



## **STRUCTURAL REFORM, GOVERNANCE AND LEADERSHIP EXPLORING THE LOCAL IMPACT OF FREE SCHOOLS, ACADEMIES AND TRUSTS**

The Government's policies for the restructuring of the school system are radical in intent; their outcomes may or may not be so radical. Nevertheless they can be expected to have substantial impacts in a number of areas:

- on the range of types of schools that emerge in response to different local conditions;
- on the governance arrangements that are established and the accountability patterns that these imply;
- on the relationships between different types of schools, and the local and national structures that emerge in terms of their potential for competition and/or for collaboration/support;
- on existing structures, especially those associated with local authorities;
- on the types of leaders and leadership that emerge and the motivations that drive these.

BELMAS is funding a number of small-scale research projects to enable issues such as these to be explored at a local level, either in relation to specific groups of schools or specific localities. It is envisaged that such projects will have the potential to throw light on systemic issues, not just on the experience of individual schools. The following projects have been approved for funding.

### **Project Summaries**

#### **Leadership and Governance: new types of schooling (Ian Abbott, University of Warwick)**

The project will focus on two Local Authorities to investigate a number of common issues arising from the restructuring of the school system. It has the following objectives:

- To identify the different types of school that have been, or are being, established in the local area.
- To identify models of governance.
- To explore accountability procedures.
- To examine leadership models.
- To establish the extent of Local Authority involvement.
- To investigate competition and collaboration.

Initial data collection will involve documentary analysis of government policies and school documentation relating to leadership and governance. The principal research instrument will be semi structured interviews in schools, which have already restructured or those intending to do so. Interviews will be conducted with the headteacher, chair of governors, business manager/bursar and sponsors. Similar interviews will be carried out in one school in each area that has not undergone a change of status. A representative from each LA will also be interviewed. The interviews will provide data to develop case studies to illustrate common

practice and to identify key issues. The project will generate local findings on a range of issues that will have national relevance.

### **Leadership of Academy Schools in England: Sponsors and the realisation of the Ethos and Vision**

**(Tom Bisschoff, University of Birmingham, and Mark Gibson, North Wolverhampton Academy)**

The project seeks to increase the knowledge base of Leadership around the Ethos and Vision of an Academy. Academies are unique in the England school system in that their governance is controlled by an external Sponsor. The Sponsor creates the initial proposal for an Academy, the *Expression of Interest*. This document includes a section on the Ethos and Vision for the Academy. The pivotal role of the sponsor necessitates an inquiry into what is the motivation to get involved in a school. The sequential research questions are:

1. What motivates an Academy Sponsor?
2. How do the Sponsor and the Principal see their roles in the realisation of the Ethos and Vision?
3. How are the Ethos and Vision realised in an Academy?

The project will follow a multiple case study methodology covering five academies in the West Midlands specifically exploring Academy leadership with regard to the implementation or realisation of the Ethos and Vision. The methods to gather data will be ten interviews with the Principal and a Sponsor Representative in five Academies. The interview data will be supplemented by observation notes and analysis of documents on the Ethos and Vision and subsequent minutes of meetings to bring that to fruition. The data generated will be analysed using a constant comparative method of analysis.

### **A geographical approach to studying the restructuring of schooling**

**(Megan Crawford, University of Cambridge)**

This research aims to explore the impact of the restructuring of schooling within the defined geographical area of the local authority. This focus has been chosen for three reasons.

1. The local authority area will be an important arena of contestation and discussion in the immediate future.
2. The future role of the LA now is decidedly ambiguous, with a potential tension between the policy for academies and free schools on the one hand yet maintaining ‘a strong strategic role’ from the LA on the other.
3. The LA provides a convenient framework for exploring structural range in a systemic way.

There is an emerging ‘fourth’ level of governance through which schools work together through a variety of new arrangements. The study will be multi-level, exploring the interaction between policies and decisions taken at national level, local authority level, institutional level and this emerging ‘fourth’ level.

The study will be multi-level, comprising interviews with:

- key LA officers, chairs of local headteachers’ associations and governors’ associations, and local representatives of professional associations
- headteachers and chairs of governors
- others as appropriate, for example representatives of school chains to which local schools affiliate

Interviews will be supported by documentation.

The aim over one year will be to produce:

- an ‘governance audit’ of the stage reached;
- a ‘story’ of the journey through which this situation has been reached;
- a basis for continuing the study in these areas over a longer period.

**First links: Exploring the interplay of authority and professional learning in the formation of an academy chain**

**(David Eddy Spicer, University of Bath)**

This study explores authority as an aspect of control in the initial stages of the formation of a chain of newly-converted academies. Recent education reforms in England have identified school to school support as the cornerstone of school improvement initiatives in a radically devolved system of schooling. Understanding the dynamics of control in school-to-school relationships becomes increasingly critical as patterns of provision of schooling proliferate and the links amongst the state and schools becomes increasingly complex. Of particular concern, the processes of school pairing and the dynamics of control in the initial stages of building relationships between schools remain little understood. The proposed study explores control in school-to-school support as an interactional process of negotiating authority across the levels of institution, organisation and person. This perspective highlights the ways in which school-to-school ties may be viewed as explicitly pedagogical relationships. The relationship is pedagogical not in the usual sense that one associates with teacher-and-pupil but in a more expansive sense of establishing institutionally-conditioned relations that place one organisation in a leading role as transmitter and others in supporting roles as acquirers. The research frames pedagogical relations in terms of the realisation and recognition of institutionally-derived patterns of authority.

**Developing a new vision, constructing a new relationship with schools: a study of the education policy process from development to implementation of a Labour Party in transition from opposition to office in a major urban local authority**

**(Richard Hatcher, Birmingham City University)**

The aim of the research is to study the development and implementation of a distinctive ‘Vision for Urban Education and Learning’, and the attempt to construct a new relationship with schools, in a major urban local authority in the context of the Coalition government policy framework, as Labour moves from opposition to control of the local council.

The research is intended to capture a developmental process over a period of 12 months. It will be based on interviews with key informants, documentary analysis, and observation of meetings. Key councillors will be interviewed regularly during the research period, and there will be a series of interviews with selected school leaders and other participants in the policy formation and implementation process.

The research will be situated in four overlapping contexts: Coalition government policies on education and local government; national Labour Party education policy as it develops; debates in the fields of urban education and local government and governance; and current debates about new future directions for school education.

**An Investigation into Free Schools in England  
(Rob Higham, Institute of Education, London)**

The Government's Free Schools (FSs) policy allows parents, teachers and community groups to apply for funding to set up and take responsibility for new state schools. By November 2010 Government had received over 180 formal FS proposals. Yet despite their policy significance we have little empirical evidence with which to interpret these emerging forms of state-sponsored civil society action on public services.

This study has two main objectives. First, to explore the social profiles of FSs proposers, the contexts in which they are working and whether and how these influence the vision and aims of the schools they seek to develop. Second, to explore the public/private/Third Sector expertise that proposers seek out as they progress and the influences these have on how FSs are led, governed and, potentially, contested.

Following a 'mapping of the landscape' to identify as many proposers as possible, a survey will be sent to all lead proposers to collect data on the core team, their rationale and context, expertise and governance and parental support. Six case studies will also be developed through in depth interviews with the proposal chair, the wider team, LA officials, and neighbouring head teachers. FSs public events will be observed and the research will also be open to interviewing wider local networks of support and resistance.

**An Investigation into the Local Impact of a Hard Federation of 10 schools, in a three tier system, in a market town in North Staffordshire  
(Gill Howland, Independent)**

Objectives are as follows:

1. To identify the enabling and constraining factors in the early development of an all age Hard Federation that will improve the outcomes for children in the whole town
2. To use these findings to inform the development of strategies to address the identified constraints and achieve the objectives of the federation
3. To investigate the various models of governance that could be adopted by the Federation

School leaders and governors in the town have committed to the development of a Hard Federation, which will offer a coherent and progressive learning experience across primary and secondary education. This will require greater collaboration in planning, use of resources, staff development and deployment, and governance. The project will identify issues to be addressed during the first year of the development.

The research will be focussed on the senior leaders and governors of the consortium, who will complete an interview questionnaire and structured one to one interview. The findings and emerging themes will inform the implementation plan and the generation of models of governance.

**Exploring Governance in a Chain of Academies  
(Maija Salokangas and Chris Chapman, University of Manchester)**

Much of the debate around the Academies programme has developed around concepts of autonomy and accountability. This research aims to address the tension between these two concepts in a chain of Academies. Autonomy as in how autonomous the members of staff in an Academy are to make decisions in their role, including the nature of issues in which they are able to use their own judgement. Secondly, there will be a focus on the limitations of autonomy, as in to whom and in what kind of issues the members of staff are held responsible

in their decision making. This will involve an analysis of accountability procedures within the school and at the chain level. Thirdly, the ways in which regulations are put in place within the school and the chain will be examined.

The methods used in data collection are senior leadership team meeting observations in the chosen schools followed by an interview with each member of senior leadership team. In addition to the Academy senior leaders, representatives of the sponsor will be interviewed and relevant school level and chain level policy documents will be consulted.

**School Sector Industrial Relations in Transition**  
**(Howard Stevenson , University of Lincoln, Alex Alexandrou and John Macklin,**  
**University of East London, and Justine Mercer (University of Warwick)**

The Coalition government's aim of making every school an Academy represents one of the single biggest educational reform initiatives of the post-war period. A stated aim of the conversion to Academy status is to provide schools with the ability to determine their own pay and conditions of service for staff. Established structures at national and local authority level for dealing with staple industrial relations issues are likely to become increasingly irrelevant in an Academy School context.

This project seeks to understand how the move towards Academy status is impacting on industrial relations structures and processes within both local authorities and schools (LA maintained and Academy). How are employers (local authorities and Academy schools) and education unions responding to the new environment? What evidence is there that Academy schools are looking to depart from existing pay and conditions arrangements, and what school-based structures (with or without unions) are being established to manage this? Focusing on developments in two local authority areas the project will seek to assess to what extent the Academies initiative in schools presages a move towards school-based 'plant bargaining'. Possible implications for local authorities, school management and education unions will be presented.