



COBIS Programme for Middle Leaders

Programme Guide

05/2026
COBIS

Introduction

The COBIS Programme for Middle Leaders (CPML) is a year-long programme for middle leaders, both teaching and non-teaching, specifically constructed to meet the needs of those who work in international education.

- The CPML is for ambitious middle leaders who wish to develop their personal and professional skills and leadership capacity.
- The programme uses a blended learning approach with facilitated workshops and self-directed learning, including five days of face-to-face training events and access to the CPML online community.
- In addition to eight modules, participants design, implement and evaluate a Leadership Challenge project within their own school context

The programme develops leadership capacity at a level consistent with UK Level 7 expectations, emphasising critical analysis, research-informed practice and reflective leadership. What makes the CPML unique is the opportunity not only to develop your own leadership, but to have a real impact in the school in which you work.

The structure of the COBIS Programme for Middle Leaders

The programme is sustained over an academic year and includes:

- Two face-to-face sessions (3 days and 2 days) in the autumn and spring terms
- A private online learning community with tasks, support and activities throughout the programme
- Advance work to be completed:
 - Getting to know others
 - Leadership Audit
 - Advance reading and tasks ahead of the face-to-face sessions
- Eight modules and Learning Outcomes:
 - Module 1 – Introduction to Leadership
 - Learning outcomes: Critically evaluate leadership theories and styles; reflect on personal leadership identity and ethical considerations.
 - Module 2 – Leading an International School (including Safeguarding in an international school)
 - Learning outcomes: Analyse organisational and cultural factors, including safeguarding, within international school contexts; synthesise perspectives to inform improvement strategies.
 - Module 3 – Leading teaching and learning
 - Learning outcomes: Apply evidence and theory to diagnose teaching and learning challenges; evaluate impact of interventions using data.
 - Module 3A – Leading to support learning (for non-teachers)

- Learning outcomes: Use research-informed approaches to support learner outcomes; evaluate operational practices with a focus on inclusivity and safeguarding.
 - Module 4 – Leading people and creating effective teams
 - Learning outcomes: Develop communication strategies and emotional intelligence; critically examine team dynamics and collaboration models.
 - Module 5 – Leading change
 - Learning outcomes: Design and justify change initiatives using relevant change theories; assess implementation fidelity and outcomes.
 - Module 6 – Leadership development
 - Learning outcomes: Synthesise leadership models; conduct advanced critical reflection to identify growth priorities and transferable skills.
 - Module 7 – Communication (including Difficult conversations)
 - Learning outcomes: Plan and manage difficult conversations; evaluate communication strategies for impact and equity.
 - Module 8 – Action Research (including Measuring impact)
 - Learning outcomes: Demonstrate critical understanding of research methodologies; design and implement a research-informed Leadership Challenge and critically evaluate data.
- Leadership Challenge – project to be undertaken throughout the course
 - A final assessed Leadership Challenge write-up
 - Certification from COBIS for successful completion

The CPML uses a blended learning approach through a number of face-to-face sessions to explore the aspects of leadership and the Leadership Challenge, as well as the asynchronous online learning environment. Middle leaders are, by definition, busy people; the school-centred approach of the programme and the use of online tools to enhance learning takes account of this. The face-to-face sessions allow deeper learning, networking with colleagues, reflection and guidance about the specific challenges participants encounter. The online learning encourages that spirit, in your own time. The CPML journey should be challenging, stimulating and fun.

What is a middle leader?

Middle leaders are found in every school and their work can be described in many ways. They can be identified as those who have responsibility for leading subjects, key phases, pastoral responsibilities or other aspects of the school's work. Middle leaders provide leadership for every educational context, from early years environments, to large departments in secondary schools, to running the business of a busy international school.

Middle leaders are essential to leading change and innovation and embedding it in the school. They monitor and evaluate, set direction, and lead and build teams that implement change. They have an influential role with colleagues, helping to create a focus on learning and contributing to the ethos that supports it. Typically, they lead an aspect of teaching and learning across the school and are pivotal in securing

consistent high-quality teaching and learning. Middle leaders are the first point of reference for most staff and are highly significant in developing a positive ethos and creating outstanding schools.

The debate about the relationship between leadership and management is one of the most fundamental from both academic and professional perspectives. On the one hand, it is purely semantic – a debate over definitions; on the other, it is fundamental to our understanding of what makes schools effective. Irrespective of the size, phase or type of school, middle leadership is pivotal to successful education. This is a theme we take up in the first module of the CPML which discusses leadership.

Why CPML?

The COBIS Programme for Middle Leaders is beneficial on a variety of levels and embraces the expertise that exists in the COBIS family of schools and the structured quality assurance that COBIS provides. Working with colleagues in a variety of roles, across a variety of phases, with experience to contribute from international schools around the world, participants are united to improve both their own learning and outcomes for their students.

First and foremost, the CPML is a powerful vehicle for your professional development, identifying and nurturing key leadership competencies. Research (e.g. Desminone, 2009) consistently shows that to be successful, professional development programmes need to:

1. Be sustained over a period of time.
2. Be reflective in content with an appropriate level of challenge supporting life-long learners.
3. Support networking. Learning through dialogue.
4. Be grounded in the reality in which you work and fitting with way and rhythm of your working environment.
5. Use blended learning that combines face to face sessions with asynchronous online engagement.
6. Useful! Supporting the ability to translate principle into practice.
7. Develop self-awareness and a knowledge of leadership theorists.

The CPML embraces these guidelines. The CPML programme has been devised with all our experience and knowledge, building on earlier work with the National College, to achieve these learning outcomes.

Secondly, for your students, your colleagues and your school the programme should enable you to:

1. Lead changes and improve the quality of teaching and learning through your leadership
2. Use approaches and interventions that reduce variation and close the gap in achievement
3. Challenge underperformance
4. Build a team and get the best from colleagues by developing future leaders

5. Enable change and sustained improvement and understand how to embed change
6. Learn with and from others, adopting an open mind-set to possibilities

Working with others

There are a number of people who will support you through the CPML so it is useful to say a few words about each.

Working with COBIS

COBIS, through the commitment to professional development, provide administration, certification and quality assurance for the CPML. All participants are registered through COBIS and COBIS supports teachers who wish to join the programme. At the end of the programme, COBIS oversees the award of certification.

Working with your Facilitator

Each programme will have at least one Facilitator, although two is the normal expectation, who will be an experienced leader of teaching and learning and who will support you throughout the programme. Your Facilitator will manage the implementation of the programme and provide expert input to sessions. This will be a combination of face-to-face sessions, pre-session activities and online engagement. Your Facilitators will support you in the CPML online community. All facilitators are trained and validated by COBIS.

Working with your Learning Colleague

Your Learning Colleague will be a colleague in your school who will act as your key support. Their most important role is to help you address your Leadership Challenge and to support you in developing your leadership skills further. They will help you to identify your leadership strengths at the beginning of the programme and which areas you need to develop. Your Learning Colleague will help to find opportunities for you to do this and work with you. He or she is your champion in your school and will provide both support and challenge while working with you throughout the programme.

Your Learning Colleague should be a senior leader in your school (but not your Facilitator) or, in some circumstances, an alumnus of the CPML. Your Learning Colleague should not be a current CPML participant. You should think carefully of your choice, taking into account their ability to help you, their willingness to listen to your ideas and your relationship with the colleague. If in doubt you should talk to your Head teacher or COBIS for suggestions.

Below are some specific guidance notes for Learning Colleagues that should help you as a participant to choose a suitable colleague:

The role of the Learning Colleague in CPML

The role of the Learning Colleague is to provide the more experienced voice of practice, and guide and advise the participant/s through the programme, acting as a critical friend. Working as a critical friend is a very effective way of continuing the learning and development of the leadership and coaching skills of the mentor. It presents a well-researched, proven and highly effective professional learning experience for middle leaders who are engaging in rich and practical Leadership Challenges to benefit students and the school as a learning community.

The Learning Colleague needs to bear in mind that their support is process-based and not dependent on specific course content or knowledge. Their role is to facilitate/coach the problem-solving process rather than to provide solutions. Listening is therefore a key skill. You should not forget that the programme participant is the central learner in the programme with responsibility for their own learning.

The Learning Colleague will:

- 1. Encourage middle leader/s or potential middle leaders to take up practice-based learning opportunities that are both personalised and progressive, that build on previous learning and provide a pathway to future lifelong learning.*
- 2. Identify key areas for development.*
- 3. Provide the middle leader/s with the opportunity to focus and reflect on the outcomes of learning and teaching that result from their leadership and management, and how these outcomes improve their own practice and that of others.*
- 4. Help the middle leader/s to maintain the focus of the learning on real-life, school-based enquiry.*
- 5. Assist the middle leader/s to focus on the Leadership Challenge, and its goal of improving outcomes for students.*
- 6. Encourage the middle leader/s to access the resources available in the online community.*
- 7. Assist the middle leader/s to recognise and evaluate the impact of their leadership on the team and throughout the school.*

Working with your Headteacher/Principal

At the start of the programme, your Headteacher will support you by ensuring that you have the data to identify the gaps that need closing. Together with the SLT, he or she will work with you to identify which gap in achievement is a priority. Your Headteacher will support your participation in the programme. It is important that this dialogue takes place, as part of the programme will be your presentation to your Headteacher/SLT and your Headteacher's signature attests to you completing the requirements of the programme in the school. It is hoped that others in your school and beyond can benefit from what you have learnt in leading improvements in teaching and learning to close a gap in achievement. This can be done in a number of ways including a presentation to SLT/Headteacher, an INSET session for colleagues, a training session for governors, a presentation at a leadership conference either in your school or at COBIS and a portfolio/video uploaded onto the CPML online site.

Use of Artificial Intelligence

Artificial intelligence (AI) must be used responsibly and in-line with the COBIS CPD Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) Guide, which can be accessed [here](#).

Referencing

Accurate and consistent referencing is essential to maintain academic integrity, acknowledge sources appropriately, and enable readers to verify and explore the evidence that underpins submissions. For detailed guidance on referencing standards, formats, and best practice, please refer to the COBIS CPD Harvard Referencing Guide [here](#).

The Leadership Challenge

The Leadership Challenge lies at the heart of the programme. It must be designed and justified using relevant scholarship (e.g. a brief literature-informed rationale). Participants will apply action research principles, make explicit methodological choices, and critically evaluate outcomes using appropriate data. It must align with the developmental needs of the school and hence the benefit of discussing this with your Headteacher.

When choosing your Leadership Challenge, it is useful to discuss this with colleagues or your Facilitator. You will have opportunities to amend or change the Leadership Challenge as you progress, but it is useful to keep in mind the following:

1. Span – what is possible – it is easy to effect change in your classroom, more difficult to change your department or year group. More difficult again if you want to make changes to your key stage, faculty or school.
2. Resource – financial cost, time cost.
3. Evidence – consider at the outset how you might provide evidence to show the impact of the Leadership Challenge.

The Leadership Challenge may not ‘succeed’, or may need longer than the CPML time-frame of a single academic year, but that does not matter if you can explain why it did not succeed either in relation to context or design. If it is going to require longer than an academic year you should be able to supply evidence of progress to date.

The Leadership Challenge can be presented in any format but is likely to include the following:

1. The context of the school/department/programme/yourself. (CONTEXT)
2. How you identified the challenge and the gap it is there to address. (AIM & THE GAP)
3. If you changed your ideas on the challenge (a good number of participants do) why and how they changed.
4. You need to explain the process you went about in leading the challenge, how you communicated? What you did? How it worked? How it did not work? How you learnt from these experiences. (PROCESS)
5. The evidence/data that you provide. How you collected this? The evaluations of this material. (IMPACT)

6. The overall reflection, what might you have done differently? What next? (CONCLUSION)

A key strength of the course is that it is based on your personal development as a leader. Your personal thoughts and reflections are key to your development as a leader. It is recognised that some participants may wish to use AI tools to support with the preparation of final submissions (e.g. for research). However, participants will need to declare on their completion form that the final submission is their own unique work and has not been copied or produced from another source (including AI software).

It is important that throughout the challenge that you are critically reflective on your journey as a leader – what are your strengths/areas to develop? What different leadership styles have you used and why?

CPML Online Learning Platform

The CPML online learning platform contains all the relevant module guides for your course as well as pre-reading/tasks and resources. The platform allows you to connect with your Facilitator and other participants in your cohort, ask questions, and share ideas.

What you need to do before the first face-to-face sessions?

Register

You will need to register for the programme. If you have a cohort in your own school, then your school may be managing your registration directly with COBIS. If you are an external participant, then you will need to complete a booking form via the COBIS website. It is essential that all participants are registered with COBIS and you will be asked to supply the following information:

1. Name as you wish it to appear on any certification at the end of the course.
2. Name of the school.
3. Email address for communication and that you intend to use to engage with the online community.
4. Provisional title of your leadership challenge (this will be collected by your Facilitator).
5. Name and role for you Learning Colleague (this will be collected by your Facilitator).

Get to know others via the online learning platform

You will receive a welcome email from COBIS and your facilitator will contact you with information and instructions about joining the online learning platform. You will find in the community all the relevant module guides, any pre-reading or tasks and resources connected with the leadership audit tool. It is important that you take the opportunity to meet others from your cohort as this is both reassuring, a great place

ask questions and will allow your facilitators to craft the first face to face sessions to meet the group's needs.

Leadership Audit Tool

One important resource as you begin your leadership journey is the chance to carry out a Leadership Audit using 360-degree feedback. This supports the two key principles of self-awareness and reflection that help guide the CPML. You will receive an email inviting you to access the Leadership Audit Tool. Following the instructions, you will first be asked to rate yourself against a series of leadership competencies. You will then be asked to supply names and email addresses of others to give their perceptions, in a structured survey, which touches on some of the same issues of leadership (note: do not use other people on the same programme as references). Combining these together produces a report which many participants have found very useful. It also forms the basis for many to have a good learning conversation with their Learning Colleague which looks at the audit in relation to the Leadership Challenge that has been identified. The choice of colleagues contributing to the Leadership Audit is yours but as guideline previous participants have found it useful to think about including people from previous schools/roles, people you line manage, people who manage you, peers and non-teaching colleagues. Remember it is your Leadership Audit. Detailed guidance is given with the Leadership Audit resource.

It is important to note that completion of the Leadership Audit Tool, by participants and referees, is **time limited**. It is important for participants to identify and approach referees before beginning the process.

The course completion evidence

The course completion evidence can be in any approved format – video, presentation, traditional write-up, website, audio file – the list is almost endless. It is likely to be an ongoing process which follows the entire programme. Please note if you wish to use some or all of the CPML for part of a qualification with a Higher Education provider, you will need to ensure that it takes account of their submission guidelines. However, for assessment by your facilitator and moderation by COBIS, the submission will include these items:

1. A learning log – a learning log/journal/blog that charts your leadership journey from the very beginning of the programme through the face-to-face sessions and the experience of carrying out the Leadership Challenge to your final thoughts and reflections. Your Facilitator will be able to give you guidance here. Journal entries should demonstrate critical reflection (analysis and synthesis rather than description), linking theory to practice and evaluating leadership behaviours and ethical considerations. Selected excerpts can be included in the final submission as evidence of reflective practice.
2. An action plan from the early stages of the Leadership Challenge and a later copy including any changes or appropriate reflections. This will be included with your Leadership Challenge
3. Your Leadership Challenge (please see the notes above; your Facilitator will be able to give you further guidance)

Your final submissions will need to be uploaded to the Moodle Course Page under the 'Leadership Challenge Submission' activity. You will receive your feedback and grade from this section when it has been assessed.

Certificate of Completion

At the end of the programme, in order to be awarded a certificate by COBIS, you will need to provide evidence to your facilitator that you have:

1. Attended all the face-to-face sessions
2. Undertaken the activities in the programme face-to-face and online
3. Addressed a Leadership Challenge to close a gap appropriately
4. Maintained a leadership learning log and gathered a portfolio of evidence to show impact
5. Evaluated the impact the course has had on pupil achievement, your team and your school and recorded this as an account of your Leadership Challenge journey

Once your facilitator is happy, they will mark you as passing the course on Moodle. You will receive an email to confirm this, and your certificate can be accessed from the course page of Moodle.

Professional Accreditation and Academic Pathways

Optional pathways upon completion of the course:

- 30 MA credits with NITE (Coventry University)
- 60 Accredited Learning (AL) credits with UWE Bristol towards MA credits.

Details available from COBIS and partner institutions.