issue with different sized cohorts, but the focus will be on agreeing a common basis for target setting, pupil tracking and sharing expertise on intervention where that is appropriate, and underpinning the whole thing with a school self-evaluation strategy in which pupils' perceptions will be a key part."*

#### Build an infrastructure to support collaboration

A large number of different structural and staffing models are in development in Cohort 2 partnerships. A number of common elements can be identified, including:

##### Creating new roles

- Establishing a single project coordinator role to implement the work and ensure a continued focus and 'follow through'.
- Creating 'activist posts', open to any member of staff wishing to take on an issue and run with it: staff are keen even if the posts are unremunerated, as they recognise the value of the development opportunity.
- Joint staff appointments: schools in the programme often employ joint ASTs or shared staff for managing partnership pupil and school data (see below).

##### Making time

- *"One of the big drivers for successful collaboration is creative use of funding. To get real quality work done people need time, so it is essential to earmark additional staff time when planning ahead for the year."*
- Heads of departments being given a slightly lighter teaching commitment and using the time for peer observation and systems development.

##### Improving communication

- Setting up a joint School Improvement Group or bringing partners from other schools into an existing school improvement.
- Cross-school meetings, e.g. for timetablers, subject staff, deputy heads, teaching assistants: some partnerships hold twilight best practice training sessions.
- Establishing a steering committee made up of a middle manager from each school, each of whom chairs a core group within their own school.
- Regularly recording and publicising the progress of collaborative activities to maintain commitment, momentum and wider awareness and to celebrate success.