

Inspiring leaders to  
improve children's lives



**National College**  
for School Leadership

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Schools and academies

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# System leadership prospectus

Resource

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# 1. Introduction

This booklet has been designed as an overview of the College's different system leadership roles. It is intended for a wide audience, ranging from school leaders to governors to local authorities and other partners. Previously we have produced separate documents explaining each role, but we felt the time was right to bring them all together into a single overview. Through this approach we hope to:

- help explain what we mean by system leadership
- explain what each role is, who it is for and how it works in practice
- help individuals and schools to see whether different roles are currently right for them

This document is not intended to cover the finer details of how the roles will work in practice or how to apply for designation. At the end of this document we explain how you can access further information. In addition, once designated, those in the roles will be provided with full guidance, induction and in some cases, training.

## Our vision

System leadership is central to the National College's overall vision of a self-improving system, where schools, academies and children's centres take collective responsibility for leading, co-ordinating and delivering sustainable school improvement.

System leaders care about and have the skills and capacity to work for the success of other children as well as those in their own school. They collaborate with other leaders within and beyond their own organisations to share and develop common solutions, making efficient and effective use of resources to raise standards. They shape thinking, policy and practice so as to have a positive impact on the lives and life chances of children and young people.

The College's system leadership provision is underpinned by:

- being committed to closing the gap and taking action to lead school improvement work
- recognising the reciprocal benefits of peer-to-peer support and joint working
- moving increasingly from intervention to prevention
- accepting collective responsibility and shared accountability for performance
- ensuring there is a positive impact with measurable outcomes

We have developed a range of designated system leadership roles with the aim of recognising and supporting leaders who are excellent at what they do and are able to help leaders in others schools to improve. This document covers the following designations:

- specialist leaders of education (SLEs)
- local leaders of education (LLEs)
- national leaders of education (NLEs) and national support schools (NSSs)
- national leaders of governance (NLGs)
- national teaching schools

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There is also a designation for **children's centre system leaders**, although it is not detailed in this document. The College is currently piloting a programme that will designate 50 children's centre system leaders through 13 local authorities. The pilot activity will be reviewed and evaluated during 2012/13.

Our vision for system leadership is not a hierarchical one. This is not about some leaders being more important than others – the roles are different and they will all play a crucial part. This is about what is right for individuals or specific organisations. We also recognise that our designations are not the only roles that contribute to the leadership of the system. A range of other roles plays a vital part, such as leading an academy chain or chairing a headteachers' network. We know that roles will change over time to meet the needs of leaders, their schools and the wider educational system.

The College's role is to support system leaders and to enable them to undertake these critical roles. In addition, we work with schools to develop appropriate review and quality assurance processes to ensure that delivery meets the high standards expected.

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## 2. Specialist leaders of education

### The role and who it is for

Specialist leaders of education (SLEs) are outstanding middle and senior leaders such as assistant headteachers, key stage leaders or subject leaders, with at least two years' leadership experience. They have a particular area of expertise (for example, a subject area, early years, behaviour or special educational needs) and a successful track record of school improvement.

SLEs support leaders in other schools. They have excellent interpersonal skills, are able to work sensitively and collaboratively with others and have a commitment to outreach work. They understand what outstanding leadership practice in their area of specialism looks like and can help other leaders to achieve it.

The role focuses on developing leadership capacity. Whilst other roles (for example advanced skills teachers) focus on developing pedagogy and classroom expertise, the SLE role is about developing other leaders so that they have the skills to lead their own teams and improve practice in their own schools. This may be done through one-to-one or facilitated group support and could involve a variety of activities, such as data analysis, coaching or joint action-planning.

SLEs can come from any school or academy, including nursery, primary, secondary, special, pupil referral unit, independent and free schools, and sixth form colleges. Whilst the individual must be outstanding, his or her school does not have to be.

### How it works

The first 1,000 SLEs were designated in spring 2012 and we aim to designate around 5,000 SLEs by 2014/15. Eventually, we plan to have up to 10,000 SLEs, ensuring national coverage.

Models and types of deployment will vary. For example, one deployment might be a two-day diagnostic exercise, whilst another might require a three-month full-time support role. Time may be taken as a block of consecutive days or spread over a longer period. There is no minimum or maximum time commitment. SLEs and schools will need to think carefully about their capacity and negotiate their availability.

SLEs must meet the needs and demands of the system. It is important that SLEs are actively deployed, not just designated. We expect to see at least half of SLEs deployed within three months of designation. SLEs will be expected to provide evidence that their work has had a positive impact on outcomes for children and young people by developing leadership capacity in other schools.

Teaching schools are responsible for the recruitment, designation, brokering and quality assurance of SLEs. Each teaching school has a pool of SLEs for which it is responsible. Multiple teaching schools may choose to join their SLEs together to offer an even wider range of expertise.

### Funding and support

Teaching schools provide support for potential and designated SLEs where needed. In addition, the National College has a dedicated SLE team, which is able to provide additional support and advice.

SLEs attend a mandatory core training day that provides an introduction to the role and helps to equip them with tools and techniques for effective school-to-school support. There is also a menu of additional, optional training sessions. SLE training is delivered by selected teaching schools around the country.

There may be payment for specific SLE deployments, either from schools receiving support or from other sources or commissioning bodies, to reimburse the SLE's school for backfill or supply cover. Any such payment will be agreed and managed by the teaching school and/or other schools involved.

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## 3. Local leaders of education

### The role and who it is for

Local leaders of education (LLEs) are serving headteachers or principals with at least three years' headship experience, good outcomes in attainment and Ofsted measures and a successful track record of school leadership and management.

LLEs work outside their own school, providing support to another headteacher and his or her school. The two headteachers work together to drive forward improvements. Through a coaching and mentoring approach, the LLE's support builds the supported headteacher's leadership capacity to ensure that these improvements can be sustained.

The LLE role is flexible but typical activities include:

- negotiating objectives for improvement
- coaching and mentoring the headteacher to develop skills, judgement and professional effectiveness
- supporting or arranging coaching or training for key staff in the supported school
- discussing and reviewing school documentation, policies and procedures
- brokering external expertise or support from the local authority or other providers
- inviting the headteacher or other staff to visit the LLE's own school for discussion, observation, development activities, coaching or placements

LLEs also act as professional partners, providing mentoring support to new heads in their first two years of headship as part of the Head Start programme.

### How it works

There are now 2,000 LLEs across the country. The College works closely with local authorities, diocesan bodies and other agencies to identify, recruit, train and deploy LLEs. Local authorities are currently the most common brokers of LLE support but other bodies or agencies may take a brokering role including, increasingly, teaching schools.

Schools that are a priority for LLE support are those where:

- attainment is below the floor standard
- the school is considered to be vulnerable
- a new, first-time headteacher has been appointed

Deployments with a school improvement focus may last from six months to three years, with LLEs normally spending between half a day and one day a week working with the supported school. The LLE can allocate some of the contracted days to other members of staff in his or her own school, so for example, the LLE's deputy headteacher could be asked to work with the partner school's deputy as part of the deployment.

LLEs are also added to the College's database of professional partners, which new heads can search online. If matched with a new head, the professional partner LLE provides approximately 20 to 30 hours of unconditional one-to-one coaching and mentoring support during the new head's first two years of headship.

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## Funding and support

LLEs attend a half-day induction event on the local context and the practicalities of undertaking the role, as well as two consecutive training days that develop core coaching and mentoring skills.

LLEs are part of a national network, with ongoing support (including an online forum) and opportunities to help them develop in the role. The College organises regional events for LLEs and other system leaders. Local authorities, teaching schools or other agencies may also offer support, such as local conferences, additional training or peer mentoring.

Whoever is brokering the LLE's time will negotiate funding for the deployment. Any funding will be paid to the LLE's school. It is up to the LLE's school governing body to decide whether the LLE is rewarded financially for his or her individual work on the deployment.

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## 4. National leaders of education and national support schools

### The role and who it is for

National leaders of education (NLEs) are outstanding headteachers or principals who use their skills and experience to support other schools. NLEs' own schools are outstanding, with consistently high levels of pupil performance or continued improvement over the last three years. They have outstanding senior and middle leaders who have demonstrated the capacity to provide significant and successful support to underperforming schools. Their schools are designated as national support schools (NSSs) in recognition of the fact that their staff are likely to work alongside them in any support they may provide.

The aim of the programme is to support schools in the most challenging circumstances. Usually, this means schools identified as being in need of significant improvement by the Department for Education (DfE), Ofsted, a teaching school or a local authority. The focus of NLE/NSS work is to assist the supported school in making significant progress.

Deployment is tailored to suit the needs of the supported school. For example an NLE could:

- take the role of full-time acting or executive headteacher in a school that has a vacancy for the headship, with a significant involvement of staff from the NSS
- work alongside an acting or executive headteacher for three days a week, providing advice and extensive support from staff in the NSS
- provide consultancy support, with some staff from the NSS, for one to two days a week

### How it works

There are currently over 600 NLEs and NSSs. Over 700 schools have been supported so far and test results for schools involved in the programme demonstrate a significant impact on school improvement. We aim to designate 1,000 NLEs by 2014/15.

The National College maintains a database of designated NLEs and NSSs for use by bodies looking to commission their services. Deployments are then negotiated between the NLE and the relevant local authority or appropriate commissioning body.

The minimum time expectation for a deployment is between one and two days a week, although depending on the circumstances and type of support provided, the deployment may be much more intense. This could be up to full time for the NLE and/or NSS staff members for a defined period of time, or permanent if the support leads to federation or academy sponsorship. A deployment typically lasts between one and three years, depending on the level of support needed.

Where the NLE is not engaged in a specific deployment, he or she is expected to undertake other work with a school or schools in challenging circumstances.

### Funding and support

The College provides ongoing support to NLEs/NSSs including:

- induction training, advice and access to continuing professional development
- opportunities to share best practice at regional seminars
- help to establish deployment contracts, if required

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- opportunities for NLEs to shape policy at a national level
  - promotion of the NLE/NSS programme to potential commissioning organisations

The College also provides an annual bursary which can be used to cover the costs of maintaining the NSS infrastructure, for example travel/supply cover for College NLE/NSS meetings and training events, travel to an initial meeting with a commissioning body to discuss a potential deployment, attendance at the College's annual national conference or the cost of recruiting additional staff to strengthen capacity in the school.

NLEs are responsible, on behalf of the NSS, for negotiating appropriate funding for deployments. It is up to the NSS governing body to decide whether the NLE or other staff are rewarded financially for their individual work as part of a deployment.

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## 5. National leaders of governance

### The role and who it is for

National leaders of governance (NLGs) are highly effective chairs of governors who use their skills and experience to support a chair of governors in another school or academy, providing additional support alongside provision offered by local authorities, dioceses and other partners. The two chairs work together to drive forward school improvements. Through a coaching approach, the NLG's support builds the supported chair's capacity to ensure that these improvements can be sustained.

All NLGs have at least three years' experience as chair within the last five years. They have contributed to raising standards in their own school by providing appropriate support and challenge to their headteacher and by developing the governing body.

Topics that a chair of governors may want to work on with an NLG will vary according to context, but may include:

- raising standards and leading improvement
- understanding and interpreting school data including RAISEonline
- providing more effective support and challenge for the headteacher
- developing the chair's relationship with the headteacher
- developing the chair's leadership, effectiveness and confidence
- reviewing governance procedures, protocols and behaviours
- mentoring a chair to provide support through a particular process

### How it works

NLGs are designated for two years and commit to 10–20 days' work a year. The first cohort of nearly 70 NLGs were designated in spring 2012.

The College works closely with local authorities, diocesan bodies and other agencies to identify, recruit, train and deploy NLGs. College associates act as the brokers for NLGs.

Deployments may last from one month to six months, with NLGs normally working with the supported chair through face-to-face, telephone and email support.

In some situations, NLGs may work alongside NLEs and LLEs.

### Funding and support

NLGs attend a 24-hour induction event on the practicalities of undertaking the role and core coaching and mentoring skills.

They are part of a national network, with ongoing support and opportunities to help them develop in the role.

A grant is paid by the College to the NLG's school from which he or she can claim expenses. Any remaining funds can be put towards the development of the governing body.

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## 6. National teaching schools

### The role and who it is for

Teaching schools are part of the government's drive to give schools more freedom and to enable schools to take increasing responsibility for managing the education system. They will provide coherent training and development for new and experienced teachers and leaders, which in turn supports school improvement and meets the needs and context of the local area.

Teaching schools are among the best schools in the country. They are outstanding in their own performance and have a track record of working with others to raise standards for children and young people beyond their own school.

Designation is open to all types of school including primary, middle, secondary, all-through, special, pupil referral unit, short-stay schools, academies, schools in chains, free schools, faith schools, independent schools, sixth form colleges and nursery schools.

Teaching schools have six key roles. These are to:

- play a greater role in recruiting and training new entrants to the profession (initial teacher training)
- lead peer-to-peer professional and leadership development (continuing professional development)
- identify and develop leadership potential (succession planning and talent management)
- provide support for other schools
- designate and broker SLEs
- engage in research and development activity

### How it works

The first 100 teaching schools were designated in July 2011, followed by a second cohort in March 2012. By 2014/15 the College aims to have established a network of around 500 teaching schools that will have driven significant improvement in the quality of professional practice and pupil attainment.

The quality of a teaching school's partnerships will be critical to its success. Each teaching school works closely with a group of schools and other partners (for example, universities or local authorities), known as its alliance, to deliver the key teaching school roles. The alliance may be cross-phase, cross local authority or cross-region: the model is flexible and enables schools to build on existing partnerships where appropriate. There is no minimum or maximum size and an alliance may include more than one designated teaching school.

Some alliance members are strategic partners. These are schools or other partners that take responsibility for some of the teaching school's delivery (though it is the teaching school's responsibility to ensure that the work of its strategic partners meets the high standards expected).

A number of alliances may decide to work together to form a network, to share services, pool funding or to offer support to a larger community of schools.

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## Funding and support

The College provides an annual grant to enable each teaching school to build the necessary capacity to lead the alliance and quality assure its work, for example by purchasing management or administrative support.

Teaching schools receive additional funding if they are commissioned or licensed to deliver services or support. This funding will come from whoever wishes to commission or purchase such activity, which may include initial teacher training (ITT), continuing professional development (CPD), SLE deployment or school-to-school support. In order for an alliance's work to be sustainable, it will need to generate funding by offering high-quality provision.

The College provides a national induction event and a number of other regional and national events for teaching schools. There is a monthly newsletter and dedicated online community enabling teaching schools to access information and share experiences. Each alliance is also assigned a College associate who will provide support or guidance on request.

# 7. Commissioning, brokerage and deployment: how they work

At the heart of the College's system leadership provision is the deployment of successful leaders to support other schools. Figure 1 aims to provide a simple guide to the deployment process to illustrate how system leaders work in practice and to explain some of the terminology used in this document.

**Figure 1: National College system leadership provision**

## Commissioning

Different organisations will **commission** support from SLEs, LLEs, NLEs, NLGs and teaching schools.

The most likely commissioners include local authorities, diocesan bodies and academy chains. Sometimes the National College, DfE or other national body will be the commissioner, either directly or indirectly. A school needing support may commission the support itself, or a teaching school may commission support for a school within its alliance.

The commissioning body will usually fund the support.



## Brokerage

The **broker** for the support is effectively the matchmaker – an individual (eg a National College associate) or organisation that matches an SLE, LLE, NLE or NLG to the supported school and negotiates how the support will work. Negotiation will be done in discussion with the school needing support, the supporting school and the commissioning body.

For an SLE, the broker will always be a teaching school. For LLEs, NLEs and NLGs, the broker will vary depending on the circumstances. Teaching schools, local authorities and other selected agencies may broker LLE and NLE support on behalf of the National College.

For each deployment, the brokering process will involve:

- finding the right SLE, LLE, NLE or NLG to undertake the specific support required
- agreeing the objectives and expected impact
- agreeing the support approach and which leader(s) will be involved in the supported school
- agreeing the time commitment required and any financial terms



## Deployment

The SLE, LLE, NLE or NLG is **deployed** to support another school.

The deployment could take different forms depending on the needs of the supported school. The relevant sections of this document give some guidance on the likely time commitment required for deployments for each designation.

The SLE, LLE, NLE or NLG could take any support approach, depending on what is needed, but will always focus on building the supported school's own leadership capacity for improvement.



## Quality assurance and review

The brokering organisation is responsible for ensuring that any support is delivered to a high standard and for reviewing progress against the agreed objectives for each deployment. However, ultimately the National College is responsible for the quality of SLEs, LLEs, NLEs, NLGs and teaching schools, and will implement review and de-designation processes where appropriate.

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## Further information

For more information about the roles included in this prospectus, please visit our website which is regularly updated with the latest application round dates, full details of the eligibility criteria and application process for each role.

Please use the following links for further information:

Specialist leader of education (SLE):

[www.education.gov.uk/nationalcollege/support-for-schools/specialist-leaders-of-education-programme](http://www.education.gov.uk/nationalcollege/support-for-schools/specialist-leaders-of-education-programme)

Local leader of education (LLE):

[www.education.gov.uk/nationalcollege/support-for-schools/lle](http://www.education.gov.uk/nationalcollege/support-for-schools/lle)

National leader of education (NLE) and national support school (NSS):

[www.education.gov.uk/nationalcollege/nle](http://www.education.gov.uk/nationalcollege/nle)

National leaders of governance (NLGs):

[www.education.gov.uk/nationalcollege/support-for-schools/national-leaders-of-governance](http://www.education.gov.uk/nationalcollege/support-for-schools/national-leaders-of-governance)

Teaching schools:

[www.education.gov.uk/nationalcollege/support-for-schools/teachingschools](http://www.education.gov.uk/nationalcollege/support-for-schools/teachingschools)

If you have a specific query that is not addressed by this prospectus or by our web pages, you can contact our helpdesk as follows:

**Telephone:** 0845 609 0009 (UK calls) or +44 1349 882095 (international calls)

**Email:** [enquiries@nationalcollege.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@nationalcollege.gsi.gov.uk)

**Opening hours:** Monday to Friday 8am to 9pm, excluding UK bank holidays

We hope you have found this prospectus helpful. We would welcome any feedback, or ideas about how we could improve it by email to [systemleadership@nationalcollege.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:systemleadership@nationalcollege.gsi.gov.uk)

The National College exists to develop and support great leaders of schools and children's centres – whatever their context or phase.

- Enabling leaders to work together to lead improvement
- Helping to identify and develop the next generation of leaders
- Improving the quality of leadership so that every child has the best opportunity to succeed

Membership of the National College gives access to unrivalled development and networking opportunities, professional support and leadership resources.

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**An executive agency of the  
Department for Education**

**We care about the environment**

We are always looking for ways to minimise our environmental impact. We only print where necessary, which is why you will find most of our materials online. When we do print we use environmentally friendly paper.