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**National College**  
for Leadership of Schools  
and Children's Services

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**Schools and academies**

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# Executive heads

**Full report**

**Resource**

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## Executive summary

The role of executive head is not defined in education law but in this report it is used to describe any headteacher role that has some kind of lead managerial responsibility for more than one school.

In 2004, there were an estimated 25 executive heads. The research supporting this report indicates that by January 2010 the number in England has risen to an estimated 450, with most have been appointed in the last two years.

The increase in executive headship is part of a broader trend that has seen schools having more autonomy and school leaders being given increased responsibilities. As a result, many school leaders now share or distribute leadership to other colleagues and have developed a more strategic approach to their leadership role.

This has coincided with schools being encouraged to work together to bring about school improvement, address underperformance, provide a broader curriculum offer for 14-19 schools, introduce extended services and develop children's services through multi-agency working.

These trends, along with the growth of national leaders of education, the introduction of National Challenge trusts, the increase in the number of academies and problems with recruiting heads to small schools and faith schools, have brought about the rapid expansion of executive headship.

Two surveys – one of local authorities and the other of executive heads – provide the following picture about the current work of executive heads:

- Rural and shire local authorities who have done most to promote executive headship have the greatest number of executive heads.
- In around 9 out of 10 cases, executive heads are responsible for two schools, meaning that relatively few are responsible for three or more schools.
- 95 per cent of the heads were the substantive head of at least one of the schools they were leading, and in 60 per cent of the cases where executive heads were responsible for two schools, they were substantive head of both the schools.
- Just under two-thirds (63 per cent) of the executive heads are leading primary schools and just under one-quarter are leading secondary schools. In the majority of cases (57 per cent) they are also leading other schools from the same phase though in over one-third of cases (35 per cent), the executive headship involves a cross-phase arrangement.
- Just under one-third of executive heads are working within the context of a federation and just over one-third in a looser partnership or collaboration. The executive headship role is undertaken on an interim basis in 17 per cent of cases.
- Respondents aged between 51 and 60 (44 per cent) account for the largest proportion of executive heads, though one-third were aged below 51.
- Executive headteachers on average have over 10 years' experience as a head before becoming an executive head. Nearly three-quarters of those surveyed had been appointed to an executive headship in the previous two years and the median length of time for being in post is just one year.
- Difficulty in recruiting a suitable candidate to be headteacher and the need to improve the performance of a school are the two most commonly cited reasons for the creation of executive head posts; the former reason is more likely to apply to primary schools and the latter to secondary schools.
- The 'opportunity to take on new challenges' was the motivation that was most influential in respondents taking on the role of executive head. A strong sense of moral purpose was also evident from the value executive heads placed on being able to 'influence and improve standards more widely' and the desire 'to give something back to the community'.
- The majority of executive headteachers were approached directly to take on their role, with only 13 per cent formally applying to an advertised post.

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The local context and reason(s) a school decided to enter into executive headship determine the scope of an executive head post and the role and range of tasks an executive head undertakes. However, there are features that are common to all contexts that will make it more likely an executive headship will succeed. These include the degree of prior collaboration between the schools, the leadership capacity within the schools, the support of the local authority and/or sponsor and the completion of a due diligence exercise to understand the background and identify the risks in advance of taking up the post.

Executive heads work in a variety of different governance and accountability structures and are, to a degree, selecting, adapting and creating different legal and governance structures to fit their particular circumstances.

Where executive headteachers are the substantive heads of all the schools they are leading, there are usually clear lines of accountability and they have authority to act. Where an executive head is effectively a chief executive officer for a group of schools, or is the substantive head for only some of the schools they lead, they have to rely for their authority on a contract, the pressure of local circumstances (such as a school being in special measures) or the authority that comes from being appointed by an overarching governing body.

Executive headteachers do not lead in isolation and the ways in which they exercise their roles are having a significant impact on other school leaders. In particular, senior leaders have the chance to act up to or assume more senior roles as the head exercises his or her executive responsibilities in other schools. This in turn creates opportunities for middle leaders to move into new roles in their home schools. In addition, many executive headteachers will use members of the senior leadership team at their home school, including leaders with specialist skills such as school business managers and ICT managers, to assist them in the school(s) they are supporting.

Executive heads identify eight skills that are needed to undertake their role:

1. Operating at a more strategic level
2. Getting the balance between standardisation and respecting difference
3. Being even-handed between schools
4. Staying focused on performance
5. Developing and practising interpersonal skills
6. Working closely with governors
7. Communicating effectively
8. Developing personal resilience

These skills provide the basis for developing a job profile for executive heads and mapping out the development support they need. Training should cover strategic, technical, behavioural and interpersonal issues. Executive heads also identified the need for practical support and mentoring and guidance from existing executive heads.

Evidence of the value of executive headship is at this stage indirect rather than direct. However, the practice of executive headship is associated with positive trends in improvements in attainment, school improvement, school leadership and cost-effectiveness.

There are also been a number of challenges, problems and risks involved in developing executive headship. These include:

- the absence of a clear legal framework (which in turn means that the statutory pay and conditions of service framework is limited in how far it can address the issue of remunerating executive headteachers)
- a lack of clarity over the role of executive heads in the inspection system
- tension between the strategic and operational roles of an executive head
- maintaining the confidence of staff and stakeholders, particularly in the early days of executive headship
- drifting into a new executive headship model, rather than taking time to choose a governance model that is appropriate to the context and circumstances of the parties involved
- underestimating the risks, including the reputational risk, in taking on another school

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- failing to develop the right relationship with the local authority at a time when the role of local authorities is evolving

Four recommendations would help address these challenges.

**First**, the post of executive head should be established in education law. Flexibility should be retained so that schools and governors can adapt the arrangements to suit their particular circumstances, given the significance that context plays in defining how each executive headship works in practice.

Thus, rather than trying to define precisely the respective roles of executive heads and heads in legislation, an alternative approach would require governors to designate for every school for which they have responsibility the person with responsibility for a defined set of tasks.

Those schools with a single traditional headteacher would designate their head in respect of all these roles. However, in those scenarios where there was an executive head, the governing body would agree those roles for which the executive head would be responsible and those for which the substantive head or the head of school or deputy head would be held accountable. The arrangements, which should be reviewed at least annually, would also provide a clearer basis for recognising the role of executive heads in the inspection and the remuneration frameworks and for principals of academies when acting as executive heads of maintained schools.

**Second**, the arrangements for training executive heads should be improved. Programmes should be based on a more strategic approach to development, starting with identifying potential executive leaders early in their career, facilitating the development of their skills, providing advice on strategic and technical issues, supporting them with practical coaching when they assume their first executive headship and enabling them to play a full role as system leaders.

**Third**, the Department for Education or the National College should produce a guide or toolkit for governors. This would take governors and executive heads through a series of questions based on the reasons and circumstances leading them to consider introducing executive headship to help them determine the appropriate remit of the proposed role and the appropriate governance arrangements.

**Fourth**, the Department for Education, in association with the National College, should consider commissioning longitudinal research into the impact of executive heads on the school system.

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# 1: Introduction

The first decade of the 21st century has been marked by the emergence of different school leadership models in England. There is now a wide range of leadership arrangements that go beyond the traditional headteacher role of being responsible for an individual school. They range from setting up informal support arrangements between schools, such as coaching and critical friendship, to more formal arrangements such as leading a federation or chain of schools. These emerging school leadership models have one thing in common – some school leaders working beyond one school to provide support and/or leadership to other schools.

## What is an executive head?

The term ‘executive head’ is not one that is currently defined in education law. The Education Act 2002 provides for schools to have a single person appointed as the legally accountable headteacher. The law (and thus the formal terms and conditions of service) do not allow for any form of co-headship, joint headship (other than jobshare) or similar arrangement that provides more than one full-time headteacher for any school. There can, to use the language that we adopt in this report, be only one substantive headteacher of a school.

The practice of executive headship has, therefore, developed and has had to operate within this constraint. Despite this, the number of executive heads has grown quickly. A review by the National College’s research group in 2004 (National College, 2005) was able to identify approximately 25 headteachers who considered themselves executive heads. Our research indicates that by January 2010, the number of executive heads in England had risen to an estimated 450, with most of these appointed in the last 2 years.

The purposes and accountabilities associated with being an executive head have also expanded and there is no single definition of what constitutes the role. However, for the purposes of this report we have defined executive headship as being:

**Any headteacher role that has some kind of lead managerial responsibility for more than one school**

Such responsibility is most likely to be exercised in one of the following sets of arrangements:

- leading two or more schools by being designated as the substantive head of both or all the schools, on a temporary or permanent arrangement
- leading two or more schools as a substantive head of one and executive head of another(s), with a substantive heads(s) in the remaining school(s), on a temporary or permanent arrangement
- leading a federation or other formal school partnership (for example, a cross-phase 3-19 cluster of schools or whole-town group of schools working together as a single trust) as a substantive head of one or more of the schools but with executive responsibilities for the federation/partnership and substantive heads in the remaining schools
- leading the development, as a chief executive officer (CEO), executive principal or director, of a family of schools (ie, a chain or federation), each of which has its own substantive headteacher

There are examples of headteachers of single schools who refer to themselves as executive heads, sometimes with a headteacher or principal reporting to them. These do not appear in the research since they are outside the definition we used, which is focused on heads working beyond their own school. It is questionable whether this use of the term ‘executive head’ is appropriate in these cases, given the more widely accepted definition referred to above.

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## The purpose of this study

Our brief from the National College was to conduct a national study focused on the following areas:

- understanding and scoping the role, responsibilities and attributes of executive headship
- identifying and explaining how the role differs from the current, traditional model of a single headteacher in one school
- exploring how school context and other factors impact upon the role
- assessing what is known about the effectiveness of the role
- identifying and describing policy issues associated with the development of the role
- looking forward to how the role might develop in the context of the government's policies for schools

We describe our research methodology for conducting this study in Appendix 1.

We carried out the study in partnership with the Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL), and Education Data Services (EDS). We thank them for their contribution to the research.

## Structure of this report

In [Chapter 2](#) we set the policy and education context for the development of executive headship.

[Chapter 3](#) brings together the results of our survey work to present a picture of how executive headship is operating in schools and the factors that are shaping its development.

[Chapter 4](#) describes the roles and function of executive heads and the various governance and accountability frameworks within which they operate.

[Chapter 5](#) looks at the impact of executive headship on other school leaders.

[Chapter 6](#) draws on our interviews with executive heads to identify a role profile, and describes the training and development support they want and need.

[Chapter 7](#) assesses the available evidence on the value that executive heads bring to the school system.

[Chapter 8](#) identifies challenges, problems and risks that need to be considered and addressed as part of developing executive headship.

[Chapter 9](#) sets out our recommendations for action.

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## 2: School leadership in transition

“Models of leadership are changing across the country. Whilst many schools remain and flourish in the structure of one school, one headteacher, one governing body, a large number of schools are developing different models of leadership to meet the challenges of education in the 21st century. These models may be informal or formal, and may include partnerships with other agencies.”

National College, 2009:3

### The international context

In 2008, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) published a major two-volume study into school leadership. Based on research in 22 countries, it confirmed the vital role that school leadership has in improving school outcomes by ‘influencing the motivations and capacities of teachers, as well as the school climate and environment’ (Pont, Moorman & Nusche, 2008: vol 1:2), adding that ‘Effective school leadership is essential to improve the efficiency and equity of schooling’ (ibid).

Pont, Moorman & Nusche identified a trend towards greater decentralisation and autonomy for schools and school leaders and charted how this was accompanied by increased accountability for school and student results, an expectation that they understand and deploy the most effective pedagogical strategies and exercise responsibility for the business operation of the school. At the same time, in response to social problems and pressures, school leaders were being given a broader responsibility for contributing to other policy outcomes affecting local communities, other schools and public services.

This has led to school leaders adopting a more strategic approach to leadership since they cannot undertake all these tasks by themselves and they have therefore moved to share leadership with other colleagues across their schools. The concept of distributed leadership has become an accepted part of school leaders’ vocabulary.

Alongside these developments, OECD also reported that the last 10 years have seen a growing number of school leaders taking on leadership roles beyond their own schools to provide advice, support and direction to leaders in other schools:

“System leaders, as they are being called, care about and work for the success of other schools as well as their own. Crucially they are willing to shoulder system leadership roles because they believe that in order to change the larger system you have to engage with it in a meaningful way.”

Pont, Moorman & Nusche, 2008: vol 2:2

This concept of system leadership, though it is in its early stages of development, is seen as positive. It is identified as bringing a number of benefits, including the development of leadership capacity, rationalisation of resources, increased co-operation, leadership being distributed further into schools and across education systems, and improving school outcomes.

England is highlighted in the report as one of the countries where these moves have been supported and encouraged. The rest of this chapter describes in more detail the context in which executive headship has developed.

### School leaders developing external roles

An independent study into school leadership that reported in 2007 (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2007) charted how school leaders, particularly in the secondary sector, were moving into a more strategic role by distributing and sharing leadership among other senior and middle managers within the school. They also identified how school leadership teams were including support staff as well as qualified teachers, with 19 per cent of primary schools and 55 per cent of secondary and special schools having one or more senior support staff on their senior leadership teams. Headteachers could be said, therefore, to be developing a role as leaders of leaders within their schools.



These developments also helped to explain another significant finding in the independent study. By having and working with a broader leadership cadre within their schools, headteachers had the time and space to take on more roles, such as supporting other heads or working with local partnerships. Just over one-third (35 per cent) of the heads surveyed in England reported that they worked beyond the boundaries of the school (see Figure 1). Secondary heads were more likely to have external roles than special and primary heads (45 per cent compared with 38 per cent and 32 per cent respectively). For the vast majority of heads involved (85 per cent), these external obligations accounted for up to 20 per cent of their working time and most were positive about the benefits. Over four-fifths (83 per cent) of heads described these roles as quite or very beneficial for their schools.

A similar and growing trend towards headteachers working beyond the individual school has also been identified in two, more recent studies for the National College. A survey of 1,100 headteachers undertaken between December 2009 and March 2010<sup>1</sup> found that 60 per cent of heads were undertaking educational/leadership support roles outside their own schools. The trend was more evident among secondary heads (70 per cent) than primary heads (56 per cent). In addition, 40 per cent of heads said that they were carrying out two or more formal system leadership roles.

<sup>1</sup> The survey was carried out for the National College by Illuminas.

**Figure 1: External roles undertaken by school leaders in England**

Role	%
Consultant leader	31
Member of local or regional authority initiatives, working groups or partnerships	14
Training, mentor or support adviser	14
School improvement partner	11
Inspector, assessor or moderator	9
Member of headteacher and leadership group or programme	8
Chair or governor	8
Executive head	5

Note: The term 'consultant leader' included a variety of wider system leadership roles in which heads worked in a number of advisory positions including those provided through the Consultant Leader programme which at the time of the survey was operated by the National College. The term has now been replaced by the National Leaders of Education and Local Leaders of Education initiatives.

Source: PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2007

A research study for the National College concluded:

“It was very noticeable that many [headteachers] were increasingly liaising and working beyond the school, collaborating with other schools and agencies to an unprecedented degree.”

Chapman et al, 2009a:8

If a changing leadership culture within schools was one factor resulting in this more external focus, there were also several other policy drivers shaping the school leadership landscape.

## The diversification of organisational structures

The previous New Labour administration saw partnership working as an important part of its education strategy. It recognised and supported institutional autonomy by increasing still further the proportion of education funding devolved to schools and by introducing new forms of autonomous governance, namely foundation and trust schools. At the same time it believed that individual schools could not on their own deliver the government’s policy ambitions in relation to school improvement, a broader curriculum entitlement for 14-19 year olds, extended services in schools and the broader welfare of children as described in Every Child Matters (DfES, 2004).

Consistent with this view, the government developed a range of structures to enable and encourage schools to work together in partnership (Figure 2).

**Figure 2: Partnership structures facilitated by the government between 2000 and 2010**

Partnerships and collaborations	Formal and informal agreements between schools to work together on issues such as behaviour management, professional development and school improvement or to provide a shared 14-19 curriculum.
Federations	Two or more schools join together under a single governing body in order, for example, to recruit and share a headteacher, develop cross-phase work across the primary or secondary divide or address the broader outcomes for children on a town- or locality-wide basis.
Mixed federations and collaborations	Groups of schools apply a combination of formal and informal models of partnership working according to local circumstances and priorities.
School companies	Groups of schools in an area come together through a company formed under the Education Act 2002 to provide services to each other.
Trusts	Schools form an autonomous charitable body with external partners such as universities, further education colleges and local businesses (and/or with other schools) in order to develop a particular educational focus appropriate to their context.
National Challenge trust and federations	A high-performing school incorporates a National Challenge school into its operation and governance.
National support schools	Schools led by national leaders of education (NLEs) are contracted to support schools that are struggling or underperforming. By May 2010, 431 NLEs had been appointed
Accredited schools and chains	Groups of schools, usually overseen by a chief executive officer, share the same teaching and learning model and organisational and governance structure.

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These structures in turn provided new opportunities and incentives for headteachers to exercise school leadership on a broader canvas. Indeed, executive headship was an essential element in making some of the new organisational arrangements viable – for example, National Challenge trusts, chains of schools and many national support school contracts assume the existence of outstanding school leaders able to take on the improvement and support of other schools.

## The growth of school-to-school led improvement

Although the government of the day sets the policy framework for education, it is school leaders who shape it and realise its potential. That is true of all the partnership programmes and structures introduced by the previous government but is particularly apparent in the area of school-to-school improvement.

From Excellence in Cities, through London Challenge, national and local leaders of education, to City Challenge to National Challenge trusts, schools leaders have taken up the opportunities to practise school-to-school improvement and develop what has come to be referred to as system leadership – namely leadership of school improvement programmes and support for other institutions outside their own schools. The fact that the previous government felt confident enough to wind down the National Strategies and rely on a school-based approach to improvement support is an indication of this.

Executive heads are at the heart of much of this school-led improvement effort. It is now commonplace, as chapter 7 illustrates, to read in Ofsted reports of the contributions that have been made by an executive head to the turnaround in a school's position.

## Recruitment and school viability challenges

Another factor that has contributed to the rise in the number of executive heads has been the continuing problem of securing sufficient appropriate applications for headship vacancies. Work undertaken by the National College on succession planning has kept vacancy rates low and stable and supported the beginning of a downward trend in temporarily filled posts, but there are some specific issues that still remain. This is particularly the case in the primary sector and for faith schools.

A recent study (Howson, 2009) showed that:

- applications for primary headteacher vacancies averaged 4.8 per vacancy compared with 15.9 for the secondary sector
- the number of applicants deemed suitable to interview for headship posts averaged 2.7 per vacancy
- over a quarter of primary headships remained unfilled after advertisement
- 40 per cent of adverts by Roman Catholic schools and 30 per cent of adverts by Church of England schools were readvertisements

These problems are particularly acute in small (often rural) schools. In 2008 there were around 2,600 primary schools in England with 100 or fewer pupils on roll (Todman et al, 2009). In these schools, executive headship offers a practical and relatively straightforward solution to the recruitment problem:

*“A key driver of formal collaborations was the difficulty in recruiting headteachers for small rural schools. Executive headship was seen first and foremost as improving the likelihood of appointing a headteacher of the right calibre. For this reason, executive headship was the preferred model of formal collaboration in all three local authorities [included in the research], and support of various degrees was offered to schools wishing to undertake this solution.”*

Todman et al, 2009:4

The executive head model also provides the basis for a more sustainable model of headship, both in terms of reducing the overall cost of leadership salaries and increasing the time and resources heads can devote to their leadership responsibilities. These issues are explored further in chapter 8.

The trend towards using executive heads as part of the answer to recruitment issues is likely to continue, given the projected scale of retirement of heads in general (and in primary schools in particular) over the next few years. Retirements of senior school leaders increased by 60 per cent between 2004-05 and 2007-08 and they are expected to remain at a high level until at least 2014<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> This figure is based on data supplied by the National College.

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## The introduction of academies and school chains

The introduction of academies into the school system from 2002 onwards has brought innovation and new models of leadership. In part this reflects the fact that, as chapter 8 explains, academies as independent state schools operate within a different governance framework.

In May 2010, 203 academies were open in 83 local authorities with a further 100 planned to open by September 2010 (Department for Education, 2010). Academy sponsors have increasingly moved to sponsoring more than one academy. In February 2008, there were 40 sponsors of multiple academies either open or in the pipeline including 5 with plans for 10 or more academies (Hill, 2010).

The introduction of several academies run by the same sponsor has resulted in executive principals or, in some cases chief executive officers (CEOs), being appointed with responsibility for leading and/or overseeing several or all the schools sharing the same sponsor. The Harris Federation of academies in South London provides an example of this, where Daniel Moynihan, the CEO, has overall responsibility for all nine academies in the federation. Similarly, Barry Day as chief executive has responsibility for all the schools sponsored by the Greenwood Dale Foundation Trust and David Triggs acts as CEO for the academies and schools that make up the Academies Enterprise Trust.

In parallel with these developments, headteachers of outstanding trust schools have used their own leadership expertise and the resources of their schools to expand their trusts to encompass up to six other (usually underperforming) schools. The creation of National Challenge trusts has encouraged this trend, though sometimes the expansion has come about through heads taking on NLE contracts, with partner schools being incorporated into a trust on a permanent basis at the end of the NLE contract. The headteachers of such trusts move over time into being executive heads or chief executives. One example is John Atkins, who is chief executive of the Kernnal Trust, which encompasses schools in Kent, south-east London and Essex.

The move towards forming chains of schools was formalised in February and March 2010 by introducing arrangements to accredit education providers and groups of schools, though these provisions are currently under review by the coalition administration.

## A continually evolving picture

The education policy agenda continues to develop and evolve, particularly with the arrival of the Coalition government in May 2010. The new government has made clear its commitment to giving schools greater autonomy but still sees school leaders as playing a broader role within the school system:

**“At the heart of this government’s vision for education is a determination to give school leaders more power and control; not just to drive improvement in their own schools, but to drive improvement across our whole education system.”**

Michael Gove, speech to National College conference, June 2010

Moreover, a number of the coalition government’s proposals are likely to reinforce the move towards executive headship. For example, the Academies Act (HM Government, 2010a) offers potentially all schools – starting with outstanding schools and including primary schools – the opportunity to transfer to academy status. In return for the additional freedoms that accompany academy status, the government has said that:

**“We will expect every outstanding school which acquires academy freedoms to partner with at least one other school to raise performance across the system.”**

Lord Hill of Oareford, opening speech on the Second Reading of the Academies Bill, 7 June 2010

Almost certainly this policy will result in more headteachers of outstanding schools having oversight of a second school. The introduction of academies into the primary sector might also act as a catalyst for an increase in the number of formal groupings of primary schools operating under a single head, since it will make sense to disburse the overheads of running a primary academy over several institutions.

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The coalition government has also said that it intends to:

“Promote the reform of schools in order to ensure that new providers can enter the state school system in response to parental demand.”

HM Government, 2010b:28

This policy is likely to result in a growth in the number of chains of schools and the consequent employment and deployment of more executive heads and chief executive officers in schools.

The reductions in public spending, which though they may not be as severe for schools as some other services, will increase pressure on schools to look at all their costs, including their leadership and management costs. Executive headship, as chapter 7 demonstrates, can lead to more cost-effective leadership structures and savings, particularly for small schools.

However, set against these drivers is the uncertainty over the future role of local authorities. Chapter 3 describes how local authorities have been an influential factor in encouraging the formation of federations and the use of executive headship, particularly in shire areas. If the scope and influence of local authorities are diminished, their reduced involvement in brokering with governors the introduction and extension of new forms of leadership could result in a slowing in the rate of new executive headship positions.

Notwithstanding this constraint, the trend in the number of executive heads is likely to continue upwards rather than downwards. Executive headship is not some passing fad or transient policy initiative. It is becoming an integral feature of the school system in England.

# 3: Understanding the executive head landscape

This chapter draws on the results of the two surveys described in Appendix 1 (a survey of all local authorities and a survey of identified executive headteachers) to chart the numbers, background and motivations of headteachers and the contexts within which they operate.

The numbers and response rate for each of the surveys is shown in Figure 3.

## Number of executive headteachers and distribution by local authority

We identified 345<sup>3</sup> executive headteachers working in 738 schools. The figure will inevitably be approximate because as the number and deployment of NLEs grows there will be some heads who move in and out of executive headship. Moreover, the number is increasing rapidly – 43 per cent of all respondents to the executive head survey had only been in their current role since 2009.

We initially identified 82 local authorities with executive heads from our survey of them. However, in our survey to the memberships of professional associations, we subsequently uncovered a total of 104 local authorities with executive headteachers. The difference is accounted for by some local authorities basing their responses on official job titles rather than the definition provided by our research.

We found no evidence of any policy decision by any authorities against executive headteacher roles. However, a number of authorities, such as those for Devon and Norfolk, had adopted a positive policy of promoting federations and executive headship and this is reflected in the list of authorities with the greatest number of executive heads (Figure 4).

The local authorities with the most executive heads are significantly rural in context. All other authorities responding, but not listed in Figure 4, had fewer than 10 executive heads

**Figure 4: Local authorities with the greatest number of executive heads**

Local authority	No. of executive heads
Norfolk	25
Kent	21
Devon	19
Somerset	16
Suffolk	15
Northumberland	13

<sup>3</sup> The total of 450 quoted in chapter 1 is based on grossing up the figure of 345 to be representative of the whole of England.

**Figure 3: Response rates from local authorities and executive headteachers surveyed**

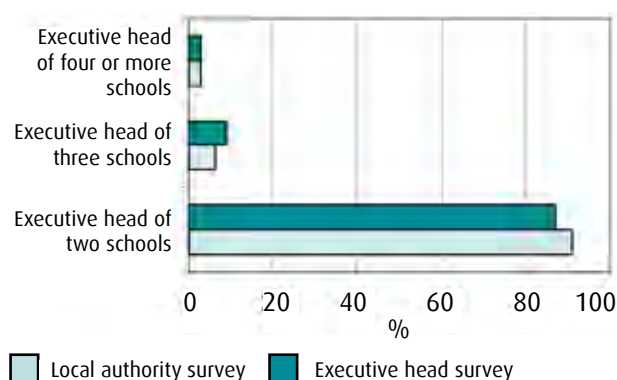
Survey	Total existing	Total responded	Percentage responding
Local authorities	151	116	77
Executive headteachers	345	142	41

Source: Survey of local authorities

## Number of executive heads by number and type of school

Both surveys produced a very similar picture in terms of the number of schools being led or managed by executive heads (Figure 5). In around 9 out of 10 cases, executive heads are responsible for 2 schools. There is a slight variation in the numbers reported as being responsible for three schools but in the case of four or more schools, both surveys show fewer than three per cent of executive heads being in this position.

**Figure 5: Percentages of executive heads leading two, three and four or more schools**



Source: Survey of local authorities and survey of executive heads

In the survey of executive heads, we also asked respondents how executive headship fitted with the formal legal status of being the substantive headteacher. A total of 135 (95 per cent) of the respondents were the substantive headteachers of at least one of the schools they led. It is probable that the remaining respondents – seven in total (five per cent) – were acting as executive directors of federations or chief executive officers of chains.

For those leading two-school models, almost 60 per cent were substantive heads for all schools under their leadership. This reduced to 25 per cent for those leading three-school models (though only a very few respondents actually led three-school models). We discuss the leadership arrangements in those schools where executive heads are not the substantive head in chapter 4 and explore the legal framework for employing and remunerating executive heads in chapter 8.

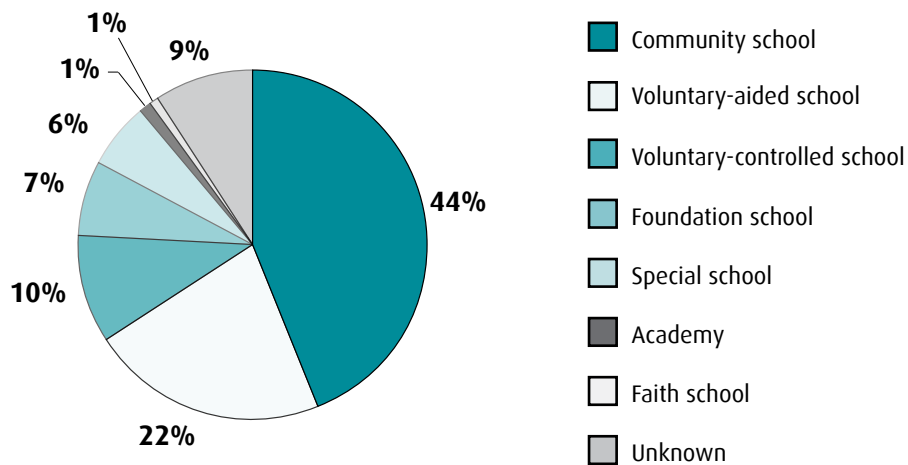
In terms of the characteristics of the schools executive heads are leading:

- Figure 6 shows the breakdown by type of school. This picture will change as the government offers opportunities for outstanding and, in due course, all other schools to become academies. Furthermore, the low representation of academies in the survey of local authorities<sup>4</sup> is almost certainly understating the overall extent of executive headship we are reporting, given that we know from other research (Hill, 2010) that many more academies than indicated in our survey have executive head-style arrangements.
- Figure 7 shows the breakdown of schools by phase of school. Significantly, nearly two-thirds of the schools are in the primary sector, reflecting the relatively large number of executive headships in the shire counties where there are many small rural schools.
- Figure 8 shows the most common combinations of phase of schools led by executive headteachers. This indicates that 57 per cent of arrangements involved schools working with other schools in the same phase, and 35 per cent were in mixed-phase arrangements. Analysis of the work of NLEs (Hill & Matthews, 2010) shows that most of the mixed-phase arrangements are likely to take the form of secondary schools, or all-through 3-19 schools, supporting primary schools; or special schools supporting another special or mainstream school, although there are also some instances of primary and middle schools supporting secondary schools.

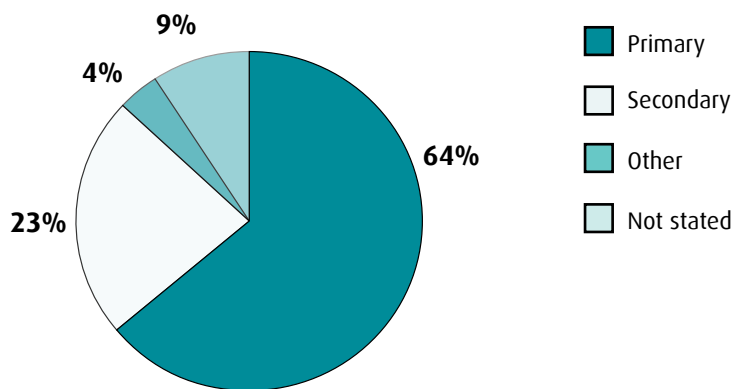
Source: Survey of local authorities

<sup>4</sup> As independent state schools, academies operate outside the mainstream local authority framework, meaning that local authorities will not necessarily be familiar with the structure of their leadership arrangements.

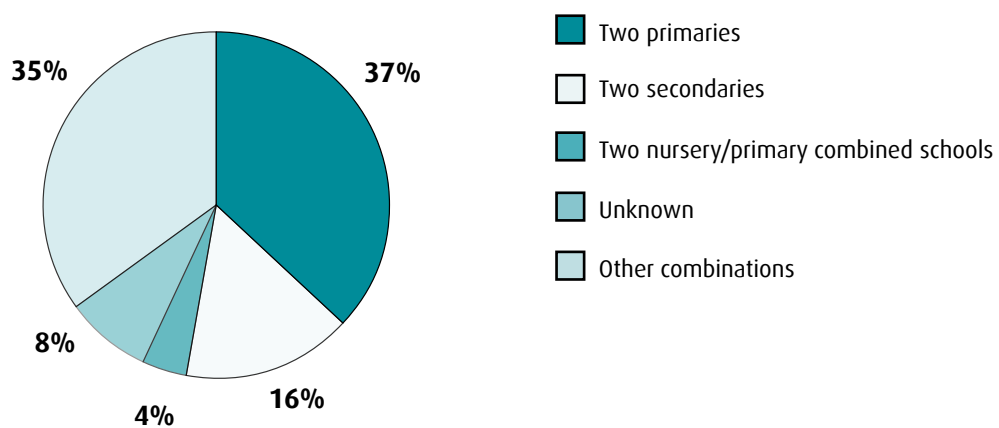
**Figure 6: Breakdown of schools led by executive headteachers, by type of school**



**Figure 7: Breakdown of schools led by executive headteachers, by phase of school**



**Figure 8: Breakdown of schools led by executive headteachers, by combination of phase of school**





## Numbers of executive heads by type of governance arrangements and number of pupils

The surveys of local authorities and executive heads reported that around one-third of executive heads are working within the context of a federation (ie what was formerly known as a hard federation, with a single governing body) – in the case of the former it was slightly less (Figure 9) and in the latter slightly more. The presence of a hard governance arrangement linked to the role of executive head would seem to be indicative of the position being a permanent one.

Around the same proportion of executive heads – just over one-third – work in looser forms of partnership and collaboration, though despite this more informal partnership context there will, as chapters 4 and 8 explore, normally be a formal contract or agreement governing the scope and operation of the executive head’s role.

The 17 per cent of executive heads working in an interim role might typically be NLEs contracted to a school to help bring it out of special measures or to assist it in tackling a specific set of performance problems.

**Figure 9: Proportion of executive heads by type of governance arrangement**

Type of arrangement	Percentage
Informal school cluster	3.2
Collaboration or partnership with each school accountable to its own governing body	36.5
Federation with one governing body for all schools	31.3
Executive head performing an interim role	17.4
Other	1.2
Not stated	10.4

Source: Survey of local authorities

Figure 10 shows the number of pupils falling within the responsibility of executive headteachers. In the case of small rural primary schools, some executive heads, despite leading at least two schools, are still presiding over very small numbers of pupils – 54 is the lowest figure recorded in the survey. However, as one would expect, executive heads are in general responsible for more pupils than in traditional single headship models. The average primary school in England has around 224 pupils. Our survey shows that the median number of pupils for which primary executive headteachers were responsible was 274.

The position in the secondary sector is even more pronounced, where the combination of several large schools can lead to executive heads having overall responsibility for a very large number of pupils. At 1,780 pupils, the median number of pupils overseen by secondary executive heads means that they are running schools that are nearly double the size of the average secondary school in England.

**Figure 10: Numbers of pupils for which executive heads are responsible**

Combined headcount of schools	All heads	Secondary	Primary
Minimum	54	294	54
Maximum	3,300	3,300	1,330
Median	412	1,780	274

Note: The 'secondary' and 'primary' columns refer to executive heads that are leading single-phase partnerships or federations. The 'all heads' column includes all the data from the primary and secondary same-phase arrangements and some additional data from multi-phase arrangements (22 partnerships in total).

Source: Survey of executive heads

## Nomenclature of executive heads

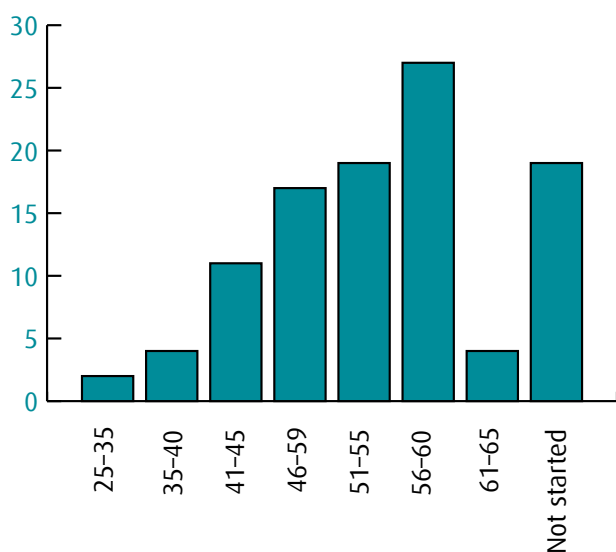
Given the breadth of the arrangements for executive heads and the different contexts and structures within which they are working, it is not surprising that the way executive heads are referred to varies, particularly as the system has not formally defined what an executive head is. The survey of executive heads revealed that:

- 58 per cent were called 'executive headteachers'
- 28 per cent were called 'headteachers'
- 14 per cent were referred to as 'executive principals', 'partnership heads', 'principals' or 'heads of federation'

## Profile of executive heads

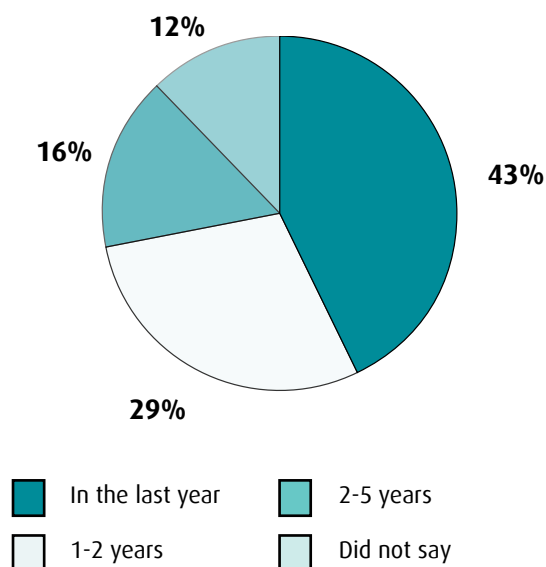
Not surprisingly, the biggest age group of executive headteachers is those aged between 51 and 60, and 19 per cent were aged between 51 and 55 with just over one-quarter aged between 56 and 60 (Figure 11). However, the fact that just over one-third of executive heads were aged below 51 indicates that younger heads are also having opportunities to play a leading role in the school system. Given that 45 per cent of headteachers will retire in the next 10 years, the experience of executive headship among this younger cohort of school leaders will be a significant asset in building and sustaining leadership expertise across the school system.

**Figure 11: Age profile of executive heads**



Source: Survey of executive heads

**Figure 12: Length of time since being appointed as an executive head**



All those surveyed reported having qualified teacher status (QTS), though the overwhelming majority (85 per cent) had not held an executive headship post in the past. That is not surprising given the recent history of the role – in fact 87 per cent of the executive head respondents said that the role did not exist prior to their own appointment.

Figure 12 shows that nearly three-quarters of those surveyed had only been appointed to an executive headship post in the previous two years. Figure 13 shows that the median length of time an executive head been in post was just one year.

Most executive heads are experienced teachers and school leaders (Figure 13), with primary headteachers having slightly longer periods of service as teachers and heads than their secondary colleagues. However, if the number of executive headship posts continues to grow at the same rate as it has been doing, heads are likely to find that opportunities to become an executive head occur much sooner in their career. Traditionally, many heads have taken on the headship of a smaller school as their first appointment before moving to lead a larger school. We may find that in future the second move as a head will be into executive headship. This in turn will have repercussions for the training and development support that is made available for heads early in their headship career.

**Figure 13: Length of service of executive heads**

Median number of years since first appointment	...as qualified teacher	...as headteacher	...as executive headteacher
All executive heads	30	10.5	1
Primary executive heads	32	12.5	1
Secondary executive heads	30	10.5	1

Source: Survey of executive heads

## Reasons for the creating the role of executive head

Our interviewees generally spoke of two main drivers for the creation of executive headship: the need to recruit a headteacher (including in some cases saving a local school from closure), or a requirement to improve the performance of a failing school. These findings were mirrored in the results from the survey (Figure 14). Of course these reasons are not mutually exclusive. For example, one federation had started to save a smaller school from closure, and then took on another local school to help improve its performance.

The survey did indicate, however, that secondary schools were most likely to introduce an executive head because of performance concerns whereas in the primary sector there was a much more even split between recruitment and performance issues as the driving factor. Budget constraints, falling rolls and meeting broader outcomes for children were the only other issues to register as factors scoring in double figures.

Note: Respondents were invited to identify and indicate any of the factors listed in Figure 14 that applied to their situation. Totals do not therefore sum to 100 per cent.

Source: Survey of executive heads

**Figure 14: Reasons for creating the role of executive head**

Why was the role created?	Total percentage of executive heads (n=127)	Percentage of executive heads of secondary schools (n=26)	Percentage of executive heads of primary schools (n=89)
To improve the performance of one or more schools in special measures or in need of support	38	58	42
Difficulty in recruiting a suitable candidate for the role of headteacher at one of the schools	37	8	44
Budget constraints requiring a headteacher to cover multiple schools	11	0	13
Falling rolls requiring a headteacher to lead more than one school	11	4	13
To promote more effective partnership working as part of the Every Child Matters agenda	11	8	13
Other (see below)	7	4	7
To address an issue of viability (eg, to lead a group of schools that were not previously viable as single entities)	6	12	8
As a result of BSF or other local restructuring of schools	4	12	2
Headteacher post needed interim filling	4	0	4
Headteacher left and decision not to replace	2	4	3

## Motivations for taking on the role of executive head

We asked executive heads to rank their personal motivations for taking on the role of executive head (Figure 15). The factor that scored most highly as being influential was the opportunity to take on new challenges. This was reinforced by the relatively high ratings for the new post being ‘more dynamic and varied than my previous position’. The comment below captures this sense of wanting a new stimulus:

“I needed greater challenge, but did not want to work in an urban environment where the larger schools are located.”

A clear emphasis on career development also emerged, with respondents according a high rating to the fact that the executive headship role would provide, for example, ‘new skills and experience’ and a lower but still significant rating for the post providing ‘a good next step in my career progression’.

There was, however, also a strong sense of moral purpose in the motivations. This was evident from the value executive heads placed on being able to ‘influence and improve standards more widely’ and the desire ‘to give something back to the community’. Significantly, the prospect of additional financial rewards, while not completely unimportant, was relatively scored at the lower end of the scale. Altruism and moral purpose also came through in some of the comments that were volunteered:

“The school had been in difficulties for 15 years and was in special measures. It seemed wrong that one school could be in special measures and another be outstanding when both schools were only minutes walk apart.”

“I strongly believe in small schools and understand [that] for them to continue to exist there will have to be more collaborations/federations.”

Behind the overall total, there were some differences between the responses from secondary and primary executive heads. Primary executive heads put much more emphasis on career progression and the opportunity to exercise a more dynamic and varied role. In contrast, secondary executive heads were more likely to feel a duty to take on the role and were also more likely to have come under pressure from a third party.

## Method of appointment to the role of executive head

The majority of executive headteachers in this sample had been approached directly to take on the role, with only 13 per cent formally applying to an advertised post. This finding was supported when we reviewed advertised vacancies from the Education Data Services (EDS) database for vacancies advertised in 2009. Between January and June 2009, there were just 8 advertised executive head vacancies and 13 advertised headship vacancies for federations.

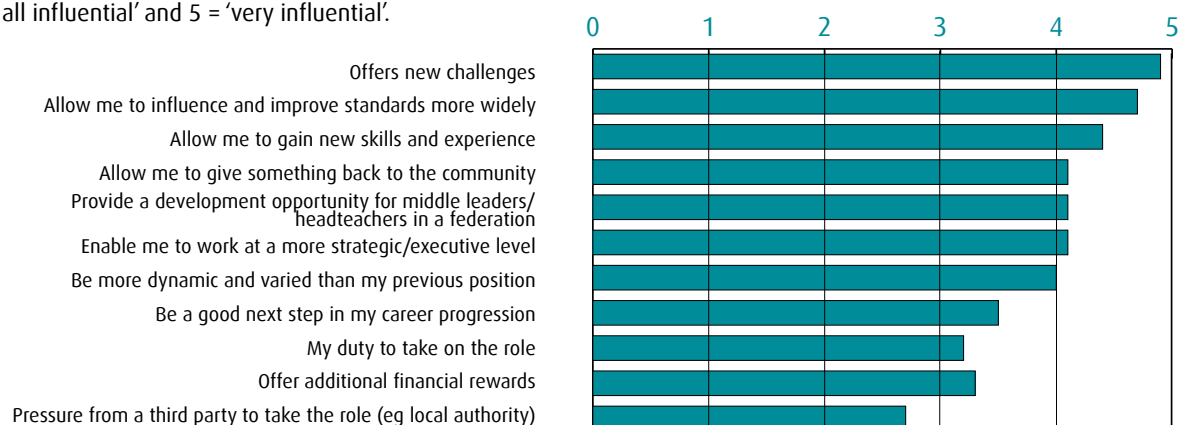
This is largely because the executive head option is often pursued when a school is in crisis and needs urgent help, or a recruitment process has failed and new avenues have to be pursued.

However, there is also some evidence that competition for interim executive headships, although not advertised as vacancies, is increasing as more school-to-school improvement contracts are formally tendered (Hill & Matthews, 2010).

**Figure 15: Motivations for taking on the role of executive**

Respondents were asked to rate how influential each factor was in their taking on the role of executive head, with 1 = ‘not at all influential’ and 5 = ‘very influential’.

Source: Survey of executive heads



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## 4: How does the executive headship role work in practice?

### Introduction

Chapter 3 showed how context is important for understanding the reasons executive heads take up the role. Context is equally important for understanding what executive heads do and how they operate:

*“The local context plays an important role in the adoption and development of new leadership patterns and structures.”*

Chapman et al, 2009a:8

The research looked at both the operational and governance contexts and the impact these had on headteachers and staff. Most of this chapter deals with understanding the differences and the varying contexts that the catch-all title of ‘executive head’ embraces. However, the first section of the chapter describes more generic factors that can affect executive heads as they take up their role.

### The preparatory context

Each executive head takes on the role in a unique set of circumstances. However, our interviews with headteachers identified a number of cross-cutting preparatory factors that can have a strong bearing on how well their executive headship gets off the ground, whatever the circumstances:

- **The degree of prior collaboration between the schools.** If there has been a positive prior relationship or link between the schools involved in an executive headship arrangement, it can help to smooth the way for the formal establishment of the new role. The link may take the form of both schools having previously been part of a successful informal partnership, or the executive head having been a member of staff at the partner schools at an earlier point in his or her career, or the two schools having shared professional development sessions: *“I had been supporting the school which was without a headteacher for one year before the soft federation was ratified. I wanted to continue to implement changes which were benefiting both schools.”*
- **The leadership capacity within the schools.** Executive headteachers will want to know that either the school they are taking on has sufficient management capacity to support an executive head model or that there is in their home school sufficient strength and depth of leadership to keep the home school moving forward and provide additional resources to support the partner school in which the executive head is becoming involved: *“I would not have pursued this if I was not satisfied that the leadership capacity in each school was in place.”*
- **The support and backing of the local authority or sponsor.** Executive heads are frequently taking on a school that is in crisis or has had serious problems over a long period of time. They need to know that as they prepare to take hard decisions they will have the necessary backing from the governors and/or local authority to enable them to see things through: *“The local authority and governors set out a challenging agenda with a remit across the authority to improve practice, together with a promise of resources to enable its delivery.”*
- **The importance of carrying out an assessment of the risks for all the schools involved in the potential executive head arrangement.** For national support schools (NSSs) led by an NLE, this is referred to as a due diligence exercise. The risks include clarity about the scale of the challenge, expectations placed on the executive head, the formal accountabilities and relationship with the governing body or sponsor, involving and securing sufficient leadership and teaching support, ensuring there is proper attention paid to the needs of the NSS, the attitude of parents, staff and governors and the financial arrangements: *“I was concerned that if I was unable to remove the new school from special measures in the expected timeframe then that would mean finishing my teaching career on a low.”*  
*“My reservations were about the views of parents to the idea of a federation – these two schools are rural schools and both schools wanted their own headteacher.”*

## The operational context

Chapters 2 and 3 described how the executive head role is introduced into a situation or is undertaken for a variety of different reasons. We need to understand how these reasons translate into the varying roles and activities that executive heads are playing within the school system.

We have identified five broad scenarios in which executive heads may be employed, though there is in practice overlap between them and in some cases an executive headship may need to address two or three of the scenarios in a particular situation. Figure 16, drawing on interviews, case studies and research reports, describes how the nature of the scenario is likely to determine the focus of what executive heads do and how they spend their time.

**Figure 16: Roles of executive headteachers in relation to their contexts**

Reason for appointing an executive head	Focus of executive head's activity
<p>A school is failing or underperforming (Potter, 2004; NCSL, 2006; Hill &amp; Matthews, 2008; Hill, 2008)</p>	<p>There is now an extensive literature on how executive heads are working with schools that are failing or underperforming.</p> <p>Following a rapid assessment of the school's position and staff performance, the executive head's initial focus is on ensuring that basic systems of teaching and learning, behaviour and management are in place and that key positions are filled by competent leaders. Key problems with the curriculum are also identified.</p> <p>In a second, much more developmental phase, the executive head leads the process of addressing underlying weaknesses, developing the curriculum, building up staff skills, providing intense modelling and coaching staff in what makes for excellent teaching and an outstanding lesson, ensuring good assessment and monitoring procedures are operating, sharing best practice and developing middle leaders.</p> <p>In the final phase, the partnership between the higher performing and partner school becomes much more one of mutual learning and sharing of practice and staff. The long-term future of the supported school is planned in this phase.</p> <p>Monitoring performance, and reporting and liaising with governors (or an interim executive board) and the local authority are a continuing task throughout all the phases.</p>
<p>A school has failed to recruit a head or is at risk of closure unless it teams up with another school(s) (National College, 2006; Todman et al, 2009)</p>	<p>The focus of an executive head's effort tends to be on sustainability and increasing the level of strategic leadership. This is reflected in the fact that the appointment of an executive head in this situation reduces or eliminates the head's own class teaching commitment, which can otherwise be quite significant.</p> <p>Their time will be spent on leading the development of an overall ethos, and a strategy and development plan for the schools. They will also provide coaching and support for the leadership team and develop a shared teaching and learning model supported by systematic professional development and appraisal and monitoring systems. Finally, they will also work with the school business manager on a viable financial plan.</p> <p>Working with parents and governors and, in the case of faith schools, church authorities to maintain and build trust in the new model of leadership is also a key task for executive heads in this situation.</p>

Reason for appointing an executive head	Focus of executive head's activity
<p>Schools in a locality or town want to adopt a broad-based multi-agency approach to education and child development (Price WterhouseCoopers, 2007; Morgan and Chapman 2009)</p>	<p>The executive head's time is likely to be focused on developing and agreeing a strategic plan, co-ordinating the activities of the schools, brokering agreed strategies for behaviour and exclusion policies and working with statutory agencies to secure their contribution in terms of personnel, services and financial support.</p> <p>The composition and the role of the workforce, leadership team and governing body often reflect the greater professional diversity involved in multi-agency working. Executive heads in these contexts may find themselves overseeing and monitoring the work of a children's centre manager, extended services manager and an education welfare team as well as that of a primary and secondary school head – all operating from the same site.</p> <p>Communicating the purpose and scope of the work and forging a common culture across the different professional backgrounds are other important aspects of an executive head's role in this situation.</p> <p>A significant proportion of time may also be spent liaising and working with community groups and agencies, particularly if community education and learning is part of the offer of the partnership, federation or trust.</p>
<p>Schools decide to form a partnership or federation focused on improving teaching and learning through shared professional and curriculum development (Lindsay et al, 2007; Hill, 2008).</p>	<p>Partnerships and federations work under the umbrella of a multitude of different governance arrangements and leadership structures. Some employ executive heads while others have a federation director or chief executive.</p> <p>The extent to which the arrangement is likely to be effective is closely linked to how far there is agreement on the shared purpose of the partnership or federation, the quality of leadership and whether the leaders of the participating institutions have signed up to a more collegiate way of working.</p> <p>Given this context, the role of an executive head or chief executive will be to ensure that there is clarity of purpose. For example, an executive head leading an all-through or cross-phase federation might well focus on enabling staff to understand and learn from working with pupils in different phases, using subject-specialist expertise across phases, maximising the potential for smooth transition between key stages and developing a whole-federation approach to inclusion.</p> <p>Depending on the nature of the governance arrangements, the executive head will also need to be able to act in a way that facilitates effective joint working between the partners, including persuading schools to contribute financially towards agreed partnership/federation programmes and to monitor and present evidence on the relative effectiveness of those programmes.</p> <p>As with multi-agency working, they will also play a key role in communicating the scope of the federation's work and the current priorities.</p>
<p>A school trust or academy sponsor decides to develop a group or chain of schools (Hill, 2010)</p>	<p>The role of chief executive officers of academies is still evolving but emerging practice indicates that the role involves setting the vision and strategic direction of the chain; developing and applying a consistent teaching and learning model and other key systems; monitoring performance and ensuring consistency to underpin reputation; developing a senior team of leaders and growing leadership throughout the chain; mentoring, supporting and managing executive principals and academy principals; setting and managing the budget; reporting to governors; acting as an ambassador in the wider education sector; and leading the strategy for expanding the chain.</p> <p>The role of an executive principal, who may have overall responsibility for two to four academies in a locality or subregion, will be broadly similar. However, where there is also a chief executive officer the executive principal will be accountable to him or her.</p>



## The governance context

As chapter 2 explained, the opportunities for headteachers to work outside their home school have increased exponentially in recent years. Figure 17 presents these opportunities in diagrammatic form, according to the degree of authority heads are able to exercise. By 'authority', we mean the real, practical and recognised right to make decisions and choices.

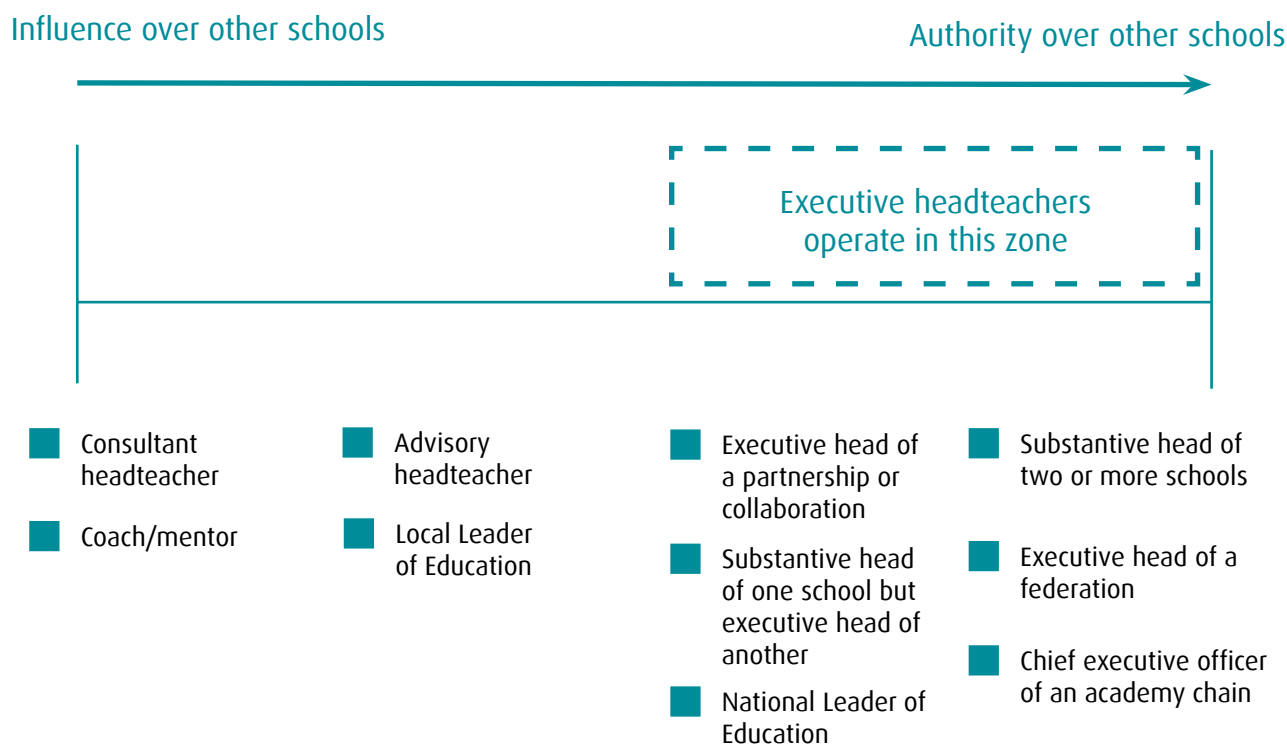
At the left-hand side of the continuum are those roles in which a headteacher in one school is used to provide advice and support to senior leaders in another school. These may be schools that are in need of improvement, or are led by an inexperienced headteacher or are not able to recruit a headteacher and are led by a deputy, acting or interim headteacher. In these situations, the

headteacher with expertise and experience does not have any direct authority to effect change in the partner school and does not have a substantive role. Their focus is on providing support through coaching and mentoring. This model can have considerable value but is not the focus of this report.

On the far right-hand side of the continuum in Figure 17 are those leadership roles that are formalised and set up so that the executive headteacher or chief executive officer is able to exercise effective authority over the schools he or she is leading.

The box in blue indicates that part of the continuum where executive heads belong in terms of the range of authority they have. The spectrum also covers a variety of governance arrangements and models, as we describe below.

**Figure 17: Variations in authority exercised by headteachers and executive headteachers working with other schools**



Executive heads operating as part of a partnership or collaboration or as substantive heads of one and executive heads of others.

## Executive heads operating as part of a partnership or collaboration as substantive head of one school and executive head of others

Three-quarters of the way across the continuum are situations in which a headteacher has a formal leadership remit that goes beyond more than one school – by way of a partnership or federation agreement or NLE contract – that gives them some authority in relation to another school(s).

But they do not have complete authority over the partner school(s). Our survey indicated that around 40 per cent of executive heads fall into this broad category. Figure 18 illustrates one example of what such a model might look like.

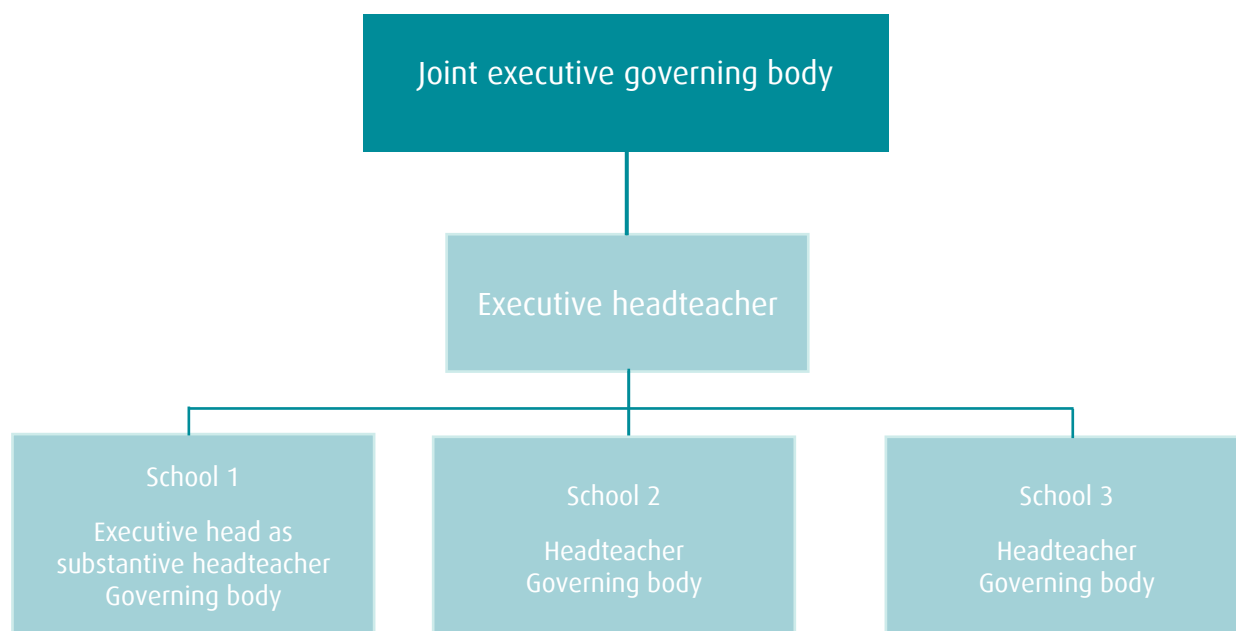
Under this organisational arrangement, the executive head will have complete authority over his or her own school as substantive head, but will have a different role and relationship with the other school(s) involved, because each is run by another substantive headteacher. In this situation, the individual headteachers retain accountability for their respective schools. So the executive head can only exercise full authority over the school of which she or he is substantive head.

This can be problematic if it blurs accountabilities, confuses teachers and parents as to who is in charge and limits the freedom of the executive headteacher to develop and follow through the policies he or she considers necessary. However, in our interviews these problems were not surfacing as major issues. In part this is likely to be because there may also be one or more of the following arrangements in place:

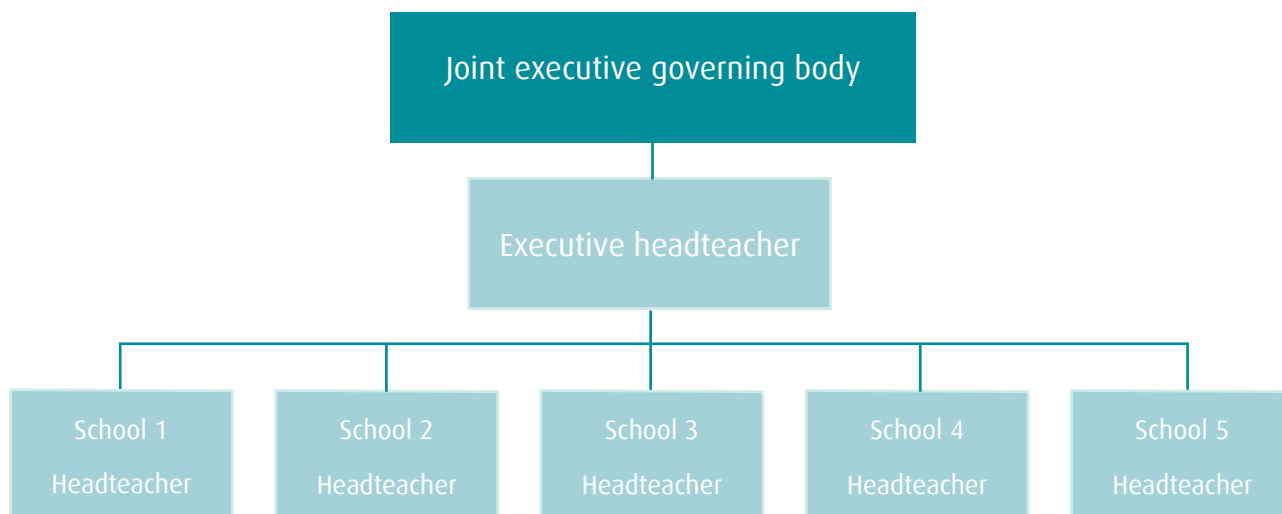
- a formal contract specifying the functions of the executive head, as there normally is when an NLE is appointed
- a formal agreement between the schools and their governing body setting out the scope of their joint work together and the remit of the executive head
- the presence of a joint governing body or joint governor committee – drawn from representatives of each school’s governing body – to which the executive head reports

Moreover, if the executive head is in place following an adverse Ofsted report, this will in practice mean that his or her authority to act and influence is fairly extensive, whatever the formal accountability arrangements are. However, this model does require executive heads to rely more on influencing and communication skills than the formal authority they draw from any legal status.

**Figure 18: An executive head with limited authority over other schools**



**Figure 19: An executive head with indirect authority over other schools**



The same considerations will apply in the case of a whole-town or locality federations where an executive director or head may report to a joint governing body but, in a variation on Figure 18, is not the substantive head of any of the schools in the partnership (Figure 19). In this scenario, the joint executive governing body is responsible for setting the strategic objectives and overseeing the implementation of agreed plans, and the executive head leads on strategic planning across the town and co-ordinates the delivery of agreed objectives. However, the individual headteachers are legally accountable for the management and conduct of their own schools.

The executive head will not have any formal power to direct the activities of the substantive headteachers and the effectiveness of the role will depend on the degree of commitment of each of the schools and their leaders to the common purpose of the federation and the executive head's skills in relationship management.

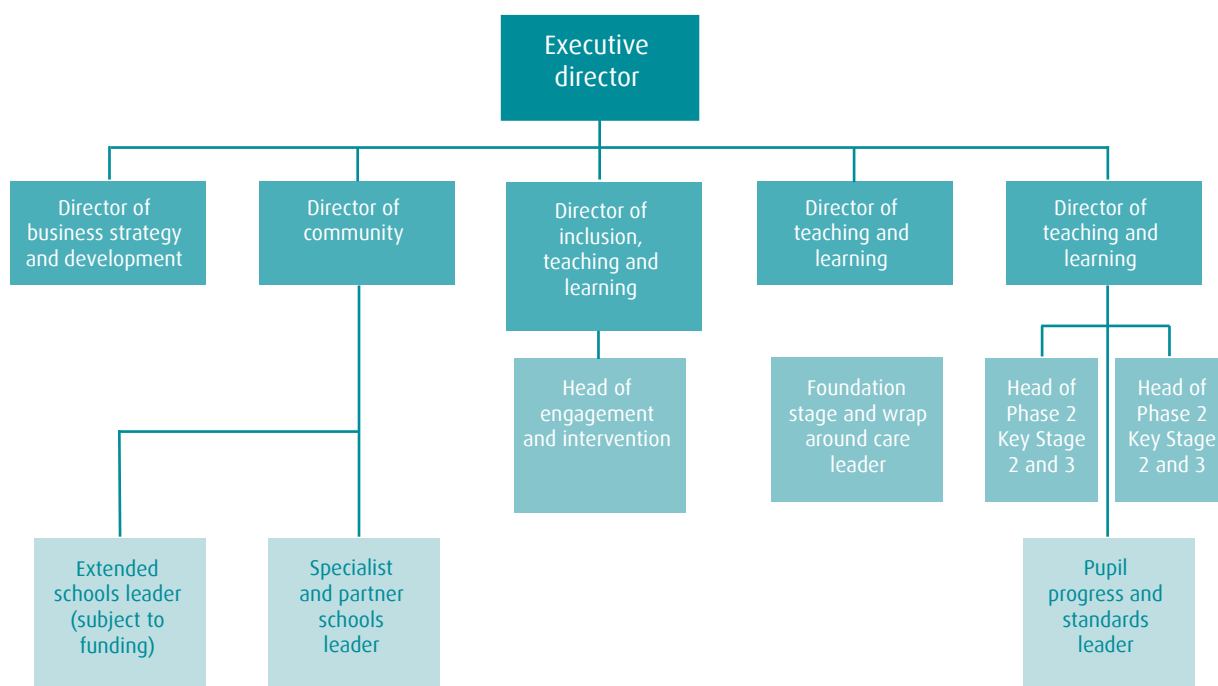
## Executive heads with effective authority over other schools

These are the schools shown on the far right-hand side of the continuum in Figure 17. In the survey of executive heads, just under one-third of the respondents indicated that they were working within this type of governance arrangement, although again there is no single organisational model.

Figure 20 provides one example of this scenario. It describes the governance model for Darlington Education Village. Darlington is a federation of a primary, a secondary and a special school under one governing body, and is led by an executive director.

The heads of the existing schools have been designated as directors of teaching and learning and report to the executive director, who is the substantive headteacher of all the schools. The directors run their schools on a day-to-day basis, but the executive director has ultimate accountability for the performance of each school and for the federation as a whole and has full authority over each school.

**Figure 20: Leadership structure of Darlington Education Village**



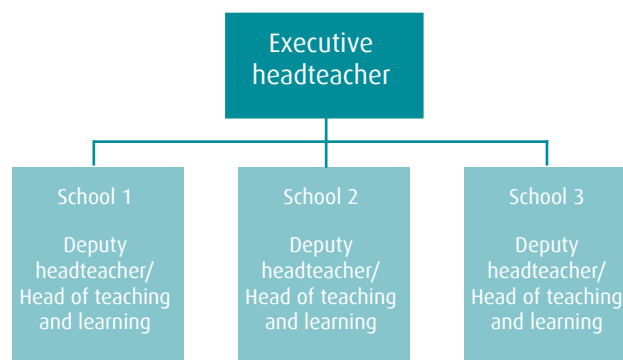
This type of model has the advantage of bringing clarity on who is leading and who is accountable for a group of schools. It also provides a clear framework and basis for the schools involved to work together.

Sometimes this type of model has been adopted to further a particular educational vision, as in the case of Darlington. In many cases, as described in chapter 2, it has been created in order to speed up the recovery of underperforming schools. The linking of a successful school with underperforming schools in order to bring about improvements is its *raison d'être*.

However, in other cases the arrangement has been created to ensure the educational viability of small, rural schools. Figure 21 provides one such example. The West Exmoor Federation was created because of the forthcoming retirement of two headteachers whose schools were subject to falling rolls. The federation was a means of forging a sustainable future for the three schools that had a strong history of collaboration. The executive head provides strategic leadership across the three schools and provides support to the heads of teaching and learning who have day-to-day responsibility for their schools.

In this model, the executive headteacher is again the substantive headteacher and has clear authority to act and to delegate across all the schools, with very

**Figure 21: Governance of West Exmoor Federation**

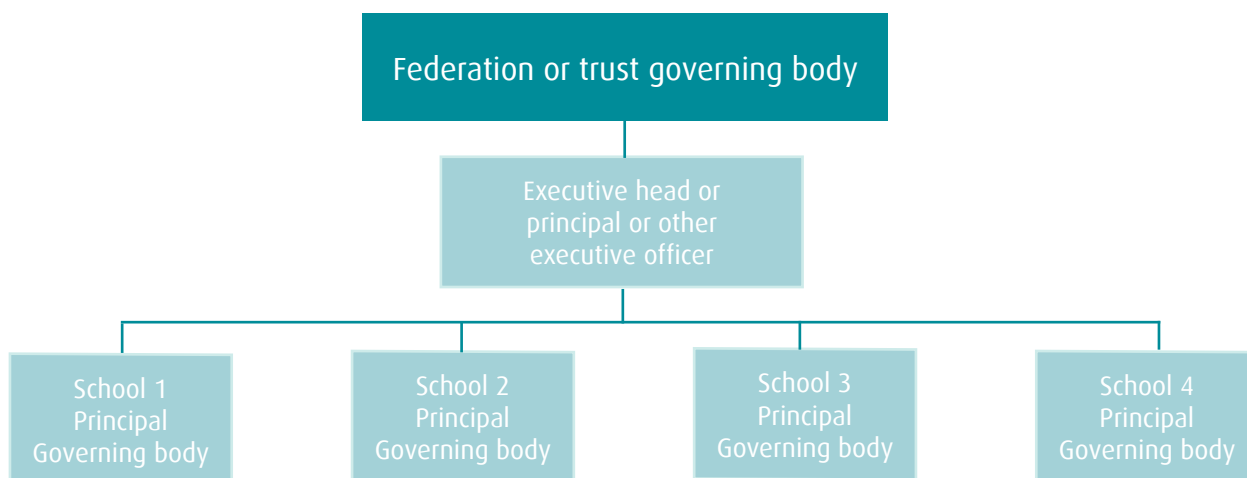


clear accountability for the performance of the group of schools and of each individual school.

Norfolk has 18 partnerships of this type. The model is seen as a highly effective response both to struggling rural schools and to headteacher recruitment difficulties.

Significantly, however, executive heads and chief executive officers can also effectively exercise authority even when they are not the substantive head of any of the schools for which they are responsible, as Figure 22 illustrates. This is most likely to be found in the chains of schools that either share a sponsor or have a trust that has incorporated

**Figure 22: Governance of an academy chain or school trust comprising several schools**



other schools. The executive leader manages and is held accountable for the individual principals, each of whom as the substantive head is accountable for the performance of their respective schools.

In this model, the executive principal or the chief executive officer derives his or her authority not from being a substantive head but from the overarching governing body or corporate board that has overall responsibility for all the schools in the chain. For this model to work, there needs to be clear delineation of the respective roles of the federation/trust governing body and the governing body or council for individual schools. Normally this is underpinned by the overarching federation/trust governing body having the power to nominate the majority of governors on each individual school's governing body and/or appoint the principal of the individual institutions.

## Interim executive heads

The 17 per cent of executive heads that, as Figure 9 identified, operate on an interim basis have varying degrees of authority to act depending on the precise circumstances in which they undertake the role. Where they are being deployed as part of a formal school improvement intervention, they are more likely to have a role as substantive head and may report to an interim executive board.

## Conclusion

The roles, responsibilities and models that have been described in this chapter demonstrate how fluid the current position is in relation to executive headship is. Executive headteachers are developing systems as they go and, to a degree, selecting, adapting and creating different legal and governance structures to fit their circumstances.

Some would see this as dangerous territory and worry about compliance with the requirements of education legislation. Others would see what is happening as evidence of innovation, enterprise and entrepreneurship which, they would argue, is benefiting schools, staff and pupils as well as the wider school system.

Both sides of the argument have right on their side. Executive heads are bringing a lot of energy to the system. They are providing practical solutions and contributing to school improvement. But at the same time there are constraints and risks that must be considered and addressed. Chapter 7 examines the evidence for the value executive headship is adding and chapter 8 address the challenges and risks.

## 5: The impact of executive headship on other school leadership roles

Chapter 2 described how headteachers were increasingly playing a role beyond their home school to provide leadership to other schools and the wider school system. The way in which executive headteachers are in practice developing these new roles was explained in chapters 3 and 4. However, executive headteachers do not lead in isolation and the ways in which they exercise their roles are having a significant impact on the roles of other school leaders.

Figure 23 summarises in diagrammatic form the emerging scope of the opportunities and roles open to senior and middle leaders as a result of the development of executive headship.

### Senior and middle leaders exercising more responsibility in their home school

Senior and middle leaders in a school will often get the opportunity to acquire experience of headship or increased responsibility as result of the head in their school moving into executive headship.

**First**, if their school is part of a federation and their head becomes executive head of the federation, there will often then be an opportunity for existing

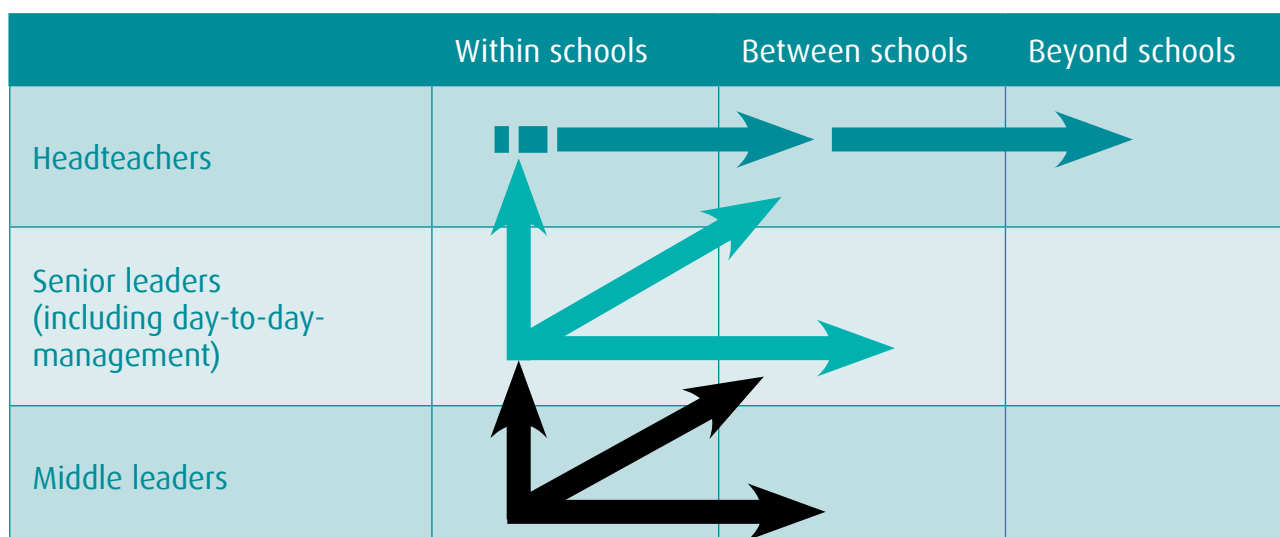
deputy and assistant heads to run the school on a day-to-day basis. These posts, sometimes referred to as heads of school, enable deputies and assistant heads to manage the operations of the school under the guidance of the executive head, who is ultimately accountable for the performance of the school.

**Second**, if a head takes on an executive headship of a school in special measures or needing significant improvement, he or she will need to make arrangements to secure the leadership of his or her own school so that it still keeps moving forward while much of the head's attention is focused on the challenge of turning round another school (Hill & Matthews, 2008). Again this will present the opportunity for a deputy or assistant head to act up to headship (ie, be designated head for a fixed period of time).

**Third**, where an executive head oversees a number of primary schools, the development is often accompanied by the creation of heads of school (or heads of teaching and learning) as the most senior posts on site. These posts provide a bridge between being a senior, classroom-based practitioner and leadership. The approach is, in effect, providing a new career path for primary school teachers. This new leadership model has the potential to make

**Figure 23: Framework for understanding the impact of executive headship on other school leadership roles**

Note: Figure 23 is based on a concept in Chapman et al (2009a), but has been adapted and developed to describe the impact of executive headship on other school leadership roles.



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a significant contribution to solving the succession planning challenge that the primary sector faces, particularly since there is some evidence that it is easier to recruit people to be heads of schools than to full headship (Hill, 2010).

Even where a head remains substantive head of the home school (in addition to their executive role with another school), this arrangement can still support leadership development, particularly for deputy heads:

**“Deputy heads were taking on more strategic roles and felt comfortable with being the most senior person on site for days and on occasions weeks at a time.”**

Chapman et al, 2009a:11

Middle leaders will also have new opportunities to exercise more responsibility as the impact of the restructuring of the senior leadership team feeds through to the rest of the school. New assistant heads may be appointed or a middle leader may be seconded to the leadership team. Middle leaders may also be asked to take on significant whole-school managerial tasks, including timetabling and curriculum and pastoral arrangements.

## Senior and middle leaders exercising more responsibility in other schools

Executive heads working with another school frequently draw on and use staff from their home school as they transpose and transfer systems and ways of working to a new school environment. A deputy or assistant head may be appointed as head of school, working under the executive head:

**“Executive heads were able to offer these individuals an opportunity that would otherwise have been unavailable to them. The challenging nature of these adopted schools provided such individuals with a diversity and intensity of leadership experience that leaders in other contexts may take years to accumulate. In addition, they were able to do so under the protective wing of a highly skilled mentor.**

**The potential benefits for their longer-term career opportunities were evident... The relationship between the executive head and the associate headteacher was in some ways similar to that of an apprenticeship model. The executive offered tutelage and coaching, providing the associate headteacher with the opportunity to draw upon such skills and expertise while at the same time, benefiting from the intensity of their own experiential learning.”**

Barnes et al, 2005: 22

In areas where performance or leadership are weak, an executive head may use a curriculum leader, an advanced skills teacher or a school business manager from the home school to lead the improvement process.

As federations and chains expand, the deployment of senior and middle staff from one school to another is growing, particularly since staff and leaders are employed on federation or chain (rather than individual school) contracts. This enables leaders to be assigned to other schools within the same group of schools (Hill, 2010).

Linked to this development, we are also beginning to see a further phenomenon: the growth of leadership development programmes involving middle and senior leaders from across the schools within the purview of an executive head, be it a federation, chain or just two schools.

## Growth of new leadership positions

The new structural arrangements associated with executive head roles, such as collaborations, partnerships and federations are also providing opportunities for the introduction of specialised posts in many schools. Senior management posts that do not require the holder to have a teaching qualification are becoming a feature of these new leadership arrangements.

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For example, the appointment of school business managers is viewed as a major contribution to more efficient use of resources, while the sharing of budgets in federations and collaborations is allowing schools to employ specialist personnel in areas such as purchasing, finance and human resource management. The appointment of specialist staff of this kind frees up time for headteachers to focus on strategic issues and also removes a number of administrative duties from teachers, allowing them to focus on their core business.

## Conclusion

Not all staff are positive about these developments (as is explored in chapter 8) but in general they are enabling senior and middle leaders to step up and assume greater responsibility at earlier stages of their career than has been possible in the past.

The trend is also helping schools to retain and develop some of their brightest and best leaders. Able and ambitious staff now find they can gain new responsibilities and experience without necessarily having to change schools or apply for a new job. Opportunities are opening up within their existing school, chain and federation. There is a growing perception of a:

“... significant shift in culture and attitude within the education system... you no longer have to serve your time to achieve leadership positions and if you are good enough you get presented with worthwhile leadership opportunities.”

Chapman et al, 2009a:11

The growth of executive headship is not the only factor contributing towards this change, but is one important dimension of it.



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## 6: Preparing, training and supporting executive headteachers

In this chapter, we look at the skills and attributes that executive heads need in order to fulfil their role and the consequent training and development support they need to prepare them for their responsibilities.

### Some common strands of executive headship work

In chapter 4, we highlighted how context is important for understanding the various roles of executive heads. The focus of their role and activity was determined in large measure by the particular circumstances that had given rise to the creation of the role and the nature of the governance arrangements under which they were operating. Figure 16 provided a summary of this argument.

However, despite the differences of the contexts and thus the roles, there are also some common themes.

In our online survey and face-to-face interviews, we invited participants to identify the specific skills needed to perform as an effective executive headteacher that differ from those required for a traditional headteacher role. The eight key skills that emerged are described in turn below.

#### 1. Operating at a more strategic level

Executive headteachers must have the ability to think and plan ahead and to recognise differences between the schools and their communities, and adapt their strategic approach accordingly. As illustrated by the following quotes, they told us that it was important to be able to:

- have [a] strategic, long-term vision and turn that into reality
- recognise different contexts and to use a range of leadership strategies to effect school improvement
- have an overview of the differing needs of both schools and make well-judged decisions

#### 2. Getting the balance between standardisation and respecting difference

Executive heads will tend to draw on tried and tested systems but they also need to appreciate and nourish differences between schools, including a school's culture, ethos and people. Simply adopting a one-size-fits-all approach won't work:

“80 per cent of what goes on in all the schools is the same in terms of how we display children's work on the walls, how we target each child, how we mark work. 20 per cent is individualised – this is the part about how the school does things to make them personal. For example, one of our schools is by the sea, so when I go there I expect to see the geographical location and theme running through the presentation of the school.”

Executive headteacher,  
five-school primary federation

“It is an advantage to have a set of policies and procedures from your high-performing school – but you can't just pick these off the shelf and apply them. There is considerable work in adapting and implementing them in the new setting.”

Executive headteacher,  
two-school primary federation

“I tried very hard not to simply create a clone. They have to be seen as two unique establishments with their own strengths and areas for development.”

#### 3. Being even-handed between schools

This is less likely to be an issue in schools where the executive head is going into another school to lead a recovery programme because in these situations there will inevitably be a period when the executive head will be mainly or fully involved in the partner school. However, in primary federations or locality-based federations,

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balancing the interests of different schools is much more of a consideration. Supporting each school equally and being seen to be doing so is crucial:

“You have to be aware of the perceived time and therefore the importance that staff and parents feel you give to each school. It is easy for some people to feel that their school is of less interest to you.”

“The big issue is how you effectively lead a federation which is on four sites, be an active presence, and maintain a full view and understanding of what is happening on each of the sites. It is quite demanding to both demonstrate and be seen as the headteacher of two schools.”

#### 4. Staying focused on performance

Executive heads have normally got where they are because they have demonstrated their effectiveness as leaders and are leading successful schools that are homes to high-quality teaching and learning. They will therefore pay close attention to performance. Thus executive headship does not equate with being distant from the things that are at the core of effective schooling. Executive heads may delegate management tasks and distribute leadership, but they still need to know what is going on in the schools for which they have responsibility. So while it is important to have the ability to:

“delegate, the ability to leave others to get on with their jobs and not to interfere,”

it is also important to have:

“the ability to set up structures which will give you the information you need to improve the school.”

Executive headteacher,  
two-school secondary trust

In particular, it is important to have good data management systems in place so that an executive head can keep on top of what is happening:

“It is important to understand what information you need to get from each school and to set up systems to gather it.”

Executive headteacher,  
two-school primary federation

#### 5. Developing and practising interpersonal skills

All school leaders need a high level of interpersonal skills if they are effectively and sensitively to manage pupils and staff and relations with parents. However, executive headship requires these skills to be exhibited and practised on another level. Substantive headship provides a clear and authoritative framework within which to exercise leadership. It is clear where the buck stops. But executive heads often operate in a much messier environment where, as we saw in chapter 4, new structures are being established, accountabilities are evolving and relationships have still to be formed. In addition, there may well be additional stakeholders, such as a federation/trust governing body, a local authority and/or an interim executive board, that have to be managed. This involves executive heads having to build and earn authority and respect that provide the platform for achieving buy-in from others and moving the school forward. They also have to be good facilitators and persuaders:

“It places so much emphasis on listening to people, separating the wheat from the chaff, and showing your appreciation of hard work. The personal touch, particularly with disillusioned teachers, is vital.”

“The ability to have good emotional intelligence, to form positive relationships, to forge quickly a shared vision, to have a good understanding of shared and distributed leadership is vital.”

#### 6. Working closely with governors

Having good working relationship with governors is desirable and necessary for all headteachers. But executive heads are often operating with new or experimental governance arrangements, so building up a relationship of trust with governors and the chair of governors is high on the agenda for all executive heads, particularly since the governing bodies of chains and federations are starting to bring in governors who act more as non-executive directors. This new breed of governor provides executive leaders with sharp but welcome challenge:

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“The governing body here are not risk averse. It is crucial to have a good relationship with the chair of governors. When we federated they made a massive effort to remodel into a structure that was appropriate to the new model – it involved slimming down the numbers of governors and making sure those who remained were those who could serve the best interest of all the schools involved.”

Executive headteacher, two-school primary federation

Executive heads also need to be prepared for the investment of time and resources involved in maintaining the confidence of governors. They may have to report to two governing bodies or manage a joint committee as well as a governing body. This in turn will involve the executive head in having to persuade multiple audiences of the outcomes and actions she or he thinks is right. Key messages have to be repeated and consolidated.

#### 7. Communicating effectively

Ensuring that staff, pupils and parents understand the new leadership arrangement is vital. Rumour at the school gate can quickly acquire the status of fact: ‘Mr or Ms X is leaving’ when in fact Mr or Ms X is staying but taking on executive leadership of another school, or ‘We are losing our own headteacher and having to make do with sharing one with the school down the road’ when in fact the two schools are coming together in a federation, each with a head of teaching and learning on site and both overseen by an executive head.

The language and role of executive headship are unfamiliar and need explanation and reiteration. The executive head has to persuade multiple audiences of certain outcomes and keep repeating conversations.

Nor does communication just relate to leadership and governance structures. It also needs to constantly reinforce strategic objectives, explain the reasons for change and tell people how the institution is doing and whether progress is being made. So what is necessary is:

“Effective communication across a variety of settings and audiences... [and an] ability to communicate with a much wider variety of stakeholders;”

#### 8. Developing personal resilience

Research on the role of NLEs has highlighted how the work is not for the ‘fainthearted’ (Hill & Matthews, 2010). Executive heads have to be able to cope with a wide variety of challenges and demands. They are dealing with employees, parents and a community that may be hostile, sad or unconvinced about the new direction of travel.

Many executive heads are coming into a situation where failure or underperformance has become endemic and/or problems have been left to fester for years. In short, executive heads are dealing with many of the toughest situations in the English school system. Some executive heads have developed support networks and rely closely on other leadership colleagues. Others find it lonely and need to dig deep to develop:

“resilience, determination and emotional intelligence. It is an incredibly lonely position. I don’t know of any support networks.”

“All heads work under huge pressure. However, this has been relentless as an executive head... The out-of-hours commitment is well beyond that of ‘normal’ headship and not conducive to family life.”

## Skills profile for executive headteachers

Based on these interviews and our review of the literature, we have constructed a skills profile of the knowledge, qualities and attributes required to be an effective executive head (see Figure 24). The profile uses the six domains of the National Standards for Headteachers (DfES, 2004) as the basis for presenting the profile.

Several of the qualities and attributes are not peculiar to executive headship; some overlap with the role of head of a single school. However, the context in which they will be applied will be different. In addition, the extent to which executive heads will need to practise every aspect or focus on particular parts of the profile will depend on local circumstances and governance structure.

### Knowledge: executive leaders will know about:

- a range of leadership models that will impact on schools and system change
- strategies that bring about transformation, change and improvement
- how culture and context influence school leadership
- the organic nature of complex organisations, clusters, networks and federations
- policy developments in education in England and in other countries
- the principles and practice of good business management

National standards domain	Professional qualities that executive leaders will be committed to	Attributes that executive leaders will be able to demonstrate
Shaping the future	<p>Placing the leadership and vision for the school group, federation or chain in a wider educational and social context</p> <p>Being confident in challenging current thinking and orthodoxy</p>	<p>Setting vision and strategic direction and continually reshaping and articulating the vision as circumstances change</p> <p>Developing a strategy that maximises the combined strengths of the school group, federation or chain, while understanding the individual context (including drawing on the strengths and addressing the weaknesses) of each school</p>
Leading teaching and learning	<p>Raising aspirations and standards across schools</p> <p>Acting on evidence of what helps to improve the quality of teaching and learning</p> <p>Encouraging a culture of mutual learning</p> <p>Listening to and engaging with students and staff</p>	<p>Coaching senior and middle leaders, delegating responsibilities and implementing a strategy for developing leaders across a school group, federation or chain</p> <p>Establishing a clear approach for teaching and learning linked to processes for assessing performance and supporting improvement</p> <p>Ensuring expertise, resources and professional development are shared and utilised fully across schools</p> <p>Dealing with unacceptable standards</p>

National standards domain	Professional qualities that executive leaders will be committed to	Attributes that executive leaders will be able to demonstrate
Developing self and working with others	<p>Practising interpersonal skills to support change management</p> <p>Developing resilience and sustaining commitment in challenging environments</p> <p>Making time for critical reflection and personal development</p>	<p>Facilitating change through effective communication, encouragement, persuasion and negotiation</p> <p>Empowering, supporting, encouraging and challenging teams</p> <p>Ensuring that sufficient time and resources are allocated for organisational and professional development</p>
Managing the organisation	<p>Keeping a grip on the key indicators of the school group, federation or chain</p> <p>Being prepared to tackle entrenched problems</p>	<p>Making long-term and short-term financial decisions linked to strategic priorities</p> <p>Overseeing the business performance of the school group, federation or chain</p> <p>Monitoring and evaluating outcomes and using indicators of progress to identify the need for change or new systems</p> <p>Representing the school group, federation or chain to the wider world and growing its role, in line with the agreed strategy</p>
Securing accountability	<p>Working closely with the chair of governors</p> <p>Being open and transparent about performance</p> <p>Assessing risks and practising due diligence before incorporating new schools into the group, federation or chain</p>	<p>Ensuring that governors, staff, pupils and parents are clear about the governance and accountability framework</p> <p>Setting objectives and holding individuals, teams and schools to account</p>
Strengthening community	<p>Understanding the concept of moral leadership and its relationship with whole-system responsibility</p> <p>Engaging with other local schools and community stakeholders to agree local policies and strategies</p>	<p>Working collaboratively across school sites with parents, community representatives and other stakeholders to bring about change</p> <p>Providing support to other schools as requested</p> <p>Avoiding policies that will be detrimental to other schools in the locality</p> <p>Consulting on and responding to the needs and views of the wider community</p>

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## Training and development for executive heads

Understanding the scope of the executive head role and the qualities and attributes required to fulfil it provides the basis for thinking about the training and development support that executive heads need.

In terms of the design of any programme, the fact that the role varies in terms of purpose, accountabilities and ways of operating means that a one-size-fits-all approach that overlooked the local context would be completely inappropriate. A development programme must be personalised and flexible to enable individuals to tailor development activities to their particular needs.

In terms of the content of a programme, the executive heads in our survey said that they needed development under four headings, which are each discussed below.

### Strategic issues

The executive heads wanted to build up their knowledge of how to lead strategic development. Executive heads need support if they are to understand and interpret the different contexts in which they operate ('contextual literacy') and relate wider education policy and thinking to their particular circumstances.

Understanding the principles of change management will also be an important component of this part of the development. For example, an executive head from a successful school may take on a school in challenging circumstances only to find that a tried and tested approach does not transfer to the new situation. Executive leaders may need help with analysing the stage of development reached by a school. They may need to work through the difference between consistency (ie, behaving in a similar way in similar circumstances) and inflexibility (ie, behaving in the same way in all circumstances in an effort to be consistent). The ability to adapt management styles and tactics to suit different contexts is a critical part of being an effective leader.

### Technical issues

There are technical areas where executive heads want to build up their knowledge, not because they are necessarily going to manage the detailed business life of their institutions but because they need a stronger grounding to inform their judgements when assessing risks, devising strategies and making decisions.

These areas include business and financial management, human resources (including employment law, transfer of undertakings (TUPE), and pay and grading systems), the management of large building and ICT projects and the pros and cons of different types of structural partnership arrangements.

### Interpersonal and behavioural issues

We have seen how executive head roles involve working across multiple groups – parents, staff, governors, agencies and other children's services - and how it is imperative for them to have an abundance of soft skills such as relationship-building, empathy, self-awareness, team-building and resilience. These skills are more difficult to develop through traditional leadership development programmes. They involve learning, developing and practising behaviours rather than acquiring knowledge and expertise. Thus a leadership development programme for executive heads will need to combine appropriate course content with local coaching and mentoring. It will need to address developing skills in listening, communicating, persuading and negotiating that are necessary for building up trust and common purpose and leading teams from different school cultures and from different disciplines and backgrounds.

### Practical issues

Survey respondents wanted access to a system that could provide practical support from experienced colleagues who were further down the executive headship road:

*"I'd already had a lot of development previous to coming into the role but a coaching model would have helped. You need to have had experience of working beyond your own school as an NLE."*

Executive headteacher,  
three-school multi-phase partnership

*"Support from someone who has done it before would be helpful."*

Executive headteacher,  
two-school primary federation

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The sort of activities executive heads wanted to see included as part of a development programme covered:

- formal peer tutoring and coaching programmes
- informal networks to meet with heads in similar partnership arrangements
- mentoring with successful executive heads
- shadowing other executive heads and having an opportunity to observe how they work
- discussion sessions with other executive heads to raise difficult issues

Respondents commented positively on a number of existing programmes. The National College, for example, has introduced a primary executive headteacher programme that supports the leadership development of existing and aspiring executive headteachers working in a range of contexts within the primary phase. It includes training and development on strategic, technical and interpersonal skills and is delivered through a combination of residential events, school visits, online networking, online materials, peer coaching and school-based development activities.

The National College also runs the Fellowship programme. This is aimed at outstanding NLEs who have shown that they are capable of improving other schools and of contributing to systematic educational improvement in their locality. The nine-month programme examines cutting-edge theory and practice of leadership and management. Participants receive one-to-one coaching and are encouraged to examine and develop their personal approach to leadership. Leaders on the programme also work with top leadership colleagues outside education and the public sector in order to strengthen and widen their leadership learning, equipping them to deal more effectively with system leadership challenges.

The Specialist Schools and Academies Trust (SSAT) runs a two-year programme for headteachers who have taken on, or are likely to take on, the leadership of schools within a federation or partnership framework. The programme is designed and led by leading executive headteachers or chief executive officers and consists of six events, including two residential events, making a total of eight contact days. The course is based on six core modules: leading the future, personalising learning, assuring quality, ensuring accountability, developing people and beyond the school.

The practical dimension is taken care of by each of the modules being led by an experienced executive leader who uses the context of and practice in one of his or her schools as part of the module. Participants also form a supportive learning network and are encouraged to develop and define the role of executive headship for their local context.

## A longer term and more strategic approach towards developing executive leaders

At present, the development of executive heads is occurring in a fairly ad-hoc way. The NLE programme is the nearest that the education system comes to identifying, designating and supporting outstanding leaders and then placing them in positions that maximise the use of their talents. But not all executive leaders come through this route. Moreover, if executive headship continues to develop at the rate it has been doing, it will be necessary to adopt a longer term and more strategic approach towards spotting and nurturing executive heads. There are two reasons for this.

**First**, it will be important that the next generation of executive heads has the opportunity to learn what is involved in this wider role from those who have already practised and applied the role in different contexts.

**Second**, it would be sensible to embed the wider skills and behaviours that executive heads need as early as possible in their careers. Executive headship calls for a strong vision, expertise in leading school improvement, sophisticated change management skills and a willingness to work with others towards a shared goal. Schools need to induct staff earlier into extended professional networks and responsibilities, within schools and across schools and other agencies, in order build up their experience of leading in different situations.

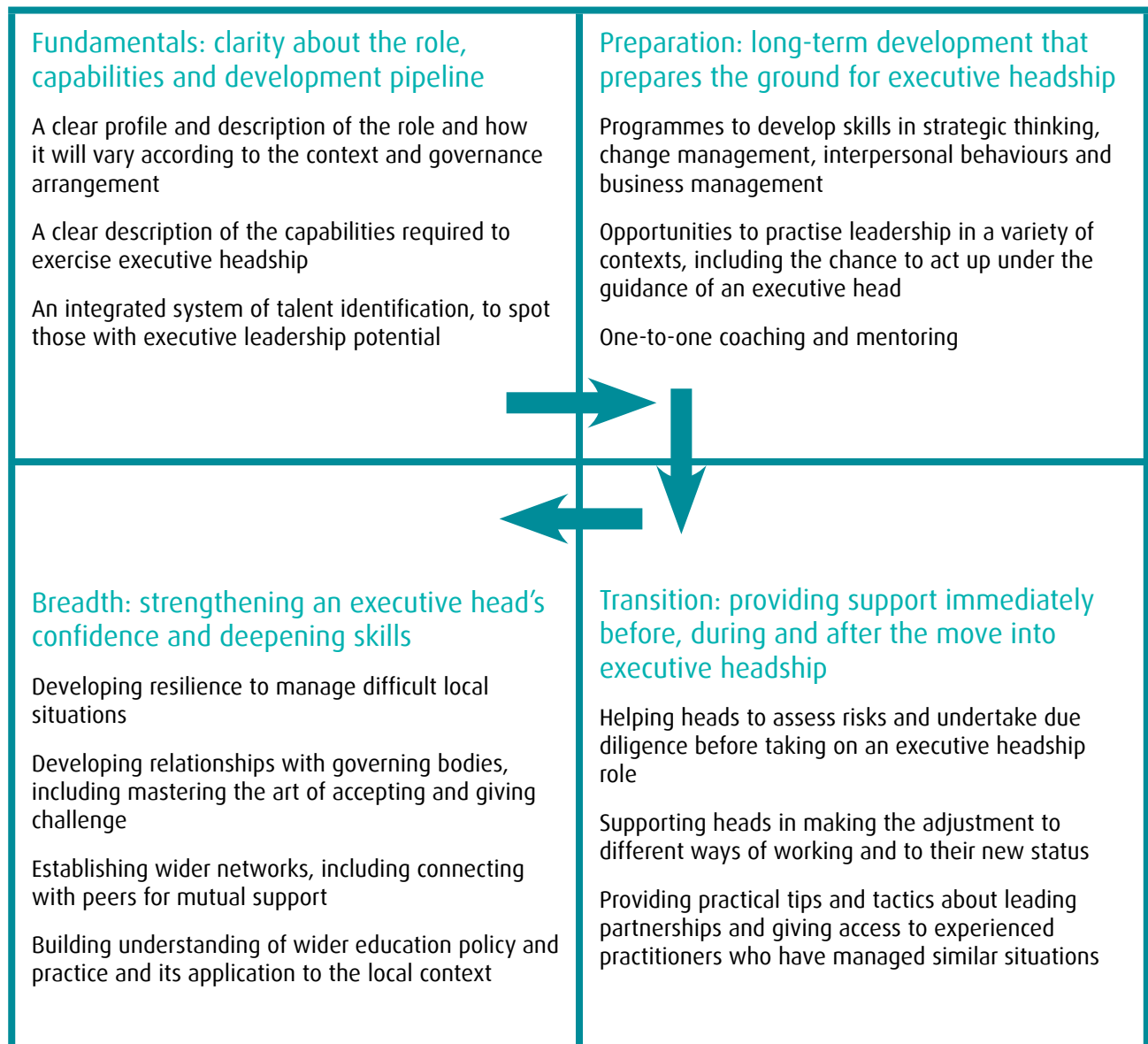
All this points to drawing on the approaches and experience that have been developed more widely within the school system. Key success factors for succession planning include:

- the definition of future skills and attributes
- active recruitment and nurturing of potential leaders
- intensive support at transition points
- commitment to further development and lifelong learning

Best practice also emphasises the benefits of developing leaders internally ('growing our own'), through early talent-spotting, allowing access to a range of different career opportunities, and by distributing leadership opportunities. Many executive heads understand this and are following these principles in developing leaders in the schools they lead (Hill, 2010; Hill & Matthews, 2010).

Learning from this experience, and the practice of other organisations, we have identified a four-stage model that would, we believe, provide the school system with a strategy for identifying, training and supporting its best leaders and moving them successfully into executive headship (Figure 25).

**Figure 25: Model for developing a more strategic approach to the development of executive heads**





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## 7: Assessing the value that executive heads bring

The practice of executive headship is, as we have seen, in its relative infancy. Most of the analysis of its impact has been via case studies rather than quantitative analysis over time. It is difficult, therefore, to collate and present definitive evidence on the impact of executive headship and what follows comes, as it were, with health warnings. The evidence at this stage is indirect rather than direct but taken as a whole describes a positive view in respect of the added value executive heads bring.

### Impact of executive heads on improved attainment

In 2009, Manchester University published research undertaken for the National College on the impact of school federations and other collaborative partnerships (Chapman et al, 2009b). Not all federations and partnerships are led by executive heads and nor are all executive heads working in the context of a federation or collaborative partnership. Nevertheless, there is a significant overlap between the two; chapter 3 indicated that around one-third of executive heads worked within the context of a federation and more than one-third within the context of a collaboration or partnership.

The researchers studied 264 schools from a random sample of 50 local authorities and grouped into 122 federations. They compared these with an equivalent sample of 264 non-federated schools with a similar baseline in terms of performance. Their analysis showed that federation was not only positively related to performance in the years following federation but that the impact was greatest where the aim of the federation was to raise educational standards by federating lower and higher attaining schools.

The other area where quantitative data is now available is in relation to the NLE programme. Again some caution must be exercised. Not all NLEs act as executive heads when they support other schools, though most do exercise a degree of executive function.

Examination and test results for 2007 to 2009 involving schools supported by NLEs show the following (Hill & Matthews, 2010):

- Primary schools supported by NLEs during 2007/08 improved the average percentage of pupils gaining Level 4 in English and maths at Key Stage 2 by 10 percentage points, while schools nationally flatlined over the same two-year period (ie, saw no increase in attainment).
- For secondary schools supported by NLEs during 2007/08, the improvement rate in GCSE pass rates over the two years (as measured by the percentage of students gaining five GCSEs at grades A<sup>\*</sup>-C including English and maths) was double the national average.

### Impact of executive heads on school improvement

The improvement in attainment is consistent with the contribution executive heads are making to school improvement. Chapter 2 highlighted the way that reports by Ofsted on schools given a notice to improve or that are in special measures commonly refer to the role of an executive head in securing improvement in the school. The extracts below are examples of scores that could have been cited.

**“The executive headteacher, well supported by the local authority, has been very successful in arresting the school’s decline and improving pupils’ progress.”**

Kings Avenue Primary School,  
Ofsted inspection, May 2008

**“The executive headteacher and head of school are tackling the main issues facing the school with rigour and determination.”**

Westgate Primary School,  
Ofsted monitoring report, November 2009

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“Since the start of the academic year, the executive headteacher and senior leaders have swiftly introduced and implemented a range of actions to tackle the key issues for improvement, namely attendance, behaviour, the quality of teaching and students’ progress and attainment.”

Plant Hill Arts College, Ofsted monitoring report, January 2010

The improvements come about, according to a small study for the National College of primary schools led by executive heads (Barnes, 2006), because the leadership of executive heads facilitates and results in:

- transformation achieved through an experienced and successful head applying their knowledge and understanding in a new setting, knowing what success looks like and setting out to achieve it
- transference of effective school systems from the host school, or the generation of new ones based on an understanding of effectiveness
- opportunities for senior and middle leaders to:
  - be coached by the executive head
  - assume positions of increased responsibility
  - learn from host school leaders
- improved management structures
- improved behaviour where this was applicable
- a rigorous focus on learning and achievement based on
  - high expectations
  - professional development
- improved clarity of focus for all staff and mechanisms to support this
- a challenging approach to underperformance
- the development of a can-do culture
- enhanced confidence in the school community in the potential of the school to secure improvement

These findings are reinforced by evaluations of the work of NLEs (Hill & Matthews, 2008; 2010), though it is important to stress that executive leaders rely and draw on the resources of a strong or high-performing school in order to achieve these outcomes in the weaker partner.

## Impact of executive heads on school leadership

The benefits that executive heads bring in relation to school leadership operate on a number of levels. First, as the survey data in chapter 3 showed, they assist with recruitment, particularly for small primary schools. This is borne out by other research:

“A key driver of formal collaborations was the difficulty in recruiting headteachers for small rural schools. Executive headship was seen first and foremost as improving the likelihood of appointing a headteacher of the right calibre. For this reason, executive headship was the preferred model of formal collaboration in all three local authorities, and support of various degrees was offered to schools wishing to undertake this solution.”

Todman et al, 2009: 4

Second, they provide a means – particularly in the primary sector – of increasing leadership capacity. The model of having a single headteacher responsible for the leadership of each individual primary school is struggling to cope with the current demands of the post, particularly in small schools. Many primary headteachers are spending a considerable number of hours each week teaching (Hill, 2010) and this leaves them insufficient time for their leadership role and tasks. The opportunities to delegate may also be restricted because there are not many other members of staff. These problems will be particularly acute in small rural primary schools where headteachers may spend up to 80 per cent of the week teaching (Todman et al, 2009).

Executive headship provides a solution to this problem:

“A likely outcome of sharing a headteacher between schools (executive headship) would be to reduce or eliminate the head’s own class teaching commitment. This would allow additional dedicated time for fulfilling leadership and management responsibilities and could be expected to lead to a notable improvement both in school strategic planning and in the head’s work-life balance.”

Todman et al, 2009: 5

**Third**, executive headship is resulting in a substantial boost to leadership development (Barnes et al, 2005; Hill, 2010; Hill & Matthews, 2010). Chapter 5 illustrated how senior and middle leaders were benefiting from the development opportunities of working with staff in other schools.

Analysis of reports on thematic visits by Ofsted to 24 national support schools (most of which are led by heads acting as executive heads in either a temporary or permanent capacity) identified 10 recurring themes relating to how these heads practised leadership development (Figure 26).

In all but two cases, inspectors found the practice of the schools in leadership development to be 'outstanding' and even in the residual two cases, they were supportive and complimentary about the work of NSSs in this area. All 10 themes confirm how executive heads value and support leadership development, but themes 5, 6, 7, 9 and 10 in particular demonstrate the way in which executive heads foster leadership across the schools for which they are responsible.

**Figure 26: Themes emerging from Ofsted visits to NSSs to survey the development of leadership skills and effectiveness**

1. Clear leadership vision is allied to high expectations and is visible throughout the school.
2. The senior leadership of the school communicates effectively with other leaders and with staff.
3. Senior leaders are focused on leading effective teaching and learning.
4. Senior leadership teams ensure that there is effective and systematic performance management in place across the school and in other schools with which they may be working.
5. The leadership team takes positive steps to identify and support aspiring leaders and provides clear pathways for leadership progression.
6. The leadership of the school provides intensive support to help develop middle leaders, including enabling them to develop expertise in new areas.
7. The senior leadership team develops a culture that empowers staff to take decisions.
8. Fostering student leadership is a key aspect of supporting leadership development in the school.
9. Support for leadership development is not confined to the NSS but includes other schools with which the NSS may be working.
10. Partnership with other schools is a powerful source of professional and leadership development for staff and leaders in NSSs.

Source: Hill & Matthews, 2010: 80-84

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## Impact of executive headship on cost-effectiveness

Although schools have not on the whole entered into executive headship arrangements primarily to make savings, the restructuring of leadership teams following the appointment of an executive head can result in reduced costs:

“The secondary school example (in our Managing School Resources tool) demonstrates how, by employing an executive principal and administrative staff across two schools and having single department heads, the management and administrative costs for one school have reduced from £633,000 to £447,000, a reduction of nearly 30 per cent. This is approximately 6 per cent of the school’s £3 million total annual revenue expenditure.... In another example, a secondary school has federated with two local middle schools and two local first schools. Net annual savings include £120,000 from rationalising the leadership structure and £100,000 through joint procurement. This represents approximately 2 per cent of overall revenue expenditure for the federation as a whole.”

Audit Commission, 2009: 38

A study of formal collaborations between small rural primary schools in three local authorities (Todman et al, 2009) explains in detail how savings accrue as a result of the introduction of executive headship:

“Where schools share a headteacher, the main financial benefit would derive from dividing the cost of the single head’s salary. This would create savings which may be re-invested in a number of ways, for example, improving administrative support and sharing staff across the schools.”

Todman et al, 2009: 4

The same conclusion has been reached by North Yorkshire County Council:

“The money saved by not employing two heads can be ploughed into additional teaching support. It depends from case to case, but usually this arrangement means that the head has more non-teaching time than the individual previous headship posts had, which means that they are better able to do the job and to provide leadership and support to the other staff. It also means that management points can be built in to provide one or more of the other teachers with some career progression – something currently lacking in many small schools.”

Cited in National College, 2008: 2

In addition to these direct savings, executive heads can also bring increased cost-effectiveness in other ways. By leading two or more schools, they have a greater economy of scale for organising support service functions such as ICT, maintenance and procurement. On taking over a school, executive heads normally deploy their bursar or business manager to forensically examine costs across the school group, federation or chain to identify areas where resources might be better used. In some cases, they are using the teaching and learning model they have developed to benchmark the cost of curriculum provision across the schools they lead (Hill, 2010).

## Conclusion

There is, then, a range of positive outcomes associated with executive headship and the evidence is now strong that where effective leaders work across two or more schools they can make a positive difference. Furthermore, the pace at which executive headship is growing provides further circumstantial evidence of the value that school leaders and local authorities consider it offers. It does, however, require a further in-depth study to track and quantify these benefits over time and make comparisons with other schools.

However, the development of executive headship has not been without its problems and challenges and these are explored further in chapter 8.

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## 8: Challenges, problems and risks in developing the executive headship role

Chapter 7 outlined the way in which executive headship is adding value to the school system. In this chapter, we examine some of the challenges, problems and risks that have been and are associated with the development of the role. Some of the issues are technical in nature while others relate to how the role is developed and managed.

### Absence of a clear legal framework

As was made clear right at the start of this report, the position of executive head currently does not have any basis in English education law. Figure 27 summarises the current legal framework. In exercising executive headship in the various ways described in chapter 4, some governing bodies and executive heads are operating on the margins of what is legally permissible. For example, in some of the models we described there could be said to be two people responsible for different aspects of headship in the same school, with the person formally named as being accountable for the school not in reality having complete authority for the operation of the whole of the school's activities.

This is not an issue in those situations where schools have established a clear legal basis by ensuring that the executive head is the substantive head of all the schools for which he or she has responsibility (Figures 20 and 21). Even outside these scenarios, there do not seem to be significant practical or day-to-day problems in operating executive headship arrangements. As chapter 4 explained, the position can be formalised either by having a formal contract or agreement governing the operation of the executive headship arrangement between two or more schools or by drawing on the legitimacy and authority that come from the remit of a governing body of the federation or chain. Nevertheless, the question of whether all the current executive headship arrangements are within the law as it stands remains open to question.

“The evidence is that school leaders are increasingly experimenting with the range of statutory frameworks and, where appropriate, combining elements from different frameworks to fit their needs at a given time.”

Chapman et al, 2009a: 12

#### Figure 27: Summary of education law relating to the post of headteacher

The Education Act 2002 specifies (section 35(3) for community, voluntary-controlled, community special and maintained nursery schools and section 36(3) for foundation, voluntary-aided and foundation special schools) that all schools must have:

- (a) a person appointed as headteacher, or
- (b) a person appointed to carry out the functions of the headteacher of the school —
  - (i) pending the appointment of a headteacher, or
  - (ii) in the absence of the headteacher

who is legally responsible and accountable for its operation.

The School Teachers' Pay and Conditions of Service Document (STPCD) (DCSF, 2009) permits a head to be the head of more than one school on a permanent or temporary basis, provided that she/he is the substantive head of one of the schools.

Thus, every school must have a head, but no school may have two heads, though one head could be the designated head of more than one school and there is no reference in either the Education Act 2002 or the STPCD to an executive head.

Source: ASCL, 2010

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As independent state schools, academies operate within a different framework. The governance arrangements for an academy are set out in an academy trust's articles of association and confirmed in its funding agreement with the secretary of state. However, where principals of academies act as executive heads of maintained schools (a scenario that is likely to become more common under the government's plans for outstanding schools to become academies and support other schools), their legal status may require clarification, particularly since academies are not able to form federations with maintained schools.

These problems have arisen because education law was written for an era in which each institution operated discretely with its own governing body and headteacher. As the government has promoted new models of school partnership and new models of leadership, it has failed to provide the appropriate legal framework for these arrangements. There may be scope to use the Power to Innovate<sup>5</sup> provisions to regularise some of the executive headship arrangements that have arisen but we are not aware that any school or local authority has attempted to use them.

The challenge is to develop a legal framework that encompasses the function and scope of executive headship, and does so while still enabling groups of schools to have the flexibility to apply arrangements that suit their particular circumstances.

## Limitations of the statutory pay and conditions of service framework

Reflecting the provisions of education legislation, the School Teachers' Pay and Conditions Document (STPCD; DCSF, 2009) does not refer to executive headteachers. However, it does provide a framework (DCSF, 2009: 153-4 paras 26-41) for:

- recognising and remunerating the work of headteachers who are leading more than one school
- adjusting the pay of other senior leaders affected by a head leading more than one school

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<sup>5</sup> Under the Power to Innovate, which forms part of the Education Act 2002, the Secretary of State for Education is able, temporarily, to suspend or modify education legislation that may be holding back, or even stopping, innovative approaches to raising standards.

However, the framework only applies where a head is also acting as a substantive head for another school on either a permanent or temporary basis. So while the governance arrangements described in Figures 20 and 21 fall within the STPCD, those described in Figures 18, 19 and 22 (unless it is an academy chain) do not. The question of whether an interim executive head post would be covered by the STPCD would depend on whether the executive head was also the substantive head of the other school. If they were, and their contract had been amended accordingly, they would be covered by the provisions of the STPCD, but otherwise they would not.

As with the legal position, schools and governing bodies are in practice able to find their way around these constraints. For example<sup>6</sup>, where a head is executive head for three schools and substantive head of one (school 1) but not the other two (schools 2 and 3) it would be possible for the governors of school 1 to:

- agree with the governing bodies of schools 2 and 3 the nature, extent and cost of the service to be provided by school 1
- arrange for the sum agreed to be paid directly to school 1
- agree with the executive head in a formal memorandum how much, if anything, the head will be paid for providing the service
- agree how much, if anything, should be paid to the deputies or any other teacher for carrying out additional responsibilities in the absence of the head

However, all the time schools and governing bodies are having to find ways to work around the system rather than being able to draw on a fit-for-purpose pay and conditions framework.

A further factor that will alter the dynamics of the situation is the creation of more academies which already have the freedom to operate and pay staff outside the STPCD. The new academies being facilitated by the coalition government could generate significant numbers of executive heads, but they may be working with schools that are not academies. This will further complicate the situation.

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<sup>6</sup> This scenario reflects the example illustrated and discussed in chapter 4 (Figure 18).

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## Lack of clarity over the role of executive heads in the inspection system

As has already been noted, Ofsted inspection reports quite commonly refer to the role of an executive head in helping to improve the performance of a school. However, the formal position of executive heads in the inspection process is not entirely clear. Ofsted will comment on how well the overall leadership arrangements are working, but the head named in the inspection report will be the substantive head, even where an executive head is playing a major role in running the school. Ofsted has no formal remit to look at or comment on the post of executive head or chief executive officer because the role does not exist in law.

As part of the revised inspection arrangements introduced from September 2009 onwards, all schools in a federation or sharing 'important aspects of their provision' – which would presumably include schools overseen by an executive head – are to be inspected at the same time (Ofsted, 2009; revised January 2010). It is unclear how far these provisions are operating in practice or will apply to schools that are part of a large group, federation or chain of schools, where Ofsted's capacity to inspect all schools simultaneously would be stretched.

## Managing the tension between strategic and operational roles

Many of the executive heads we interviewed spoke of the challenge of balancing their time between strategic and operational activities, particularly in the early days of their executive headship. The balance will of course depend on the local context. However, there was a broad consensus on the need to focus on strategic management:

**“The role of executive headteacher is incompatible with a teaching role. There is too much time involved in teaching to do the executive headteacher role as well. When I stopped teaching, the planning and the effectiveness of the school leapt forward.”**

Executive headteacher,  
two-school multi-phase federation

**“The difference between my role and a ‘traditional head’; I don’t check everything. The leadership team meet without me and don’t come to me to check everything off. You can’t be an old [traditional] head across two schools.”**

Executive headteacher,  
three-school multi-phase partnership

However, a number of those interviewed also explained the difficult process of letting go of the more hands-on and day-to-day involvement in the life of a school:

**“You don’t track individuals in the same way as before, you don’t reward achievement instantly as you hear about it later in the week.”**

**“The skill of being hands-off (not to interfere too quickly) was difficult to learn at first. It is important to allow those with new jobs to do them.”**

Executive headteacher,  
two-school multi-phase federation

Studies of early executive head arrangements (eg Barnes et al, 2005) seem to suggest that the tension between managing strategic and operational duties eases over time and that coaching deputies and assistant heads in their new roles, learning to delegate and bringing in external support for time-consuming, ad-hoc tasks (such as running a major building project) can help resolve the problem.

## Maintaining the confidence of staff and stakeholders

Chapter 6 emphasised the importance of securing and maintaining the confidence of governors. But reassuring other stakeholders and winning their support are equally important.

Although executive headship brings many opportunities for middle and senior leaders, not all will necessarily espouse the adoption of new ways of working or be positive about the new structural arrangements. In interviews, some staff expressed concern that the absence of the executive head from their school had resulted in the staff feeling neglected. They also pointed to how the increased opportunity to step up into more senior roles had been accompanied by parallel increases in accountability for results.

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This issue may be particularly acute in federations or partnerships of very small schools, as described to us by one head of school:

“The other school is low performing and the executive head has to concentrate on their issues. This means that my school may suffer in the longer term, although it hasn’t very much immediately. The opinion in the other school is that the executive head has had a very beneficial impact... The capacity of the school was reduced as the headteacher had teaching responsibilities that needed to be moved to part-time teachers – this causes disruption to the classes with relief teachers. Time capacity is very small in the assistant headteacher role and the executive head is absent for long periods. Other roles in the school also have to pick up more work to try and achieve same levels.”

Clearly, the move to executive headship needs to be planned and thought through in terms of its impact on all the schools involved. It will also need to be accompanied by processes for providing coaching, guidance and support to those individuals who take on the new leadership opportunities. Above all, communication and explanation will be vital to securing the support of other staff:

“Trying to build relationships quickly and knowing that you had a limited amount of time to get your team on board with you. That involved a lot of energy and a lot of time spent with people. Investing a lot of time in the human side of the job, which for me is the most important part of the job, because if you get that right, it impacts positively on the learning.”

Cited in Barnes, 2006: 26

Maintaining the confidence of parents is also more of an issue in the primary sector than the secondary sector. Parents of children at primary school are more used to taking and picking up their children from school and seeing and meeting the headteacher through, for example, being invited to be part of class assemblies. In a secondary school, pupils are more independent and parents will visit the school and see the headteacher less frequently.

So executive heads in the primary sector have a particular challenge to ensure that parents understand and support the new arrangements.

These comments from secondary and primary school leaders describe the issues well from their different perspectives:

“The children all know who the executive headteacher is. She is the main leader of the school - she just isn’t here all the time.”

Head of department,  
two-school secondary federation

“The biggest challenge was to keep the trust of the parents in both schools.”

Executive headteacher,  
primary two-school federation

## Opting for the appropriate governance model

The role of executive head, as chapter 3 confirmed, quite frequently comes about as a result of a crisis in recruitment or performance. This creates pressure to put in place governance arrangements that are not always sustainable in the longer term.

Significantly, a study of small primary school schools found that:

“... executive headships were often seen as provisional arrangements. Where this was so, federation tended to be perceived as a device for confirming the permanence of the arrangement, rather than as a means in itself to bring about institutional change and improvement.”

Todman et al, 2009: 8

In this scenario, executive headship comes first, while federation, locking in the arrangement between the schools long term, comes later. Executive headship by itself does not always provide the long-term answer to the problem of leadership in a school.



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Where there wasn't the pressure of an immediate problem to be dealt with, practice varied as to how thoroughly schools thought through the governance structure they had in mind. In some cases there was considerable research:

“At the time [2003], there were no existing examples of federations. My then chair of governors had a strong business background, and held a strong view that leadership in schools was currently nonsense. We thought, ‘If we are doing well, shouldn't we be helping others?’ We researched the possibilities, agreed how we would set up the role, and went to the local authority and put the offer on the table with a set of key guiding principles. They liked it, but it took a year for them to find another school for us to federate with.”

Executive headteacher,  
five-school primary federation

Another executive headteacher told us how his governors and school very deliberately opted for a hard governance model at the outset as part of accepting an extended executive headship. They saw the model as intrinsic to the role achieving the objectives they had set for it:

“If our federation was going to be held accountable for improving the performance of the new school, we had to have direct control over the school.”

Executive headteacher of three schools  
two federated and one in partnership)

In other cases, the schools involved just seemed to slip into executive headship:

“Not much planning was involved in creating the executive head role – it just evolved.”

Governor, two-school secondary partnership

Sometimes a school did have a long-term vision and strategy, to which the executive headship was party, but didn't seek buy-in across the board from the start:

“With hindsight, it would have been better to be more up-front with the vision for the federation.”

Executive headteacher,  
two-school primary federation

A number of executive heads explained how their form of governance was likely to change as their involvement in and work with other schools evolved:

“The model for our executive head depends on the context. At the moment we have a principal at each academy and an executive head overseeing them. Once the situation becomes more stable, and the new academy establishes itself, we will need a different kind of structure.”

Governor, two-academy partnership

These findings point to the need for there to be more support for heads and governors as they think about the governance options open to them when they introduce executive headship.

## Underestimating the risks

At various points we have emphasised the need for executive heads to assess risks and to undertake due diligence before taking an executive role. The risk most commonly identified in interviews was the reputational risk: the risks to a high-performing school from being associated with one that was performing poorly or in special measures.

In fact the evidence suggests that strong schools involved in school improvement work actually benefit from their involvement (Hill & Matthews 2008; 2010) but governors, parents and the local media may not see things this way and will need convincing that the interests of the home school are being safeguarded.

There is also the risk of executive heads over-extending themselves and the resources and capacity of their schools. They could end up taking on a task for which they are not equipped. Because they have been successful in turning round or incorporating one school does not mean they can automatically take on another.

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In the current climate of public spending cutbacks, due diligence will also involve a careful examination of a school's budget and cost profile before committing to a permanent executive head arrangement.

## Failing to develop the right relationship with the local authority

The role of local authorities is changing. They no longer run schools and their role in providing school improvement services is diminishing and may go entirely. As more schools become academies this will also affect how authorities interact with schools. However, there are still several important functions for local authorities to fulfil, including ensuring every child has access to a school place, co-ordinating admissions, attending to the needs of pupils with special needs, identifying schools that are underperforming (or at risk of moving into this category) and brokering support from another school or other third party.

The relationship with schools and groups of schools, federations and chains will, therefore, increasingly operate at a more strategic level. The move toward this style of relationship was echoed in our interviews with executive heads.

In some cases, the local authority had been supportive and helpful in helping to establish the executive headship and in other cases, less so. However, the over-riding theme was that support from the local authority was important, but in a hands-off way – 'let us get on with it'.

One practical suggestion was for the leadership of local authorities to improve its understanding of the operation and potential of executive headship:

*"The training of directors of children's services needs input from executive heads about how they work – they need to understand how we work. There are opportunities to make savings because the directors could devolve responsibilities to executive heads and be creative. Overall, there should be more engagement between the directors and executive heads."*

Executive headteacher,  
three-school multi-phase partnership

## Conclusion

The problems, challenges and risks identified in this chapter need to be addressed; the recommendations we make in chapter 9 go some way towards this. However, these factors should not be seen as 'showstoppers'. Instead they should be seen as the expected and inevitable issues that accompany innovation, enterprise and new policy approaches. They need to be worked through rather than being seen as justifications for slowing or halting the pace of change.

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## 9: Recommendations

In this chapter, we draw on the analysis in the earlier chapters to recommend the changes we consider are needed to support the further development of executive headship.

### Providing a clear legal framework

The legal uncertainty surrounding the way in which some executive headship arrangements operate needs to be resolved. The post of executive head does need to be established in education law. However, we recommend that schools and governors should still be accorded ample flexibility to adapt the arrangements to suit their particular circumstances, given the significance that context plays in defining how each executive headship works in practice.

Rather than trying to define precisely the respective roles of executive head and head in legislation, we propose that an alternative approach might be to require governors to designate for every school for which they have responsibility the person that has the responsibility for<sup>7</sup>:

1. securing the quality of education in the school and being accountable for educational standards in terms of performance tables and Ofsted inspections (including the completion of the self-evaluation framework)
2. drawing up, submitting to governors and implementing the school development plan
3. reporting regularly to governors on the progress made towards achieving the aims and objectives set for the school and progress towards meeting specific targets
4. having the power to exclude pupils for fixed period(s) of not more than 45 days in total in a year or permanently
5. advising the governing body on the appointment, remuneration, capability or dismissal of members of staff
6. deploying, managing and leading all teaching and non-teaching staff of the school and allocating particular duties to them

7. drawing up for the governing body and overseeing the operation of a performance management policy for staff, including being responsible for the appraisal process
8. suspending a member of staff
9. determining, organising and implementing an appropriate curriculum and ensuring that the national curriculum is implemented in the school
10. evaluating the standards of teaching and learning in the school and ensuring that proper standards of professional performance are established and maintained
11. liaising with external partners and other statutory agencies regarding services to be provided on the school site
12. exercising day-to-day management of the school
13. overseeing and implementing a safeguarding policy
14. exercising overall responsibility for the internal organisation, management and budgetary control of all the schools for which the governing body has responsibility including implementing the strategic framework established by the governors

Schools with a single, traditional headteacher would designate their head in respect of all these roles. However, in scenarios where there was an executive head, the governing body would agree those roles for which the executive head would be responsible and those for which a head of school or deputy head would be held accountable. We would not generally expect more than one person to be accountable for any single task but the allocation of names to roles would clarify for governors, staff and parents in each particular context how the executive headship arrangement was operating. We think it would be sensible for the arrangements to be reviewed at least annually.

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<sup>7</sup> This is not a complete list of the statutory duties of headteachers but an indicative list of the main responsibilities involved in leading a school.

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The sort of legal framework described above would also provide a better and clearer basis for:

- Ofsted, in operating the inspection system, though it may also be necessary to amend the law so that it can take account of the role of executive heads in the inspection process
- principals of academies, in acting as executive heads in the maintained sector
- the School Teachers' Review Body (STRB), in being able to consider the remuneration of executive heads, should the secretary of state decide to give the STRB a remit to this effect
- ensuring that the key leadership tasks are carried out by senior leaders and minimising the risk of middle leaders being inappropriately given tasks for which heads of school or executive heads should be responsible

## Improving professional development

The nature of the professional development support that executive heads need and want was described in chapter 6. In order to address the issues identified in that chapter, we recommend that the National College develop its role in relation to the development of executive heads based on:

- adopting the four-stage model described in Figure 25, which provides a framework for identifying and supporting the development of executive heads working in primary, special, secondary and cross-phase contexts
- using school leaders and the clusters of schools they lead to ensure that mentoring, coaching and support from other, more experienced executive heads and learning from seeing executive headship practised in different contexts are built into the design of development programmes on executive headship
- incorporating content on executive headship into other leadership development programmes so that young leaders can be aware of potential career opportunities

## Offering advice to governors

Chapter 4 emphasised the importance of the local context in shaping the nature of the executive head role. There are important considerations for governing bodies to take into account, such as the purpose of the role, the governance arrangements, the distribution of accountabilities, the nature of the relationships across the groups of schools and the reaction of staff, parents and pupils to new arrangements.

We recommend that the Department for Education consider the production of a guide or toolkit for governors. This would take governors and executive heads through a series of questions based on the reasons and circumstances that were leading them to consider introducing executive headship and help them to determine the appropriate remit of the proposed role and the appropriate governance arrangements.

## Commissioning a longitudinal evaluation

The evidence of the impact of executive headship is at this stage provisional and largely circumstantial, though the evidence that is available points to it being a positive development for the education system. However, the issue would benefit from a more in-depth longitudinal study and we recommend that the Department for Education in association with the National College considers commissioning such research.

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# Appendix: study methodology

The study consisted of a primary research phase conducted by Hay Group which involved engagement with the broad education sector, including consultation with the professional associations such as the Association of school and college Leaders (ASCL) The Association for All School Leaders (known as NAHT), the Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL), the teachers' union NASUWT, executive headteachers themselves, and school staff working with executive headteachers.

Our working definition of executive headteacher was:

any headteacher role which has some kind of lead managerial responsibility for more than one school

## Phase A: Understanding the context of executive headship

### Desk-based literature review and data analysis

The first stage of the project involved a team of Hay Group consultants and analysts reviewing existing materials on executive headship, and its links to new models of school leadership and school organisation. There were three broad aims of this phase, to:

- draw together an understanding of how context affects executive head and CEO positions, what they and those who report directly to them are held accountable for, and how they compare with traditional headship positions
- begin to assess the nature and prevalence of these positions across the sector, including an assessment of the types of position in existence (both nationally and internationally) and historical trends in recruitment (again relating to school context)
- begin to understand what the capability requirements are of different executive head positions

The team reviewed existing published information and drew on external data sources provided by partners to supplement the research.

### Survey design and distribution and face-to-face interviews

The survey stage of the project involved several steps as follows.

#### i) Verifying the size of the executive headteacher population and its geographic spread:

A contact campaign with local authorities was carried out to request data on current executive head positions, using our working definition.

A series of demographic questions were asked within the survey to allow further post-survey stratification by respondent:

- role (multiple choice)
- category of school
- school phase

federation type (including an option for heads operating in an advisory capacity)

Finally for this stage, we sent out a survey to headteachers and principals using the membership databases of the professional associations we had consulted.

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## ii) Survey of executive headteachers

From the information collected in the initial survey, all executive heads identified were sent a second, electronic survey seeking information about their roles, pay and contract arrangements, context of appointment, governance structures and specific details of role accountabilities. Optional questions were included on specific remuneration arrangements, contracts for performance-related pay (including benefits, incentives, bonuses etc), and specific performance management arrangements in terms of before/after school improvement outcomes.

## iii) Face-to-face interviews

### a) Job analysis interviews with executive headteachers

Using contacts from the survey phase, we carried out face-to-face interviews with a range of executive heads, conducted in line with Hay Group's protocol for conduct during school visits. The purpose of these interviews was to:

- understand the specific accountabilities of executive head/CEO positions and how they differ according to context (eg, primary, secondary, rural, urban etc), and how they differ from traditional head positions
- understand how this context affects relationships with school governance structures, external organisations and those reporting directly to the executive head/CEO
- understand the critical drivers of executive head positions (eg, budgets, falling rolls, school improvement) and the professional background required to deliver successfully in these roles
- remuneration arrangements
- performance target information

We were able to arrange interviews in 15 school or federation contexts. The range of contextual factors we saw as being important for the sample were:

- type of arrangement (eg, federation, collaboration, partnership, trust)
- arrangement size and complexity (scale/phase)
- faith/community
- school performance
- rural/urban
- academy/non-academy

### b) Face-to-face interviews with other school leaders and governors

As well as meeting executive headteachers in each of the participating school settings, we also conducted interviews with the heads of school who report to them, and interviewed a member of the governing body.

We also interviewed a number of school staff to gain their perspectives on the impact of the executive head on their role.

## iv) Survey of external perspectives

To round our data about the issues, a series of face-to-face and telephone interviews was carried out with a wider group of stakeholders.



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## Phase B: Job evaluation and competency profiling

### Analysis of the roles

Using the rich contextual information obtained through the research phase, role profiles for a range of executive headteacher posts were created. The Hay Group's chart profile method of job evaluation was used to determine the job size of each role.

The resulting job evaluation scores enable comparison with other roles of similar sizes in our reward database, which contains salary information for more than 600,000 jobs across the public and private sector.

The final stage of analysis involved profiling the behavioural competencies necessary for performance in each role type identified. A skills profile for executive heads is set out in chapter 6 (Figure 24).

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