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Is the National Professional Qualification for Headship Making a Difference?

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ABSTRACT *This article investigates the data from a national survey of headteachers of maintained schools in England conducted during 1999 by means of a self-completion postal questionnaire to see whether there was any evidence to support the hypothesis that respondents who had taken part in the National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH) felt better prepared than their predecessors for the post of headteacher. The survey sought to establish the perceptions of English headteachers with regard to their state of readiness on taking up the role. Where respondents reported themselves as well prepared or extremely well prepared for aspects of their role they were asked to attribute their perceived state of readiness to training, experience, or a combination of the two. In addition respondents were asked to complete open-ended questions which asked them to identify activities and support which would help the induction of newly appointed headteachers. The findings reported in this paper do not draw on these qualitative responses.*

Headship in England

The position of headteacher in England differs both in name and role expectation from similar positions in most other countries. First, the title of 'headteacher' carries with it an extensive history of professional independence. Second, the position is unique in the level of responsibility allocated to the position by legislation.

Traditionally, headteachers in England have been considered to be autonomous autocrats, a status that grew from the respect accorded to their predecessors in independent schools in Victorian times. That level of respect is still largely maintained despite a radical shift in central Government policy, accompanied by legislation, over the last 25 years which has dramatically raised the levels of accountability for those running schools in the maintained sector. The headteacher is considered to be the pivotal figure in the state education system, one whose leadership qualities largely influence and determine the effectiveness of the school.

In addition, headteachers in England are the only official identified in the state education system as being individually responsible for the administration and management of the school. Under the terms of the School Teachers' Pay and

Conditions Act, 1991, the headteacher carries specific responsibility for the internal organisation, management and control of the school. All other officials responsible for decision-making are either lay members of the public (serving on the governing bodies required for each school) or are employees of the local education authority (LEA) and are thus only vicariously liable for actions and decisions taken at the site level.

The net result of these two influences is to create a position equated in the public and Government perception with notions of 'omnicompetence' (Bowring-Carr & West-Burnham 1997: 118) whereby headteachers are perceived as:

the skilled classroom practitioner plus curriculum leader, plus technical expert, plus all the manifestations associated with being the figurehead and with being 'in control' of the whole mechanism [school] all the time.

The role of headteacher has changed considerably since the 1988 Education Reform Act which introduced a system of site-based management that by now requires administration of virtually the entire budget (including all staff costs) at the school level. With most of the mandatory school governing bodies operating in a supportive, rather than controlling, mode the headteacher is effectively the managing director of a self-managing organisation (albeit within a curricular framework that is nationally determined).

National Professional Qualification for Headship

Prior to the introduction of NPQH in 1997 there had been no systematic preparation for headship and in the main it has been individual aspirants who organised and, in many cases, paid for their own development. Usually this had been a postgraduate qualification in educational management, although some prospective candidates had availed themselves of qualifications in business management, generally with a focus on public service or personnel management. Role definition had been the province of the hiring body which, since 1988, had been the governing body in all maintained schools. Various attempts by central Government to improve the quality of headship and school management have been described by closely associated observers as 'patchy' (Bolam 1997: 227), 'haphazard' (Bush 1999: 244) and disjointed and insubstantial' (Male 1997: 6). All such initiatives had failed both to define the role and to reach a high enough proportion of school leaders to make a difference (School Management Task Force 1990).

Against this background the Teacher Training Agency (TTA), created in 1994 and charged with all aspects of teacher education, developed a framework for continuing professional development which included national standards for headteachers (TTA 1998). The standards were used for identifying the professional development needs of headteachers and as a basis for a formal qualification designed to demonstrate readiness for role, the National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH).

NPQH is a professional qualification based on the national standards that include 8 leadership attributes, 27 skills and 15 aspects of professional knowledge

and understanding framed within a defined core purpose and five key areas of headship. From these attributes, skills, knowledge and understanding it is deemed possible to make an assessment of the capability of a prospective or serving headteacher and the NPQH programme and assessment processes have used the national standards to derive criteria for the identification of successful candidates. All assessments, training and development associated with NPQH were run through regional centres working under contract to the TTA until 1999 when the responsibility for headteacher development was transferred to the DfEE, pending the establishment of the National College for School Leadership (NCSL). From September 2000 responsibility for NPQH and all other Government funded headteacher development programmes has been with the newly formed NCSL.

NPQH has undergone a number of changes since the trials and piloting in 1997 when it was configured as a 3-year programme with few possibilities for exemption. The programme was reviewed in 1999, to take account of the lessons from the early stages and the work undertaken by Hay McBer for both the TTA and the DfEE on headship, the outcomes of which provide us 'with better information than ever before about effective headship, what constitutes readiness for headship and how to train and develop tomorrow's school leaders' (Collarbone 2000: 6). NPQH now runs in three phases: the Application/Access Phase, the Development Phase (Phase 1) and the Confirmation Phase (Phase 2). During the application/access phase a candidate's development needs are analysed and, where necessary, they are directed to access modules that are now available on-line. Once accepted Phases 1 and 2 will be completed within a one-year time frame. Options also exist for an accelerated (one-term) route for 'fast-track' candidates.

By May, 1999 a total of 5668 candidates (DfEE 1999) had registered for NPQH in five cohorts with another round of recruitment scheduled for the period between May to July. All these cohorts would have been working on the first model of NPQH. The ratio of recruitment was 11.2:8.3:1 (Primary, Secondary, Special) against a national requirement of 16:4:1, an outcome which demonstrated the dominance of those from the secondary sector. The Government has now made provision for the NPQH to become mandatory but is yet to determine when it will do so.

The National Headteacher Survey

The survey was conducted by an internally funded research team from the University of Lincoln, led by the author. A stratified random sample of 10% of all serving headteachers from maintained schools in England was established, totalling 2285 potential respondents in all. Completed returns were received from 1405 headteachers, an overall response rate of 62%.

Fifty-four per cent of survey responses were from women. Ninety-nine per cent of the sample reported themselves as 'white' or 'Irish', with only a small proportion ($n = 18$) of respondents indicating they were of a different ethnicity. Of these respondents there were four black African, two black Caribbean, one black Other, four Indian, two Pakistani, one Bangladesh and one Chinese. In addition to these

nationally recognised classifications two reported themselves as 'Mixed Race European' and one as 'Pomeranian'. The age range was from 28 to 63 years, with length of service ranging from three respondents in their first year of service to one who had completed 30 years in post.

The timing of the survey was aimed to precede the anticipated effects of the NPQH and to establish a profile of English headteachers who had not been required to undergo formal preparation for the role. At the time the survey closed only 403 candidates (just under 2% of the population of headteachers) had taken part in the NPQH through voluntary participation in the trials, pilot and initial cohorts of the programme. There were 54 respondents to this survey, however, who had been participants on the new qualification, although there was no clarity as to whether they had achieved the qualification before or after they had become a headteacher (an option at the time) This survey provides the last set of data, therefore, where the majority of beginning headteachers had no formal programme of preparation for the role.

Questionnaire Design

The questionnaire was in four parts, with Part 1 focusing on training and experience and Part 4 seeking to discover demographic details including ethnicity, gender, age and type of school. The major purpose of the questionnaire was contained in Part 2 which provided a range of 28 questions examining the perceptions of serving headteachers as to their level of preparation for the headship. Answers were offered on a 4-point scale with a score of 3 equalling 'well-prepared' and a score of 4 equalling 'extremely well prepared'. Those headteachers who felt well prepared or extremely well prepared for the post on entry were then asked to complete an associated question as whether they attributed their perceived degree of preparation to training, experience or some combination of both. This time they used a 5-point scale with a score of 1 equalling 'training only', a score of 2 equalling 'mostly training', a score of 3 reporting an 'equal training and experience', a score of 4 equalling 'mostly experience' and a score of 5 equalling 'experience only'. Part 3 of the questionnaire allowed the respondents to write short answers where they gave suggestions for improving the preparation and induction of new headteachers.

Work began on the design of the questionnaire in January 1998. The design was based on previous work by Daresh *et al.* (1998) who had applied the Delphi technique (Robson 1993: 27) to solicit information about effective principal preparation from practising principals in the El Paso area of Texas who had been identified by peers, supervisors, and university colleagues as effective leaders. Their finalised list included 28 items which they grouped into three categories entitled:

- (a) Development of Skills;
- (b) Formation of Attitudes and Values;
- (c) Increase of Knowledge.

In adapting their work for this study, the first step was to consider the appropriateness of the original instrument for addressing both the purpose of this study and its

intended audience. The 28 items identified by the principals were compared to the current version of the national standards for headteachers. Each of the 28 items were reflected in the standards identified by the TTA. Consequently, the components were revised to reflect cultural and linguistic differences, to become the base for a new questionnaire exploring the role of prior training and experience on preparation for the headship.

The questionnaire was pre-tested with convenience samples of headteachers drawn from schools within the immediate region of the university and volunteers from the MBA in Educational Leadership at the University of Lincoln. Further guidance was sought from a recently retired headteacher (with over 20 years experience as a head) and two serving headteachers (of 2 and 5 years experience, respectively), by means of a series of meetings and discussions held over a 2-month period between September and November 1998. The final version of the questionnaire was printed and distributed in February 1999, with two subsequent follow up mailings to non-respondents during the period to June of that year.

Findings

Analysis of all responses reveals that the majority (57%) perceived themselves to be either well prepared or extremely well prepared in the skills element of their role defined by the questionnaire, with 74% also feeling similarly prepared in the formation of their values and attitudes and 64% perceiving themselves to have had the levels of knowledge and understanding necessary for the post. Of those who felt themselves either well prepared or extremely well prepared in the development of skills, 53% attributed this mostly or entirely to experience rather than training, with 65% of respondents similarly identifying experience as the key factor in the formation of attitudes and values. It was only in the last category, the increase of knowledge, that fewer than half the respondents (34%) indicated that something other than experience was the major factor in their preparation for the role. The major contributor in this instance was a mixture of training and experience, with 54% of respondents making this choice.

The influence of training was deemed to be minimal by respondents in all categories, with just 7% indicating that mostly training or training only had been the principal factor in the development of the skills identified in this survey. Just 2% of respondents indicated that training was mostly responsible for the formation of their attitudes and values, with less than 1% ($n=9$) attributing this element of their preparation entirely to training. The highest response rate in the attribution of training as the key factor in their preparation was with the increase of knowledge where 12% of respondents felt that training was either mostly or wholly responsible for their perceived state of readiness for the role.

The Development of Skills

A majority of respondents felt either well or extremely well prepared in 11 of the 18 skills identified for this survey. The highest ranked individual skill was the mainte-

TABLE I. Development of skills

Question	%	Attributable to (%):				
		Training only	Mostly training	Equal	Mostly experience	Experience only
<i>A1: Putting vision into words (n = 797/1405)</i>	57	1	6	41	41	10
<i>A2: Ensuring that all people with an interest in the school are involved in the school mission (n = 801/1405)</i>	57	1	6	41	42	10
<i>A3: Building community/parental involvement (n = 1020/1405)</i>	73	0	1	25	51	23
<i>A4: Working effectively with adults (n = 1149/1405)</i>	82	0	1	27	52	20
<i>A5: Working with the under-performing teacher (n = 344/1405)</i>	24	2	8	34	39	18
<i>A6: Identifying children with special needs (n = 1020/1405)</i>	73	1	8	54	25	12
<i>A7: Using student performance data to plan curriculum (n = 419/1405)</i>	30	0	11	51	29	9
<i>A8: Maintaining effective school discipline (n = 1261/1405)</i>	90	0	1	28	41	29
<i>A9: Resolving conflict/handling confrontation (n = 928/1405)</i>	66	0	2	32	43	23

<i>A10</i> : Using effective communication techniques (<i>n</i> = 1089/1405)	78	0	3	39	40	18
<i>A11</i> : Conducting a meeting (<i>n</i> = 1016/1405)	72	1	4	34	37	24
<i>A12</i> : Forming and working with teams (<i>n</i> = 1085/1405)	77	0	3	37	41	19
<i>A13</i> : Applying educational law to specific situations (<i>n</i> = 256/1405)	19	5	21	50	18	6
<i>A14</i> : Planning for future needs and growth (<i>n</i> = 628/1405)	44	1	8	53	31	6
<i>A15</i> : Assuming responsibility for school management (<i>n</i> = 506/1405)	36	3	12	46	26	13
<i>A16</i> : Organising school administration (<i>n</i> = 660/1405)	46	1	5	42	35	17
<i>A17</i> : Constructing timetables (<i>n</i> = 952/1405)	68	1	3	27	38	31
<i>A18</i> : Using information technology and other tools in the management process (<i>n</i> = 406/1405)	29	4	10	44	24	18

nance of effective school discipline with 90% of respondents indicating themselves to be either well prepared or extremely well prepared for this aspect of the role in their first year of headship. Three other skills were identified by over three-quarters of respondents as ones for which they felt more than adequately prepared:

- working effectively with adults (82%);
- using effective communication techniques (78%), and;
- forming and working with teams (77%)

In the remaining seven skills where the majority of respondents felt themselves to be more than adequately prepared, all scores were in the third quartile (see Table I).

The least prepared aspect appears to be in the application of law to specific situations with only 19% of respondents scoring this as a 3 or 4 on the rating scale. There were three other areas where under one-third of respondents felt confident in their level of skills:

- working with the under performing teacher (24%);
- using information technology and other tools in the management process (29%);
- using student performance data to plan curriculum (30%).

The three remaining aspects of skill in which fewer than half of respondents perceived themselves to be either well prepared or extremely well prepared were:

- assuming responsibility for school management (36%);
- planning for future needs and growth (44%), and;
- organising school administration (46%).

As indicated in the overview of the results at the start of this section on findings, few respondents attributed their perceived state of readiness to training. In only one skill, the one for which respondents felt least prepared, did more than a quarter of those who felt well prepared indicate training as being the key factor contributing to their readiness. Only three other skills scored more than 10%, with the overall figure established at 7%.

Formation of Attitudes and Values

The vast majority of respondents felt more than adequately prepared for this aspect of their role (see Table II). Training seemed to play a minimal part in achieving this perceived state of readiness, with only 2% of respondents indicating that training as being mostly responsible. Those willing to nominate training as being wholly responsible numbered fewer than 10 in total, less than 1%.

Increase of Knowledge

The majority of respondents felt themselves to be either well prepared or extremely well prepared for the six aspects of knowledge identified in this survey, with all scores confined to the third quartile. Whilst training again seemed to play a minimal

TABLE II. Formation of values and attitudes

Question	Attributable to (%):					
	%	Training only	Mostly training	Equal	Mostly experience	Experience only
<i>B1</i> : Behaving in ways consistent with your values, attitudes and beliefs (<i>n</i> = 1188/1405)	84	0	1	28	38	34
<i>B2</i> : Promoting ethical practices in the school (<i>n</i> = 1129/1405)	80	0	1	32	40	26
<i>B3</i> : Encouraging respect for life-long learning (<i>n</i> = 893/1405)	63	0	2	34	37	27
<i>B4</i> : Creating a community of learners (<i>n</i> = 929/1405)	66	0	3	38	37	22

TABLE III. Increase of knowledge

Question	% age	Attributable to (%):				
		Training only	Mostly training	Equal	Mostly experience	Experience only
<i>Knowing and understanding</i>						
C1: Ways in which reflective practice develops healthy organisations (<i>n</i> = 738/1405)	52	2	12	55	23	7
C2: The process of matching student learning styles with appropriate teaching methods (<i>n</i> = 977/1405)	60	1	7	56	25	11
C3: How the planning and selection of appropriate curriculum affects student learning (<i>n</i> = 1038/1405)	74	1	7	57	27	8
C4: How educational trends and issues influence organisational change (<i>n</i> = 833/1405)	59	3	14	54	22	6
C5: How values and attitudes affect the way people view educational issues (<i>n</i> = 866/1405)	62	1	7	43	35	13
C6: The basic principles which guide assessment and evaluation (<i>n</i> = 919/1405)	65	1	13	60	19	7

role in this perceived level of readiness (see Table III), respondents did not indicate that experience was the main causal factor. A mixture of training and experience was the largest score for each aspect of knowledge increase.

The Impact of NPQH

Evidence accumulated from the National Headteacher Survey begins to demonstrate, however, that those going through the NPQH process perceive their level of skill to be at different levels to other serving headteachers. The respondents to the survey included 54 headteachers who indicated that they had taken part in NPQH training. Although this return constitutes under 4% of the total responses to the survey ($n = 54/1405$) and just under 1% ($n = 54/5668$) of those registered for NPQH at May, 1999 (Department for Education and Employment, 1999) it still considered to be of interest to this work, given that one of the premises for the survey was that it was timed to examine the situation in England *prior* to the wide spread introduction of NPQH.

As can be seen from Table IV those who had experienced NPQH training ranked themselves as better prepared in all 18 skills nominated in the questionnaire. Statistical analysis of these data findings indicated significant differences at the level of 5% or lower between 14 of the 18 questions when using the Mann-Whitney test, although this number reduces to 9 when also applying the two-sample Kolmogorov-

TABLE IV. Development of skills: ranking and mean ranks according to NPQH status

Question	NPQH trained		Serving heads	
	R	M	R	M
A1	1	2.94	2	2.48
A2	1	3.03	2	2.48
A3	1	3.11	2	2.79
A4	1	3.28	2	2.94
A5	1	2.31	2	1.88
A6	1	3.01	2	2.83
A7	1	2.61	2	1.96
A8	1	3.31	2	3.19
A9	1	2.89	2	2.69
A10	1	3.06	2	2.85
A11	1	3.34	2	2.82
A12	1	3.26	2	2.85
A13	1	2.14	2	1.78
A14	1	2.80	2	2.29
A15	1	2.57	2	2.12
A16	1	2.88	2	2.36
A17	1	2.76	2	2.70
A18	1	2.65	2	1.89

Note: R = ranking; M = Mean rank

Smirnov Test. The respondents' perception of role readiness in the skills that they consider themselves to be more advanced than other serving headteachers are:

- A1 Putting vision into words
- A2 Ensuring that all people with an interest in the school are involved in the school mission
- A5 Working with the under performing teacher
- A7 Using student performance data to plan curriculum
- A11 Conducting a meeting
- A12 Forming and working with teams
- A15 Assuming responsibility for school management
- A16 Organising school administration
- A18 Using information technology and other tools in the management process

These are interesting findings for of the seven least developed skills nominated by all respondents, NPQH candidates felt themselves to be better prepared in five of those skills, leaving just two where no significant difference (where $p > 0.05$) could be revealed between themselves and other headteacher colleagues. The two areas of skill seemingly not being addressed by NPQH are:

- The application of educational law to specific situations, and;
- Planning for future needs and growth.

Whereas it would appear from the responses of NPQH candidates that the process is addressing the development of skills in the other five areas where over half the total respondents felt inadequately prepared on taking up post. Specifically, the five skills are:

- Working with the under performing teacher;
- Using student performance data to plan curriculum;
- Assuming responsibility for school management;
- Organising school administration, and;
- Using information technology and other tools in the management process.

The responses of the NPQH cohort to the formation of attitudes and values were not significantly different ($p < 0.05$) to those recorded by other respondents in the survey. Significant differences were noticeable, however, between the two groups with perceptions of levels of professional knowledge and understanding. Those with experience of NPQH considered themselves better prepared in all six aspects of this section, with further statistical analysis showing the differences to be significant ($p > 0.05$) in all but question C2 when using the Mann-Whitney test. This total is reduced to three aspects when also applying the two sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, with questions C1 ('knowing and understanding ways in which reflective practice develops healthy organisations'), C4 ('knowing and understanding how educational trends and issues influence organisational change') and C6 ('knowing and understanding the basic principles which guide assessment and evaluation') remaining as significantly different.

The Recency Effect

Speculations offered by the author elsewhere for these findings (Male 2000; Male & Hvizdak 2000) suggest that a possible reason for the majority of headteachers not feeling prepared for dealing with, for example, teacher under performance, using student data to plan curriculum and making fuller use of information technology could be the very newness of these processes to school management and leadership. Such has been the pace of recent change over the last few years in these three aspects alone that the majority of serving headteachers would not have entered their role with those skills forming a requirement. To test this hypothesis the data was analysed further to see whether there were differences between those recently appointed (less than 2 years in service) and the rest of the respondents, with a further comparison between those within that category who had been through NPQH.

Analysis of the dataset revealed that of the 1358 respondents who had revealed their length of service as a headteacher, 235 had been in post for less than 2 years with 36 of those respondents indicating that they had been through NPQH. Six respondents who indicated they had undertaken NPQH gave their length of service as longer than 2 years, whilst the remaining 12 of the total of 54 respondents who indicated they had undertaken NPQH did not reveal their length of service. The expectation was that all 54 NPQH respondents would have been in post less than 2 years as the pilot training programme did not commence until January 1997. Consequently it was predicted that no serving headteacher surveyed between February and June 1999 would have completed more than 2 years service after the introduction of NPQH. Two explanations which could account for this anomaly are that they had either been serving headteachers who had opted to take part in the trials, pilot phase or in the first cohort of NPQH (an option offered under Headlamp, for example) or that these six respondents had merely incorrectly recorded their length of service as a headteacher. For the purposes of subsequent data analysis, however, these six NPQH respondents plus the 12 respondents who did not record their length of service as a headteacher will be removed from the NPQH sample, leaving a population of 36 who had undertaken NPQH and were within their first two years of service at the time of the National Headteacher Survey.

Newly appointed headteachers (less than 2 years in service) perceived themselves to be better prepared than longer serving headteachers in all 28 aspects. In all instances the difference between newly appointed and longer serving headteachers was significant ($p < 0.05$) on the Mann-Whitney test. Separating out those with experience of NPQH ($n = 36$) from the other newly appointed headteachers produces a different profile, however, which shows the former group perceiving themselves to be better prepared in 14 of the 18 skills (see Table V), in all four of the questions associated with the formation of attitudes and values and in five of the six aspects of professional knowledge and understanding.

The difference between the two groups in four of those skills were demonstrated to be of significance ($p > 0.05$) by use of the Mann-Whitney test, but there were

TABLE V. Questionnaire responses: ranking and mean ranks according to NPQH status of headteachers and length of service

Question	NPQH trained		Serving heads 0–2 years		Serving heads 2+ years	
	R	<i>M</i>	R	<i>M</i>	R	<i>M</i>
A1	1	2.94	2	2.71	3	2.48
A2	1	3.03	2	2.82	3	2.48
A3	1	3.11	2	3.02	3	2.79
A4	1	3.28	2	3.11	3	2.94
A5	1	2.31	2	2.28	3	1.88
A6	2	3.01	1	3.26	3	2.84
A7	1	2.61	2	2.37	3	1.96
A8	2	3.31	1	3.31	3	3.19
A9	1	2.89	2	2.89	3	2.69
A10	2	3.06	1	3.09	3	2.86
A11	1	3.34	2	3.10	3	2.82
A12	1	3.26	2	3.10	3	2.86
A13	1	2.14	2	1.85	3	1.79
A14	1	2.80	2	2.58	3	2.30
A15	1	2.57	2	2.23	3	2.12
A16	1	2.88	2	2.40	3	2.34
A17	2	2.76	1	2.92	3	2.71
A18	1	2.65	2	2.35	3	1.89
B1	1	3.29	2	3.16	3	3.08
B2	1	3.06	2	3.05	3	2.96
B3	1	2.91	2	2.83	3	2.69
B4	1	2.89	2	2.80	3	2.73
C1	1	2.89	2	2.74	3	2.42
C2	2	2.91	1	3.03	3	2.71
C3	1	3.09	2	3.08	3	2.79
C4	1	2.88	2	2.81	3	2.57
C5	1	2.94	2	2.76	3	2.63
C6	1	3.15	2	3.05	3	2.60

Note: R = ranking; M = mean rank

no significant differences between the groups in respect to their perceived state of readiness in sections B (formation of attitudes and values) and C (professional knowledge and understanding) of the survey. The four skills where those with NPQH experience felt better prepared than other newly appointed colleagues were:

- A1 Putting vision into words;
- A13 Applying educational law to specific situations;
- A15 Assuming responsibility for school management;
- A16 Organising school administration.

Conclusion

The evidence from the National Headteacher Survey would seem to suggest that in addition to differences noted between those newly appointed to headship (less than 2 years in service) and longer serving colleagues, those who had taken part in the NPQH trials, pilot phase or early cohorts consider themselves to be better prepared in four of the skills identified in the self-completion questionnaire in comparison to all other appointees. Of those four skills, three correspond to those identified by the majority of respondents in the survey who felt these to be less developed aspects when taking up post. The one skill that remains outside this equation is 'putting vision into words' where the majority of respondents felt well prepared or extremely well prepared for this aspect of the headteacher post.

The inference is that the first model of NPQH had an enhanced effect on the development of four key skills that is in addition to that accrued by colleagues in the same peer group who have travelled alternative routes to headship. What has not been examined in this article, however, are other possible reasons for this difference. The data have not yet, for example, been analysed to investigate the professional development profile of those with experience of NPQH compared with other respondents. Neither has the group containing those with NPQH experience been compared with other sub-divisions of the whole dataset, such as gender or type of school. Caution must be expressed at this stage as to the reliability of these findings, therefore, although it worth noting that the express purpose of NPQH training is to assist those preparing for the role in the very issues that have been highlighted in this article. As with all research of this nature, further in-depth analysis is required before we can express a high degree of confidence in the efficacy of NPQH. All we can say at this stage is that it might just be ...

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