

## Fast Track and CfBT

by [Richard Churches](#)

I have been working for CfBT as a full-time consultant for two years. I am the Lead Professional Development Consultant for the DfES Fast Track Programme and Lead Consultant for two NCSL London Leadership Strategy Work Streams. For Fast Track the core part of my role is to design the content of the programme and develop training that supports accelerated leadership development. The Fast Track programme is the first accelerated leadership development programme in education in the world. Participants join from both outside the profession and from within it and pass through an assessment centre based on 'blue-chip' company models.

Central to the vision of the programme is the identification and development of leaders who have the intrapersonal and interpersonal capacity not only to take on early leadership, but also the long-term potential to lead at a very senior level. For example 'Chief Executive' for a cluster of schools, or leader of all local public sector service provision. After three years there are 1,200 on the programme, with alumni in deputy head, assistant head, advanced skills teacher and LEA advisory roles. A significant number of Fast Track teachers are now doing the National Professional Qualification for Headship alongside their Fast Track training and development. The average number of years in teaching for the Fast Track teachers who are now on NPQH is 3.6.

Working for a large education consultancy is quite different from being an independent consultant. Project managers and administrative staff provide a lot of support, and the company itself can provide a vast range of expertise. Like all consultancy practice work there are the usual challenges of ensuring that the client actually gets what they want and not just what they say they want, as well as maintaining high quality client management processes. In addition, there is balancing the needs of the consultancy with the needs of the beneficiaries and the client. In this respect the experience is similar to the one that you would find in a business context working for a management consultancy. In many ways CfBT's ethical, not-for-profit ideals make this much easier than it might be in a profit-making context.

What is special about CfBT is not just its charitable status and its core values. The combination of education philosophy and values with business commercial practice is a marriage that I believe should be a model for all education organisations. The organisational structure lends itself to the development of high performing teams.

Joining the SEC I hope will give me the opportunity to connect with consultants who are working in other fields and as fully independent consultants. Would I recommend working for a consultancy for a while? Absolutely. Alongside everything that I have already said, there is the opportunity to work in consultant teams, something that is

not only intellectually stimulating but is a lot more rewarding than just producing ideas on your own.

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