The discursive representations of leadership development in the reform of UK health and education public services.¹

Dermot O’Reilly*, Mike Wallace*, Rosemary Deem**, Jonathan Morris* and Mike Reed*²

This paper is work in progress.

Contact: Dermot O’Reilly oreillyd@cardiff.ac.uk

¹ The research reported in this paper is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), Award No R-000-23-1136 ‘Developing Organisation Leaders as Change Agents in the Public Services’. The views expressed in this paper are those of the authors and do not represent the views of the ESRC.
² * Cardiff Business School, Cardiff University; ** Graduate School of Education, University of Bristol
Abstract
The paper investigates the UK government’s discursive representations of leadership development support provided by national leadership development bodies for present/aspiring leaders of service organisations in education and health in England. The paper examines how leadership capacity development to acculturate organisation leaders as change agents in three publicly funded service sectors and one part-public funded sector relates to the UK government strategy for implementing public service modernisation, and to independently-inspired change and improvement.

The paper presents a critical discourse analysis of the evolution of the discursive representations of leadership development since the election of the New Labour government in 1997 in high-level documents from central government and the relevant government departments. These discourses evidence how the New Labour political project to modernise the public services is pursued through the discursive strategy of articulating for public consumption how service organisation leadership, and so leadership development, contribute to the implementation of reforms. Those means of promoting leadership development established by the Labour government since 1997 represent its control technologies. The paper outlines and details how these discursive strategies constitute and effect control, and what spaces of struggle are simultaneously constituted and constrained through these discourses.

Introduction
We are interested in exploring how far discourses of leadership development support emphasise developing service organisation leaders’ capacity to act as change agents for agendas flowing from central government and other stakeholder groups, and as agents for more autonomous change agendas. Special reference is being made to provision offered by three national leadership development bodies (NLDBs) that have been established for particular service sectors in education and health. We have selected four service sectors that vary over the extent of their public funding, and over the origin, nature, and evolution of the NLDB serving them.

Three sectors (secondary schools, hospitals, and primary care trusts) are fully public funded and one (higher education institutions) is part-public funded. The relevant NLDBs are the National College for School Leadership (NCSL), the NHS Institute for Innovation and Improvement (NHSIII), and the Leadership Foundation for Higher Education (LFHE). They vary in their degree of association with, or independence from, central government. The NCSL and the NHSIII, serving the three fully public-funded service sectors, are central to the infrastructure for implementing government-driven public service modernisation in schools and in health service organisations respectively (DFES 2004, 2005; NHSIII 2006). But the LFHE, serving the one part-public funded service sector, developed independently of government. It is linked to Universities UK (UUK), representing university vice-chancellors, and the Standing Conference of Principals (SCOP), representing college principals (UUK/SCOP 2003). Its funding comes from the national higher education funding bodies, plus membership and service fees (LFHE 2006a). Accordingly, the origin and roles of the NLDBs are variably linked to government policies for the modernisation of the public services and to more independent agendas. We wish to ascertain how their roles may be reflected in the extent to which their leadership development provision is designed to acculturate service organisation leaders as change agents for government-inspired modernisation and for other agendas.
The aim of this paper is to track the evolution in England since 1997 of discourses of public service leadership and its development and its relation to the project of public service reform, as reflected in public documentation. This paper is a theorisation and an investigation of an attempt at cultural control by the centre, and of how this attempt is distributed across a series of governmental and non-governmental levels.

Investigating the means by which leadership is developed in the public services is important for a number of reasons. Firstly, developing leadership capacity is integral to the UK government’s strategy for implementing public service modernisation. But it could also be viewed as a means of bolstering independence from the government modernisation agenda and leading more autonomously-motivated change, or both.

Secondly, developing organisational leaders’ capacity as change agents for service improvement is an enduring political and practical concern. Successive UK governments have responded to global economic and technological pressures by introducing public service reforms targeted, in significant part, on managing change in service organisations as a conduit for implementing system-wide service improvements. Variously labelled as ‘managerialism’, ‘new public management’ (McLaughlin et al 2002), and now ‘post-new public management’ (Ferlie et al 2003), these pressures show no sign of abating and government-inspired modernisation is being actively pursued. These findings are likely to be salient for policy-makers bent on public service reform and practitioners who must cope with it alongside more locally emergent change agendas.

Theoretical Framework
The conceptual framing of the investigation reflects the social-scientific importance of exploring how systemic social change is generated through the development of leadership capacity, whether to promote, mediate or translate government modernisation and other change agendas. The notions of government-driven ‘modernisation’ and ‘personalisation’ (Leadbeater 2003) may be defined in terms of three conceptual components, coexisting in some tension. First, as a generic political project focused on restructuring to transform the organisational forms and mechanisms through which public services are managed and delivered. Second, as a discursive strategy to shape thinking about public services consistent with this political project (the focus of the early findings reported in this paper). Third, as a loosely-coupled configuration of control technologies, designed to translate political aspiration and discursive intent into action across administrative levels which changes the character and quality of service delivery. These components provide intellectual and ideological means for reconceiving and reconstructing the public services to realise new priority interests. A related political and ideological struggle is ongoing to determine and legitimate a new settlement for public and partly public-funded services emerging in the post-new public management milieu.

Since government depends on service organisation leaders to implement public service reforms, it becomes important to acculturate service organisation leaders, in part through national leadership development bodies, as change agents mobilising frontline professionals to change their practice, and for other stakeholders wishing to acculturate change agents retaining some independence from government. Acculturation implies promoting change in beliefs, values, norms and codes of behaviour (Firestone and Louis 1999).
We have adopted a qualitative approach to address these concerns, incorporating the methods of critical discourse analysis. The main unit of analysis is cross-administrative level: between the Labour party, the centre of government, spending departments, and NLDBs.

Our interpretation of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is that it is concerned with tracking both the linguistic and argumentative strategies in texts, and also identifying and tracing the framing ideas, rationalities, problematisations and elisions that underlie and imbue texts with a distinctive message aimed at particular audiences. The purpose of CDA is to explore and elucidate discourse practices that reproduce unequal power relations. We acknowledge that texts are socially mediated and that their effects are not linear or simply causative. Nonetheless, we stress the importance of looking at social texts as sites and instances of social struggle. We also acknowledge that there can be incongruity and contradiction within and between texts. As such, our interpretation of CDA is opposed to the reification of discourses as homogeneous social phenomena. Nonetheless, we recognize that particular discourses are represented as, or are used to represent other phenomena as, homogeneous social phenomena. As such, we are particularly interested in both the continuities and discontinuities of discrete discursive elements and the broader discursive frames (or ideational methodologies) that create a level of coherence and continuity between different discursive elements.

The documents analysed have been chosen as they are explicit statements of the aims of each of the four actors at the four levels of analysis at particular points in time. This does not imply, however, that they exhaust or faithfully represent all the discourses utilized by these actors, nor of course do they capture alternative discourses utilized by other agents.

Analysis
Empirically, our starting point is to examine discourses of leadership development, in particular its relation to public service reform, as reflected in central government documentation and in the documentation of NLDBs. These discourses evidence how the New Labour political project to modernise the public services is pursued through the discursive strategy of articulating for public consumption how service organisation leadership, and so leadership development, contribute to the implementation of reforms. Those means of promoting leadership development established by the Labour government since 1997 represent its control technologies, but those established in partnership with or exclusively by other stakeholder groups may represent control technologies for government-driven reform or alternative change agendas.

The table below presents the documents selected for this overview analysis of the New Labour discursive strategy. They were selected according to the research focus and levels of analysis outlined above. That is, this selection of documents includes instances of the discourses at the levels of: the new Labour Party; central government; the two selected spending departments of government; and the three selected NLDBs.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Labour Party</th>
<th>Central Government treatise on public service reform</th>
<th>OPSR</th>
<th>Spending Depts</th>
<th>DoH/ NHS</th>
<th>NLDBs</th>
<th>National Health Service (NHS)</th>
<th>LFHE</th>
<th>NCSL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>1997 Manifesto</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>2001 Manifesto</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **Labour Party**
  - 1997 Manifesto
  - 2001 Manifesto
  - 2005 Manifesto (May)

- **Central Government treatise on public service reform**
  - Reforming our public services (Mar)

- **Spending Depts**
  - DfEE/ DfES
    - Green/ White papers
    - The future of higher education (WP, Jan)
    - A new specialist system (WP, Feb)

- **DoH/ NHS**
  - Service documents
    - Managing for excellence in the NHS (Oct)

- **NLDBs**
  - NCSL
    - Your introduction to NCSL

- **National Health Service (NHS)**
  - Introducing the LFHE
  - Introducing the NHSIII (June)
The discussions of the four levels of analysis will give more detail as to the selection of the specific documents within each level. The obvious limitation of our selection is that there is no extended discussion of the changes over time in the discourses related to the subject of the reform of the public services at central government level, at spending department level, or at NLDB level.

The cross-administrative analysis between the four levels takes place over a certain period of time, features of which affect the selection. The analysis of the cross-administrative level centres on a 2002 Office of Public Service Reform (OPSR) document which was a particularly important treatise on the reform of the public services produced by the centre of government. Ideally, documents from the spending departments and the NLDBs (similar to each other within these levels) would have been selected within two years of this document. However, it proved impossible to meet this objective fully. The Department of Health did not produce a White Paper or a Green Paper within this period, and so a ‘service document’ was chosen instead. The audiences and styles of writing between these documents, therefore, are not strictly comparable, but as we develop in the analysis below, there are nonetheless similarities in the discourses utilized. Comparable documents produced by the NLDBs were available, but the time period of their production is over three years. Also while both the LFHE and the NHSIII produced the documents selected for analysis in their first year of existence (2004 and 2005 respectively), the NCSL’s document is a version from approximately 2003, roughly three years after its origin. There are, therefore, differences between these documents, but there is sufficient content-similarity between them to warrant analysis.

The rationale for choosing OPSR 2002 as the fulcrum of the cross-administrative analysis relates to the temporal importance of the reform of the public services to the new Labour political project as expressed at this time. In 1997 the relevant aspect of the political project, as expressed in the Labour Party’s manifesto, discusses changes in individual public services, for example, making ‘education our number one priority’ and ‘saving’ and ‘modernising’ the NHS. By the 2001 manifesto, however, the language takes on a meta-level perspective on public services as generic: ‘Renewal of our public services is at the centre of new Labour’s manifesto’ (Labour Party 2001: 6). This is the first explicit discussion of the public services as a generic entity amenable to a generic programme of reform in a new Labour manifesto. OPSR 2002 then articulates this generic programme of reform in more detail. Analysis of spending department documents and NLDB documents in the similar and ensuing time-period, therefore, enables us to see whether and to what extent this discourse of the role of public service organisation leadership in the reform of the public services is reflected in the representation of leadership development at these levels.
Public service reform within the new Labour political project

Limitations of space disallow an extended discussion of the linking of public service reform to the new Labour political project. The main aspects of this relationship of relevance to this paper that are evident in the manifestos and OPSR 2002 are:

- The new Labour political project is regularly signified by the central formula of ‘economic prosperity and social opportunity’;
- The imperative for the new Labour political project is regularly identified both explicitly and implicitly as the global knowledge economy;
- The reform of the public services is located as an essential part of the new Labour political project;
- The central formulation of public service reform represents it as the necessary counterpart to investment in the formula of ‘investment and reform’.

Although the OPSR was disbanded in 2005 it produced a number of documents on public service reform, and work on reform (including aspects of its work programmes) was taken on by other central agencies after its closure (the Economic and Domestic Secretariat, Government Communication Group and the Strategy Unit among others). In the terms of the theoretical perspective developed above the OPSR amounted to a government control technology in that it was established to achieve an aspect of the new Labour political project, namely, generic public service reform.

OPSR (2002) articulates public service reform in some detail. The overall theme is ‘putting the customer first’ through reforms reflecting four principles: standards and accountability; devolution and delegation; flexibility and incentives; and, expanding choice (2002: 1).

Public service reform is discursively placed as central to the new Labour political project, expressed in terms of the political project’s core formulation, by the Prime Minister in the foreword:

Modernising our public services is crucial to everything the Government wants to achieve for the country. Strong and high quality public services are essential if we are to achieve our central aim of spreading prosperity and opportunity (Tony Blair in OPSR 2002 p.2)

The OPSR document explicitly addresses ‘frontline’ service staff (not solely managers), and there is a strong narrative of ‘genuine partnership between Government and people in the frontline like yourselves’ (Tony Blair in OPSR 2002: 2). Importantly, leadership is formulated early in the document as requiring a contribution from the frontline, which resonates with the narrative of a partnership between the Government and frontline staff: ‘I know that we have a lot more to do. Without your support, your advice and your leadership we won’t be able to do it’ (Tony Blair in OPSR 2002: 3).

Significantly, in OPSR 2002 public service organisation leadership and leadership development are represented as necessary parts of the project of public service reform. In the theoretical terms of this paper the OPSR constituted a control technology for the achievement of generic public service reform, and how leadership development is presented within it. Also significant is that national NLDBs were
presented as a type of generic agent of reform in OPSR (2002) in the section on leadership and management, signalling the presentation of another type of entity for controlling the project of public service reform – national leadership development bodies.

**Representations of leadership and leadership development in the public services across the levels of analysis.**

Having summarised the relationship of public service leadership and its development to the project of public service reform, and between public service reform and the new Labour political project, we move on to a fuller analysis of the representations of leadership and its development across the levels of analysis.

In the 1997 manifesto, implicit rationales for leadership in the public service are evident in relation to both education and health:

> The strength of a school is critically dependent on the quality of its head. We will establish mandatory qualifications for the post. A head teacher will be appointed to a position only when fully trained to accept the responsibility (Labour Party 1997).

> Hospitals will retain their autonomy over day-to-day administrative function, but, as part of the NHS, they will be required to meet high-quality standards in the provision of care. Management will be held to account for performance levels (Labour Party 1997).

> Labour will retain the lead role for primary care but remove the disadvantages that have come from the present system. GPs and nurses will take the lead in combining together locally to plan local health services more efficiently for all the patients in their area (Labour Party 1997).

The education extract contains not only an implicit rationale for the importance of leadership, but also for leadership development, as evidenced in the intention to introduce a compulsory qualification for headteachers. The second health extract refers to primary care, and outlines the intent to place decision-making powers with local GPs and nurses. Importantly, although the health extracts mention ‘management’ and ‘taking the lead’, nowhere in this manifesto is the concept of ‘leadership’ applied explicitly to a formal decision-making role in the public services in question.

The concept of ‘leadership’ in the public services is first linked explicitly to a formal decision-making role in the 2001 manifesto:

> Strong school leadership and better teaching have turned around 700 failing schools (Labour Party 2001: 18)

> In future every school must have: **The right leadership**
> Headteachers must have the freedom and resources necessary to run their schools effectively. (bold in original Labour Party 2001: 18)
In health organisations, however, frontline staff are portrayed as having power:

Reform will be driven through primary care trusts (PCTs) as power and resources are decentralised to frontline staff (Labour Party 2001: 20)

Power devolved
To achieve this vision there will be clear national standards but greater decentralisation to frontline services and to the staff who run them (Labour Party 2001: 22)

This is mirrored by language in relation to generic public service reform that locates frontline staff as reformers:

In all our public services, the key is to devolve power to give freedom to frontline staff who perform well, and to change things where there are problems (Labour Party 2001: 17).

Now we need to move on, empowering frontline staff. Each service needs the right structure and incentives at local level – decentralisation of power with strong incentives for high performance. Frontline staff are advocates for citizens, and ambassadors for their services. Motivated by an ethos of service, they must be supported to carry through change (Labour Party 2001: 18).

While the formal leadership position of the headteacher is referred to, in health and in the generic public service discussions frontline staff are described as having change agency, although, interestingly, it is not discussed in terms of ‘leadership’.

The 2005 manifesto again locates leadership in schools:

Every school with more money and effective leadership.
… Heads and governors will be in control. Successful schools and colleges will have the independence to take decisions about how to deploy resources and develop their provision. (Labour Party 2005: 33).

We want all secondary schools to be independent specialist schools with a strong ethos, high-quality leadership … (Labour Party 2005: 35)

But the concept is not applied to health, where again powers of agency are described as belonging to various elements of staff:

We have widened the responsibilities of nurses and pharmacists, paramedics and porters, creating health service more convenient for patients (Labour Party 2001: 58).

We will put more money into the frontline, develop practice-based commissioning, and so ensure that family doctors have more power over their budgets (Labour Party 2001: 61).

OPSR 2002 is similar to Labour Party 2001 in putting an emphasis on frontline staff, but explicitly allocates them a role as ‘local leaders’:
• These standards can only be delivered effectively by **devolution and delegation** to the frontline, giving local leaders responsibility and accountability for delivery, and the opportunity to design and develop services around the needs of local people.

• More **flexibility** is required for public service organisations and their staff to achieve the diversity of service provision needed to respond to the wide range of customer aspirations. This means challenging restrictive practices and reducing red tape; greater and more flexible **incentives** and rewards for good performance; strong leadership and management; and high quality training and development. (bold in original OPSR 2002: 10)

These mentions of leadership in the public services place it in relation to two of the four principles of public service reform presented in this document. The discussion of devolution and delegation constructs an obligation on government to devolve and delegate both responsibility and accountability for delivery to local leaders/frontline staff. In the discussion of flexibility and incentives, strong leadership and management is listed as one of the elements that will enable flexibility and incentives, yet it is not clear whether this is establishing a requirement on government to create strong leadership and management, if local leadership and management are expected to be strong, or a combination of the two.

Later in the document the rationale for leadership development activities explicitly relates them to the aim of public service reform in the chapter discussing the principle of ‘flexibility and incentives’:

**Inspirational leadership and management**

Public services reform requires support for and development of excellent leaders capable of tackling poor management and inspiring ambitious performance. The Government needs to invest in high quality training and development to help fulfil the potential of all public servants, and in particular current and future leaders and managers (OPSR 2002: 21).

The logic of this section is encapsulated in the epistemic statement that public service reform requires the development of good leaders, and the ensuing obligational statement that therefore the government needs to invest in leadership development activities. In this way, this document serves to place the responsibility for developing strong leadership on government, yet at the same time places the responsibility for management, service delivery and performance on local leaders and frontline staff. This extract is followed by an insert box listing a variety of NLDBs and their activities to improve leadership thereby representing the government as fulfilling its responsibility to support leadership development and thereby putting an obligational onus on leaders to reciprocate by implementing government reforms.

---

3 Note the representation of excellent leadership – ‘tackling poor management and inspiring ambitious performance’ – this represents leadership as a role separate, and superior, to management; and as being inspirational for staff performance rather than ensuring performance from staff.

4 Epistemic or declarative statements are statements of fact. They can be categorical, that is, claiming to be true, or modulated, tempered by modifiers. Obligational statements evoke or express an obligation or need. They can also be either categorical or modulated. See Fairclough 1995, 2000.
Secondary Education

In DfES 2003b there are multiple formulations of public service leadership and leadership development contributing to reform of the secondary education system:

In the foreword as one of the four key areas of the government’s strategy for transforming secondary education:

- Our strategy is based around four key areas:
  - Creating a new specialist system;
  - Building strong leadership teams;
  - Reforming the school workforce;
  - Developing partnerships beyond the classroom (DfES 2003b).

This is re-stated in the executive summary, which lists the NCSL as one of the actions of the strategy:

- We will develop strong leadership teams to lead school improvement:
  - The National College for School Leadership will provide a wide range of programmes for middle leaders through to experienced head teachers (DfES 2003b);

Leadership is also discussed in this document in relation to both the aim of secondary education, and specific elements of the school educational agenda:

The aim of secondary education to which leadership is linked is ‘teaching and learning’. The specific elements of the school educational agenda that leadership is linked to are: specialist schools and the development of ‘a new specialist system’; to developing innovative work; to the implementation of new policies; to the reform of the school workforce; to the development of collaborative ‘leading edge’ schools; and to collaboration between schools included in the ‘Excellence in Cities’ programme and other schools in ‘challenging circumstances’. Furthermore, in the main body of the text the NCSL is specifically mentioned as being in partnership with government in developing leaders to transform the education system:

- The growing strength of school leadership and the commitment from the Government in partnership with the National College for School Leadership (NCSL) to provide significant and on-going professional development for school leaders at all levels is pivotal to achieving the vision of a transformed education system (DfES 2003b).

This explicitly links professional development to the education reform agenda of a ‘transformed education system’ and it is soon followed by a section outlining ‘core principles of school improvement’ which present a quite detailed prescription as to what school leadership is expected to consist of:

- The following core principles of school improvement are helping inform developing strategies to strengthen and support school leadership.

  Core principles of school leadership:
• create a dominant focus for improvement: select key priorities for improving teaching and learning to concentrate effort and build experience of success;
• agree clear and unifying goals: ground goals for teachers and students in evidence, including performance data and benchmarks;
• build collective ownership of the development work: engage staff across the school in a school improvement group;
• enhance knowledge and teaching skills through focused professional development: create time for staff to learn together;
• embed the development work: reinforce it to make the results part of normal school practice;
• collaborate with other schools: widen the vision and create opportunities for joint development. (bold in original DfES 2003b)

This version of school leadership contains a series of rationalities – the idea of a unifying ‘dominant focus’ or ‘vision’; the use of evidence and data; and collaborative learning within and outside of the school. The promotion of this version of school leadership seeks to reproduce the rationalities of the government educational reform agenda within the practices of school leaders.

Higher Education
Leadership and leadership development in higher education occurs regularly in DfES 2003a. It is mentioned in relation a number of elements of the higher education reform agenda: to supporting research so that universities ‘can compete globally’; to developing HEI financial autonomy; and to ensuring that student fees affect teaching and learning.

Leadership is also explicitly related to generic higher education reform:

Both mission and collaboration are challenges that will demand outstanding management and leadership in our higher education institutions. We must support the sector in developing the capacity not only to manage these changes, but also to be in the driving seat of reform (DfES 2003a: 21).

More specifically, leadership is mentioned in a list of the future vision for the sector:

our vision is of a sector which:

…

Has the freedom to be innovative and entrepreneurial, with strong management and visionary leadership which will set and achieve clear goals for improving quality across the whole range of each institution’s activity to implement its plans (DfES 2003a: 22)

Later in the document the government implicitly endorses the creation of the LFHE. Immediately before this, the importance of leadership and management to HEIs is represented:

Management and Leadership
As the sector develops more freedom and self-determination, excellent leadership and management will become increasingly important. … In such a
complicated environment, management poses exceptional challenges and, given the return to the economy, it is only right that the Government should seek to provide help where it can. Universities need the full range of professional skills among their managers and administrators (DfES 2003a: 78)

Note the explicit referral to the economy as providing the rationale for supporting universities. This chimes with part of the description of the LFHE that follows:

Once it is in place, the Leadership Foundation will take forward the key recommendations of the Lambert Review, announced by the Chancellor in November 2002, on how leadership and management can best support links between higher education and business (DfES 2003a: 78).

It is worth noting that leadership is not explicitly linked to the aims of higher education in this document (that is, to the education of students), but only to the generic higher education reform agenda and to some of its elements.

Health
Representations of the importance of leadership and leadership development also occur in the health sector, as seen in DoH 2002.

In the preface from the Chief Executive, developing leadership and management makes up the majority of the listed actions to take the opportunity of increased investment to make change happen and provide high quality NHS services (note the implicit connection of leadership development to a version of the core public service reform formula):

Taking action
We need to strengthen and develop the way we manage the NHS if we are to seize this opportunity. In order to do so we will:
- implement the Code of Conduct for NHS Managers which sets out shared values
- support managers and leaders through investing in development
- bring on and bring in talent to create an even more skilled, experienced and diverse leadership
- develop senior management and succession planning
- reduce top down burdens and bureaucracy and encourage diversity (DoH 2002: iv)

Leadership is also discussed in relation elements of, or supportive of, the health reform agenda: to change and improvement; ‘coalitions for improvement’ or a ‘management and leadership community’ for reform; and to managerial style.

The NHS Modernisation Agency and the NHS Leadership Centre (the forerunners of the NHSIII) are mentioned as components of the national contribution for Managing for Excellence:

---

5 This document is explicitly aimed at NHS managers rather than being a White Paper, so it is unsurprising that it discusses leadership and management to a greater degree than the two DfES documents.
Supporting managers and leaders – investing in skills development linked specifically to reform and working to a common set of leadership qualities
Bringing on and bringing in talent – to create a more diverse leadership community through new development programmes to nurture the very best talent
Strengthening senior management development – through a new development and succession planning system for the most senior managers (bold and italics in original DoH 2002: 12)

As in school education, professional development is explicitly represented as being tied to the sectoral reform agenda. The NHS Modernisation Agency’s and Leadership Centre’s leadership development activities are further expanded upon and explicitly linked to the government’s reform agenda in health:

Development programmes and skills training offered nationally

The new model
The NHS Modernisation Agency and Leadership Centre are focusing their national leadership and management development programmes on the links between leadership, improvement science and changes in the way care is being delivered (DoH 2002: 14)

The introduction of this new system (of national and local leadership networks) links to a major review of leadership development for senior people across the service. This is being led by the NHS Leadership Centre and will result in all senior leadership development being better aligned to the challenges of managerial reform and the service improvement agenda. The first phase of this will start in January 2003 for all Chief Executives (DoH 2002: 17).

In the second of these extracts leadership development is again explicitly linked to the health reform agenda.

NLDBs
The self-introduction documents by the NLDBs also contain representations of the rationale for leadership and leadership development in individual public services⁶.

NCSL
Instances of the representation of leadership and leadership development in secondary schools are evident in NCSL 2003.

In its opening ‘welcome’ note leadership is related to the transformation of education – which resonates with the language of the DfES’ vision of educational reform:

Welcome

⁶ The self-introduction documents are quite short – from 7 to 11 pages, but they were selected as they offer an overview of the NLDBs in terms of how they present themselves to their prospective clients.
“We believe … that all children have the potential to become successful learners. That schools can create and sustain the confidence and energy to prepare children for the future. That leadership has a central role to play in the transformation of education (NCSL 2003: 1).

Leadership development is expressed in terms of enabling leaders’ and schools’ self-fulfillment:

Our core purpose is to develop individuals and teams to lead and manage their schools to be the best they can be (NCSL 2003: 1).

The objectives of its Corporate Plan resonate with both the aim and aspects of educational reform:

Key objectives
NCSL was launched in 2000 by the Prime Minister Tony Blair. Our key objectives, as set out in our Corporate Plan 2003-07, are to:
• develop and deliver a range of leadership programmes that enable leaders to build the confidence, skills and understanding to transform the quality of learning for all pupils
• find, analyse, describe and celebrate great practice in school leadership in order to build a usable knowledge base for school leaders to share
• promote collaborative learning and communication so that all school leaders feel that they are a part of a network of vibrant professional learning communities and have opportunities to contribute to developments in education policy
• make NCSL a challenging, supportive and dynamic place to work which itself demonstrates the qualities of a learning organisation
• demonstrate the impact of NCSL on school leadership and progress towards achieving our key goal

The first objective explicitly relates leadership development to the DfES aim of transforming secondary education. The second objective supports the first through the development of a ‘usable knowledge base’ which resonates with the language of evidence-based practice (as evident in the ‘core skills for school improvement’ that are to inform school leadership in DfES 2003b). The third objective resonates with both the association between school leadership and collaboration between schools; and between school leadership and policy development and implementation, both of which were present in DfES 2003b. The fourth and fifth objectives show how the NCSL is imposing similar organisational rationalities on itself that both it and the DfES are promoting in schools, that is, that it is a ‘learning organisation’ and that it ‘demonstrates’ impact.

NCSL 2003 goes on to list and describe its main activities. Two of these activities link leadership development to the support of schools pursuing reform: the national Remodelling Team and the National Leadership Network resonate with aspects of the educational reform agenda – namely the reform of the school workforce, and the development and support of collaboration between schools.
LFHE
Like the NCSL document, the LFHE document recounts its launch by a government minister:

This is our first publication, issued to coincide with our launch by the Chancellor of the Exchequer on 24 March 2004. It presents our Board’s view, based on a well researched business case, of our initial work programme. … Our aim is to serve the diverse leadership development needs of over 160 higher education institutions. We exist to stimulate and promote good practice against an increasingly challenging agenda for change. … Leadership development goes well beyond training courses. It is about creating a culture of learning driven by the real challenges and issues facing institutions (LFHE 2004: 2).

This extract refers to a ‘challenging agenda for change’ but does not explain what this agenda is or whose it is. This is developed later in the document and is discussed below. Note how, in this extract, the description of the LFHE’s aim resonates with the description of it in DfES 2003a – as meeting the leadership needs of HEIs and promoting good practice.

The vision and mission of the LFHE also resonate with the language of DfES 2003a – the term ‘leadership, governance and management’ is used to describe its remit; the aim of universities is described as striving to be ‘world-class’, and equipping leaders with ‘skills’ and ‘good practice’:

our vision
That the leadership, governance and management of UK higher education institutions is regarded as world-class and the practice of excellence in leadership is recognised and held in high esteem by the higher education sector.

our mission
The Leadership Foundation is to deliver a significant and visible contribution towards:
• equipping current and future leaders in higher education with the skills and awareness of good practice to help them deliver continuous improvement and respond to future challenges
• developing, commissioning and delivering high quality programmes
• demonstrating the benefits of tailored development approaches for leadership teams in individual higher education institutions
• actively promoting a culture of organisational learning and reflection
• promoting equality and diversity by creating a larger pool from which future leaders, governors and managers within higher education can be drawn
• enhancing the esteem given to effective leaders, governors and managers, thus encouraging a larger and more diverse pool of candidates to seek these positions
• championing examples of excellent leadership, governance and management within UK higher education institutions, so that they are showcased worldwide as model organisations.
Later in this document, the LFHE document presents its analysis of the context for leadership development in higher education:

the context for leadership development in higher education
The Leadership Foundation’s Board recently considered the challenges that are likely to face leaders, governors and managers between now and 2010. We are planning programmes and activities to help equip our sector to deal with these challenges:
• Responding effectively to the continued expansion of higher education [DfES 2003a: 16]
• Encountering an increasingly competitive market for higher education, nationally and internationally, needing to offer a market focused and entrepreneurial response [DfES 2003: 11]
• Working in closer partnership with business, identifying and negotiating opportunities for third-stream funding and facilitating increased knowledge transfer [DfES 2003a: 5, 19]
• Delivering the agenda on widening participation and promoting equality and diversity in the leadership culture to help support these changes [DfES 2003a: 74, 75]
• Diversifying sources of income, relying proportionately less on government funding [DfES 2003a: 80]
• Integrating with the specific agendas of regional government and/or the devolved administrations [DfES 2003a: 36]
• Developing good leadership and management of the research process [DfES 2003: 14]
• Adopting more strategic approaches to human resources, to ensure that the best talent is attracted to, and retained in, the sector during a peak period in the retirement profile of higher education [DfES 2003: 34]
• Managing increasingly complex change programmes, particularly involving structural change, alliances, mergers and development of the higher education estate [DfES 2003a: 80]
• Working collaboratively with organisations and alliances within and outside the higher education sector [DfES 2003a: 29, 45, 63]
• Applying more e-learning and internet-driven business solutions [DfES 2003a: 58, 40]
• Evolving new forms of leadership, governance and management processes and career development to support the above changes [DfES 2003a: 78]
• Embedding equality and diversity across higher education institution activities [DfES 2003a: 75, 77] (LFHE 2004: 9).

This presentation represents these ‘challenges’ as phenomena occurring from outside the LFHE as ‘sector forces’ and does not acknowledge that each one of these items is discussed in DfES 2003a as part of the government’s aspirations for the higher education sector (examples of their occurrence in DfES 2003a are included after each item). The LFHE’s rationale for affecting the culture of leadership in HE institutions, therefore, is either heavily influenced by, and/or reflective of, the government’s agenda for HE.
Instances of the representations of leadership and leadership development in health organisations are evident in NHSIII 2005. However, as the NHSIII is not solely concerned with developing leadership, it is less dominant an occurrence than in the NCSL and LFHE documents. The NHSIII is related to the priority issues of the NHS in the foreword:

**Foreword**
The NHS Institute for Innovation and Improvement is a new and exciting venture which will provide an ambitious focus for new ideas, technologies and practices to improve services to patients, users and the public. From the outset, we will be receptive to the needs of the NHS, working as part of the wider NHS system to draw on the best skills and expertise to clarify solutions to the priority issues (DoH 2005: 4).

The document explicitly states that the priorities of each of the four areas of expertise to be developed within the NHSIII will be set by the DoH in consultation with stakeholders:

**Setting Priorities**
The NHS Institute will focus expertise in service transformation, technology and product innovation, leadership development and learning on a small number of big priorities at any one time. These priorities will be set by the Department of Health in consultation with a wide range of stakeholders (DoH 2005: 6).

There is no particular discussion of the rationale for health service leadership in the document, and the NHSIII’s listed activities were essentially inherited from the Leadership Centre within the NHS Modernisation Agency. While there is not a discussion of leadership development, the foreword and priorities make clear that health service leadership is seen to support the achievement of NHS priorities set by the DoH in consultation with stakeholders.

From the above analysis it can be seen that the representations of leadership and leadership development in the NLDB self-introduction documents closely follow the representations in the spending department documents. The representations by the spending department documents are shaped by that in OPSR 2002, although the descriptions of reform within each service take on different formulations of what reform within their sector consists. OPSR 2002 and the Labour Party manifestos evidence a meta-level discourse of generic public service reform which is differentially reflected in departmental and NLDB documents.

The representations of leadership and leadership development within OPSR 2002 show features of homogeneity across sectors through the use of a generic language of public service reform which includes leadership as an item within the project of generic reform. In contrast, the representations of leadership within all of the manifestos show heterogeneous application with regard to individual services. While there is a homogeneous meta-level language concerned with generic public service reform in the 2001 and 2005 manifestos this does not extend to the use of a generic
concept of public service leadership being applied across public services in these two documents. This is of interest as they variably represent reform in these documents as being driven by frontline staff in response to public users, whereas the generic role of leaders in reform is conflated with frontline staff in OPSR 2002. In contrast the roles of leaders in individual service reforms are articulated more explicitly in the spending department documents and the NLDB self-introduction documents.

Discussion
The explicit occurrence of public service leadership and its development across the different documents is summarised in the following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of document</th>
<th>Occurrence of leadership/ leadership development</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Manifestos</strong></td>
<td>- Mentioned to a cursory degree in education, not in health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Central treatise of reform – OPSR 2002</strong></td>
<td>- explicitly highlighted as elements of reform within a formulation of reform</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **Department documents – DoH 2002; DfES 2003a; DfES 2003b** | - explicitly linked to aims of the service  
- explicitly linked to version of service reform  
- explicitly linked to various discrete elements of reform; including professional development and learning organisations  
- explicitly linked to rationalities of government reform |
| **NLDB self-introduction documents – on NCSL 2003; LFHE 2004; NHSIII 2005** | - explicitly linked to the aims of the service in the NCSL document, but not in the other two documents  
- explicitly linked to direct elements of, or supportive of direct elements of, the service versions of reform process in all three NLDB documents  
- explicitly linked to more generic professional development in the three NLDB documents which is an element of the service versions of reform in the three sectors, but which is not necessarily supportive of the reform agenda  
- explicitly linked to rationalities of government reform |

The manifestos do not articulate public service leadership to a great degree. They do so to a cursory degree in education but not in health where agency is attributed to easily-recognisable service positions such as doctors and nurses. Public service leadership and its development are thus only cursorily explicit in the manifestos. They are made overtly explicit, however, in the OPSR document (where it is, however, conflated with frontline staff) and the departmental documents. The prominence given to public service leadership in government documents, therefore, is greater in
documents aimed at services than in documents aimed at the public. This raises the question as to the willingness of the Labour party to present the theme of public service leadership to the public.

The self-introduction documents of three national leadership development bodies either make explicit reference to their role in developing sectoral leadership to transform their sector according to the government’s sectoral agenda of reform, or how their description of the challenges of their sector closely mirrors the government’s sectoral agenda of reform. Also, in all three NLDB documents public service leadership and its development are linked to elements of the version of reform in that service, or are supportive of elements of reform in that service. Furthermore, in the NCSL and LFHE documents there are instances of the rationalities that constitute elements of the government’s reform agenda being represented as constitutive of public service leadership or its development. These rationalities include:

- a stress on the need for the ‘demonstration’ of performance;
- a focus on ‘evidence’ for the efficacy of service practices;
- a stress on the need for and benefits of collaborative working or ‘partnership’;
- a stress on the principles of organisational learning or of the ‘learning organisation’; and
- a focus on ‘continuous improvement’ or ‘innovation’.

On the other hand all three NLDB documents also link public service leadership and its development to a discussion of the themes of professional development and, either implicitly or explicitly, to learning organizations. While these themes are themselves a part of the sectoral versions of reform, they are also potentially neutral, or even oppositional to ideas and processes underlying the sectoral versions of reform. The rationalities underlying reform are likewise necessarily neutral to the actual models of reform pursued by the government.

This is best developed through an illustrative example: the government promotes and legitimates a certain element of reform claiming that there is evidence to support the efficacy of the change it is proposing (say, the devolution of budgets to hospital trusts). But likewise this evidence can be challenged, and other agents wishing to promote alternative changes are potentially able to present ‘evidence’ in support of their changes (say, the collation of information on the cutbacks in hospitals after the devolution of hospital budgets and the resulting effects on patients). The rationalities used to legitimate the government’s reform agenda thus set the terrain for the contestation for and struggle between particular elements of the reform agenda.

The rationalities of reform that are contained within leadership development provision, therefore, although supportive of the government’s reform agenda, are also potentially open to be utilised for alternative agendas.

**Other institutionalisations of public service leadership in the sectors**

Public service leadership has not solely been addressed by public sector organisations as a phenomenon to be developed. Indeed the salience of the focus on leadership development is only clearly appreciated in tandem to the institutionalisation of public service leadership in other aspects of public service organisations.
Secondary education has experienced a series of innovations addressing school leadership (Bolam 2004). They include the National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH), soon to be replaced by a National Qualification in School Leadership. NPQH was launched in 1997 and made mandatory for new and serving headteachers from 2004. The Teacher Training Agency, set-up by the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE), developed the original NPQH training programme, which was later based on ‘national standards for headteachers’ published by the DfEE. The NPQH was brought within the remit of the National College for School Leadership (NCSL), when the DfEE established this new NLDB for schools in 2000. The NCSL contributed to developing the leadership inspection methods of the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED), the national school inspection body, which separated school leadership from management in its inspection criteria in 2002. The government’s education department also offered ‘Leadership Incentive Grants’ for schools in ‘challenging circumstances’ and instituted a requirement for dedicated weekly ‘leadership time’ for headteachers from 2002. Alongside a remodelling of payment scales for school staff, a ‘leadership scale’ was established for senior members of school management or leadership teams from 1998.

The only other institutional development explicitly addressing leadership in higher education since 1997, other than the Leadership Foundation for Higher Education (LFHE), was the establishment of a ‘Leadership, Governance and Management’ (LGM) initiative, including an LGM fund, by HEFCE that supports developments by HEIs in these areas.

The health sector has witnessed a series of changes addressing leadership. A ‘competency framework’ published by the Department of Health (DoH) for PCT board use in appointing new Chief Executives includes leadership as a criterion. The Healthcare Commission, the independent body for both the NHS and independent healthcare, inspects healthcare organisations according to DoH core standards which include leadership as an element within these standards (see DoH 2006).

In short, the different sectors have involved different institutionalisations of the theme of leadership – in secondary education a qualification in leadership is to become mandatory for the position of headteacher, leadership is subject to inspection, leadership is a formal part of the pay scale, distinct leadership time has been identified and allocated; and leadership development has been incentivised. In higher education leadership development initiatives have been incentivised. While in health, leadership is subject to inspection, and leadership is a part of the criteria for promotion into the position of chief executive in Primary Care Trusts.

These changes in the institutional and organisational environment of public service organisations in relation to leadership necessarily affect the salience of leadership development for those in, and aspiring to, managerial positions.

**Conclusion**

We have examined selected thematic elements of New Labour’s mechanisms and discourses of leadership development within the project of public service reform. As
part of a wider political project, such reform is presented as part of the necessary re-
orientation towards national productivity in the face of global economic competition.

The representations of leadership and leadership development within the project of
public service reform were traced within and across the four types of documents. The
representations of leadership and leadership development in the NLDB self-
introduction documents closely followed the representations in the spending
department documents. Each of the three NLDB documents closely mirrored the
aspirations presented in their respective documents, including the LFHE despite its
further distance from the spending departments.

We have pointed to the use of discourses of leadership as a technology of control, and
the activities of NLDBs as contributors to this discourse. In particular, the
representations of leadership and leadership development in the NLDB self-
introduction documents as supporting and implementing service reforms, and the
incorporation of the underlying rationalities of reform within their representations of
leadership development, as in the departmental documents, substantiates this
interpretation.

We conclude that this is strong evidence that the language of public service leadership
is used across government levels as a control technology to promote and legitimate
the development of leaders to implement its reforms, and that the national leadership
development bodies have been set up, or are supported, by government as control
technologies to do this. This, in turn, is complemented and reinforced by the
increasing institutionalization of leadership in the public services.
References


NHS Institute for Innovation and Improvement (2005) *Introducing the NHS institute for innovation and improvement*. Coventry: NHSIII

NHS Institute for Innovation and Improvement (2006) *NHS Institute for Innovation and Improvement 2006/07 Plans* Coventry: NHSIII


