England's National College for School Leadership: a model for leadership education?

Dan Riley

University of New England, Armidale, Australia, and

Bill Mulford

University of Tasmania, Hobart, Australia

Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this article is to critique the strengths and weaknesses of the National College for School Leadership (NCSL). The primary purpose of the NCSL is to improve student attainment levels through enhancement of leadership capacity within England's government schools. The critique aims to include the issues of strategic rethinking, definition of terms, leadership competencies, core competencies, selection criteria, and research needs.

Design/methodology/approach – This article provides a review of literature related to leadership capacity building and challenges to the NCSL enhancement of student attainment levels in England's government schools.

Findings – The article indicates that the NCSL had numerous strengths adequate for the initial core activities of headteacher development. Subsequent broadening of those responsibilities to include all leadership development in government schools is a challenging task. The continued increase in expectations necessitates a strategic rethinking of NCSL capability.

Practical implications – The number of potential school leaders warrants reflection on current practice. The "demographic time-bomb" of the teaching profession has implications for succession planning and professional development. The NCSL has endeavoured to prepare additional school leaders. The increase in NCSL responsibilities regarding school leadership necessitates a sharing of responsibility with other providers.

Originality/value – The article is among the first to critique the NCSL and to identify lessons to be learned by educational leaders from the NCSL experience.

Keywords Educational personnnel, Leadership, Education, England

Paper type General review

Introduction

Levine's (2005, p. 54) damming report of the education of school leaders in USA had strong praise for the England's National College for School Leadership (NCSL) stating that it provided "the most promising model we saw, providing examples of good practice that educational administration programs might seek to emulate". Given such praise and the renewed and growing interest in school leaders and their education, it would seem sensible to have a closer look at the NCSL and its strengths, weaknesses and areas that may need further consideration.

The impetuous for the NCSL in England was the belief by the New Labour Government of Tony Blair that leadership was central to achieve results but that existing school leadership was not effective in responding to the increasing challenges of standards-based reforms. This impetuous was consistent with moves in different countries to make school leaders increasingly accountable for the quality of teaching and learning within schools (Fullan and Watson, 2000; Hargreaves, 2003; Leithwood and Menzies, 1998; Wildy and Louden, 2000).

While other writers have evaluated the influence of the New Labour Government on education (Walford, 2005), this paper contributes to the discussion through a more specific critique of the NCSL.

Background

During the 1960s and early 1970s there was movement towards greater coordination of leadership development at the national level in England. The concept of a national college had a long gestation period during which significant changes to provision of professional development and the emergence of dominant professional organisations were evident (Bolam, 2004). For example, in 1995 the needs of newly appointed headteachers were addressed through the Headteachers Leadership and Management Programme (HEADLAMP) and in 1997 the National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH) was initiated (Bush and Jackson, 2002). The concept for the NCSL were first advanced in a 1998 Green Paper titled, *Teachers meeting the Challenges of Change* (Department of Education and Employment, 1998), which canvassed ways to modernise the teaching profession (Department of Education and Employment, 1999). The NCSL was launched in 2000 and David Blunkett, the then Secretary of State for Education, detailed key areas for college activity:

> ... provide a single national focus for school leadership development, research and innovation; be a driving force for world-class leadership in our schools and wider community; provide support to and be a major resource for school leaders; [and], stimulate national and international debate on leadership issues (Bolam, 2004, p. 254).

In July 2002 the NCSL staff moved from its temporary location at the University of Nottingham into its nearby purpose built Learning and Conference Centre. On 24 October the Prime Minister, Tony Blair, officially opened the new £28 million high-quality, conference facility and addressed the 160 attending school leaders. The address included the words, "One should never ignore the blindingly obvious, and the blindingly obvious about any good school is that it has got a good head". The official opening of the national home of the NCSL together with the Prime Minister's words were a clear and unambiguous statement as to the esteem and purpose of the NCSL. No country has invested as much as England in a national institution for the growth and development of school leaders (Harris and Muijs, 2005; Bush and Jackson, 2002; Walker and Dimmock, 2004).

The NCSL (2003) *Corporate Plan 2003-2007* resonates with the ambitious goals articulated by David Blunkett in 2000 and highlighted by the Prime Minister. The objectives included to:

- Develop and deliver a range of leadership programmes that enable leaders to build the confidence, skills and understanding to transform the quality of learning for all pupils.

- Find, analyse, describe and celebrate good practice in school leadership in order to build a usable knowledge base for school leaders to share.
- Promote collaborative learning and communication so that all school leaders feel that they are a part of a network of vibrant professional learning communities and have opportunities to contribute to developments in education policy.
- Demonstrate the impact of NCSL on school leadership and progress towards achieving our key goals.

After five years of operation the contribution of the NCSL to development of leadership in public schools was reviewed by the Office of Standards in Education (OSE). OSE conclusions included (NCSL, 2005a):

- the leadership by headteachers in most primary, secondary and special schools is good and is characterised by purposefulness and clarity of vision;
- the management of schools is generally less effective than leadership;
- few schools have a convincing, systematic programme for developing middle managers;
- in most schools that have successfully sustained improvement, leadership has been developed at all levels and accountability for implementing policies is shared by all staff;
- monitoring and evaluation are not yet strong;
- schools are better at judging the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement than at judging the quality of the curriculum and assessment; and
- in schools causing concern, effective leadership and management at all levels are key elements in a school's capacity to continue its progress.

Also, it was found that while England's National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy initially improved student achievement, the results had levelled off in 2001 and "stayed at that level to the present" (Fullan, 2006, p. 40). This situation was seen to necessitate a "transformation" of the English school system (Southworth, 2005, p. 1).

The NCSL's response was articulated in the publication titled, *Learning to Lead* (NCSL, n.d.), which together with all NCSL programmes, activities and learning activities are based on the moral purpose stated in the NCSL key goals that, "every child in a well-led school, every leader a learner." The purpose of the publication is to detail the six key areas of leadership learning and related means used by the NCSL to support and enhance leadership learning. The six key areas are:

(1) leading learning and teaching;
(2) developing self and working with others;
(3) creating the future;
(4) managing the organisation;
(5) strengthening community through collaboration; and
(6) securing accountability.

More recently, and with the change of chief executive officer and subsequent widespread consultation with school leaders across England, NCSL's (2006a) 2006-09 corporate plan contains four goals, which are to:

(1) develop excellent school leadership to transform children's achievement and well being;

(2) develop leadership within and beyond the school;

(3) identify and grow tomorrow's leaders; and

(4) create a fit for purpose, national college.

Strengths

The strengths of the NCSL are numerous and include its national profile, comprehensive programmes, leadership framework, research focus, direct and indirect influence, and international awareness.

National profile

The NCSL is recognised as the national focus for school leadership and its establishment was a significant shift from leadership acquired through osmosis to a national coordinated development focus. Its mission and parameters are clear; the NCSL is "to be a driving force for world-class leadership in schools" (Mulford, 2004, p. 316). A shift in thinking about leadership has witnessed a widening of the NCSL initial focus. The result is the NCSL is not solely a headship college but a leadership college for English public schools leaders (Southworth, 2004a). It places great emphases upon enhancement of student attainment levels which are still not perceived as high enough (Department of Education and Skills, 2005) The closeness of the working relationship with government allows the NCSL to contribute to policy formulation and provides government with a single entity for leadership development. More specifically, and as a recipient of government funding for educational leadership research, the NCSL can exert an unprecedented influence on the direction and scope of educational research within England.

Comprehensive programmes

The NCSL was initially tasked with managing pre-existing national programmes for leadership development: The NPQH, the Leadership Programme for Serving Heads (LPSH), and the HEADLAMP. To date around 10,000 teachers have gained the NPQH in public schools. Since April 2004 it has been mandatory for first-time headteachers to either hold or be enrolled in the programme. From 2009 completion of the NPQH will be a prerequisite for appointment. Applications are made in May and October each year but require the support of the headteacher. The cost is approximately £3,000 per candidate with the NCSL meeting 80 per cent for applicants from the government school sector and the school normally meeting the remaining 20 per cent. The NCSL meets the total cost for primary schools with enrolment of fewer than 100 students (*Times Education Supplement*, 2005).

The NCSL programmes for leadership are diverse and, in order to meet the specific needs of school leaders, are divided into five categories:

(1) *Emergent leaders.* Teachers who are beginning to take on management and leadership responsibilities, including heads of departments and subject leaders.

(2) *Established leaders.* Experienced leaders who do not intend to pursue headship, including assistant and deputy headteachers.

(3) *Entry to headship.* Those preparing for their first headship and for newly appointed headteachers.

(4) *Advanced leaders.* Experienced headteachers looking to refresh themselves and update their skills.

(5) *Consultant leaders.* Experienced headteachers and other school leaders who are ready to develop further their training, mentoring, and coaching skills (Southworth, 2005).

The need for the formative and summative evaluation of programmes is acknowledged and results are distributed to the teaching profession (Southworth, 2004a). Through critical reflection and openness to participants, there has been a greater emphasis on capacity building within and between schools to reflect the realisation that leadership matters and that more leaders are needed. Developing networked learning communities of schools (NCSL, 2005b) continues to be a particular emphasis in NCSL activities.

The urgency for capacity building is heightened by pending succession challenge. The NCSL refers to retirement of baby boomers as a "demographic time-bomb". The reality of this challenge was evident in 2005 when 37 per cent of primary headships and 27 per cent of secondary sector had to be re-advertised due to a lack of suitable applicants and sometimes a lack of any applicants (*Times Education Supplement*, 2005).

While the NCSL was the sole provider of qualifications for current and future headteachers, it now seeks "to create and sustain active partnerships with all key players and stakeholders" (Southworth, 2004a, pp. 340-41).

Leadership framework
The NCSL programmes are based upon a leadership conceptual framework developed in collaboration with school leaders and experts in leadership development. The conceptual framework is founded on existing and contemporary research (Hallinger and Heck, 1999a, b; Leithwood and Riehl, 2003; Southworth, 2004b) and evidence from the Office for Standards in Education together with close working relationships involving school leaders and deputies.

Although not always the case, NCSL is now committed to distributed leadership and challenges the long-standing belief in the power of one leader. This commitment is consistent with research findings into leadership, which report that it "is sufficient to render meaningless any assumptions about being embodied in just one individual" (Gronn, 2000, p. 331; see also Hargreaves, 2001; Bennett *et al.*, 2003; Leithwood and Riehl, 2003; Spillane *et al.*, 2005). The traditional belief that hierarchical-based leadership in which one individual has sole responsibility for school leadership is now under sustained questioning and critical reflection.

Leadership capacity building within schools through the application of knowledge is also pivotal to the NCSL (Hopkins and Jackson, 2003). For Katzenmeyer and Moller (2001, p. 5) leadership capacity building involves teacher leadership and refers to teachers who "lead within and beyond the classroom, identify with and contribute to a community of teacher learners and leaders, and influence others towards improved

educational practice". For Frost and Durrant (2002, p. 3) it was "not a matter of delegation, direction or distribution of responsibility, but rather a matter of teachers" agency and their choice in initiating and sustaining change'. Bush and Glover (2003, p. 10), in a review of the leadership literature for the NCSL, defined leadership as "a process of influence leading to the achievement of desired purpose. It involves inspiring and supporting others towards the achievement of a vision for the school which is based on clear personal and professional values".

Research focus
As a freestanding institution the NCSL research focus is not subject to university regulations and values. It is debatable that had the NCSL been incorporated into a university, if it would have had the current research focus of "evidence-informed practice, school-based enquiry and practitioner involvement in research" (Bolam, 2004, p. 260). The NCSL is committed to supporting school leaders' beliefs that they learn by being given opportunities to "lead and through on-the-job learning". Such an approach identifies the school as the focus where essential support and encouragement of emerging leaders must be provided (Southworth, 2004a, p. 345). Blasé and Blasé (2000) and (Cardno, 2005) both found followers want leaders who can lead by doing, have a strong and consistent interest in what they are doing, and facilitate dialogue with them about pedagogy and professional practice. School leaders do not necessarily dislike theoretical academic research but prefer "know how" results (Southworth, 2004a, p. 348; see also Southworth, 2004b).

To ensure resilience and sustainability of school leadership, the NCSL has identified broad research themes and has offered to consider ideas not included or those that have been overlooked (NCSL, 2004). In 2004 the broad themes were:

- leadership for sustainability;
- distributed leadership;
- learning-centred leadership;
- leadership development; and
- diversity and differentiation in leadership (NCSL, 2004).

The emerging lessons from NCSL's (2006b) most recent research activity include:

- Common themes for successful leadership focus on people and school learning.
- Successful schools are characterised by trust, professional dialogue and monitoring through use of evidence.
- A single input by a leader can have multiple outcomes - it is the deployment of seemingly ordinary strategies and tactics in combination and with care and diligence that makes them powerful and potent.
- Leaders needing to be able to see the whole as well as the individual elements.
- Successful leaders are driven by a belief that every child can succeed and be developed as a whole child, a commitment to learning, including responsibility to develop others, and leadership succession and sustainability, and taking responsibility for system as well as one's own school.

Direct and indirect influence
Consistent with recent research (Leithwood and Jantzi, 2000; Leithwood and Riehl, 2003; Mulford, 2003a, b), NCSL has increasingly focused on the direct and indirect effects of leadership on teaching and learning. For example, Southworth (2005) draws on Hallinger and Heck (1999a, b) to identify three forms of leader influence upon the classroom:

(1) direct effects–where leaders' actions directly influence school outcomes;

(2) indirect effects–where leaders affect outcomes indirectly through other variables; and

(3) reciprocal effects–when the leader or leaders affect teachers and teachers affect the leaders and through these processes outcomes are affected.

International awareness
NCSL has committed itself to the establishment and maintenance of international awareness. For example, it hosted a seminar in response to the war in Iraq in 2003. The seminar revealed the complex role of school leader, plus found the school to be more than an organisation; they involved the community (Southworth, 2004a). This culturally sensitive role reflects the NCSL's willingness to confrere in order to advance leadership thinking (Walker and Dimmock, 2004). In addition, the NCSL Research Group works with the OECD and its counterparts in Canada, The Netherlands, and New Zealand to consider scenarios for schools of the future (Coles and Southworth, 2005).

Weaknesses
The potential weaknesses of NCSL may include its political support, the murky nature of leadership and distributed leadership, limited evidence for direct and indirect effects, the division between leadership and management, research focus, mission creep, and professional inertia of the late adopters.

Political support
The NCSL is the brainchild and funded by the New Labour Government as a political initiative. Any change in government may witness a cessation of political commitment to the NCSL and the establishment of alternative provisions. Other major weaknesses include the possible loss of confidence by major stakeholders in the capacity of school leaders to improve children's achievement levels with a resultant adverse effect on government funding. The potential for failure is apparent owing to the difficulty of identifying verifiable improvements in classroom performance due solely to leadership programmes (Bush *et al.*, 2006). A further weakness is the investment in the NCSL coupled with the energy and effort invested by schools which place an undue burden on the NCSL and the schools to demonstrate improvement in student achievement (Southworth, 2005).

To these difficulties must be added the dichotomy of the NCSL emphasis on leadership with the New Labour Government's stress on performance accountability via managerial approaches (Bush and Middlewood, 2005). Performance management is based on the traditional concept of leadership, with an emphasis on formal authority delegated within a hierarchical structure (Simkins, 2005). This approach is at variance with the NCSL methods to achieve distributive leadership and capacity building in

schools, where the headteachers remain ultimately accountable for student achievement levels. The approaches to leadership driven by efficiency, effectiveness and performance appraisal and those driven by values, learning communities and distributive leadership appear to have an inherent tension (Gold *et al.*, 2002). This may represent a no-win situation for the NCSL.

Further, the increased complexity of leadership will require greater individualised, or personalised, support programmes. As a result, the activities of NCSL will need to increase and diversify (Southworth, 2004a). With this growth and being the single most influential leadership institution in England with a monopoly on school leadership qualifications, NCSL may generate an impression of attempting to "rule the world" and create dissatisfaction amongst the very stakeholders from whom it needs support. It may even result in NCSL being tempted to give in to the ineffective strategy of prescription in the preparation of school leaders (Mulford, 2004, p. 315).

Murky nature of leadership
The lack of agreement on a definition for, or the main purpose of, leadership may hamper the NCSL. There is no doubt that "leadership is to this decade what standards were to the 1990s" (Fullan, 2003, p. 6). However, Day *et al.* (2000, p. 7) described the volume of leadership material as a "swamp" where different assumptions are "not contested". Simkins (2005, p. 10) reminds us that "the nature of leadership remains elusive". The lack of agreement as to the meaning and manifestation of leadership, together with expectations of theoretically informed research, make it difficult to achieve a grand theory. Heck and Hallinger (2005, p. 233) reconsider Boyan's (1988) question, which asked if "the field was one that actually lent itself to scientific study, or was merely a field for study?" Heck and Hallinger (2005, p. 239) note "the field has been long on intellectual critique, but short on sustained action (and demonstrated results) about alternatives that will enhance schooling for children".

Furman (2002) asked: "What is the purpose of leadership? Is the purpose of leadership development to improve student achievement levels or is there a social justice focus?". For some schools the paramount goal is student physical safety and meeting their immediate health needs before undertaking sustained effort to enhance attainment levels. Numerous researchers argue the primary purpose of the education system is the achievement of social justice. The moral endeavour of social justice may be achieved in-part through improvement of student achievement levels, although counter arguments would be forthcoming from scholars who strenuously differentiate between traditional goals of school and social justice (Bates, 2002; Marshall, 2004).

Murky nature of distributive leadership
The NCSL is now clearly identified with the approach of distributive leadership. The inevitable result is potential conflict with alternative developments and theories (Bolam, 2004). While distributive leadership has been described as "an idea whose time has come" (Gronn, 2000, p. 333), Bennett *et al.*, (2003, p. 2) note: "there were almost no empirical studies of distributed leadership in action" and "little agreement as to the meaning of the term".

Woods (2004, p. 5) considers the concept of distributive leadership as "seductive and [it] has a high degree of plausibility". Studies that report development of distributed leadership depend on the headteacher as the source or impetus (Blasé and Blasé, 2000;

Gold *et al.*, 2002). Other publications provide informative not conclusive evidence of a positive relationship between school improvement and distributed leadership (Day *et al.*, 2000; Harris and Chapman, 2002). The most recent and comprehensive review of teacher leadership literature (York-Barr and Duke, 2004) was able to find only five empirical studies of teacher leadership effects on pupils and none reported significant positive effects.

In addition to this inclusive research base, Bennett *et al.* (2003, p. 2) note there is "little agreement as to the meaning of the term". For Harris (2005, p. 164) "interpretations and understandings vary" and there is "almost no empirical studies of distributive leadership in action." Hopkins and Jackson (2003) express a similar assessment, noting that actual accounts of distributive leadership practice are not forthcoming. Harris (2005, p. 166) issued an urgent call for contemporary research, "if misuse, exploration and distortion of the concept are to be avoided".

Bennett *et al.* (2003, p. 2) advocate that distributive leadership is better understood not as a technique or practice but as a "way of thinking about leadership." If accepted as a technique or practice, the term "distributed leadership" is not a theory of leadership. This perspective allows greater reflection of the term but has not stimulated studies that consider the effect of distributive leadership on organisational outcomes.

While the term "distributed leadership" is widely used and is increasingly integrated into contemporary literature (for example, Hargreaves and Fink, 2006), it may be driven much more by philosophy and democratic values than by evidence. But distributed leadership is not automatically a good thing. As Hargreaves and Fink (2006, p. 102) point out, "distributed patterns of leadership don't always serve the greater good. Distributed leadership is sometimes bad leadership". This situation poses a dilemma for NCSL in its evidence base for action.

Limited evidence for direct and indirect effects

There is some agreement emerging that the effects of headteacher and distributed leadership are indirect but also that these effects are difficult to measure (Hallinger and Heck, 1996, 1999a, b; Leithwood and Jantzi, 2000; Witziers *et al.*, 2003). As noted by Hallinger and Heck (1996, p. 1): "despite the traditional rhetoric concerning headteacher effects, the actual results of empirical studies in the US and UK are not altogether consistent in size and direction." Hallinger and Heck (1999a, b) found a number of avenues that indicate how headteachers influence student achievement levels. However, the review did not identify the ways school leaders achieve an impact on student achievement levels nor the interaction of forces that influence school leadership. For Witziers *et al.* (2003) the evidence of indirect effects substantiates the conclusion that the nexus between leadership and student achievement is weak.

More recent research agrees that schools may have limited impact on pupil outcomes and the impact of school leaders while direct on teachers is indirect upon pupils (Bolam, 2004; Hallinger and Heck, 1999a, b; Silins and Mulford, 2002). These recent studies suggest that leaders can exert indirect effects on achievement levels through their influence on school conditions and the quality of instruction. For example, protection of planning and teaching times from interruptions, supporting critical reflection upon current practice, alignment of professional developments with

www.man

school goals, promotion of trust between staff, and distributive leadership (Smylie and Hart, 1999; Spillane *et al.*, 2001; Young and King, 2002).

Further quality research into the nexus between the direct and indirect effects of leadership and student attainment levels would seem warranted as an evidence base for policy and practice in a major provider of leadership education such as the NCSL.

Division between leadership and management
A further hindrance to NCSL effectiveness is the division between leadership and management, with greater emphasis on the former. Some argue that the "challenge of modern organisations requires the objective perspective of the manager as well as the flashes of brilliance of vision and commitment wise leadership provides" (Bolman and Deal, 1991, p. xii). It is argued that leadership is a facet of successful management or alternatively that management is a facet of successful leadership. Both terms are often used interchangeably in the literature but can also describe different concepts, as reflected in the well-known statement "Managers do the things right, while leaders do the right things".

Witziers *et al.*, (2003, p. 403) defined an educational leader as one:

[. . .] whose actions (both in relation to administration and educational tasks) are intentionally geared to influencing the school's primary processes and, therefore, ultimately students' achievement levels.

Glatter and Kydd (2003, p. 321) in their discussion of best practice in educational leadership and management, posed the question: "Can we identify it and learn from it?" They advocate best practice needs to be applied more rigorously and the criteria of what constituted best practice needs to be clearly articulated. Commitment to the development of both leadership and management competencies coupled with recognition of their respective importance in different contexts appears warranted (Bush and Glover, 2003). The fragmentation of the role and responsibilities of leaders may also generate a false dichotomy between management and leadership (Bush and Middlewood, 2005).

There is a need to ensure school leaders have the necessary discretion for leadership rather than being mere compliance managers (Mulford, 2003a). However this discretion may be difficult to sustain in hierarchical systems based on, and/or with expectations for, the great man/woman or super man/woman theory of leadership. This situation can be compounded further in a system where once a person attains headship they must always be a headteacher (Mulford, 2003a).

Research focus
Continued exposure to increasing expectations of major stakeholders (government, profession, students, parents) and the need to do more with existing resources may result in constraints on the NCSL budget and activities. While Foskett *et al.* (2005, p. 249) identified the three constituents of research as those who fund it, the intended audience, and researchers, the inevitable result is increased emphasis initiated by those who fund research, judge the quality of the research and its contribution to practice. While government provision of current funding is substantial, research priority is determined by government policy and expectations (Mulford, 2005, p. 142). As a result, the escalation of expectations to produce relevant research may generate a lack of

capacity to take risks in research and practice and thus adversely affect the ability of the NCSL to improve leadership capacity at the school level over the longer term.

Without supporting evidence, the shift from a university-based programme to a prescribed training programme executed at the school level is open to question. Bush (2002, p. 15) notes that such questioning "has been accompanied by a cacophony of dismissive comments about the alleged over theoretical bias of university education departments". Yet Bush (2002) also identified the NPQH as "atheoretical". In fact, the current practitioner focus may fail to deliver relevant research at school level due to its specificity, which is not conducive to generalisation and wider application. What is required is research that moves from a simplistic focus on different forms of adjectival leadership (distributive, transformational, and so on) to a more complex set of variables and their interrelationships.

Mission creep
The NCSL initially focused on headteachers, but its focus has been broadened to include a range of middle-level leaders and bursars (Harris and Muijs, 2005). The original three core areas of activity (leadership development programmes - NPQH, HEADLAMP and the LPSH, research and development and online learning, networks and information) have been considerably extended to include Networked Learning Groups, the National Remodelling Team, "Leading from the Middle", the Headteacher Induction Programme and the "New Visions for Early Headship" Programme (the latter two replacing HEADLAMP). To this must be added the increased geographical responsibilities through regional leadership centres.

Continued escalation of stakeholder expectations together with 80 networks and involving more than 1,000 schools place an increased burden on the NCSL (Bolam, 2004). With approximately 250,000 leaders at all levels, the reality is that the needs of every leader cannot physically met by the NCSL and therefore, leadership development must remain a partnership that is school-based but supported by external agencies. It could be asked whether the NCSL has ever divested itself of activities. For example, it could be argued that in the most successful programme organisers "do themselves out of a job" as professionals in the field take over responsibility for their own individual and collective learning.

There is clearly room for everyone with the major issue being one of coordination. The number of potential leaders to be inducted, developed and supported will require years of support from all partners; the NCSL, local education authorities and universities, to achieve a significant impact upon the level of student achievement in every school. To these figures must be added the implications of the "demographic time-bomb" identified by the Hartle and Thomas (2003, p. 3):

> Many teacher training places remain unfilled; fewer pupils are planning to become teachers; over half of the teaching profession will be over 50 by 2006; one-third of non-retiring teachers intend to leave the profession within five years; approximately 20 per cent of PGCE and BEd graduates never enter teaching, and 25 per cent leave the profession within five years.

Professional inertia of the late adopters
A plateau in enrolment numbers for NCSL programmes may become evident due to resistance from potential participants. The cohort of early adaptors is limited and the coming challenge is the engagement of the majority of late adopters in the teaching

service. As Simkins (2005, p. 10) notes, the uncertainty and deep ambiguity of teachers to the role of leadership, the "massive learned helplessness" acquired during the experience of hierarchical-centred leadership, and hesitation to having "leadership hard-wired into their make-up" are not conducive to the efforts of the NCSL. Added to these reservations is the experience and expectations of potential school leaders, who may not be receptive to further expenditure of time and effort with no corresponding additional extrinsic or intrinsic incentives.

Commentary
Given the identified strengths and weaknesses on the NCSL, we advocate those considering NCSL as the model for school leader education give further consideration of the issues of strategic rethinking, definition of terms, leadership and core competencies, selection criteria, and greater complexity in research.

Strategic rethinking
The magnitude of the potential numbers of school leaders and the escalation of expectations on the NCSL necessitate reflection of current practices and frameworks. This reflection may advocate a shift in its function from provider to facilitator or coordinator of programmes with programme delivery outsourced to multiple providers, including the profession itself.

Strategic thinking and implementation takes time. There appear to be several NCSL weaknesses that are the result of misunderstanding. The traditional culture of the teaching profession appears at variance with New Labour Government expectations of results and the approach of the NCSL to achieve those results. It is an unrealistic expectation to place responsibility on the NCSL to achieve in one decade significant change to entrenched custom and practice. This is not to infer the task to achieve substantial improvement in student achievement levels cannot be attained, rather it will take longer. There is a need to accept that leadership capacity building involves a time-consuming process of definition, constant study, and critical reflection (Hadfield, 2003). There is also a need to buffer the profession from unrealistic political expectations and/or educate the politicians to what can reasonable be expected within different timeframes (not the time between elections).

Definitions
The different interpretations of the role of leadership and distributive leadership warrant clarification and explanation. Consideration of the expectations and experiences of the teaching professions indicates the enormity of the challenges before the NCSL. There is limited recognition or consideration of the implications of the existing culture within schools. The approach adopted by the NCSL for capacity building initially appeared to be from top-down rather than a bottom-up. The focus for change was initially the headteacher, but has been broadened to encourage more school leaders to emerge who traditionally had limited input to school leadership. Involvement requires necessary competencies, interest and time to contribute. Their involvement, based on experience, will influence expectations and commitment. Development of learning organisations or communities takes time and trust. Experience within the teaching profession is substantial with more than 50 per cent of the teaching profession over 50 years old. It therefore, contains professional teachers

with three decades of experience. During 30 years many changes have been initiated, and that experience will influence their receptiveness to further change. Investment of effort to reap the long-term benefit for schools should witness an emphasis upon those in key positions and potential for long-term membership of the profession.

Leadership

At each level of an organisation the basic responsibilities of leadership are different due to the nature of the position. It is common practice within organisations that in order to achieve greater effectiveness, competencies are identified. A competency is a set of skills, characteristics and related abilities that underlie effective performance. What emerges from first generation competency lists is a greater emphasis upon present needs based upon experience. Second-generation competencies place an increased emphasis on future needs, while sustaining the organisation's current roles and responsibilities. Competencies should enable success but they do not guarantee it. A correlation between competencies and a level of leadership within the specific organisation is essential. For example, the essential functions of leadership involve traditional competencies of integration, coordination, assimilation of details, macro-perspective, capacity for multi-perspectives, diplomacy, and core-business competency. Kouzes and Posner (2002, p. 22) identified five practices of leadership that reflect the needs in leaders expressed by followers. Leaders need to model the way; inspire a shared vision; challenge the process; enable others to act; and encourage the heart. Followers need to have the related capacity of trust in their colleagues, relevant knowledge, and capacity (Harris and Muijs, 2005).

Competencies

To assist with the development of school leaders, the research of Zenger and Folkman (2002) and Zenger *et al.*(2004) has relevance. They found the strengths of "great" leaders to be limited to three or four things done extremely well and these made a positive impact on the organisation. These were identified as differentiating competencies and number 16 clustered into five areas. The metaphor employed is that of a tent with each area represented as a pole:

(1) Character: honesty, integrity and clearly identified as core for effective leadership.

(2) Personal capabilities: technical competence, problem solving skills, innovation, and taking initiative.

(3) Focus on results: establish stretch goals for the team, accept responsibility for group results and appreciate that results are the ultimate measure of leadership.

(4) Interpersonal skills: be an effective, powerful and prolific communicator, motivating and inspiring as well as collaborative.

(5) Leading change: be forward thinking, champion constant change and link to outside the organisation (Zenger *et al.*, 2004, pp. 4-5).

The metaphor reveals that by lifting the poles the size of the tent increases. It identifies character as central but development in the other four areas is essential to ensure a "great" tent.

Selection criteria
Identification of potential participants in leadership development programmes is a vexed issue. The selection criteria should be based on who will give the greatest return to government schools. However, where an individual has a "fatal flaw", that is, is unable to recognise a severe weakness, they are unable to develop until the weakness is acknowledged and addressed. Zenger *et al.* (2004) found typical fatal flaws included:

- inability to learn from mistakes;
- interpersonal incompetence;
- lack of openness to new ideas;
- tendency to blame others for problems; and
- lack of initiative.

Although the cohort of potential leaders may be reduced, the question of who to develop remains. Normal practice within organisations is to focus on under-performers in order to bring them to an adequate level, or alternatively, organisations invest in the high potential executive and restrict resources to the others. Zenger *et al.* (2004) found to achieve results an organisation needs to help the vast numbers of "good" managers to become "great". This result is achieved by not focusing on weaknesses, but rather by further enhancement of three to four selected strengths needed to ensure improvement.

Greater complexity in research
The extensive work of Leithwood and his colleagues based mainly on North America research is also helpful here (Leithwood and Riehl, 2003; Leithwood *et al.*, 2004; Leithwood and Day, forthcoming). These researchers concluded that:

- Leadership is second only to classroom instruction among all school-related factors that contribute to what students learn at school, accounting for about a quarter of total school effects.
- Mostly leaders contribute to student learning indirectly, through their influence on other people or features of their organisation with their success depending a great deal on their judicious choice of which parts of the organisation to spend time and attention on.
- Four sets of practices can be thought of as the "basics" of successful leadership, developing people, setting directions, managing the instructional program, and redesigning the organisation.
- All successful leadership is "contingent" to the unique contexts in which it finds itself but leadership effects are usually largest where they are needed most, such as in schools that are in more difficult circumstances.

In their most recent review of transformational school leadership research conducted between 1996 and 2005, Leithwood and Jantzi (2005) confirm three of their four sets of transformational leadership practices of helping people, setting directions and redesigning the organisation. In addition, they conclude that evidence about transformational leadership effects on organisational effectiveness, student outcomes and student engagement in school are all positive (although with decreasing amounts of supporting evidence as one moves through the three areas). They believe that these

conclusions justify the current interest in the area but suggest that in order to advance the field there is a need to identify and take greater account of antecedent (e.g. individual traits, professional development experiences), moderating (e.g. family background) and mediating (e.g. school culture) variables over time in varied contexts.

Other international research evidence (e.g. Mulford, 2003a, b) takes up this call for greater complexity. The 13 variable Leadership for Organisational Learning and Student Outcomes (LOLSO) research finds that leadership which makes a difference to be both position based (principal) and distributive (administrative team and teachers). But both are only indirectly related to student outcomes. Organisational learning (OL), or a collective teacher efficacy, involving three sequential development stages (trusting and collaborative climate, shared and monitored mission and taking initiatives and risks) supported by appropriate professional development is the important intervening variable between leadership and teacher work and then student outcomes. That is, leadership contributes to OL, which in turn influences what happens in the core business of the school – the teaching and learning. It influences the way students perceive how teachers organise and conduct their instruction, and their educational interactions with, and expectations for, their students. Pupils' positive perceptions of teachers' work directly promote their participation in school, academic self-concept and engagement with school. Pupil participation is directly and pupil engagement indirectly (through retention) related to academic achievement. School size is negatively and socio-economic status and, especially, student home educational environment positively linked to these relationships.

Conclusions

The NCSL as the national focus for school leadership has the pivotal role in the enhancement of teaching and learning in England. Its numerous strengths appeared adequate for the initial core activities of headteacher development. The subsequent broadening of those responsibilities and widening of the parameters to include all leadership development is a challenging task. The continued increase in responsibility necessitates a strategic rethinking of NCSL capability. The number of potential school leaders warrants reflection on current practice. The "demographic time-bomb" of the teaching profession has implications for succession planning and professional development. The NCSL has endeavoured to prepare school leaders in sufficient numbers. However, it may be time for a realignment of NCSL capacity with increased expectations. The delineation of NCSL responsibilities regarding school leadership may necessitate an increased sharing of responsibility with other providers. Others have much to learn from the NCSL experience.

References

Bates, R. (2002), "Administering the global trap: the role of educational leaders", *Educational Management and Administration*, Vol. 30 No. 2, pp. 139-56.

Bennett, N., Harvey, J., Wise, C. and Woods, P. (2003), "Distributive leadership: full report", available at: www.ncsl.org.uk/literaturereviews

Blasé, J. and Blasé, J. (2000), "Effective instructional leadership: teachers' perspective on how principals promote teaching and learning in schools", *Journal of Educational Administration*, Vol. 38 No. 2, pp. 130-41.

Bolam, R. (2004), "Reflections on the NCSL from a historical perspective", *Educational Management Administration and Leadership*, Vol. 32 No. 3, pp. 251-67.

Bolman, L. and Deal, T. (1991), *Reframing Organizations: Artistry, Choice and Leadership*, 2nd ed., Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, CA.

Boyan, N. (1988), "Administrative behaviour", in Boyan, N. (Ed.), *Handbook of Research on Educational Administration*, Longman, New York, NY, pp. 77-97.

Bush, T. (2002), "Educational management: theory and practice", in Bush, T. and Bell, L. (Eds), *The Principles and Practices of Educational Management*, Paul Chapman, London, pp. 15-23.

Bush, T. and Glover, D. (2003), "School leadership: concepts and evidence", available at: www.ncsl.org.uk/literaturereviews

Bush, T. and Jackson, D. (2002), "Preparation for school leadership: international perspectives", *Educational Management Administration and Leadership*, Vol. 30 No. 4, pp. 417-29.

Bush, T. and Middlewood, D. (2005), *Leading and Managing People in Education*, Sage Publication, London.

Bush, T., Briggs, A. and Middlewood, D. (2006), "The impact of school leadership development: evidence from the new visions programme for early headship", *Journal of In-service Education.*, Vol. 32 No. 2, pp. 185-200.

Cardno, C. (2005), "Leadership and professional development: the quiet revolution", *International Journal of Educational Management*, Vol. 19 No. 4, pp. 292-306.

Coles, M. and Southworth, G. (2005), *Developing Leadership: Creating the Schools of Tomorrow*, Open University Press, Wokingham.

Day, C., Harris, A., Hadfield, M., Tolley, H. and Beresford, J. (2000), *Leading Schools in Times of Change*, Open University Press, Buckingham.

Department of Education and Employment (1998), *Teachers Meeting the Challenges of Change*, Cm 4163, The Stationery Office, London.

Department of Education and Employment (1999), *National College for School Leadership: A Prospectus*, Department of Education and Employment, London.

Department of Education and Skills (2005), *Higher Standards, Better Schools for All: More Choice for Parents and Pupils*, White Paper, Department of Education and Skills, London.

Foskett, N., Lumby, J. and Fidler, B. (2005), "Evolution or extinction? Reflections on the future of research in educational leadership and management", *Educational Management Administration and Leadership*, Vol. 33 No. 2, pp. 245-53.

Frost, D. and Durrant, J. (2002), *Teacher-led Development Work: Guidance and Support*, David Fulton, London.

Fullan, M. (2003), *The Moral Imperative of School Leadership*, Corwin Press, Thousand Oaks, CA.

Fullan, M. (2006), "Systems thinking, system thinkers and sustainability", *Thinking Scenarios, Rethinking Education*, OECD, Paris.

Fullan, M. and Watson, N. (2000), "School-based management: reconceptualization to improve learning outcomes", *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, Vol. 11 No. 4, pp. 453-73.

Furman, G. (2002), "The 2002 UCEA presidential address", *UCEA Review*, Vol. 45 No. 1, pp. 1-6.

Glatter, R. and Kydd, L. (2003), "Best practice in educational leadership and management: can we identify it and learn from it?", *Educational Management Administration and Leadership*, Vol. 31 No. 3, pp. 231-43.

Gold, A., Evans, J., Early, P., Halpin, D. and Collabone, P. (2002), "Principled principals: value driven leadership: evidence from ten case studies", paper presented at AERA, New Orleans, LA, 1-5 April.

Gronn, P. (2000), "Distributed properties: a new architecture for leadership", *Educational Management and Administration*, Vol. 28 No. 3, pp. 317-38.

Hadfield, M. (2003), "Building capacity versus growing schools", in Harris, A., Day, G., Hopkins, D., Hadfield, M., Hargreaves, A. and Chapman, C. (Eds), *Effective Leadership for School Improvement*, RoutledgeFalmer, London, pp. 107-20.

Hallinger, P. and Heck, R. (1996), "Reassessing the principal's role in school effectiveness: a review of the empirical research, 1980-1995", *Educational Administration Quarterly*, Vol. 32 No. 1, pp. 5-44.

Hallinger, P. and Heck, R. (1999a), "Exploring the principals contribution to school effectiveness: 1980-1995", *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, Vol. 9 No. 20, pp. 157-91.

Hallinger, P. and Heck, R. (1999b), "Can leadership enhance school effectiveness?", in Bush, T., Bolam, R., Bell, L., Glatter, R. and Ribbins, P. (Eds), *Educational Management: Redefining Theory, Policy and Practice*, Paul Chapman Publishing, London, pp. 178-90.

Hargreaves, A. and Fink, D. (2006), *Sustainable Leadership*, John Wiley & Sons, San Francisco, CA, pp. 95-139.

Hargreaves, D. (2001), "A capital theory of school effectiveness and improvement", *British Educational Research Journal*, Vol. 27 No. 4, pp. 487-503.

Hargreaves, D. (2003), *Teaching in the Knowledge Society*, Open University Press, Maidenhead.

Harris, A. (2005), "Distributed leadership", in Davies, B. (Ed.), *The Essentials of School Leadership*, Paul Chapman Publishing, London, pp. 160-72.

Harris, A. and Chapman, C. (2002), *Effective Leadership in Schools facing Challenging Circumstances: Final Report*, National College for School Leadership, Nottingham.

Harris, A. and Muijs, D. (2005), *Improving Schools through Teacher Leadership*, Open University Press, Wokingham.

Hartle, F. and Thomas, K. (2003), "Growing tomorrow's school leaders: the challenge: summary report", available at: www.ncsl.org.uk/researchpublications

Heck, R. and Hallinger, P. (2005), "The study of educational leadership and management, where does the field stand today?", *Educational Management Administration and Leadership*, Vol. 33 No. 2, pp. 229-44.

Hopkins, D. and Jackson, D. (2003), "Building the capacity for leading and learning", in Harris, A., Day, C., Hadfield, M., Hopkins, D., Hargreaves, A. and Chapmans, C. (Eds), *Effective Leadership for School Improvement*, RoutledgeFalmer, London, pp. 84-105.

Katzenmeyer, M. and Moller, G. (2001), *Awakening the Sleeping Giant: Helping Teachers Develop as Leaders*, Corwin Press, Thousand Oaks, CA.

Kouzes, J. and Posner, B. (2002), *The Leadership Challenge*, 3rd ed., Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, CA.

Leithwood, K. and Day, C. (Eds) (forthcoming), *Making a Difference: Successful School Leadership in Eight Countries*, Springer, Boston, MA.

Leithwood, K. and Jantzi, D. (2000), "The effects of transformational leadership on organisational conditions and student engagement", *Journal of Educational Administration*, Vol. 38 No. 2, pp. 112-29.

Leithwood, K. and Jantzi, D. (2005), "A review of transformational school leadership research", paper presented at AERA, Montreal, 11-15 April.

Leithwood, K. and Menzies, T. (1998), "Forms and effects of school-based management: a review", *Educational Policy*, Vol. 12 No. 3, pp. 325-46.

Leithwood, K. and Riehl, C. (2003), *What We Know About Successful School Leadership. A Report by Division A of AERA*, National College for School Leadership, Nottingham.

Leithwood, K., Seashore, L.K., Anderson, S. and Wahlstrom, K. (2004), *Review of Research: How Leadership Influences Student Learning*, The Wallace Foundation, New York, NY, available at: www.wallacefoundation.org/WF/KnowledgeCenter/KnowledgeTopics/EducationLeadership/Documents/HowLeadershipInfluencesStudentLearningES.htm

Levine, A. (2005), "Educating school leaders", available at: www.edschools.org/pdf/Final313.pdf

Marshall, C. (2004), "Social justice challenges to educational administration: introduction to a special issue", *Educational Administration Quarterly*, Vol. 40 No. 1, pp. 5-15.

Mulford, B. (2003a), "School leaders: changing roles and impact on teacher and school effectiveness. Commissioned paper by the Education and Training Policy Division, OECD, for the Activity Attracting, Developing and Retaining Effective Teachers", OECD, Paris, available at: www.oecd.org/dataoecd/61/61/2635399.pdf

Mulford, B. (2003b), "The role of school leadership in attracting and retaining teachers and promoting innovative schools and students. Commissioned paper by the Commonwealth Department of Education Science and Training for their Review of Teaching and Teacher Education", available at: www.dest.gov.au/NR/rdonlyres/161EEEC9-713A-40CD-9E87-2E5ACA1E19A3/1661/leadership.pdf

Mulford, B. (2004), "Organizational life cycles and the development of the national college for school leadership", *Educational Management Administration and Leadership*, Vol. 32 No. 3, pp. 309-24.

Mulford, B. (2005), "The international context for research in educational leadership", *Educational Management Administration and Leadership*, Vol. 33 No. 2, pp. 139-54.

National College for School Leadership (NCSL) (n.d.), *Learning to Lead: NCSL's Strategy for Leadership Learning*, NCSL, Nottingham.

National College for School Leadership (NCSL) (2003), *Corporate Plan 2003-2007*, NCSL, Nottingham.

National College for School Leadership (NCSL) (2004), *Annual Review of Research 2003-2004*, NCSL, Nottingham.

National College for School Leadership (NCSL) (2005a), *School Leadership 2005*, NCSL, Nottingham.

National College for School Leadership (NCSL) (2005b), "What are we learning about school learning networks?", available at: www.ncsl.org.uk/nlc.

National College for School Leadership (NCSL) (2006a), "Corporate plan 2006-09", available at: www.ncsl.org.uk/publications/publications-c.cfm#corporateplan

National College for School Leadership (NCSL) (2006b), "Emerging lessons from NCSL research activity", available at: www.ncsl.org.uk/media/1CA/F6/emerging-lessons-from-NCSL-research-activity.pdf

Silins, H. and Mulford, W. (2002), "Leadership and school results", in Leithwood, K. and Hallinger, P. (Eds), *Second International Handbook of Educational Leadership and Administration*, Kluwer Academic, London, pp. 561-612.

Simkins, T. (2005), "Leadership in education, what works or what makes sense?", *Educational Management Administration and Leadership*, Vol. 33 No. 1, pp. 9-26.

Smylie, M. and Hart, H. (1999), "School leadership for teacher learning and change: a human and social capital perspective", in Murphy, J. and Louis, K. (Eds), *Handbook of Research on Educational Administration*, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, CA, pp. 421-40.

Southworth, G. (2004a), "A response from the National College for School Leadership", *Educational Management Administration and Leadership*, Vol. 32 No. 3, pp. 339-54.

Southworth, G. (2004b), *Primary School Leadership in Context: Leading Small, Medium, and Large Sized Primary Schools*, RoutledgeFalmer, London.

Southworth, G. (2005), "School leadership and system leadership", available at: www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa4013/is_200501/ai_n9473822 (accessed 26 October).

Spillane, J., Halverson, R. and Diamond, J. (2001), "Distributive leadership: towards a theory of school leadership practice", *Educational Researcher*, Vol. 30 No. 3, pp. 23-8.

Spillane, J., Diamond, J., Sherer, J. and Coldren, A. (2005), "Distributive leadership", in Coles, M. and Southworth, G. (Eds), *Developing Leadership Creating the Schools for Tomorrow*, Open University Press, Wokingham, pp. 37-49.

Times Education Supplement (2005), "Headship", 14 October, pp. 11-14.

Walford, G. (2005), "Education and the Labour Government an evaluation of two terms", *Oxford Review of Education*, Vol. 31 Nos 1, special issue, pp. 3-10.

Walker, A. and Dimmock, C. (2004), "The international role of the NCSL: tourist, colporteur or confrere?", *Educational Management Administration and Leadership*, Vol. 32 No. 3, pp. 269-87.

Wildy, H. and Louden, W. (2000), "School restructuring and the dilemmas of principals' work", *Educational Management and Administration*, Vol. 28 No. 2, pp. 173-84.

Witziers, B., Bosker, R. and Kruger, M. (2003), "Educational leadership and student achievement: the elusive search for an association", *Educational Administration Quarterly*, Vol. 39 No. 3, pp. 398-425.

Woods, P. (2004), "Democratic leadership: drawing distinctions with distributive leadership", *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, Vol. 7 No. 1, pp. 3-26.

York-Barr, J. and Duke, K. (2004), "What do we know about teacher leadership? Findings from two decades of scholarship", *Review of Educational Research*, Vol. 74 No. 3, pp. 255-316.

Young, P. and King, M. (2002), "Principal leadership for professional development to build school capacity", *Educational Administration Quarterly*, Vol. 38 No. 5, pp. 643-70.

Zenger, J. and Folkman, J. (2002), *The Extraordinary Leader: How Good Managers Become Great Leaders*, McGraw-Hill, New York, NY.

Zenger, J., Sandholtz, K. and Folkman, J. (2004), *Leadership under the Microscope*, Extraordinary Group, Orem, UT, available at: www.expgi.com.