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TITLE	**EVALUATION OF THE COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP STRATEGY**
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SPONSOR	**National College for School Leadership**

INTRODUCTION

The Community Leadership Strategy (CLS) was developed by the National College for School Leadership (NCSL) to encourage community collaboration, partnership working between schools and their local communities, and multi-agency working. The Strategy has paid particular attention to the development of knowledge and skills associated with Standard 6 of the National Standard for Headteachers, 'strengthening community,' and was closely linked to the new approach to the well-being of children and young people resulting from the Every Child Matters and extended schools agenda. The results reported here are key findings from a qualitative evaluation study of four strands of the CLS carried out by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) between January 2006 and January 2007. The four strands were: the Developing Community Leaders' Programme, the Challenge Workshop Programme, the Community Leadership Networks and the on-line National Professional Qualification for Headteachers (NPQH) module for aspirant leaders of extended schools.

KEY FINDINGS

- Participants in the Developing Community Leaders Programme (DCLP) reported personal gains and some success in breaking down barriers between schools, but progress in terms of establishing and completing action research projects was varied.

- Some community leaders on the DCLP experienced difficulty in establishing and maintaining partnerships with schools; and this and lack of time were regarded as the main challenges by strand participants.

- Although a few expressed reservations, the majority of participants in the Challenge Workshops were positive and enthusiastic about the programme and thought that their partnerships would continue in the future.

- Participants reported progress in their plans to replicate the Challenge Workshop model in their own localities, and believed it would stimulate interest in community leadership.

- The progress made by Community Leadership Networks varied considerably, with some thriving and others having ceased to operate. Only a few reported concrete examples of successful activities, but a number of network leaders said good foundations had been laid for future collaboration.

- The NPQH on-line module was not being widely accessed, but those who had used it were positive about its content, presentation and quality.

RESEARCH SUMMARY

- The three strands that involved bringing together professionals from the education world and from other aspects of community life demonstrated how barriers could be broken down and mutual understanding fostered, although this could be a very slow process.

- The main challenges to school–community partnerships and community collaboration were perceived by schools to be a lack of time for development and too many other priorities. For community organisations they were difficulty in gaining initial entry to schools and a lack of understanding on the part of schools of how other organisations were already contributing. The phrase 'community leadership' was also widely considered to present problems because it was so difficult to define and could be interpreted in so many ways.

ABOUT THE STUDY

The aim of this research was to evaluate the extent to which each of the four strands was meeting its objectives, and its contribution to the overall strategy. The evidence was collected in five overlapping stages:

- a review of CLS documentation

- exploratory interviews with key personnel at NCSL and contracted organisations

- initial surveys of participants in three of the strands, Challenge Workshops, Community Leadership Networks and the on-line NPQH module (the first two being telephone surveys and the third an on-line survey)

- in-depth telephone interviews with those who participated in the three cohorts of the Developing Community Leaders Programme

- follow-up telephone interviews, exploring in more detail issues raised in the third stage above.

CONCLUSIONS

The Developing Community Leadership Programme

Most participants were enthusiastic about the programme, especially the professional facilitation and inspiring speakers and visits. Although there were differences between the three cohorts, the outcomes were broadly similar. Participants reported personal gains, but there was very varied progress in terms of establishing and completing projects.

The Challenge Workshops

Although a few expressed reservations, the majority of participants reported that the workshops had so far met their needs and many were very enthusiastic about the programme. Most interviewees had planned their local workshops and felt that they would achieve a worthwhile community project. There was the possibility of many partnerships continuing in the future.

RESEARCH SUMMARY

The Community Leadership Networks

There was considerable variation in the size of networks, the length of time they had been operating and the number of different agencies involved. There were few concrete examples of successful activities, but a perception that the foundations had been laid for future collaboration. Some networks were planning to continue beyond the end of the programme.

The NPQH on-line module for leadership of extended schools

As few candidates seem to have accessed the module, the response to this strand was limited. Those who had used it were positive about its content, presentation and quality, but the module did not appear to have been widely publicised and even some regional tutors were not aware of it.

Recommendations

There were good examples of successful community collaboration from all the first three strands referred to above, and it would appear that there is considerable scope for further development of the CLS. So far, the numbers involved have been relatively small and it would be valuable to extend the programme so that it reaches more people. To ensure its effectiveness, we recommend that consideration be given to the points below.

- Collaborative projects can be very motivating and produce many benefits when they work well, but this takes much time and commitment, so planning and funding need to be long-term if possible and there should be access to advice and support if it is required.

- The on-line module needs to be better publicised, and ideally it should be fully integrated into the NPQH, or made more widely available, as all schools should be offering extended services by 2010.

- Most interviewees knew only about the strand in which they were participating, and did not realise it formed part of a wider strategy. Publicity material outlining the whole strategy and the programme options available would help to spread awareness. Although information is available on the NCSL website, people will not necessarily find it there.

- As more schools begin delivering extended services, it may be worth linking headteachers who are still at the planning stage with those who have experience of running extended schools, with the latter providing advice and guidance on the model used in the Primary Leadership Programme.

- The knowledge gathered from the pilot phase of the CLS could form the basis of very useful resource material, which needs to be disseminated as widely as possible. This resource should be available in print, as well as web-based.

PUBLICATION AND DISSEMINATION

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