

7. Leading an academy

The purpose of this section is to discuss if, and how, leading an academy (whether sponsored or converting) is different or similar to leading in a non-academy setting and the implications of this for the training and development of academy leaders.

This section is structured under the following headings:

- Introduction
- Strategic leadership
- Organisational leadership
- Operational leadership
- Leadership development
- Summary and discussion

Introduction

An independent study on school leadership carried out by PwC (2007a) provides evidence from the literature that good leadership and management lead to good teaching and learning, and that leadership is second only to teaching among school-related factors in terms of its impact on student learning.

‘As far as we are aware, there is not a single documented case of a school successfully turning around its pupil achievement trajectory in the absence of talented leadership. One explanation for this is that leadership serves as a catalyst for unleashing the potential capacities that already exist in the organisation.’

Leithwood et al, 2006:5

The overall aim of this section is to present the findings from the research with leaders of sponsored and converting academies in relation to each aspect of leadership. Many of the attributes and skills that school leaders in general need along with the strategies and structures they employ are similar to, and overlap with, those found in the academy sector. However, this section explores what is distinctive about leading these two types of academies, and what academy status means for leadership.

Strategic leadership

McKinsey & Co (2010) found that school leadership is crucial to outcomes and that it has grown in importance over the past decade: one of the key revelations over the past 10 years is that school leadership is not just an HR issue, it is a strategic issue. Setting the vision and strategic direction of an academy is critical to securing long-term and sustainable improvements in pupil achievement and attainment.

As indicated earlier, the principal and, where applicable, the academy sponsor both have a key role to play in helping to shape their academy’s vision and values. The surveys invited senior and middle leaders to state what their vision and core values were. The most commonly cited responses indicated that pupils are at the heart of their school’s vision, and included the following:

- for every child to achieve, meet high standards and fulfil their potential
- personal development of pupils
- to raise attainment and achievement
- to be a high-quality education provider

The case studies with sponsored academies indicated that, in keeping with their motivations for becoming an academy, significant investment had been made in raising the aspirations and ambitions of pupils and their communities (where there had

previously been low aspirations). Consequently, there was a strong desire among interviewees that academy freedoms would be used to put in place appropriate structures and systems to enable the new vision to be achieved and owned.

Sponsored academies use of freedoms to raise aspirations and ambitions of pupils

“It was that core belief for social justice and respect that came... so whatever the children had experienced or wherever they were coming from, [our staff]... would understand and you can feel this as soon as you walk into the academy.”

Senior leader, sponsored academy

“Values are absolutely fundamental and central to who we are and what we are about – when I was looking at which academy I would like to be involved in working with... I wanted to work somewhere challenging.”

Senior leader, sponsored academy

“Overall it is to create an outstanding all-ability community school... to do that is about having high expectations and high aspirations for youngsters – believing that their background and abilities will not hinder them from achieving. Previously the school believed that they couldn’t achieve; they were on SEN and behaviour registers and therefore, that is the view that they had of themselves.”

Senior leader, sponsored academy

In contrast to the above, converting academies already had a strong vision in place, prior to becoming an academy. This was very much rooted in being centres of excellence, and in pushing their students to be the best. Therefore, converting academies were focused on using academy freedoms to continue to do what they were already doing very well. Consequently, the majority of converting academies involved in the case studies had no plans to change either their vision or ethos.

Impact of conversion on vision and values of converting academies

“We want to push our students to compete with the best of the best in life.”

Senior leader, converting academy

“All our values have carried through to the academy. Our practices are outstanding and we are determined to maintain the good things. Academy status presents the opportunity for growth with continuity.”

Senior leader, converting academy

“We hope to continue with the same values.”

Survey respondent, converting academy

“The aim and values of the school remain unchanged in the conversion to an academy.”

Survey respondent, converting academy

All schools will experience challenges in achieving their school’s vision. The important point to note in relation to this study is that the nature of these challenges is linked to the context of the school. The survey data points to a distinct difference between converting academies and sponsored academies in terms of the most frequently identified leadership challenge. In contrast to sponsored academies, where the majority of respondents identified raising pupil attainment as their top challenge, the top challenge identified by the majority of respondents in converting academies was funding and financial resources.

For converting academies the challenge of funding and financial resources reflects their desire and motivation for greater financial autonomy. Linked to this, the second most frequently identified challenge for converting academies was buying in support services. Notably, this was a bigger challenge for primary converting academies, where 56 per cent of respondents identified this challenge, making this the second most important challenge for primary converting academies. This may be explained, in part, by the size of the school, which would have implications for achieving economies of scale, and the fact that, unlike secondary converting academies, very few primary academies had had any experience of operating independently of the local authority.

The challenges identified in the sponsored academies survey were broadly similar to those

identified in the case studies. Leaders recognised that one of the challenges they face in achieving their vision is to implement effective strategies to address the needs of both pupils and staff.

Leadership challenges in relation to staff and pupils in sponsored academies

The challenge of balancing inclusion and standards

“Really it is about balancing inclusion and standards – we need to support children with their multitude of differences but we also have to raise standards.”

Senior leader, sponsored academy

“Because certain students have been excluded previously it was a challenge, but because rules and boundaries are different for us it works better for us as a school... challenges for us are we are in a poor area and we have some very challenging parents and students. Sometimes it is what primary school has not done that we then have to implement, that is a challenge.”

Middle leader, sponsored academy

The challenge of balancing professional growth and accountability

“Teachers have found it tough to feel successful when we are demanding ever higher standards, so we do lots of regular reviews and observations but we absolutely want teachers to feel proud of what they achieve. I hope that people like the approach to leadership.”

Senior leader, sponsored academy

“There is a lot more pressure. There is a lot more accountability and you need to be driving things and be more involved. So it is trying to find the balance. Academies lead towards more accountability which does equal more pressure.”

Middle leader, sponsored academy

Respondents were also asked to identify their need for leadership support. As Table 7.1 shows, respondents in both converting and sponsored academies identified leadership development as one of the top three areas needing support. In addition, support in relation to networking and collaboration was the third most frequently identified area for support for respondents in both types of academies, which may reflect an acknowledgement by leaders of the responsibilities that academies have in this regard as well as the benefits that can be derived from networking and collaboration.

Table 7.1: Leadership challenges impacting on academy leaders, and areas identified for greater leadership support

Academy type	Leadership challenges (top three)	Leadership support (top three)
Sponsored	Raising pupil attainment (68 per cent) Pupils’ background and/or interest in learning (54 per cent) Quality of teaching staff (43 per cent)	Leadership development (79 per cent) Leadership of teaching and learning (71 per cent) Networking and collaboration (68 per cent)
Converting	Funding and financial resources (65 per cent) Buying in support services (33 per cent) Raising pupil attainment (31 per cent)	Financial management (69 per cent) Leadership development (56 per cent) Networking and collaboration (52 per cent)

Source: PwC, Sponsored academies survey, 2010 and PwC, Converting academies survey, 2011
Base for sponsored academies: 199
Base for converting academies: 160

For sponsored academies, the top two areas identified were leadership development and leadership of teaching and learning. These areas of support are consistent with the top three challenges identified by these academies. The most frequently identified area in terms of support for respondents in converting academies related to financial management, which is also consistent with the most frequently identified leadership challenge for these academies, which was funding and financial resources.

Organisational leadership

Our research suggests that, compared with their predecessor schools, sponsored academies have a distinctive business-like feel. The majority of interviewees in the case study visits believed that their academy was run like a business, with more defined roles, and more responsibilities and accountability mechanisms than maintained schools. In addition, the language used by interviewees in some academies depicted the pupil as a client (or service user) rather than as a receiver of services.

A business like approach to leadership in sponsored academies

“There is much more focus on schools as independent businesses.”

National stakeholder

“Sometimes I think the most effective academies see themselves as delivering to clients and see students as clients... Those academies are tasting success... they have to put students at the heart of their plans.”

National stakeholder

“As middle leaders we are more accountable and this transfers to the teachers down the line. What happens is that they are then driven to perform better... it is making sure we are more accountable to the student as a client... [that] we feel more accountable to them and we put more thought into the process of how you teach and what you are doing in order to achieve the end outcome, ie, results.”

Middle leader, sponsored academy

The literature suggests that sponsored academies have generally been successful in using their freedoms to distribute responsibilities (and accountabilities) in a different way to their predecessor school, particularly in relation to the role of middle leaders. Although senior leadership in sponsored academies has generally been initially very directive in order to drive school improvement, it has also been accompanied by giving middle leaders greater responsibility and accountability for teaching and learning strategies, either on a faculty or year group basis. Sponsored academy trusts that incorporate more than one school are also able to develop leaner senior leadership structures due to leadership responsibilities operating across the group or between phases, as is the case, for example, in all through academies. Both these factors are illustrated in Case study 6.

In general, the research (PwC, 2007a) suggests that leadership structures in converting academies were more traditional (ie, typically a headteacher supported by one or more deputy heads and assistant heads with a number of middle leaders working together in a single school and generally including a degree of distributed leadership). It is important to note that there were exceptions to this. One converting academy provided an example of system leadership where the headteacher was a national leader of education and the school part of a wider cluster.

Case study 6

Distributed leadership in a sponsored academy

Background

This school is a non-selective all-through 3-19 academy that opened in September 2009 incorporating a secondary school, a junior school and a nursery and infant school. The socio-economic context of the school is that it serves an area of high deprivation and is in the bottom quartile of the Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI). Almost two-fifths of the pupils are eligible for free school meals. The school has a large number of pupils who are of Black or minority ethnic heritage. Over 40 per cent of students have English as an additional language (EAL).

The leadership structure

The academy has a leaner senior leadership structure than would be the case if each school had its own senior leadership team. A number of the leadership responsibilities operate across the phases (for example, teaching and learning, and inclusion and access). The senior leadership structure covering all three schools consists of:

- principal of whole school
- vice principal, responsible for the primary schools
- assistant principal for the primary schools
- vice principal, responsible for 11-14
- vice principal, responsible for 14-16
- four other assistant principals

In addition, the school also has a middle leadership structure, which includes:

- leaders of learning zones (maths, science, English, performing arts etc)
- a house structure which is pastoral and vertical
- progress leaders, supported by pastoral leaders and based on year groups
- curriculum leaders

Middle leaders feel increasingly empowered due to a more distributed leadership model.

“Last year was quite firm which was what was needed and this year I have noticed a change to distributed leadership and collegial style with working groups and a staff input into ideas. I have got roles that have been distributed to me.”

Middle leader, sponsored academy

“There is also [more] distributed leadership for me personally which I quite enjoy. I have taken on a few more senior roles this year: that’s been good for me. I feel confident in moving on to the next level of leadership and that’s my aim for the next year.”

Middle leader, sponsored academy

Figure 7.1 illustrates that the leadership structure had stayed the same in a high percentage of converting academies (86 per cent agreed or strongly agreed)²³. Many of the senior and middle leaders in converting academies indicated that they had not changed their leadership structure as this had served them well in the past and, they believed, had helped the school to achieve an Ofsted rating of outstanding. However, almost two-thirds of headteachers indicated that they could see the roles and responsibilities of senior leaders changing quite a lot in the next three to five years, particularly in relation to the headteacher and the finance/business manager/bursar. Therefore, as with sponsored academies, some converting academies may use their academy status to change the leadership model and a wider range of leadership models/structures may emerge within these academies as the programme develops.

The case study visits are consistent with these data, and suggest that the expected changes in leadership roles are linked to increased financial autonomy and associated responsibility. Whilst there may be some expected changes in relation to the roles of leaders, the case study visits also confirmed that these schools have established leadership structures that have worked well for them in the past. Almost all of the interviewees spoken to indicated that they had few, if any, plans to use their academy status to change the structure of leadership in their school.

However, it is important to note that those spoken to as part of the consultation events suggested that they did not have sufficient lead-in time to rethink their leadership structures to have greater impact on standards.

Impact of conversion on leadership structures

“There’s no need to change the structure. If it ain’t broke...”

Chair of governors, converting academy

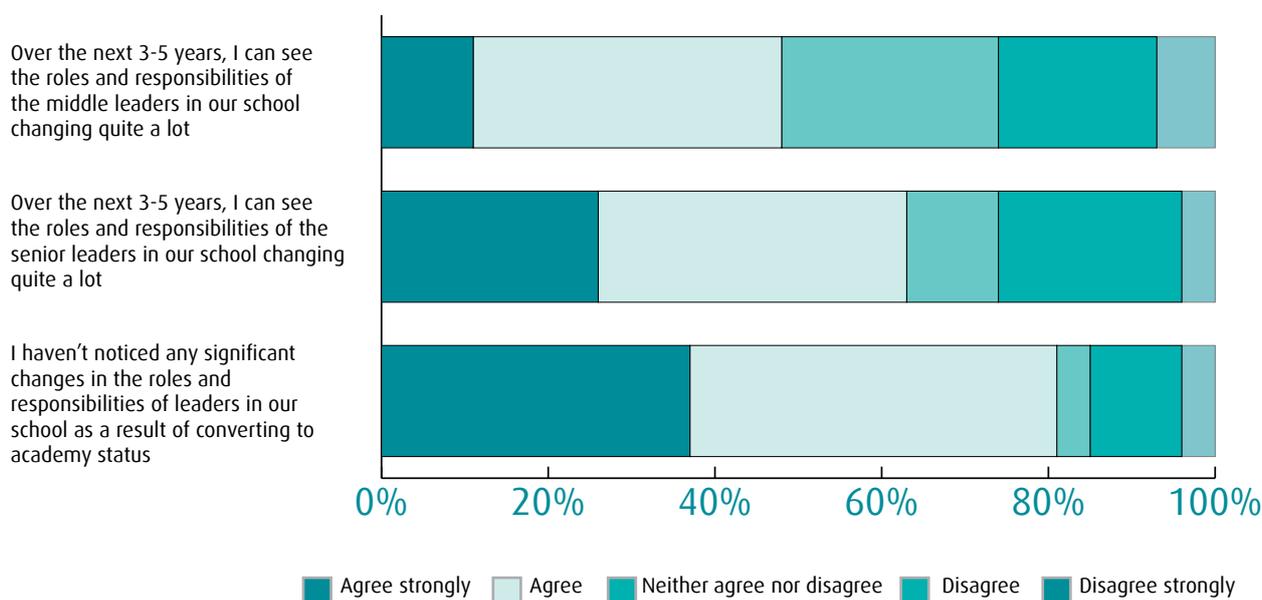
“I’m hoping that when you talk to my staff there’s no difference, we don’t feel there is a difference.”

Senior leader, converting academy

The core vision of sponsored academies is focused on raising attainment and improving pupil outcomes. The research found that in almost all the sponsored academies visited, there was a strong focus on aligning leadership structures to teaching and learning outcomes by expanding the middle tier of leadership.

23 The base is 27 for this question.

Figure 7.1: Impact of conversion on leadership structures, roles and responsibilities in converting academies



Base: 27
Only headteachers/academy principals were asked to respond to this question
Source: PwC, Converting academies survey, 2011

Alignment of leadership structures with pupil outcomes

“The heads [in the predecessor schools] wanted to be heads rather than work to an overall principal, so they left.”

Senior leader, sponsored academy

“He put a lot more people on [the] leadership [pay] scale and gave them a lot more responsibility. He also pulled in a couple of advanced skills teachers to strengthen that middle band.”

Middle leader, sponsored academy

Case study 7, from a sponsored academy, provides an example of how devolving responsibility and increasing the accountability of middle leaders have contributed to improving outcomes.

Sponsored academies, in particular, are charged with using their freedoms to develop strategies to improve the quality of teaching and learning and learning outcomes. The findings from the sponsored academies survey suggest that they were using a wider range of leadership strategies in their academy context, compared with the predecessor school, or compared with the maintained schools in which respondents had previously worked.

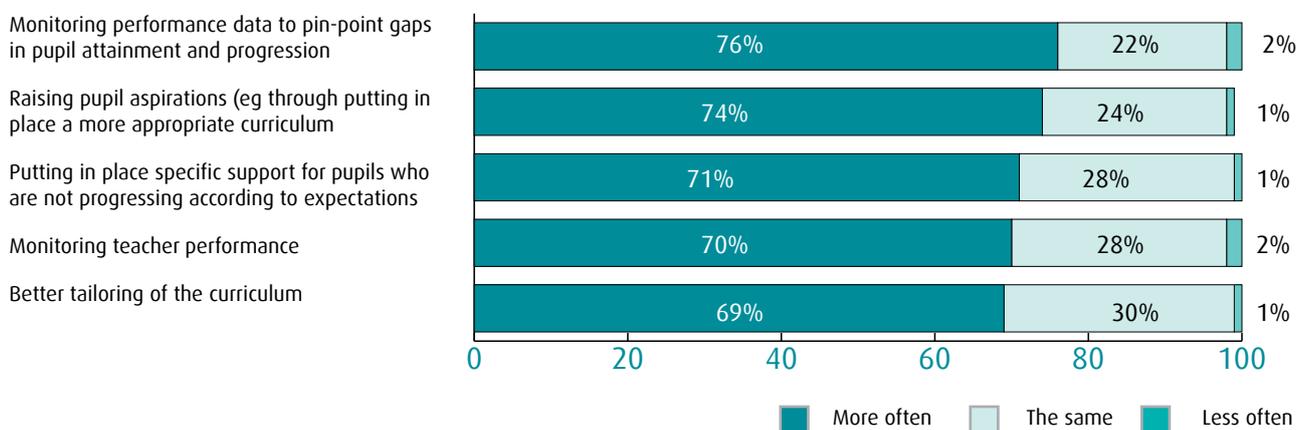
Figure 7.2²⁴ illustrates the top five leadership strategies that were considered by leaders to be used more often in their academy than in the previous maintained school they had worked in. For each of the top five leadership strategies, the majority of respondents (regardless of the number of years they worked in their academy) reported using each of them more often in their academy compared to the previous maintained school context.

Four-fifths or more of all respondents in sponsored academies indicated that the strategies that had been in place since becoming an academy had been effective in raising standards. This is affirmed by research, including the NAO (2010) report.

A small minority of respondents (no more than 6 per cent) indicated that these strategies were used less often in their academy compared with the last maintained school they worked with. The exception to this was the response to the option ‘working with, and supporting, other schools/academies’, where a sizeable minority of almost one-fifth (19 per cent) of respondents indicated that this was used less often than in the maintained school they worked in previously. This is consistent with earlier findings in relation to collaboration, and might be explained by the intense pressure within these academies to rapidly raise standards.

²⁴ 86 per cent of sponsored academy survey respondents previously worked in a maintained school setting. The survey data suggests that the academy context may be more (or equally) challenging than their previous maintained school. For example, 45 per cent of survey respondents indicated that the proportion of pupils eligible for FSM was higher than the previous maintained school context, and a further 47 per cent indicated it was the same. The fact that a high proportion of sponsored academy survey respondents reported using a range of leadership strategies more often in their academy compared with in the previously maintained school is likely to reflect the context of the academy within which they now work.

Figure 7.2: Top five leadership strategies used in survey respondent’s academy (compared with last maintained school they worked in)



Source: PwC, Sponsored academies survey, 2010

Case study 7

Impact of leadership structures on student outcomes

Background

The academy opened in 2006 following the closure of two predecessor schools. The proportion of students who are entitled to free school meals is well above the national average and reflects the social and economic circumstances of its catchment; it serves one of the most deprived areas of the city. The academy was visited by Ofsted in 2009 and received an overall grade of good, with leadership and management given an 'outstanding' rating.

Sponsorship

The academy is sponsored by a religious organisation. Sponsors played a key role in the development of the vision and ethos of the school. They have a daily presence in the school which helps to reinforce the vision and ethos. Leaders are aware of a high degree of accountability to the sponsor.

Leadership structure of the academy

The leadership structure includes 1 principal, 2 vice principals, 6 assistant vice principals (also head of houses), 18 middle leaders, some of whom are subject/faculty based and some project based, a number of lead practitioners and emergent leaders. The academy has been structured into vertical groupings and six houses, which means that the children are in the same house as their siblings. These changes have enabled the development of middle leaders with increased responsibility and accountability.

Benefits of leadership model

For staff:

- improved relationships and increased sharing of expertise
- more identification of talent and growing talent earlier in a person's career
- increased accountability

For pupils:

- pupil/family issues can be dealt with more holistically
- staff get to know particular groups of children and stay with them for longer periods of time; ultimately this impacts on their engagement with learning
- reduction in bullying

Impact on pupil outcomes

The leadership and pastoral structures that are in place, along with the changes in relation to teaching and learning, have contributed to a rapid improvement in student attainment.

"95 per cent [of pupils achieved an] A*-C [grade at GCSE] with over 30 per cent including English and Maths in 2010, and 37 students went to university compared with zero when the academy opened."

Senior leader, sponsored academy

Table 7.2: Teaching and learning strategies in sponsored academies

Category	Components	Supporting evidence
Timetabling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Altering length of school day 	<p>“We start at 8.30am and finish at 2.30pm. This enables a work life balance. With the change in the school day, we have been able to offer more enrichment activities. This flexibility has allowed us to enrich the lives of young people beyond academic performance to include sports, music and drama.”</p> <p>Senior leader, sponsored academy</p>
Monitoring pupil performance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Target setting/use of targets — Better use of data — Setting according to ability — Use of faculty/department reviews — Provide additional support to students (eg, prior to sitting exams) 	<p>“We use a module grade system that assesses students each half-term and this links to their sub-level targets for the year. Children that are flagged up as struggling are picked up and we work hard to support them.”</p> <p>Middle leader, sponsored academy</p> <p>“The school has three bands – red (entirely academic); blue (mixture of academic and vocational), and green (focus on life skills). The pupils who are in the green route excel in practical [subjects, but they also have an] academic focus.”</p> <p>Senior leader, sponsored academy</p> <p>“Since becoming an academy, we have introduced faculty reviews.”</p> <p>Senior leader, sponsored academy</p>
Focusing on pupil behaviour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Getting the rules of engagement right — Walking around and observing class conduct 	<p>“We were clear from the start what we weren’t going to do... [we] set out the stall from the start.”</p> <p>Senior leader, sponsored academy</p> <p>“[We] do the walk, crucially going into classrooms, without intruding... just enforcing what we expect”</p> <p>Senior leader, sponsored academy</p>

Category	Components	Supporting evidence
Leadership capacity-building	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Continuing professional development — More frequent lesson observation/teacher support 	<p>“For our gifted and talented maths students we worked with two other teachers from one of the other academies in the federation. We learned from their approach and style and then spread it to the rest of the department.”</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Middle leader, sponsored academy</p> <p>“We will stand next to, in front of, behind a member of staff and say we’re here.”</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Senior leader, sponsored academy</p>
Critical reflection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Self-evaluation — External evaluation 	<p>“We do self-evaluation – we do self-reviews once a term as this enables us to look at how things are working in different classrooms.”</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Middle leader, sponsored academy</p> <p>“We brought in external consultants including some with Her Majesty’s Inspection experience to provide external inspection every half-term.”</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Senior leader, sponsored academy</p>

A number of examples of teaching and learning strategies were identified in the case studies with sponsored academies. These are consistent with those reported by PwC (2008), and include altering the length of the school day, improvements in relation to target setting, addressing pupil behaviour, and leadership capacity-building. In practice, many maintained schools have benefitted from some of these freedoms in the past, eg, freedom to alter the length of the school day or school term. However, academy status formalises those freedoms and creates an expectation for change which, in turn, empowers schools to make decisions without having to seek the permission of others (for example, the local authority).

Converting academies had existing strong systems of leadership accountability in terms of pupil outcomes, as well as successful teaching and learning strategies. The findings from the case studies suggest that most converting academies had no immediate plans to use their freedoms to radically change their teaching and learning strategies. However, some interviewees suggested that they did have plans to use their academy freedoms in the future to further improve learning and learning

outcomes. Table 7.3 illustrates some of the plans that were identified.

Operational leadership

The research literature suggests that the skills required by academy leaders are wide ranging and include political, decision-making and personal skills (Davies and Macaulay, 2006). In addition, the framework compiled by the National College (2011) identifies qualities and behaviours that are expected of academy leaders, such as securing and maintaining transformational change, as well as personal characteristics, such as courage, patience and resilience.

The academies survey invited senior and middle leaders in sponsored and converting academies to indicate whether, compared with a maintained school, certain attributes were more/the same/less important for leaders to have in an academy context.

Table 7.3: Converting academy plans to use academy freedoms

Category	Supporting evidence
Altering structure of school day and school year	<p>“We want to look at and consider the whole of the structured teaching day and [academy status] gives us the opportunity to do that.”</p> <p>Senior leader, converting academy</p>
Curriculum review	<p>“We’ve got to think about how we tailor the curriculum to actually meet the needs of the secondary school... we need to think about the curriculum we need in the early years and Key Stage 2 which provides the foundation for the seniors.”</p> <p>Senior leader, converting academy</p>
A broader curriculum	<p>“Bottom line is that we’d love to be able to offer a broader curriculum eg, Mandarin, dance and astronomy.”</p> <p>Senior leader, converting academy</p>

The response to these questions from senior and middle leaders in both sponsored and converting academies will have been informed by their pre-academy context and experience. For example, many sponsored academies will have undergone significant change at strategic, organisational and operational levels, and this will have had an impact on the degree of importance they place on specific skills/attributes. In addition some leaders in sponsored academies will have transferred from a predecessor school while others – especially senior leaders – may well have come from another school.

In contrast, all converting academies involved in the research had only recently converted or were in the process of converting to academy status. Therefore, they will only have had a limited amount of time to assess the skills and attributes required within their new context. In addition, most of these academies have been operating as outstanding schools for some time, are generally more confident in the skills and attributes of their existing leadership team and would, therefore, have been making their judgements against this benchmark.

Some caution, therefore, needs to be exercised in interpreting the results below. However, even allowing for this, the findings are interesting. Table 7.4 points to some similarities and some differences between the two sets of respondents in terms of the top five most important attributes identified.

The top five attributes chosen were almost the same for leaders in both sets of academies.

However, compared with leaders in sponsored academies, a lower proportion of leaders in converting academies consistently choose the same attributes. Between one-fifth and one-third of respondents in converting academies indicated that being a risk-taker; being resilient; being decisive and being creative were more important attributes for leaders in academies to have, compared with over one half of respondents who consistently identified these attributes in sponsored academies.

The higher scoring among the sponsored academy leaders is probably a reflection of two factors. First, they have had more experience of using and understanding what academy freedoms actually mean in practice. Second, the nature of the challenges they have had to face in turning around a failing or seriously underperforming school means that they need to demonstrate greater energy, drive, and resilience.

The findings presented below provide a summary of the views of national stakeholders and leaders in academy case studies.

Attributes required by academy leaders

“Risk-taking, creativity, self-motivation are all very important. As an academy leader you also need resilience to go in and be certain that you can keep on leading it.”

National stakeholder

Table 7.4: Top five attributes that are more important for leaders to have in an academy than in a maintained school

Attribute	Per cent of respondents (sponsored academies)	Per cent of respondents (converting academies)
Excited by autonomy and freedom	69% (1)	64% (1)
Risk-taker	56% (2)	35% (2)
Creative	50% (=5)	27% (3)
Decisive	50% (=5)	25% (4)
Resilience	55% (3)	21% (5)
Energy and drive	51% (4)	-

Source: PwC, Sponsored academies survey, 2010 and PwC, Converting academies survey, 2011
 Base for sponsored academies: 175
 Base for converting academies: 204

“There is a greater opportunity for creativity and entrepreneurial skill to be expressed in the context of an academy [and] there is also a greater need for these attributes.”

National stakeholder

“Leadership of an academy is perhaps much more focused, primarily on getting results and there is no complacency. It is about doing what is right for the students [and involves] taking risks to allow change.”

Senior leader, sponsored academy

A key objective of the research was to understand how leading in an academy is different from leading in a maintained school. The freedoms associated with academy status suggest that a number of skills, whilst important in all school contexts, may be more important in an academy context. Table 7.5 identifies the top five skills identified by respondents in both types of academies as being more important in an academy context. The following observations are notable from the data:

- Political and diplomatic skills were ranked first or second in order of importance by respondents in both types of academy. This may indicate that academy leaders were aware of the contested policy context within which academies have operated, which has attracted both political and media attention. Therefore, leaders might expect that academy status will bring an additional layer of scrutiny.

- There was agreement among respondents in sponsored and converting academies in relation to four of the top five skills. However, respondents in sponsored academies were more consistent in their choice of skills, with over half of all respondents agreeing on the top four.
- Whilst financial management/budgeting skills was ranked fourth in order of importance for respondents in sponsored academies, nonetheless, it is notable that over half of all respondents identified this as an important skill.

In addition and linked to the last bullet point above, over 70 per cent of respondents in converting academies indicated that their school previously had GM status. When the views of respondents from converting academies that were formerly GM schools were compared with the views of respondents in converting academies that did not previously have this status, there was some variation. For example:

- 19 per cent of respondents in converting academies that were formerly GM believed that planning and organisational skills were more important in an academy context, compared with 43 per cent of survey respondents in converting academies that did not previously have this status.
- 63 per cent of respondents in converting academies that were formerly GM rated financial management/budgeting skills as more important in an academy context compared with 82 per cent of survey respondents in converting academies that did not previously have this status.

Table 7.5: Top five skills that are more important for leaders to possess/demonstrate in an academy context than a maintained school context

Skill	Per cent of respondents (sponsored academies)	Per cent of respondents (converting academies)
Political/ diplomatic skills	60% (1)	43% (2)
Dealing with accountability	56% (2)	35% (3)
Change management skills	55% (3)	26% (4)
Financial management/budgeting skills	52% (4)	68% (1)
HR skills (eg, recruiting new staff)	45% (5)	-
Negotiating/influencing skills	-	25% (=5)
Planning and organisational skills	-	25% (=5)

Source: PwC, Sponsored academies survey, 2010 and PwC, Converting academies survey, 2011
 Base for sponsored academies: 176
 Base for converting academies: 201

— A number of the top five identified skills were more frequently identified by respondents in primary converting academies. For example, 77 per cent of respondents in converting primary schools identified financial management/budgeting skills, compared with 64 per cent of secondary converting academies. Other skills with notable differences between primary and secondary converting academies included:

- dealing with accountability (46 per cent versus 30 per cent)
- negotiating/influencing skills (38 per cent versus 19 per cent)

The increased frequency with which primary converting academy respondents identified these skills might be a reflection of the perceived capacity of primary school leaders in terms of maximising the opportunities that independence and the associated freedoms offer.

It should be noted that there was some variation in the views of respondents in sponsored academies with different sponsorship arrangements. For example:

— A greater proportion of respondents in academies with a single sponsor identified dealing with accountability (64 per cent) compared with 50 per cent who have chain sponsors²⁵ and 47 per cent who have group sponsors²⁶.

— In relation to financial management/budgeting skills, 62 per cent of respondents from academies with a single sponsor thought these were more important in an academy compared with 45 per cent of respondents in chain-sponsored academies, and 51 per cent of respondents in academies with group sponsors.

The variation in the views of respondents in relation to these particular skills may be indicative of the established centralised financial procedures that most chain or group sponsors have in place. The key point, however, is that the sponsorship model will have implications for the skills that leaders require.

Table 7.6 provides examples of the views of senior and middle leaders in sponsored academies in relation to each of the top skills identified by survey respondents.

Over one-half (55 per cent) of sponsored academies identified change management skills as being more important in the context of an academy. This was not surprising given that many sponsored academies had been established with a new name, a new uniform, and in some cases a new building. In addition, these outward expressions of change had been accompanied by new governance and management structures, and a new vision for the school. This required academy leaders in sponsored academies (particularly academy principals) to possess strong change management skills.

25 These are sponsors that sponsor more than one academy.

26 These are sponsored academies that have two or more sponsors.

Many of the interviewees in the sponsored academy case study schools alluded to the pressures involved in managing this process. It was particularly noted in one academy that establishing a new school required a range of skills to bring about change (Case study 8).

Table 7.6: Views of leaders in sponsored academies on the skills required to lead an academy

Skill	Sponsored academy evidence
Political/ diplomatic skills	<p>“For political reasons, academies are viewed by unions as being a major issue in education. In order to show the academy in a good light we need to work harder to maintain our very high standards that we had in the predecessor school.”</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Survey respondent, sponsored academy</p>
Dealing with accountability	<p>“Each learning zone is now more accountable for what it spends and how it spends it. A learning zone leader has to see everything that goes out... which probably wasn’t the case in the old school.”</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Middle leader, sponsored academy</p>
Change management skills	<p>“Change management is needed as there is more likely to be frequent change in a [sponsored] academy.”</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Survey respondent, sponsored academy</p>
Financial management	<p>“It’s the same skill [financial management] needed but with better professionalism.”</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Middle leader, sponsored academy</p> <p>“We have our own individual budgets and more freedom on how we spend them.”</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Middle leader, sponsored academy</p>
HR skills (eg, recruiting new staff)	<p>“We are more responsible and accountable for human resources due to changes in pay and conditions.”</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Survey respondent, sponsored academy</p>

Case study 8

The importance of managing change in a sponsored academy

Background

This school is part of a chain of academies. It opened in 2009 and has an enrolment of c 1,300 pupils. The socio-economic context of the school is mixed and it is located in a reasonably aspirational area of town, situated in an area of high deprivation. The school is over subscribed.

Managing the change involved in establishing a new school

Strong leaders should be in place prior to becoming an academy. The principal explained the importance of having a strong leadership team in place with a complementary range of skills. It was noted that being able to recruit staff from other academies within the group was one of the benefits of being part of a chain.

"I believe we've had a fantastic year this year. People must not underestimate how difficult it is to set things up – it is vital to have a strong complementary team of vice principals."

Senior leader, sponsored academy

"Ideally, growing your own from within to the philosophy, practices, procedures and systems and routines is hugely beneficial – you save time and hit the ground running."

Senior leader, sponsored academy

Understanding the demands of leading an academy is critical. The principal stated that schools should not underestimate that the pace of change in an academy is faster and this requires huge stamina.

"You need to be able to have huge stamina. In a maintained school – and it's not true of all – people may clock in and clock out – you need to go above and beyond normal hours."

Senior leader, sponsored academy

"You are dealing a lot with the unexpected... you don't know what is going to hit you... I've noticed this so much more working in an academy."

Senior leader, sponsored academy

It is essential to use the lead-in time effectively. Having time to prepare prior to becoming an academy was felt to be important in managing the change process. This included the principal being in post a year before the academy opened. Policies and contracts were in place well before the academy opened. Heads of departments and other staff benefitted from training sessions.

"I had sessions where I worked with managers and head of departments... I had 40 staff working on the curriculum before the academy opened. They gave up time in the evenings... it was about bringing it right down to the basics and streaming it all through."

Senior leader, sponsored academy

Bringing people on board and developing a culture is challenging. Developing a new culture is a key challenge for academy leaders, particularly in sponsored academies where a new school has been established with a new vision and new staff. This creates challenges for leaders who are also working under intense pressure to raise standards rapidly.

“When you have an amalgamation of a lot of staff from different backgrounds you need to understand where they are coming from and where the knowledge gaps might be and you need to be prepared to spend time bridging those gaps.”

Senior leader, sponsored academy

“You need to have skills to develop a culture...we really expect [a lot from our] staff.”

Senior leader, sponsored academy

Leadership development

McKinsey & Co (2010) suggest that attracting and selecting those with the right qualities is critical to the overall leadership capacity of the system. They suggest that there are primarily three approaches to unlocking and developing future leadership talent. The first depends on self-identification by potential leaders, as well as the informal mechanisms by which leaders are coached and developed within schools. The second builds on this by providing opportunities for potential leaders to become involved in courses and programmes in order to build their capacity for and interest in leadership. The third approach goes one step further by guiding the careers of potential leaders by enabling them to take on new roles within their schools so that they can gain greater leadership experience, with the appropriate guidance and support.

In addition to establishing the necessary skills and attributes for leading an academy, a key focus of this research was to understand the extent to which academy leaders shared this analysis of the role of leadership development and to identify the leadership development requirements of senior and middle leaders in both sponsored and converting academies.

Findings from the survey with leaders in sponsored academies suggest that leadership development opportunities have been more widely available for senior and middle leaders since they opened as an academy. Table 7.7 illustrates the top five leadership development opportunities experienced by leaders in sponsored academies.

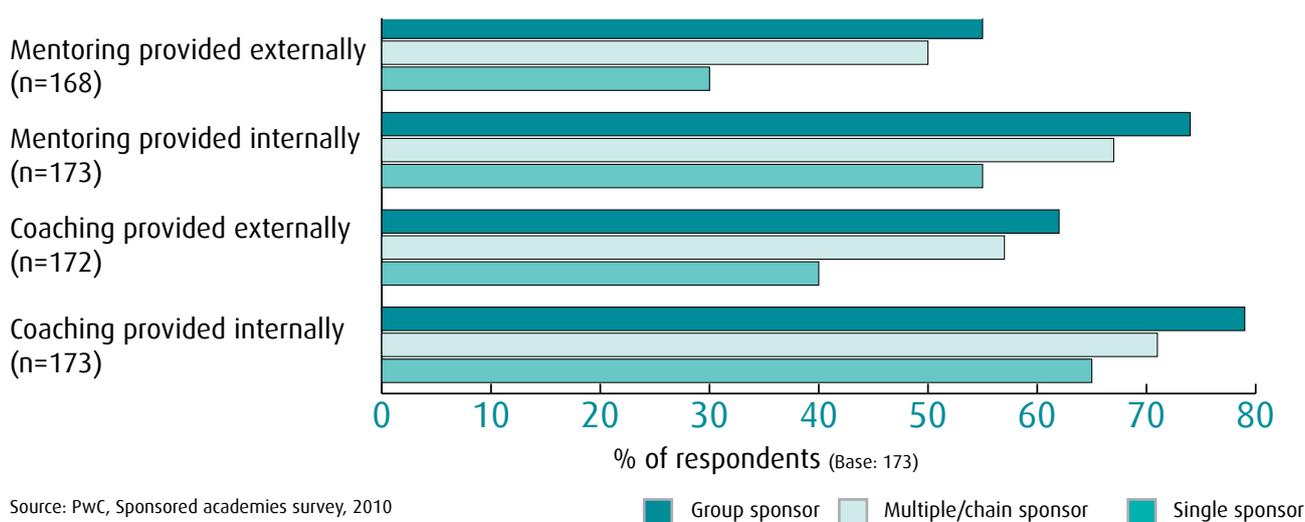
All the top five leadership development opportunities that senior and middle leaders had experienced since becoming an academy were

Table 7.7: Top five leadership development opportunities available to senior and middle leaders

Leadership development opportunity	Per cent of respondents indicating more widely available since academy opened
Coaching (internal)	69%
Mentoring (internal)	62%
Opportunities to learn on the job through peer-to-peer review	56%
Opportunities to learn on the job through action research	55%
Opportunities to step up to the next level of leadership (internal)	54%

Source: PwC, Sponsored academies survey, 2010. Base: 167

Figure 7.3: Coaching and mentoring opportunities in sponsored academies by type of sponsor



Source: PwC, Sponsored academies survey, 2010

internally based. In addition, there were differences in the numbers of leaders experiencing this development according to the type of sponsorship model.

Respondents in academies with either chain or group sponsorship appeared to have had most opportunity for internal and external coaching and mentoring compared with academies with a single sponsor. This finding is consistent with findings from the sponsored academy case studies, which highlighted the significant potential for leadership development opportunities across the family of schools in academies with chain sponsors in particular. Figure 7.3 illustrates the types of training where notable differences existed in terms of sponsorship type.

Senior and middle leaders in converting academies were asked whether they thought there would be more leadership development opportunities as a result of converting to academy status. In overall terms, less than one-third of respondents

believed there would be more opportunities to undertake various types of leadership training and development.

Table 7.8 details the top five leadership development opportunities identified by senior and middle leaders in converting academies.

Almost one-third (32 per cent) of the senior and middle leaders who responded to the survey believed that there may be more secondment opportunities to other schools. This might be linked to the plans that some academies have to become part of a wider cluster of schools (or indeed a soft/hard federation)²⁷. Alternatively it could be an indication of the formal expectation placed on converting academies to work more collaboratively with other schools to raise standards.

²⁷ For example, one of the converting primary schools that was subject to a case study indicated that it had extensive plans to use academy status to become part of a larger federation of trust schools.

Table 7.8: Top five leadership development opportunities that may become more widely available as a result of converting to academy status

Leadership development opportunity	Per cent of respondents
Secondment opportunities to other schools	32%
Opportunities to learn on the job through peer-to-peer review	31%
Opportunities to learn on the job through action research	29%
Coaching (internal)	27%
Opportunities to step up to the next level of leadership (internal)	25%

PwC, Converting academies survey, 2011. Base: 119

The remaining top five development opportunities identified by converting academies were internal in nature. These included more opportunity to learn on the job through peer-to-peer review, and through action research and internal coaching. One-quarter of respondents in converting academies indicated that there may be more opportunities to step up to the next level of leadership internally as a result of the school converting to academy status.

There was variation by school phase, with proportionately more leaders in converting primary academies, compared with leaders in converting secondary academies indicating that academy status would bring more leadership development opportunities. For example, 41 per cent of primary school respondents indicated that academy status would provide their senior and middle leaders with more opportunities to step up to the next level of leadership externally²⁸, compared to less than one-fifth (18 per cent) of respondents from secondary school academies. This may suggest that primary schools view academy status as an opportunity to deepen their relationships with other schools, for example by becoming part of a cluster.

28 This leadership development opportunity was not one of the top five identified in Table 7.8. However, these data illustrate the leadership development opportunity where the largest variation was recorded by school phase.

The survey with senior and middle leaders in sponsored academies asked leaders to indicate, from a range of identified areas, whether there was a need for the National College, or another provider, to offer more leadership training or support.

In summary, the data in Table 7.9 suggests that the majority of respondents from sponsored academies would welcome support in all the identified areas. The area that respondents identified as requiring most support is leadership development, with approximately four-fifths (79 per cent) of all respondents in sponsored academies agreeing or strongly agreeing that there was a need for this. In addition, well over two-thirds of respondents indicated that they would welcome support in relation to:

- leadership of teaching and learning (71 per cent)
- networking and collaboration (68 per cent)
- management of staff performance and development (68 per cent)
- talent identification and management (67 per cent)

Table 7.9: The extent to which survey respondents agreed there is a need for the National College to offer more leadership training

Leadership training needs	Per cent of respondents (sponsored academies)	Per cent of respondents (converting academies)
Leadership development	79%	56%
Leadership of teaching and learning	71%	41%
Management of staff performance and development	68%	40%
Networking and collaboration	68%	52%
Talent identification and management	67%	38%
Financial management	64%	69%
Recruitment and development of staff	58%	35%
Organisational/staffing structures	56%	39%
Setting the strategic vision	54%	41%

Source: PwC, Sponsored academies survey, 2010 and PwC, Converting academies survey, 2011. Base for sponsored academies: 178. Base for converting academies: 119

The data shows that the picture was somewhat different for converting academies. The majority of respondents identified a need for training in three areas, namely financial management, leadership development, and networking and collaboration. However, approximately two-fifths or fewer of the survey respondents in converting academies identified a need for further training in the other areas listed. The top three areas identified by most respondents in converting academies were largely consistent with both the additional freedoms and the additional responsibilities that academy status brings.

There was some variation by school phase with converting primary academies, in particular, welcoming further support from the National College or other providers in terms of talent identification and management. Over one-half of primary academies (51 per cent) indicated they would like more support in this area, compared with just over one-third (34 per cent) of secondary converting academies.

Converting primary schools also indicated that they would welcome further support from the National College or other providers in terms of networking and collaboration (72 per cent of primary converting academies indicated they would like more support for this compared with less than one-half (45 per cent) of secondary converting academies). This finding reflects the views expressed by senior and middle leaders in the case study visits and in stakeholder consultations with converting primary academies. For example, one senior leader suggested that there should be a broker to help primary schools collaborate more effectively with other schools in their area as, in this leader's view, collaboration was a greater challenge for primary converting academies than for secondary converting academies.

The case studies with both sponsored and converting academies suggest that there are particular ways in which the National College or other providers might deliver training. Table 7.10 illustrates a number of principles that could be adopted in the delivery of future training. Most academy interviewees highlighted the importance of providing bespoke training which takes account of the context of the academy. In addition, training should be dynamic in that it should reflect the journey of the academy and the experience of the leaders that are in place at various stages of that journey. Linked to this, training should be differentiated in terms of the roles and responsibilities expected within the context of the academy. For example some interviewees in converting academies suggested that there was a need to focus on middle leadership to enable

the school to unleash its creativity and embrace the opportunities that academy status offered in relation to innovation. The overwhelming view from interviewees was that the training should be designed and delivered by professionals with experience and knowledge of academies.

Linked to the above findings, Hopkins (2005) suggests that school leadership should be based on the distinctive and inclusive context of the school. This implies that the particular mix of skills of school leadership will differ, often dramatically, from context to context. In addition, Hopkins (2005) states that school leadership that is purposeful, inclusive and values-driven should involve a commitment to equity, empowerment and high standards of learning and achievement as the moral purpose of education.

Case study 9 illustrates the leadership challenges faced by a converting primary academy. It sets out the gaps in terms of leadership training and development. It also offers some suggestions as to how training and development provision could be enhanced to enable the academy to become a teaching school.

Table 7.10: Principles for delivering training to academy leaders

Delivery principle	Supporting evidence from case studies
<p>Bespoke and designed to meet the needs of academies</p>	<p>“It needs to be specifically for academies rather than something where academies and maintained schools are pulled in... there are so many academies out there where training isn’t really pitched at them.”</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Middle leader, sponsored academy</p>
<p>Designed by individuals with a good knowledge of academies</p>	<p>“You need to have someone that is really aware of what academies are under and the good and the bad of being an academy.”</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Middle leader, sponsored academy</p>
<p>Delivered in partnership with the academies</p>	<p>“New academies should be supported by leadership teams [from] academies that have already done it. The National College could broker this.”</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Senior leader, converting academy</p> <p>“Leaders in academies should be utilised for training purposes.”</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Middle leader, sponsored academy</p>
<p>Differentiated provision for different leadership roles in an academy (senior leader, middle leader and non-hierarchical; ie emerging leaders)</p>	<p>“[There] needs to be a specific programme for senior leaders of academies.”</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Senior leader, sponsored academy</p> <p>“There is a need for leadership programmes for academy heads and for senior and middle leaders as their roles are very different.”</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Senior leader, sponsored academy</p> <p>“For middle leaders, training is about no longer being told you are good if you comply with what the book says... they now need to be able to innovate themselves... They need help to free up the creativity that has been stunted in the past.”</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Senior leader, converting academy</p>
<p>Organised into a menu of options</p>	<p>“You have to have a menu because what I [need] is very different to what a grammar school will need... some core things should be on the menu including independence/freedoms, charity company law, TUPE, finance.”</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Senior leader, sponsored academy</p>

Case study 9

Leadership training and development to help a school become a teaching school

Background

This school is a primary school and has a very strong independent ethos and tradition of being autonomous. It was previously a GM school before becoming a foundation school and then a trust school. It recently converted to academy status. The school has grown quite rapidly from having c 150 pupils in 1986 to c 900 pupils today, and is a five-form entry primary. Almost half the pupils are eligible for free school meals. The school has an executive headteacher and headteacher, two assistant headteachers for juniors and early years respectively, and seven team/cluster leaders with responsibility for five classes in a year group.

Academy challenges

The school faces a number of challenges in the longer term. They include:

- continuing to maintain high standards and meet expectations
- managing high turnover of staff
- finding deputy headteachers of the necessary quality, who are prepared to teach for up to three-quarters of their time
- recruiting and retaining staff for the middle school curriculum

“Finding good deputies [is a challenge]... I have got two assistant heads at the moment but it is finding deputies who are of the necessary quality to take us on.”

Senior leader, converting academy

Ambitions for leadership and development

The school views academy status very positively. Leaders view it as an opportunity to take control of a number of challenging areas such as class size. Leaders indicate that they have the capacity to provide many of the services (eg, teacher training) they need more effectively themselves.

The headteacher is a teacher leader and takes a key role in teacher training. He spends one day a week in the classroom and the other four days on: monitoring plans; observing teachers and checking observations (15-20 newly qualified teacher (NQT) observations every half-term); co-ordinating the induction programme, and dealing with parents and discipline issues. The school views the opportunity to become a teaching school very positively and this is where its senior leadership team would like to take the school.

Areas for support

The school would value the National College as a critical friend in helping the school become a teaching school. This would involve the National College in helping the school assess the strengths and weaknesses of its management structures and assisting it to develop specific programmes that the academy would deliver for young/emerging leaders. The school is also interested in sending its leaders to the National College for them to meet peers, and reflect upon their own practice.

“We would like an organisation such as the National College to be a critical friend to us, to be outside of that, to look at that and to look at our management structures and give us an overview of our success or failures and to work with us to provide what I consider to be high-quality CPD and young managers’ training.”

Senior leader, converting academy

“There is something powerful [about] sending someone away to the National College for a week and having reflection time and talking through things and coming back with a slightly different perspective.”

Senior leader, converting academy

Summary and discussion

Strategic leadership in academies was strongly influenced by the context of the school. In particular, the research suggests that it is important to take account of the starting-point at the time of converting in terms of pupil attainment, as this had influenced the motivations of leaders in desiring academy status, and was also reflected in the vision and core values of the school. There was a strong desire among the majority of respondents in sponsored academies that academy freedoms would be used to put in place appropriate structures and systems to enable the new vision, which had generally focused on raising the aspirations and attainment of pupils, to be owned and achieved. The nature of the challenges for strategic leadership was linked to the context of the school. Therefore, for strategic leadership in sponsored academies, the key challenge was to implement organisational change with the aim of achieving the vision of the school.

In contrast, converting academies involved in the research, all of which were high-achieving schools, already had a strong vision in place, and this was very much rooted in being centres of excellence in terms of educational provision, and in pushing their students to be the best. Leaders of converting academies viewed academy status as a positive enabler to maintaining or raising standards even further, but it was not for the most part seen as an opportunity to alter the vision and ethos of their school.

In relation to organisational leadership, the research confirmed that the leadership model in sponsored academies was influenced by the sponsorship model; in particular whether the academy was operating as part of a chain, or was a free-standing academy trust. Linked to the key challenge of sponsored academies, which focused on raising pupils’ aspirations and attainment, in almost all the sponsored academies visited, there was a strong

focus on aligning leadership structures with teaching and learning outcomes by expanding the middle tier of leadership, in recognition of their key role in improving outcomes. Although senior leadership in sponsored academies has generally been initially very directive in order to drive school improvement, it has also been accompanied by giving middle leaders greater responsibility and accountability for teaching and learning strategies, either on a faculty or year-group basis. The research suggests that sponsored academy trusts that incorporate more than one school were also able to develop leaner senior leadership structures due to leadership responsibilities operating across the phases, as is the case, for example, in all-through academies. In relation to leadership strategies, the findings from the survey with sponsored academies suggest that, compared with their predecessor schools, or compared with the maintained schools in which respondents had previously worked, sponsored academies were using a wider range of leadership strategies. In practice, many maintained schools have benefitted from some of these freedoms in the past. Therefore, academy status formalises those freedoms and creates an expectation for change which, in turn, empowers schools to make decisions without having to seek the permission of others (for example, the local authority).

In contrast, the leadership structures in converting academies tended to be more traditional. It is important to note that there were exceptions to this. Given the attainment profile of these schools, it was not surprising that most converting academies had no immediate plans to use their freedoms to radically change their teaching and learning strategies. However, some interviewees suggested that they did have plans to use their academy freedoms in the future to further improve learning and learning outcomes.

Therefore, as with sponsored academies, some converting academies may use their academy status to change the leadership model and a wider range of leadership models/structures may emerge within these academies, as the programme develops.

In terms of operational leadership, the research evidence points to some overall agreement between respondents in sponsored and converting academies in relation to the skills that were more important for leaders in an academy context. However, there were variations within and between sponsored and converting academies in terms of the degree of importance placed on these skills. The key point to note is that variations in relation to the particular skills required to lead an academy appear to be linked to the existing and previous context of the school, thus for sponsored academies, the type of sponsorship model in place, and for converting academies, whether or not the school had previous GM status, or whether it was a primary or secondary academy.

The majority of respondents from sponsored academies indicated that they would welcome support from the National College or other providers in a range of areas, including leadership development, leadership of teaching and learning, networking and collaboration, management of staff performance, and development and talent identification.

The majority of respondents in converting academies identified a need for training in three main areas: financial management, leadership development, and networking and collaboration. Notably, the top three areas identified by most respondents in converting academies were largely consistent with the additional freedoms and responsibilities that academy status brings. There was also variation by school phase, with proportionately more leaders in converting primary academies, compared with leaders in converting secondary academies, indicating that academy status would bring more leadership development opportunities. Most academy interviewees highlighted the importance of providing bespoke training which takes account of the context of the academy. Linked to this point, many respondents stated that training should be differentiated in terms of the roles and responsibilities expected within the context of the academy, including, for converting academies whether or not it is a primary or secondary academy. Finally, the overwhelming view from interviewees was that the training should be designed and delivered by professionals with experience and knowledge of academies.