



National College for  
Teaching & Leadership

# **New pathways into headship?**

## **Annex 1: Literature review**

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## Introduction

Headteacher recruitment, retention and succession remain major policy challenges in England. There is increasing recognition that preparing teachers as leaders cannot be left to chance. Thomson (2009: 32), for instance, argues that doing nothing relies entirely on the “vagaries and serendipities of circumstance. Some headteachers might offer leadership opportunities to teachers, others might not”. For Bush (2008: 307) headteachers, principals and senior staff should “undertake specific preparation for the distinctive role of educational leadership and management. Headship is a specialist position that requires different skills from those of classroom teachers”.

Within the context of contemporary debates over headship preparation and succession, the New Pathways into Headship research project was commissioned to focus on three research groups of headteachers. These groups were defined as: fast track entrants to headships; younger headteachers who have progressed to headship outside an accelerated leadership development programme; career changers into teaching, who progress to headship.

To inform the research, the aims of this literature review were to synthesize existing evidence relating to school leadership and career progression pathways towards and into headship. The review combined two approaches. First, publications already known to the research team to constitute key evidence and arguments in the field were purposefully included. Second, a literature search was conducted using the following databases: CERUK<sup>1</sup>; ERIC<sup>2</sup>; Google Scholar; JSTOR<sup>3</sup>; Web of Knowledge; Springer Link and Taylor and Francis online. The search terms were clustered around seven main themes. These were: headship; accelerated leadership development; young heads; career changers; career progression; headteacher appointment process; headteacher apprenticeship. An outline of the identified literature was developed and research publications were categorised thematically to develop and refine the initial search themes.

The final literature review presented here is organized around seven themes. First, pathways to headship are located within broader contemporary debates over leadership

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.ceruk.ac.uk/>

<sup>2</sup> Education Resources Information Center, <http://eric.ed.gov/>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.jstor.org/>

supply. Second, policy responses to leadership supply are considered, including on succession planning and fast track development programmes. Third, approaches to identifying potential headteachers and the associated risks of acceleration are explored and balanced against the effects of being able to support leaders. Fourth, common pathways into headship and the structural influences upon leadership careers are reviewed. Fifth, the processes of headteacher socialisation are discussed and a number of resulting career frameworks considered. Sixth, the challenges faced at the beginning of headship and common phases in the learning and action of new headteachers are explored. Seventh, the leadership approaches of headteachers in post are reviewed.

# 1. The need for school leaders

A range of studies has noted that the demand by schools for headteachers has the potential to outstrip supply (Howson 2005). Two measures are commonly used to monitor whether supply meets current demand. First, the headteacher vacancy rate, which over the last decade has remained at just below 1% of schools nationally (Earley et al 2012). While this equates to over 200 schools without a headteacher each year, the trend does not suggest a significant worsening in supply. Second, the headteacher re-advertisement rate, which conversely points to schools experiencing considerable and worsening difficulties in filling posts. Howson and Sprigade (2010), for instance, found record numbers of headteacher posts were re-advertised in 2009/10. In that year, the overall re-advertisement rate for primary headteacher posts exceeded 40% for the first time in the 26 year history of the Senior Staff Appointment Survey (up from 35% in 2006/07). For secondary heads, the re-advertisement rate rose to 28% (up from 19% in 2006/07). For special school heads, it rose to 41% (up from 33% in 2006/07).

Underlying these headlines rates, there are significant geographical and contextual variations. Thomson (2009) has shown how headteacher shortages are associated with particular locations (inner-city, rural), particular types of schools (schools in challenging circumstances, Catholic schools) and particular school sizes (small primary schools). Lupton (2005) has demonstrated how schools in more challenging contexts face above average difficulties in staff recruitment and retention. Howson and Sprigade (2010) have evidenced regional variations in the proportion of headteacher vacancies that are re-advertised. Table 1, for instance, calculates from Howson and Sprigade (2010) the 3 year average between 2007/08 – 2009/10 in the headteacher re-advertisement rate for each Government region in England. The South and East of England, including London, have faced notably higher re-advertisement rates. NCSL (2007) has also reported that headteacher vacancies rates are as high as 5% across a range of inner-London boroughs, well above the 1% national average.

**Table 1: Headteacher re-advertisement rates by Government region, three-year average between 2007/08 – 2009/10**

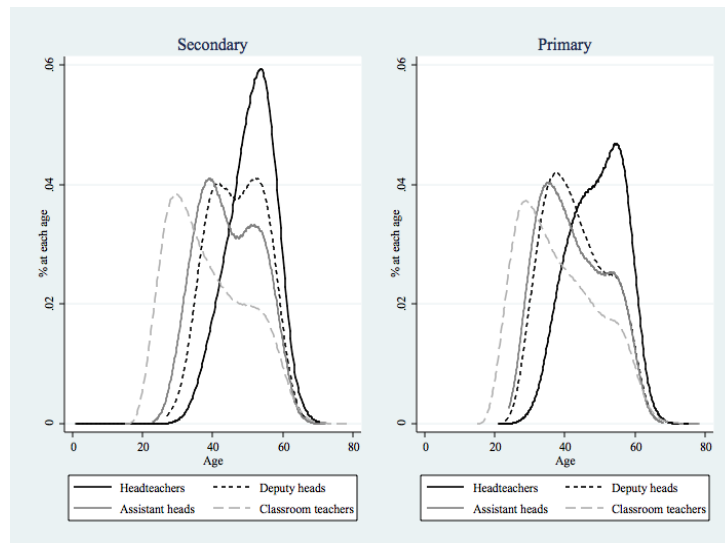
Region	Rate (%)
East of England	43
South East	42
Inner London	40
Outer London	40
East Midlands	36
West Midlands	35
North West	34
Yorks & Humber	33
South West	30
Wales	23
North East	22

Source: Howson and Sprigade (2010)

A number of explanations for challenges in headteacher recruitment has been noted. Howson (2005) suggests there are three key factors: a demographic bulge of older headteachers; a trend towards earlier retirement; falling applications for leadership posts. On, first, the demographic bulge, Earley et al (2012) reviewed the current age profile of school leaders in England with the 2010 School Workforce Census. They found that, compared to a decade ago, there were considerably more heads in their late 50s and 60s in November 2011. Just under a third of all headteachers were aged 55 years and over (up from a quarter in 2005). There were also, however, more teachers achieving headship in their 30s. As traced in Figure 1, Earley et al (2012) found a bimodal age distribution for most categories of teachers. The upper peak of this bimodal distribution was in the late fifties for all groups of teachers, reflecting the demographic bulge in teaching from those born after the end of the Second World War. The age of the lower peak varied across leadership levels. For assistant and deputy head posts this

was 39 and 40 years respectively, reflecting “a large number of appointments into these posts during a teacher’s 30s and large numbers of first promotions to headship from the late 30s onwards” (Earley et al 2012: 33).

**Figure 1: Age profile of teachers**



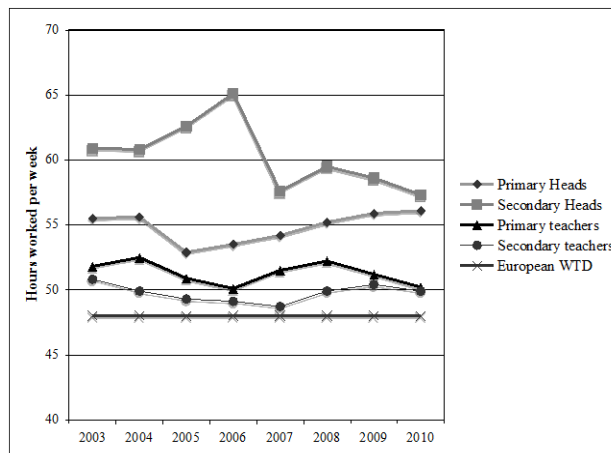
Source: Earley et al (2012: 34)

On the second trend, towards earlier retirement, Earley et al (2012) found that almost half of headteachers who reach the age of 55 take early retirement between the ages of 55 and 59 years. Howson (2007) has also noted that a significant proportion of headship vacancies, 31% of primary and 40% of secondary schools, are advertised because headteachers retire before the age of 60. On the third trend, of falling applications for leadership posts, a range of research has noted a declining pool of middle leaders attracted by headship (Gronn 2003, Hayes 2005). Earley et al (2002) found a quarter of deputy and assistant heads definitely wished to become a headteacher, but that 4 in 10 did not. Senior leaders with aspirations to headship were also found to prefer not to go to a school in a challenging situation. The NSCL (2007) reported that 43% of deputy heads and 70% of middle leaders expressed a desire not to move in to headship. ICM (2009) reported that one-third of deputy and assistant heads hoped to progress to headship in the next three years but another third had no plans to become headteachers.

Exploring a decline in aspirations among teachers to achieve headship, Smithers and Robinson (2007) argue that a lack of candidates for headship is rather surprising. This is especially the case in secondary schools given that, notwithstanding a changing age structure, the average teacher / headteacher ratio is 60:1. (In primary schools the ratio is 10:1 and hence a supply shortage can be seen as more likely). In light of this, Smithers and Robinson propose that factors beyond demography are important to a decline in headteacher supply, including: increased workload and too many Government initiatives that require implementation; excessive accountability and vulnerability to sacking through poor Ofsted reports; and an insufficient pay differential for the extra responsibility of headship (especially in the Primary sector).

On specifically workload, Deakin et al (2010) report from the Teachers' Workload Diary Survey 2010, that hours worked remain a common reason for teachers to leave the profession. The average hours worked per week has fallen for most grades of teacher in maintained primary, secondary and special schools since 2000. However the average hours worked remains high, at above 50 hours. Among primary headteachers, average hours worked has increased annually since 2005 to 56.1 hours per week in 2010. Among secondary headteachers the average was 57.3 hours per week, which represents a decrease compared to 2005. Figure 2 traces the average hours worked for headteachers and teachers from 2003. All groups of teachers have consistently remained above the European Working Time Directive, which includes the right to work no more than 48 hours per week.

**Figure 2: Average hours work by teachers and headteachers in England, 2003 to 2010**



Source: Deakin et al (2010)



A range of research has highlighted how workload and the nature and content of school leadership work have been strongly influenced by education policy reforms, in particular from the 1980s. Simkins (1997) showed, for instance, how following the 1988 Educational Reform Act (ERA) leaders had to manage the competing pressures of local governance, parental choice and central control in a 'balancing act'. Earley et al (2002) found schools had become more complex to manage following ERA, especially in terms of budgets, human resources, professional development and administration, and this had led to longer working hours. Gronn (2003), following Grace (1995), termed this trend 'intensification' and suggested that leadership had become 'greedy work' where Governments and agencies place total claims on school leaders, who are meant to work at a relentless pace and always be available and utterly committed. For Draper and McMichael (2003) this has led to a reluctance among teachers and middle leaders to take on further responsibilities, to address burdensome bureaucracy and to lose control over their lives. For Thomson (2009: 42), these influences have not been sufficiently recognized in policy responses to a decline in the supply of headteachers:

The most glaring gap in the supply problem-policy solution still lies in the comparative absence of strategies to address headteachers' workload, the nature of the work and its impacts on personal and family life. Sidelining this set of issues in the supply problemization [sic] is to ignore the evidence from numerous surveys of teacher and headteacher attitudes to school leadership. Teachers report over and over again that what they see in and as the job of headteacher *does* affect their decision about whether to apply or not.

## 2. Policy and succession planning

Policy responses to the challenge of leadership recruitment and retention in England can be seen to have reflected contemporary approaches to leadership development and school leadership more generally. Simkins (2012) maps three distinct eras of school leadership. First, the era of Administration, from 1944 to the mid-1980s, during which teachers had high degrees of autonomy and the work of school administrators, as 'lead professionals', was commonly underpinned by values derived from professional practice, situated within a bureaucratic framework of rules and procedures. During this time, a 'patchwork quilt' of Local Authority leadership development provision drew closely on social science theory. The second era of Management, from the mid-1980s to 1997, was marked by increasing Government concern about the performance of schools. Administrators were reconstituted in policy as 'managers' who were made responsible for their school's performance against centrally defined criteria. Leadership development (LD) began to set out occupational standards and competencies, often informed by private sector business management theory.

The third contemporary era of Leadership, began in 1997, Simkins argues, as New Labour articulated a 'modernization' agenda. Although debated, Simkins argues that this built on the managerial framework of school autonomy and accountability but added 'leadership' as a "stronger agentic thrust to instituting change and improving performance in the public sector" (2012: 625). To support this thrust, the NCSL was created in 2000 with the aim of providing both greater policy influence over and great coherence to leadership development provision. NCSL (2001) subsequently set out a five-stage career framework for leadership development (as emergent leadership, established school leadership, entry to headship, advanced leadership and consultant leadership). Each stage was populated with a range of development programmes including: Leading from the Middle, Leadership Pathways; NPQH and Leadership Programme for Serving Headteachers.

Across these programmes, NCSL (2007) also set out key areas in which it would seek to stimulate work to increase the supply of school leaders. These included: a focus on talent-spotting among teachers early in their careers, with the aim of developing their classroom expertise and their leadership skill; opportunities for aspirant leaders to experience aspects of leadership prior to taking on senior roles; the retention of talented leaders by encouraging governing bodies to work with headteachers to provide experiences that kept them invigorated. NCSL (2007) recognized that teachers can be discouraged by what they see as the overwhelming demands of headship, but argued

that this is not the only deterrent. Schools, NCSL argued, have traditionally waited for talent to emerge of its own accord, rather than seeking out leaders and this has created “a barrier that hinders more teachers setting their sights on the top jobs”. The system as a whole, NCSL (2005: 6) argued:

needs to look at the rewards and challenges of headship, needs to communicate the satisfactions and achievements more effectively and needs to consistently identify, nurture and guide leadership talent from the very earliest stages of teaching careers.

In practice, these stated ambitions can be distilled into at least three prominent overlapping contemporary policy approaches to leadership supply: new models of leadership; succession planning; new pathways into headship. On the first, new models of leadership, Tunnadine (2011) argues that leading beyond one’s own school, or ‘system leadership’ has roots, in part, in responses to the challenge of leadership succession. This includes school federations, executive headship and co-headships that evolve due to headteacher shortages. NCSL (2010) argues that the executive headteacher role is most common in the primary sector as a response to failure to recruit and hence the appointment of one headteacher across two schools. NCSL (2007) has also argued that these new models offer new ways to develop career development opportunities and pathways for aspirant leaders who can move across schools, federations and increasing Academy chains to gain experience in new leadership roles (Hill et al 2012).

The second policy approach is succession planning. At the school level, succession planning has become more commonly conceived as part of the role of school leadership. Hargreaves and Fink (2006) emphasize, for instance, the need for a systematic school approach to leadership recruitment and development. Good succession plans, they argue, are prepared long before the leader’s anticipated departure and are based on a clear diagnosis of the school’s existing stage of development and future needs. Earley and Jones (2010) argue that career development and planning in schools has not traditionally been strong, but where schools have taken leadership development seriously potential leaders have a strong chance of being developed, not only those who have self-selected themselves.

Within these approaches to succession, opportunities to gain direct experience of senior leadership work have been argued to be a central component of good leadership development. Earley et al (2002) report that school leaders looked chiefly to their peers, both within and outside their school, for ideas and inspiration, and many derived

effective professional development from undertaking acting leadership roles. Earley et al (2011) found new headteachers referred to the benefits of working with prior heads who had seen it as part of their role to develop their deputy(ies) for headship, by organising specific tasks and sharing responsibilities. Matthews et al (2011) found that 'outstanding' schools involved in multiple school partnerships worked purposefully to identify and develop new leaders, including by constructing their partnerships to provide a range of hands-on experiences, acting-up leadership roles and mentoring opportunities for future leaders. Working alone, Matthews et al (2011) argue, the schools would have found these opportunities hard to provide, in part given the costs and capacity required.

Reflecting these developments at a system level, the NCSL's (2008) Succession Planning framework provided earmarked funds to Local Authorities to develop 'local solutions' to leadership succession with schools. Evaluating these strategies, Bush (2011) identified that Local Authorities and schools had commonly developed a mix of strategies to 'grow their own' leaders, to fund leadership development programmes and to use new models of leadership, including to reduce the number of headships through school federations. Bush (2011) found strong support among schools for a local solutions approach and significant reductions in the difficulties schools faced in recruiting heads across a range of contexts. Bush also noted however that the capacity of schools to engage in planning varied and challenges to succession remained significant in small rural schools, faith schools and in more deprived contexts. Participants also reported that accelerating school leaders into headship appointments contained quality risks, while uncertainty over the sustainability of programme funding had reduced local succession planning activity.

The third focus of contemporary policy, on potential new pathways into headship, has commonly focused on the concept of career acceleration, both for existing teachers and for career changers into teaching. This has included the early identification of 'potential leaders', mentoring and coaching of identified individuals and the provision of opportunities for individuals to lead in their own and other schools, both to broaden their knowledge of school contexts and potential role models (NCSL, 2008:15). At a system level, new accelerated leadership routes have been pursued within several specific NCSL funded programmes, including first as 'Fast Track Teaching' and then 'Accelerate to Headship'.

The Fast Track programme was initiated by the then DfES in 2001 and led by NCSL from 2005. Researching the programme, Churches et al (2009) identified its key

features as selection through an assessment centre (focussed on behaviour competencies) and professional development through residential training (focussed on intra- and interpersonal development), 1-to-1 coaching and a wider school role (focused on participants taking on delegated senior leadership tasks in practice). The programme also often dovetailed with early entry to NPQH. Initially, entrants were drawn substantially from outside teaching, career changing into teaching, although from 2005 entrance was restricted to participants already in the teaching profession. The programme ended in August 2009 having served 2300 participants, 82% of whom were under 34.

Churches et al (2009) identified a number of impacts. By 2008, 374 Fast Trackers had achieved an Assistant, Deputy, Headship or LA advisory post, 60% of whom were under 30 years old. By 2008, among those with up to 5 years' teaching experience, 5.1% of Fast Trackers had been promoted on to the leadership group pay spine, compared with 0.6% of teachers nationally (in 2006). After 10 years teaching experience, the proportions rose to 9.9% of Fast Trackers and 1.8% of teachers nationally. Evaluating the programme, Jones (2010) found participants were overwhelmingly positive and often believed Fast Track had supported rapid career progression. Jones noted that the assessment centre entrance process may have filtered out candidates with more reflective and theoretical learning preferences (as oppose to active learning) and that participation had rapidly out-grown funding so that individual support had become insufficient. Jones (2010: 162) also noted that the programme did not include an explicit account of the special meaning of leadership in a *learning organization* and that the programme's rooting in practice was:

potentially deeply conservative. There is the danger, common to all apprenticeship models of learning, that this merely reproduces extant cultures ... [rather than] promoting creativity, new knowledge bases and transformational leadership.

As Fast Track ended in 2009 the second programme, Accelerate to Headship, began. It commenced with two accelerated routes, 'Tomorrow's Heads' and 'Future Leaders' (which had started earlier in London in 2006), with places for approximately 200 NCSL funded candidates each year from both traditional and 'non-traditional' routes (i.e. non Qualified Teaching Status candidates). Tomorrows Heads, started in 2010, as a three year programme to support candidates to NPQH, although the programme ended in 2012. By 2012, from 260 participants, 16 had achieved headship (including as co- and acting heads). Future Leaders was developed by a partnership of Absolute Return for

Kids, NCSL and the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust in 2006. From 20 participants in secondary schools in London in 2006, it has expanded to over 150 participants per year in London, the North West, the West Midlands and the Humber. By 2012, 32 participants had achieved headship (including as associate heads). Unlike Tomorrow's Heads the funding for Future Leaders has continued and the programme expanded to primary schools in 2013.

Evaluating the Future Leaders pilot programme in 2009, Earley et al (2009) outlined the programme's strong vision on leading in challenging urban schools, an expectation for participants to gain NPQH and become heads within four years and a focus on recruiting middle leaders and former teachers re-entering schools as 'career returners'. Earley et al identified four key programme phases: i) selection, through interviews and an assessment centre, linked to the NPQH/headship standards; ii) training, incorporating a two week residential focused on headteacher experiences (rather than theoretical reflection); iii) a residency year, as an Assistant (or associate Deputy) Head in a placement school, with the support of an external professional tutor; iv) application for a substantive post. By 2009, 94% of those who had completed their residency year were in (permanent or temporary) senior leadership posts. Earley et al found participants were positive about the vision of the programme and the networking and support from other Future Leaders. Earley et al noted a key challenge for the programme was to increase its stock of 'good' placement schools, given the variable support, challenge and level of responsibility participants had received.

### 3. Acceleration, identification and risk

Reflecting on school and system level responses to building new pathways into headship, Fink and Brayman (2006) argue these commonly include leadership 'talent identification', recruitment, preparation, placement, induction and continuous professional development. Across these steps there are a number of challenges. As Bush (2008) notes, how potential leaders should be identified for preparation is a key issue, particularly in the case of accelerated career routes. For Thomson (2009) there are a number of 'risky assumptions' that need to be made clear. Glatter (2009) argues there are also issues of (a lack of) experience and developing contextual wisdom. These are considered briefly in turn.

Reviewing existing approaches to talent identification, Rhodes et al (2008) argue schools have traditionally relied on the tacit knowledge of educational professionals and there has been a lack of clarity over the criteria for selection. Rhodes et al argue, accelerated leadership programmes have developed a number of competencies and values "against which aspirant individuals may be measured" (2008: 313). Setting out to test appropriate characteristics for talent identification, Rhodes et al surveyed staff in 70 schools in a variety of contexts. They found little variation between heads, middle leaders and teachers "about the majority of the characteristics involved in leadership talent identification". The most agreed upon characteristics, in rank order (with 1 being high), were that an individual:

1. Has people skills
2. Has good communication skills
3. Has vision
4. Has the respect of staff
5. Has the respect of students
6. Possesses professional values
7. Shows enthusiasm
8. Shows initiative
9. Can deal with stress

10. Good self-organisation

11. Works hard

12. Is a very good teacher

Tomlinson and Holmes (2001: 105) also sort to “determine the viability and reliability of using profiling instruments to identify leadership talent in mid-career primary teachers with a view to accelerating their participation in the NPQH”. Following survey and focus group research with schools, they argued that a group of characteristics could be used successfully to identify individuals suitable for fast-tracking to headship. These are:

- Purpose: mission, responsibility;
- Direction: focus, school awareness and communication;
- Motivation and authority: credibility, achiever, activator, command;
- Relationships: relator, empathy, individualised perception, developer, stimulator;
- Workstyle: discipline, arranger.

Notwithstanding the commonalities between these proposed criteria, Thomson (2009) argues there are risky assumptions inherent in talent identification and leadership succession planning. Three are particularly relevant here. The first risky assumption is that ‘potential leaders can be identified’. For Thomson, identification is not straightforward, competency definitions of talent and potential are not particularly robust and there can be a tendency for people to select candidates who are like themselves. Further, to “show talent one must be in a situation where there is an opportunity to do so” and so talent spotting can be “as much about the school as an organisation and what affordances are offered to school staff ... as it is about what staff actually do” (2009:36). The risks, Thomson argues, are that a narrow group is recognised as being worthy of leadership development and existing (gendered and raced) norms of leadership are reproduced.

The second risky assumption, Thompson argues, is that ‘potential leaders will identify themselves’. Programmes often ask for candidates to self-select, volunteer or apply. The risks of relying on people identifying themselves are that: “only some people will see themselves in and/or able to do the job, and thus a significant number of potential leaders will be lost to the system. This in turn will perpetuate a particular kind of leader/manager, one who is overtly careerist and/or in an advantaged social and family situation” (ibid: 37).



The third risky assumption is that 'succession programmes create a pool of school leaders'. While aspirant heads may graduate from leadership programmes, Thomson argues, this is not necessarily the same as reducing leadership succession challenges due to the unattractiveness of some positions. While "the supply problem occurs in particular school types and places... [h]aving a large pool of prospective heads may simply mean more competition for a limited number of jobs in desirable locations, and no change for schools where it is difficult to attract a range of qualified and suitable candidates". (ibid: 38).

A further critical issue concerns experience. Exploring the importance of experience, Glatter (2009) points to a key distinction between formal, explicit or public knowledge, on the one hand, and informal, tacit or personal knowledge on the other. While school leaders work with both, Glatter argues "much of the knowledge that is most useful for leadership learning is personal, but this is harder than formal knowledge to put in a form that can be transferred to others". This leads to the question, Glatter argues, of a maturity of judgement, that he refers to as wisdom, "which is neither purely analytical nor purely intuitive, but conveys 'an ability to deliberate about issues and problems, to see how different people might be affected and to put them into longer term perspective' (Eraut 1999, 122)". Such wisdom, Glatter argues, is central given the challenges of school leadership:

While various areas of knowledge and types of skill could be identified for competent performance, above-average performers [are] considered in addition to possess certain cerebral or higher order capacities such as 'reading the situation', 'balanced judgment', 'intuition' (not just hunch but tested against stored memory and ordered experience) and 'political acumen'. Knowledge for example of models of leadership and of social and legal contexts and skills are clearly important but the higher order capacities are crucial in enabling the knowledge and skills to be applied appropriately in the complex situations in which school leaders find themselves daily.

The extent to which accelerated development programmes can support the development of a maturity of judgement, informed by and "tested against stored memory and ordered experience", is a key concern. Nye (2008) notes that gaining core skills and experience is vital to effective headship but that it can take time for leaders to develop contextual intelligence. The Hay Group (2008) identified a difference between established leaders, who showed strengths in such matters as political awareness,

indirect influencing and alliance building skills and long term thinking and planning, and emergent leaders and those on fast track programmes, who often did not.

## Risk and need

For some, these risks may, in part, be mitigated in the design of leadership development programmes. On identification, Morrison et al (2006) argues for instance for social justice to inform leadership development and NCSL (2008) notes that equality, diversity, fair treatment and social inclusion should be integral to all decision making. On experience, Earley and Jones (2010: 87), reviewing the acceleration of high potential staff, argue that experience can to some extent be 'fast tracked'. Factors supporting this, they argue, include providing for aspirant heads: rigorous development plans; challenging job responsibilities; detailed feedback; room to reflect upon and capture learning reflection (James et al, 2007); task force membership; work placements (NCSL, 2009); and work shadowing (Simkins et al, 2009). Reviewing factor associated with effective preparation programmes in America, Darling-Hammond et al (2007) argued these include:

- a powerful, guiding vision for the scheme
- effective recruitment strategies
- rigorous selection procedures
- a training programme focused on teaching and learning and school improvement
- instructional design based on adult learning theory and problem-based learning
- intensive and highly focused induction experience at the beginning
- a cohort structure that encouraged collaboration and mutual support
- lengthy school-based internships (e.g. one year) with meaningful leadership work
- regular support from expert coaches and mentors.

In addition to attempts to mitigate risks, a range of commentators has argued that there are a number of systemic aims against which the risks of experience and identification may (need to) be balanced. Situated within wider debates over the supply of heads, the risks of new pathways into headship may be weighed, for instance, against the impacts of a lack of headteachers. Other aims that have been argued for, within the literature reviewed, include for instance:

- **a faster apprenticeship:** NCSL (2007) has argued that the long traditional apprenticeship of headship can de-motivate potential leaders and lead to talent moving out of the school system. (It is noted, however, that there is little research

evidence demonstrating that wastage from the system is due to a lack of progress and substantial evidence of wastage linked to workload pressures, stress etc).

- **the nurturing of potential:** Barber et al (2010) report that high-performing headteachers in their sample most commonly cited being 'identified as a potential leader' (74%) and having 'opportunities to take on responsibility' (70%) as having a major impact on their development as leaders. Identifying and supporting leadership talent at an earlier stage may support potential leaders to better prepare for the challenges of contemporary headship (Baker 2003), including by developing a peer group that can share experience and intelligence.
- **a supported career path:** Coleman and Campbell-Stephens (2010) find leadership careers can 'stall' for a range of reasons including inter-personal relations, contextual factors and family life. Hayes (2005) also notes the large numbers of deputy heads with no intention of moving into headship places who indirectly block aspirant heads from accessing the leadership experiences they need to gain.<sup>4</sup> Supporting aspirant heads to gain experience and to navigate key career transition points, Hayes argues, may reduce blockage and stalling.
- **new career (re-)entry points:** Teaching is one of the most common career change destinations. This includes teachers returning to teaching having pursued other careers. Both career returners and mature entrants to teaching may have a range of leadership and management experience and aspire to headship. However, they may well also need to gain appropriate and deep educational expertise (Smithers and Robinson 2007) and "opportunities to 'author' themselves, as *educational* leaders" (Thomson 2009: 40) [emphasis added].

Balancing these aims and potential risks raises questions about what is a common career path towards and into headship. It is to these issues that we now turn.

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<sup>4</sup> Howson (2009) has argued for fixed-term posts to prevent the career deputy, especially in primary schools, from inhibiting those below with aspirations for headship acquiring the necessary experience.

## 4. Common pathways into headship

Reflecting on the *Making of Educational Leaders*, Gronn (1999: 27) notes that the idea of a 'career' has often been seen as a "desired, vertical, ladder-like movement through age-related and time-phased stages". Care needs to be taken however, Gronn argues, not to "impose an order and logic to an individual's experience for which there is not evidence". Accident and the chance of being in the right place at the right time play a role in promotion. There are different reasons and motivations among those who achieve headship. For instance, Earley and Weindling (2004) distinguish between those with a clear and predetermined career plan ('to achieve headship by the time I am 40') and those who 'fall into the role' as a job becomes available. There are also critical turning points, temporary set backs and different enablers, including key personnel with organisational power and influence who can provide support, advice and short cuts. In these ways, Gronn argues, a smooth career pathways is rarely the norm.

Notwithstanding these complexities, reviewing career progression towards headship in England and the United States, Daresh and Male (2001) argue a common pattern is characterized by significant experience at either deputy head level or in senior management positions in more than one school. Investigating career progression in England, Earley and Weindling (2004) compared the findings of a 1987 study (Weindling and Earley 1987) and a 2002 study (Earley et al 2002). In 1987, the average age at appointment to headship among a sample of 188 new heads was just over 42 years old. The average number of years teaching prior to appointment was just over 19. Within the sample, 97% had spent on average 6.5 years as a deputy head and 86% had spent on average 6.4 years as a head of department. In 2002, Earley et al found broadly similar patterns in a sample of 758 headteachers. The average years in teaching prior to headship remained at just under 20 years and 77% had held the post of Deputy Head immediately before becoming a headteacher (12% had been acting heads).

In 2012, Earley et al reviewed age and leadership promotion with the 2010 School Workforce Census of teachers in England. The average age of first promotion to assistant, deputy and headship was 39, 42, 45 years old respectively in secondary schools and 38, 40, 42 years old in primary schools. The peak age of promotion to a first headship was from the late 30s through to the late 40s. Promotion to headship happened, however, well into an individual's 50s, particularly for internal promotions (which may in part relate to internal candidates being more likely to fill posts created by sickness, maternity cover and failure to appoint). Promotion to Assistant Headship

generally took place during an individual's 30s, with promotion to a new school as an external candidate peaking at around 35 year old. There was again a small peak in the mid-50s in internal appointments to Assistant Headship (Earley et al 2012).

Underlying these trends, there is an important tension between individual agency and wider structural influences on career pathways. Gronn and Lacy (2004: 407) argue that the processes of leadership formation have facilitated “varying degrees of openness or closure (according to distinctions based on gender, social status, class, age, etc.)”. This can be highlighted in particular in relation to gender and ethnicity. (Class and socio-economic status may also been significant – although there is surprisingly little empirical data on these.)

On gender, Earley et al (2012: 8) found that, while teaching continues to be a female-dominated profession, smaller proportions of women than men move into each stage of senior leadership. The differences were particularly pronounced in the 30-39 age range, where 88% of primary classroom teachers and 64% of secondary classroom teachers were female, yet only 60% of primary and 20% of secondary headteachers were women. This gender under-representation narrowed slightly in older age ranges, but remained significant.

There is a range of potential reasons for under-representation of female teachers in senior leadership. In addition to the time women take out on average to raise children, McNamara et al (2010) found that the behaviour of men and women may differ. On average, men apply for significantly more leadership posts than women before being appointed, they feel less constrained by child care choices and are more prepared to move regionally for a new post than their female counterparts. Coleman (2005) has also shown how gender stereotyping and discrimination remain significant. This includes, in particular, the ways in which career breaks for childbirth and childcare are regarded and managed in schools, which can act as significant barriers to leadership promotion for women teachers.

On ethnicity, Earley et al (2012: 8) found that while 10% of teachers are from Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) groups, this is true for only 5% of headteachers. This may, in part, relate to the older age profile of headteachers and the lower proportion of BME groups in older generations. However, comparing ethnic groups, Earley et al found that while white British men were by far the most successful at achieving promotion to senior leadership, Black male teachers were the most under-represented group, suggesting a relative promotional disadvantage for male BME groups in particular. McNamara et al (2009) found BME teachers were clustered in schools where pupils shared their ethnic

background and that this clustering may not solely be due to choice and may restrict career opportunities. Coleman and Campbell-Stephens (2010) report that racism, often in the form of stereotyping and low expectations, remains a real barrier. Bush et al (2005) found a tendency for BME staff to be in subordinate roles, after being directed towards working with pupils where English was a second language or to a pastoral area.

The appointment process for headship has also been identified as a particular barrier. Coleman (2005) reports, for instance, concerns of female headteachers that many governing bodies are perceived to be looking for a male headteacher and that the most common example of sexism in interviews relates to the family commitments of the women. The appointment process may also be influenced by perceptions on age. Reviewing the experience of fast track candidates, Earley and Jones (2010) questioned whether governing bodies are prepared commonly to take the 'risk' of selecting a senior leader who has experienced rapid promotion and 'not served their time'. Earley and Weindling (2004: 131) conclude that:

The role played by Governing Bodies in the appointment process is worth further investigation – not only to explore governors view's on the merits or otherwise of internal candidates, but also to test out some anecdotal evidence about how appointment panels tended to opt for 'safe' white, middle class, male, candidates.

## 5. Leadership, socialisation and identity

Recognising the range of influences that act on teachers, becoming a school leader has commonly been conceived as an ongoing process of socialisation (Crow 2006). Stevenson (2006) notes the powerful processes of learning that often take place throughout a school leader's formation and career. Duke (1987: 261) suggested this is an "involved and incremental process, beginning as early as a teacher's own schooling and extending through their first years on the job as leaders". Following Merton (1963), two main process of headteacher socialization have been widely recognized (Weindling and Dimmock 2006). The first, professional socialisation, concerns learning what it is to be a headteacher, prior to taking up the role, through personal experience of schools, teaching and leadership and through formal courses, modeling and mentoring. The second, organisational socialisation, concerns the learning and experiences gained from a particular role in a specific school, including the knowledge, values and behaviours required to undertake the role. Earley and Weindling (2004: 23) argue that there is a two-way interaction between these processes. Both the new headteacher and the school's institutional culture can be seen to be trying "to change and influence the other".

From the longitudinally perspective of socialisation (Simkins 2012), a number of career frameworks of school leadership have been proposed. Coleman and Campbell-Stephens (2010), drawing on Hall (1976) and Van Eck et al (1996), proposed a four-stage framework, with the stages:

- **Preparation:** obtaining initial qualifications and making career plans;
- **Establishment:** entering teaching and the lower stages of management;
- **Advancement:** gaining further qualifications and promotion to more senior levels of management;
- **Acquisition:** obtaining and carrying out the role of headteacher.

Gronn (1999) also proposes a four-stage module as:

- **Formation:** early socialization within the family, school and peer groups that shape the outlook and character of future leaders;
- **Accession:** career experience and progression that develops the personal efficacy and self esteem of leaders;

- **Incumbency:** the period of headship;
- **Divestiture.**

Reviewing the accession stage, Gronn and Lacey (2004: 412) argue that a key activity for aspirant leaders during this phase will be ‘positioning’. This has, they argue, two interrelated aspects. First, subjectively, individuals will be developing and questioning their self-belief, including their self-esteem and efficacy. They are likely, Gronn and Lacey argue, to be “preoccupied with factors to do with ambition, career goals, motivation, ... and whether or not they believe they ‘have what it takes’ to do what they want to do”. Second, externally, individuals will be considering which people they need to “convince that they ‘have what it takes’ and what they need to be able to do to be judged as convincing and acceptable in respect of the goals they have set themselves”. This includes developing and rehearsing their identity as a leader.

In these ways, the socialisation of headteachers is commonly understood to incorporate processes of identity (re)formation. Thomson (2009: 29) argues that deciding to become a headteacher is in part a decision to “become someone other than a classroom teacher, and to claim expertise, authority and power in relations to the education of children and young people”. This may require aspirant leaders, Gronn (1999) argues, to reconstruct themselves professionally, transcending older identities that have reduced status.

A range of research has explored how external influences on leadership formation have also become increasingly significant (Thrupp 2006). At least two main sets of influences have been noted, occurring particularly since the Management era outlined earlier by Simkins (2012). The first concerns the pressures of accountability and policy reform (Higham and Earley 2013), which Stevenson (2006) argues have created new tensions over values within leadership socialisation. While the identity of headteachers can be defined as ‘educational leaders’ and ‘as ‘leaders of learning communities’ (Sackney and Walker 2006), accountability and performativity can conflict with educational ideals (Ball 2003) and demand managerial responses which can lead to ethical dilemmas, as leaders are ‘forced to rethink long held commitments’ (Gerwitz 2002: 49).

Evetts (1991), intriguingly, charted the emergence of these influences within an early phase of the Management era (Simkins 2012), when investigating change and continuity in headteacher selection following the 1988 Education Reform Act (ERA). Heads with more than 8 years’ experience (appointed prior to ERA) were more likely to have been encouraged to discuss at interview their educational philosophy and their



aims for the school. Newly appointed heads (appointed after ERA), in contrast, were more likely to face questions on the management of change, goal setting and achievement, task execution and conflict resolution. Evetts (1994: 48) concluded by arguing that:

If the new headteacher is required to be competitive, efficient and accountable, developing assertive and task-centred leadership styles, then such changes to the headteacher role might prove to be unattractive to many women (as well as to many men) teachers.

The second set of influences concern the introduction of National Standards and standardized assessments on mandatory or accrediting leadership courses. Gronn (2003) termed these 'designer leadership', arguing that Standards and assessments have created much greater state control over traditional processes of socialization and development. In particular, Gronn argued, these have commonly: emphasized hero leadership models rather than shared leadership; altered career incentives towards accreditation rather than critical analysis of course context; potentially narrowed the range of the kinds of school leader it is possible to be. Gunter and Thomson (2009: 473) referred to these effects as a 'makeover' that has constituted headteachers as "transformational charismatic leaders with a 'can do' and change-oriented persona" who accept responsibility for policy delivery. As Simkins (2012) notes, Luckcock (2008:545) argues these approaches to leadership development have been:

oriented to a psychology of personal achievement and organisation effectiveness ... with little interest in other philosophical approaches to community leadership, for example, the quest for wisdom, a flair for originality and authenticity, caring for the well-being of others or peaceful mediation in times of strife and conflict.

## 6. Entry into Headship

While a range of socialisation processes, role-identity formation and preparation takes place prior to headship, research has commonly found that “[n]o amount of experience or preparation... can provide a sufficient induction to what is a demanding and complex job” (Weindling and Dimmock, 2006: 338). Daresh and Male (2001), for instance, found in a study in England and America that nothing prepared new headteachers for the full extent and intensity of the job and the change in perceptions of other staff towards them. Earley et al (2002) reported from a survey of 758 headteachers in England that only one in eight heads felt well prepared when they had commenced headship. Weindling and Dimmock (2006) noted that an essential part of learning to be a headteacher was acquired through living the experience and that there were few shortcuts to this on-the-job learning. Stevenson (2006: 417-8) argues that becoming a headteacher for the first time:

... is the moment when school leaders really have to confront the difficult questions, but they often do so without the experience, the networks of support and the reservoirs of loyalty that more established principals can draw on. This can also be the point at which educational values are most tested by management imperatives and the pressures ...[of] high stakes accountability ... . There is no manual to provide an answer, while others can offer advice – they cannot take responsibility.

The steep learning curve on entry to headship often leads to a range of common challenges (Briggs et al 2006). Reviewing research in England and internationally, Hobson et al (2003) found that new headteachers faced a similar set of challenges across a range of contexts. These included:

- feelings of professional isolation and loneliness
- dealing with the legacy and style of the previous head
- dealing with multiple tasks, managing time and priorities
- managing the school budget
- dealing with ineffective staff
- implementing new government initiatives
- problems with school buildings and site management.

Reviewing research on school leadership in England between 1982 and 2004, Weindling and Dimmock (2006) found that new headteachers reported common challenges included:

- managing the transition from the previous head
- leading change in established cultures and behaviours
- dealing with ineffective staff
- improving the image of the school
- managing government policy.

Similarly, investigating the experiences of new headteachers in cities, Earley et al (2011) found common challenges included:

- feelings of professional isolation and loneliness
- managing staff who thought the school was better than it actually was
- improving teaching and learning
- improving pupil progress and raising standards at a rapid pace
- developing staff, especially in preparation for change
- developing resilience in coping with emotional and traumatic situations
- dealing with multiple tasks, and managing time and priorities
- managing the school budget, especially those in deficit
- dealing with ineffective staff
- restructuring staffing, especially of the leadership team
- dealing with the legacy of the previous head.

Examining these challenges, Earley et al (2011) note that the majority of the new heads in their sample were leading schools that needed to raise standards of student attainment and the heads were very conscious of the high-stakes accountability culture in which they were operating. There was an aspiration to share and distribute

leadership, but the headteachers did not feel they knew staff well enough to distribute with confidence and so their initial experience was more demanding than expected. They had commonly recognized the potential isolation of the role, but the loneliness had still come as a shock.

The timing of action was also considered important. One of the more experienced heads in Earley et al's (2011: 101) study noted how it had taken longer than expected to accomplish key plans, including reshaping the leadership team and improving the progress of children and the quality of teaching and learning. These were more difficult and lengthier tasks than were originally expected and the headteacher reflected that headship "is a marathon not a sprint ... you can't move a school that quickly". For Quong (2006: 382), a central, complex problem of early headship is "when to act and when not to act". Achieving a balance between moving to quickly or slowly, Quong concludes, is "among the beginning principal's most stressful dilemmas".

Reflecting the importance of timescales, Earley et al (2011) reviewed research that identified a number of common phases or stages in the learning and action of new leaders. Gabarro (1987) for instance proposed a five stage model of senior management succession, based on research in businesses and industries in the US and Europe. The stages were:

1. **Taking hold (the first 6 months):** involving intense learning as the leader develops a cognitive organizational map and strategic priorities and takes action on urgent problems.
2. **Immersion (6–12 months):** involving deeper learning and diagnosis as the leader develops an understanding of underlying issues and the strengths and weaknesses of staff.
3. **Reshaping (12–21 months):** involving major change, organisational reconfiguration and implementation.
4. **Consolidation (21–27 months):** involving the assessment of the consequences and unanticipated problems of reshaping and the development of corrective actions.
5. **Refinement (27–36 months):** involving fine-tuning with the leader having taken charge and established their credibility and powerbase, or not.

Examining these phases in light of research and evidence on new headteachers in England, Earley and Weindling (2004: 26-27) found parallels to Gabarro's stages and proposed a modified framework and indicative timeline of:

1. Entry and encounter (months 1-2)
2. Taking hold (3-12 months)
3. Reshaping (year 2)
4. Refinement (years 3-4)
5. Consolidation (years 5-7)
6. Plateau (year 8 and onwards)

Earley et al (2011) also noted that further research could review Gabarro's stages and consider whether the timeline has subsequently changed in light of the high stakes accountability in which new headteachers operate in the 2010s.

Reflecting these challenges and learning, research has commonly found, as we have noted, that it is very hard to prepare heads for the experiences of isolation, accountability and relentlessness that the role often entails. Earley et al (2011) note in a review of research, however, that more recent studies (post 2007) provide additional insights into the effectiveness of including practical learning and context-specific support in formal preparation programmes. Cowie and Crawford (2009), for instance, in a study of five new headteachers in Scotland, found that effective aspects of the Scottish Qualification for Headship (SQH) included being talent spotted and being given opportunities to take on significant responsibilities to broaden experience and technical expertise. This also, it was reported, supported an increase in confidence and self-belief among aspirant heads who could begin the role-identity changes explored earlier.

Within this 'anticipatory socialisation' (Kelly and Saunders 2010), in which aspirant heads begin to come to terms with the job, Crow (2007) notes the critical importance of helping candidates to develop their beliefs, values and attitudes, as these will be needed to guide their decision making in increasingly complex and challenging contexts of external change. Indeed, a growing literature emphasises how values (*should*) inform school leadership, including in the overlapping approaches of leadership of learning, transformational and distributed leadership. It is to these actions and leadership approaches of headteachers in post that we now turn.

## 7. Leadership approaches of headteachers in post

The importance of context, values and the creation of a vision have been highlighted widely within research on headteachers in post. On context and values, Day et al (2000) argue that school leaders need to be skilled in reading and responding to context, but that that is not sufficient. School leaders also need to be values-led, and in particular student- and staff-centred, as this enables them to retain consistency, authenticity and direction. On turning these values into a communicable vision, Bush and Glover (2003) argue leadership is a process of influence (Yukl 2002). Rather than commanding from a formal post, headteachers and senior leaders need to seek the commitment of staff and stakeholders to a vision 'of a better future' for the school and its students. On realising this vision, Lewis and Murphy (2008) argue that building a professional learning community is a central task (Stoll and Seashore Louise, 2007). The skills of implementation, and hence effective management (as well as leadership) of people, systems and structures are also considered vital (Huczynski and Buchanan, 2001).

Reviewing evidence on leadership work, Leithwood and Riehl (2005) proposed four broad categories of successful school leadership practice. Successful leaders, they argued:

- i. Build vision and set direction: by identifying and articulating a vision, creating shared high expectations and monitoring organisational performance.
- ii. Understand and develop people: by detailing the knowledge and skills staff need in order to accomplish school goals, providing individual support, modelling good practice and rewarding personal development.
- iii. Redesign the organisation: by building a collaborative culture, facilitating the work of teachers and building productive relations with parents.
- iv. Manage teaching and learning: by staffing the curriculum appropriately, providing support for teaching and learning, buffering staff and students from distractions and fostering stability.

Leithwood (2001:1) acknowledges these practices are a "necessary but not sufficient" part of an effective school leader's repertoire. Leaders need to also respond to context.

Reflecting the complex interactions of context, values and vision, research has commonly concluded there is no one best-fit approach to school leadership – rather, there are a number of potentially effective approaches. Earley et al (2002), for instance,

reporting on a survey of 758 headteachers in England, found there was no 'identikit' leadership style or approach – rather two approaches were founded to be most commonly effective when combined. The first, broadly termed transformational leadership, included building a clear vision, establishing commitment to agreed goals, encouraging high expectations and being highly visible to reinforce expectations. It also involved developing a conception of leadership that was:

... neither linked to status nor embodied in the actions of any single individual, but rather dispersed or shared throughout the school (Earley et al 2002: 80).

Where leaders had a strong influence on student outcomes, Earley et al argued, transformational leadership was commonly combined in practice with a second approach, defined as instructional or learning-centred leadership. This focused on the behaviours of staff that affected the quality of teaching and learning and included leadership action on both organisational matters (e.g. to control constraints on the amount of time students spent learning) and on promoting and developing schools as learning-centred, with leaders acting themselves as lead learners.

Day et al (2009) researched schools that had improved student learning outcomes over three consecutive years. This reconfirmed, Day et al argued, Leithwood et al's (2008) finding that effective school leadership is second only to classroom teaching as a school level influence on student learning. Headteacher leadership, in particular, Day et al argued, could create and influence improvement in the school's organisation and in the teaching and learning environment, which in turn, could indirectly impact on student outcomes.

Common improvement strategies reported by headteachers, Day et al argued, included encouraging the use of data and research, designing teaching policies and practices, improving assessment procedures, strategically allocating resources and promoting professional development. Leaders were also found to share a common set of values (e.g. a commitment to equal opportunities), characteristics (e.g. resilience, optimism) and approaches (e.g. transformational and instructional leadership). However, reiterating Earley et al (2002), Day et al concluded there was no single best-fit approach: 'effective headteachers' were found to be sensitive and responsive to the school's development phase, the confidence of staff, the behaviour and attainment of students and wider contextual constraints.

The importance of leaders actively leading professional and student learning has also been highlighted within a recent meta-review of leadership effects. Robinson et al (2009) found the two largest leadership effects on student outcomes were achieved when (i) leaders promote and participate in teacher learning and development and (ii) plan, coordinate and evaluate teaching and the curriculum. These actions, Robinson et al argued, enable leaders to better understand what is needed for improvement, to provide formative feedback that teachers find useful and to support effective professional learning. Three further leadership effects found to be significant were where leaders (iii) used resources strategically to prioritise teaching goals, (iv) established clear goals and expectations and (v) ensured an orderly and supportive environment for teaching. Overall, Robinson et al (2009:28) argued, the:

... more leaders focus their influence, their learning, and their relationships with teachers on the core business of teaching and learning, the greater is their influence and impact in terms of improved student outcomes.

While there is a growing literature on leadership 'effectiveness' – and related critiques of this field (Gunter and Thomson 2009) – there has been little research that considers whether younger heads approach headship differently (in comparison to their older colleagues). Cohen (1971) is one early exception. Cohen became interested in American research on school principals that had found older principals were more authoritarian and closed-minded than younger colleagues and were less receptive of educational innovation and less likely to actively supervise the performance of their staff. Cohen tested these findings among a sample of headteachers in England and Wales. His research failed to support the American findings. Older headteachers, Cohen concluded, exhibited less authoritarianism than younger headteachers. They were also neither more traditional in outlook nor any less concerned with supervising the work of their teaching staff than their younger colleagues.

More recently, Edge et al (2012) have begun to explore the entrance into senior school leadership of what they call 'Generation X', or individuals born between 1960-1980. With a focus on headteachers and deputy headteachers under the age of 40, Edge et al (2012) argue that common themes emerging from preliminary research group discussions with 'Gen-X' school leaders in London include:

- Work life balance issues: including, family life, personal health and having a life outside work.



- Challenges of being a young leader: including, fear of burnout, sustainability and challenging parental relations (relating to their age as a leader).
- Leadership challenges: including, staff relations and responding to under-performance, gender and leadership and the positives and challenges of working in challenging schools.

As Edge (2013) notes, the latter concern, about working in challenging schools, has been raised more generally. Brian Lightman (2013), for instance, argued as General Secretary at the 2013 ASCL conference that, while many headteachers of lower performing schools had the motivation to lead improvement, the accountability system neither allowed leaders an appropriate timescale nor offered appropriate support. This risked “undermining and demotivating a whole tranche of aspirant and serving leaders” (Lightman 2013: 8). This contemporary concern over the extra-ordinary demands that can be placed on school leaders dovetails back to our initial concern with leadership supply.

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