

# School Federations Pilot Study 2003-2007

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## **Executive Summary**

### **Introduction**

The Government has supported a number of institutions to develop collaborative working between schools as one means of effecting system change and improving standards. The development of federations of schools was central to the 'Transforming Secondary Education' agenda. The Education Act 2002 Section 21 sets out the power for governing bodies to federate. The Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF), previously part of the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) during the period of this study<sup>1</sup> has defined federations in two ways;

- The definition as invoked in the 2002 Education Act which allows for the creation of a single governing body or a joint governing body committee across two or more schools.
- A group of schools with a formal (i.e. written) agreement to work together to raise standards, promote inclusion, find new ways of approaching teaching and learning and build capacity between schools in a coherent manner. This will be brought about in part through structural changes in leadership and management, in many instances through making use of the joint governance arrangements invoked in the 2002 Act. ([www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/federations/what\\_are\\_federations](http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/federations/what_are_federations))

This report presents the outcome of an evaluation of the Federation Programme funded by the DCSF for 2003-07. Thirty seven federations were funded to a total cost of £16 million on the basis of bids setting out the plan of their federation. The main evaluation took place between April 2004 and September 2006, with further analyses of key stage attainment data from 2006 taking place during February-March 2007.

### **Methodology**

The evaluation comprised three strands;

#### *Case studies*

Ten federations were selected to represent the range of models within the project. They included federations where a successful school federated with one or more schools having difficulties and federations comprising schools seeking to address common issues in order to produce enhanced opportunities and standards across the federation. All federations sought to improve standards and several also had a major focus on increasing inclusion; this was a primary focus for one federation. Size (2-26 schools), location (urban, rural) and level of social disadvantage were all taken into account.

Case study federations were visited over three phases. Interviews were held with the federation director, headteacher, teachers, chairs of governors (of governor representatives) and pupils. Local authority (LA) officers and representatives of external agencies were also interviewed where appropriate. Documentary analysis was also carried out, which included Ofsted reports, school improvement plans and policy statements. Meetings of governing bodies and joint committees were observed.

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<sup>1</sup> In June 2007 there was change in the machinery of Government in which the then DfES was split to form two new Departments, the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) and the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS)

Two case studies, both of the successful school paired with a school in difficulties type, declined to continue after phases 1 and 2 respectively. In each case the federations claimed they were unable to give the time necessary. This was very unfortunate as these federations were consequently not included in the study at all, so limiting the case study evidence available to a single federation of this type rather than the planned three. Conclusions regarding this model must therefore be treated with caution. An 11<sup>th</sup> federation was added, resulting in a total of nine in the final sample.

### *Surveys*

The 27 federations not included in the case studies were surveyed using postal questionnaires. Survey 1 (October 2004) comprised separate questionnaires to the headteacher/principal, a head of year/Key Stage, chair of governors and federation director. A total of 444 questionnaires were distributed, 249 were returned (response rate 56.1%).

Survey 2 (May 2006) was sent to headteachers, chairs of governors ( $n = 148$  in each group); response rates were 38% governors and 71% headteachers.

### *Analysis of datasets*

The third strand was a comparison of project schools, compared with non-programme schools in the national dataset on attainment at GCSE and at Key Stage 2 and 3 national curriculum assessments, and with respect to authorised and non-authorised absences.

## **Main findings**

- This Federations Programme provided an overarching structure that has promoted shared understanding of the possibilities for restructuring and revising important cultural aspects of the education system. The support of different types of federation within the programme allowed schools to explore different purposes, foci and degrees of collaboration pertinent to their particular needs and priorities.
- A particular strength of the programme has been its 'tight/loose' nature which has stimulated and supported localised change focussed on issues and concerns that have emerged from within the community concerned, in the context of a national initiative with specific parameters and accountability systems.
- Federations had a variety of goals but almost all sought to improve standards and half sought to improve inclusion as their main goal(s).
- Many different approaches were adopted to achieve the goals. These grew out of determination of priorities and were frequently based on previous collaborative work between schools that formed the federation.
- Federations can be categorised along a 4-stage continuum of decreasing 'hardness' of changes to governance:
  - Statutory: hard governance federation
  - Statutory: soft governance federation
  - Non-statutory, soft federation
  - Non-statutory informal, loose collaboration

In practice the federations clustered towards the 'softer' end of this continuum. Furthermore, there was variation among soft federations in terms of leadership and

governance; there was also development from softer to harder federations in some of the case studies, but not others.

- Federations generally placed a high premium on respecting and maintaining each school's autonomy. Changes to governance were generally limited to what was necessary to achieve specific objectives, although chairs of governors in particular were frequently very involved and supportive. Otherwise, federation matters were part of general governing body business.
- Changes to governance followed decisions on practice, they were not drivers for change.
- Barriers to success included the lack of a clear legal status of the federation director; tensions arising from imbalance of power in the successful school-weaker school model; and uncertainty about sustainability arising from the cessation of financial support at the end of the programme.
- The key factors identified as important for success of federations were leadership and collegiality. Federation directors and headteachers, together with chairs of governors in a number of cases, were the key personnel to provide leadership.
- The characteristics of effective leadership of federations were similar to those found in studies of effective schools and included: building upon past collaborations and good relationships; having clear aims and objectives for federating; developing collegiality, trust and effective communications; and adapting to the style of leadership required in the context of the federation.
- Most federations agreed a system of pooling an element of the schools' budgets, or only used the project grant. Development of greater levels of joining budgets, and especially of a single pooled budget were rarer and linked to 'harder' federations. Again, this trait reflected necessity for fitness for purpose.

## **Detailed findings**

### *Plans and expectations*

- Nine out of ten headteachers specified raising standards as a main goal.
- Over half of headteachers also specified inclusion as a main goal.
- Federations had a broad focus with about a quarter of heads targeting pupils with SEN, low achieving pupils, high achieving pupils and gifted and talented (range 22-28% of headteachers).
- Four out of five chairs of governors were involved in the decision to federate.
- About 80-90% of headteachers predicted federations would improve attitudes to learning and pupil behaviour, reduce exclusion, broaden pupil entitlement and improve primary/secondary and secondary/post-16 transition.

### *Outcomes*

- Both headteachers (93%) and chairs of governors (85%), judged the federation to have been somewhat or very successful in raising achievement, although only about a quarter in each case rated this very successful.
- Analysis of the national datasets, however, revealed no statistically significant difference between schools in the Federation Programme and non-programme schools with respect to pupil achievement at KS2 or KS3. At KS4 there was no difference in the percentage of pupils achieving 5A\* - C. However project schools recorded a significantly higher percentage of pupils gaining 5A\* - G: 93.6% compared with 91.3% for non-programme

schools and a significantly higher contextual value added outcome (1004.8 compared with 1000.8).

- There was no consistent pattern between schools in the Federation Programme and non-programme schools with respect to absence.
- Headteachers judged their federations somewhat or very successful in reaching goals in inclusion (91%), and Gifted and Talented education (76%), improving attitude to teaching (82%) and behaviour (68%), reducing exclusions (60%), and broadening pupil entitlement (90%).
- Improving transition from primary to secondary school and from secondary to post-16 was a goal for only three quarters of schools, but in each case about three quarters concluded this had been reached successfully.

### *Processes*

- Schools generally took very seriously the need to develop collegiality and to do this from a basis of schools being regarded as autonomous partners.
- Where the nature of the federation involved imbalance of power, as in the successful school-weaker school model, the development of trust was also important but was more difficult and took longer to achieve.
- High quality leadership was regarded and valued by federations and was central to their successful operation. Successful leadership was characterised by a strong sense of commitment to collegiality and schools' autonomy, with democratic and facilitative styles predominating.
- Leaders had a strong sense of purpose regarding the development of teachers' and pupils' standards. Where inclusion was also a key factor, leadership was also characterised by a deep and sustained commitment to the right of all children to inclusive education, together with a non-ideological practical and pragmatic approach seeking evolutionary change that got teachers, pupils and parents on side.
- The specific nature of the leadership role and title was less important: titles varied as did the nature of the formal or informal contract.
- The lack of a clear legal status of federation directors was a concern throughout the project.
- Models of distributive leadership developed within schools did not apply so clearly to federations where leadership was often collaborative, a team of acknowledged equals.
- Chairs of governors often contributed to the setting up of the federation and supported its work, but generally at a distance. Unless the federation was statutory, governing bodies were involved to a relatively limited degree – it was part of the general business.
- Models of governance were linked to finance. The extent to which schools pooled finance, from sharing the federation grant only, through a form of top-slicing to a joint budget, was related to the continuum from hard statutory to informal collaborative models of federation. The harder the federation the greater the degree of budget pooling and hence the lower the level of financial autonomy for constituent schools.
- Every Child Matters and Inclusion were the two major Government initiatives that impacted on the federations. There was relatively little interest in or engagement with the idea of Trust schools until the end of the project. This may reflect its recency or the experience of federations where governance change were not seen as a central factor.

### *Sustainability*

- Six out of ten headteachers considered that their federation would definitely (39%) or most likely (23%) continue beyond the DCSF funding.
- Sustainability was a function of the nature of the federation. Where joint decision-making regarding budgets had been established and where the federation was committed to longer term activities, sustainability was enhanced.
- Sustainability was linked to the nature of the federation, including budget sharing, rather than specifically to there being a harder federation structure: hence sustainability could

be facilitated either by collegial practice or as a result of specific changes in governance and decisions to pool budgets. Sustainability was therefore also linked to decisions of the *necessity* to maintain the federation: where there was little choice because of the creation of a harder form of federation, sustainability had to be addressed and built in. Where softer forms existed schools could choose whether to maintain the federation with reference to new priorities.

- The study indicates that given the opportunity, schools will generally seek to develop collegial practice where autonomous schools collaborate for locally determined purposes. Where schools seek to make fundamental changes to their operation, whether out of choice or external pressure, changes to and greater involvement of governance may be necessary and inevitable.
- The evidence on the successful school-weaker school model suggests that if such a federation is to be successful careful attention must be paid to developing a shared set of values and common understanding of the nature and purposes of the collaboration. Establishing the conditions for the collaboration is an important precursor to the implementation of appropriate school improvement processes within this challenging and complex context. Where both the conditions have been set and an appropriate set of strategies implemented there was evidence to suggest that (if desired) the relationship could be sustained in the long-term.

## **Conclusions and recommendations**

Over the period of this project, Government policy has developed to provide schools with a broader range of collaborative models to choose from. This has been accompanied by an increasing emphasis on the importance of schools being able to build strong sustainable, relationships with external partners. The stated aim of Government policy is to ensure that schools are better able to adopt a model which is appropriate to their needs, which supports their efforts to raise standards and which provides high quality services to their communities.

One of several significant developments has been the introduction of Trust schools. The Education and Inspections Act 2006 enables all schools to become Trust schools by forming links with 'external partners' able, if the school chooses, to appoint the majority of the governing body. Some schools may use this new status to formalise existing partnerships whilst others may take the opportunity to establish relationships with new external partners. The fostering of innovative practices derived from the private sector could provide yet another potential incentive, but the chance to work with external partners may remain a key factor.

Another significant development has been the introduction of Education Improvement Partnerships (EIPs). These are capable of providing schools with an overarching structure for their various collaborative arrangements which can bring new opportunities to work other education providers whilst rationalising the growing number of smaller partnerships.

Our study has revealed the benefits of schools working together for common purposes, particularly to raise standards and increase inclusion. We have identified those aspects of federation that facilitate this process.

Interestingly, changes to governance featured only as a response to a need to achieve particular objectives concerning fundamental changes to the federation's schools. Although new governance structures are essential in the acquisition of a Trust, it appears that they may also be needed to allow other fundamental system changes, as indicated also by the Innovations Unit's *Next Practice in System Leadership* field trials which reported in September 2007 ([www.innovation-unit.co.uk](http://www.innovation-unit.co.uk)). The survival of the many informally developed

examples of collaboration, however, would indicate that some forms of partnership do not necessarily need to be supported by changes to existing governance arrangements.

The Federations Programme has provided a tight/loose model for change which has the potential to make a significant contribution to the re-structuring and re-culturing of the education system. A particular strength of the programme was the overarching framework which had the ability to foster structural change in a range of settings combined with the flexibility to support schools and their communities to engage in the re-culturing of their locality. In short, the federation policy offers a welcome blend of co-constructed educational reform.

On the basis of our study we recommend:

1. The DCSF should continue to support schools that seek to improve standards by joint activity, recognising a continuum of possible types of federation, namely:
  1. Statutory: hard governance federation
  2. Statutory: soft governance federation,
  3. Non-statutory, soft federation and
  4. Non-statutory informal, loose collaboration.
2. There is benefit in supporting the development of this range of types, determined locally to meet locally identified needs but within a national framework of priorities. This 'loose/tight' approach has the potential for both restructuring and reculturing the education system and should be explicitly supported by the DCSF.
3. The further development of federations will require consideration of the legal status of various models developed to date and of the federation director; of the appropriate means of inspection by Ofsted; and of the appropriate recording and analysing of school/federation level data as well as other systems designed for single schools, including school budget formulae.
4. If the DCSF seeks to address the shortage of school leaders by reducing the numbers needed by creating federations of schools under an executive headteacher/director, a more directive strategy will be necessary. Given the choice, schools value autonomy, collegiality and equality, working together as separate schools that have chosen to collaborate.
5. The DCSF should support the development of federations which have a primary goal of increasing inclusion and undertake a detailed study of initiatives such as those examined in the present study.
6. The development of a range of collaborative arrangements, and in particular of federation, should be studied in the context of new legislation, particularly Trust schools. The Innovations Unit has an important role in supporting innovative practice; this should be complemented by research of the policy and its implementation.

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 The present study

The Government has supported the development of collaborative working between schools. A number of initiatives have been introduced recently with different characteristics but all have had at their heart a premise that collaboration between schools can lead to an improvement in standards and also one or more other policy outcomes, for example greater inclusion.

The present report describes a study between 2004-2007 of the Federation Programme funded by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF)<sup>2</sup> in 37 federations with an initial budget of about £16 million.

### 1.2 Background

It is clear that new organisational forms of schooling are required for system transformation and sustainable improvement to occur. In his writing, Michael Fullan (2004:16) argues that *changing whole systems means changing the entire context in which people work* and it is clear that the current context of schooling is rapidly shifting. Most recently, England has been leading the way in developing networks of schools in the form of partnerships, federations and Network Learning Communities as an integral part of the drive to improve standards. This development has been aimed at relocating innovation closer to schools in order to generate greater collective capacity for change.

In the past, schools tended to work in relative isolation with relatively few links to schools other than their nearest primary or secondary schools. While this way of working might have been appropriate a decade or so ago in the current climate of rapid and technological change there is a need for collective knowledge creation and information sharing at both the school and system level. There is ample evidence from both the public and private sector that school to school networks and partnerships are a powerful means of achieving such knowledge creation and sharing (Sullivan and Skelcher, 2003; Church et al, 2002). Also evidence shows that such networks and partnerships provide particularly powerful mechanisms of self-renewal during periods of extensive change (OECD, 2000).

The OECD research (2000) shows that creating collaborative structures around schools is more likely to result in deeper organizational learning both collectively and individually. This work shows that school networks are locations in which specialised knowledge can be created and transferred within collaborative contexts. Senge (1990) emphasises collaborative learning and team skills as being the key to successful and sustainable organizational development rather than individual skills and individual learning. His work suggests that networks of schools do not just facilitate innovation but the evidence would suggest that they offer the possibility of new ways of working. It has been shown that they offer the potential for redesigning local systems and structures by promoting different forms of collaboration, linkages, and multi-functional partnerships (Senge et al, 2000). Consequently, school networks are increasingly being seen as a means of facilitating innovation and change as well as contributing to large-scale reform (Hopkins, 2001; Demos, 2001, OECD, 2000).

The DfES document 'Education Improvement Partnerships - local collaboration for school improvement and better service delivery' underscores the shift towards partnership and

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<sup>2</sup> Department of Education and Skills (DfES) during the life of this project. To avoid confusion, the current title (DCSF) will be used except where reference is made to a publication with DfES as author.

collaboration as a means of transforming education. It proposes that '*confident schools want to collaborate with others in the community to drive a shared agenda for improving standards*'. The document continues '*there will be greater freedom to fashion what works locally rather than a requirement to collaborate on a range of separate defined models of national partnership*'.(DfES, 2005:3).This reinforces the fact that school to school collaboration is now an important part of educational policy and practice in England.

### 1.2.1 Federations

Collaboration in the form of federations remains central to the Government's 'Transforming Secondary Education' agenda. Within this agenda, diversity and collaboration are the two main driving forces for raising standards and improving teaching and learning. Federations are viewed as an innovative strategy for transforming education across groups of schools that are working together - sharing staffing, resources, professional development, curriculum development, leadership and management. Federations offer schools the opportunity to look at how best to develop Specialist, Leading Edge, training and Extended Schools within and across federations. It is also argued that a federation can extend curriculum opportunities for young people at 14-19 level and promote inclusion in the broadest sense. Each federation is configured to meet local conditions and can therefore be responsive to the particular educational challenges its community faces.

In terms of definition, the term 'federation' has been broadly interpreted and applied. It has been used to describe many different types of collaborative groups, partnerships and clusters, even through to mergers and the creation of new schools. Within this evaluation, federations were defined by the DCSF in two ways:

- The definition as invoked in the 2002 Education Act which allows for the creation of a single governing body or a joint governing body committee across two or more schools from September 2003 onwards.
- A group of schools with a formal (i.e. written) agreement to work together to raise standards, promote inclusion, find new ways of approaching teaching and learning and build capacity between schools in a coherent manner. This will be brought about in part through structural changes in leadership and management, in many instances through making use of the joint governance arrangements invoked in the 2002 Education Act.

The former have been termed "hard" federations as they are tightly coupled and sit at the more formal end of the spectrum of collaborative arrangements. Across all types of federations, whether hard or soft, it is generally recognized that there is a need for high levels of trust, co-operation and confidence. Consequently, while the Government has been keen to promote all forms of school to school collaboration it is arguable that groups of schools need to take a measured and staged approach to partnership to guarantee impact and success. A more refined typology of collaborative arrangements, including federations, is examined in this study.

### 1.2.2 School improvement

A review of the last two and a half decades of school improvement suggests that the field has evolved in a number of distinctive phases as practitioners and researchers have gained experience of implementing and studying school change. In their analysis of the field, Hopkins and Reynolds (2002) have identified three phases of school improvement. The first phase of school improvement was encapsulated by the holistic approaches of the 80s and was epitomized by the OECD's International School Improvement Project (Reynolds et al, 2000). This first phase of school improvement tended to be loosely conceptualised and

under-theorised. It did not represent a systematic, programmatic and coherent approach to school change. There was also an emphasis upon organisational change, school self-evaluation and the 'ownership of change' by individual schools and teachers. However these early school improvement initiatives were not strongly connected to student learning outcomes.

The second phase of development began in the early 1990s. In this phase, the school improvement tradition was beginning to provide schools with guidelines and strategies for implementing classroom level change. There was a greater focus upon organisational and classroom change reflected in approaches to staff development premised upon models of teaching. A desire to link school improvement to student learning outcomes was the main goal during this phase, which was pursued with varying degrees of intensity and success. In the last five years a third phase of school improvement has emerged. Reynolds and Hopkins (2001) suggest that in this phase there has been the creation of more collaborative patterns of innovation and change in schools. Emerging from these various patterns of collaboration has been the establishment of school networks and networking as an effective school improvement strategy.

It is clear that networks or federations are not a new idea as various forms of school to school collaboration have always existed. However, the extent of current networking activity within the school sector is unprecedented and the contemporary evidence would suggest that this investment is offering some educational return (Sammons et al., 2006). Where schools are in networks there is evidence that they are able to raise their collective performance through greater degrees of flexibility and adaptability (NCSL, 2001). The evidence shows that they are also more adept at knowledge creation and knowledge management (Castells, 2003). It is argued that this position is maximized within a diverse set of schools rather than a homogeneous group:

*Network theory tells us that homogeneous networks, characterised by close proximity (e.g. the same local authority) limit the extent of different ideas to which the members are exposed and consequently restrict their thoughts and actions to a small repertoire of options. In contrast, networks developed among educators from diverse educational backgrounds, of diverse professional belief systems, and with diverse professional practices or teaching assignments provide a rich source of new ideas and new possibilities and a foundation for experiments in practice. This sort of experimentation holds the potential for profound improvement (Smylie & Hart, 1999:6).*

This work implies that schools in disadvantaged contexts and those in more favourable circumstances might find collaboration mutually beneficial.

In this evaluation, we investigated a cross section of federations of varying size and type. The evaluation aimed to investigate and highlight the relative benefits and limitations of various forms of federation (i.e. hard and soft). The case study data collected throughout the evaluation both illuminates and illustrates the potential and potency of collaboration between schools. It also shows the sheer diversity and range of activity occurring under the umbrella term of 'federations'. While it is important to ask questions about sustainability and performance over time, the immediate evidence suggests that where federations of schools work effectively, there are positive gains for the schools involved.

## 2. Methodology

The two main elements of the evaluation comprised case studies of a sample of the 37 federations in the programme together with surveys of schools in the non-case study federations.

### 2.1 Case studies

Ten federations were initially selected as case studies using a sequence of criteria to ensure a sample that reflected the range within the project. Selection was made on the basis of the DCSF summaries of the federations derived from their original bids.

The first criterion was type of governance. This varied in terms of a 'soft-hard' continuum, reflecting increasing power and responsibility for a governance system for the federation. At the 'softer' end, federations comprised schools voluntarily joining together for specific purposes with relatively informal arrangements. Governing bodies of individual schools retained independent power. At the 'harder' end, schools set up new systems of governance which supported stronger links between schools. These could include joint meetings of governors, service level agreements approved by all governing bodies, and moves towards a single governing body for the federation.

The main second order criteria were the aims of the federation and the types of schools/organizations involved. Aims reflected governance. For example, federations developed on the model of a successful school supporting a school experiencing difficulties had, or were working towards, forms of governance where there were formal arrangements and structures. Where the focus was on CPD, for example, governance appeared to be primarily based in the individual schools with informal arrangements between governing bodies. Sampling also ensured there was a range of sizes of federations (from 2 to 20) and of institutions. Consequently, some federations comprised only schools of a single phase, others crossed school phases, and others included FE colleges and/or other services. Finally, geographic spread was also taken into account to ensure both urban and rural locations and a distribution across England.

Two of the original 10 federations declined to continue from Phase 2 of the study. A new federation was included in Phase 3. The final sample, therefore, comprised nine very varied case studies and these provide the majority of evidence for this research strand. Brief descriptions of the nine case studies are provided in the Appendix.

#### 2.1.1 *Data gathering methods*

Data gathering was undertaken in three phases in order to gain information on the early stages of the federation, its mature phase and finally the phase at which DCSF funding was coming to an end. Documents including original bids, Ofsted reports, governing body papers and development/improvement plans were examined throughout the project.

Interviews were held with:

- The federation 'lead', who was typically its director, but could be a senior LA officer instrumental in developing the federations (n = 31).
- Headteacher/college principals (n = 67)
- Chairs of governors and members of governing bodies (n = 34)
- Teachers holding posts of responsibility such as year tutor (n = 96)
- Other professionals (n = 22).

In addition, group interviews were held with pupils initially on an exploratory basis. However, as expected, for much of the period of the project the concept of a 'federation' did not impact very much, if at all, on pupils, particularly where the federation's aims were concerned with staff issues (e.g. Continuing Professional Development (CPD)).

All interviews were semi-structured and followed pro formas appropriate to the phase and interviewee. For example, Phase 1 interviews addressed setting up the federation, plans and expectations, whereas Phase 2 focussed on the embedding process, and Phase 3 interviews included reflections on reasons for and barriers undermining success, sustainability and the interaction between the development of the federation and other Government initiatives over the period, including Every Child Matters, Education Improvement Partnerships and the proposals for Trust schools. The study also included attendance at federation meetings.

## 2.2 Surveys

### 2.2.1 *Initial survey*

Two surveys were undertaken of schools in non-case study federations. Survey 1 was distributed in October 2004 with a follow-up in January 2005. Each school received three separate questionnaires: for the headteacher/ principal, head of year or Key Stage, and chair of governors. Directors of federations who were not included in the headteacher sample received a separate questionnaire. A total of 444 questionnaires were distributed 249 were returned (response rate 56.1%) of which 235 were received by the second deadline and included in the analysis. We were able to compare the headteacher respondents with national statistics on gender, and age.

The governor survey was completed and returned by 67 governors: 92.4% were chairs of their governing body. On average, they had been in their present position at the school for 5.4 years; 37% of respondents were between 51 and 60 years old, 34% over 60, and 26% between 41 and 50; 65.6% of governors responding were male.

The headteachers and principals survey was returned by 107 respondents. Of these, 90% were heads, 4% federation directors and 6% deputy heads. Compared with the 2005 national statistics for headteachers, the sample were comparable in terms of gender: 66% respondents were male, compared with 65% nationally. On average they had been in their present position for 5.8 years, but were younger as a group: 46.5% were between 51 and 60 years of age (nationally 62% male, 57% female headteachers)<sup>3</sup> and 46.1% were between 51 and 50 (nationally 31% male, 37% female headteachers), with 7.8% 40 and under (nationally 4% male and 3% female headteachers).

Sixty one heads of year completed and returned the survey. On average they had been working in the school for 4.8 years; 42% were between 41 and 50, 36% between 31 and 40, 12% between 51 and 60, and 19% below 31. Just over half (53.1%) of respondents were male.

In Section 3.1, three sets of data are presented separately: chairs of governors; headteachers/principals, head of federation; and head of year/Key Stage.

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<sup>3</sup> The national statistics have slightly different ranges: 50-59 and 40-49 in these comparisons.

### 2.2.2 *Second survey*

The second survey was sent out to heads and chairs of governing bodies in all the federations involved in the project except the case studies (n = 148 in each case) in May 2006. Fifty six chairs of governors and 105 heads returned the surveys, producing response rates of 37.8% governors and 70.9% heads.

Of the chairs of governors (from here on in referred to as 'governors'), 66.7% were male and 33.3% female. The majority (36.4%) were between 51 and 60, 32.7% over 60, 23.6% between 41 and 50, and 7.1% between 31 and 40. Of the heads, 65% were male and 35% were female. The majority (56.3%) were between 51 and 60, 39.8% between 41 and 50, 1.9% over 60 and 2% below 41, representing an older profile than from survey 2, closer to the national age profile of secondary headteachers (see above).

### 2.3 Analysis of datasets

The third main strand of the research was a comparison of the project schools compared with the non-project national dataset (Pupil Level Annual School Census: PLASC) of attainment at GCSE and Key Stages 2 and 3 national curriculum assessments. Rates of authorised and unauthorised absence were also examined.

### 3. Aims and achievements of federations

In this section we report the evidence from two surveys undertaken at the end of 2004 and May 2006 together with an analysis of the Pupil Level Annual School Census (PLASC) data for federation compared with non-federation schools.

#### 3.1 Initial survey of federation schools: Plans and expectations

The aim of the initial survey was to identify the views of headteachers, principals and heads of federations, chairs of governors and year tutors/heads of Key Stages with respect to the early stages of the federation including its goals target groups, expected outcomes and likely success factors and barriers to success.

##### 3.1.1 *Federation goals and targets*

Respondents were asked to indicate the goals of their federation. Results are given in Tables 1 and 2. (NB respondents could choose one or more options).

**Table 1: Main goals of the federation (%)**

	Raising achievement	Recruitment and retention	Inclusion	Gifted and Talented	Other
Chair of Governors	83.3	7.6	33.3	12.1	24.2
Head/Principal	90.6	14.2	56.6	25.6	25.5
Head of Year	90.4	11.5	46.2	28.8	3.8

Raising achievement was clearly the main goal of most federations, with Inclusion being the second most frequently named. Secondary goals most frequently mentioned were Inclusion, recruitment and retention, and gifted and talented pupils.

**Table 2: Secondary goals of the federation (%)**

	Raising achievement	Recruitment and retention	Inclusion	Gifted and Talented	Other
Chair of Governors	9.1	36.4	40.9	39.4	7.6
Head/Principal	7.5	42.5	33.0	54.7	11.3
Head of Year	3.8	28.8	30.8	25.0	1.9

Heads were generally more likely to mention all the suggested factors as goals of the federation than were governors. This was most pronounced with regards to Inclusion and Gifted and Talented. Heads of year were less likely to mention secondary goals and 'other' factors but were more likely to mention Gifted and Talented as a main goal than governors. Other goals mentioned by governors concerned post-16 provision and sharing good practice while CPD, sharing good practice and community cohesion were mentioned by Heads.

**Table 3: Main Key Stages targeted by the federation (%)**

	KS 1	KS 2	KS 3	KS 4	KS 5
<i>Chair of Governors</i>					
Main target	9.1	27.3	57.6	62.1	16.7
Strongly targeted	12.1	7.6	21.2	15.2	15.2
Somewhat targeted	4.5	15.2	6.2	7.0	13.6
Not targeted	73.3	49.9	15.2	19.7	54.5
<i>Head/Principal</i>					
Main target	14.2	21.7	53.8	68.9	23.6
Strongly targeted	6.6	9.4	18.9	8.5	17.0
Somewhat targeted	1.9	5.7	9.4	3.8	2.8
Not targeted	77.3	63.2	18.0	18.8	56.6
<i>Head of Year</i>					
Main target	0.0	5.8	63.5	73.1	17.3
Strongly targeted	0.0	3.8	21.1	9.6	5.8
Somewhat targeted	3.8	9.6	3.8	1.9	7.7
Not targeted	96.2	80.0	11.8	15.4	69.8

Key Stage 4 and 3 pupils were the most frequently targeted age groups (Table 3), whereas in terms of characteristics other than age low achieving pupils were most frequently targeted, with lifelong learners being the least frequently mentioned target group (Table 4). Heads and heads of year were somewhat more likely than governors to claim that the federation targeted low achieving pupils and gifted and talented pupils.

**Table 4: Main target groups of pupils for the federation (%)**

	Pupils with SEN	Low achieving pupils	High achieving pupils	Gifted and Talented	Lifelong learning
<i>Chair of Governors</i>					
Main target	18.2	15.2	12.1	7.6	4.5
Strongly targeted	21.2	33.3	18.2	25.8	9.1
Somewhat targeted	21.2	13.6	16.7	19.7	15.2
Not targeted	39.3	37.8	53.1	47.0	71.2
<i>Head/Principal</i>					
Main target	17.1	32.1	12.3	15.1	4.7
Strongly targeted	21.7	28.3	24.5	28.3	17.0
Somewhat targeted	15.1	9.4	15.1	17.9	12.3
Not targeted	46.2	30.2	48.1	38.7	64.0
<i>Head of Year</i>					
Main target	13.5	28.8	15.4	17.3	5.8
Strongly targeted	15.4	19.2	13.5	13.5	5.8
Somewhat targeted	19.2	13.5	19.2	15.4	15.4
Not targeted	51.9	38.4	51.9	43.8	73.1

### 3.1.2 Setting up the federation

Over half of the chairs of governing bodies rated themselves as 'very involved' in the setting up of the federation, with just 6% not being involved at all (Table 5). The governing body as a whole was less strongly involved than chairs, although over 70% were still claimed to be very or quite involved in the process.

**Table 5: Involvement of the governing body in the decision to federate (according to chairs of governors) (%)**

	Very Involved	Quite Involved	Not very involved	Not at all involved
The Chair of Governors	54.5	27.3	12.1	6.1
The Whole Governing Body	24.2	47.0	22.3	6.0

When asked how the federation was set up, strong consistency emerged between the three groups of respondents. The initiative to explore federation was taken by the heads in the vast majority of cases who would then inform or consult with governing bodies and the LA. In many cases federations were built on existing collaborations between schools. Less commonly, the initiative to federate was first taken by LA officers, who contacted heads. Only occasionally did the governing bodies take the initiative while, exceptionally, external parties such as DCSF and the Youth Sports Trust were said to have led the initial discussions.

As mentioned above, a very similar picture emerged between respondents, with the only differences being a stronger emphasis by heads on the fact that many federations had been built on existing links between schools, on their own role in discussion with colleagues, and on discussion with other staff, and a weaker emphasis on the role of governors. Overall, however, the pattern is one of triangulation between respondents. Heads of year likewise emphasised the role of the heads or the LA in starting the federation.

### 3.1.3 Facilitators and barriers

According to chairs of governing bodies, the three main factors that hindered the formation of the federation were:

- staff resistance and fear, especially among middle managers and teachers in schools that felt they might be being amalgamated rather than collaborating,
- confused central guidance and ever-changing rules, and
- an embedded culture of competition between schools in the area.

A lack of funding and uncertainty over how long funding would last, a lack of time for joint planning and meetings, legal problems in constituting the federation, the difficulty of constituting a joint governing body, tensions with existing initiatives in schools, and changes in key personnel were also mentioned at least by two chairs.

Heads produced a very similar list of issues, with confusion in guidance from the DCSF and lack of time arising as the most pressing problems, and lack of support from governors being mentioned as well. Heads of year most frequently mentioned time constraints as the key barrier. Lack of consultation with staff, geographical distance between schools, clashes with other initiatives and lack of resources were also mentioned by them. The main factors respondents felt were likely to lead to success are summarised in Table 6.

Headteacher leadership was the factor heads and governors saw as most likely to lead to success in their federations, with teacher willingness to collaborate and the financial grant from the DCSF also overwhelmingly deemed important facilitating factors (Table 6). Reduced teacher workload was least likely to be seen as a facilitating factor. Headteachers were more optimistic than governors that improved teacher recruitment would be a facilitating factor. Heads of year were less likely than other respondents to see headteacher leadership as a key factor, and were more likely to agree strongly with the importance of reduced teacher workload as a facilitator. About two thirds of each group of respondents saw teacher willingness to collaborate as a key factor.

The facilitating factor most frequently mentioned by all three respondent groups was prior existing networks and links between federating schools, which had strongly aided the formation of the federation, and meant that trust and good working relationships were already present. Enthusiasm and goodwill from all participating schools was also seen as a key factor. Strong leadership from the headteacher, and good relationships with heads of other schools were also frequently mentioned. DCSF finance was seen as a key facilitating factor in many federations, as was LA support. Among heads good working relationships between headteachers and funding from the DCSF were more frequently mentioned than among governors. DCSF guidance was also mentioned by quite a few heads, as was geographical proximity of schools, the fact that schools were similar and did not compete, heads sharing a similar vision, and supportive governing bodies. Heads of year additionally mentioned good relationships between non-management staff in the schools and staff willingness to participate.

**Table 6: Main factors likely to lead to success in the federation (%)**

	Arrangement for governing body/formal collaboration	Headteacher leadership	Financial grant from DCSF	Teacher willingness to collaborate	Improved teacher recruitment	Improved teacher retention	Reduced teacher workload
<i>Chair of Governors</i>							
Strongly Disagree	1.9	3.1	3.2	3.2	2.4	2.3	9.1
Disagree	5.6	1.6	3.2	0.0	28.6	25.0	45.5
Agree	55.6	14.1	34.9	27.3	59.5	56.8	34.1
Strongly Agree	37.0	81.3	58.7	65.2	9.5	15.9	11.4
<i>Head/Principal</i>							
Strongly Disagree	0.0	2.9	2.9	1.0	0.0	0.0	3.7
Disagree	11.2	0.0	1.9	0.0	25.4	20.8	40.7
Agree	60.7	11.5	29.8	38.5	52.2	59.7	39.5
Strongly Agree	28.1	85.6	65.4	60.6	22.4	19.4	16.0
<i>Head of Year</i>							
Strongly Disagree	0.0	6.3	2.3	4.1	3.0	2.9	16.2

Disagree	6.5	2.1	0.0	0.0	33.3	31.4	8.1
Disagree	64.5	37.5	40.9	30.6	45.5	34.3	37.8
Agree	29.0	54.2	56.8	65.3	18.3	31.4	37.8
Strongly Agree							

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The main barriers to success were predicted to be insufficient finance and time, both for leaders and staff (Table 7). The federation model chosen and accountability demands on staff were not likely to be barriers. Few differences existed between respondent groups, with headteachers slightly more likely to agree that staff time and accountability are barriers, and slightly less likely to strongly agree that finance will be barrier than governors. Heads of year were generally more likely to agree that the factors given could be barriers to success. In particular, they were more likely to perceive the federation model for their school, staff resistance, lack of training and staff accountability demands as a barrier than other respondents.

**Table 7: Main barriers to success in the federation (%)**

	Insufficient finance	Staff resistance	Lack of necessary training	Insufficient time for those leading the federation	Insufficient time for staff in the federation	The federation model for our school	Staff accountability demands
<i>Chair of Governors</i>							
Strongly Disagree	3.7	19.1	14.3	3.7	1.8	29.8	16.3
Disagree	22.2	45.6	51.0	16.7	26.3	66.0	60.5
Agree	31.5	27.5	32.7	50.0	50.9	4.3	16.3
Strongly Agree	42.6	5.8	2.0	29.6	21.1	0.0	7.0
<i>Head/Principal</i>							
Strongly Disagree	4.1	12.4	4.4	1.0	0.0	22.2	8.0
Disagree	22.7	56.7	68.1	24.8	20.6	70.0	62.5
Agree	41.2	25.8	24.2	49.5	58.8	5.6	26.1
Strongly Agree	32.0	5.2	3.3	24.8	20.6	2.2	3.4
<i>Head of Year</i>							
Strongly Disagree	2.3	9.3	2.4	0.0	0.0	15.6	5.4
Disagree	30.2	44.2	45.2	16.3	12.2	56.3	45.9
Agree	41.9	39.5	40.5	55.8	56.1	21.9	35.1
Strongly Agree	25.6	7.0	11.9	27.9	31.7	6.3	13.5

#### 3.1.4. Predicted impact of the federation

The federation was seen as likely to have a strong impact on raising achievement, with over 90% of heads and governors expecting at least a ‘quite strong’ impact on achievement (Table 8). Inclusion and gifted and talented pupils were also seen as highly likely to benefit. All factors mentioned were expected to show at least some impact from federating. Heads were less likely than governors to say that any of the factors mentioned would have a weak impact, while heads of year were less likely to expect a strong impact, but the overall pattern of responses between respondent groups was similar.

**Table 8: Predicted impact of the federation on specified goals (%)**

	Raising achievement	Recruitment and retention	Inclusion	Gifted and Talented
<i>Chair of Governors</i>				
Very strong	48.4	7.8	34.4	28.3
Quite strong	45.2	60.8	52.5	54.3
Quite weak	4.8	31.4	13.1	17.4
Very weak	1.6	0.0	0.0	0.0
<i>Head/Principal</i>				
Very strong	40.0	18.5	33.7	20.0
Quite strong	56.2	65.4	57.1	69.4
Quite weak	3.8	16.0	8.2	7.1
Very weak	0.0	0.0	1.0	3.5
<i>Head of Year</i>				
Very strong	22.9	9.8	22.7	19.5
Quite strong	62.5	58.5	56.8	61.0
Quite weak	14.6	22.0	15.9	14.6
Very weak	0.0	9.8	4.5	4.9

While many respondents indicated that the impact would be strongest on other factors, they did not in majority indicate what those factors would be. Factors mentioned included reform of the 14-19 curriculum, increasing post-16 retention, sharing good practice, community cohesion and CPD.

The main reasons given for these positive impacts were the sharing of good practice between schools and the pooling of resources, especially where federations were cross-phase, involving secondary schools and FE colleges, for example. Sharing good practice was seen by several respondents as based on strong collaboration and leading to a higher level of 'collective intelligence'. The fact that federating makes schools collaborate rather than compete as was previously the case was mentioned by several respondents, as was the situation where a strong school was helping a weaker one. Strong leadership from the head or principal was seen as a major contributing factor by governors as well. Heads focussed more on the existence of clear, shared goals and the professional development opportunities that came with federating as key factors in helping the federation have a positive impact. Shared CPD was seen as cost-effective in this respect. Quite a few respondents said it was too early to judge, while a small minority of respondents claimed to expect no benefits from federating.

**Table 9: Predicted impact of federating on specific goals related to students (%)**

	Improving attitudes to learning	Improving behaviour	Reducing exclusions	Broadening pupil entitlement	Improving primary/secondary transition	Improving transition to post-16
<i>Chair of Governors</i>						
Very strong	34.4	33.3	24.1	37.3	17.3	39.6
Quite strong	60.7	47.4	31.5	55.9	63.5	56.3
Quite weak	4.9	19.3	42.6	6.8	19.2	4.2
Very weak	0.0	0.0	1.9	0.0	0.0	0.0
<i>Head/Principal</i>						
Very strong	30.8	23.7	17.2	44.9	21.6	30.9
Quite strong	62.5	62.4	65.5	51.0	52.3	59.3
Quite weak	5.8	12.9	16.1	4.1	23.9	8.6
Very weak	1.0	1.1	1.1	0.0	2.3	1.2
<i>Head of Year</i>						
Very strong	18.2	14.0	18.6	25.5	25.0	25.0
Quite strong	65.9	58.1	53.5	63.8	41.7	52.8
Quite weak	11.4	20.9	20.9	8.5	27.8	19.4
Very weak	4.5	7.0	7.0	2.1	5.6	2.8

From Table 9 it is again clear that respondents anticipated a positive impact of federating across a range of outcomes. Improving transition post 16, improving attitudes to learning and broadening pupil entitlement were seen as likely to improve quite or very strongly by over 90% of heads and governors, but rates of agreement with the other statements were high as well, apart from heads being more likely to believe that exclusions would be reduced. In general, heads of year were again slightly more sceptical about the impact of federating, with the exception of primary/secondary transition, although the valid sample size here was small.

**Table 10a: Predicted impact of federating on the aspects of school/college organisation (%)**

	School /college leadership	Sharing of Resources	Sharing good practice	Teacher recruitment	Teacher retention	Organising primary/ secondary transition
<i>Chair of Governors</i>						
Very strong	35.1	50.8	69.2	3.8	6.0	11.8
Quite strong	52.6	46.0	29.2	65.4	56.0	70.6
Quite weak	12.3	3.0	1.5	30.8	38.0	15.7
Very weak	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	2.0
<i>Head/ Principal</i>						
Very strong	38.0	42.3	66.0	12.8	13.1	17.4
Quite strong	58.0	51.9	34.0	59.3	57.1	55.8
Quite weak	4.0	3.8	0.0	25.6	26.2	26.7
Very weak	0.0	1.9	0.0	2.3	3.6	0.0
<i>Head of Year</i>						
Very strong	19.6	25.0	36.0	8.1	7.9	11.1
Quite strong	67.4	64.6	58.0	48.6	50.0	55.6
Quite weak	10.9	6.3	6.0	37.8	36.8	27.8
Very weak	2.2	4.2	0.0	5.4	5.3	5.6

Tables 10a and 10b again demonstrate the overall positive attitude of respondents towards federating: most organisational dimensions probed were expected to benefit. This was particularly the case for the sharing of good practice and resources, although leadership, building on other initiatives and cost effectiveness were expected to benefit at least quite strongly by over 80% of respondents. Teacher recruitment and retention were the factors with the lowest number of positive responses, with around a third of respondents not expecting at least a strong benefit from federating and very few expecting a very strong impact. Heads were generally more sceptical than governors on the impact of federating on transition, and more positive on the impact on teacher retention. Heads of year again showed themselves the most sceptical group.

**Table 10b: Predicted impact of federating on school/college organisation (%)**

	Organising transition to post 16	Facilitating inclusion of SEN pupils	Cost effectiveness	Building on and adding to other initiatives	Impact on the wider education system
<i>Chair of Governors</i>					
Very strong	30.4	21.4	24.6	28.1	28.8
Quite strong	65.2	55.4	57.9	64.1	57.6
Quite weak	4.3	21.4	15.8	7.8	13.6
Very weak	0.0	1.8	1.8	0.0	0.0
<i>Head/Principal</i>					
Very strong	22.8	28.9	29.6	37.9	33.7
Quite strong	64.6	53.3	56.1	60.2	52.0
Quite weak	11.4	16.7	13.3	1.9	13.3
Very weak	1.3	1.1	1.1	0.0	1.1
<i>Head of Year</i>					
Very strong	12.8	11.9	8.1	37.2	25.0
Quite strong	66.7	59.5	64.9	53.5	47.5
Quite weak	17.9	19.0	24.3	9.3	22.5
Very weak	2.6	9.5	2.7	0.0	5.0

Federating was reported to have already had a positive impact through the provision of more leadership opportunities for other staff, in particular middle managers. Federating had helped distribute leadership across the school, and had led to the provision of high quality leadership development in many schools. The sharing of best practice and ideas between schools had allowed management to improve, it was claimed. Staff had obtained a broader outlook through being able to develop a closer understanding of how things are done in other schools. Collaboration between schools was seen as beneficial, especially when compared with previous competitive arrangements. A downside mentioned by many chairs of governing bodies and heads of year was that time pressures on heads and senior managers have increased, leading to staff shortages in management.

### 3.1.5 Conclusions

The results of this survey suggest a large degree of agreement between the three main respondent groups, but with heads of years and key stage leaders - the middle managers - having greater degrees of scepticism than either headteachers or chairs of governors. However, this needs to be balanced by acknowledging the generally high level of positive comments made across the groups.

Raising achievement was clearly seen at this stage as the major goal for federations but inclusion was also a substantial driver, particularly for the heads and heads of year. Recruitment and retention, by contrast, was very much a secondary goal. The focus was also very much on KS3/4. It is interesting, however, to note that despite the major goal being to increase achievement, low achieving pupils were reported by headteachers as the main target in only a third of schools (Table 4). Rather, the evidence suggests that the federations intended to achieve this goal by spreading their work across a broader pupil constituency.

Setting up the federations had involved chairs of governing bodies but governing bodies as a whole to a lesser extent, with possible implications for the development of the federations if these governors had not 'bought in' to the initiative. However, this may also reflect the differing degrees of impact on governance involved in different federations.

Headteacher leadership was recognised as the major factor to lead to success for the federations but the financial allocation by the DCSF was also a key factor. However, these major factors were supported by pre-existing relationships and involvement in other initiatives, particularly collaborative ventures with other schools. That is, federations were seen as benefiting from, even growing out of other initiatives. But it was also recognised that teacher engagement was central to success. However, there were concerns regarding insufficient time for both those leading the federation and other staff are important to note.

There was a general concordance between the goals of the federations, especially increasing achievement, and the expected impacts. Raising achievement was seen as likely to be a strong impact but this appears to have been linked to expected improvements in pupils' attitudes to learning and improved behaviour. The Inclusion agenda was also represented here by expected broadened entitlement for pupils, but also by greater collegiality among staff characterised by sharing resources and good practice. The likely impact on recruitment and retention was less frequently highlighted as a strong impact but this may reflect different current positions of the schools in the sample. In any case, this is typically a secondary goal.

## 3.2 Second survey: The impact of federation

The aim of the second survey was to capture the views of headteachers and chairs of governors with respect to their federation's impact, the factors what had facilitated or presented a barrier to success, and sustainability.

### 3.2.1 *Views on federation impact*

A key element of this evaluation, which was therefore a central element of the survey, was that of the impact of federation, and in particular the success or otherwise of the federations in reaching their goals. Respondents were firstly asked to respond to a number of items regarding overall goals of the federation.

**Table 11: Success of the federation in reaching specific goals (%)**

	Raising achievement	Recruitment and Retention	Inclusion	Gifted and Talented
<i>Governors</i>				
Very successful	24.1	20.8	29.6	15.4
Somewhat successful	61.1	43.4	50.0	51.9
Not very successful	11.1	7.5	7.4	15.4
Not a goal of this federation	3.7	28.3	13.0	17.3
<i>Heads</i>				
Very successful	28.4	14.7	41.0	30.0
Somewhat successful	64.7	45.3	50.0	46.0
Not very successful	5.9	4.2	3.0	10.0
Not a goal of this federation	1.0	35.8	6.0	14.0

As can be seen in Table 11, both governors and heads largely felt that their Federation had been reasonably successful in reaching its goals. In all cases, the largest group of respondents felt that the federation had been somewhat successful in achieving the stated goal, with percentages ranging from 43% to 65% of respondents. The percentage of respondents feeling that the federation had not been successful was below 20% in all cases, and below 10% in most. Inclusion and raising achievement were seen as having benefited most from federation, with over 90% of heads and 80% to 85% of governors who responded claiming that the federation had been very or somewhat successful in reaching these goals.

These results largely reflect the prior expectations of respondents as indicated in the first survey, though the impact was not always as strong as expected. In that survey, in response to the question 'How strong do you think the impact of the federation will be on the following goals', over 40% of both heads and nearly 50% of governors had expected the impact of the federation on raising achievement to be very strong compared with the 24% and 28% respectively who considered the federation had been very successful in this domain.

There were few differences between heads and governors, with the exception being that heads were more positive about the impact of federation on Gifted and Talented than were governors. Other goals mentioned by governors and heads in the open 'other' category included 14-19 Pathfinder and curriculum, and collaboration and staff interaction. Heads additionally mentioned widening CPD opportunities.

Respondents were also asked to rate the impact of federation on a number of more specific goals (see Table 12).

It is clear from Table 12 that the goal seen as having been reached most successfully with regards to students was that of broadening pupil entitlement, which over 80% of respondents judged to have been very or quite strongly impacted by federation. The majority of respondents also considered that federating had had quite a strong or a very strong impact on improving attitudes to learning and on improving behaviour. Impact on improving transition, both between primary and secondary and between secondary and post 16 was least often seen as having been strongly affected by federating, although this was largely due to many respondents not seeing this goal as applicable to their federation.

**Table 12: Success of the federation in reaching specific goals related to students/pupils (%)**

	Improving attitudes to learning	Improving behaviour	Reducing exclusions	Broadening pupil entitlement	Improving primary/secondary transition	Improving transition post 16
<i>Governors</i>						
Very strong	14.3	10.7	7.4	21.4	16.4	9.3
Quite strong	57.1	48.2	38.9	58.9	32.7	33.3
Quite weak	14.3	17.9	16.7	12.5	14.5	16.7
Very weak	3.6	7.1	7.4	1.8	0.0	0.0
Not applicable	10.7	16.1	29.6	5.4	36.4	40.7
<i>Heads</i>						
Very strong	10.9	13.9	20.0	37.3	20.8	14.9
Quite strong	71.3	53.5	40.0	52.9	24.8	39.5
Quite weak	8.9	13.9	17.0	3.9	24.8	17.8
Very weak	5.0	5.0	2.0	2.9	3.0	3.0
Not applicable	4.0	13.9	21.0	2.9	26.7	24.8

Some differences again emerged between heads and governors. Overall heads reported a stronger impact of the federation on students than did governors, and were less likely to say that the goals were not applicable to their federation. This tendency was most pronounced for exclusions, where 60% of heads, but only 46% of governors considered the federation has had an impact, but was also strong for transition post 16.

Again the actual impact was generally somewhat less positive than the expected impact as surveyed in the first questionnaire, where, for example, over 90% of respondents had expected positive impacts on attitudes to learning, behaviour and broadening entitlement. This difference was particularly marked with regards to exclusions, where over 50% of governors and over 80% of heads had expected a positive impact of federation.

**Table 13a: Impact of the federation on aspects of school/college organisation (%)**

	School leadership	Sharing of resources	Sharing good practice	Teacher recruitment	Teacher retention	Organising primary/secondary transition
<i>Governors</i>						
Very strong	26.8	29.6	37.5	7.3	3.6	9.1
Quite strong	42.9	46.3	55.4	32.7	30.9	38.2
Quite weak	12.5	20.4	5.4	25.5	30.9	14.5
Very weak	5.4	0.0	0.0	3.6	1.8	1.8
Not applicable	12.5	3.7	1.8	30.9	32.7	36.4
<i>Heads</i>						
Very strong	30.0	23.5	44.7	4.0	2.0	15.0
Quite strong	59.0	61.8	50.5	30.0	33.0	24.0
Quite weak	4.0	12.7	4.9	25.3	25.3	24.0
Very weak	3.0	1.0	0.0	3.0	3.0	3.0
Not applicable	4.0	1.0	0.0	37.4	36.4	34.0

Tables 13a and 13b clearly show that federation was seen as having had a notable impact on a wide range of organisational features of the schools involved. In particular, sharing

good practice, seen by over 90% of respondents as having been affected quite or very strongly by federation, was seen as having benefited from federation; as also were sharing of resources, cost effectiveness, school leadership, and building on and adding to other initiatives (over 70% quite or very strong). Federation was also seen as having had positive benefits for the education system as a whole, and as having benefited the inclusion of pupils with SEN. Retention, recruitment and transition arrangements were seen as having been less strongly impacted by federation, although in all these cases over a third of respondents still reported quite strong benefits of federating.

**Table 13b: Impact of the federation on aspects of school/college organisation (%)**

	Organising transition post 16	Facilitating inclusion of pupils with SEN	Cost effectiveness	Building on and adding to other initiatives	Impact on wider education system
<i>Governors</i>					
Very strong	7.3	16.4	11.3	14.3	12.7
Quite strong	34.5	54.5	56.6	58.9	41.8
Quite weak	20.0	10.9	18.9	17.9	29.1
Very weak	0.0	5.5	7.5	1.8	5.5
Not applicable	38.2	12.7	5.7	7.1	10.9
<i>Heads</i>					
Very strong	1.5	16.2	19.0	31.0	21.9
Quite strong	37.5	46.5	55.0	61.0	53.1
Quite weak	20.1	18.2	15.0	6.0	17.7
Very weak	1.0	2.0	3.0	2.0	2.1
Not applicable	28.1	17.2	8.0	0.0	5.2

Heads tended to be more positive than governors about impact on leadership, sharing of resources, impact on the system and building on other initiatives, while governors were somewhat more positive on the impact of federating on primary/secondary transition and Inclusion.

As was the case with respect to students, judgements of actual impact were somewhat less positive than the very high expectations expressed in the first survey (e.g. over 66% anticipating a very strong impact on sharing good practice). However, the pattern of actual impact mirrors that of expected impact in terms of which factors are seen to have been affected most strongly.

### 3.2.2 Facilitators and barriers

Respondents were asked to indicate what factors had helped the federation to be successful. These findings are given in Tables 14a, 14b and 14c

**Table 14a: Main factors that have helped the federation to be successful (%)**

	Arrangement for governing body or formal collaborative agreement	Headteacher leadership	DCSF financial grant	Teacher willingness to collaborate	Improved teacher recruitment
<i>Governors</i>					
Disagree strongly	5.6	3.6	1.8	1.8	3.6
Disagree	11.1	0.0	5.4	3.6	23.6
Agree	44.4	42.9	33.9	50.9	32.7
Agree strongly	24.1	53.6	57.1	41.8	10.9
Not Applicable	14.8	0.0	1.8	1.8	29.1
<i>Heads</i>					
Disagree strongly	5.3	0.0	0.0	0.0	2.0
Disagree	13.7	1.9	0.0	1.9	15.2
Agree	46.3	32.0	25.2	44.2	38.4
Agree strongly	24.2	66.0	74.8	53.8	6.1
Not Applicable	10.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	38.4

**Table 14b: Main factors that have helped the federation to be successful (%)**

	Improved teacher retention	Reduced teacher workload	Built on good existing relations between schools	Management willingness to collaborate	Trust between schools
<i>Governors</i>					
Disagree strongly	1.8	5.6	3.6	5.4	3.6
Disagree	26.8	46.3	14.5	1.8	9.1
Agree	32.1	25.9	43.6	50.0	38.2
Agree strongly	7.1	3.7	38.2	41.1	45.2
Not Applicable	32.1	18.5	0.0	1.8	3.6
<i>Heads</i>					
Disagree strongly	2.1	5.3	1.0	0.0	0.0
Disagree	16.5	38.9	6.8	1.9	1.9
Agree	40.2	21.1	35.9	26.9	30.8
Agree strongly	5.2	3.2	56.3	71.2	66.3
Not Applicable	36.1	31.6	0.0	0.0	1.0

**Table 14c: Main factors that have helped the federation to be successful (%)**

	Quality of leadership in federation schools	Quality of governance in the federation	LA involvement	Equality of school status	Quality of communication
<i>Governors</i>					
Disagree strongly	3.6	3.6	7.1	3.6	1.8
Disagree	0.0	5.4	42.9	26.8	14.5
Agree	46.4	51.8	33.9	37.5	60.0
Agree strongly	48.2	28.6	3.6	26.8	23.6
Not Applicable	1.8	10.7	12.5	5.4	0.0
<i>Heads</i>					
Disagree strongly	0.0	3.0	19.6	5.8	0.0
Disagree	0.0	15.8	40.2	10.6	3.8
Agree	25.0	50.5	56.5	39.4	47.1
Agree strongly	74.0	19.8	6.9	40.4	49.0
Not Applicable	1.0	10.9	6.9	3.8	0.0

Leadership, both of individual school heads and of the federation as a whole, and the financial grant from the DCSF emerged as the most significant factors according to respondents, with over 50% strongly agreeing that they helped the federation succeed. Willingness to collaborate, both among teachers and among managers, and trust and relations between schools also emerged as highly significant enabling factors, as did quality of communication and quality of federation governance, with more than half of all respondents agreeing that they constituted success enabling factors in their federation. Improved recruitment and retention and reduced workload, as a result of this federation, each produced a more ambiguous response, with fewer than half of respondents (governors and heads) agreeing that these had contributed to success. There may be a perception among many respondents that these factors have not improved substantively enough to become major facilitators, although the high proportion (about a third) stating these were not applicable to their schools must also be considered.

Mixed views emerged on LA involvement, with heads being substantially more positive on the impact of their involvement than governors: 63% against 38% respectively. Some other differences between heads and governors also emerged. Heads generally attached a greater importance to federation leadership and management issues than governors (74% compared with 48% strongly agreed), and to a lesser extent to good communication, trust and existing relationships.

Again, these findings conformed largely to the prior expectations of the heads and governors as expressed in the first survey, where likewise headteacher leadership had been seen as the most likely factor to impact on success, with teacher willingness to collaborate and the financial grant from the DCSF also overwhelmingly deemed potentially important facilitating factors. Reduced teacher workload was least likely to be seen as a facilitating factor in the first survey.

Heads' and governors' ratings of the main barriers to success for their federation are given in Tables 15a and 15b. Time pressures, both for leaders and staff, were seen as the key barrier to success in the federation by over 60% of respondents. No other factor was seen as a barrier by more than 50% of respondents, although over 40% cited insufficient finance as an issue, and about a third agreed that conflicts with other national initiatives were a problem.

**Table 15a: Main barriers to the success of the federation (%)**

	Insufficient finance	Staff resistance	Lack of necessary training	Insufficient time for those leading the federation	Insufficient time for staff in the federation
<i>Governors</i>					
Disagree strongly	3.6	11.1	5.8	3.8	1.9
Disagree	45.5	61.1	73.1	26.9	31.5
Agree	34.5	24.1	21.2	61.5	55.6
Agree strongly	12.7	1.9	0.0	7.7	11.1
Not Applicable	3.6	1.9	0.0	0.0	0.0
<i>Heads</i>					
Disagree strongly	4.0	14.7	10.9	5.8	5.8
Disagree	49.5	60.8	68.3	32.0	27.2
Agree	22.2	18.6	9.9	42.7	52.4
Agree strongly	21.2	3.9	2.0	17.5	12.6
Not Applicable	3.0	2.0	8.9	1.9	1.9

**Table 15b: Main barriers to the success of the federation (%)**

	The federation model for our school	Staff accountability demands	Unclear legal status of the federation	Unclear legal status of the federation Executive Head	Conflicts with other national initiatives
<i>Governors</i>					
Disagree strongly	12.7	3.8	9.4	9.3	5.5
Disagree	65.5	59.6	54.7	42.6	50.9
Agree	10.9	28.8	22.6	20.4	34.5
Agree strongly	10.9	3.8	5.7	7.4	3.6
Not Applicable	0.0	3.8	7.5	20.4	5.5
<i>Heads</i>					
Disagree strongly	16.5	9.1	18.8	16.2	12.7
Disagree	70.1	65.7	50.5	39.4	47.1
Agree	6.2	17.2	15.8	10.1	24.5
Agree strongly	1.0	3.0	4.0	3.0	7.8
Not Applicable	6.2	5.1	10.9	31.3	7.8

Heads' and governors' responses were generally consistent, though governors were more likely to feel that lack of staff training, unclear legal status of the federation and the executive head, and staff accountability demands were problems. Heads were more likely to agree strongly that insufficient time for leaders of the federation was a barrier,

Again these findings are generally consistent with the prior expectations of heads and governors, as in the first survey lack of finance and lack of time had been singled out as the most likely barriers to success. In practice, lack of time had turned out to be more, and lack of finance less of a barrier than initially expected, however.

### 3.2.3. Involvement of the governing body in the development of the federation

While over 60% of respondents felt that governors had been quite or very involved in the development of the federation fewer than 50% felt that this was the case for the governing body as a whole (Table 16). Governors (it is important to note that the respondents here were intended to be, and in most cases will have been, the chair of governors) were more likely than heads to feel that the chair of governors was very involved, but less likely than the heads to feel the governing body as a whole was very involved.

**Table 16: Involvement of the governing body in the development of the federation (%)**

	The Chair of Governors	The Governing Body as a whole
<i>Governors</i>		
Very involved	38.2	7.1
Quite involved	23.6	39.3
Not very involved	32.7	39.3
Not involved at all	5.5	14.3
<i>Heads</i>		
Very involved	29.4	12.0
Quite involved	32.4	32.0
Not very involved	32.4	52.0
Not involved at all	5.7	4.0

These results suggest that governors were less involved in the development than in the setting up of the federations, as in the first survey over 50% of responding governors had claimed that the chair had been very involved in the setting up of the federation, and over 25% felt the same about the governing body as a whole.

Governors had mixed views on the impact of federating on the governance of their schools, with a group claiming closer relationships and cooperation, while a larger group claimed to see little or no impact at all. Heads reported a greater impact on governance, citing improved communication between governors, a broadened outlook and greater focus, though again a very substantial group (though not, in this case, the majority) reported little or no impact.

#### 3.2.4. Sustainability

Respondents were also asked to comment on the sustainability of the federation, and the likely impact of three key Government programmes, Every Child Matters; Academies; and Trusts schools on their federation. Results are given in Tables 17 and 18.

**Table 17: Sustainability of the federation (%)**

	Will the federation continue once DfES funding ceases?	Will the federation continue once the current leadership has left?	Will governance become more tightly integrated between federation schools?
<i>Governors</i>			
Definitely	16.4	15.4	9.3
Very Likely	34.5	26.9	14.8
Likely	40.0	50.0	25.9
Unlikely	9.1	7.7	50.0
<i>Heads</i>			
Definitely	38.5	20.0	9.8
Very Likely	23.1	36.0	9.8
Likely	35.6	35.0	24.5
Unlikely	2.9	9.0	55.9

A majority of heads (62%) and governors (51%) felt that the federation would definitely or very likely continue following the cessation of DfES (now the DCSF) funding, while only 9% of governors and 3% of heads felt that this was unlikely. Both groups were somewhat more tentative regarding the impact of leadership changes, although the number of respondents who felt it unlikely that the federation would continue under these circumstances was still

small. About half of respondents (50% governors, 56% heads) did not think that governance was likely to become tighter in future, with only one in ten believing this would definitely happen.

From Table 18 it is clear that the impact of Every Child Matters is seen as likely to be positive, especially by heads, while the impact of Trust schools and Academies are either not known or seen as likely to be neutral to the federation.

**Table 18: Predicted impact of other initiatives on the future of the federation (%)**

	Every Child Matters	Trust schools and Academies
<i>Governors</i>		
Very positive impact	23.2	9.1
Somewhat positive impact	48.2	14.5
No impact	14.3	25.5
Somewhat negative impact	3.6	9.1
Very negative impact	0.0	9.1
Don't know	10.7	32.7
<i>Heads</i>		
Very positive impact	30.1	4.9
Somewhat positive impact	50.5	13.6
No impact	9.7	31.1
Somewhat negative impact	1.0	10.7
Very negative impact	1.0	7.8
Don't know	7.8	32.0

### 3.3 The impact of federations on pupil outcomes

The National Pupil Database provided by the DCSF was used to calculate comparisons between the achievements of pupils in schools in the federations programme (federation schools) and all other secondary schools in the state sector in the country for which full data were available (non-programme schools)..

#### 3.3.1 *Key Stage 4*

There is no evidence that being part of one of the 37 federations within the programme, taken as a whole, has led to higher levels of performance at KS4 compared with the other secondary schools in the country (non-programme schools) in terms of 5 A\*-C at GCSE (Table 19). Although a higher percentage of pupils in non-programme schools attained this level, the difference was not statistically significant. However, federation schools in 2006 achieved slightly better than non-programme schools in terms of the percentage gaining 5 A\*-G and on contextual value added measures (Key Stage 2 – Key Stage 4). No differences between federation and non-programme schools were found in gains over time in GCSE A\*-G passes when results for 2001, 2002, 2003, and 2004 were compared with results for 2006 (Table 19). As can be seen, although small differences emerged, none reached statistical significance. This remained the case when further analyses were conducted taking account of other initiatives (e.g. Excellence in Cities), pupil profile with respect to special educational needs, school size, urban/rural, and prior achievement.

**Table 19: Comparison of federation and non-programme schools on examination performance at end of Key Stage 4 in 2006**

	Federation average	Non programme school average	Significance
% 5A*-C	59.9	62.8	Ns
% 5A*-C including English and maths	46.0	49.5	Ns
% 5A*-G	93.6	91.3	$p < .001$
Contextual Value Added KS2-KS4	1004.8	1000.8	$p < .01$
Gains %A*-C over time 2004-06	4.0	5.0	Ns
Gains %A*-C over time 2003-06	4.5	6.1	Ns
Gains %A*-C over time 2002-06	6.6	7.6	Ns
Gains %A*-C over time 2001-06	8.0	8.9	Ns

Note: *ns* = non-significant

There was no significant difference between federation and non-programme schools with respect to total absence (8.1% v 7.9%) or for unauthorised absence (1.2% v 1.3%), although authorised absence was significantly higher (6.7% v 6.4%,  $p < .01$ ).

### 3.3.2 Key Stage 3

No statistically significant differences were apparent at Key Stage 3 between federation and non-programme schools in terms of achievement, value added or gains over time (Table 20). This remained the case when further analyses taking account of other factors were conducted (see Section 3.3.1).

**Table 20: Comparison of federation and non-programme schools on examination performance at the end of KS3 in 2006.**

	Federation average	Non programme school average	Significance
% Level 5 and above - English	75.2	74.6	Ns
% Level 5 and above - Maths	75.9	74.3	Ns
% Level 5 and above - Science	72.1	70.2	Ns
Value added measure	99.8	99.6	Ns
Gains %A*-C 2004-06 English	3.0	3.1	Ns
Gains %A*-C 2004-06 maths	1.6	0.8	Ns
Gains %A*-C 2004-06 science	4.0	3.5	Ns

Note: *ns* = non-significant

### 3.3.3 Key Stage 2

Federation schools were compared to non-programme schools on performance in the three core subjects and on gains in performance from 2003 to 2006, to provide a comparator with previous test results (Table 21).

**Table 21: Comparison of federation and non-programme schools on performance at end of Key Stage 2 in 2006**

	Federation average	Non programme schools average	Significance
% Level 4 and above English 2006	80.3	80.1	Ns
% Level 5 and above English 2006	27.9	32.3	Ns
% Level 4 and above Maths 2006	78.1	76.9	Ns
% Level 5 and above Maths 2006	30.8	33.2	Ns
% Level 4 and above Science 2006	89.6	87.7	Ns
% Level 5 and above Science 2006	46.2	45.8	Ns
Value added measure 2006	100.1	99.8	Ns
Gains in English %A*-C 2004-06	7.0	3.8	Ns
Gains in Maths %A*-C 2004-06	2.7	-0.3	Ns
Gains in Science %A*-C 2004-06	-0.7	-0.2	Ns

Note: *ns* = non-significant

Performance in federation schools increased more rapidly than the national average in 2006, although the gains were (just) not statistically significant. Further analysis taking into account other factors (see Section 3.3.1) did not change the finding. Furthermore, no significant differences were found with respect to authorised or unauthorised absence.

### 3.3.4 Conclusion

Overall, these results do not indicate that federation has impacted substantially on examination results or absence although there was evidence of an effect on rate of success at 5 A\* - G. However, the timescale, in effect three years of which one was largely consumed by setting up, would make any impact surprising in view of the acknowledged time period needed for genuine school improvement to take place. This is usually considered to be 3-5 years (Fullan, 2003). Furthermore, the federations had disparate aims although raising achievement was a primary goal in about nine out of ten schools (Table 1). Many federations were more strongly focussed on factors such as broadening curriculum or inclusion which may lead to longer term gains, but not necessarily to short term improvements in exam results. Finally within the non-federations programme group used for comparison in the above analyses were an unknown number of schools not in the federations programme but developing some form of collaborative relationship or federation. As no accurate data were available for these schools their influence could not be taken into account.

These analyses of pupil outcomes had several limitations which should be taken into account when interpreting the findings. Firstly, the federations group were compared with the total group of secondary schools not in the project. The latter group was, consequently, very much larger than the federation group and contained schools known to have developed some form of collaboration, including federations not funded within the programme. No specific matching of schools (e.g. by socio-economic disadvantage) was possible. Finally, pupil level data were available for attainment but not for attendance where school level data were used.

## 4 Case studies

The nine case studies were selected to sample different types of federation with respect to situation (e.g. urban, rural), size and primary purpose and goals. Summaries of the case studies are presented in the Appendix. The present section summarises the general findings from the case studies discussed by the major themes we identified during the evolution of the Government's programme funding 37 federations.

### 4.1 Background, aims and studies

It had been thought when the Programme began that there would be four broad models of federations:

- Two-school model (usually involving one high performing school working with a school facing challenging circumstances/in or near special measures)
- An LA-wide model
- Groups of schools of similar nature/ethos/levels of achievement
- Innovative models that do not fit the above, e.g. primary school models

Inspection of the details of the 37 federations in the pilot suggested that this typology did not really do justice to the diversity displayed. One factor was that of 'hard-soft' in terms of the governance structure, with 'soft' referring to minimal impact on governance while 'hard' implies a significant change to governance. The former were similar to other forms of collaboration negotiated between schools either of their own accord or as part of other institutions, e.g. Leading Edge Partnerships, Network Learning Communities. The variation in federation can be seen from these accounts of those studies and a more elaborated typology is presented (Section 5.5).

#### 4.1.1 *Size*

Federation B was the smallest (2 schools); federations E and H had just three schools each (The federations that dropped out of being a case study each comprised just 2 schools, one federation rising to 3). The largest was federation I with 26 schools, a college and a full range of children's agencies (Connexions, police, social services, youth service, etc). There was a range of sizes between these extremes.

**Table 22**      ***The nine case studies***

	Constituents	Urban/rural	Type
A	8 secondary, one special	Rural	Soft non-statutory
B	2 secondary	Urban	Soft non-statutory
C	10 secondary, FE college	Rural	Soft non-statutory
D	1 secondary, 4 primary	Urban	Soft non-statutory
E	1 secondary, 1 primary, 1 special	Urban	Hard statutory
F	4 secondary, 2 special (FE college)	Urban	Soft non-statutory
G	5 secondary, 1 special	Urban	Soft non-statutory
H	3 special (plus links to 22 primary)	Urban/rural	Soft non-statutory
I	4 secondary, 22 primary, 1 special, 1 FE college, (LA services)	Urban	Soft non-statutory

Notes: 1. Within the 'soft non-statutory' was a range of sub-types.

2. Federation E moved to become a harder federation over the period of the project.

3. Two case studies originally in the sample dropped out. Each was urban and towards the harder end of the continuum.

#### *4.1.2 Types of school and other constituents*

While some federations comprised only secondary schools, most included a mixture of different educational provision. The former included federations of successful schools working with a school (or schools) in difficulties where a common phase, always secondary, was logical. The latter included a rich diversity of groupings. For example, Federation A comprised 8 secondary schools and one special school; Federation F included 4 secondary schools and 2 special schools with an FE college included where appropriate (the college was not a 'formal' part of the federation). Federation D comprised one secondary school and 4 feeder primaries (although in practice only three engaged). In some LAs there was more than one federation.

#### *4.1.3 Aims and purposes*

Linked with, and indeed superordinate to the question of size, was purpose. Bids had been produced to address certain aims and the number of schools within the proposed federation reflected this. Typically, federations that were intended to be towards the 'harder' pole on the 'hard-soft' continuum comprised small numbers of schools of the same phase. However, the federation that moved furthest along this continuum comprised three different schools secondary, primary and special. In one case the federation of institutions was only one element as the proposal was to develop a single site for all schools, sharing buildings.

Federations that comprised a successful school and one in some difficulties had similar purposes, primarily to assist the latter school to improve although one federation which began with this model, changed to a more egalitarian model very early in its lifetime. Two federations originally included as case studies had existed prior to the current project. In each case the successful secondary school had been expected to use its experience and resources to inform, support and fast-track improvement in the partner secondary school which had been facing considerable difficulties. In each case a substantial improvement in GCSE scores had been recorded following federation (but prior to the present funding programme's commencement in 2003-04). In one case a third school also joined the federation. Unfortunately, both of these federations declined to continue as case studies and so our information on their progress is limited.

Federation H, however, comprised three special schools working with pupils with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties (BESD). In terms of structure the federation was 'soft' in the sense each school retained a high level of autonomy and their DCSF number but due to a history of ineffective governance of two of the schools the federation developed a joint governing body to support the work of the federation principal, thereby exhibiting elements of a 'hard' federation. In addition to raising standards in all three schools, the federation was intended to improve key areas of weakness in two schools; to develop consistent practice and processes across those schools; to establish a multi-agency team to work with the federation to support children and families served by the three schools; and to promote links between the federation and mainstream schools to support the inclusion of pupils with BESD. Since establishing the federation, the two weaker schools have been removed from special measures.

Federation E comprised a secondary, primary and special school, the only special school in the LA which included pupils with profound, multiple and severe learning difficulties and autism, as well as those with moderate learning difficulties and BESD. In their case there were two different drivers. The LA wanted to replace school buildings. In addition, the LA

was committed to increase inclusion. Together, this combination of practical and philosophical factors led initially to consideration of models which split the special school, locating children into units within mainstream schools. However, this was not considered appropriate for their vision of inclusion and so a proposal for a single school complex for all three schools was proposed. This provided the opportunity for a substantial development of inclusive education. The federation had other aims concerning the general improvement of standards, particularly in the secondary school, and the improvement of efficiency and value for money expected from the development.

An example of a 'softer' federation in an urban context is Federation D. The community served by the secondary and four feeder primaries in this small town is characterised by high levels of social disadvantage; high ethnic segregation and substantial numbers of pupils with English as an Additional Language; and low levels of attainment at the end of Key Stages 2 and 3 and at GCSE. The original proposal focused on the improvement of teaching and learning within the KS2 and 3 transition from primary to secondary schooling. Low levels of attainment at transfer were considered to lead to low levels also at the end of KS3. Hence, a collaborative endeavour across this period was proposed by the schools. In addition, and influenced by the community unrest in this and other towns in the region, the federation was approved by the DCSF but with a further task to address community cohesion.

Finally, by way of another example, Federation C represents a group of 10 schools and a college in a rural area. It is not an area of social disadvantage (*"people want to live in this area"* - chair of governors) and parents are supportive. The federation is in some respects 'soft' in that it has no joint governing body. However, it has elements of a hard federation in that a company was set up to which certain powers have been devolved and this limited company has a joint governing body. An executive group of headteachers became the board of the limited company and the governors meet as a scrutinizing committee. The focus of the federation has been on leadership and management, and on teaching and learning. Action points for the federation were:

- Using school, self-evaluation and review collaboratively
- Establishing a joint pattern of initial teacher training
- Remodelling the workforce
- Coordinating the work of advanced skills teachers (ASTs) across the federation
- Developing CPD programmes relating to each school's specialist status
- Consolidating the 14-19 programme operating in those areas
- Improving inclusion by identifying gifted and talented pupils and those at risk of disaffection.

As with Federation H, Federation C is an interesting combination of a 'hard' and 'soft' federation.

Case study federations generally had the raising of standards as one of their aims; as indicated also by the survey of non-case study schools (Table 1) but in addition there was a good deal of diversity. Inclusion was common, with varying foci. Federation C was the most developed in this regard, but others addressed inclusion in various ways, mainly for those disadvantaged, disabled or low achieving, but also the gifted and talented (Federations F, C and A). The development of teaching expertise through CPD was another common theme, with schools collaborating to learn from and with each other.

In summary, the case studies reveal a high level of diversity within an agenda concerned with raising standards and increasing inclusion.

#### 4.2 Generating relationships, communication, trust

Federations differed in the extent to which they were developed from historical, collaborative working relationships. Those that involved successful schools joining with schools in difficulty were essentially collaborations engineered out of adversity with an in-built power and status differential, which in one case at least was quickly renegotiated by the schools involved. Federations that grew out of past collaborations, however, had a greater sense of equality. However, this description, while having general validity, is too simplistic. In the case studies we found other, more subtle variations.

Federation C is an example of a federation grounded in collaboration. The federation was built on a basis of collaboration in the area, going back to the Technical and Vocational Education Initiative (TVEI). Therefore, there has been a long tradition of heads meeting together every half term, so schools have been 'talking to each other even during the most competitive of times' (head). Two large schools took the lead, first by trying to be joint leading edge schools. The DCSF was at the time not interested in this possibility, however. The schools then went for federation status with other schools in the area.

The initiative for the federation came from the heads '*it is essentially personality driven*' (secondary head). Two heads in particular, the heads of the two largest schools in the area, took the lead in the federation, partly as capacity issues for the smaller schools meant that their potential to take the lead in the federation was limited. A small collection of people with a vision had driven the process. New appointments from outside the area to headship in a number of schools was seen as having helped in terms of getting a group of people together who were very keen on getting mutual support.

Federation A grew out of a pre-existing local Head Teachers' Conference which itself was an outgrowth of other developments. As one headteacher put it, "*The federation gives us the money to do what we were already doing*" - speculating that the federation would not have achieved nearly so much had it started as a new initiative when the funding began. All of the headteachers interviewed placed importance on the trust between the heads themselves as the foundation of the network. This was echoed by a governor, who cited it as a positive influence which had allowed the federation to be much "*further down the road*" than it would have been otherwise. This was a 'soft' federation, in that there was no legal relationship between schools. The chair of the federation described himself as '*primus inter pares (first among equals)*', and emphasised the need for independence among the schools. In spite of this 'soft' nature, however, headteachers within the federation were clear that the structures which were in place allowed for more consistent and useful work between the schools than a looser, more ad hoc relationship (such as was extant for other areas of the LA). A discordant voice was heard, however, from a head who had previous experience of a more tightly structured federation elsewhere, and felt that Federation A could be more effective if the structure were to be tightened.

These two examples indicate the benefits of pre-existing collaboration but it is necessary to note they are federations by agreement. These schools saw an opportunity to do more of what they were already doing, but better. Federation B, however, comprising two secondary schools, one of which was having difficulties, had a less equal relationship at the start. The two schools involved in the secondary network had not previously had much collaboration: therefore, there was a great deal of ground work to be done before the federation could be successful, as the headteachers themselves acknowledge. This was compounded by three other issues: the preconceptions staff had about what federation might be/entail; existing ways of working in one of the schools; and the LA's original idea of what the federation should be.

Before the federation got off the ground, there was a good deal of speculation in the national education press which headteachers are convinced was unhelpful. In essence, this information seems to have led staff to believe that all federations would be 'hard', would have joint governance, and led to staff fears of loss of school identity, of headteachers becoming remote, and of changes in employment status. As one of the headteachers pointed out,

*Because we were a softer federation it would have been much more helpful if we could have called ourselves a collaborative from day one... But it was very hard because forces from without - and I would include the LA in that - were really quite locked into the idea of a hard federation - that was my perception anyway - hard in the sense of accountability and change (headteacher)*

This example also highlights the 'hard-soft' dimension. The schools saw themselves in a soft federation despite the focus on improving standards in one of the constituents, whereas others in this model developed harder types of governance systems with a formal agreement or contracts.

Due to the small nature of this federation, communication was not as much of an issue as it might have been in larger groups. There are two main levels of communication: headteacher to headteacher, and through the federation manager, who acts in some respects as a broker, headteachers have commented on the value to the federation of the manager's communication and people skills. However, both headteachers pointed to the need to build a relationship between the schools before the federation could become truly effective. There was a change in the working of the federation over the period of the evaluation, based on this increasing trust and knowledge: the schools came to the conclusion that one size did not fit both, and that within the overarching umbrella of the federation, they did not need to do the same things, or participate in projects in the same way.

*I think we did waste time and expended a lot of energy, emotional and intellectual in trying to squeeze the schools to a place where there was that identical commonality of interest and the same way forward for both and we began to realise - without actually talking about this perhaps directly - that you need to loosen it up a bit and allow schools to take things forward from where they are. (federation manager)*

*We've been able to be more relaxed and creative about how we've used the federation but you couldn't have foreseen that at the beginning. For me it's been an extraordinary learning experience because you just don't know. (headteacher)*

Federation D was essentially a collaborative proposal for the secondary and feeder primary schools, but in practice there was some tension, even suspicion, that can exist between these two phases. There was a feeling that federating may be a 'take over' attempt by the secondary school.

*There was quite a fear that there would be one governing body for all five schools and, you know are we looking at some type of 'superhead' position where somebody is taking a controlling role in all five schools. (headteacher, primary)*

The primary schools were unclear as to the whether 'soft' may progress to 'hard' and were uneasy about this. They were also unclear about the leadership, management and legal roles and responsibilities and how this ambiguity might impact on their own school governance and autonomy. As the process developed, these fears reduced.

The imperative for establishing Federation H was to halt a decline in educational provision and standards. The model necessitated the successful school providing significant resources to support the failing schools. The challenge of promoting involvement of staff was recognized by the LA:

*We started off on the back foot. [School C] were understandably a bit resentful, it was like well, you know this federation sounds great but It's take, take, take and from their perspective in the first year it was because we had nothing to take from the other two schools really. (LA officer)*

The loss of a senior member of staff, the sharing of resources, the dissolving of their governing body and loss of chair of governors, combined with the associated loss of autonomy, further coupled with increased workload, all contributed tensions associated with developing social capital. However, some teachers within School C articulated a sense of moral purpose and remained optimistic regarding the longer-term benefits of having a close relationship with the other two schools. These included developing joint curriculum provision and making joint appointments within the federation. Furthermore, as the federation and communication links have developed, negative attitudes have mellowed. Staff in School C are beginning to understand the concept of working within and across organizations for the benefit of students.

The situation facing Federation E was different again. The move to one school site required collaboration throughout the whole of the educational experience of pupils and the organisation of the institutions, including use of teaching space, school uniform(s), pastoral care and discipline policies, staffing structure, and finance. Whether the development of the proposed single campus would allow the continuation of three separate schools, as was planned for the initial phase, or a move to a single school in the longer term was a key issue for many staff and governors and indeed parents. The appointment of the Head of the special school as acting chief executive raised questions for some parents, and indeed some staff, about the federation; *"I didn't come into teaching to be an SEN teacher"* (secondary year tutor). The executive head later commented that, *"people thought I didn't know what I was doing - how could I make judgements on other areas?"* But their importance resulted in the federation addressing the issues directly and putting great efforts into trying to optimise communication and collaboration.

This issue of the perception of those with experience in special education was also identified in Federation A which had employed a teacher for the special school to work across the federation. The headteacher commented that this would not have happened before the federation because there would have been distrust that a special school teacher could make a valuable contribution to mainstream schools.

Whatever the reasons for the federation, and the pre-existing collaborative basis, it was recognised by all federations that success would depend on the development of trust, collaborative practice and mutual respect. Where there was little previous history of collaborative practice, trust had to be built up and this occurred across the case studies. The head of Federation D reflected on how the relationships between the heads had developed during the initiative.

*Over the past two years there has been a definite improvement in relationships of the five headteachers involved. So if one of the targets at the outset was to improve transition and relationships between the five schools that has improved. (headteacher, secondary)*

A primary head also noted that relationships between headteachers had developed since the creation of the federation.

*It's now a case of I'll pick up the phone for a chat. That would not have happened before we got involved with the federation. (headteacher, primary)*

This federation contributed to developing a common language around what effective teaching and learning may look like in primary and secondary settings. Another primary headteacher reflected that this process began with visits to each other's schools:

*Secondary colleagues came down from the high school to see how numeracy was taught in a primary school and that was a big icebreaker. Because, I think they realized what numeracy teaching looked like here and that that started to change some of their practice up there, which is good. (headteacher, primary)*

As conversations progressed and trust and understandings developed some common approaches to the teaching of subjects including English, Maths and Science across the phase boundary were developed. Modern Foreign Language and Music teaching had also occurred across the phases. This had taken place in both primary and secondary settings. Where these initiatives have been most successful the mix of personalities of those involved has supported the development of positive relationships within a short time-span. In one subject area progress was slow. The headteacher of the secondary school realized this was largely due to the secondary school department involved. However, the headteacher deliberately identified this department for involvement in an attempt to raise their expectations of students and to develop their range of teaching strategies through interaction with primary school teachers. In one case this strategy may lead to a member of staff moving to a post in another school. Where there have been issues in developing a common approach these have emerged from a combination of personalities that have hindered the development of trusting relationships, combined with strong contrasting philosophical positions in terms of what constitutes effective teaching in different settings.

The director of Federation F identified effective communication and awareness of federation activities across all levels of staff and the wider community as one of the main lessons learned. This was not always easy across a number of schools. School staff - (deputy) headteachers, middle managers, classroom teachers - referred to the federation/partnership directors as facilitators, realising how hard they work to keep the activities going. A middle manager pointed to the significance of the directors having stayed in the job throughout the duration of the federation/partnership, which allowed for continuity and consistency. A headteacher emphasised the willingness of the senior management teams in the schools to collaborate as a major facilitator.

There were instances of variations of commitment, collaboration and communication within individual federations, particularly those that were larger. In one federation, a headteacher questioned the commitment of another school:

*It is a bit, well, we'll grab the money and run...It was suggested that, should they not make the commitment, should the funding not be withdrawn from that particular school? - but that was cast aside. We can't do that. Well, why not?*

This was also the case in Federation E but in this instance fundamental changes were under consideration. The secondary headteacher originally appointed to lead the federation left before the evaluation began and the primary headteacher resigned whilst the project was

underway, followed towards the end of the period of evaluation by the head of the secondary school then in place.

### 4.3 Leadership and management

Structurally, our case studies had a number of different leadership and management models. Leadership was undertaken by various variants and combinations of the governance system, the senior staff in the federation, middle managers, and also the LA. We consider governance in the following section and focus here on the other aspects of leadership and management.

#### 4.3.1 *Structural variations*

Federations differed in the use of an overall 'leader'. Terminology, function and power also varied. In some cases there was a chief executive who saw their role as concerned with facilitation:

*My role has stayed the same. Although I'm the chief executive, my role is to be chief facilitator, to bring people together to discuss things.*

In this instance, the chief executive was the headteacher of the secondary school in Federation D who had been instrumental in the setting up of the federation. The secondary school exhibits an entrepreneurial approach and was opportunistic in terms of developing materials and activities that could add value to the federation's work. This is an example of a 'loosely-coupled' model where participants negotiate their level of involvement and nature of contribution.

Leadership of Federation C rested very much with the headteachers. Governors had been a help in identifying specific issues such as emphasising the need for proper budgeting, but the heads were clearly in control. This dominance of the process by the heads was seen as a key factor in developing the openness that had led to successful collaboration. This means the process was driven forward and led from the top. (This applies also in the case of Federation G). In fact, the federation was not just dominated by heads, but specifically by the heads of the larger schools, seen as having more capacity to engage in the leadership of the federation as well as having been the drivers towards setting it up in the first place. Getting people comfortable with the notion that the larger schools lead the federation had been a challenge, according to the head of one of the large schools '*there is a need for endless sensitivity with regards to the feelings of others, especially when there are a large number of Government initiatives that actually make collaboration quite a difficult thing.*' The smaller schools sometimes perceived the federation as being the larger schools telling them what to do, although according to the deputy head of one of the larger school this had improved over time as the smaller schools had come to know the working model of the federation. The cultural change required for these feelings to disappear was slow, however. In some of the smaller schools there was still a suspicion that some of the activities of the federation might aim at furthering the interests of these large schools '*when I see some policy documents written by certain heads in the federation I do wonder what the motivation is*' (governor, smaller school). This concern by smaller (e.g. primary) schools was also evident in Federation D but their fears reduced considerably over time as they saw the reality of operation.

Some federations set up separate posts of director or chief executive. In the case of one of the federations that dropped out of the study, the chief executive had been the headteacher of the successful secondary school. When he took on this chief executive post he was replaced as head by his deputy, a strategy also noted in a recent study of this model of

federation (Glatter & Harvey, 2006). In Federation E, the LA had originally planned to appoint the head of the secondary school as chief executive but, when he resigned, they rethought and subsequently appointed the head of the special school. Over time, the federation 'hardened' and has moved towards a single school, with the acting chief executive having been confirmed as chief executive of the federation.

In other cases, a federation appointed a director who was not simultaneously a headteacher, but with a clear leadership role and appointed at a level to match this. Such directors had a delicate path to tread but were very successful. Federation F was within a larger partnership which was beginning to untwine by the end of the project. The director's role here was very wide-ranging and, ultimately, it was decided to be too much so. Nevertheless, school staff - (deputy) headteachers, middle managers, classroom teachers - referred to the work that the federation/partnership directors carried out as facilitators, realising how hard they work to keep the activities going. A middle manager pointed to the significance of the directors having stayed in the job throughout the duration of the federation/partnership, which allowed for continuity and consistency. A headteacher emphasised the willingness of the senior management teams in the schools to collaborate as a major facilitator. Hence, the director was important as a leader, but by facilitation.

This was also the case in Federation H where the federation principal provided the strategic leadership. During the early stages of development of the federation, the principal paid particular attention to developing and communicating a vision for the federation based on the support for schools in special measures. This involved making key appointments and providing leadership capacity in key areas. Once Schools A and B had been removed from special measures much of the vision had been accomplished. Therefore the federation leadership revisited their core values and beliefs in an attempt to develop a shared vision for future development. The outcomes of these discussions will dictate how the federation will evolve and the nature of leadership roles and responsibilities assigned to individual leaders. This is a challenging task because tensions exist within the leadership group. The federation has created an additional tier of management. A governor highlighted how the new structure has impacted on the headteachers:

*When a headteacher has been directly responsible to his [sic] governors and now he's responsible to his principal as well as his governors. I mean it's taking something away from his original authority. (federation governor)*

The headteachers also recognized their power and autonomy have been eroded. One reflected:

*You're not a head any longer you are merely managing a department...*  
(federation headteacher)

In Federation E headteachers left their posts over the period of the federation's planning and development, the last despite having an important role to play in moving towards a new management structure that abolished the roles of the headteachers other than the executive director. Another headteacher commented on the development of "a campus mentality" where heads would be managing no more than a section or department on a mainstream site under the new proposals for Building Schools for the Future. The experienced headteachers within the federation found the changing nature of leadership demanded by the federation a challenge. The concepts of 'system leadership' and 'collaborative leadership' have yet to be embraced. For the leadership of the federation to develop further, leadership practices within the federation must move towards adopting the characteristics that underpin these concepts.

This will require changing attitudes and behaviour or, as Michael Fullan (1991) puts it, you need to change what people *“think and do, It’s as simple and complex as that”* (Fullan, 1991).

The personal styles and commitment of the federation leaders were seen as very important to success, whatever the formal designation of the post of chief executive/director. The partnership director was seen as a vital part of the work of Federation I, described as

*‘a human dynamo. He’s passionate about what we’re doing and when there is a barrier ... he’ll find a way round it and to have that sort of leadership helps. ... [He]’s been the facilitator, the leader, the inspiration for us to move forward’* (headteacher).

Similar comments were made by other interviewees in this federation. Losing the project management and with it the drive to move things forward would spell the end of the federation, because headteachers are not able to do it. An assistant head pointed out that the headteachers all needed to support the federation for it to be maintained, with the partnership director the *‘real driving force’*, adding that she would not want to lose the part of the federation with which she was involved.

The importance of these personal characteristics of drive and commitment, but coupled with sensitivity, was evident across the sample. Drive and similar characteristics have also been reported as likely key success factors when a successful school combines in some sense with a school in difficulties. However, sensitivity is less central in those cases. Indeed, the head charged with helping to turn the other school round may consider there are hard decisions to be made, and quickly, such as removing staff and pupils (Glatter & Harvey, 2006). In the current study, however, the majority of schools were federations of choice, so working relationships had to be developed not imposed. Many schools, while happy to collaborate, sought to maintain their autonomy. For example, in Federation A the need to maintain autonomy was articulated by the federation chair (who was also a headteacher), the administrator (a deputy head) and other heads and, although not expressed as such, this desire for autonomy might mitigate against there ever being a hard federation with a chief executive who had power to intervene in constituent schools. While interviews in this federation’s schools did not indicate a concern for autonomy in such trenchant terms, it was still apparent that individual cultures were considered sacrosanct. One headteacher spoke of consistency across the network in terms of issues such as piercings and uniforms and in terms of relationships with parents and pupils, but not in terms of conformity of pedagogy and structure.

#### *4.3.2. Local authority role*

LAs had very different involvement either in supporting the setting up of the Federation or in terms of its maintenance and development. When the LA had been influential at the start, this was viewed positively. For example, the director of education had taken a personal interest in the development of Federation E, linked to a new school build. The single campus was seen as an important new development for the Authority and the community. The development of the leadership and management systems required sensitive handling but also a clear sense of purpose for the LA which was crucial. This included setting down the principles as well as pushing the process along:

*“It’s the old story of being able to move as quickly as the slowest moving member.... we couldn’t move as quickly towards a federation as maybe the logic and the circumstances dictated.”* (director of education)

Eventually, the LA decided that, after much consultation, it had to “lay the law down as far as you can in these circumstances and say, *‘These are the six things that you’ve got to sign up*

to; if you don't sign up to that then the LA isn't going ahead with the PFI bid". (director of education).

In Federation H the LA was the driving force behind the concept of establishing a federation to support the 'failing' schools

*The CEO of the time was working towards putting a federation together. One of the schools at the time was in special measures...Our concern was that of the three schools you've got two that were very challenging and have not got the capacity to move forward... The first step was to see what capacity there was in school C. (LA officer)*

Over time, reorganization and changes in personnel within the local authority led to less LA involvement with the federation. The federation principal reflected:

*Also, there have been issues within [the LA] itself, X has gone, then we've had two interim CEOs and Y has gone, so there's an issue there as well. Certainly, in the last six or seven months I've been left alone to do it, and they appear to be happy with it.*

*(Federation principal)*

In other cases, however, the LA appears to have had little or no involvement at the start. In the case of Federation B the running of the education service had been given over to an outside company in 2001 on a 5 year contract. Although engaged in the early years of the federation, the company's involvement diminished considerably, probably related to the appointment of a deputy head in one of the schools as federation manager. By 2005-6 management of the federation was fully in the hands of this federation manager and headteachers rather than the company or LA.

A further factor leading to less LA/company involvement is thought to be the difference between their original vision, which the heads believed was for a 'harder' federation of a successful school and one in difficulties, and the federation that developed. Headteachers reported that the LA had shown little interest in the federation and had not asked for updates. Furthermore, the agenda which had prompted setting up the federation had been overtaken by events. One of these was the development of a pairing based on a more equal footing than originally envisaged as the strengths of the school seen as having difficulties were recognised and built upon.

In the case of Federation I the LA's service for children out of school was a key component of the developing federation. The LA wanted to stop having to transport excluded pupils out of the area and the success of this element of the service resulted in their education being delivered locally. In addition this initiative was designed to integrate (previously fragmented) services. The success of the federation was noted by the LA, which could see the benefits of partnership working and intended to replicate them elsewhere.

Federation F is an example where LA involvement varied over the project. The change from LEA to LA brought significant developments. While the behaviour improvement programme could have come under the remit of the director of Children's Services, as a vehicle for multi-agency working, it actually came under the federation director through the Excellence Cluster. This resulted in 'a much more involved relationship' (assistant director) with the director of Children's Services as well as other agencies. The LA was viewed as very supportive but the impetus to 'chase that support' needed to come from the federation staff.

Across the case studies we see a wide range of LA involvement with the federations over the whole time span. Some were fundamentally involved with the initial planning of the federation, others had little involvement. Later relationships tended to follow on from this state of affairs. For example, in Federation E where the director of education had taken a personal interest in the development of the federation, the LA was still engaged all through the project, despite two changes of LA director. Where LAs were less involved initially, this tended to continue. Federation interviewees had differing views on this state of affairs but those with a positive opinion of LA involvement argued that the benefits of the federation and LA working effectively together were evident.

#### *4.3.3 Middle managers*

At the beginning of our evaluation, it was clear from interviews with middle managers and other teachers in schools and with governors, that there was relatively little understanding of the federation of which they were part. This suggests that the proposal to the DCSF for funding as a federation had largely been provided by the head and senior members of staff and with chairs of governors in some cases. This is perhaps not surprising. One of the facts of life for schools over recent years has been the importance of responding quickly to new Government initiatives, especially those that brought resources into schools. This is not a cynical reaction but one developed out of necessity and may be less of an issue now, especially as more schools have been running budget surpluses and the average size of these has increased. Furthermore, as we have shown above, many of these federations were already committed to collaboration and partnership. Consequently, bids built upon existing practice but were typically developed without extensive discussions throughout the schools.

Over the period of the study, however, other staff and governors became more knowledgeable and enthusiastic and there were opportunities, for example, for middle managers to take on whole school and federation-wide roles. This was not always the case, although reasons could be complex. For example, in Federation A there was a marked difference in enthusiasm for the federation as one delved down: senior staff were generally quite enthusiastic; governors were supportive but unable to show much impact on the life of the school; some teachers were unenthusiastic at best. Two teachers could see no gains to be accrued from the federation or its work. Perhaps significantly, these teachers saw little input from the federation or any other network in terms of information and resources, that is, in terms of immediate impact on teaching rather than on any long term issues.

This may indicate that the federation concentrated on upper level issues - choice of specialism for federated schools seeking specialist status, fresh start, etc. rather than classroom based change. As headteachers were so enthusiastic about the work of the federation it may be the case that the federation served and supported their work. This does not mean, of course, that there was no effect in the classroom - in fact, it is clear that initiatives run through the federation had significant effect in the classroom. However, this work was not branded as federation led or inspired. This lack of branding was almost certainly linked to, if not a direct result of, the culture of independence and individual ethos mentioned above. Schools undertook initiatives which were supported by the federation but those initiatives remained school based and owned.

In other cases, the impact of the federation was readily appreciated and commented upon by the staff throughout the school and by governors. These instances were characterised by clear branding of initiatives as part of the developing federations, for example the emphasis on CPD in Federations D, G and I and the development of an initiative to promote inclusion in federation I. The latter was developed over a period of the project and by May 2006 had been rated 'good, with outstanding features' by Ofsted.

#### 4.4 Governance

The governance of schools has developed greatly over the years. Since 1986 the concept of stakeholder representation has been a central feature of governing bodies. However, a number of stresses have become evident. Governing bodies are often large (10-22 members, with most comprising between 14-18 governors) and the distinction between management and governance have often become unclear. Governors have become more involved in a wide range of issues and hence demands on the time of these volunteers have become greater, even excessive (Barton, Lawrence, Martin, & Wade, 2006). New Government policies including Academies and Trust schools have introduced new models of governance. The Federation Programme brought its own set of issues to address.

Underlying the concept of 'federation' is a different level of governance beyond schools simply making informal arrangements to collaborate in particular activities. Discussion of types of federation often used the 'hard-soft' continuum as one key variable. A 'hard' federation has a different governing body structure with powers removed from isolated constituent schools and invested in a new federation governing body. At the other end of the continuum ('soft') the governing bodies are unchanged and all activities are arranged by agreement.

In the case studies we have found a continuum, not a dichotomy. Indeed, the defining characteristic, even in the early stages, was the lack of uniformity. Even within the 'hard' federation there appeared to be different models while in the middle of the continuum there are examples of varying degrees of changes to governance. In one example there was a Strategic Management Board comprising two members of each school's governing body together with headteachers, the federation director and assistant director, and an LA representative. In another example, there was an interim partnership board comprising three governors from each school and their headteachers, which was expected to give way to a federation board. At the 'soft' end, Federation G has no executive head or development manager, nor any formal governing body spanning the schools.

By the end of the project, this variation in models of governance remained. While some federations had continued to develop, others continued essentially as they had started. The secondary head of Federation D reported that, '*There have been no real changes to governance as a result of the federation*'. In terms of governance this was a soft federation. Each school had its own governing body; the federation however, had a joint governance/strategic committee without delegated powers. All schools within the federation shared a set of common goals that bind federation activity together. There were agreed protocols and the joint committee can make recommendations but it is up to individual governing bodies to authorize plans. There was no common budget and each school retained their DCSF number. The strategic committee decided how the DCSF pump-priming federation grant was used over the three years of the project. In terms of staffing, there have been some joint appointments and movement of staff between schools. However, the federation has been unable to appoint a federation principal/ manager despite offering an attractive salary and re-advertising the position. This role is carried out by the secondary school headteacher.

In Federation I a collective of governors who meet on a termly basis was established in the late phase of federation, although a couple of schools reported difficulties in nominating a link governor, owing to the responsibilities governors already had in school.). The main purpose was for the link governors to air issues (bulk buys, data protection, etc.), provide input into the federation/partnership, and to report about federation matters to their governing bodies and thus raise awareness among these. The meeting was attended by the partnership director so that suggestions could feed into the federation and thus serve several

functions: forum of ideas, mechanism to dispel misconceptions among governors, and networking among governors. Governors were also welcome to attend federation activities, such as the Partnership Day and any of the CPD courses. Federation matters became a regular agenda item on full governors' meetings in schools.

Federation F provides an example of some changes over the period of the project. The basic structure of a Strategic Management Board (SMB) has continued - half way through the evaluation the federation director reported that its meetings had been '*real drivers for change and accountability*'. Proposals to amend the constitution were under consideration by the four governing bodies as there was no significant budget for the SMB. The re-drafted constitution casts the SMB into a monitoring (rather than strategic) role and recommends that the terms of reference for a full governing body make it more explicit that the school-based governing bodies are to monitor their schools' contributions to the federation. The revised constitution also foresees a reduced number of SMB meetings (three times a year). A chair of governors did not think that the role of the governing bodies had developed over the life-time of the federation. While governors' responsibilities and statutory duties had increased substantially, their role had not really developed and the SMB meeting was simply another 'talking shop'.

This federation also had a Student Parliament which continued to promote student voice and so may be seen as a contribution to governance in a broad sense. Once a term members discuss matters of federation-wide interest, raised by school councils. The parliament has commissioned research and presented research results to headteachers and deputy headteachers directly. This has led to change and also kindled interest in research among students. School meals are one area where research has informed changes, especially with regard to provision and facilities. Discussions in the Parliament also feed into the local Youth Council. Students were consulted during the production of the DVD 'Where are they now?' and for the Citizenship Awards. They have thus had '*a real input ... and that's getting stronger*' (director). Student Parliament meetings moved from the Town Hall to federation schools, which gives student delegates the opportunity to see other schools and dispel misconceptions, especially about special schools. Meetings now take place after school rather than during school hours. A further step in involving students in teaching and learning processes is for them to carry out lesson observations, which, according to the director, was already beginning to happen across schools, but needed to be brought together with a common policy in conjunction with staff appointments and assessment of students' work.

A different governance approach was taken by Federation C. Although there was no joint governing body for the federation, the federation decided to develop legal status by setting itself up as a limited company with a joint governing body. An executive group of headteachers became the board of the limited company and the governors meet as a scrutiny committee as members of the company, in order to get them involved, but without the binding legal power of a hard federation. The choice of company status was generally seen as very successful. It allowed the federation to appoint staff working specifically for the federation, such as the coordinator and an advisor. Human Resources policies had been somewhat unclear with regards to matters such as pension conditions, although this was changing as more people were federation employed. Company status had also made it easier for the federation to enter into contracts with other organisations and to provide services. It gave the federation a sense of structure: '*it is a statement of intent. It's like musketeers stepping into the ring and saying "we really mean this"*' (headteacher, secondary). Capacity for growth in the federation without external pressure was seen as a further advantage. According to the chair of governors of a large federation school, the fact that the federation is a company has led to a stronger feeling of ownership among the schools. '*If you want to make something work, make sure people have a financial interest in it*'.

Both Federations A and B had shared governance committees but with limited authority. In Federation B the committee comprised governors from each school but with no statutory powers. In both cases the meetings of governors provided a forum for communication and discussion rather than decisions. In both cases, there was a strong commitment to respecting the individual ethos of schools, and indeed their governing bodies. In Federation A, a joint governor training had developed which was now being taken up by the LA.

Federation E, however, had proceeded from the earlier partnership board to a federated governing body of the three schools. This, the most radical development among the case studies, had not been without challenges along the way. The original proposal for the federation had included bringing the three schools into one building but without an explicit plan to have only one school, although such a possibility was under consideration as a possible long-term option. In the absence of a definitive long-term policy several factors became apparent. Firstly, the process of developing the system had caused some difficulties in the early stages. As one interviewee noted, *'I was absolutely astounded to learn that the first time the three governing bodies had come together was just over a month ago'*. The changes of headteacher at the secondary school interacted as these reflected different views by those in post compared with the LA's vision, but the change of key staff was disruptive, both because this had resulted in three different heads and because some secondary staff felt their voice was lessened.

The governors initially also had concerns. The discussion of a 'soft' or 'hard' federation was reported by one governor to be a *'sticking point'* but in the end they had decided to *'bite the bullet'* and support the hard version. Governance was initially through a partnership board although there was a separate project board which guided the PFI building of the new school. The partnership board included three governors from each school and their headteachers. The director of education described the relationship between these as *'The partnership board.... being the operational doer and the project board being the executive arm that would take key decisions if the partnership board were unable to take them'*. The development of the model had not been easy, with both practical concerns (e.g. how many governors per school) and other matters particular to specific schools. The director thought that, *'if anybody wants to know how to do it, we can tell them how to do it, now, and based on our mistakes. But, you know, you never learn unless you make mistakes.'*

In the early stages, the governing bodies were seen to be pulling in different directions at times. They were in a difficult position. As governors, they had a duty to consider the development of the federation, but they also took seriously their responsibility towards their own school. This caused tensions *'I think everybody was pulling in their own direction, as it were, and it wasn't coming together'* (headteacher, secondary). Each had its own culture and history and had different degrees of interest in and commitment to either federating or the importance of the inclusion agenda. There were also technical questions regarding the legal status of a joint body and the basis for representation for each school; would the secondary school, by nature of its size, have an inbuilt majority of governors?

Nevertheless, the governors were positive in principle, not least because they could see the benefits of the new building that came with the federation. They would have liked joint meetings of the governing bodies earlier in the planning stage but they had voted in favour of the federation and governors interviewed articulated benefits in terms of joint working and sharing expertise. However, these early positive perspectives were to some extent replaced by doubts as the realities of the federation became apparent, e.g. budget decisions.

The early days of the federated governing body required a substantial commitment from its members. A number of sub-committees were set up to which tasks were delegated. These

were not organised around schools but themes, seen as an important decision. Another fundamental issue was the decision to pool all schools' budgets; *'We couldn't do what we now do if we hadn't got that (single budget)'* (executive director). Similarly, the workforce reform received *'outright opposition from both (primary and secondary) schools until the new secondary head gave his support for (what he termed) this 'brilliant idea''* (executive director). By the end of the study the federation was able to address economies of scale and there was support for the single budget.

The partnership board, set up initially, was replaced in April 2005 by the federated governing body which took over the responsibilities from the three separate governing bodies, which were disbanded. These two bodies had the benefit of committed and highly respected chairs who were able to steer the development of the federation during these challenging times with sensitivity and efficiency widely assisted by those in the committees. It was apparent also that by the summer of 2006 members of the federated governing body generally had high regard for their colleagues. The difficulties and contentiousness of some issues were recognised but there was also appreciation of the positive contribution of governors:

*'When the governing bodies were dissolved and we created the federated governing body, then it took on a whole new meaning and people were starting to look, particularly at that level, at the good of the federation'* (member of federated governing body)

These examples provide a flavour of the range of governance models developed by federations. Most are towards the 'soft' end of the continuum with governance responsibility remaining primarily with the constituent schools. The joint bodies, with various titles, were set up to facilitate, provide for a discussion and opportunities for joint strategic planning but generally they had only limited decision-making powers. In this sense, Federation E provides a substantially different model, but one that was regarded as necessary given the nature of the federation. In some case studies, governance remained throughout the 'life' of the federation (e.g. Federation G) while others debated governance and amended slightly, rejecting a move towards harder-edged arrangements (e.g. Federation F) and others evolved (e.g. Federation L).

#### 4.5 Financial aspects

The Federations Programme was funded to a total of about £16 million over the three years 2003-04 to 2005-06. The amounts allocated to each federation varied and were related to their original bids. It is worth noting that other federations have developed outside this funded programme which we have evaluated. Some had small start up allocations (about £10,000 being a typical figure) while others had no financial input from the DCSF. These non-funded and minimally funded federations were not part of the present evaluation.

Federations in the project used their finance in a number of different ways. Some appointed a director/chief executive but others either deliberately chose not to or were unable to do this as no suitable person was identified, e.g. Federation D where the secondary Head took on this role in addition to his normal duties. In Federation E, the acting executive director was also head of one of the three constituent schools.

Towards the end of the evaluation we asked key personnel to judge the value for money of their federation. As always, judgements of 'value for money' were difficult to make. For example, In Federation A, while most of those interviewed were convinced of the value of the federation to the schools involved, there were some voices of, if not discontent, then belief that the federation could have done more, and delved more deeply into the lives of the

schools. As one deputy headteacher put it, the federation did not touch the *'nitty gritty of the children's lives'* but rather remained at a surface level (in that person's opinion). However, this report is offset by the obvious enthusiasm of others for the federation and its work. Perhaps most profound were the repeated calls for the replacement of the LA by the federation; this clearly shows a trust in the workings and outcomes of the federation which is greater, at least, than that placed in the local government body.

A further difficulty in judging value for money in this federation is that it was not a new venture for the schools involved: they were already part of a network, and it is not possible to say what initiatives would or would not have been undertaken by these schools had they not formed into a federation. The most obvious example is its behaviour project, which did require the financial support offered by the federation. Other initiatives - such as the fresh start programme - might well have happened without the federation funding; the same may be said of the discussions surrounding choice of specialism for new bids.

Variations of view were also apparent in Federation F, although there were indications that some economies of scale have been, or may be achieved. The 'digital divide' project was, in the director's view, potentially cost-effective. This initiative is federation-wide and seeks to address the differential in access to on-line resources among the student population. Bulk purchases for ICT, facilitated by the e-learning director, were underway. Also, the e-learning director will look at specifications for whiteboards in cases where schools intend to acquire these, to ensure that whiteboards meet the requirements of intended use, and organise bulk orders. IT managers were said to welcome this support, as assessing specifications is time-consuming. However, one middle manager, who is part of the ICT strand, commented that only two schools seem to be willing to take up the e-learning suggestions and recommendations regarding IT provision.

Federation E also reported the benefits of providing IT services across the whole LA in this case. Cost benefits had also been attributed to the appointment by the federation of a business manager at a senior level who had already produced very welcome financial benefits in different area. However, this federation might suffer financially as the overall financial position was not entirely clear. By summer 2006 it had the budget of each school, which brought benefits in terms of the LA's formula. The federation also had three specialisms and the business manager was concerned that this would not be allowed, so leading to loss of grant. On the other hand, the federation was entrepreneurial: its initiatives had brought new income (e.g. IT, see above) and other initiatives were planned (e.g. curriculum materials) but the nature of the federation would need recognition in terms of core funding if the model was to be sustainable.

Federation E's move to a single federation budget was welcomed but had not been an easy process: the tendency for heads to want to keep control of their budget was in tension with possible benefits of pooling and producing economies of scale.

In Federation B, both headteachers were clear that the work of the federation had been of great use and value to both schools, and had enhanced the teaching and learning in both establishments. Not all initiatives undertaken through the federation have been useful, but the heads felt that even these have been of value, in that much was learned from them and mainly that such failures paved the way for the efficient further workings of the federation. Perhaps the most cogent indicator of the perceived value for money of the federation was the dedication of the headteachers to continuing its work and to continuing to fund the work of the federation manager in one form or another.

In Federation F the director stated that federations were not expensive, but that you *had* to pay for capacity, a *'critical amount of funding'* was required to make things happen.

However, most federation activities could be done at nominal cost, the biggest cost was staff. There was cost effectiveness in shared intelligence about contracts and services and better value. Some savings were realised through shared appointments, although it was 'a bit early' to speak of significant savings (director). The added value lay in the level of provision that the federation was able to make: with regard to staff, CPD (staff could access a wider range of CPD), and leadership. The federation had created cross-school leadership opportunities, allowed shared leadership in certain instances, made headteachers feel empowered by being in a group and less isolated, allowed them to share solutions to common issues and emboldened them to challenge others (colleagues, contractors, etc.) in ways that they may not have been so confident to do on their own. With regard to students, there was value added by the experiences they had had, the access to certain aspects of the curriculum and enrichment which they did not have before, the bigger voice they have had through the school councils and the Parliament. Also, they had more recognition through events like Citizenship Awards and they benefited from best practice filtering down to classroom level. 'It is', in the director's words, 'questionable whether that would have happened in all of those schools, had we not worked collaboratively'.

A headteacher rated financial effectiveness positively, stating that resources used for teaching and learning activities, initial teacher training (ITT), and for creating opportunities for students had been well spent. However, while attainment across the federation had risen, initiatives needed time to embed. Furthermore, one interviewee suggested that less infrastructure and fewer posts would have allowed for more practical strategies in schools and support for school staff. A chair of governors also questioned the cost/benefit ratio stating that, while the federation overall had achieved some positive results, it was questionable whether these were worth the money spent. These negative views were unusual across the range of interviewees in the case studies.

Finally, in Federation I, one secondary headteacher distinguished value for money from 'added value'. He commented that his main concern was not added value, because 'we are nowhere near that yet'. For that to happen, the common budget would need to be increased substantially. However, he rated the financial effectiveness of the federation at the highest level on a 5-point scale, because 'everything we do is run by the finances'. Other headteachers gave financial effectiveness the same rating: one suggested the federation was 'massively cost effective' in terms of best value for staff training (a view shared by other heads), economies of scale, and potential for future savings.

These opinions suggest that those working in the federations, particularly their leaders, considered they had provided substantial value for money. There were economies of scale, the benefits from sharing resources and expertise, and benefits also from developing greater entrepreneurial activity. In all cases, the federation was supported by DCSF funding, which ended after March 2006, so the intention of federations to carry on was an important indicator supportive of value for money. Sustainability is discussed in Section 4.7.

#### 4.6 Role of national agendas

The Federation Programme was just one of many Government initiatives over the period of the research. We therefore sought views on the impact of their federation on other agendas and impact of other agendas on their work developing a federation. The main topics addressed were inclusion, 14-19 curriculum and Every Child Matters (ECM), although our interviewees did refer to other matters. Towards the end we also discussed the possible implications of Trust school status but, as with the respondents to our survey, our case studies had little to say on the subject. This is interesting in itself. Partly this was due to the newness of the proposal, but also because interviewees could not identify obvious

implications. For example, in Federation I one secondary school began to explore the contents of the white paper (parental choice would have a great impact in this area), but abandoned this process because of perceived uncertainty regarding the proposals at that time.

A headteacher of another school in this federation saw no relevance of these initiatives in his school, except for ECM. In a primary school, an assistant headteacher commented, such initiatives would be discussed and included in the strategic thinking in the federation leadership meetings, but apart from the ECM initiative, there would be little, if any, evidence of these filtering down to classroom level. In fact, a federation-wide INSET day in February 2006 focused on the Every Child Matters agenda, how it affected the various departments in the schools and how it could be implemented within curriculum areas. The ECM agenda was also acknowledged in other federations, but more at the level of schools than the federation, unless there was joint training.

Inclusion, by contrast, was a key element in many federations' plans, echoing the result found in our survey (See Table 1). Federation A had developed a 'Fresh Start' initiative whereby the federated schools work together to prevent permanent exclusions of students. Cases of pupils nearing permanent exclusion status were brought to federation meetings, and heads 'bid' for those pupils to take on to their rolls for a definite period of time. Pupils facing exclusion were 'loaned' to other schools in the federation with the intention of giving them a 'fresh start' in a new environment. The emphasis of the programme was to remove pupils from the situations in which they were having behavioural difficulties and to give them a 'fresh start'. Pupils were dealt with on a case by case basis during the heads' meetings, with different schools collaborating. All costs were met by the schools, other than transport (which remained the remit of the LA). Schools even contributed, where necessary, to the purchase of a uniform for attending the new school. This programme was integral to the federation's work on lowering exclusions and was successful.

Also, at the outset of the federation, a decision was taken to invest in a project aimed at dealing with behavioural issues across the federation. A deputy from the special school was delegated to visit each school in the federation and to compile a comprehensive report for each school (as well as a précis for the federation as a whole). This work formed the basis for the revamping of behaviour policies within each school (though it did not lead to a federation-wide policy, emphasising again the culture of individuality in the federation). Once this phase was complete, a member of staff from the special school was employed by the federation on a part time basis to continue the work on developing behaviour strategies. The deputy head who carried out this work later argued strongly that the project changed the perception of special school teachers throughout the federation.

The most important agenda for Federation E was that of Inclusion. The special school had a history of innovation in the area and its head (later the executive director) was a vigorous and committed advocate of inclusive education. The commitment of the LA and the need to address how to replace school buildings combined to make inclusion a major driver. An earlier bid to develop units in partner mainstream schools was rejected in favour of the concept of the single campus. As the then acting executive director commented:

*Very quickly we didn't like the feel of that, the Government didn't like the feel of that, it wasn't really moving the Inclusion further forward, so we got back together and came up with a scheme where we would put (special school) lock, stock and barrel in the centre of a (campus) concept.*

This change of direction was fundamentally driven by an Inclusion agenda which was seen as central:

*...we could start to build an inclusive setting that would help drive all the other things that we wanted to do, rather than having the special school just located in the mainstream context, which would have meant a grace and favour placement...We wanted this (federation) to belong to all those pupils who were willing and under one roof (acting executive director).*

Interviews with staff and governors indicated support of inclusion, albeit mixed with a strong sense of practicality. For example, special school staff were keen to build on the collaboration practice that had already been developed, but were acutely aware that many of their pupils had substantial needs that required very careful planning and provisions.

After the single campus had opened, staff were talking positively about the experience in those early weeks. For example, secondary pupils had become engaged with special school pupils to support and 'buddy' them. It was recognised that these were early days and the development of true inclusive education would require careful implementation of many months if not years. But the signs were positive:

*Little examples like some of our older students actually going and working and helping to feed children in the (special school) section. Staff actually going over to (special school) staff and picking their brains about different ways of working with children. People starting to organise joint activities at lunchtimes. It's a process of accretion really ... we need (now) to create structures which (support Inclusion). (headteacher, secondary)*

The acting headteacher of the special school had selected an office that was central and on a thoroughfare, both symbolic and facilitative for access. She was positive about progress but recognised the need for other staff to train in skills possessed by her staff, including de-escalation of conflict and confrontation and positive handling. But already some of her pupils had been involved in a joint musical theatre production and the special school pupils were benefiting from engagement in a community - *'they can go out on the (campus) green and be surrounded by other kids and staff'* but the benefits were two-way; *"they actually see (name)...rather than "a wheelchair"*.

The adoption and implementation of national agendas and policies within the locality created a rapidly changing unstable local context that led to high levels of uncertainty within the schools and leadership of Federation H. The combined agendas of inclusion, Academies and Building Schools for the Future (BSF) were particularly influential. The LA planned for the BESD day schools to be relocated onto mainstream school sites. Currently, how these agendas will impact on the development of the federation remains unclear. However, one headteacher reflected on the complexity and pace of change:

*It's very difficult, things change very rapidly... It is linked in with Academies and BSF programme where they've [LA] got district working and they're going to have Academies linking with geographical areas. (federation headteacher)*

and went on to speculate that the reorganization may have a negative impact on the work of the federation:

*If you are talking about BSF and Academies being a complex network, the federation is another level of complexity bought over... and district working is going to hold us back. (federation headteacher)*

Federation C was very proactive in taking charge of different Government initiatives in the area, and this mediation of policies was seen as a key role of the federation. The 14-19 agenda is a good example of this, where it is at federation level that programmes are being developed to serve this age group. However, the ECM agenda is seen as somewhat problematic in terms of how it has impacted on the LA and its relations with the schools. *'Their leadership is struggling because there is a big new agenda out there. The restructuring means they are facing different directions rather than focussing on education'*. The federation has in a way moved onto this vacated territory, but the LA, it was claimed, feels threatened by this.

*We thought that the LA would be happy for us to move onto this vacated territory, but on the contrary they feel threatened by the idea of losing control. We are a touch disappointed that they haven't just said, you are doing well, but have been rather protective and reluctant. It is a big cultural change.* (federation director).

There were tensions with the LA over a number of specific issues. For example, the federation wanted to employ its advanced skills teachers (ASTs) to work within the federation rather than be used LA wide. This was seen as likely to be more effective because *'LA wide there is a poorly coordinated system, and therefore there is a tendency for headteachers to use ASTs just in their schools. There are some very good people in the county, but quite a few who are not working well for us'* (headteacher)

Generally, the tension in Government policies between collaboration and competition was seen as a challenge to interviewees across federations. Government policy was perceived as presenting irreconcilable directions, with encouragement of partnership working on the one hand and expansion of large schools fostering competition on the other. In light of dramatically falling rolls, the latter did not make sense and contributed to severely strained relations between institutions. Also, parental choice was seen as undermining partnership. While the aim of raising standards and the notion of accountability were accepted, the criteria for achieving these were considered to be arbitrary and suggested the lack of joined-up thinking. Another point was the 'initiative overload' from Government. One federation had thought about turning itself into a Trust, but is conscious of a number of thorny issues arising from this, including the question whether it would be allowed.

#### 4.7 Sustainability

Although there were very high levels of commitment to their federations, and satisfaction that the initiative had been a substantial success, there were also concerns about sustainability once the grant finished. For example, in Federation C there were mixed views. On the positive side, the trust that had been built up and the general feeling that the federation had had positive impacts suggest that efforts will be made to sustain the federation. In particular, the shared vocational provision was becoming embedded and popular. The company structure gave an added incentive for the federation to sustain itself over time, while the use of external consultants both added significant capacity and had put in place a cadre of people with responsibility primarily to the federation rather than to individual schools.

An important programme with regards to the future development of the federation was the development of a central data base across the federation, which means schools will share and be able to look at each others' data. This move towards a shared database was set to change relations between schools significantly, possibly leading to a system where accountability really was to the federation rather than to individual schools, with schools in the federation working like departments within a school rather than being entirely separate entities.

On the negative side, resourcing was increasingly becoming an issue.

*It was not a huge amount....., but it is a shame that this isn't being continued. The problem for us is that a lot of Government funding is being directed to areas of deprivation. While we would applaud this as an aim, it is often at the expense of rural areas where deprivation is often hidden and not picked up by the indicators used. This means that we are working within a falling resource. Therefore this is a considerable barrier to school contributions. (Head of Federation).*

This resourcing issue had left the federation very stretched, and working with a limited number of people who were therefore very busy. This was an even greater problem for small schools, where it may often be the same person who is asked to do everything and is always called out to meetings. The federation had been trying to overcome resource barriers by attempting to secure additional resources. This was being done by attempting to widen the involvement of stakeholders and partners, exploring Education Improvement Partnership opportunities, increasing contributions from schools, and making cost savings.

The fact that the federation was strongly personality driven (two heads) was acknowledged as a disadvantage. This had been evident as one of the heads was off ill, which destabilised meetings somewhat. There was the additional issue of motivating people at middle level leaders level, who were working hard in their department, to take on additional responsibilities across the federation. Parents and the community needed to be more involved in future, according to one interviewed governor *'if you asked parents now, I don't think any of them would know what the federation is'*.

A key sustainability issue is how relations and power structures will evolve with regards to the LA. The federation would like to have more funding delegated from the authority.

*'The reason is we are a more affluent area, and if we got a per capita share we would be better off than at present. So we would kind of be robbing the poor, if you like, but you can understand our reason for wanting to do it, and as a member of the federation I support that tactic (headteacher).*

*Where there are services that we as a federation can do more efficiently, more effectively, then we should be doing that...However, do we have the capacity to do that? (headteacher)*

Clearly, then, the federation can be seen as part of an evolution whereby, as the role of the LA in education has weakened, schools are coming together to create intermediate structures that can take up some of the roles which LAs are no longer able to fulfil effectively. The head of the federation believed that the move, certainly in this LA, was towards more and more provision of services from diverse organisations outside the central services of the LA. This was seen as a general trend, but one that was particularly strong here due to the diversity of the LA.

*It seems likely that the future lies with us taking control of our own area and moving on.... We want to get stuff away from the county that we are responsible and accountable for. But at the moment we don't yet have enough structures in place (deputy head).*

How the role of the LA within Every Child Matters and the role of the federation and similar networks can be reconciled is a key future issue, and one that should be an important consideration for national policy.

Federation D expressed concerns about the viability of continuing without the financial support provided through the project. To continue in its current form it will either need to generate income to support continued activity or devolve some of the individual school budgets to the federation. In a sense this will be the acid test as to whether the collaboration has been a worthwhile exercise. Where the collaboration has been valued by the constituents it is more likely that leaders will invest resources in attracting funding or be prepared to make a contribution from their own school budgets. In the short term on-going conversations suggest that while the federation may not exist in its current form there will be elements of federation activity that will continue. For example the use of subject specialists from the secondary school in the primary schools were being negotiated. This would be funded by the primary schools buying into a package. Teachers working together on curriculum issues across the primary schools is also likely to continue. Although, it is unclear as to how this will be resourced.

*Now we've got specialist schools status. We're able to offer language teaching to the primary schools and all four schools are involved in that so whilst the federation funded that activity of our teachers going into teach language in the primary the specialism is now going to provide it and we're going to be able to satisfy the key stage 2 requirements for teaching language. (headteacher, secondary)*

The federation leadership was also exploring alternative sources of funding including the establishment of an Education Improvement Partnership and the possibility of becoming an Academy within a plan for Building Schools for the Future. Most recently the idea of moving towards Trust Status had been discussed. Whatever the outcome, it would seem the federation will continue to search for increased resources and creative solutions to tackle underachievement in this challenging and complex context. The federation structures are likely to be reincarnated into another collaborative arrangement that will be influenced, if not dictated by central Government policy.

In the case of Federation H it could be argued the federation had served its purpose. One stakeholder reflected:

*I wonder whether the federation has passed its sell by date as far as the LEA is concerned because School A is virtually out of special measures and it will come out next time [now removed from special measures]. School B is out of special measures and it is now stable, School C is fine. As far as the federation stuff... we're doing a lot of good stuff but as far as the LEA is concerned the immediate reason, getting two schools out of special measures has now been sorted.*

The forthcoming term (autumn 2006) was a key period in the direction of the federation. It was likely to play an important role in shaping the federation's evolution or decline. The headteachers, federation principal and chair of governors were working to develop a common view of the nature of relationships between schools within the federation, the extent to which schools would collaborate and what protocols and procedures were needed to be put in place to promote, guide and support this work. Ultimately, and probably most importantly, a common view must also be established regarding the status of the federation. Will it move towards becoming 'hard'? Retain the status quo, remaining 'soft'? Or fragment towards independence so that schools can concentrate on building new relationships and networks within the context of locality working? One headteacher summarized the challenge:

*If they are to proceed with the federation as it is, they will have to look at how they are designating these heads of units because that is all they*

*will be. And certainly if the federation became fully federated with a single DCSF number, then at that point the roles of the two current heads would have to be examined as would be the management structures in the places... so the future of the federation, it could continue but in a radically changed form (Federation headteacher)*

A teacher highlighted the value of being part of a Federation:

There are all sorts of initiatives that you can bring on board and if you are part of a federation then you've got a better chance than doing it on your own. *(teacher, School A).*

To date, this federation illustrates the potential for collaborative approaches to halt a downward spiral of educational failure in extremely complex and challenging schools. However, the extent to which this approach can be sustained in the longer term remains unclear.

Federation E has the benefit of a new, very well-resourced school building and a high sense of commitment. In one sense, sustainability is sure as the separate schools have already moved to a federated governing body and are discussing a fundamentally revised staffing structure. Whether the new entity is a federation of these three schools or a new single school, however, is an interesting question. Also the original nature of the initiative, supported by DCSF, requires a positive decision on finance if the current organisation is to be sustained.

The sustainability of Federation A rests on its previous existence; the fact that the schools involved have become federated has not had a massive impact on their ways of working, other than to allow the employment of the federation administrator and to fund certain activities. As with many networks and federations, the initiative provided support to work which would probably have been done among the schools anyway, with the exception of the behaviour project. (It is fair to say, however, that this project may well have a very large and long term impact on the lives of the schools involved.) The federated schools have continued to bid for funding, with some success. In terms of relationships among the members of the federation, it would seem probable that the collaborations will continue, particularly as many of the schools are members of other groups and networks (even if these groups are, according to one headteacher, less effective than the federation due to having a more loose structure). Overall, then, this federation does seem to have developed a successful and sustainable model of collaboration providing issues of funding can be resolved, and power and capacity differentials within the federation continue to be handled sensitively.

## 5. Discussion

### 5.1 Introduction

This study of the Federations Programme has revealed a greatly variegated picture. The nine case studies, in particular, have indicated that there is a lack of conformity on all the major themes by which we have analysed the data. Whether aims and focus, models of governance, models of leadership and management, or any other dimension we have selected, the common result is variation.

Research suggests successful change is underpinned by ownership of the change residing with teachers (Fullan, 1991), in a similar vein Datnow and colleagues (2002) consider all change to be local. This study supports these claims. Where the federations worked well, as evidenced by our case studies, and the schools were keen for their continuation it was clear they had addressed their own internally driven priorities in their own way. These were schools coming together with a common purpose rather than being forced into alliances to solve problems defined and driven by outside agencies. These initiatives could be built upon positive action, to enhance existing good practice, but there were also examples of schools working together to support one or more schools experiencing significant difficulties. However, in the latter case also, the schools developed a federation that was more collegial and equal than a simple 'good school - weak school' combination, with its implications of differential power and value.

The notion of interdependence is associated with successful collaboration particularly in urban and challenging contexts (Ainscow and West, 2006). This was found in the present study where schools in the more successful federations had developed strong interdependent relationships based on the assumption that all partners within the Federation could learn from each other, rather than the relationships promoting a one way transfer of ideas, knowledge and resources from the 'good' school to the 'weak' school. This was viewed as being important in avoiding a dependency culture where the weaker school is reduced to a 'performance training sect' holding negligible internal capacity (Hargreaves, 2003).

In this section we consider the major outcomes of the study. We examine the evidence that relates both to process as well as outcomes. We then consider the implications of the study for the further development of federations now that the specific funding for this programme has ended, and the implications for the organisation of schooling in this country.

### 5.2 Goals

Effective change programmes tend to set a limited number of clearly defined goals (Stringfield, 1995). The range of the goals set by federations reflected those found in successful school improvement initiatives (Harris et al, 2006; Hopkins, 2001; Potter et al, 2002). In the present case all federations were required to have as a main goal the raising of standards. Nine out of ten heads confirmed this was their main goal in our first survey, although they were less convinced about the likely impact of federating: just over half predicted impact would be 'quite strong', and just over half 'very strong'. Increasing inclusive education was the next most frequent goal with heads divided as to whether it was a main or secondary goal. Other goals such as improving recruitment and retention or provision for the gifted and talented were much less prominent. The main focus was on Key Stages 3 and 4 but there was a wide range of target pupil groups, although low achieving pupils were most frequently mentioned, by a third of heads.

In practice the approaches taken by the federations were many and varied. There were specific initiatives which could be based on CPD or new systems. Common to these approaches was the belief that combining the expertise to be found in different schools, and across phases and types of school, provided a greater potential for positive development and impact.

This approach was grounded in the schools' own needs analysis and jointly determined targets and activities. Variation therefore was needs-led and reflected local circumstances rather than externally determined targets and activities. The federations welcomed and responded very positively to the facilitation of their actions resulting from the extra finance and freedom to determine their own priorities within an overall framework. This contrasts with a system built on targets to be achieved or strategies to be adopted which have been set externally, and has support from previous research (Teddlie & Reynolds, 2000).

### 5.3 Generating relationships, communication, trust and motivation

Successful partnerships and collaborations tend to be underpinned by strong relationships between those involved and increased interaction between actors can further enhance such relationships (Latour, 2005). As relationships develop, and trust and motivation flourish, social capital is expanded and the potential for school improvement increases (Hargreaves, 2001). The federations understood the need to generate collegiality by actively building relationships. However, due to their varied structures the actions to develop trust and good relationships took many forms. The model of the successful school supporting a school in difficulties was not a common form of federation in this study. One of those originally selected as a case study opted out after phase 1 of the evaluation and a second opted out after Phase 2. We therefore have very limited evidence on this model of federation. This is unfortunate as it might be predicted that this model would pose the greatest challenges. In cases where federation members can collaborate as equals, by agreement, the process of developing trust may be less challenging. However, other studies (Ainscow & West, 2006; Chapman & Allen, 2006) have highlighted the potential for stronger schools to support their weaker counterparts through the development of communities and constellations of practice (Wenger, 1998). Therefore, despite the limited evaluative evidence from this study it is likely that the federations policy has much to offer schools in these challenging contexts.

The evidence generally supports the view that there is a relationship between the 'hardness' of the federation (see Section 5.5) and the development of trust and good working relationships. Where the federation was focussed on collaborative practice by agreement, there were relatively few indications of difficulty other than practical concerns such as the time necessary for key players to meet. Where the federation was towards the hard end of the continuum and there was a statutory basis for the federation there was clear evidence that the building of trust was a fundamental requirement that took a great deal of time and effort to be successful.

This was also true where, even with soft federations, issues of autonomy of schools and power relationships were seen as important. Here too the schools needed to tread carefully, to work through the issues over a period of time, to be sensitive and have open discussion.

Motivation within federations varied with leaders consistently showing high levels of commitment and motivation. These included the headteachers, chairs of governors and federation directors or coordinators. Below this level, however, there was often a decreasing sense of awareness of the federation and of motivation linked to its goals. There was a trend over time, of increasing awareness as federations developed and became more meaningful to staff, but even at the end of the project the notion of being in a federation had relatively

little direct impact on many staff. Accountability mechanisms were developed, however, with protocols and agreements regarding resource management and commitment.

Parents' understanding of the federation was usually even less developed. This was often not a major issue, for example where the focus was on teacher CPD, but many federations did publicise their existence. Harder federations, particularly where there were changes in the statutory basis of the schools' relationship, needed to take effective action not only to inform parents but also to engage them. Parents know what a school is but the concept of a federation, and particularly its implications for their school, is a very different matter. Harder federations, therefore, paid detailed attention to engaging and informing parents. Newsletters, branding and other information methods were common. The governing body as a whole was a key player. In some cases additional structures for parents' voices were set up to encourage dialogue.

#### 5.4 Leadership

The relationship between headteacher leadership and school effectiveness has been demonstrated in numerous studies over several decades (Teddlie & Reynolds, 2000). Findings from this study indicate that the success of a federation depends on the quality of the headteachers involved. This suggests that the quality of headteachers' leadership is not only important in terms of the effectiveness of individual schools but also for the development of effective collaborations between schools. Headteachers in this study tended to display characteristics of 'system leaders' (Fullan, 2004) by taking an evolutionary theory perspective where they could see the benefit of collaboration for both individual organizations and the wider system (Alter & Hage, 1993).

The leadership structures put in place varied across the federations. Some appointed a federation director (the titles varied) but these typically had a facilitating role with few delegated powers. This reflected both the nature of the federations and also the lack of clarity about the legal aspects of federation headship that continued throughout the study. For example, the federation that comprised three schools combining on a single campus moved from a structure of three headteacher posts plus federation director to a new structure by the summer of 2006 when the resignation of the last headteacher allowed the federation director to take on the legal status of headteacher.

The issue of legal status of the leadership and governance of federations is an important issue and the development of the 2007 School Governance (Federations) (England) Regulations (DCSF, 2006) appears to go some way to providing a stronger framework. However, and perhaps more importantly the underlying purpose of federations seems to be key. It has been argued that one of the original policy drivers for federations was the view that there were insufficient potential headteachers of the necessary quality to lead the country's schools (Glatter & Harvey, 2006). The development of a system where a leader could have responsibility for two or more schools was a response to this view. However, the federations in the present study generally did not set up models that reflected this. As noted, federation leaders tended to have facilitating roles, and in some cases a headteacher of a constituent school took on the role because of the failure to appoint. Typically this was seen as *primus inter pares* ('first among equals'). As such it reflected a very different model compared to that given above in a harder federation, or that exhibited in one of the federations that dropped out of our study, where there was an executive head with a powerful role over the constituent schools.

Models of distributive leadership within schools have some applicability in federations, but there are further issues to consider. As we have shown, the present federations varied in how they distributed leadership and this was not necessarily similar to the way that

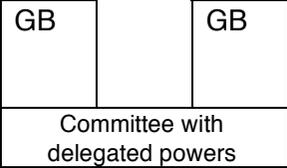
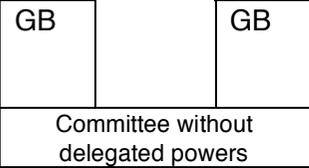
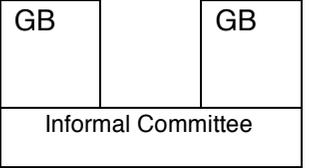
responsibility is delegated in a school. Rather, the general model was for the schools to continue to have autonomy - federations frequently stressed how important this was to their functioning - under the facilitation of the federation director - although in some federations there was evidence of a greater degree of distributed leadership.

## 5.5 Governance

Sullivan and Skelcher (2002) provide a helpful taxonomy of forms of collaboration and rules of governance within the public sector. They argue that the loosest form of collaboration involves informal networks underpinned by self governance through mutual norms and obligations and shared values and trust. Within this continuum networks become defined as partnerships when parties agree to share a limited amount of information. Such partnerships become more formalized and move towards becoming a federation when there is agreement to undertake joint activity and constitute a formal governing body. However, it is argued that the defining feature of a federation is the creation of a *“federal structure in which participating bodies agree to devolve upwards some of their autonomy”* (p. 43), this is underpinned by external Government through an overarching constitution. At the extreme, Sullivan and Skelcher describe the merger of participating bodies into a single organization as integration.

A federation continuum became apparent during this study and a typology was developed by the DCSF. The main dimension may be termed ‘hard-soft’ and is the construct mainly used during this report. A further refinement concerns whether the federation has a statutory or non-statutory basis (Figure 5.1). At the ‘hard’ end of the continuum are federations with hard governance, established under statute (Section 24 of the Education Act 2002). These have a single governing body covering all schools. Next are federations set up under Section 26 of the Education Act 2002, which may be described as ‘soft governance’. Here each federation has its own governing body but the federation has a joint governance / strategic committee with delegated powers.

**Figure 5.1 Federations Continuum**

	Hard Governance Federation	Soft Governance Federation	Soft Federation	Informal, Loose Collaboration
	<b>STATUTORY</b>		<b>NON-STATUTORY</b>	
<b>Diagram</b>				
<b>Governing Body?</b>	<b>Single governing body</b> shared by all schools	Each school has its own governing body, but the federation has <b>joint governance/strategic committee with delegated power</b>	Each school has its own governing body; the federation, however, has <b>joint governance/strategic committee without delegated powers</b>	Each school has its own governing body and the <b>group of schools meet informally on ad-hoc basis.</b>
<b>Statutory?</b>	Yes. Hard governance federations are established using <b>Federations Regulations</b> made under Section 24 Education Act 2002.	Yes. Soft governance federations established using <b>Collaboration Regulations</b> , made under Section 26 Education Act 2002.	No. Schools can set up soft federations without having to follow regulations.	No. Schools can form informal collaborations without having to follow regulations.
<b>Common goals?</b>	All schools share common goals through <b>SLA and protocol</b> ; having single governing body allows for <b>efficient, streamlined decision making in all areas.</b>	All schools share common goals through <b>SLA and protocol</b> ; joint committee can make <b>joint decisions in some areas, but not all.</b>	All schools share common goals through <b>protocol</b> ; joint committee <b>can make joint recommendations</b> , but it is up to individual governing body to authorise plans.	All schools share common goals and can work together <b>on ad-hoc issues and informal agreements.</b>
<b>Common Budget?</b>	No, but having a single governing body allows for <b>prompt budgetary decisions</b> on behalf of the group of schools.	No, but if JSC has budgetary powers delegated to it, they can make prompt budgetary decisions for the group of schools.	No, but it could <b>make budgetary recommendations</b> for the group, which in turn would have to be approved by individual governing body.	No. However, if group of schools wish to commit budget, they would need to go back to their individual governing bodies to approve.
<b>Shared staff?</b>	<b>Common management and appointments</b> are agreed in a simple, effective manner. Sometimes choose to have single headteacher across group of schools.	<b>Common management positions and appointments</b> , but need to have protocol/contract to underpin commitment to shared posts.	<b>Common management positions and appointments</b> , but need to have protocols/contract to underpin commitment to shared posts.	Unlikely to have common management positions, but if they exist, they have to be agreed in a protocol/contract.

The other two types of federation are non-statutory. In a soft federation each school continues to have its own governing body. In addition, the federation has joint governance with a strategic committee but without delegated powers. Finally, the fourth type is not a federation as such but a group of schools meeting for a particular purpose. This may be termed a loose collaboration. In practice variation may also exist in this last group in terms of the issue that brings them together to work collaboratively and also the non-statutory structures they agree short of delegated powers.

Within this study, most of the federations would fall into the category of non-statutory or soft governance statutory federations. This may suggest that while schools involved in the pilot could see the advantage of collaborating to achieve economies of scale and transfer of knowledge and resources, ultimately they value their independence and powers of autonomy.

Governors, especially chairs of governing bodies, were typically key to the setting up of the federation but thereafter the role of governing bodies was often relatively limited. This was the case more often with softer federations, where reports to individual governing bodies or relatively informal joint committees of governors were seen as more appropriate. Harder federations, however, needed to set up systems of governance. One federation moved through a partnership board to a federated governing body over the period of the study, as the nature of the federation took shape and responsibilities changed.

Central to the structure of governance was finance. In most federations schools retained their own budgets. The discussion regarding finance, therefore, was firstly to agree on the use of the DCSF grant under this programme and secondly whether, and if so by how much, to pool resources, and what accountability measures could be put into place. The federation's approach to pooling resources was an important factor in its likely sustainability after the funding ceased. It was evident that loosening and giving up control of the school budget was a fundamental issue for schools. Most avoided moving down this line, a position that was possible where this was not essential to the federation's operation. Where a single budget was desirable or necessary, as was the case for hard federations with a statutory basis, schools had to face the issue head on and this hit at the heart of their autonomy.

## 5.6 Role of national policies

Federations are just one of many Government initiatives. Federating is one approach to addressing a number of goals by drawing upon collegiality. Federations, potentially, have the power to release more resources for a common good: the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. The evidence from our study is that many operated in a fashion similar to other forms of partnership. Our evidence indicates a relatively low level of interest in changing governance structures. Initially, the proposal for Trust schools, which were introduced in the 2005 White Paper, was not being picked up by many of these schools. Rather, these federations were developing management and day to day operational systems rather than new forms of governance to further their aims. However, more recently, since the Government's publication of the Education and Inspections Act (DfES, 2006) there has been increased interest in the concept of Trust status from some federations but on the whole federation leaders remain sceptical of the benefits of Education Improvement Partnerships (DfES, 2005).

There were two main, related national agendas, apart from raising standards that the federations did address. Firstly, inclusion was a factor in most federations and, for some, this was central concern. Inclusion, however, has different foci and meanings. In some

cases the focus was on pupils with special educational needs. Inclusion was seen as a key philosophical driver to how education should be delivered. That is, inclusive education was seen as necessary, with support in local schools for local pupils. The federation that was moving to a single campus for a primary, secondary and special school was the most advanced version of this position by far, but other federations had made serious attempts to develop inclusive practice.

The example of the single campus school is instructive in this regard as it was a radical initiative which posed significant challenges at many levels. Also, the federation moved increasingly towards the model that came into operation as this evaluation ended, a hard federation with a single governing body and a single federation director. It was expected that the three schools would continue for the foreseeable future, as a planned development of skills and ethos is undertaken. This evolutionary approach is a careful strategy to develop inclusion but on the basis of experience of what works best.

In other cases social inclusion was the main focus. Examples include the development of a facility to address pupils with challenging and disruptive behaviour. Here the aim was to prevent these pupils having to leave the area.

The second major agenda was that of Every Child Matters (ECM). This was less evident in a number of federations, but seen as more significant in those that were also developing inclusion. The ECM agenda also raises the interaction between the federation and the LA. Some saw the federation as a key focus for developing ECM. In part there was a sense of feeling more comfortable that there was educational expertise, especially where the new director of Children's Services did not have an educational background. However, federations may also be in a key strategic role if their focus is ECM-related.

## 5.7 Outcomes

Partnership and collaborative arrangements are an attractive means for improving educational outcomes further than the traditional levers for improvement such as tests, targets and National Strategies have managed. However, we need to know much more about the impact of such initiatives on cognitive outcomes. To date, the evidence pertaining to the impact of networks and partnership on cognitive outcomes is both mixed and limited (Earl, 2006; Mongon & Chapman, 2006; Sammons, 2007). This study further compounds the situation. Although raising standards was the main goal of the federations, headteachers had concerns at the onset about how much impact federating could have, at least in the time span of the project: over half thought likely impact would be quite strong while under half predicted it would be very strong. Tables 8 and 9 indicate similar, carefully optimistic predictions across a range of possible outcomes. The headteachers' views towards the end of the study were a little less positive. Two thirds (64.7%) judged their federation to have been somewhat successful in raising achievement, with 28.4% reporting their having been very successful (Table 11). Our analysis of GCSE and other data failed to identify a clear federation effect (Section 3.3). There was some evidence in favour of federations in terms of percentage of pupils gaining 5A\* - G grades (Table 20) but a lack of evidence from other analyses.

Both headteachers and governors also considered their schools to have been successful with respect to Inclusion, Gifted and Talented and addressing recruitment and retention (Table 11). Quite strong effects of federation were also reported on pupils' behaviour and attitude to learning. Other positive impacts were reported by both heads and chairs of governors (Tables 12, 13a,b).

The headteachers had a reasonable point in questioning whether impact on attainment could be attributed to federation over a period of 2-3 years. Also, these initiatives were not 'quick fixes' but mostly aimed at developing practices and systems to support the constituent schools over many years. While changes in pupil behaviour and transition procedures could realistically be expected within the project's timescale, demonstrable improvement would be less likely for pupil attainment, although some degree of change might reasonably have been predicted.

The evidence for the impact of federation in terms of outcomes from this study is therefore inconclusive. The heads and chairs of governors certainly believed their federations had a positive impact on standards, a position generally confirmed by case study interviews. The statistical evidence does not substantiate this view. However, this is not necessarily a negative finding. Given the relatively short timescale and the diverse purposes of the federations, a clear 'federation effect' may not be very likely at this stage. What is reasonable to conclude, however, is that there is good evidence of tangible, positive outcomes in terms of a variety of processes and systems set up by the federations which have the potential to support further development and hence raise standards. For example, federating had developed methods of determining jointly agreed objectives and measures of achieving these, and sharing finances. System change of the type characterised by federation, cannot reasonably be assumed to have a simple set of outcomes. Impact on standards, therefore, would in any case be varied across different domains. This has implications for the judgements regarding not only the present evaluation but similar studies.

## 5.8 Sustainability

A significant challenge implicit in many Government initiatives is to ensure they continue good practice once pump-priming funding is removed. Sustainability was found to be dependent not so much on good management of resources, although this was important, but on the nature of the relationships within a federation. Some federations had progressed to a situation where individuals and teams clustered around a common set of issues and developed a joint strategy to tackle to them. Other federations had progressed further beyond a task orientated approach. In these cases joint enterprise tended to be driven by a shared understanding and philosophy rather than a particular set of issues. The work of Michael Fielding (1999) is helpful here. He differentiates between collaboration and collegiality arguing that "*collaboration is an over-ridingly instrumental form of activity... a plural form of individualism*" (p. 16) where the driving force is a common set of concerns and other teachers are viewed as possible sources of resources "*but not deserving of attention or sustained interest when the task has been completed and the drive for unity dissipates, disappears or becomes tenuous*" (p. 17). This definition corresponds with the example where individuals work together in an instrumental way focusing strongly on the task in hand and its associated gains. In contrast Fielding argues that collegiality is

*"overridingly communal in form and substance...collaboration within the context of a collegial relationship is transformed from a narrowly functional activity ... into a joint undertaking informed by the ideals and aspirations of a collective practice infused by value, rationality and the commitment to valued social ends."* (p. 17)

Some federations were making the transition towards collegiality, others, as in the second example, had achieved it. In these cases teachers tended to relate to each other in terms of professional identity and ideas. It would seem that federations exhibiting more collegial approaches to their work would be more likely to sustain their efforts in the longer term,

beyond any pump-priming funding arrangements. Therefore, federations should actively engage with strategies that promote collegiality.

Sustainability also requires decisions on budget allocation. Where softer federations were set up there was typically limited cash injection from the schools; the federation relied on the grant. Some federations resisted pooled budgets to maintain school autonomy. Where harder federations were formed they tended to move towards pooled or combined budgeting systems which enhanced sustainability.

Sustainability was also dependent upon the need for continued action. The development of Federation E, moving to a new campus comprising the three schools in one federation, required permanence and hence ways to ensure sustainability were essential. Others were more concerned with relatively specific shorter term actions which could reasonably be completed. The model of the successful school federating with a school in difficulties does not necessarily require continuation of the arrangements. If the school in difficulties had progressed satisfactorily perhaps it could return to its previous single school status.

Questions of sustainability, therefore, raise more fundamental issues concerning the federation's purpose. If the Government's aim is to reduce the number of 'educational units' (i.e. federations of schools rather than schools) that have a head because there are insufficient headteachers with necessary skills, then the present study indicates this was not a favoured approach. Where the development is for a harder federation with changes to the statutory basis, attention to sustainability is essential. Governance, management and leadership, accountability, and budgetary arrangements all require detailed consideration. If, on the other hand, federations are to have a broader role to enhance education by collegial collaboration, then sustainability becomes a more fluid concept. In such cases, schools might decide to have collaborations for a limited time, for specific purposes; or to have differing degrees and types of collaboration over time.

Taken overall, the main financial need for federations is pump priming, money to allow additional action beyond that possible with normal resources at school level. Those federations that were most concerned about sustainability had allocated substantial resources (from the DCSF grant) to essentially recurrent spending such as a post of federation director. Sustainability from a financial point of view requires a reconfiguration of budgets. This is facilitated and even dependent upon some degree of pooling elements of, or combining whole budgets. Not only does this increase the absolute amount of finance available it focuses attention on prioritisation. It also requires a restatement of commitment such that those schools that benefit also contribute.

Our study suggests that many schools would recognise the benefits of such pooling/combining budgets provided the implications for the balance between autonomy and shared purpose were determined to their satisfaction. Hence, evidence from this Federation Programme suggests that non-recurrent pump priming finance has the potential to stimulate innovation within a federated structure. Once up and running, economies of scale will also be apparent, so allowing further reprioritisation. Hence, the development of federation is likely to be characterised by this organic, cyclical process.

## 6.0 Conclusions and recommendations

The present study has explored federations of school across England, of different sizes, in urban and rural settings, and with a range of goals and organisational structures. The overall picture emerging is of a successful project which gave dynamic and thoughtful professionals extra capacity to undertake work which enhanced the educational processes in their schools within a framework specified by the DCSF. Unlike some informal, loose collaborations which are entirely locally determined, these federations had the structure of the programme to support and hold them to account. The evidence on processes in this study is very positive.

The evidence from end of Key Stage assessments such as GCSE results, however, does not present clear evidence for the success of the federations programme, a 'federation effect'. There was no evidence of significantly better results for schools in the federations programme compared with all other secondary schools in the state sector on any of the measures at Key Stages 2 and 3. At Key Stage 4 there was no difference in percentage of pupils gaining 5 GCSE at A\*-C, the only significant differences were in terms of A\*-G and contextual value added results, both in favour of schools in the federations programme. However, the variability among the federations in terms of their purposes makes single measures of outcomes as the main measure, (e.g. GCSE results) of questionable validity especially given the relatively short time-scale of the programme.

### Main findings

- This Federations Programme provided an overarching structure that has promoted shared understanding of the possibilities for restructuring and revising important cultural aspects of the education system. The support of different types of federation within the programme allowed schools to explore different purposes, foci and degrees of collaboration pertinent to their particular needs and priorities.
- A particular strength of the programme has been its 'tight/loose' nature which has stimulated and supported localised change focussed on issues and concerns that have emerged from within the community concerned, in the context of a national initiative with specific parameters and accountability systems.
- Federations had a variety of goals but almost all sought to improve standards and half sought to improve inclusion as their main goal(s).
- Many different approaches were adopted to achieve the goals. These grew out of determination of priorities and were frequently based on previous collaborative work between schools that formed the federation.
- Federations can be categorised along a 4-stage continuum of decreasing 'hardness' of changes to governance:
  - Statutory: hard governance federation
  - Statutory: soft governance federation
  - Non-statutory, soft federation
  - Non-statutory informal, loose collaboration

In practice the federations clustered towards the 'softer' end of this continuum. Furthermore, there was variation among soft federations in terms of leadership and governance; there was also development from softer to harder federations in some of the case studies, but not others.

- Federations generally placed a high premium on respecting and maintaining each school's autonomy. Changes to governance were generally limited to what was necessary to achieve specific objectives, although chairs of governors in particular were

frequently very involved and supportive. Otherwise, federation matters were part of general governing body business.

- Changes to governance followed from developments within the federations: they were not drivers of developments.
- Barriers to success included the lack of a clear legal status of the federation director; tensions arising from imbalance of power in the successful school-weaker school model; and uncertainty about sustainability arising from the cessation of financial support at the end of the programme.
- The key factors identified as important for success of federations were leadership and collegiality, not governance. Federation directors and headteachers, together with chairs of governors in a number of cases, were the key personnel to provide leadership.
- The characteristics of effective leadership of federations were similar to those found in studies of effective schools and included: building upon past collaborations and good relationships; having clear aims and objectives for federating; developing collegiality, trust and effective communications; and adapting to the style of leadership required in the context of the federation.
- Most federations agreed a system of pooling an element of the schools' budgets, or only used the project grant. Development of greater levels of joining budgets, and especially of a single pooled budget were rarer and linked to 'harder' federations. Again, this trait reflected necessity for fitness for purpose.

## **Detailed findings**

### *Plans and expectations*

- Nine out of ten headteachers specified raising standards as a main goal.
- Over half of headteachers also specified inclusion as a main goal.
- Federations had a broad focus with about a quarter of heads targeting pupils with SEN, low achieving pupils, high achieving pupils and gifted and talented (range 22-28% of headteachers).
- Four out of five chairs of governors were involved in the decision to federate.
- About 80-90% of headteachers predicted federations would improve attitudes to learning and pupil behaviour, reduce exclusion, broaden pupil entitlement and improve primary/secondary and secondary/post-16 transition.

### *Outcomes*

- Both headteachers (93%) and chairs of governors (85%), judged the federation to have been somewhat or very successful in raising achievement, although only about a quarter in each case rated this very successful.
- Analysis of the national datasets, however, revealed no statistically significant difference between schools in the Federation Programme and non-programme schools with respect to pupil achievement at KS2 or KS3. At KS4 there was no difference in the percentage of pupils achieving 5A\*-C. However, project schools recorded a significantly higher percentage of pupils gaining 5A\*-G: 93.6% compared with 91.3% for non-programme schools, and significantly higher contextual value added outcome (1004.8 compared with 1000.8).
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schools and a significantly higher contextual value added outcome (1004.8 compared with 1000.8).

- There was no consistent pattern between schools in the Federation Programme and non-programme schools with respect to absence.
- Headteachers judged their federations somewhat or very successful in reaching goals in inclusion (91%), and Gifted and Talented education (76%), improving attitude to teaching (82%) and behaviour (68%), reducing exclusions (60%), and broadening pupil entitlement (90%).
- Improving transition from primary to secondary school and from secondary to post-16 was a goal for only three quarters of schools, but in each case about three quarters concluded this had been reached successfully.

### *Processes*

- Schools generally took very seriously the need to develop collegiality and to do this from a basis of schools being regarded as autonomous partners.
- Where the nature of the federation involved imbalance of power, as in the successful school-weaker school model, the development of trust was also important but was more difficult and took longer to achieve.
- High quality leadership was regarded and valued by federations and was central to their successful operation. Successful leadership was characterised by a strong sense of commitment to collegiality and schools' autonomy, with democratic and facilitative styles predominating.
- Leaders had a strong sense of purpose regarding the development of teachers' and pupils' standards. Where inclusion was also a key factor, leadership was also characterised by a deep and sustained commitment to the right of all children to inclusive education, together with a non-ideological practical and pragmatic approach seeking evolutionary change that got teachers, pupils and parents on side.
- The specific nature of the leadership role and title was less important: titles varied as did the nature of the formal or informal contract.
- The lack of a clear legal status of federation directors was a concern throughout the project.
- Models of distributive leadership developed within schools did not apply so clearly to federations where leadership was often collaborative, a team of acknowledged equals.
- Chairs of governors often contributed to the setting up of the federation and supported its work, but generally at a distance. Unless the federation was hard, and particularly if it was statutory, governing bodies were involved to a relatively limited degree – it was part of the general business.
- Models of governance were linked to finance. The extent to which schools pooled finance, from sharing the federation grant only, through a form of top-slicing to a joint budget, was related to the continuum from hard statutory to informal collaboration models of federation.
- Every Child Matters and inclusion were the two major, related Government initiatives that impacted on the federations. There was relatively little interest in or engagement with the idea of Trust schools until the end of the project. This may reflect its recency or the experience of federations where governance change were not seen as a central factor.

### *Sustainability*

- Six out of ten head considered that their federation would definitely (39%) or most likely (23%) continue beyond the DCSF funding.

- Sustainability was a function of the nature of the federation. Where joint decision-making regarding budgets had been established and where the federation was committed to longer term activities, sustainability was enhanced.
- Sustainability was linked to the nature of the federation, including budget sharing, rather than specifically to there being a harder federation structure: hence sustainability could be facilitated by collegial practice or as a result of changes in governance and budgeting decisions necessary to maintain changes to governance and management. Sustainability was therefore also linked to decisions of the *necessity* to maintain the federation: where there was little choice because of the creation of a harder form of federation, sustainability had to be addressed and built in. Where softer form existed schools could choose whether to maintain the federation with reference to new priorities.
- The study indicates that given the opportunity, schools will generally seek to develop collegial practice where autonomous schools collaborate for locally determined purposes. Where schools seek to make fundamental changes to their operation, whether out of choice or external pressure, changes to and greater involvement of governance was necessary and inevitable.
- The evidence on the successful school-weaker school model suggests that if such a federation is to be successful careful attention must be paid to developing a shared set of values and common understanding of the nature and purposes of the collaboration. Establishing the conditions for the collaboration is an important precursor to the implementation of appropriate school improvement processes within this challenging and complex context. Only in cases where both the conditions have been set and an appropriate set of strategies implemented is there evidence to suggest (if desired) the relationship could be sustained in the long-term.

## **Recommendations**

Over the period of this project, Government policy has developed to provide schools with a broader range of collaborative models to choose from. This has been accompanied by an increasing emphasis on the importance of schools being able to build strong sustainable, relationships with external partners. The stated aim of Government policy is to ensure that schools are better able to adopt a model which is appropriate to their needs, which supports their efforts to raise standards and which provides high quality services to their communities.

One of several significant developments has been the introduction of Trust schools. The Education and Inspections Act 2006 enables all schools to become Trust schools by forming links with 'external partners' able, if the school chooses, to appoint the majority of the governing body. Some schools may use this new status to formalise existing partnerships whilst others may take the opportunity to establish relationships with new external partners. The fostering of innovative practices derived from the private sector could provide yet another potential incentive, but the chance to work with external partners may remain a key factor.

Another significant development has been the introduction of Education Improvement Partnerships (EIPs). These are capable of providing schools with an overarching structure for their various collaborative arrangements which can bring new opportunities to work other education providers whilst rationalising the growing number of smaller partnerships.

Our study has revealed the benefits of schools working together for common purposes, particularly to raise standards and increase inclusion. We have identified those aspects of federation that facilitate this process.

Interestingly, changes to governance featured only as a response to a need to achieve particular objectives concerning fundamental changes to the federation's schools. Although new governance structures are essential in the acquisition of a Trust, it appears that they may also be needed to allow other fundamental system changes, as indicated also by the Innovations Unit's *Next Practice in System Leadership* field trials which reported in September 2007 ([www.innovation-unit.co.uk](http://www.innovation-unit.co.uk)). The survival of the many informally developed examples of collaboration, however, would indicate that some forms of partnership do not necessarily need to be supported by changes to existing governance arrangements.

The Federations Programme has provided a tight/loose model for change which has the potential to make a significant contribution to the re-structuring and re-culturing of the education system. A particular strength of the programme was the overarching framework which had the ability to foster structural change in a range of settings combined with the flexibility to support schools and their communities to engage in the re-culturing of their locality. In short, the federation policy offers a welcome blend of co-constructed educational reform.

On the basis of our study we recommend:

- The DCSF should continue to support schools that seek to improve standards by joint activity, recognising a continuum of possible types of federation, namely:
  - Statutory: hard governance federation
  - Statutory: soft governance federation,
  - Non-statutory, soft federation and
  - Non-statutory informal, loose collaboration.
- There is benefit in supporting the development of this range of types, determined locally to meet locally identified needs but within a national framework of priorities. This 'loose/tight' approach has the potential for both restructuring and re-culturing the education system and should be explicitly supported by the DCSF.
- The further development of federations will require consideration of the legal status of various models developed to date and of the federation director; of the appropriate means of inspection by Ofsted; and of the appropriate recording and analysing of school/federation level data as well as other systems designed for single schools, including school budget formulae.
- If the DCSF seeks to address the shortage of headteachers by reducing the numbers needed by federating schools under an executive headteacher/director, a more directive strategy will be necessary. Given the choice, schools value autonomy, collegiality and equality, working together as separate schools that have chosen to collaborate.
- The DCSF should support the development of federations which have a primary goal of increasing inclusion and undertake a detailed study of initiatives such as those examined in the present study.
- The development of a range of collaborative arrangements, and in particular of federation, should be studied in the context of new legislation, particularly Trust schools. The Innovations Unit has an important role in supporting innovative practice; this should be complemented by research of the policy and its implementation.

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## Appendix Case Studies

The following nine case study summaries are based on visits made in three phases between early 2005 and summer 2006 together with documentary evidence.

### Federation A

#### Origins, aims and purposes

Federation A was a soft federation with 8 secondary schools and one special school. Overall, the schools served just fewer than 10,000 students. Attainment of pupils on entry to a number of schools was below the national average; there were pockets of great socio-economic disadvantage in the area. Geographically, the federation covered a large area.

This was a “soft” federation, in that there is no legal relationship between schools. In spite of this “soft” nature, however, headteachers within the federation were clear that the structures which were in place allowed for more consistent and useful work between the schools than a looser, more ad hoc relationship.

Federation A was based on the area headteachers’ conference. As one headteacher put it, “The federation gives us the money to do what we were already doing” - speculating that the federation would not have achieved nearly so much had it started as a new initiative when the funding began. All of the headteachers interviewed placed importance on the trust between the heads themselves as the foundation of the network.

There were two main structures of the federation:

1. Governing body. This consisted of the headteacher from all the schools involved and one named governor; sometimes chair of governors, sometimes another named governor. This body functioned in the area of strategic planning.
2. Heads steering group. This body was the continuation of the area headteachers’ conference. It dealt with implementation, with the practicality arising from the strategic plans made by the governing body. There was two way communication between the two. The focus of the federation was on school improvement. New bids for specialist status were discussed in the federation so that a good distribution of specialisms is achieved in the area. The federation had given time and monetary support to bids for specialisms for its schools.

One of the schools in the federation had recently added a sixth form. This initiative grew out of a recognition that the other secondary schools were over subscribed and that “we were part of the solution to that” (headteacher).

Specific projects in the federation included:

1. SEF document

The document aimed to aid schools in filling in the self evaluation form (SEF), showing what types of evidence could be used for each section. Creating it required collaboration and agreement among the federation schools (particularly deputies) as to what sorts of evidence would be useful for each section.

2. 6<sup>th</sup> Form heads group

This group began a system of observations and meetings to gain consistency across the federation on what constitutes an “outstanding” “good”, etc. lesson in terms of Ofsted.

### 3. Fresh Start:

The federated schools worked together to prevent permanent exclusions of students. Cases of pupils nearing permanent exclusion status were brought to federation meetings, and heads “bid” for those pupils they could take on to their rolls for a definite period of time. Pupils facing exclusion were “loaned” to other schools in the federation with the intention of giving them a “fresh start” in a new environment. The emphasis of the programme was to remove pupils from the situations in which they were having behavioural difficulties and given them a “fresh start”.

### 4. Behaviour project

At the outset, a decision was taken to invest in a project aimed at dealing with behavioural issues across the federation. A deputy from the special school was delegated to visit each school in the federation and to compile a comprehensive report for each school (as well as a précis for the federation as a whole). This work formed the basis for the revamping of behaviour policies within each school (though it did not lead to a federation-wide policy, emphasising again the culture of individuality in the federation). After this phase of the project was now completed, a member of staff from the special school was employed by the federation on a part time basis to continue the work on developing behaviour strategies.

## **Generating relationships, communication**

As noted above, the relationships between most of the schools were already in existence, due to previous collaboration. At the level of headteachers and to some extent deputies, the relationships within the federation were reasonably sound, (although not all heads would agree that they are as sound as might be useful). There was clear evidence that at least one of the schools felt distanced from the work of the federation and that not all of the good practice in that school was known by other schools. It was clear that the sixth form heads’ group was building its own communication (and support) structure. This was, however, still at the outset of this work during the life of the evaluation.

## **Leadership and management**

Heads emphasised the “empowering” of the governing bodies through the federation - this was most clearly seen in the production of the Guidance on Induction for governors, produced by the governors themselves to answer a need they perceived for such training. (This was later taken on board by the LA).

In terms of effects on students, it would seem that the federation had the most effect on what one headteacher termed “the top and bottom” groups: gifted and talented pupils (who had been given extra training and support for university interviews, some of whom have been funded for a trip abroad, etc.), and students facing exclusion who were supported through the fresh start programme.

There were a number of interesting strands to the leadership and management in this federation.

1. Need for autonomy in individual schools.
2. The perception that the federation was taking the place of the LA in all but statutory processes, or that it would be beneficial for the schools if it were to do so.

### 3. “Depth” and “reach”

There was a marked difference in enthusiasm for the federation as one delved down; senior staff were generally quite enthusiastic. Governors were supportive but unable to show much impact on the life of the school; some teachers were unenthusiastic at best. This may indicate that the federation concentrates on upper level issues - choice of specialism, fresh start, etc. rather than classroom based change. This does not mean that there *was* no effect in the classroom - in fact, it is clear that initiatives run through the federation had significant effect in the classroom.

There were two main post holders, in terms of the formal leadership of the federation. The first is that of the executive of the federation, who described himself as “primus inter pares” - first among equals. Although clearly held in esteem by his colleagues, he exercised no authority over them or over the federation as a whole. Secondly, there was a federation administrator, who fulfilled the administrative role of facilitation for the federation. However, this role was not that of an administrator, per se, but rather was fulfilled by a deputy headteacher of one of the schools who was seconded to the federation two days per week. While it remained true that this post holder arranged meetings, initiated conversations between heads, etc., her role is also one of facilitation of meetings, rather than merely of setting them up, (hence the need for someone of status and experience to fulfil the role).

#### **Governance**

There were no significant changes governance systems in this federation; although there was communication between governing bodies through the joint heads/governors’ committee, there was no expectation that there would be uniformity among governing bodies. There was, however, joint governor training among the federation. This programme was devised by the federation under the leadership of a deputy from one of the schools.

The main legal issue which arose in this federation was the movement of pupils from one school to another on a temporary basis in the fresh start programme. These issues were dealt with by the headteachers themselves, with the “money following the child”, even when the child remained on the roll of the original school.

As always, judgements of “value for money” are difficult to undertake. Most of those interviewed were convinced of the value of the federation to the schools involved; there were some voices of, if not discontent, then belief that the federation could have done more, and delved more deeply into the lives of the schools. However, this was offset by the obvious enthusiasm of others for the federation and its work.

Relations with the LA were supportive. However, it should be noted that two of the headteachers in the federation, when asked what they would like to see in the future, suggested the abolition of the LA, with funds going directly to the federation or group of schools. Interaction with outside agencies did not seem to be a priority for the federation - schools reported such interaction but say that this was not through the medium of the federation.

#### **Sustainability**

The sustainability of this federation rests on its previous existence; the fact that the schools involved had become federated had not had a massive impact on their ways of working,

other than to allow the employment of the federation administrator and to fund certain activities.

The federated schools had sought funding to sustain their work at the end of the DCSF funding. They have bid for and secured a sum from the LSC for project work among them, but were continuing to seek funding. Finding such funding, writing bids, etc. was part of the work of the federation administrator.

In terms of relationships among the members of the federation, it would seem probable that the collaborations will continue, particularly as many of the schools are members of other groups and networks (even if these groups are, according to one headteacher, less effective than the federation due to having a more loose structure).

## **Federation B**

### **Origins, aims and purposes**

This case study examines a soft federation in a large conurbation in the south east. There were actually two federations in the area, primary and a secondary. This report will concentrate on the secondary federation although general information will be given about the primary.

The LA for this federation experienced a good deal of turmoil and in the early phase of the evaluation a joint venture company which won the contract to take over school improvement. In September 2001, the company began 5 year external contract due to ineffective LA leadership identified in May 2000. During the life of the evaluation their role became increasingly distant from the secondary federation. By the third and final phase of the case study, the company's contact had come to an end, and it seemed to have no further contact with the secondary federation.

The secondary network was much more rigid than the primary network. It arose out of the needs of the weaker school (School A) and the desire of the stronger school (School B) to improve in certain areas. The original model for the secondary federation was that of "good school/failing school". Admittedly this model fit the schools as a paper exercise, but it also ignored the very real contributions that School A was able to make to the collaboration. With the appointment of a new headteacher at School A, the two schools renegotiated the model of the federation with the DCSF, to put the schools on a more equal footing.

Both of the schools involved in the secondary federation are in areas of high social deprivation. Both schools have experienced a fairly high turn over of staff during the life time of the federation.

It is clear that the federation had operated mainly on the level of senior management in terms of formal working; however, the work facilitated by the federation had permeated throughout both schools. This work includes:

- ***Emotional Intelligence - Working together for Success***

In the LA, the program was supported partly by London Challenge and partly by federation funding. Although not everyone is entirely positive about the outcome of the program, the School B deputy rated it as very effective in terms of the workings of the senior leadership team within that school.

- ***Prefects' Conference***

This conference brought together the prefects from the two schools.

- ***Literacy and science***

At School A, in particular, students' attainment in science was below the national average. In conjunction with the federation manager, the science staff at School A collated the science attainment levels of pupils with their literacy attainment levels: the resultant information allowed the creation of a program of personalized learning which supported students whose science scores were suffering due to lack of attainment in literacy (rather than lack of content knowledge in science).

- **Teaching and learning audit**

The federation manager undertook a thorough audit of teaching in the schools, and produced comprehensive reports which formed the basis of work on new teaching and learning policies in both schools.

- **Use of Data**

The work of the federation was also clear in the Ofsted report references to the use of data identified early on as a strand in the federation's work. The federation supplied the funding for a data manager to work with School A around probability banding, in preparation for the inspection and in the longer term. School B had been using probability banding for some time.

### **Generating relationships, communication, trust & motivation, 'voice' (incl. student voice)**

The two schools involved in the secondary network had not previously had much collaboration: therefore, there was a great deal of ground work to be done before the federation could be successful. This was compounded by three other issues: the preconceptions staff had about what federations might be/entail; existing ways of working in one of the schools; and the LA's original idea of what the federation should be.

Due to the small nature of the secondary federation, communication was not as much of an issue as it may be in larger groups. There were two main levels of communication: headteacher to headteacher, and through the federation manager, who acted in some respects as a broker (Both headteachers commented on the value to the federation of the manager's communication and people skills). However, both headteachers commented on the need to build a relationship between the schools before the federation could become truly effective.

The headteacher of School B counted it as an indicator of success of the federation that new initiatives presented with the caveat that they had worked at the other school in the federation were well received on that basis.

Student voice was a focus for both schools in the federation, e.g. the prefects' conference.

### **Leadership and management**

The leadership and management structure of the federation was a simple one, again reflecting the small complement of schools. There were no formal leadership/management committees; rather, the headteachers and federation manager met as and when needed (the fact that the schools are geographically close is a bonus). Particularly in the last academic year (2005-6), management of the federation was firmly in the hands of the headteachers and federation manager, rather than with the LA or the company with the contract for school improvement.

One aspect of this perceived lack of interest on the part of the LA caused some discomfort to the headteachers, in that they feel that the benefits of the federation were not being shared as widely as might be - that the LA is missing out in not utilising the learning from the federation or the expertise within it.

## **Governance**

This remained a soft federation. There was a shared governance committee, composed of governors from both schools, but this committee had no statutory powers, and generally received reports and discussed them. Reports were also made from this committee to the two school governing committees; both governing bodies took a keen interest in the workings of the federation, due at least in part to the financial implications. Headteachers and the federation manager were clear that each school had its own ethos, which must be respected.

In terms of value for money, both headteachers clear that the work of the federation had been of great use and value to both schools, and had enhanced the teaching and learning in both establishments.

Perhaps the most cogent indicator of the value for money of the federation was the dedication of the headteachers to continuing its work and to continuing to fund the work of the federation manager in one form or another.

## **Role of national agendas/policies, Inclusion, Every Child Matters**

As both schools are secondaries, the role of the 14 - 19 curriculum initiative was central to their current work. However, this was not articulated as an area where the federation work, per se, was focussed: it was, rather, an underlying, integral part of all the work in both schools.

In terms of inclusion, both schools are very mixed in terms of ethnicity, ESL, and SEN; both are in areas of high economic and social deprivation. Work on pupil voice is cited above.

## **Sustainability**

Sustainability may be viewed in this federation under two headings: discreet projects and ways of working. The headteachers and the federation manager were clear that the second of these not only was but “must be” sustainable for the good of both schools (and other schools - see comments on dissemination). Discreet projects were slightly more problematic.

Foremost in terms of sustainability will be finding funds for the continuing employment of the current federation manager, in some guise. This post holder was self employed by the end of the project, rather than being employed directly by either school. Both headteachers were anxious that her skills and expertise remained available for direct use by their schools.

In terms of the ways of working, it is clear from reports and observation that these were embedded enough to be sustainable at least in the near future. The relationship between the schools had deepened over the course of the federation, and was beginning to percolate down from the heads to other members of staff - but this cascading down was, as admitted by the headteachers, in its infancy.

The federation had, in the feelings of those interviewed, become a much more powerful force in the last year. Partially this was due to the slow start of the federation, due to the renegotiation of aims resulting from the new headship at School A; the acting-headship in place at School B may also have had a hand in slowing the process down somewhat (though the acting head was appointed as head).

## **Federation C**

'There is an increasing appreciation that the way ahead isn't single schools' (head of governors, large school).

### **Background, aims and structures**

This federation consisted of 10 schools in a rural LA in the north of England. The local FE college was also part of the federation. Schools were diverse in terms of geographical area and size, ranging from very small rural schools to large semi-urban schools. The federation served an affluent rural area.

The federation is best described as a soft federation, not having constituted a joint governing body. However, elements of a hard federation did exist, in that a company was set up to which certain powers have been devolved. The federation decided to develop legal status by setting itself up as a limited company with a joint governing body. An executive group of headteachers became the board of the limited company and the governors met as a scrutiny committee as members of the company, in order to get them involved, but without the binding legal power of a hard federation. Funding had been attracted from the LA and LSC for work in the 14-19 arena to complement DCSF funding.

The focus of the federation was on leadership and managing and on teaching and learning.

The federation was built on a basis of collaboration in the area, going back to the TVEI programme. Therefore, there has been a long tradition of heads meeting together every half term.

The initiative for the federation came from the heads. Two in particular, the heads of the two largest schools in the area, took the lead in the federation, partly as for the smaller schools capacity issues mean that their potential to take the lead in the federation is limited. The governors were not directly involved in the setting up of the federation. The governors' role was relatively marginal. There was later a perceived need to include governors more in the running of the federation, especially as schools were increasingly being asked for a financial contribution.

On the ground, the federation operated through a system of working parties focussing on different areas, such as assessment, 14-19 curriculum group and data sharing.

### **Generating relationships, communication, trust and motivation**

Relationships had largely been developed through action, in that working groups were formed that brought not just senior leaders and heads but middle managers together, thus developing the relationships that can generate trust and collaborative working relationships. There were many examples of this development of relationships through action in the federation, such as collaborative work on the 14-19 curriculum working party, programmes for disaffected students and a joint federation-wide training day. As well as through action, specific activities have been undertaken to build trust. The main example of this is a joint heads visit to Chile, which, according to the chair of a governing body as well as a deputy head of one school had been very important in making them feel like a group.

The fact that the federation was built on existing collaboration had been an advantage in building, though this had in the past waxed and waned as policy imperatives had

emphasised competition more or less and, as mentioned above, some heads arriving from different contexts clearly felt that existing collaboration was not that extensive.

The federation led to a growing understanding that some things are better done collaboratively. The strategic planning meetings had been really important in this respect as they brought issues onto the table, among a group of heads who obviously wanted to do the best for their own schools. The consultant tried hard to ensure that whenever there have been misunderstandings, or the feeling that certain schools were not in the loop, these were resolved through visits to the head to raise these issues and bring them back to the other heads.

In a competitive environment, the federation allowed schools to offer support across distance. This could make things easier as close proximal schools may see each other as competitors more than schools which are further away. The geographical spread of the federation was an advantage in this respect.

The building of trust was also seen as partly down to the individual work of two heads and the federation coordinator. Trust had grown as the benefits of the federation became clear.

### **Leadership and management**

As mentioned above, leadership of the federation rested very much with the headteachers. Governors had been a help in identifying specific issues such as emphasising the need for proper budgeting, but the heads were clearly in control. This dominance of the process by the heads was seen as a key factor in developing the openness that had led to successful collaboration.

The federation was not just dominated by heads, but specifically by the heads of the larger schools, seen as having more capacity to engage in the leadership of the federation as well as having been the drivers towards setting it up in the first place. Getting people comfortable with the notion that the larger schools lead the Federation had been a challenge. The smaller schools sometimes perceived the Federation as being the larger schools telling them what to do, though according to the deputy head of one of the larger school this has improved over time as the smaller schools had come to know the working model of the federation. The cultural change required for these feelings to disappear was slow, however. In some of the smaller schools there was still a suspicion that some of the activities of the Federation might aim at furthering the interests of these large schools.

The federation had also made a number of common appointments. These joint appointments, though still limited in number, were varied in type, from the federation coordinator to a peripatetic chef who goes from school to school organising the catering courses, consultants and working group leaders. In some cases these were secondments from federation schools, in others they were externals from other LAs. Use was made of external consultants to help overcome the fact that capacity to provide services is not always present in a rural area. However, this had been done at a financial cost, and in some cases could hinder integration of federation activities into daily routines of schools, relying on this external support rather than developing internal capacity.

Another management issue within the federation was the very different size and location of the schools. Some of the smaller schools were peripherally located within the federation, and felt less involved in the process. Distance was an issue, especially where joint courses were

timetabled, as it could be hard for them to get their pupils to the venue. This could also be a problem in getting staff to meetings of the federation.

## **Governance**

A specific governance factor in this federation was the choice for company status, generally seen as very successful. The company status allowed the to appointment of people working specifically for the federation, such as the coordinator and an advisor, although HR policies had so far been somewhat fuzzy with regards to matters such as pension conditions; this was changing as more people were federation employed. Company status also made it easier for the federation to enter into contracts with other organisations and to provide services. It also gave the federation a sense of structure and purpose.

## **Role of national policies**

The federations programme had been key to developing collaboration in this area. While collaboration existed before, federating changed its extent by creating new systems and structures which would otherwise not have been possible.

The federation had been very proactive in taking charge of different Government initiatives in the area, and this mediation of policies is seen as one of its a key roles. The 14-19 agenda is a good example of this, where it was at federation level that programmes were being developed to serve this age group.

The tension in Government policies between collaboration and competition was seen as a challenge. The fact that the area population is stable and the problem of falling roles is not present was an advantage in this respect though.

In terms of examination results there is no real evidence of federation impact. The Federation felt that the DCSF had unrealistic expectations in this respect, especially with regards the timescale in which improvement was expected to happen.

## **Sustainability**

In terms of sustainability a number of elements suggest optimism, while some others are a cause for concern. On the positive side, the trust that has been built up and the general feeling that the federation had had positive impacts suggest that efforts will be made to sustain the federation. An important programme with regards to the future development of the federation was the development of a central data base across the federation, which means schools will share and be able to look at each others' data. This move towards a shared database was set to change relations between schools significantly, possibly leading to a system where accountability really was to the federation rather than to individual schools.

On the negative side, resourcing was increasingly becoming an issue following the end of DCSF funding. This resourcing issue had left the federation very stretched, and working with a limited number of people who were therefore very busy. The federation was currently trying to overcome resource barriers by attempting to secure additional resources.

The fact that the federation was strongly personality driven (two heads) was acknowledged as a disadvantage.

A key sustainability issue is how relations and power structures will evolve with regards to the LA, seen as a less effective provider of services to these schools. The federation would have liked to have more funding delegated from the Authority. Clearly, then, the federation

can be seen as part of an evolution whereby, as the role of the LA in education has weakened, schools are coming together to create intermediate structures that can take up some of the roles which LAs are no longer able to fulfil effectively. The head of the federation believes that the move, certainly in this LA, was towards more and more provision of services from diverse organisations outwith the central services of the LA. How the role of the LA within Every Child Matters and the role of the federation and similar networks can be reconciled is a key future issue, and one that should be an important consideration for national policy.

Overall, then, this federation does seem to have developed a successful and sustainable model of collaboration providing issues of funding can be resolved, and power and capacity differentials within the federation continue to be handled sensitively.

## Federation D

### Origins, aims and purposes

This federation was situated in an urban LA in the north west of England. It involved one secondary school and four primary schools. The federation aimed to improve transition between key stages 2 and 3 and to develop social cohesion between diverse communities. The formal governance structures remained largely unchanged. The secondary school headteacher and chair of governors' led this soft federation. The context the federation operated within was both complex and challenging. The schools and communities involved in the Federation faced a myriad of socio-economic challenges including:

- **High levels of socio-economic disadvantage**

The schools serve communities that exhibit above average levels of socio-economic disadvantage.

- **High levels of ethnic segregation**

The secondary school and three of the primary schools within the federation served Asian communities. The fourth primary school served a predominantly white community with high levels of social housing.

- **High levels of 'English as an additional Language**

The vast majority (over 75%) of three of the primary schools students came from backgrounds where English is spoken as an additional language

- **Low levels of attainment at end of Key Stage and at GCSE**

Attainment was well below national average but improving at Key Stage 2 and 3. In 2006 Key Stage 4 GCSE attainment was above national average (68% 5+A\*-C). However, attainment in the measure 5+ A\*-C including English and Mathematics was 15%. In 2005 the secondary school was in the top percentile for value added.

The federation was led by the secondary school and the primaries were engaged in federation activity to varying degrees.

The LA had little involvement and the secondary school had been the main initiator and driver of the federation. The federation had two core areas of focus. The first was teaching and learning within key stage two and three transition, that is, the movement between primary and secondary school.

The DCSF imposed the second area of focus on the federation, a 'community cohesion' dimension. It is likely that this was linked to the socio-political tension that the area and other parts of the region were experiencing at the time.

Strategic leadership of the federation was provided by the headteacher and a link governor from each school. However, both the headteacher and chair of governors of the secondary school acted as federation principal and federation chair of governors. The federation appointed a technician and a data manager. However, it had been problematic appointing a federation manager and this post remained vacant. The roles of the manager had been taken on by the secondary school head and middle manager.

Within this federation there was a strong commitment to improving teachers' classroom practice and the experiences of students. The federation provided all primary schools with 30 laptops. This was very well received by the schools and acted to solidify individual teachers' commitment to the process of federating because they recognized the additional

resource was having an impact on their teaching practice. Key transition subjects were targeted and the secondary school had provided the primary school with subject specialist teachers to lead and support lessons. This was viewed by primary teachers as important professional development. The primary schools also formed working groups in subject areas to develop joint plans and approaches.

### **Generating relationships, motivation and trust**

The federation suffered initially from the primary schools' unease with their role vis a vis their secondary partner. Relationships developed over the project as indicated by both the secondary head, "if one of the targets at the outset was to improve transition and relationships between the five schools, that has happened", and reinforced by a primary head colleague. The federation contributed to developing a common language around the nature of effective teaching in primary and secondary settings, a process initiated by visits to each others' schools.

The motivations underpinning each school's willingness to engage in the federation were complex. For one school in the federation it was clearly a case of *'taking the money and running'*. For another, it would appear to have been isolation from other schools and a strong professional learning community, coupled with insufficient resources that precluded the LA from providing effective support. For the secondary school the standards agenda continues to drive them. The chair of governors argued that if standards and teaching and learning could be *'sorted out'* in the primary schools the secondary school would be able to succeed. The secondary headteacher took a different view, arguing that if secondary and primary school teachers could work together then issues of transition this would have a positive effect in both primary and secondary schools.

The community cohesion element of the federation appeared least developed. This was not unsurprising as it was not an aim of the federation's own bid. In order to receive funding the federation was asked to include this aim also. A primary headteacher reflected:

*It wasn't something that came out of the federation schools themselves. It was not why they were joining it. And to have something thrown on, a bolt on at the last minute, to drag another school in to get the go ahead from the DCSF isn't the best way to achieve the success of that particular aim.... It hasn't been a particularly successful part of the federation.*

### **Leadership and management**

The secondary school leading this federation exhibited an entrepreneurial approach and was keen to develop networks and activity that could add value to the federation's work. This could blur the edges of what can be deemed as federation activity, in one sense. This case illustrates the 'loosely coupled model' very well. It is hard to identify what distinguishes this model of a federation from other forms of school-to-school networks or indeed, other collaborative arrangements the school was involved in.

The distribution of leadership within the federation contributed to building capacity within and beyond the federation. It provided less experienced teachers with the opportunity to gain leadership experience, working within a complex initiative across different organizations.

### **Governance**

*There have been no real changes to governance as a result of the federation  
(headteacher ,secondary)*

In terms of governance the federation was a soft federation. That is, each school had its own governing body; the federation however, had a joint governance/strategic committee without delegated powers. The federation was non-statutory, i.e. schools could set up 'soft federations' without having to follow regulations. All schools within the federation shared a set of common goals that binded federation activity together. There were agreed protocols and the joint committee could make recommendations but it was up to individual governing bodies to authorise plans. There was no common budget and each school retains their DCSF number. However, the strategic committee decided on how the DCSF funding was used within the federation. In terms of staffing there were some joint appointments and movement of staff between schools. However, the federation had been unable to appoint a federation principal/manager despite offering an attractive salary and re-advertising the position. This role was carried out by the secondary school headteacher.

### **Role of national agendas**

The federation leadership explored alternative sources of funding including the establishment of an Education Improvement Partnership and the possibility of becoming an Academy within a plan for Building Schools for the Future. Most recently the idea of moving towards Trust status had been discussed. Whatever the outcome, it would seem the federation will continue to search for increased resources and creative solutions to tackle underachievement in this challenging and complex context. The federation structures were likely to be reincarnated into another collaborative arrangement that will be influenced, if not dictated by central Government policy.

### **Sustainability**

If the federation is to continue in its current form it will have to either generate income to support continued activity or devolve some of the individual school budgets to the federation. In a sense this will be the acid test as to whether the collaboration had been a worthwhile exercise. Where the collaboration had been valued by the constituents it was more likely that leaders will invest resources in attracting funding or be prepared to make a contribution from their own school budgets. However, if the collaboration is viewed to have been a rhetorical exercise where the leadership and management have exploited opportunities provided by the incentives in order to supplement existing budgets it is unlikely that the federation will continue to exist. In the short term on-going conversations suggest that while the federation may not exist in its current form, specialists from the secondary school working in the primary schools was being negotiated. This will be funded by the primary schools buying into a package. Teachers working together on curriculum issues across the primary schools is also likely to continue, although it is unclear as to how this will be resourced.

This case study illustrates the potential for school-to-school collaboration in the most challenging circumstances. It highlights the commitment, enthusiasm and drive demonstrated by some leaders and teachers working in the most testing situations and the processes and structures that may support the development of a collaborative approach to improving some of our most disadvantaged school communities.

## **Federation E**

### **Origins, aims and purpose**

This federation was located in the north of England in a small unitary LA. It comprised a primary, secondary and the only special school in the LA. There were two main drivers to the development of the federation: the LA wished to replace poor school buildings and to undertake a development that developed its policy of inclusive education. The proposal for a federation came after other plans were judged not to develop inclusion to the desired extent.

The initial plan had been for the new headteacher of the secondary school to become federation director, but this headteacher left and the head of the special school was appointed acting executive director. At the beginning of the study each school was in its own buildings. Over the period of the study, a new building was developed and the pupils from the three schools all moved into the new campus after Easter, 2006. In addition to inclusion the LA also sought to improve the standards in the secondary school. This had a history of relatively poor results unlike the primary and special schools.

Federation E was the case study with the greatest focus on inclusion as a main policy driver. Also, the development of the federation was substantially affected by the governance, policy, structural and practice issues in the constituent schools and the fact that a new building costing £37.3 million was being developed. Hence both senior management and governors needed to focus substantial resources on both fronts. Over the period of the study, and as the schools moved into the new single campus, the federation moved increasingly to a hard governance model.

### **General relationships, communication, trust and motivation**

Whether the development of the federation would result in three schools in a federation or a single school was a key issue from the start. The very different school histories also contributed, with the secondary school reported to be in the bottom 10% while the primary and special school were in the 10% of their categories. The LA's decision to change the job specification of the executive director from necessarily being the secondary school headteacher also contributed to unease. The appointment of the special school head as acting executive director was a concern for many teachers, governors and parents with worries that there would be 'one large special school'. The early stages of the federation, therefore, were marked by concerns about unknowns and fears for the future. One result was a retrenchment by some staff and governors, seeking to protect their school from perceived threats.

Developing trust, co-operation and collaboration and a common sense of purpose was seen as central to the development of a successful federation while the campus was being built and each school had its own identity, its own head (or, initially an acting head of the secondary school) and governing body. Methods to address these important issues were developed on several fronts. These were aided by a previous history of collaboration between constituent schools and a clear and strong support from the LA. Working across schools, working parties and joint training days were key to developing trust and understanding but so too was the development of positive relationships and respect between the senior management team. This was facilitated by the high regard held for the acting executive director but was not unproblematic.

Interviews with teachers and governors in the early stages all indicated both hope and respect for the aims of the project and the management of their being achieved. However, they also revealed anxiety and a feeling existing, or a fear, of loss of that which was known and familiar. The development of this federation, therefore, provided substantial challenges to senior managers, who were themselves unsure of their futures and to the staff and governors. In some respects the evolutionary changes to the nature of the federation aided the process. The early plans had the schools continuing to exist with their own headteachers albeit within a single campus. However, the gradual change was unsettling to some who felt unclear about the ultimate arrangements.

### **Leadership and management**

The LA's original plan to appoint the new headteacher of the secondary school as executive director of the federation was amended when that head resigned. The appointment of the special school head as acting executive director was then made at a time when all three schools continued to exist in separate buildings, with an incumbent primary head and an acting head of the secondary school.

The development of this senior management team required careful handling especially as the longer term planning of the federation moved towards a new structure. By the time the new building opened the governing body had made much progress and within about a month had approved a consultation document on a school staffing review. By this time the Acting Executive Director had been confirmed as Executive Director. Central to the review was a restructure below the executive director from one where there was a headteacher of each school to a structure of five posts of director: Inclusion, teaching and learning; Teaching learning and innovation; Engagement and pupil wellbeing; Business strategy; and Community. Beneath this leadership team three department head posts were proposed: Phase 1 (Foundation - Y2); Phase 2 (Y3 - Y8); Phase 3 (Y9 - Y14). In addition, leaders of Personalised Learning and Achievement: Curriculum Innovation; and Transition were proposed.

This was a major philosophical as well as practical and structural change. It was built upon a view that for the federation to continue as three separate schools, each with its own headteacher and leadership team, was both non-viable and against the principles of inclusion to which the federation was committed. Furthermore, the revised structure was seen to cut out duplication and lead to clearer lines of communication and responsibility. The process of developing this alternative structure was facilitated by outside consultants and was generally praised.

The role of director of business strategy was located at this high level because the Education Village also provided IT support to the whole of the LA. The appointment to this role of an ex-LA officer who had worked to support the development of the federation in that previous role was seen as a significant opportunity.

Within a term of the new building opening and the relocation of all three schools onto a single site, the fundamental change of the leadership team had been approved. Although revolutionary in some respects, and challenging, there was also a good deal of support for its acceptance. Its implementation was also aided by the lack of incumbent headteachers with the confirmation of the chief executive and the resignation of the primary and secondary heads. The support and leadership of both the LA and the executive director were also important in effecting this transition.

## **Governance**

In the early stages, the three governing bodies were seen to be pulling in different directions at times. They were in a difficult position. As governors, they had a duty to consider the development of the federation, but they also took seriously their responsibility towards their own school. This caused tensions. Each school had its own culture and history and had different degrees of interest in and commitment to either federating or the importance of the inclusion agenda. There were also technical questions regarding the legal status of a joint body and the basis for representation for each school; for example, would the secondary school, by nature of its size, have an inbuilt majority of governors?

Nevertheless, the governors were positive in principle, not least because they could see the benefits of the new building that came with the federation. They would have liked joint meetings of the governing bodies earlier in the planning stage but they had voted in favour of the federation and governors interviewed articulated benefits in terms of joint working and sharing expertise. However, these early positive perspectives were to some extent replaced by doubts as the realities of the federation became apparent: budget decisions, for example.

The partnership board, set up initially, was replaced in April 2005 by the federated governing body which took over the responsibilities from the three separate governing bodies, which were disbanded. The early days of the federated governing body required a substantial commitment from its members. A number of sub-committees were set up to which tasks were delegated. These were not organised around schools but themes, seen as an important decision. Another fundamental issue was the decision to pool all schools' budgets. Similarly, the workforce reform received opposition from both primary and secondary schools until the new secondary head gave his support. The federation then became able to address economies of scale, at which point support for the single budget increased.

Both the partnership board and the federation governing body had the benefit of committed and respected chairs who were able to steer the development of the federation during these challenging times with sensitivity and efficiency widely assisted by those on the committees. It was apparent also that by the summer of 2006 members of the federated governing body generally had high regard for their colleagues. The difficulties and contentiousness of some issues were recognised but there was also appreciation of the positive contribution of governors.

By the end of the project the overall financial position of the federation was not entirely clear. At that time it had the combined budgets of each school, which brought benefits in terms of the LA's formula. The federation also had three specialisms (technology, vocational education and art) and the Business Manager was concerned that this would not be allowed, so leading to loss of grant. On the other hand, the federation was entrepreneurial and provided IT support for all of the LA. Its own initiatives had brought new income and other initiatives were planned (e.g. curriculum materials) but the nature of the federation would need recognition in terms of core funding if the model were to be sustainable.

## **Role of national agendas**

The most important agenda addressed by the federation was addressing was that of inclusion. The special school had a history of innovation in the area and its head (later the executive director) was a vigorous and committed advocate of inclusive education. The commitment of the LA and the need to address how to replace school buildings coincided to

make inclusion a major driver. An earlier bid to develop units in partner mainstream schools was rejected in favour of the single campus with all pupils sharing facilities.

Interviews with staff and governors indicated support for inclusion, albeit mixed with a strong sense of practicality. For example, special school staff were keen to build on the collaborative practice that had already been developed, but were acutely aware that many of their pupils had substantial needs that required very careful planning and provision.

After the campus had opened, staff were talking positively about the experience in those early weeks. For example, secondary pupils had become engaged with special school pupils to support and 'buddy' them. It was recognised that these were early days and the development of true inclusive education would require careful implementation of many months if not years. But the signs were positive. The acting head of the special school had selected an office that was central and on a thoroughfare, both symbolic and facilitative for access. She was positive about progress but recognised the need for other staff to train in skills possessed by her staff, including de-escalation of conflict and confrontation and positive handling. But already the federation's production of a musical had included some of her pupils who had volunteered. The special school pupils were benefiting from engagement in a community.

After a term on its single campus the federation was turning its attention to other important challenges including the development of its community functions linked to the Extended Schools Agenda.

### **Sustainability**

The federation had the benefit of a new, very well-resourced school building and a high sense of commitment. In one sense sustainability was certain as the separate schools had already moved to a federated governing body and had approved a fundamentally revised staffing structure. Whether the new entity would be a federation of these three schools or a new single school, however, is an interesting question. Also the original nature of the initiative, supported by DCSF, required a positive decision on finance if the current organisation is to be sustained.

### **Conclusions**

Federation E is a far-reaching, innovative concept. It had already received many visitors including the Education and Schools Select Committee when they were producing their 2006 report on special educational needs. The model of inclusion is a very interesting and potentially very positive initiative. The benefits to the other pupils, including the raising of standards among the secondary pupils, are also potentially significant. This is a federation where progress should be monitored closely as it is a potential mine of information on educational practice.

## **Federation F**

### **Origins aims and purposes**

This federation was located in the south-west of England and was one of two federations in the LA. It consisted of 2 special schools (3-19, SLD/PMLD and 7-16, MLD) and 4 secondary schools (all specialist, one applied successfully in Phase 2). The move of one of the special schools to new premises coincided with the start of the federation. Repeated changes at headteacher level marked one secondary school, but this stabilised in Phase 2. Another secondary school was in special measures in Phase 1. Although the local (FE) College was included in the original federation bid, it was not a formal partner, but was effectively included in some areas, e.g. post-16 provision. A consultancy was used for the bid; its services were retained in Phase 1.

This federation operated within the wider entity of a partnership, which comprised Excellence Cluster (16 schools: federation schools plus 10 primaries), Aim Higher Partnership, and LIG (Leadership Incentive Grant). In Phase 2, the Behaviour Improvement Programme (BIP) was added. At that time, initiatives multiplied and extended in remit and combined with one another (e.g. ITT and CPD), with the opposite trend occurring in Phase 3. Federation and partnership were closely intertwined in terms of initiatives and management. An LA pupil referral unit (EOTAS or Education Other Than At School) was another partner.

The development of the federation/partnership occurred against the wider context of geography, local situation, and educational provision in this area (inner-city features, seaside location). The 'burning platform' revolved around LA turbulence (5 LA directors in six years), poor performance at primary and secondary level, migration for post-16 education, 6th-form provision having moved to the College, culture of poor expectations and lack of ambition and thus underachievement. The federation arose from 'the family of schools' which had formed to address some of these issues. At its heart was 'the intention to create a unified and integrated approach to learning and teaching' (bid), thus improving standards, together with increasing confidence in what education could provide in the area (appropriateness of available pathways, quality and diversity of provision) and raising aspirations.

### **Generating relationships**

#### ***Communication***

Communication and establishing effective channels of communication was a major challenge, notwithstanding the communication strategy developed in Phase 1. Despite 'massive support' and optimism at the launch of the federation, initiative fatigue, cynicism, and indifference among some staff had to be overcome. Communication was perceived as a potential barrier, because of the assumption that structures in place in schools ensured feedback and information to all staff. Engagement at governor, headteacher, and senior management team (SMT) level was good from the very beginning, with a filtering process increasing to middle management level and below in the later phases. Direct benefit or engagement with federation/partnership ensured relevance to staff or perception of impact. All staff were involved in federation/partnership related CPD, but not necessarily always aware of the federation connection. Operational success - impact upon the classroom, students, and parents - was considered key to raising awareness and shaping perceptions. Awareness among pupils varied, except for those involved in the students' parliament or school councils. The director addressed governing body meetings to up-date about federation matters and these were added as a standard item on their agendas.

## ***Trust and motivation***

While the initial phases were active, involving 'a lot of meetings to get things going', a certain degree of realism set in with regard to what could be done, given time and resources. Also the extent of schools' commitment to federated working became clearer: schools which felt strongly about federation advanced matters as priorities, while the one or other school was described as 'dragging their feet'. The degree of commitment thus determined availability of staff, willingness to provide funding, etc. This was reflected in a model of federated working which imperceptibly began to operate in Phase 2: the notion of full commitment from all schools gave way to pragmatic acceptance that not all schools would be fully on board all the time, given particular circumstances. However, differentiated federated working raised barriers for some joint initiatives.

The need for central leadership was recognised, as was the need for rigorous monitoring of all activities. Also, all partners had to understand that 'buying in means doing something' and this needed to be reiterated. While not all partners were on board at the same time, 'you need a critical mass of leaders who are [...] passionate about it'. By Phase 3, the relationships within the federation/partnership had 'matured enormously', with central staff having realised where they could work or where it was not effective to work. Among schools, the term 'collaboration' was very common by then.

## **Leadership and management**

Leadership and management were organised in a set of tiers which linked with governance. First, there was a director (from January 2004) who also became director of the Excellence Cluster and Partnership, strategic lead for Aim Higher, and then also line manager for the BIP co-ordinator. The director was neither executive nor manager, but had a strategic role, without executive powers. In developing an integrated plan for the wide range of activities, the director was pivotal for giving direction, facilitating, providing strategic leadership, and operational management. An assistant director was recruited in Phase 1 to relieve the director's workload - he took on operational management of Aim Higher, initial teacher training, CPD, and some cluster work. Both directors' contracts ran until August 2006. Second, there was a strategic leadership team (SLT) which consisted of the headteachers and the two directors. The SLT's monthly meetings were the 'key meetings' where an LA representative was invited to attend. Third, there were strand leadership groups (e.g. for teaching and learning, ITT, CPD, ICT), consisting of staff, the directors, and strand leaders. These groups varied over the life of the federation, both in remit and content. Fourth, task groups which aimed to secure engagement as at many levels as possible (e.g. contracts and services, communication and marketing, attainment & achievement, resources & facilities, teacher recruitment & supply staff, PR, learning support unit) and had different agendas and objectives. Again, these varied across the life of the federation, with some ceasing to operate at various points. The fifth tier was the student parliament whose members were selected by each school's council. This forum gained momentum over time and promoted student voice through, among other ways, commissioned research and surveys and input into the LA's Youth Council. This led to tangible results in enrichment activities, catering provision in schools, and some classroom practice. Students were also consulted regarding some Federation/partnership wide events (e.g. citizenship award events, a DVD about former students' careers).

## **Governance**

There was a somewhat hard-edged structure, but there was no one governing body with authority to make decisions. The Strategic Management Board (SMB) consisted of two representatives of the federation schools' governing bodies, the directors, all the headteachers, and an LA representative. The SMB met once a term, made strategic decisions, monitored progress, and asked key questions. It voted on decisions made by the strategic leadership team (SLT). The SMB had delegated authority from the schools. Consensus was sought in all matters. The SMB had a permanent finance sub-committee. All schools had the same representation and voting rights, regardless of size (important for the special schools).

The federation did not change the schools' leadership structures or governing bodies. That governors were represented on the SMB allowed them greater insight into what was happening in other schools, which was seen as useful, although there was, at least initially, concern about the engagement of non-SMB governors.

While becoming harder-edged was not seen as desirable or necessary in the early phase, the proposal to establish one governing body was put to the federation conference in summer 2005, but overwhelmingly opposed. However, the SMB's constitution was re-drafted in Phase 3, with a review of its role as a monitoring (rather than strategic) body and fewer meetings.

## **Role of national agendas/policies**

Government conceptions such as full service extended schools, Every Child Matters (ECM), and multi-agency working added new dimensions to various federation/partnership projects. However, while recognising that ECM could provide real stimulus (e.g. in sharing best practice), this federation had not taken it that far. Two schools which used BIP were somewhat further in this regard, but still essentially at the beginning.

An indirect impact of national policies came through the LA's re-organisation which developed and quite significantly changed the relationship with the LA. For ITT, standards were re-written to take into account ECM and multi-agency working and the ITT experience was to be broadened by offering trainees placements in primary and special schools in addition to their main practice. The 14-19 agenda had not really taken off, despite being a priority, because of the imminent Tomlinson Report. However, once the White Paper was published, discussions got underway in schools. Developing partnership with the FE College and establishing 6th-form provision in two subjects in one school was a beginning.

The EIP (Education Improvement Partnerships) concept was perceived to be a too wide an umbrella and unclear about funding. The lack of mandatory requirements and (necessary) funding meant a lack of clear templates for the way schools might be commissioned by LAs. It also raised concerns about capacity within schools for such work and quality assurance. Therefore, both excitement and caution were needed until there was greater clarity.

The DCSF, it was felt, could be more open to the range of federation models. Favouring the strong/weak school model was considered unhelpful. While certain strategies which meet national targets would be high-profile, wider thinking was required to allow for innovative work and for learning from it. This federation offered a way for the future, because it was important to think about how future leaders and managers should be trained to work across

and beyond schools (which was relevant to the dearth of headteachers) and how schools were organised nationally.

Also, this federation had expressed an interest in 'next practice', but this did not lead to any involvement. The notions of Trust schools and charitable status were perceived as interesting, but contradictory with regard to the benefits of partnership and conveying confused messages. Also, the 14–19 agenda stressed the collaborative nature of curriculum provision. Overall, there was 'a bit of dust to settle around what the Government's *real* agenda around partnership working is'. For a chair of governors, the liability governors incurred for Trust schools was a significant deterrent.

### **Sustainability**

The question of sustainability began to exercise the federation/partnership in spring 2005 and remained a live issue. The secondary headteachers committed to strategic priorities for 2006–08 and to funding strategic leadership for these. As from September 2006, the current federation/partnership director is employed as federation director for two days a week. Apart from some administrative support, all other central posts discontinued. The director's brief is predominantly 14-19, quality assurance, peer review, self-evaluation, and development of a shadow structure. Funding derives partly from the schools, partly from the LA. Beyond 2008, sustainability is 'a real issue'. Excellence Cluster and Aim Higher Partnership reverted to the LA. The ITT work will continue in a scaled-down federated approach, as application for substantial funding beyond 2006 was not successful.

However, relationships between schools are established and staff are used to visit each other's schools at various levels. The future of the federation strands relies to some extent on these, as only some activities can be sustained with central support.

For federation work to be effective, engagement at school level needs to be 'more robust'. Activities which are embedded and have staff commitment are most likely to continue. There was a general feeling that having come so far, it would be a shame for the federation to stop functioning. It is undoubtedly the case that the federation shows a range of remarkable achievements. The director stated that she felt positive about the future, although it was difficult to let any of the activities go. The fact that this federation had not started with a narrow remit was important. The underlying concept was the question how can the way that schools work can be changed radically through collaborative arrangements for leadership and management.

## **Federation G**

### **Origins aims and purposes**

This federation is located in the south of England and is one of three federations in the local authority. It consisted of six schools: two grammar schools (selective, specialist), three secondary modern schools (non-selective), a special school (2-19, specialist). One of the non-selective schools is voluntary controlled and successfully bid for specialist status in Phase 1. The special school and another non-selective school (just out of special measures when the federation started) were to share a site (PFI project) by 2007, when the latter will also have a 6th form. The former had a change of headteacher in the federation period. The third non-selective school was in special measures (for the second time) in Phase 1. It opted to become an Academy in 2007 (11-18).

This federation was 'soft' - there was no federation development manager, federation manager or executive head nor was there any formal governing body to span across the schools. The federation was very much characterised by the particular context in which it was embedded (highest number of non-English speakers in the country, inner-city features, high turn-over of staff, proximity to the capital, student migration) and the LA's unitary character. The LA played an instrumental role in the formation and initial development of the federation in funding a member of its staff to co-ordinate ideas and prepare the bid.

Historically, schools in this LA have worked well together, in different combinations. There is a network of collaboration between primaries and secondaries. Headteachers get on very well, with a willingness to be part of a team. The federation was one way of formalising and developing the history of co-operation. Existing links and common features converged: language issues ('impoverished language') and the desire to develop leadership teams. 'Our schools are all very different, but what we were all trying to do is to produce a [good] education; all the schools have different strengths and it was about matching those strengths and everybody benefiting from matching those strengths' (headteacher). Initially, the schools saw the federation as a source of funding what they were already doing, but to do it better and spark new initiatives. The federation focused on leadership and management issues (SMT and middle management), raising achievement, addressing 'impoverished language' across schools (Inclusion), and support for classroom teachers (improving teaching and learning).

### **Generating relationships**

#### ***Communication***

Communication between the headteachers was very good, given regular meetings and contact by phone and e-mail. Communication with other staff members trickled from the top down, with a relatively slow filtering process to begin with. This changed with federation-wide events, both for SMTs and all staff, which provided opportunities to learn about the federation, meet counterparts in other schools, and have informal exchanges. This cemented more collaborative work and changed the way staff thought and talked about working with other schools. Creating opportunities for staff to develop increased their motivation and enthusiasm. The cross-school work by senior management teams allowed staff to discover other schools' specialisms or particular areas they could consult with each other. By Phase 2, heightened awareness of the federation had led to schools naturally

giving priority to their federation partners when organising or planning activities across schools.

Awareness of federation among students, parents, and outside agencies was low, although parents were informed in newsletters. The headteachers did not deem it overly important to raise awareness among students and parents - tangible benefits for students were the priority.

### ***Trust and motivation***

Collaboration shaped by historical ties made for close relationships between headteachers. Their commitment and will to collaborate supported all the other activities, and translated into regular attendance of meetings and full commitment to agreed activities. However, some headteachers' particular school situations (special measures, PFI, new in post) determined other priorities at times. Those whose schools experienced difficult circumstances felt supported by colleagues. Meetings were occasions when the heads actually talked about education and in-school issues rather than statutory business. Their relationship with one another was described as warm, without the 'natural reticence' that headteachers display when they feel their schools are 'up against it'. They also saw working together as a way of taking the isolation away in which schools tend to work, especially at senior management level. Therefore, 'one of the areas we're very keen to take advantage of [with regard to] the federation was in getting senior management teams to work together and managers within the schools to work together.' (headteacher) Headteachers thus extended their egalitarian way of collaborating to their SMTs. By Phase 2, barriers between SMT members had broken down effectively: they knew one another by name and face and felt free to consult colleagues when needed, knowing there was trust and confidentiality.

However, there was also the realisation in Phase 3 that despite common themes, each school needed to be able to address these in its own way. Federation was about 'layering things in schools that will raise the standard of performance', but not one single item would achieve this. Nor would one single target improve all schools, because each school had particular strengths which could be harnessed for particular projects. There were indications that differentiated federation working along geographical lines was taking shape ('natural' affinities between schools were emerging through geographical proximity, historical links or other factors, e.g. personalities), together with the realisation that not all schools could be engaged in all activities all the time.

### **Leadership and management**

The federation was driven by the headteachers, with a 'real shared approach' and all headteachers at the same level, rather than a hierarchy of schools. There was no federation management group (although this was initially planned) or federation Team. Such structures, it was felt, may apply to schools which did not traditionally work together. Despite competition between the schools and the selective system, there was no resistance at any level to work together.

The driving force for this federation thus came from the headteachers who worked well with each other. Therefore, 'we haven't created an artificially new structure; we've built on our existing channels of communication and strengthened those' (headteacher). The rationale was that headteachers' (and SMTs') commitment was needed, otherwise time (e.g. release of staff) and resources would not be made available. There were intense discussions among the headteachers at the beginning, whether to create a 'top-heavy structure', but the general

view was against this and remain so. Headteachers met at least twice a term, more often if required (e.g. to organise specific federation activities).

The federation brought no changes to the leadership structures of the schools, except in the school where an additional assistant headteacher was appointed who was seconded to the federation (full-time in Phase 1, then part-time). The headteachers' initial intention to have a federation co-ordinator in each school was never formalised.

### **Governance**

This federation was 'soft', with no over-arching governing body. There were no changes to the governing bodies of the schools. The headteachers saw their work structured by their accountability to the governors, their school improvement plans, and finances. Governors supported the federation and its activities and were kept informed. The governing bodies wanted to pursue the strengths in their own schools and develop them. They saw that the benefit of this working relationship was the strength at headteacher and SMT level and saw this as a way of giving students better provision in all schools. The federation was about enriching teaching and learning, not about governance.

### **Role of national agendas/policies**

National policies had or will have an indirect impact. The future 6th form in one secondary school and the future Academy will offer better provision for the local communities, but are likely to present a threat to neighbouring schools, especially those with a strong vocational element. The White Paper, it was pointed out, seemed to suggest more stand-alone schools, which makes it even more important to have schools working together, otherwise they would compete with one another and risk a retrograde step to the 1990s when 'we had successful schools and sink schools'. Government should therefore see federations as worthy of funding.

Education Improvement Partnerships did not present any clear aspects to bid against and while, a good idea, were a case of 'watch this space'.

There was also the view that schools do what is right for the students, not because Government says so. In some instances, Government policy was following what happened already (e.g. consultation of parents, promotion of student voice). Another comment was that Government agendas do not directly impinge on collaboration, unless they provide funds. These then accelerate activities. Uncertainty about some aspects of policy, e.g. Trust schools, and the ever changing nature of initiatives and remits of organisations (e.g. Specialist Colleges Trust, TDA, DCSF) were concerns.

### **Sustainability**

This federation effectively ceased to exist once funding ran out in early 2006. The link between the six headteachers continued through the monthly meetings of all headteachers in the LA. Joint CPD across the schools, while an ongoing aim, cannot continue for lack of funding. School-based activities (e.g. around 'impoverished language') have continued in the schools in various ways and their importance has been highlighted by greater national attention to this topic.

Lack of funding effectively brought the federation to a halt. Initial hopes that funding from the Specialist Schools Trust might be applied for did not materialise. Lack of time militated

against headteachers developing a strategy for attracting funds. The schools would like to see central funding renewed, because it allowed 'us to be creative in the way we used it and it's very seldom that we get that' (Headteacher).

This federation built on former ties and produced outcomes by cementing the co-operative ethos between headteachers and spreading it among SMT and middle managers and (to some extent) classroom teachers, building trust between staff so that things like consultation across schools can happen, breaking schools out of the isolation within which they tend to operate, and working around whatever barriers may be in the way. The indirect effects engendered promise to raise attainment and provision for the students.

## Federation H

### Origins, aims and purposes

This 'soft' federation was composed of two Emotional Social Behavioural Difficulty (ESBD) secondary day schools in an urban setting and one ESBD secondary residential school situated 20 miles away in a rural area. The ESBD day schools had a complex and challenging history that had included being identified as failing. However, a major success of the federation was that both schools have been removed from special measures.

The core aim of the federation was to deliver significant improvements to the ESBD provision within the LA, and arguably, as both day schools were removed from special measures this aim has been met. The federation was also responsible for establishing an additional joint site where vocational training including hairdressing, building and carpentry skills were taught by teaching and non-teaching staff. The joint site had made some links with local firms specializing in this area and is developing mechanisms for accreditation. Furthermore the centre could offer classrooms for key-stage four provision. This facility could be booked by any of the schools in the federation. The federation has led to some joint professional development activity for staff across the schools. There was also some movement of staff to provide additional support at critical times. An important feature of the federation was that it contributed to the effective management of admissions into and between the ESBD schools.

### Generating relationships, motivation and trust

A key challenge for this federation was to develop relationships between the staff of the schools. Due to their challenging circumstances staff in Schools A and B tended to subscribe to the concept of federating and could see the benefits of being involved.

*The federation has taken [School C] as a role model. For the past two years they've been disseminating, rather than it being everybody sharing. It's been we'll take the [School C] behaviour modification model and use in [school A] (senior manager, School A)*

Schools A and B had direct access to an experienced behaviour support manager who had previously been a member of staff at school C but was now employed by the federation. However, staff in School C found it more difficult to build relationships or motivation to engage because of perceived little benefit or reward for being involved with the federation. The challenge of promoting involvement of staff in School C was also recognized by the LA:

*We started off on the back foot. [School C] were understandably a bit resentful, it was like well, you know this Federation sounds great but its take, take, take and from their perspective in the first year it was because we had nothing to take from the other two schools really. (LA officer)*

The loss of a senior member of staff, the sharing of resources, the dissolving of their governing body and loss of chair of governors, combined with the associated loss of autonomy, further coupled with increased workload, all contributed to this situation. However, some teachers within the School C articulated a sense of moral purpose and remained optimistic of longer-term benefits as Schools A and B became more stable. Furthermore, as the federation and communication links developed negative attitudes mellowed. Staff in School C were beginning to understand the concept of working within and across organizations for the benefit of students.

## Leadership and management

During the early stages of development of the federation the principal paid particular attention to developing and communicating a vision for the federation based on the support for schools in special measures. This involved making key appointments and providing leadership capacity in key areas. Once School A and B had been removed from special measures much of the vision had been accomplished. Therefore the federation leadership was revisiting their core values and beliefs in an attempt to develop a shared vision for future development. The outcomes of these discussions will dictate how the federation will evolve and the nature of leadership roles and responsibilities assigned to individual leaders. This was a challenging task because tensions existed within the leadership group. The federation had created an additional tier of management. A governor highlighted how the new structure had impacted on the headteachers:

*When a headteacher has been directly responsible to his [sic] governors and now he's responsible to his principal as well as his governors. I mean it's taking something away from his original authority. (governor)*

The headteachers also recognize their power and autonomy have been eroded. One headteacher reflected: *You're not a head any longer you are merely managing a department....*

Another headteacher commented on the development of *"a campus mentality"* where heads would be managing no more than a section or department on a mainstream site under the new proposals for Building Schools for the Future. The experienced headteachers within the federation have found the changing nature of leadership demanded by the federation a challenge. The concepts of 'system leadership' and 'collaborative leadership' had yet to be embraced. For the leadership of the federation to develop further, leadership practices within the federation must move towards adopting the characteristics that underpin these concepts. This will require a changing attitudes and behaviour.

## Governance

Prior to the establishment of the federation Schools, A and B had very few structures or policies in place to support the work of governors or staff and the governing bodies were ineffective. The formation of the federation provided the opportunity to develop one effective governing body. In terms of structure, the federation had three semi-autonomous schools, each with their own history and tradition and DCSF number working under one governing body led by the chair of the 'successful school. The chair of governor's had a background as a senior executive in the private sector, was politically astute and well networked, very confident and forthright in his approach and was very active in the federation decision-making processes. For this federation issues pertaining to governance have tended to focus on whether the federation should move towards becoming fully integrated, adopting a single DCSF number. The chair of governors' vision was for the federation to become 'hard' and for the schools to move towards full integration but it was also recognized that this vision was not necessarily shared by the headteachers: *You've got the worry of the feeling that their responsibility is reduced and their status is reduced and this is something that has to be very carefully and very slowly approached. (governor)*

The relationship between the federation principal and the chair of governors' was positive became strained as the federation leadership had attempted to clarify and redefine their vision. Issues of power, autonomy and leadership within the federation continued to be a

source of frustration as the leadership team grappled with the challenge of developing a shared vision for the future of the federation.

### **Role of national agendas**

The adoption and implementation of national agendas and policies within the locality had created a rapidly changing unstable local context that had led to high levels of uncertainty within the schools and leadership of the federation. The combined agendas of Inclusion, Academies and Building Schools for the Future were particularly influential. The LA planned for the ESD day schools to be relocated onto mainstream school sites. How these agendas will impact on the development of the federation remained unclear. However, one headteacher reflected on the complexity and pace of change and went on to speculate the reorganization may have a negative impact on the work of the federation:

*If you are talking about BSF and Academies being a complex network, the federation is another level of complexity bought over... and district working is going to hold us back. (headteacher)*

### **Sustainability**

Revisiting the federation's vision was a key task if the federation was to be sustainable. An exploration of the values and beliefs held by the leadership group and their perceptions of the aims and core purposes of the federation are likely to be important in establishing the vision. Once a shared vision has been developed and articulated within the leadership group the vision will need to be communicated effectively to other stakeholders if the federation is to be sustainable in the longer term. Identification and renegotiation of clear roles and responsibilities for headteachers, the chair of governors' and the federation principal are also likely to be key factors. Furthermore, the structural elements and governance arrangements must also be clarified. The headteachers, federation principal and chair of governors' must develop a common view of the nature of relationships between schools/centre within the federation, the extent to which schools will collaborate and what protocols and procedures need to be put in place to promote, guide and support this work. Ultimately, and probably most importantly a common view must also be established regarding the status of the federation. Will the federation move towards becoming 'hard'? Retain the status quo, remaining 'soft'? Or fragment towards independence so that schools can concentrate on building new relationships and networks within the context of locality working?

In conclusion, to date this federation illustrates the potential for federal approaches focused on sharing resources can halt a downward spiral of educational failure in extremely complex and challenging schools. However, the extent to which this approach can be sustained in the longer term remains unclear.

## **Federation I**

### **Origins aims and purposes**

This federation was located in the south of England. It is embedded within the complex entity of a partnership which involved different types of schools and agencies: initially 22 primary/infant schools, 4 secondary schools, 1 specialist special school, 1 FE College, and local authority services, all engaged in a wide range of initiatives. The federation comprised the four secondary schools (all specialist), with inclusion as its focus. This was because DCSF 'were adamant that it had to be a secondary focus' (headteacher). The four headteachers were the main drivers. The structure to promote inclusion was a facility planned in Phase 1 and established in Phase 2, rated by Ofsted in May 2006 as 'good, with outstanding features'. Its aim had been to stop transporting excluded pupils out of the area and provide provision for them locally as well as to integrate (fragmented) services (e.g. behaviour support). The local authority's Children Out Of School Service thus has the strongest link with the federation through this facility. The director of Children's Services (appointed in November 2005) saw the federation as a model for the other county regions to follow. However, collaboration with other LA services still has some way to go, with an 'inclusion action team' (as of May 2006) yet to embed itself.

The geographical location (largest conurbation in the county, seaside location) and its particular implications for education have governed initiatives and activities. Traditionally, schools did not get on and competed openly, despite efforts to build links through pyramids. Two issues featured strongly: future falling rolls and the migration of pupils for post-16 education outside the area.

The willingness to co-operate arose from a change of headteachers across the secondary schools, one of whom had experience of Education Action Zone (EAZ) partnership. He initiated wider collaboration in 2002 so that 'the partnership has grown from strength to strength' (headteacher), with meetings thrashing out details, removing barriers, and building trust. The FE College joined after a new principal had taken up post. Collaborative working was to benefit all, including the local community. Partnership was to increase better value education, bring economies, make facilities more accessible, use resources better, and give schools more power to 'get the best deal' for the students.

The FE College experienced weaknesses in financial management and governance (Ofsted inspection, October 2002), but had 'largely resolved' these by 2004 under a new principal. It competed with one of the secondary schools which has a 6th form. Tensions regarding post-16 provision were reinforced by the intention of another secondary school to establish a 6th form.

### **Generating relationships**

#### ***Communication***

Given the number and types of schools involved, generating relationships and fostering communication among the 1,000 was a challenge. However, this was achieved through a range of activities involving all or sections of staff (including support staff). Partnership-wide INSET days were held annually. Staff were involved in various projects, such as modern foreign languages (MFL), transition (e.g. infants to primary), SEN, and ICT. Middle managers from across schools met and fed into the partnership and co-ordinated school-based

arrangements (e.g. placement of students with local employers). An extensive twilight CPD programme offered a range of courses (sometimes combined with training) to all staff and was 'now firmly embedded' (assistant headteacher). This made for natural exchanges between participants and promoted informal sharing of practice across schools.

The transition process between primary and secondary phase was facilitated by Primary College (a four-day programme of 61 workshops for all Y6 pupils, to widen their horizon, enhance social skills, and make them aware of further education opportunities), transition projects in MFL and literacy, and sharing of information through formal and informal channels. Building on the success of Primary College, a Secondary College was piloted in 2006 with Y9 students to raise aspirations by demonstrating pathways into further and higher education. Students from different schools participated in various projects, for example Sci-Tech week or arts projects.

As of summer 2006, a newsletter reporting on partnership news furthered communication across schools.

### ***Trust and motivation***

An annual leadership conference increased trust and openness between headteachers and principals. Tangible consequences were arrangements between schools (e.g. managed moves to avoid permanent exclusions, ICT support), which, 'in the past, [...] would never have happened' (headteacher). Relationships between headteachers/principals were 'getting stronger' and were marked by trust and mutual support. This and 'commonality of purpose and expectations' made for effective meetings. The dynamics of the leadership team and the way it worked developed over time and strengthened co-operation. However, induction of new headteachers to the ethos of partnership and well-nigh insurmountable tensions over post-16 provision (attributed to contradictory thrusts in Government policy) challenged partnership working. A further challenge was the LA's proposal to partner a secondary school with a school *outside* the partnership. Yet, this federation/partnership was based on voluntary participation and a differentiated form of participation was generally accepted, guided by individual schools' needs.

While some secondary staff perceived a mis-match between partnership and competition for students (due to student weighted funding), there was an overall sense that schools belonged to a wider entity. Initial doubt about schools being open to change and willing to share information had been overcome. However, staff perception was also closely linked to their particular experience, which had been mixed.

There was a 'profound effect' on ethos across schools, because they worked together and students were less antagonistic to one another. This promoted the (intended) perception (also reflected in the press, e.g. through publication of joint results) that the federation/partnership was *one* learning population.

### **Leadership and management**

Leadership and management operated at different levels, but worked hand in hand. There was no 'hard' federation. First, a central manager directed and facilitated the development of all aims and projects and acted upon leadership decisions. This role progressed from being mainly executive to having delegated powers, as reflected in the title: first development manager, later partnership director. Second, the leadership group consists of all headteachers and principals (with voting rights) and the director, with a chair and vice chair

(both primary headteachers). It met every half term. A majority vote was required, but decisions tended to be unanimous. Third, the Steering Group consisted of nine elected headteachers or principals, representing all geographical areas and types of schools, who met half-termly. Fourth, the 'group of three' (chair and vice-chair of leadership group and director) met every two weeks and took ideas to the steering group, which in turn submitted proposals to the leadership group. Fifth, the four secondary headteachers met twice a term informally, with the director present. These leadership and management structures allowed the federation/partnership to move forward and keep the momentum by adjusting structures, as required.

### **Governance**

No changes to the schools' governing bodies or governorship had occurred. Leadership structures in some schools had changed slightly (e.g. with an additional assistant headteacher) or some leadership members' remit extended to include partnership issues.

In Phase 2, link governors began to be nominated, creating a collective of governors across schools who met on a termly basis. The meeting was attended by the Director so that suggestions can feed into the federation/partnership and thus served as a forum of ideas, dispelling misconceptions among governors, and form a network for governors. A governing body for the facility to support excluded pupils was envisaged, but not yet in place.

### **Role of national agenda/policies**

The federations project and, to some extent, the idea of Education Improvement Partnerships had shaped this federation/partnership. A partnership-wide INSET day in early 2006 focused on the Every Child Matters (ECM) agenda, how it affected the various school departments and how it could be implemented within curriculum areas. This created a step change in staff feeling informed about ECM, although some schools had already had internal training.

The partnership considered becoming a Trust, but was conscious of thorny issues and uncertainty. Other Government initiatives were included in the strategic thinking at school leadership level. For example, one secondary school explored the white paper, but abandoned the process because of uncertainty and inconclusive proposals. Overall, apart from ECM, Government policy was perceived as presenting irreconcilable directions: encouragement of partnership working on the one hand and expansion of large schools fostering competition on the other. The latter was seen as not making sense in falling rolls scenarios and strained relations between schools. Parental choice was also seen as undermining partnership. While raising standards and accountability were accepted notions, the criteria for achieving these were seen as arbitrary and suggesting lack of joined-up thinking. Another concern was 'initiative overload'.

### **Sustainability**

Despite general agreement that 'partnership is a good thing' and should continue, there was concern about sustainability. Funds will stretch until September 2007. Although external funding was an option (and had been successfully drawn on), there was the view that the partnership should be viable without it. Views differed about how to achieve this: an increase in the schools' levy, further DCSF funding, economies of scale, or 'pay as you go' in a differentiated partnership. However, there was uniform agreement that the director was vital for the management of the federation/partnership. While headteachers need to lend general

support, the director is the 'real driving force'. The emphasis in the next twelve months is to continue embedding ethos, encouraging more champions, and initiating strategies. The knowledge that 'the brick wall is coming' was seen as a barrier. Changes at senior management level could also impact negatively.

Lack of money and existing funding structures for institutions were perceived to militate against sustainability, either directly or indirectly. Post 16 provision would be easier to resolve if income were not so closely linked to student numbers. Systemic tensions (created by budgetary constraints) were seen as barriers to partnership. Some activities could not be sustained without funds, yet were the very 'glue to hold things together'.

However, the future of the facility to tackle exclusions was secured through LA funding. It was balancing its budget and could stand on its own. The next stage in its development was still firmly pursued: to combine it with a children's and community centre. Its role was to serve the community and can do this, even if the partnership ceases. The LA's willingness to devolve resources and personnel will support the facility and promote greater integration of various services. The director of Children's Services saw it as a model (changing and developing practice and increasing value) to be replicated across the county - it is evidence for 'trail blazing' partnership work. The LA's support will thus be important for sustaining the partnership, although the LA's reorganisation (officially in place since April 2006) created a transient state in services. Therefore, despite the considerable amount and range of activities within the federation/partnership and remarkable achievements, it is 'not all plain sailing' (director).

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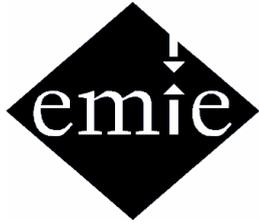
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