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Trevor Male
International Leadership Centre
University of Hull

with

Tim Bright, Nick Ware
National College for School Leadership

Correspondence: Trevor Male
International Leadership Centre,
University of Hull,
Cottingham Road,
Hull. HU6 7RX
ENGLAND

Telephone: +44 (0)1482 465224
Facsimile: +44 (0)1482 466343
Email: tmalehull@aol.com

The professional socialisation of headteachers in England: Further findings from the National Headteacher Survey

Trevor Male, International Leadership Centre, University of Hull
Tim Bright and **Nick Ware**, National College for School Leadership

Abstract
This paper reports on a further investigation of data first accumulated through a national survey of headteachers conducted in 1999. The survey was conducted by means of a self-completion postal questionnaire with a stratified random sample of 10 per cent serving headteachers in England, totalling 2285 potential respondents in all. Completed returns were received from 1405 headteachers, an overall response rate of 62 per cent. Initial findings from the survey have subsequently been published as conference papers and journal articles (Male, 2000; Male and Hvizdak, 2000; Male and Male, 2001, Male 2001).

The survey primarily sought to establish the respondents' perceived state of readiness for the demands of the headteacher position in a number of job categories and competencies. A secondary aim was to allow respondents to attribute reasons to their state of readiness where they perceived it to be adequate or better. A third aim was to seek opinion from the respondents as to what provision and support would be beneficial to headteachers in their first two years in post.

This further investigation has been commissioned by the National College for School Leadership and has been conducted by the original author, aided by two serving headteachers who have been appointed as research associates by the college during the period January to July of 2002.

Introduction

Earlier work by the principal author had produced data which seemed to suggest that beginning headteachers were not fully prepared for the role, particularly in being able to deal with the transition to the formal leadership position that was integral to the concept of the post (Male, 1996; Daresh and Male, 2000; Male and Merchant, 2000). The induction and transition of headteachers into the profession is of great concern, especially if there are particular events and/or circumstances that either encourage or discourage capable educators from seeking the position. Socialisation theory, which conceptualizes the manner in which new members of an organization deal with the realities of the job, has been touted as a useful way to capture how new principals are inducted into the profession.

Merton (1963) distinguishes between two overlapping phases of the socialisation of the new leader to the school, organisational and professional. Organisational

socialisation is the process by which one learns the knowledge, values and behaviours required to perform a specific role in a particular organisation; professional socialisation involves learning what it is to be a headteacher. In examining these processes Weindling (2000: 1) suggests that organisational socialisation can only, by definition, take place after appointment whilst professional socialisation can be learnt, at least in part, prior to taking up role and, for that reason, it becomes important to study the preparation period prior to headship.

The process of professional socialisation does continue into headship, however, as Duke argues:

> School leaders do not emerge from training programs fully prepared and completely effective. Their development is a more involved and incremental process, beginning as early as their own schooling and extending through their first years on the job as leaders. Becoming a school leader is an ongoing process of socialisation. (Duke, 1987: 261)

The early stages of headship tend to be dominated by organisational issues and require considerable learning on the part of the new headteacher as they encounter the people and the organisation and attempt to focus on rational interpretations and understandings that people construct (Hart, 1993). This is a period which Louis (1980) called 'sense-making' and is one that lasts for approximately the first six months in post (Gabarro, 1987).

The process of professional socialisation also continues throughout this same period, however, and is often characterised by 'surprise' (Louis, 1980) where there is considerable difference between the job as expected and as experienced. The surprises for new headteachers emerging from the empirical data of Draper and McMichael (1998), for example, were categorised in terms of role perceptions, the majority of which had not eliminated the 'shock' of the actual job. More than half of new headteachers featuring in the research were surprised to find, for example, that procedures that had worked for them in their previous school did not work in

their new school, whilst a majority were surprised by the respect given to them (Draper and McMichael, 1998: 207-8).

Researchers have attempted to understand this transition as new principals are inducted into the profession. Recent examples include empirical data dealing with the perceptions of new principals about what they gain and lose by taking on the role (e.g., Draper and McMichael, 1998), the surprises of the job (e.g., Daresh and Male, 2000), and the stages of professional socialisation they experience (e.g., Weindling, 2000). This paper continues that work by exploring the issues of professional socialisation for English headteachers that emerge from the data gathered for the National Headteacher Survey.

The National Headteacher Survey

The impetus for the survey conducted by the first author in 1999 came from the relative paucity of research and empirically based investigations into the nature of headship in the United Kingdom. The intention was to establish a body of data which could inform future policy and practice, particularly in the preparation and continuing professional development of headteachers.

Interest in the headship during the later stages of the twentieth century had sprung from the HMI report 'Ten Good Schools' which had identified the quality of leadership exhibited by the headteacher as central to the success of the school (Department of Education and Science, 1977: 36). Despite the fact that by definition the HMI report was a small scale non-representative study, much emphasis was laid on this report by government and led the department to commission a survey of training provision (Hughes *et al*, 1981), a project on the selection of secondary school headteachers (Morgan, Hall and Mackay, 1983) and to fund the National Development Centre for Schools' Senior Management Training at Bristol (Bolam, 1986). A Leverhulme Trust funded investigation into the nature of secondary school headship followed in 1986 and was prompted by the "absence of an empirical foundation for descriptions of secondary headship in Britain in the 1980s" (Hall, Mackay and Morgan, 1986: 4).

Early research into the nature of headship almost exclusively concentrated on the secondary sector and tended to be mostly qualitative in nature, focused on small numbers of the headteacher population. Representative surveys were few in number, with the exception of the study by National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) which used a variety of data collection techniques including interviews with newly appointed secondary headteachers during their second term in post, case studies and a questionnaire survey which was distributed (in the winter of 1983) to 304 headteachers who had been in post between three and eight years and to all the other 233 headteachers (summer 1984) who had been appointed at the same time as the first interviewees (Weindling and Earley, 1987). In its totality the NFER study, remains the most substantive piece of research on headship. With the largest sample size (around 600 serving headteachers), and by making use of a combination of research techniques, it provides us with the largest body of evidence to date, albeit confined to secondary school sector. Similarly Jones (1987) also studied the experiences of secondary school heads and received 400 responses to her postal questionnaire sent to 500 members of the Secondary Headteachers Association in two regions of the country. She attributes the quality of the responses and the high response rate to the fact that she was a serving head, something which allowed her colleagues to offer observations "more honest and less defensive than the kinds of comments Headteachers normally make in public" (Jones, 1987: 55).

Research into primary headship has been even more limited with no major study into the primary school headship, despite the fact that there are over 20,000 post holders in England and Wales (Southworth, 1995: 1). The studies that have emerged are largely small scale descriptive studies involving small numbers of heads and of short duration projects (e.g. Clerkin, 1985 and Harvey, 1986), investigating the way subjects spent their time which provide "a very narrow and limited view of headship" (Southworth, 1995: 1). Southworth's study, whilst offering depth, also falls into the pattern of small numbers reliant upon semi-structured interviews conducted in face to face sessions and is perhaps typical of the pattern of research to be found in this period (e.g. Lomax, 1996; Male, 1996).

Also significant is that little research had been undertaken into the nature of headship since the introduction of LMS in the 1988 Education Reform Act, particularly with a view to examining the potential or real changes to role caused by this major change to the organisation of the nation's education system. Southworth (1995) is an exception here in that he deliberately set out to examine this phenomenon through careful selection of his subjects, each of which had been in post long enough to have experienced both regimes. One study, commissioned by the National Association of Headteachers and jointly funded by the Leverhulme Trust sought to investigate the changes wrought by the new legislation, in particular the effect on children's education (Bullock and Thomas, 1997). Although revealing of the impact of LMS, the project took a very broad view of the changes caused by the legislation and reported on the headship only incidentally.

Government sponsored research in this field has either been a by-product of other services or remain unpublished. Potentially rich sources of government data have not reported on the nature of headship itself, although many interesting statistics have emerged from the work of departmental and non-departmental government bodies. Statistics on education are published annually by the DfES annually, for example, as is the report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector (HMCI). Neither publication focuses on nature of headship itself, however, and both need separate analysis and interpretation for those seeking to inform themselves on developments in headship. Where empirical research was commissioned by government agencies the data or findings have generally not been made available for public scrutiny. Two major investigations during the late 1990s into the NPQH and one into Headlamp remain unpublished, for example, although a resumé of the Ofsted findings from the inspection into the first seven cohorts of NPQH and the induction of new headteachers was contained in the HMI report on leadership and management training for headteachers (Office for Standards in Education, 2002). These findings were not available, however, at the time this survey was being designed. Similarly the TTA, which was responsible for headship training and development from 1994-99, did not publish any of its findings from a wealth of data that has been collected as a by product of its activities in the field during this time. Despite the fact that all Headlamp funded activities have to be evaluated by the

participant, for example, none of this data has ever been made available and we have no feedback on the reviews of the training provision and assessment processes which were systematically conducted by the TTA as a part of its quality control procedures. It is difficult to ignore the irony of two government agencies, charged with inspecting and promoting the education system, failing to report on their own activities.

What has emerged in the way of government sponsored empirical research during the later stages of the twentieth century was the report of the School Management Task Force which included the results of a national audit of training (School Management Task Force, 1990) and the contribution of all departmental and non-departmental government bodies to the Parliamentary Select Committee for Education and Employment investigation into the role of headteachers (House of Commons Select Committee, 1998). Contained in two volumes, the Select Committee report contains a wealth of primary data, evidence and opinion from all government education bodies and from other groups and individuals as well as the findings and conclusions of the committee itself. Consequently, the report contains the most up to date and comprehensive evidence and opinion of the nature of headship that can be found in recent times. The report is ostensibly the only coherent source of government statistics and opinion on the headship that has emerged to date.

It was against this backdrop of insubstantial data sources that the current study was conceived. The timing of the survey aimed to precede the anticipated effects of the National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH). At the time the survey closed only 403 candidates (just under 2 per cent of the population of headteachers) had taken part in the NPQH since its introduction in 1997 (through voluntary participation in the trials, pilot and initial cohorts of the programme). The total of respondents to this survey included 54 (just under 4 per cent), 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). The government has now made provision for the NPQH to become mandatory and plans are now in hand for that regulation

to enacted by 2004 (Department for Education and Skills and National College for School Leadership, 2002). This survey provides the last set of data, therefore, where the majority of beginning headteachers had no formal programme of preparation for the role.

The Questionnaire

The questionnaire was in four parts. In Part 1 respondents were asked to provide details about training and experience prior to and since assuming headship. They were asked to list the year in which they were awarded Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) and then indicate any award-bearing courses and professional development programmes they had attended, as well as any other work experience they had carried out.

In Part 2 of the questionnaire, respondents assessed their level of readiness for headship and, where they felt they were adequately or well prepared, indicated whether they had attributed their perceived degree of readiness to training or experience, or some combination of both. They were asked first to refer to a list of 28 activities associated with headship. These activities were grouped into three categories. The categories, number of activities per category and examples of activities are given below:

a) **Development of Skills** (18 activities) – e.g. using student performance data to plan the curriculum; constructing timetables; conducting a meeting.
b) **Formation of Values and Attitudes** (4 activities) – e.g. behaving in ways consistent with own values, attitudes and beliefs; promoting ethical practices in the school; encouraging respect fro lifelong learning.
c) **Increase of Knowledge** (6 activities) – e.g. knowing and understanding how educational trends and issues influence organizational change; knowing and understanding the bsic principles that guide assessment and evaluation; knowing and understanding ways in which reflective practice develops healthy organizations.

Item selection for activities was based on related studies, relevant literature and expert advice received from serving headteachers and other relevant professionals.

Respondents utilised the following four-point scale to indicate how well prepared they considered they were to carry out each activity on taking up post: 1, Not at all prepared; 2, Inadequately prepared; 3, Adequately prepared; 4, Well Prepared. For each item rated 3 or 4, respondents were asked to indicate their mode of preparation, using a second, five point scale: 1, Training only; 2, Mostly training; 3, Equally training and experience; 4, Mostly experience; 5, Experience only.

In Part 3 of the questionnaire, participants were asked to provide qualitative responses to two open-ended questions which sought to elicit comments ad suggestions for improving preparation for headship:

1. What do you think would help first-year headteachers to be more effective?
2. What level of support would be helpful during the first two years of headship?

Respondents could cite as many examples as they chose. Respondents were also invited, through a third question, to provide any additional comments.

In Part 4 of the questionnaire, respondents were asked to provide demographic information relating to ethnicity, gender, age and type of school. Confidentiality and anonymity were assured, therefore providing some degree of confidence to veridicality of responses.

The respondents

The survey was targeted at headteachers of LEA Maintained Schools in England. 1405 responses to the questionnaire were received, giving a response rate of 62 per cent. This can be considered to be a very high response rate for a voluntary self-completion questionnaire by a group of respondents who, as serving headteachers, are considered to be one of the most elusive group of subjects

(Cohen and Mannion, 1994). The number of respondents from each phase was: Secondary, 176; Primary, 1100; Special, 94. In addition 35 responses were received from headteachers of nursery schools, although these findings are not reported here.

The demographics of the study largely matched the profile of the headteacher workforce, where such statistics were available, with the single exception of the ratio of women to men. There were a greater proportion of women respondents (54 per cent) in the survey than within the entire headteacher population (49.5 per cent: 1997 figures – Department for Education and Employment, 1998: 28-29). Given the size of the sample responses (of those indicating gender, Women: n = 748; Men = 626), however, the results are still considered to be generalisable. There are no figures available to compare the ethnicity of the sample with that of the entire headteacher population. 99 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 (see Table 1). Length of service ranged from three respondents in their first year of service to one who had completed 30 years in post.

Table: 1
Biographical details of respondents

	Secondary respondents N= 176		Primary respondents N= 1100		Special school respondents N= 94	
	Mean (Years) and (SD)	Range (Years)	Mean (Years) and (SD)	Range (Years)	Mean (Years) and (SD)	Range (Years)
Age	49.68 (sd 5.22)	39-62	47.96 (sd 7.48)	28-63	48.07 (sd 5.97)	29-63
Age on Entry to Headship	41.37 (sd 4.23)	31-55	39.20 (sd 6.45)	26-56	40.80 (sd 5.94)	26-53
Years in Education	26.60 (sd 5.57)	13-40	24.92 (sd 5.98)	6-40	25.37 (sd 5.38)	12-38
Years as a class teacher	12.65 (sd 4.57)	1-31	13.83 (sd 6.06)	2-35	13.04 (sd 5.42)	5-30
Years as a Deputy Head	5.87 (sd 3.11)	0-18	5.01 (sd 3.29)	0-26	5.55 (sd 3.59)	0-19
Years as a Head	8.49 (sd 5.55)	1-23	8.91 (sd 6.22)	1-29	7.71 (sd 5.89)	1-22

Findings

The respondents

Table 2 (below) indicates mean scores and standard deviations (sd) for headteachers' perceptions of readiness in the three areas of activity: development of skills, formation of attitudes and values, and increase of knowledge. It can be seen from the table that, as a group, the headteachers considered themselves to be inadequately prepared to adequately prepared for the three areas of activity, with mean scores for all groups of activities and respondents being closer to adequately prepared than inadequately prepared.

Table: 2
Perceptions of Readiness

	Secondary		Primary		Special	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Development of Skills	2.76	0.91	2.52	1.00	2.68	0.46
Formation of attitudes and values	2.91	0.83	2.88	0.77	2.91	0.65
Increase of knowledge	2.81	0.77	2.64	0.76	2.84	0.53

Note: 1 = Not at all prepared; 2 = Inadequately prepared; 3 = Adequately prepared; 4 = Well prepared

According to experience/inexperience as a deputy headteacher

Table 3 (below) indicates mean scores and standard deviations for perceptions of readiness for the three areas of activity according to experience/inexperience as a deputy headteacher. Those whose experience was below the mean were considered 'inexperienced', those on or above the mean were considered 'experienced'.

Table: 3
Perception of readiness according to experience/inexperience as a deputy headteacher

	Secondary		Primary		Special	
	Exprcnd N=82	Inexprcnd N=94	Exprcnd N= 319	Inexprcnd N= 673	Exprcnd N= 35	Inexprcnd N= 59
	Mean & SD	Mean & SD	Mean & SD	Mean & SD	Mean & SD	Mean & SD
Development of Skills	2.81 (sd 0.86)	2.72 (sd 0.94)	2.61 (sd 0.87)	2.59 (sd 1.12)	2.63 (sd 0.45)	2.68 (sd 0.69)
Formation of attitudes and values	2.91 (sd 0.85)	2.91 (sd 0.82)	2.96 (0.77)	2.96 (sd 0.73)	3.00 (sd 0.65)	2.80 (sd 0.69)
Increase of knowledge	2.82 (sd 0.72)	2.80 (sd 0.81)	2.73 (sd 0.73)	2.76 (sd 0.74)	2.83 (sd 0.50)	2.78 (sd 0.55)

According to higher degree status

Table 4 indicates mean scores and standard deviations for perceptions of readiness for the three areas of activity according to whether or not headteachers held higher degrees.

Table: 4
Perception of readiness according to higher degree status

	Secondary		Primary		Special	
	Without higher degree N=89	With higher degree N=87	Without higher degree N=922	With higher degree N=176	Without higher degree N=35	With higher degree N=56
	Mean & SD	Mean & SD	Mean & SD	Mean & SD	Mean & SD	Mean & SD
Development of Skills	2.69 (sd 0.89)	2.83 (sd 0.86)	2.51 (sd 1.02)	2.58 (sd 0.90)	2.62 (sd 0.38)	2.67 (sd 0.49)
Formation of attitudes and values	2.85 (sd 0.73)	2.98 (sd 0.81)	2.87 (sd 0.76)	2.89 (sd 0.82)	2.95 (sd 0.48)	2.88 (sd 0.73)
Increase of knowledge	2.72 (sd 0.78)	2.90 (sd 0.76)	2.62 (sd 0.75)	2.78 (sd 0.77)	2.73 (sd 0.38)	2.82 (sd 0.57)

By gender

Table 5 indicates mean scores and standard deviations for perceptions of readiness for the three areas of activity according to gender.

Table: 5
Perception of readiness according to gender

	Secondary		Primary		Special	
	Male N=129	Female N= 45	Male N=442	Female N= 638	Male N=129	Female N= 45
	Mean & SD	Mean & SD	Mean & SD	Mean & SD	Mean & SD	Mean & SD
Development of Skills	2.74 (sd 0.90)	2.82 (sd 0.90)	2.44 (sd 0.94)	2.57 (1.04)	2.68 (sd 0.50)	2.64 (sd 0.40)
Formation of attitudes and values	2.90 (sd 0.83)	2.98 (sd 0.83)	2.76 (sd 0.78)	2.96 (sd 0.75)	2.90 (sd 0.74)	2.89 (0.58)
Increase of knowledge	2.78 (sd 0.78)	2.89 (sd 0.75)	2.50 (sd 0.76)	2.74 (sd 0.74)	2.78 (0.56)	2.82 (0.58)

In all instances (i.e. according to experience/inexperience as a deputy, whether or not a higher degree was held, or according to gender) the headteachers considered themselves to be inadequately to adequately prepared for the three areas of activity.

Attributions of readiness

Table 6 (below) indicates attribution of readiness for those activities where respondents considered themselves to be adequately prepared or well prepared. As shown in the table, of those respondents who considered themselves to be well prepared in terms of the development of skills more than half in all phases attributed this readiness to experience. In the case of formation of attitudes and values, more than three-fifths attributed readiness to experience. In terms of increase of knowledge, more than half of those from primary and special schools and close to half of those from secondary schools attributed their readiness to an equal mix of training and experience. As indicated, most/only training received fewer than 12 per cent of mentions for all three activities.

Table: 6
Attributions to readiness (% of respondents)

	Secondary			Primary			Special		
	Train	Equal	Exprnce	Train	Equal	Exprnce	Train	Equal	Exprnce
Development of Skills	5	35	60	8	40	52	5	37	58
Formation of attitudes and values	2	26	72	2	34	64	2	31	68
Increase of knowledge	11	47	42	12	55	33	7	53	40

Levels of support for first-year headteachers

Table 7 (below) indicates responses to the open-ended question asking all respondents what would have helped them to feel more effective in their first year of headship. Over 90 per cent of respondents from all phases took the opportunity to offer comment. It can be seen from the table that the most frequently cited type

of support which was considered to be useful in the first year of headship was mentoring, which was seen by the respondents as the opportunity to discuss school management issues with a colleague who had knowledge, appreciation and preferably experience of headship. The relationship was to be non-judgemental and to form a core part of individual development for the beginning headteacher. Such criteria ruled out personnel from LEA advisory/ inspection teams and from members of the headteacher's own staff or governing body. This principle was exemplified in the response of one special school headteacher who urged the mentor to be:

> … a fellow headteacher rather than LEA support which can be too dogmatic and overbearing when you are trying to find your feet.

Percentages recorded in Table 7 have been determined by corresponding mentions of a single topic against the total of responses recorded for all items mentioned in the categories used. So, for example, secondary headteachers deemed mentoring to be the single most important element of support needed for the first year in post, with 90 mentions out of a total of 225 recorded responses to items to Question 1 in Section 3 of the questionnaire. Headteachers from all other types of schools also deemed mentoring to be highly important with those from primary schools making 481 out of a total of 1612 mentions and those from special schools making 48 out of a total of 155 mentions.

Table 7
Type of support preferred as a % of each cohort (first year)

	Secondary		**Primary**				**Special**
Type of Support	No higher degree	Higher degree	All Schools	Schools <100	Schools 100-199	Schools 200+	
Mentoring	47	39	35	42	30	35	48
Training in specific skill areas	17	17	16	17	16	17	17
LEA support	3	7	8	7	8	7	16

Specific preparation during deputy headship	17	14	21	16	26	21	8
Induction programme	7	8	10	9	10	10	7
Work shadowing	6	7	10	9	9	10	4

Where respondents cited the need for training in skills, these were largely non-specific, often referring to the development of generic management and leadership skills. In terms of specific skills, the most frequently cited area was finance (secondary = 15 mentions out of 65; primary = 117 mentions out of 561; special = 8 mentions out of 56). Personnel issues (including help with under-performing teachers and subsequent capability procedures) was the next most important skill cited by respondents (secondary = 7 mentions out of 65; primary = 53 mentions out of 561; special = 5 mentions out of 56). Requests for more training and support with the law and legal information were less obvious (secondary = 8 mentions out of 65; primary = 30 mentions out of 561). No respondents from special schools identified this as a specific training need.

LEA Support, when mentioned, mainly referred to adviser and officer support, but also took account of LEA systems (including handbooks/guidance documents). Induction, when mentioned, was defined as the process of becoming familiar with the expectations and demands of the LEA and was deemed to be in terms of administrative, rather than professional, induction. The opportunity to enter headship through a process akin to apprenticeship was the central theme of mentions regarding the nature of deputy headship. This theme was particularly evident in the primary sector where, typically, deputies were also classroom based teachers who had minimal release time to engage in leadership and management tasks. The calls for greater flexibility and opportunity for deputy headteachers in this respect was the major concern of respondents, with many also calling for serving headteachers to create meaningful development opportunities for their deputies. Work shadowing was defined as the opportunity to observe headteacher behaviour in practice and differs from mentoring in that there was no expectation

expressed of personal reflection in the company of a more experienced practitioner.

Over the first two years

Table 8 (below) shows headteachers from all types of schools perceiving the role of the mentor as becoming more important throughout the first two years in post. Less importance was placed on further training, with those responses in favour being mainly non-specific in nature. The majority of calls were for generic management and leadership courses. Peer group support became more important for respondents as did the role of the LEA in providing support. The importance of work shadowing, induction and time to reflect were perceived to be less than that recommended for headteachers during their first year in post.

Table 8

Type of support preferred as a % of each cohort (over first two years)

	Secondary		**Primary**				**Special**
Type of Support	No higher degree	Higher degree	All Schools	Schools <100	Schools 100-199	Schools 200+	
Continued mentoring	47	37	45	43	56	40	46
Access to support groups/networks	13	15	27	25	26	27	32
Continued LEA support	15	17	18	19	11	21	16
Continued training in specific areas	3	9	10	13	7	11	10

Other comments

Over half the respondents (n = 808; 58 per cent) took the option to make additional comments to the third open question in Part 3 of the questionnaire. 24 per cent (n = 196) of respondents made comments on the *nature of headship*. These comments indicated a concern for the lack of understanding of the issues, pressures and tasks that the headteacher face in their role and the difference between the requirements of the role and that enjoyed prior to appointment, e.g.

> Being a headteacher is very different from being a teacher and no amount of training prepares you for the actual total responsibility of headship. (Primary head)
>
> Headship, more than any other role in education, is undoubtedly very personal. No amount of training can really take the place of hands-on experience. (Primary head)
>
> [Headship] is like driving a car – you learn when you get on the motorway if you can drive or not – but sometimes that is too late! Much more support is needed. (Primary head)

There were many mentions of the loneliness of the job and the fear that accompanied many as they set off in their new role, e.g.

> There is nothing more frightening than finding yourself alone in your office the week before your first term and realising you haven't got a clue about what being a headteacher is really about. (Primary head)
>
> I am enjoying [the headship] very much but I am lonely. People do not really see the agendas I am having to work to. (Secondary head)
>
> Being a headteacher can be lonely. The headteacher is continually working on the self-esteem of pupils and staff. Help with personal self-esteem is occasionally crucial in order to carry on. (Primary head)
>
> This is a very lonely, isolated, crisis driven and stressful job. I get support from colleagues in school, but I should really be giving them support. (Primary head)

The culture shock of moving into the role was also noted by respondents with the following types of comments:

> It is not easy to learn the real skills until on the job – then the learning curve is vertical. (Secondary head)
>
> I am not sure whether there is anything which would really avoid the sense of in at the deep end. In some ways I have learnt most through just having to sink or swim, but the personal cost of this is horrendous. (Secondary head)

18 per cent (n = 145) of respondents commented on their *early experiences* either prior to or on taking up the position of headteacher. Typical amongst these

responses was the perceived impact of those experiences on the respondents' readiness for the role of headteacher, e.g:

> I had little or no preparation for headship with a poor role model. All has been learned on the job. (Special school head)
>
> Filling in this questionnaire brought it home to me strongly how unprepared I was. I think it took me seven years to feel confident and effective. (Secondary head)
>
> I had one day of training when I was appointed. I was isolated and didn't know who to ask. It is only after several years that I feel secure in the job. If more help is given earlier this should not be the case nowadays. (Special school head)

The need to provide effective development opportunities for aspirant headteachers, particularly *deputy headteachers* was an issue for 6 per cent of respondents (n = 46). In this instance, however, this need was identified by and confined to the primary sector. The following comments are typical:

> Too many headteachers have not had adequate training as a deputy for challenges ahead. Too many remain classroom bound.
>
> The situation will not improve whilst deputy headteachers in primary schools have a full teaching load which makes curriculum delivery so central and restricts access to managerial skills.
>
> Non-contact time of at least 50 per cent is needed for deputy headteachers. A teaching commitment is needed but often prevents the deputy from enjoying the training and experiences required of a prospective headteacher.
>
> All headteachers should give aspiring headteachers as many training opportunities as possible within the school and with outside school trainers.

Discussion

The findings from this study need to be set against the national initiatives designed to improve the capability of headteachers as promoted by central government over the last quarter of the twentieth century which have been described by closely associated observers as "patchy" (Bolam, 1997: 227), "haphazard" (Bush, 1999: 244) and "disjointed and insubstantial" (Male, 1997: 6). These initiatives have tended to focus on the technical as opposed to affective and symbolic aspects of

school leadership and have treated all aspirant and serving headteachers as having common training and development needs irrespective of the phase or designation of their school.

The further analysis of quantitative data undertaken for this phase of the study shows there to be little difference that could be aligned to the phase or designation of the school in the perceptions of the respondents with regard to their state of readiness for the role (Table 2). Nor was there a notable difference in perceptions of readiness related to their experience as a deputy (Table 3), additional qualifications (Table 4) or gender (Table 5), although women did generally score higher than men, particularly in mainstream schools. Where readiness was perceived to be adequately to well prepared, respondents attributed this largely to experience in the development of skills and the formation of attitudes and values, although the equal combination of training and experience was perceived to be the main formative factor with an increase of knowledge and understanding (Table 6). The quantitative data from the national headteacher survey does not reveal at this level of analysis, therefore, how issues associated with the professional socialisation of newly appointed headteachers are best addressed. Responses from the open-ended questions in Part 3 of the survey are more revealing in that context and demonstrate a particular need for specific development opportunities as a deputy headteacher and for mentoring throughout the first two years of service as a headteacher.

145 respondents drew attention to the very varied and frightening nature of their early experiences in the headship. Nothing, it seemed, had prepared them for the role and their survival depended upon their ability to learn quickly once in the post. There has been no effort to introduce aspirant headteachers to the rigours of the post in a threat free environment in formal pre-service development programmes. The opportunity for managed real-time learning for aspirant headteachers without danger to the children or to the system is absent from our nation's school system, it seems, unless a progressive incumbent headteacher manages the process out a sense of altruism or professional responsibility. An alternative approach would be the establishment of a more formal apprenticeship where would-be headteachers

can try out their leadership and management approaches, ideas and styles without the pressure of ultimate responsibility. Working alongside an experienced, capable and confident headteacher colleague may answer the concerns exhibited in this instance by the respondents to their own early experiences. The recommendation offered here is for the introduction of a model of internship by means of placement for headship candidates in schools other than their own, with a concrete task to achieve or role to play. The demands of such an internship would begin to mirror the demands on newly appointed headteachers trying to become an effective leader in an organisation to which they are frequently the newest member.

The issue of time for deputy headteachers in primary schools to develop their leadership and management capabilities is also prominent. 46 respondents took the opportunity of commenting on this need in their answer. The demand for deputy headteachers to undertake full-time or high levels of classroom teaching militates against their development as school leaders, to which the respondents offered a number of variations to the common theme of quality time for developing deputy headteachers. As has been shown by empirical research those aspiring to headship in primary and special schools have fewer opportunities to engage in meaningful development activities whilst in post as deputy headteacher as they generally have a heavy teaching load (Coulson and Cox, 1975; Craig, 1987; James and Whiting, 1998; Shipton and Male, 1998, Male and Male, 2001),. Typically, deputy headteachers in primary schools are classroom based whose whole school management/leadership responsibilities tend to be in administrative roles, rather than in strategic policy and decision making (Purvis and Dennison, 1993; Jayne, 1995; Webb and Vuillamy, 1995), whilst those in special schools reported a lack of opportunity to engage in whole school management responsibilities or to adopt meaningful leadership roles prior to taking up post (Male and Male, 2001).

The key area for support for helping headteachers to successfully complete the professional socialisation, however, was mentoring. This finding was consistent from respondents in all types of schools and was the only issue where a greater volume of responses was evident in recommendations for support in the second year. The definition of mentoring used in this study makes it quite clear that the

emphasis is on support rather than judgement and on professional reflection rather than external measures of accountability. This support was to be on an individual basis and was to avoid the potential pitfall of providing mentor support from those who did not know and understand the pressures of headship. The general call was for a headteacher colleague with successful experience in the role. This is not a surprising finding, given that the formal evaluation of the sponsored Headteacher Mentoring Scheme found wide spread support amongst the profession (Bolam, McMahon, Pocklington and Weindling, 1993). The need for such a mechanism was recognised again by the Parliamentary Select Committee which saw "mentoring, for instance by other headteachers, … as key elements of the [beginning headteacher] training process" (House of Commons,1998: para 131). The only explanation, it seems, for mentoring failing to remaining a formal process had been the absence of specific, earmarked funding. The message from this study is clear, however, that formal mentoring would be of great assistance to those beginning the post of headteacher. A similar finding is to be found in the DfES sponsored study of school leadership where respondents who were providers of headteacher training development and education indicated that mentoring, coaching and shadowing schemes should be more widely available (Earley *et al*, 2002: para 5.6).

Conclusions

This paper has developed the findings from the National Headteacher Survey by considering the professional socialisation of headteachers. A clear distinction has been made between the overlapping nature of professional and organisational socialisation, with the former focussing on the generic skills of headship and the latter developing the skills necessary for a specific organisation.

Headship is promoted by government and its associated agencies as being central to the success of its schools, yet there has been very little empirical research, either before or after the introduction of Local Management of Schools, which examines the role of headteacher and thereby informs the development of appropriate policy. The National Headteacher Survey has addressed this void by

accessing more than 1400 respondents and gaining their views on how well they perceived their preparation to be for the role of headteacher.

Secondary

The quantitative data shows that for Development of Skills, Formation of Attitudes and Values and Increase in Knowledge respondents were inadequately prepared to well prepared. These findings are irrespective of gender, additional qualifications and experience/inexperience as a deputy headteacher (Tables 3, 4 & 5). Further, for those respondents who did consider themselves well prepared in all three categories, the majority attribute this to experience (Table 6). This raises questions and possible further investigation for it would appear from the respondents that In-Service Training over the last 20 years has had minimal impact on their own personal and professional development.

The qualitative data is revealing in terms of each individual's insight into their personal state of readiness. The comments received through the open ended questions present a worrying scenario with regard to the concerns expressed. Successive governments have relentlessly challenged school leaders since the early 1980's to the point where the role of headteacher no longer appears to be an attractive proposition within the profession. These policy initiatives have changed the nature of headship, making public accountability central to raising the standards of leadership in our schools. Appointment to secondary headship is generally the culmination of successive promotions based on initial success as a classroom teacher and the governors' view of a candidate's potential to be successful in post. At the time of the survey there was no requirement for applicants to the post of headteacher to have acquired a minimum academic standard, be psychologically suitable or have the necessary management skills and leadership potential. What emerges from the evidence presented here is that many respondents were not prepared for the rigours of headship. The implications for the education of children and the leadership of schools in such circumstances are worrying .

The challenge for government must be to reverse this perception by ensuring that the professional socialisation of future headteachers is appropriate through preparation and training, so that aspirants to the role are able to manage the challenge of organisational socialisation. Mentoring is seen as beneficial and the opportunity for this type of non-judgmental support is welcomed by many of the respondents (Table 7 & 8), although the lack of funds and the availability of headteachers to act as mentors reduce the opportunities for mentoring. Where mentoring is used, the data indicate that it is used as a safety net rather than an enabling technique. What is also evident is that the traditional role of the deputy headteacher is not suitable as a basis for preparing for headship. Male implies that the NPQH maybe the start of a suitable training regime (Male, 2001), but this still does not necessarily provide the opportunity for future headteachers to experience the reality of the role. A more structured approach to training and 'real-time' leadership and management experiences involving staff and children, under the tutorship of a number of headteachers, could be a positive way forward. This would have implications for the role of both the deputy headteacher and the headteacher, with consequences for the school leadership team.

Primary

Within the primary sector there is a very divergent range of experience and circumstance amongst the 1100 respondents. The lack of any pattern here is disconcerting with, for example, some heads having 35 years experience in the classroom as teachers whilst at the other extreme some passed through this stage in their career within two or three years. The ranges of age and experience that are highlighted in Table 1 are perhaps one reason why previous 'one size fits all' type training courses have in the past had apparently so little impact on head teachers perceptions of how they prepared themselves for their current role.

As a group, primary head teachers felt least well prepared in comparison to heads of both secondary and special schools. In fact the larger the primary school the more this was apparent. A clear pattern emerged from both the quantitative and qualitative data that previous classroom practice had very little to do with running a large primary school and didn't prepare head teachers for that very different role. In

small schools the head was often also a classroom teacher and ran the two roles side by side. Here at least one side of the job was clearly familiar while the other was one where lack of time and energy were a constant issue.

It's interesting to note that even experience as a deputy head was no real preparation for headship. It was simply another job. It was clear that the title deputy head was often seen as a misnomer and was the closest their job actually came to being a headteacher. They fulfilled all sorts of responsibilities but deputising for the head, taking the hard decisions and making long term policy changes was rarely part of that role.

Further or higher qualifications generally had a positive effect for the recipients in the way they perceived themselves and their role. It was seen as having some marginal effect upon the development of skills and slightly more impact in terms of increased knowledge. What it did not appear to do was alter or help in the formation of the attitudes and values of those undertaking such courses. Presumably this is one of the key reasons given for leaders to take such training: that such training is not simply about improving technical competencies but should be aspirational and mind provoking. Either such courses are not sufficiently challenging or teachers undertaking such training have deeply embedded value systems and attitudinal responses that are not easily changed.

The vast majority of primary teachers are female yet only a relatively small majority of the total in our survey (60 per cent) were female. From this it can be gathered that a consequently high proportion of men who enter teaching go on obtain senior positions within schools. Their own perception of readiness for this role lags behind that of their female counterparts. There could be many reasons for this difference worthy of further investigation. In a job where respondents regularly wrote of their isolation this could be heightened where a man is largely dealing with a female workforce.

Respondents generally reported experience as the key tool in preparation for headship with training for headship coming a poor second, particularly within small

primary schools where the relevance of pure management training was questioned. The new head in a small primary school typically came across as someone who was swamped with the minutiae of every day decision making and coping with large work loads and insufficient time. In such circumstances they seemed to rely upon a mixture of intuition and common sense to get them through. In larger primary schools previous experience for most heads meant classroom experience and that often left them feeling vulnerable and ill at ease with a new headship as they saw classroom experience largely, and increasingly, irrelevant to their new role. They were caught in the dichotomy of needing to understand curriculum matters while feeling inadequately prepared to handle complex personnel issues and organisational detail.

The needs of primary head teachers of differing size schools was evident. This was most apparent in relation to generic management training. What was requested repeatedly was a bespoke model of support based around mentoring from another more experienced headteacher and far more specific preparation within deputy headship that would help them deal with the realities of headship. The National College for School Leadership appears to be addressing these issues with their emphasis on leadership through innovative training programmes such as the 'New Visions for Early Headship' which is geared toward experiential training and the need for colleagues to support each other in what is a difficult and challenging role.

Special

The findings demonstrate the need for a differentiated programme of training and development which recognises the particular needs of headteachers from special schools. Their declared need for the opportunity to develop their technical skills, together with the needs emanating from the 'special' nature of special schools, indicate the desire for differentiation. Advanced interpersonal and intrapersonal skills, particularly in stress management, and the requirement to adopt national policies to the context of their student population are the main differences emerging from the data. Headteachers in special schools, it seems, are need of a reference group of colleagues from similar organisations with whom they can

exchange ideas and concerns. This is a particualr form of the more general call for mentoring and peer group support that emerges from all respondents in this study.

NOTE

A copy of the questionnaire may be obtained from the first author.

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