

The Mentoring of New Headteachers/Principals

Dr Sara Bubb

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Challenges faced by heads

‘Leading has become a high wire act that only the most skilled are able to perform successfully over a protracted period of time’. (Kellerman, 2015, p.263)



High autonomy-high accountability

‘Heads should: exercise their autonomy to innovate in response to parental needs, whilst at the same time meeting centrally prescribed targets and requirements; improve literacy and numeracy scores every year, whilst maintaining a broad and balanced curriculum; close attainment gaps, while pushing the brightest and the best; and collaborate with their peers to develop skills and capacity, while competing to ensure that their schools move up the local hierarchy’.

(Greany and Earley, 2017, p4)

Research questions

- What are the challenges of new headteachers?
- What difference does the provision of a mentor make?

Base study 2016

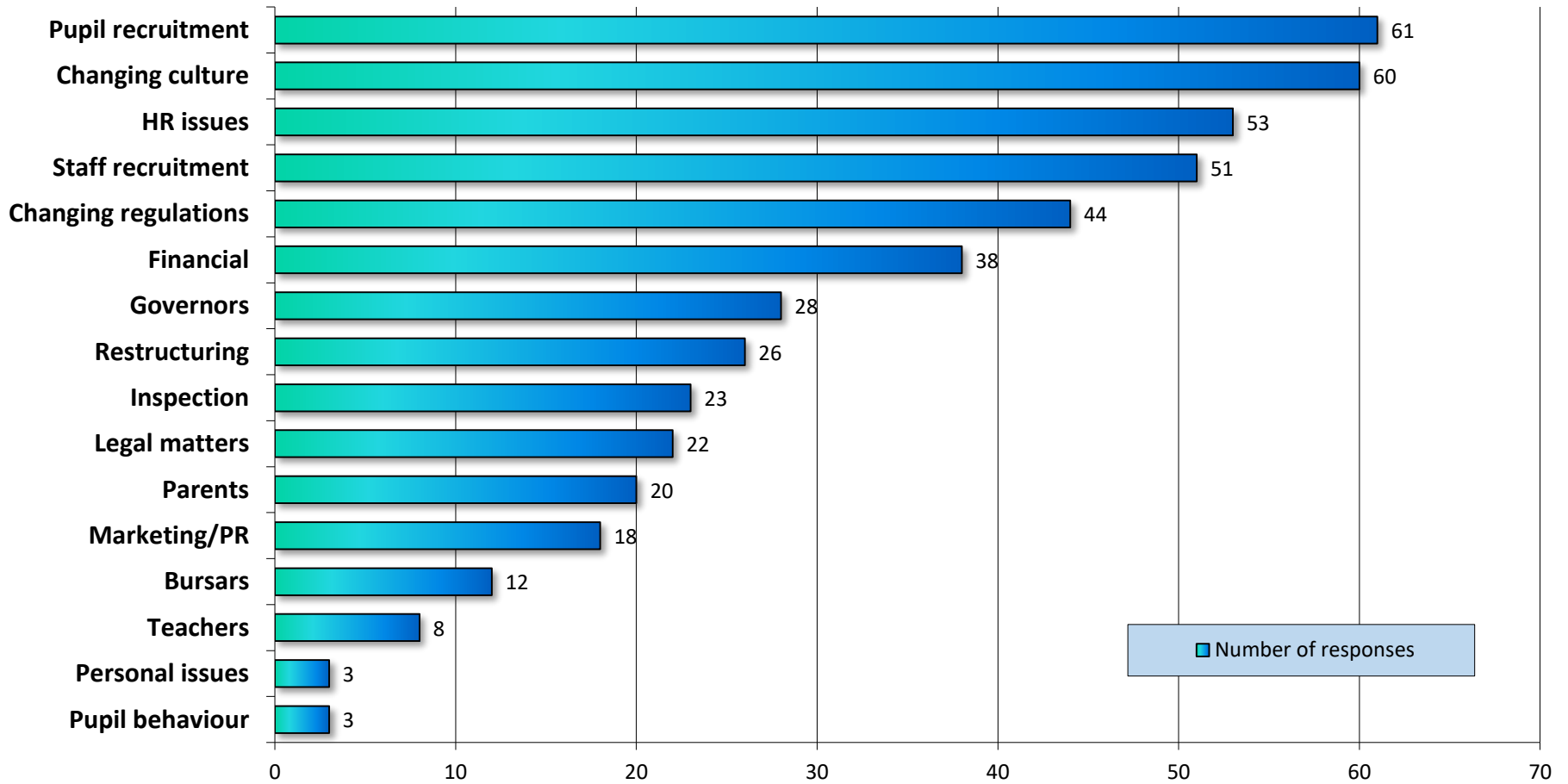
Earley, P., Bubb, S. & Berry, J., 2016. *The professional development needs of heads of HMC schools*. London: UCL/HMC.

2016	Activity	Numbers
Jan	Interviews with key stakeholders	11
Jan	Focus group of new heads	15 Heads
Feb-Mar	Survey for HMC heads. 47% return rate	155 Heads
Mar-Apr	Survey for chairs of governors. 25% return rate	84 Chairs
Jan-March	3 Focus groups of heads	56 Heads
March	Discussions with governors at AGBIS conference	20 Chairs
March	Focus group - HMCPD Committee	18 Heads
Mar-Apr	Interviews with a sample of survey respondents	10 Heads, 5 Chairs

Mentoring 2018/19 - qualitative

2018/19	Activity	Numbers
Sept	Interviews with mentors	8 mentors
Oct	Interviews with new heads	15 heads
Feb	Focus groups of new heads	20 heads
June	Interviews with mentors	8 mentors
June/July	Interviews with new heads	15 heads

Challenges faced by HMC heads



Note: Heads were each invited to choose 3 main challenges from a selection. 155 responses in 2016

Skills

Prospective heads need to 'up-skill themselves on finance, strategy, accountancy, marketing, etc. If you don't have a clue it's very difficult and you need to understand at least the basics of everything even if you have very skilled business managers, finance officers and marketing people. Being a head of an HMC school is about running a business.'

Challenges - experienced / new heads

Challenges	Experienced heads (114)	New heads (41)
Pupil recruitment	38%	<u>44%</u>
Staff recruitment	<u>37%</u>	22%
Changing culture	33%	<u>54%</u>
HR issues	32%	<u>39%</u>
Changing regulations	<u>32%</u>	20%
Financial issues	18%	<u>41%</u>

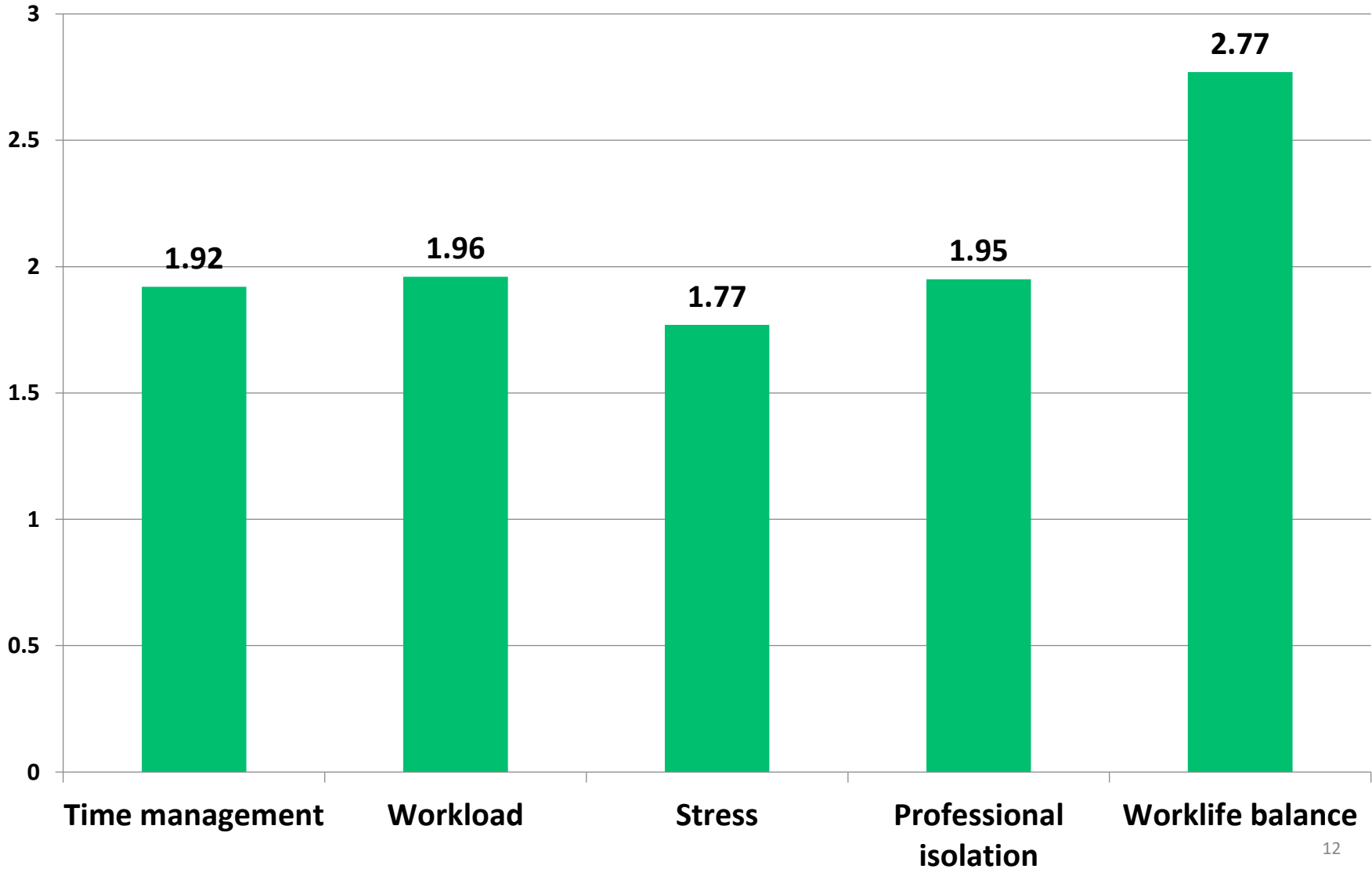
Workload was a challenge that many heads identified

- ‘Being too busy on a daily basis; too many emails; trying to be perfect’
- ‘Workload – this is just enormous at any one stage’
- ‘The job is all consuming and one is constantly working at the very edge or beyond one’s capacity’
- *Look after yourself, look after yourself and what are you doing about it?*

Workload

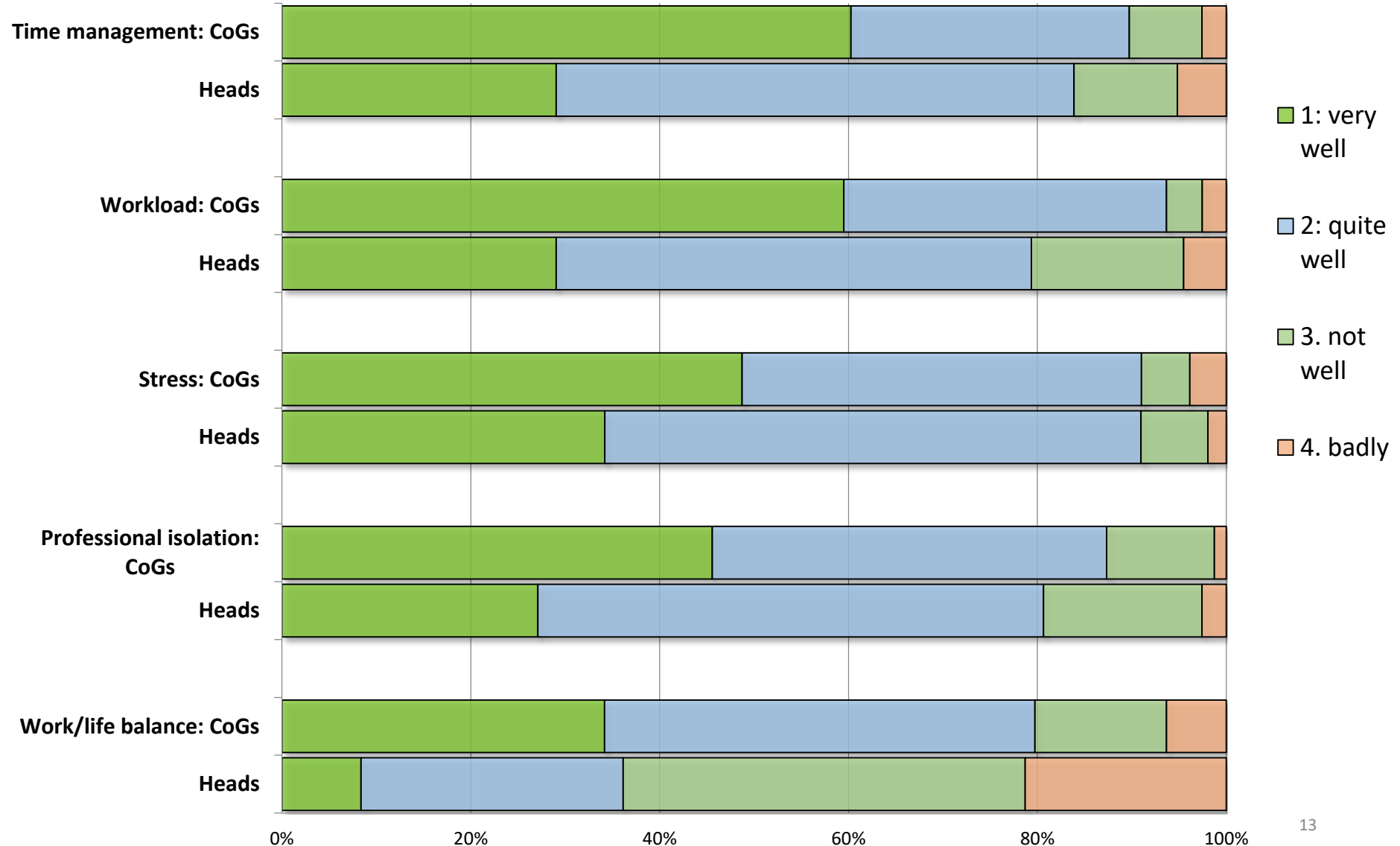
‘Much of this extra work is hidden from public view in the additional hours at home, not just on weekday evenings but also at weekends and on ‘holiday’. If leaders do not do this then the job begins to run away from them. So a Catch 22 situation can develop, where work requires unsustainable hours if individuals are to keep on top of it, but where the job becomes unsustainable if they do not’ (Bottery, 2016)

How well do you manage the following? (1=very well, 4=badly) weighted average of 155 responses



How well does the Head deal with...?

Chairs of Governors'(n=79) and Heads' (n=155) Views Compared



Professional isolation

‘The isolation can be overwhelming and it sneaks up on you at funny times. We all know that there is "loneliness in headship", but I don't think I have a clear idea of why the loneliness appears at certain times and not at others.’

‘Headship is like a powerful drug to which you can get addicted and it's tricky coming down from it’

Mentoring of new heads

- Mentors - recently retired heads, one day's training
- Heads choose from a brochure of mentors. Some chose people they knew or knew of; others deliberately chose a stranger. A female head chose a female mentor deliberately and said that it was important to have that choice.
- Allocated 6 days over 2 years – first contact in term before they start. Confidential in perpetuity.

Suggestion

Have a list of mentors' experiences/skills

- Boarding
- Expulsion
- Recruitment difficulties
- Handling the media
- Staff disciplinary actions
- Regions worked in
- Size of school
- Historic abuse cases

Mentors overwhelmingly positive

- *It's such a privilege to work with these new heads.*
- *I'm stunned by their skills.*
- *Better than I ever was.*
- *I love it!*

Heads' views of mentoring are positive

- *reassuring; uplifting; validating; encouraging*
- *Mentors are sympathetic; very knowledgeable; massively professional; good listener*
- *It's good to feel cared about;*
- *I know I could contact them at any time*
- *The mentoring relationship is perfect. I feel very happy. I'm very lucky*

Understanding the mentoring role

Almost everyone said that they understood the mentoring role but variations in practice suggested that this was not the case:

- Appraisal
- Meeting chair and partner
- Running training for staff

Models of contact

- As well as a tour of the school, many mentors met key people. Sometimes this was informal and at others it was formalised.
 - staff given slots with the mentor alone to give confidential feedback on how they thought the head was doing. The mentor then summarised the key points for the head.
- Some mentoring happened at the mentor's home or at another location. 'It's a good opportunity to get out of school – immerse yourself in a mentoring day'. 'You have to be able to leave the school – tearing yourself away is definitely a good thing'.

Peer support

I have long felt that there is room for a more developed peer support system or even something similar to the process of supervision used by counsellors.

Too much is left to serendipity and the good fortune of a head to have a supportive partner, good governing body or SLT.

It's the wisdom of fellow heads (who become firm friends) brought together by HMC that counts most for me.

Conclusion

‘school leaders need high levels of self-efficacy, resilience, self-awareness and judgement in order to cope with the emotional demands and complexities inherent in school-based ethical decision-making’
Lovett *et al.* (2015, 138)

Supported reflection

- ‘in practical terms, the most powerful basis for learning is supported reflection – support being provided through coaching and mentoring, the use of a reflective journal, structured reading to inform review and, perhaps most importantly, peer review and feedback on actual practice’

Nicholas and West-Burnham (2016, 22)

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Dr Sara Bubb
s.bubb@ucl.ac.uk