

# Specialist leader of education case study

## Helen Morgan, Harton Technology College, South Shields

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Helen Morgan is a history teacher and training manager at Harton Technology College, an outstanding 11-18 comprehensive school with 1,600 pupils situated in South Shields.

Just over half of Helen's time is devoted to the training manager role. The remit includes responsibility for ITT, NQT induction and induction of all new staff at Harton. "Anyone who is new or needs training comes to me," she says.

All of this activity is delivered within the school but when School Direct started this soon became part of Helen's remit. She joined the specialist leader of education (SLE) programme in May 2012 with a specialism in ITT and a focus on implementing School Direct across Harton's alliance of 13 strategic partners, as well as building partnerships with other schools and HEI partners.

"I applied because I was working in a teaching school and we had started to look at ITT across the teaching alliance," says Helen.

"I was happy to be involved in school-to-school support in ITT and I'd spent some time developing a mentoring system as part of this work. So I was seeing the benefit of getting out and going to other schools, meeting people in different schools with different approaches and strategies. That was really exciting and I wanted to develop that role so when the SLE programme came along I thought that was perfect."

The rolling out of School Direct started last June. The starting point was to ensure that every school that wanted to be involved had the information they needed to make an informed decision. This was harder than it seemed as details about School Direct were at that stage sketchy, Helen admits.

"There were lots of unknowns and one of the problems was getting alliance partners to buy into something that we did not have much detail on at the time. We needed to get people to buy into it and just to trust us."

Helen did this through sharing as much information as possible, taking a questioning approach and setting out a vision that people could understand and agree to. "We always said that we weren't trying to sell anything," she says. "We had done partnership ITT before and we needed to know how School Direct was different. So we really questioned the programme, asking whether it was of benefit to us and the students. Once everyone was reassured that we were coming at this with the right intentions I informed everyone that I would work on the detail."

"Our vision was to create a successful, collaborative training programme that people would fight to get on to. We felt that we had so much we offer to new students and agreed that what we wanted was a training programme that would be envied. A lot of the schools involved felt that their expertise was under-used in these areas. This was their chance to take part."

For the 2013-14 academic year the alliance has a total of 12 School Direct places available across six schools. This is made up of seven tuition based secondary places across four schools, and five salaried places across two schools.

Ensuring that both secondary and primary schools were involved in School Direct was the next management challenge for Helen. "Secondary schools found the idea of School Direct much more palatable. They were happy with one of the main requirements of School Direct training providers, which is that they offer employment to the trainee at the end. But that put a lot of primaries off, although we do have one primary offering a salaried School Direct place in the next academic year."

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Helen has had to use her management and leadership skills to bring primary heads around the table and determine exactly how she can persuade more primaries to get involved in the programme in 2014-15.

“We now have a working party of six primary heads and we have agreed a primary system for 2014-15 which they have all agreed to work on,” she explains. “The main issue has been that many primaries, especially smaller ones, do not have the resources to take on School Direct trainees on their own and they need to take a much more collaborative approach so that the responsibility is shared and isn’t on any one school’s shoulders. We’re looking at up to 12 secondary tuition places for 2014-15 and 8 primary places.”

Building alliances beyond the teaching school alliance has been another major element of Helen’s SLE work. “We formed an alliance with other teaching schools in the region,” she says. “We are using Newcastle University as our HEI partner and we’re working with the five other teaching school alliances that they are partnered with.”

The level of co-operation between the alliances has been reassuring for Helen and her colleagues. “We were worried in the beginning about it being a bun fight but it’s not like that at all,” she says. “It’s been very collaborative.” The alliances are holding trainee conferences and discussing how they can share resources and expertise to make the delivery of training more cost effective. They are also holding a recruitment event to fill the last few training places available across the six teaching alliances.

Helen’s earlier experience of developing a mentor scheme has been invaluable in her School Direct work. Mentors within the teaching school alliance meet once a half term to work together on their professional development, while all teaching schools in the regional alliance can send their School Direct mentors on a one day training course that has been jointly planned between Harton and other regional teaching schools.

While Helen’s SLE work is having a profound impact on the delivery of School Direct within the alliance and beyond it has also had an enormous influence on her own professional development. The SLE training she received at the start of her deployment gave her an insight into leadership and management styles which she says has been invaluable. She says:

“Looking at leadership styles was brilliant and helped me to reflect. In teaching you don’t tend to have time to do that. There was also a great session looking at what kind of mentor you are. I’ve actually used that in our mentor programme. In fact it was all very useful in a general sense rather than just for the role.”

Helen is in no doubt that the SLE role has helped accelerate her professional development and while she is keen for others to consider the role, she stresses that they should think carefully about their motivations before going any further. “You have to be someone who has the desire to work with others,” she says. “You have to sit down and look at what you want to achieve and what motivates you in your role. The role has to be done for the right reasons. You also need to have as much experience of getting out into different schools and seeing how they work before you become an SLE.

“I have never worked this closely with so many people from so many schools in my career. That is the most exciting thing about all of this. I’ve learned more in the last year than I had in the previous 15 years.”