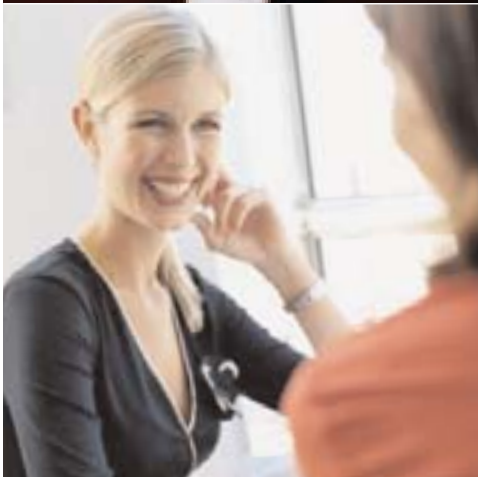


# An Introduction to School Federations





# “Over the last couple of years the DfES Innovation Unit has provided the means for practitioners who are working in school federations to come together to support and learn from each other”

The DfES Innovation Unit would like to thank all the leaders of school federations who have given time to produce this booklet. The “open source culture” in which ideas are freely shared and developed for the benefit of all, as described by David Hargreaves in an early DfES Innovation Unit publication *Working Laterally*<sup>1</sup>, is alive and well as far as our federation practitioners are concerned!

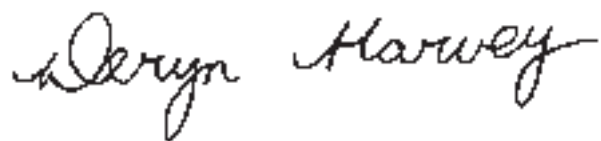
Over the last couple of years the DfES Innovation Unit has provided the means for practitioners who are working in school federations to come together to support and learn from each other. Some of those teachers and school leaders compiled this booklet, which is backed up by a range of dynamic on-line materials which you can access on the DfES Innovation Unit website. (<http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/innovation-unit>)

We have produced these materials at the request of teachers and school leaders to provide a way of sharing and developing the best and most effective ways of delivering learning to young people. Anecdotal evidence indicates that using a federated approach enables schools to have a considerable impact on the learning opportunities of their pupils.

You are all invited to contribute your ideas and experiences via the DfES Innovation Unit’s website. There will also be an on-line database with experts from the world of school federations to enable you to make direct contact with other experienced practitioners for information or advice.

I would especially like to thank Annie Tempest, Headteacher at Dartington Primary (Totnes Federation); Paul Mortimer, Headteacher at Hollingworth High and Graeme Jones, a consultant with Transformation, who have all led the federation collaboratives. Kelvin Peel, consultant with Ark Education and leader of the “All-Age Federation Collaborative” whose guide will be available via the website, has also made a valuable contribution.

We hope you will find this guide useful. If you are interested in becoming a member of a federation support group, please contact Annie Tempest (federation in general) or Kelvin Peel (all-age federations). You can contact them via the DfES Innovation Unit’s website.



Deryn Harvey  
**Director, DfES Innovation Unit**

<sup>1</sup> Hargreaves, D (2004) *Working Laterally: how innovation networks make an education epidemic* DfES

## “Federations agree to work together for the benefit of all pupils and their school communities”

Welcome to our first in a series of Practitioner Guides.

This booklet describes the essentials of school federation. It has been put together by a number of us who are currently working in a school federation and therefore have first-hand experience of what is involved. We hope you will find it both useful and informative and that it will help you decide whether this is a path you wish to take. This booklet is designed with those in mind who might want to federate either across phases or within the same phase.

### What is a federation?

A federation is a group of schools, often cross-phase, usually numbering from two to five – although some are much bigger. Federations agree to work together for the benefit of all pupils and their school communities. This could entail sharing curriculum, teaching, ICT, sports facilities or even budgets. All of us run schools which have their own particular strengths or advantages. This can be in terms of facilities, staff expertise or local resources. Sharing these assets can help every school make education better for all its pupils.





## What is the benefit to our school community?

School federations enable us to share best practice, facilities, expertise and to learn from the strengths of excellent teaching in different phases. Some federations have identified, partly through the use of data, that student responses to environment, teaching techniques and learning differ radically, and they are keen to utilise these findings.

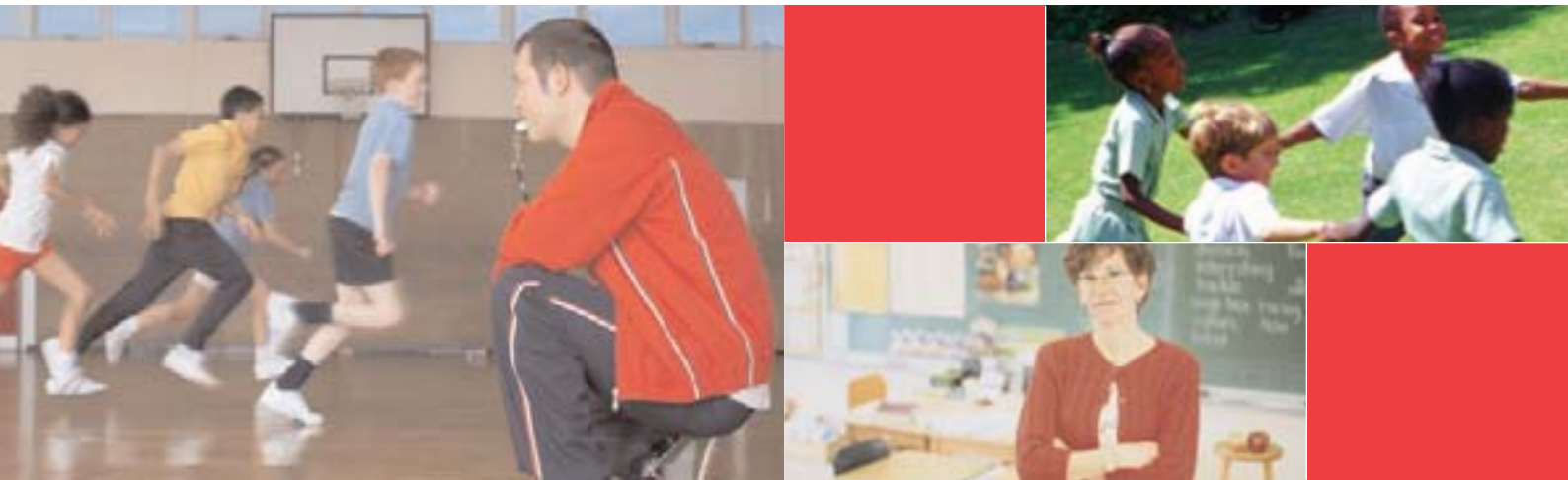
Avoiding duplication of effort or resources often leaves us as teaching heads and professionals with more time to devote to the core business of teaching and learning, rather than to administrative or management duties. The same principles could be applied to having common policies on behaviour and admissions, amongst others.

Some quick benefits from a federated approach are combining forces to achieve enhanced purchasing power: to gain economies of scale from single rather than multiple maintenance contracts for buildings and grounds, ICT equipment and support, school catering and caretaking.

Working together in federation can enable a group of schools to coordinate either curriculum, teaching or learning strategies for localised coherence and can also facilitate inclusion and diversity across a federation.

Additionally, a growing interest in cross-phase federations enables a smooth and effective transition for pupils.





Collaboratives are many and varied – schools often find these easy to operate within, as there are no fixed legal arrangements or structures, therefore allowing for easy networking and sharing.

Some schools we have worked with, however, require a more structured partnership. A federation exists where there is some type of formalised agreement to work together. From the diagram, we should highlight two main types of federation:

- i) **'Soft' federations – these have made a formalised commitment to work together, for example by creating joint committees on any aspect of teaching and learning or leadership, but each member school retains a degree of autonomy. Those of you wishing to delegate responsibilities from individual governing bodies to joint committees must follow the guidance in the School Governance (Collaboration) Regulations – see next page.**
- ii) **'Hard' federations – these are single legal entities, with a single governing body across all schools. This is in accordance with the Education Act 2002, section 24, and also the School Governance (Federations) Regulations – see next page.**

Many of us find ourselves somewhere in between these two positions. These 'chewy' federations have sometimes chosen to go further than joint committees by creating, for example, an overarching strategic committee to oversee all partnership activities, whilst still retaining each school's separate governing body.

**“Trust is fundamental to effective collaboration and should be fostered at every level of management. There has to be a real sense of openness and a willingness to operate in a joined-up way”**

**The School Governance (Collaboration) (England) Regulations 2003 – [these apply to all non-hard federations]**

These Regulations came into force on 1st September 2003. They allow maintained schools to have collaborative arrangements with other maintained schools, including joint meetings of governing bodies and joint committees. Under the Regulations, two or more governing bodies may arrange for any of their functions to be discharged jointly; and they may delegate any of their functions (subject to certain restrictions on delegation) to a joint committee.

You can find the Guidance on GovernorNet, and the Regulations are available to download on the HMSO website – links later in this booklet.

**The School Governance (Federations) (England) Regulations 2004 – [these apply only to hard federations]**

These Regulations came into force on 30th August 2004 (replacing previous 2003 Regulations). They allow all categories of maintained schools to federate under one governing body, subject to the procedures stated in the Regulations.

The Regulations apply to between two and five schools. Governing bodies wishing to become members of larger statutory governance federations would need to ask the DfES about special arrangements.

Less formal collaborations are not affected by these Regulations.



## What are the conditions for a successful federation partnership?

In our experience to date, we have found many of the factors below to be crucially important to the success of our partnerships:

1. A sense of **shared identity** between the schools. Geographical proximity and having common aims on curricular and non-curricular activities are extremely beneficial.
2. A **common purpose**. Schools need a shared sense of what needs to be done and how, with a joint vision for improving attainment and achievement levels.
3. **Leadership**. Partnership working requires strong leadership and federations will benefit from developing and sustaining leadership at all levels.
4. A strong **management structure**. Schools must understand and co-operate with this for effective partnerships to grow.
5. **Trust**. Trust is fundamental to effective collaboration and should be fostered at every level of management. There has to be a real sense of openness and a willingness to operate in a joined-up way amongst governors, heads and all other staff.
6. A **system of review**. We need to have good monitoring/evaluation systems to show that we are achieving the anticipated benefits of federation.
7. **Commitment**. Both time and resources are needed to ensure that the federation is effective and sustainable.
8. **Communication**. Excellent communication mechanisms are required when introducing change, particularly where lots of schools are involved. Many of us are developing intranets and various other e-forums.

**“We have produced these materials to provide a way of sharing and developing the best and most effective ways of delivering learning to young people.”**

9. **Sustainability.** There must be a clear sustainability strategy in place to enable a collaboration to cope. For example: if the leadership of one of the schools changes; if additional schools wish to join in; if existing schools wish to leave. If committing to contracts or expenditure for any length of time, financial sustainability is vital.

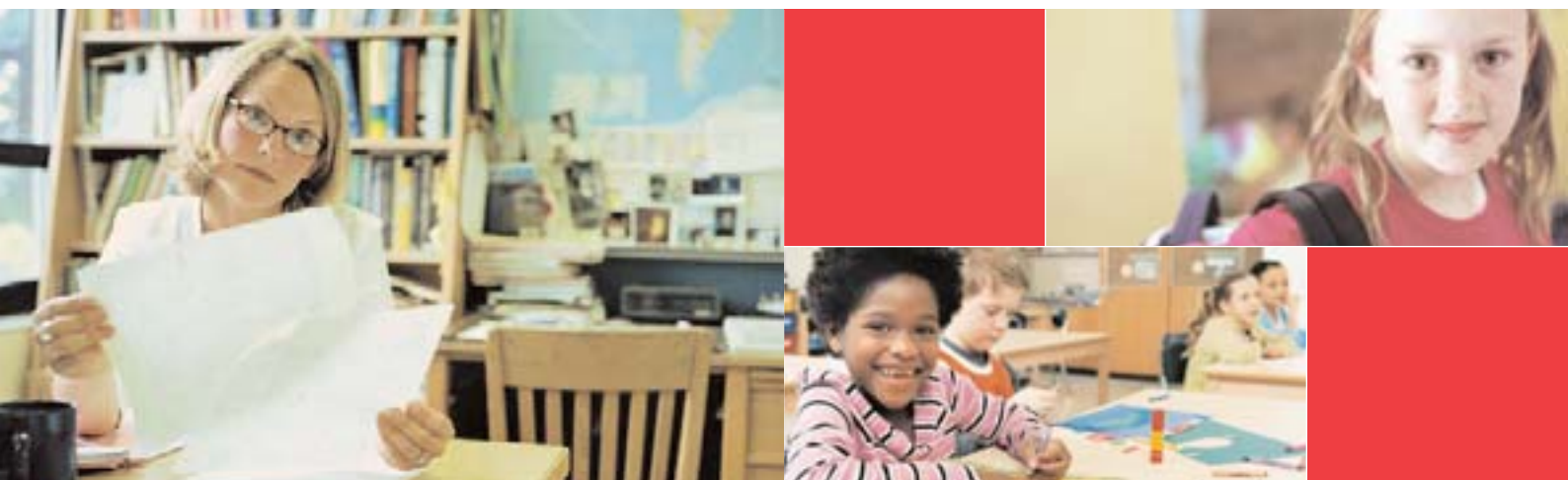
## What support is there to help us?

Federations have been up and running for some time now, with 37 DfES pilot federations amongst the many established federations. We have learned much about what concerns schools at various stages – from initial ideas, to the set-up and eventually to the day-to-day running of a partnership arrangement and the structural issues concerned. Recently the DfES, through the Innovation Unit, ran a number of seminars which encouraged federated schools to maximise the sharing of experience and expertise to capacitate information exchange.

## Further Information & Essential Links

For further information about federations, please consult the DfES Innovation Unit’s website containing The School Federations Information Exchange (please see next page for full details) and links to the Innovation Online Community. Please get in touch with us via the website to take part!

DfES Innovation Unit	<a href="http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/innovation-unit">http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/innovation-unit</a>
DfES (Also for Education Improvement Partnerships)	<a href="http://www.dfes.gov.uk">http://www.dfes.gov.uk</a>
Regulations	<a href="http://www.governornet.co.uk">http://www.governornet.co.uk</a>
Publications	<a href="http://www.hms.gov.uk">http://www.hms.gov.uk</a>
TeacherNet	<a href="http://www.teachernet.gov.uk">http://www.teachernet.gov.uk</a>



## The School Federation Information Exchange

We see this booklet as a way of introducing colleagues to federations. The DfES Innovation Unit website contains an accompanying 'information exchange' area for schools who are both interested in federations and are who are currently federating. This area provides resources and promotes the sharing of information and learning.

It contains the following three main sections:

1. **Background** introduction (of which this booklet is a part), which is designed to provide you with essential information to get started and to provide links to other sources of information.
2. A set of **resources and ideas** – these are working examples of every aspect of active federations. Firstly, contractual and structural documents for use if planning, for example, to have joint sub-committees, job descriptions for newer federation-based roles and so on. These are documents which have been developed and used by other practitioners. Secondly, case studies, approaches and lessons learnt – what has worked for us and demonstrable effective practice.
3. An **evaluation and support** section to provide a source of practical and useful tools – all of which have been tested by practitioners. These include surveys for soft data collection (from staff, students, parents etc), evaluation mechanisms and project planning and monitoring tools. Plus, the federation contact database from which you can contact similar federations.

Together, these sections form our collective 'live knowledge base', and the information and examples within will be continually edited. On the above sections within the DfES Innovation Unit website you can find details of how to submit your documents.

