

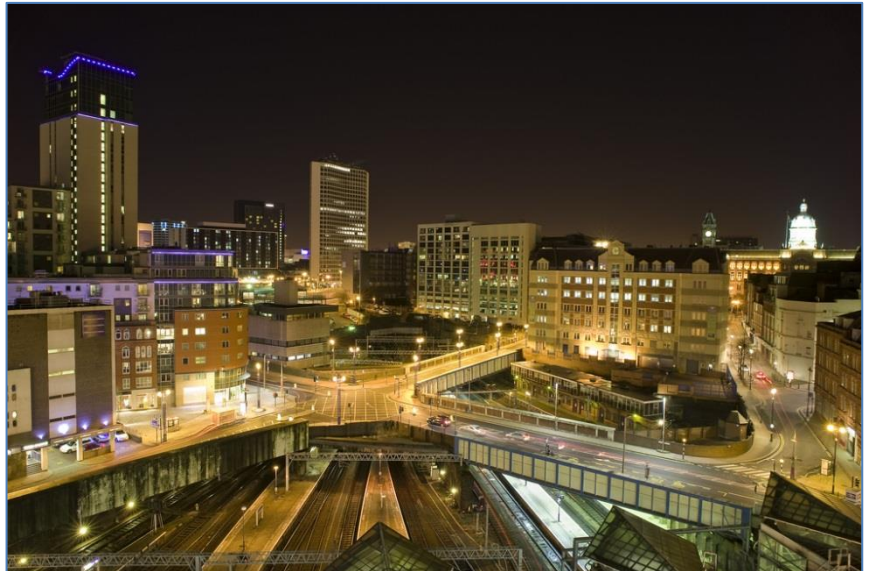
## Research Briefing N°23

# Experiences of New Headteachers in Cities

This study investigated the experiences of and the issues faced by new headteachers in London and Birmingham.

**Key words:** headteachers; cities; international

## Key findings



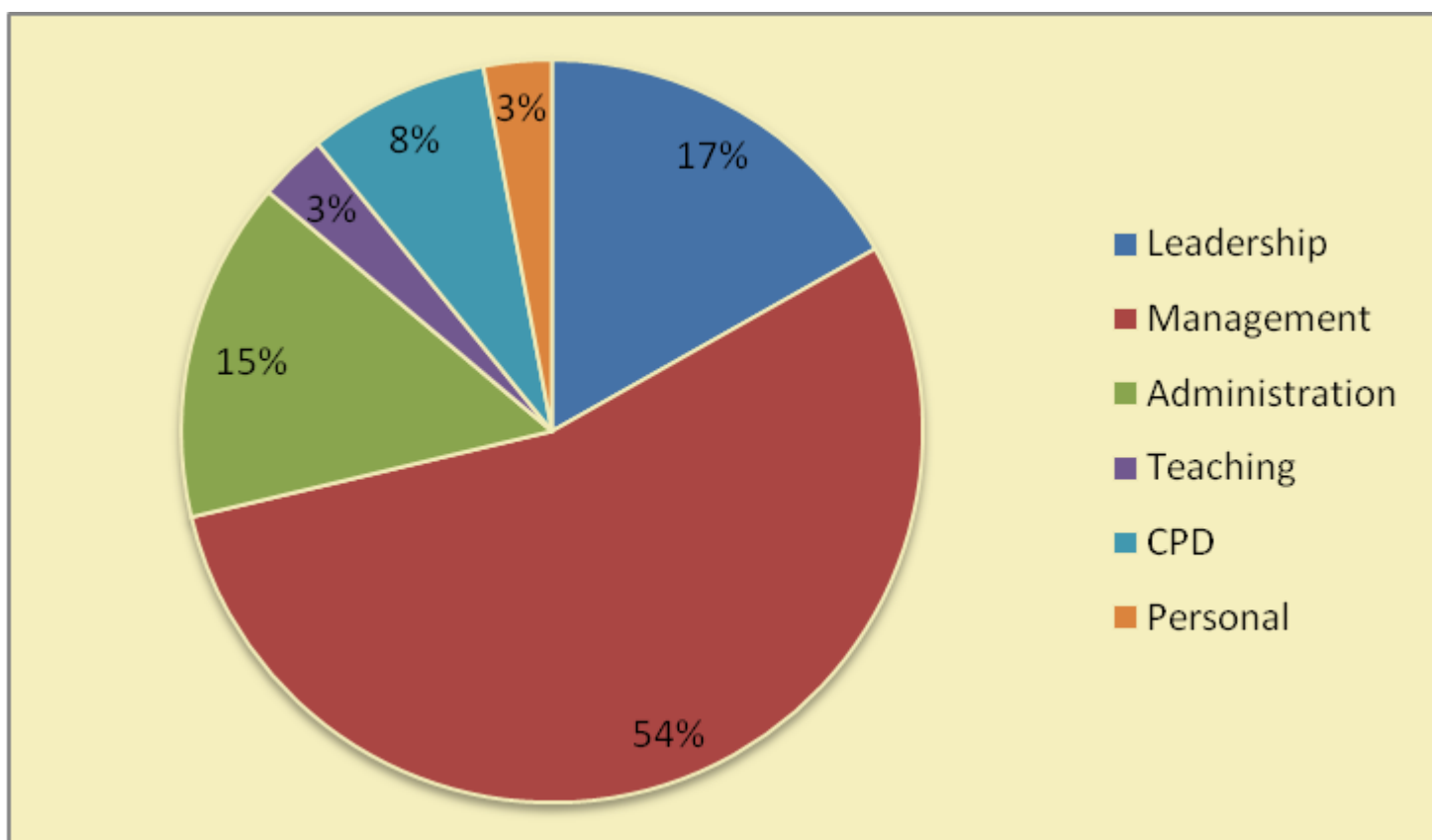
The key findings of the research, relate to challenges faced, preparation for headship, loneliness of headship, mentoring and other forms of support:

- the challenges experienced by newly appointed heads were many and varied: often there was a need to raise standards quickly and they were very conscious of the high stakes accountability culture in which they operated;
- newly appointed heads found the speed with which change was needed and the manner in which it was introduced an issue;
- school decisions were influenced by the competence and capability of existing staff and the possibility of making new appointments, especially to the senior leadership team;
- reading the context of the school and its capacity for change was a key skill;
- new heads found the early days of their headship much harder and more demanding than expected;
- the research heads' experience of being observed or 'shadowed' (see Figure 1 for an example) with feedback was found to be an important form of leadership development.

## What we did

Funded by the National College for School Leadership (NCSL), the research investigates the experiences of newly-appointed urban heads: how they prepare for headship and the challenges they face in their first year in post. It is set against the many changes currently affecting the education system, such as the changes outlined in the recent White Paper (Department for Education, 2010); and wider contextual challenges such as reducing Local Authority support, new curriculum and accountability demands, and funding pressures. More specifically, it focused on key leadership and management challenges, how these were being addressed, the preparations newly-appointed heads feel they need for taking on the role, and the support available during their first year of headship and pre-headship.

**Figure 1:** Rose's day using categorisation of activity (Earley, et al, 2011, p.91)



## How we did it

The research project was conducted between January and April 2011.

A small number of newly-appointed heads in London and Birmingham were interviewed and shadowed for a full day (to gain insights into a typical head's day) by a member of the research team. From these sources of data six in-depth case studies and four vignettes illustrating the experiences of new heads within a variety of contexts in large cities were produced. Interviews were also conducted with London heads in post for 2-4 years to reflect on this period of headship. The interviews with a similar number (6) of more experienced heads – but those not too far removed from the experience of early headship – provided further insights into the early headship experience.

## Further information

The research resulted in a report which can be found on the London Centre for Leadership in Learning, Institute of Education website:

[Earley, P., Nelson, R., Higham, R., Bubb, S., Porritt, V. and Coates, M. \(2011\). Experiences of New Headteachers in Cities. Nottingham: NCSL.](#)

Articles for academic journals were also published:

Earley, P. and Bubb, S. (2013 Forthcoming). A day in the life of new headteachers: learning from observation, *Educational Management, Administration and Leadership*

Earley, P. (2012). Observation methods: Learning about leadership practice through shadowing, *Journal of Educational, Cultural and Psychological Studies*, Vol. 6, (December), pp15-31.

The report's findings are also drawn upon in:

Earley, P. (2013). Exploring the School Leadership Landscape: Changing demands, changing realities. London: Bloomsbury.

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