

In Headship

The Critical Colleague's Role: Advice for Critical Colleagues

A key principle of the Masters programme leading to the Specialist Qualification for Headship is the combination of various perspectives based on the model of professional learning where practice-based learning sits as the integrating concept. This model includes four interdependent dimensions:

- reflection on practice;
 - cognitive development: building knowledge;
 - experiential learning: learning through structured experiences including practice and peer learning processes; and
 - social learning: engaging in the processes of learning and learning improvement engaging with cohort peers, staff in school, colleagues in partner schools and agencies.
- (Reeves et al. 2002; Reeves and Fox 2008)

Underpinning the programme are sets of relationships that build a comprehensive process of professional learning across: academic and professional learning; theory/practice; school/community and programme; practice based learning and building knowledge; individual and school improvement; and, building individual and school/community capability and capacity. These relationships are facilitated through support roles including that of the 'critical colleague' (Watson and Drew 2017).

During the *In Headship* programme it is intended that the 'critical colleague' (Fox and Drew 2014) and participant will develop an 'educative mentoring' relationship (Norman and Feiman-Neimer 2005) in which both parties seek to challenge and interrupt thinking around practice in an ethical endeavour, encouraging the learner to move beyond their comfort zone, and so promote changes which impact positively on practice.

The role of the critical colleague involves:

- having experience of senior leadership and understanding of the role of a headteacher as set out in the Professional Standard for Headship (GTCs 2021) and the expectations set out in HGios4 (ES 2015).
- supporting the participant as they take forward the school/community dimensions of the programme;
- agreeing to a series of formal and informal meetings with the participant to discuss their work on the *In Headship* programme; and
- enhancing practice in strategic leadership, through the support and development of their colleague.

A 'critical colleague' is expected to demonstrate the following attributes:

- empathy
- criticality
- intellectual curiosity
- political insight and awareness
- impartiality
- ethical awareness (in relation to the obligations of a mentor e.g. confidentiality);

and be prepared to facilitate the participant to:

- clarify and extend their experience
- explore feelings and intentions
- explore the outcomes of professional action
- articulate their learning
- identify next steps.

(Fox and Drew 2014)

The *In Headship* participant has responsibility for selecting a 'critical colleague' to work with during, and perhaps beyond the programme. The critical colleague should preferably be someone from outwith the participant's existing networks and from another local authority, if possible. This will bring different perspectives to their critical reflections and contribute to the development of systems level leadership capacity.

Critical Colleagues will normally be headteachers or, may on occasions be Local Authority (LA) or Scottish Independent Schools personnel with senior leadership experience who are currently employed in a senior leadership position. Critical Colleagues may work across LAs and sectors. Whilst we recognise the commitment in taking on the role of Critical Colleague, it is anticipated that this role will enhance Critical Colleague's professional learning and leadership capacity.

Finally, as the principles and practices of the role of the Critical Colleague are embedded within the Professional Standard for Headship (GTCS 2021), which all leaders at this level are expected to demonstrate, it is not envisaged that training will be required for Critical Colleagues.

References:

Fox, A. and Drew, V. (2014) Supporting Practice-based Masters-level Learning: The Emergence and Role of the 'Critical Colleague'. Paper presented at the European Conference on Educational Research, University of Porto, Porto, Portugal, (September).

Norman, P.J. and Feiman-Nemser, S. (2005) Mind activity in teaching and mentoring. *Teaching and Teacher Education*. Vol.21 pp.679-697

Reeves, J., Forde, C., O'Brien, J., Smith, P. and Tomlinson, H. (2002) Performance Management in Education: Improving Professional Practice, London; Paul Chapman Publishing.

Reeves, J. and Fox, A. (2008) *Practice Based Learning: Developing Excellence in Teaching. Policy and Practice in Education*, Volume 24. Edinburgh, Dunedin.

Watson, C. and Drew, V. (2017). Enacting educational partnership: collective identity, decision-making (and the importance of muffin chat). *School Leadership and Management* 37(1-2), 3-18.