

# Executive Summary

## 1 Context

In November 2006 The Sage Gateshead was awarded £345,000 of Creative Partnerships funding to conduct a national programme in co-mentoring between emerging leaders in creative and cultural organisations and schools. The **REFLECT** pilot programme, which concludes in July 2008, adds a cross-sector dimension to recent developments in professional learning that have been promoted by Creative Partnerships and other national agencies and programmes. Strategic initiatives in education have increasingly been underpinned by different models of mentoring and coaching but the shift towards collaborative practice is now acknowledged as central to the delivery of the Government's creativity agenda. Cross-sector reflective dialogue, that connects to its context and is grounded in evidence-based practice, is pivotal in strengthening the quality of partnership practice and collaborative creative work. Co-mentoring, as exemplified by **REFLECT**, becomes a key process in deepening and broadening the quality of professional learning for teachers and creative practitioners.

## 2 Outline of the REFLECT programme

The principles underlying **REFLECT** have been embedded in the DNA of the Practitioner Development Programme at The Sage Gateshead since its inception in 2001. They have now become an integral part of the strategy in mentoring and peer learning being developed by Creative Partnerships. The aim of **REFLECT** has been to provide one-to-one structured co-mentoring for emerging leaders from schools and creative and cultural organisations to develop more innovative partnership practice and enhance creativity at the heart of their organisations.

The four main elements contributing to the effectiveness of the **REFLECT** programme are:

- The **REFLECT** framework, found in the Handbook, is the key touchstone to the programme. (In the light of the pilot, the Handbook has been revised and published by The Sage Gateshead – [www.thesagegateshead.org/reflect](http://www.thesagegateshead.org/reflect), [www.reflectco-mentoring.com](http://www.reflectco-mentoring.com)) It pays special attention to structuring a co-mentor relationship, making a learning agreement and agreeing a shared focus. The principles and processes of **REFLECT** are articulated in a conceptual frame which comprises:
  - definitions of roles related to mentoring and co-mentoring
  - characteristics of an effective mentoring relationship
  - main elements of a co-mentoring process
  - relationship between the co-mentors
  - reflective practice
  - reflexive practice
  - characteristics of effective co-mentors

- The management and delivery element of the programme including:
  - handling the matching process, using the expertise of the two Programme Managers supported by the knowledge of Regional Advisory Groups
  - ongoing monitoring of the programme by the Programme Managers
  - setting up a National Advisory Group to ensure that **REFLECT** would contribute to and learn from national policy debates on creativity, education and skills, and workforce development
- A clear structure for the programme including:
  - the range of activities and processes engaged in by co-mentors on the Training and Gathering Days
  - making a learning agreement
  - setting a shared focus (linked to the first payment of the Honorarium)
  - establishing a minimum number of co-mentoring meetings
- The lack of prescription in terms of allowing open-ended outcomes. A key element in the programme has been the balance achieved between lack of prescription and having a clear structure.

### 3 Evaluation process

‘Conversation’ and reflective enquiry have formed the basis of the evaluation process, which has been guided by the principles and processes in the **REFLECT** framework. Out of the 138 co-mentors, 49 responded to the evaluation questionnaire. The results were analysed by Dr Alexandra Lamont, Senior Lecturer in Psychology of Music, and Rebecca Hale, doctoral student, at the Research Institute for Life Course Studies, Keele University.

Twenty nine in-depth interviews were held with co-mentors (17 with creative practitioners and 12 with teachers). Further interviews were conducted with the **REFLECT** team, with the Lead Trainer and the Senior Officer at Creative Partnerships. 7 creative practitioners and 6 teachers presented testimonies about their personal responses to **REFLECT**, whilst 2 co-mentoring pairs produced case studies of their work together. The Findings and Outcomes are dependent on an analysis of the data drawn from the questionnaires, interviews, testimonies and case studies.

### 4 Key findings

- The management and delivery of **REFLECT** has had to operate within constraints arising from a tight timescale. A national programme of this complexity needs to be positioned within a realistic time frame.

- The development of **REFLECT** and its delivery costs, separated from evaluation, conference and web development, total £282,126.50, which is the equivalent to £2,044 per participant. This figure includes an honorarium of £500 per person together with the development of a co-mentoring framework, handbook and training materials as well as a delivery team.
- The effective matching of co-mentors was one of the most significant aspects of **REFLECT** and the Programme Managers worked closely with Regional Advisory Groups throughout the selection and matching process.
- Having a clearly defined shared focus was a central aspect of an effective co-mentoring partnership. Some co-mentors saw themselves at a transitional stage in their professional life and were seeking greater clarification about future direction. **REFLECT** enabled them to review their own practice. Others considered that the co-mentoring process would help them to address such specific issues as reconnecting with their creative energy, rekindling their motivation, strengthening their creative leadership, responding creatively to curriculum challenges, exploring ways of transforming their organisation and establishing collaborative ways of working. The shared focus provided the parameters of a structured reflective conversation that could act as a springboard for change. In the words of one headteacher:

My co-mentor used story to facilitate a reflective conversation which helped me understand my relationship with my own creativity, deepening my understanding of myself and my personal and professional journey. This proved an ideal exercise for uncovering professional direction. My co-mentor allowed me to adopt a critical perspective about reasons and consequences of my actions both personal and professional (**Headteacher**).

- The Training and Gathering Days were critical in initiating, supporting, sustaining and developing effective co-mentoring relationships. Opportunities were given to deepen an understanding of the co-mentoring process and to explore key issues that might arise from their partnerships. Each Training Day focused especially on asking reflective questions and on examining possible co-mentoring scenarios. The Gathering Days enabled co-mentors to strengthen their relationship and to share knowledge, ideas and experience with colleagues through group discussion and practical problem-solving exercises. The potential of the training and development process was summed up by the Lead Trainer :

One of the really exciting possibilities afforded through co-mentoring is the opportunity for people to focus on their own personal motivations, and how that impacts on their role within their organisation, and in turn how their organisation operates within its sector. ...

The co-mentoring process is a clear and useful way of enabling participants to recognise, value and harness their personal potency, which they can then apply within their working environment (**Dave Camlin**).

- The 9 Training Days and 18 Gathering Days throughout the country served as a crucible for examining the styles of workshop leadership that are most effective in generating creative conversations and reflective learning for co-mentors from cross-sector contexts.

## 5 Questionnaire evaluation

Completed questionnaires were received from 49 participants, including 22 from schools and 27 from creative and cultural organisations. They were drawn from every region in England, with the largest group from the North East (20%). Most had been in their current role for 3-10 years (26 participants), with 13 having less than 3 years experience and 10 having had more than 10 years experience.

In her summary of the questionnaire evaluation Dr Alexandra Lamont considers that the overall data gave:

a positive impression of the impact of the **REFLECT** programme, which has been well received by both those working in schools and in creative organisations. The strongest relationship between factors found here is that between the effectiveness of the matching process between co-mentors and the overall effectiveness of the programme in terms of personal, professional, organisational and creative outcomes. In general most participants found the entire process to be of considerable benefit, and it has produced some major shifts in thinking and in practice amongst some participants. Many view the co-mentoring relationship as one which will have long-term benefits as well as contributing to the effectiveness of working practices in the short term (pp.56).

## 6 Outcomes

- The synergy between the personal and the professional is mirrored in the reflective dialogue that has characterised every aspect of the **REFLECT** programme - from conception to planning, management, matching, delivery, training, development and evaluation. Engaging in shared reflective enquiry that is rooted in a cross-sector context has resulted in unpredictable outcomes that have effectively transformed practice. Paradoxically, for a process that has not been prescriptive or target-driven, the outcomes have been clear, tangible and pragmatic for the co-mentors and their organisations. As an example, one headteacher saw **REFLECT** as an opportunity to redefine her approach to leadership:

I never really stopped to think about why I was doing things in a particular way. I was not a natural reflective practitioner ... (but) the programme looked as if it would make me stop and think about my leadership and by experiencing a co-mentoring relationship with a cultural partner ... (this) would strengthen my ability to challenge my preconceived views, perhaps take more risks, and make more connections and even shift my perspective. Hopefully it would help me map out a future vision that is sustainable and rooted in practice-based evidence and experience (**Headteacher**).

- **REFLECT** has demonstrated that if a professional development programme gives people time, space and permission to pause, to reflect, to reconnect and to reappraise, they are likely to see themselves and their professional life in a new perspective. To quote another headteacher:

I have come to realise the extent to which my opportunities to be creative in the workplace have been constricted by external initiatives and imperatives. The constant balancing act between being accountable to the Government and to the Local Authority, while truly listening and responding to children's needs and wants is exhausting. The added responsibility of developing financially sustainable childcare and a whole raft of other initiatives means that I have little time to genuinely reflect on what I am doing. The **REFLECT** programme has given me time and space to really think about these tensions and it has motivated me to look for creative solutions (**Headteacher**).

- The dialogue and shared activities experienced by the co-mentors have enabled them to shift their ways of seeing, to reconnect with their creativity and to re engage with the workplace in a qualitatively different way. For one director of an arts organisation:

The **REFLECT** programme has had an impact on my personal creative practice by providing an exchange which has focused on process in an often outcome-centred educational context. Having the 'space' to talk, think, relax and share perspectives with another professional has enriched my thinking, motivation and creative practice (**Creative Practitioner**).

By positioning the programme in a cross-sector context, **REFLECT** has provided a rich model of personal and professional development that is readily transferable.

- Co-mentoring is essentially about collaborative learning. The challenge of exploring a shared focus within a cross-sector context has enabled many co-mentors, especially teachers, to put their own creative practice back into their work with young people. The experience of **REFLECT** has also shown that a non-judgemental co-mentoring relationship based on parity of respect provides a strong basis for sharing values and exploring different points of view. To make sense of this experience, each partnership has had to find a form of communication, a shared vocabulary that is comprehensible to both co-mentors. At times non-verbal modes of communication have opened up new ways of thinking and recording reflections. One pair of co-mentors used sketchbook 'logs' to record information:

I have suggested alternative forms of documentation, one of which was to set 'Creative Challenges' - using visual means to describe the sort of day we've had or what personal circumstances impacted on our work, life, etc. We both now keep a daily log, building a 'patchwork', using colour, shape, pattern and occasionally words to document the main events of each day (**Creative Practitioner**).

For collaborative learning to work, the processes used have to allow participants to build up confidence and trust so that they can share any feeling of vulnerability.

- One of the strongest impacts of **REFLECT** has resulted from the way in which co-mentors have taken key aspects of their creative and professional learning back into their respective schools and cultural institutions. Examples include: organisations developing their own co-mentoring programme; creating new cross-sector links; capitalising on the creative and educational potential of cross-sector partnerships; strengthening creative learning in schools; developing new approaches to exercising creative leadership; encouraging reflective forms of learning within the curriculum. In one arts organisation, for example, staff have shown a keen interest in developing their own co-mentoring programme. Their director points out that:

The **REFLECT** Co-mentoring Scheme is not 'rocket science'; it is basically a simple, common sense, cost effective approach to professional development. We are planning to integrate the scheme into our own work by linking members of our education team to local teachers over a two-term period beginning in September 2008 (**Creative Practitioner**).

For a creative practitioner exploring visual art in the Primary curriculum with her headteacher co-mentor, she used her art gallery as a stimulus for creative work linked to writing and drama.

My co-mentoring relationship has meant that we've been able to pilot three different sessions with six of (the Headteacher's) Key Stage 2 classes (212 pupils) at the gallery. Having (the Head's) critical and honest feedback has proved extremely useful and our sustained contact means that we can continue to trial things together. (The Head) and other staff members have attended twilight CPD events at the gallery and will be holding a whole-school INSET at the gallery in the summer. We will soon bring together the Maths Co-ordinator and artists from the gallery's Creative Practitioner team to work collaboratively to develop new sessions that support numeracy through art-based activities, which will be piloted with pupils before added to the gallery's programme (**Creative Practitioner**).

Another creative practitioner could see the strategic benefits of the **REFLECT** programme.

**REFLECT** has impacted on (my organisation), influencing the shape of our project delivery, therefore strategically benefiting young people in the schools that we already work with and those we will work with in the future. **REFLECT** has reiterated to me how important space for ideas and conversations to develop is with both young people and adults. ... It continues to remind me that committing to listen, talk, relax and enrich ourselves as creative thinkers is essential if we are to shape creative experiences for those with whom we work (**Creative Practitioner**).

- One of the main features of **REFLECT** is that it was not task or project-oriented. The openness of the co-mentors and the lack of pressure for specific outcomes have resulted in a creative response to the programme. This was unexpected for many co-mentors whose previous experience of professional development had been more circumscribed and failed to promote reflective dialogue. In the words of one headteacher:

Although we had identified an area to explore we were not bound by externally imposed expected outcomes and I believe this is a strength of the programme. The luxury of having uninterrupted time and space to share our thoughts, feelings, and possibilities without the expectation of producing measurable outcomes at the end of the process was totally liberating and in itself promoted creative thinking (**Headteacher**).

- The evidence gained from the evaluation demonstrates that the key principles and processes embedded in the **REFLECT** framework are clearly transferable to cross-sector training and development programmes aiming to deepen the quality of professional and creative practice. The framework is not a mechanistic toolkit but its principles could be applied to many different Continuing Professional Development (CPD) contexts and could form the basis for training co-mentors and facilitators.

## 7 Dissemination

- Four recurring themes have arisen in **REFLECT** that could inform the planning of regional and national cross-sector workforce development programmes:
  - What are the necessary conditions for ensuring an effective co-mentoring relationship?
  - What are the necessary conditions for enabling cross-sector co-mentoring conversations to facilitate personal and professional learning?
  - What are the necessary conditions for strengthening creative learning through cross-sector co-mentoring?
  - What are the necessary conditions for using the process of cross-sector co-mentoring as a vehicle for organisational change?

These questions lie at the heart of **REFLECT** and they need to be central to discussions within the dissemination process. The interactive, interconnected approach to **REFLECT** presents a creative challenge to the way in which **REFLECT** is disseminated.

- Currently many national initiatives in the area of workforce development cut across traditional silos and encourage cross-fertilisation across sectors. In this context co-mentoring will figure increasingly alongside mentoring, coaching, co-coaching, peer-to-peer learning and work-based learning. Lessons from **REFLECT** could fruitfully inform subsequent developments in these areas.

- The dissemination of **REFLECT** should be managed strategically by Creative Partnerships and The Sage Gateshead, supported by members of the National Advisory Group.

## 8 Recommendations

### 1. Creative Partnerships and The Sage Gateshead should set up a **REFLECT cross-sector co-mentoring Lab with a focus on:**

- Research and development into key areas connected to cross-sector co-mentoring including:
  - Exploring different models of co-mentoring between sectors
  - Exploring the potential for building the **REFLECT** model into the National Framework for Mentoring and Coaching
  - Further development of the **REFLECT** framework
  - Further development of **REFLECT** as a model of creative learning for adults
  - Undertaking research to understand the impact of the **REFLECT** programme on its participant's future work with children and young people
  - Planning for a research and evaluation framework to capture learning outcomes for children and young people who have participated in activity developed by **REFLECT** co-mentors
- Training and development of co-mentors, facilitators and leaders of trainers.
- Building up a pool of co-mentor trainers, facilitators and leaders who are effective at working in cross-sector contexts.

### 2. Creative Partnerships and The Sage Gateshead, through the established **REFLECT Lab**, should further strengthen their developmental links with other strategic national agencies and programmes. Areas of development should include:

- Developing the **REFLECT** website so that it serves as a co-mentor database linked to key national agencies and programmes.
- Exploring the feasibility of transferring the **REFLECT** framework into training and development programmes of key national agencies including the Sector Skills Councils representing the cultural sector.

### 3. Creative Partnerships and The Sage Gateshead, in conjunction with key national agencies and appropriate government departments, should seek to ensure that **REFLECT** plays a strategic role in policy discussions about raising the quality of workforce development through mentoring, coaching and co-mentoring.

- 4. Creative Partnerships, The Sage Gateshead and the REFLECT National Advisory Group should ensure that the findings of the pilot programme are shared and discussed with the DCMS and the DCSF to inform policy and national programme development specifically around cross-sectoral working: e.g. Find Your Talent and national development schemes.**

