

**HEADTEACHER PREPARATION PROGRAMMES IN ENGLAND AND SCOTLAND:
DO THEY MAKE A DIFFERENCE FOR THE FIRST YEAR HEAD?**

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Introduction

Headteacher preparation is regarded in many countries as a crucial aspect of school development and progression. However, despite the growth of global interest in headteacher preparation in the past decade (Hallinger, 2003), pre appointment preparation is largely an 'act of faith', because long-term studies are not often carried out. Research often focuses on designing, developing and delivering preparation programmes, but it rarely considers the difference they make to headteachers once they take up post. In this article, we move beyond that initial interest in preparing for headship to the experience of head teachers taking up a post for the first time and report on part of the data from an International Study of Principal Preparation (ISPP). The ISPP involves researchers in several countries and was introduced in our previous article in *School Leadership and Management* (Cowie and Crawford, 2007). In this article, we use the term 'headteacher' as this is the title in use in the UK.

Our starting point for the research overall is a belief that headteacher preparation is a crucial aspect of school development and progression, and that programmes of preparation should have positive outcomes for those who undertake them. Our research objectives for the whole study are to examine how programme graduates handle the experience of becoming a headteacher and to consider the relationship between programme learning outcomes and the leadership and management practice of novice headteachers. It is clear that an interesting and challenging conceptual and methodological task lies ahead. In each country in the ISPP project, researchers have begun the process of tracking the experiences of small groups of newly appointed primary school headteachers, to consider the relationship between what it is that headteachers do, their preparation experience and the learning outcomes of our respective programmes. All of this will be affected in various ways by the cultural context, the policy context, and eventually by the school context in which the newly appointed headteacher finds himself or herself. Teasing apart the strands that weave together to influence this process is not simple, but it is a task worth undertaking. In this article, however, we focus on the English and Scottish studies that are part of the international study.

In both England and in Scotland, we explore the reality of the lives of headteachers as reported by them through interview. We do this by taking a narrative methodological approach to consider the experiences of a small group of relatively new primary school headteachers, two in England and five in Scotland. All seven had undertaken specialist preparation programmes in their respective countries and been in post for approximately one year at the time of interview. Although the paper is based on self-reporting, this study allows us to begin to consider the extent to which the respective preparation programmes connect with our participants' early experience of headship. As the ISPP develops, we hope to be able to compare and contrast this with very different cultural and policy contexts. This article is thus a small step in moving closer to answering that difficult question – to what extent to do headteacher preparation programmes prepare participants for the reality of life as a school headteacher? We start with an explanation of the delivery context in the two countries.

The delivery context in England and Scotland

In England, the National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH) and in Scotland, the Scottish Qualification for Headship (SQH) were introduced to prepare aspiring headteachers. The NPQH and the SQH are benchmark qualifications, underpinned by the National Standards for Headteachers in England and the Standard for Headship in Scotland (SfH). Delivery in both programmes includes online learning, supported self-study and face-to-face events, but both programmes are predominantly work place based with candidates being required to manage and lead whole school projects and provide portfolios of evidence containing a claim for competence against the Standard supported by reflective commentaries.

Although headteacher preparation in both countries is shaped by standards, there are differences in the policy framework for headteacher preparation and the preparation process in each country. The NPQH is delivered through 9 regional consortia that bid for the contracts to deliver NPQH on a contractual basis, which is regularly renewed. Unlike Scotland, there is no direct university input, and the qualification is run by the National College for School Leadership (NCSL). The NPQH takes approximately six to 15 months to complete, depending on candidates' development needs, and is delivered by a number of providers around the country. A new version of NPQH is about to be piloted, so this is changing.

The SQH takes just over 2 years to complete. Three regional consortia (partnerships involving universities and local authorities) were licensed to deliver the programme by the General Teaching Council for Scotland following an intensive accreditation process, during which partnership arrangements and the programme specification, design and structure are scrutinized in detail. The professional award of the SQH is aligned with the academic award of a postgraduate diploma.

In England, from 1 April 2004, it became mandatory for all first-time headteachers appointed to a post in the maintained sector to hold NPQH, although a transitional arrangement (until 2009) allows those with a place on the programme to be appointed to a first headship. However, from 1 April 2009 only those who have successfully completed NPQH will be able to be appointed to their first substantive headship position.

In Scotland, attainment of the Standard for Headship became mandatory for new headteachers in August 2005. At that time, the only means of attaining the SfH was through the SQH. Making attainment of the SfH mandatory for new headteachers presented the Scottish Executive (now the Scottish Government) with a problem since the number completing the programme, particularly from the primary sector, is not large enough to fill the number of posts likely to become vacant over the next decade. In the short term, local authorities may consider that a person has attained the Standard based on their experience to date. However, an alternative means of attaining the Standard is being piloted by the Scottish Government since, it has been argued, the SQH programme does not meet the needs of all potential applicants (SEED, 2006). The intention is that local authorities accept responsibility for supporting individual participants through increased mentoring and coaching supported by trained and experienced headteachers. Universities will not be involved in the accreditation process. Participants following the alternative routes towards attaining the SfH will gain the professional award of the Scottish Qualification for Headship, but not the academic award of a postgraduate diploma.

The introduction of standards for new headteachers has clearly had a massive influence on preparation programmes in England and in Scotland. Standards in both countries provide a framework within which programmes have been designed and delivered. But standards also set the terms in which the performance, disposition, behaviour and attitudes of aspiring headteachers can be controlled, measured and assessed and

although it is not within the scope of this article to rehearse arguments surrounding the origins, nature and use of standards in any detail, these considerations cannot be ignored (Brundrett, 2001, 2006).

International discourses about modernization, performance management and improvement are reflected in educational policy in both England and Scotland and these discourses have had an impact on professional development (Gleeson and Husbands, 2003). The introduction of headteacher standards in both countries, for example, mirrors the politically driven 'competence movement' which emerged in teacher education in the 1990s, and can be seen in terms of the attempts to control quality, specify outputs, and reconstruct meaning and identity among headteachers which are characteristic of 'new managerialism' (Clarke and Newman, 1997).

However, although the preparation programmes are set within prevailing orthodoxies and focused on helping participants demonstrate that they have attained 'the standard' in each country, there is considerable emphasis placed on critical thinking, professional values with discussion and reflection on practice, suggesting continued reliance on the 'reflective practitioner' model of teacher education, a model prevalent in the 1980s, which continues to have some currency twenty years on (Cowie and Crawford, 2007). This locates preparation programmes within the debate about the nature of contemporary professional identity and places aspiring and new headteachers in a '*complicated nexus between policy, ideology and practice*' (Stronach et al., 2002, p. 109).

Bearing this context in mind, we move now to the study itself, which is not intended to be a comparison between preparation programmes in Scotland and England, but rather the beginnings of a process to examine the lived reality and experience of a small group of new headteachers in both places.

Methodology

This article reports the second stage of the ISPP research in England and Scotland. Regional programme coordinators were asked to identify programme graduates who had secured headships and been in post for approximately one year. As noted earlier, seven headteachers, five in Scotland and two in England, were identified and invited to

participate in the study. The only male participant is a school head in England. Although the limitations of a small sample and self reporting must be acknowledged, this initial work has given us an opportunity to begin to identify issues for further work as the project progresses. Each headteacher was interviewed for between an hour and two hours.

The research was undertaken with a narrative approach in mind. Cortazzi suggests that:

A narrative perspective allows the exploration of research activity itself as a story. That is much research writing (not only narrative research) is reported and presented as a story, with a kind of constructed plot, which is in effect, a rhetorical design aimed at persuading readers of the interest, if not the truth, of the research.

(Cortazzi, 2002, p.200)

Leadership and management are 'sanitized' concepts in much of the literature on headship even though the work of headteachers involves working with people. The narrative approach attracted us because of its focus on the relational, and what Roberts (2002, p.15) calls the 'reality producing' nature of the interview. This approach seems well suited to an investigation into the early years of headship, because, as Muller (1999) notes, it 'stresses the 'lived experience' of individuals, the importance of multiple perspectives, the existence of context-bound, constructed social realities, and the impact of the researcher on the research process' (p.223). We wanted to know who our new headteachers were, why they wanted to become headteachers, how they became headteachers, what drives them and how they deal with their new duties and responsibilities. Narrative analysis, with its focus on the individual and the interplay between the individual and the social (Roberts, 2002) seemed particularly appropriate. As Josselson and Leblach (1995) argue:

Through narrative, we come into contact with our participants as people engaged in the process of interpreting themselves. We work then with what is said and what is not said, within the context in which that life is lived, and the context of the interview in which words are spoken to represent that life. We then must decode, recognise, recontextualize or abstract that life in the

interest of reaching a new interpretation of the raw data of experience before us. (p.ix)

At the same time these accounts can only ever be a portion of the truth because they reflect both the interviewees and us as researchers. Josselson sums this up as:

Narratives select the elements of the telling to confer meaning on prior events – events that may not have had such meaning at the time. This is a narrative transposition of Kierkegaard's famous statement that we live life forward but understand it backwards. In understanding ourselves we choose those facets of our experience that lead to the present (...) Narrative models of knowing are models of process in process...personal narratives describe the road through the present and point the way to the future. But the as-yet-unwritten future cannot be identified with the emerging plot, and so the narrative is revised.

(Josselson, 1995, p. 35)

The headteachers' experiences that are related here have been subjected to what Elliott (2005, p.158) calls the 'most explicitly reflexive stage of the analysis process'. This is where the reader reads the text in a sense, for herself, in that we put ourselves along with our own background, history and experiences behind our analysis of the headteachers' experiences.

The aims of the narrative analysis that follows are three fold. Firstly, the analysis seeks to outline the story of these teachers becoming headteachers, as it is relevant to headteacher preparation. Secondly, to draw on the headteachers' reflections on their early headship, as told in the interviews, and examine these narratives, to see if there are explicit or implicit connections with the learning outcomes of our respective programmes. To conclude, we hope to begin to make connections between the experiences of all the headteachers in the sample.

Findings

Becoming a headteacher

All seven of our interviewees took very different paths to becoming a headteacher. As our sample was predominantly women, this is particularly noticeable, as women often have fractured career paths. We realise the limitations of our sample, but it chimes with

other work done on teachers that looks at them more widely as people (Day et al., 2006, Hargreaves, 1993, Nias et al., 1989). Hargreaves, for example, suggests that:

Teachers don't just have jobs. They have professional and personal lives as well. Although it seems trite to say this, many failed efforts in in-service training, teacher development and educational change more widely are precisely attributable to this neglect of the teacher as a person.

(Hargreaves, 1993, p.viii)

The personal and professional lives of the seven headteachers we interviewed are also intertwined in the telling of their narrative. A few of these are presented here in order to give a flavour of this personal/professional interface.

When I graduated from the university I did some lecturing, statistics and accountancy just at the Tech and it was actually just part time at that time I was married and had a family so a Mum was my job for a while. I went into teaching as a mature student and did my PGCE and qualified in 1988.

Head 1

I went into teaching as a mature student and did my PGCE and qualified in 1988. I was aware of other people going in earlier to teaching and a number of comments were made. Whereas I felt that I had ten years behind me outside education, which gave me a better grounding through a variety of stages.

Head 2

I did my teacher training in Canada, I did it at university and it was a B. Ed but felt more like a Postgraduate programme where you would do your degree first then a year and a half of post grad training. I came over here on a teacher exchange the got engaged and moved to Scotland. When I first came here I had to of course apply for verification in Scotland. Even though I had taught for two years and was only given a probation registration so I wasn't too happy about that. I didn't work for the first 10 years I stayed at home with my family and then I went back to work as a supply teacher.

Head 3

I first started teaching in a primary school in 1974 and I remained there for 16 years. The reasons for staying that amount of time was because it was close to where I lived and it was a school where people were very friendly even though I was the youngest and they were very helpful.

Head 4

All of the above interviewees are women, and interrupted career patterns can be noted as well as their own belief in themselves. Day et al. (2006) note that self-belief influences personal efficacy in teaching, and this is also true of wanting to move on to headship. The other heads in the sample also moved into headship via working in manpower support, learning support, youth work, and sport and leisure. The latter was the one man in the sample who moved from being a PE graduate in a sports centre into teaching as an unqualified teacher, through qualification into class teaching and eventually deputy headship. Two interim posts boosted his confidence about the move to headship, one as a deputy, and one as a head, which he carried out on secondment, so that he did not lose the security of his main school base.

Without exception, the new heads talked about having been 'talent spotted' and encouraged to accept responsibilities outwith the classroom. These development opportunities appear to have broadened their outlook and helped develop confidence and self-belief. Secondment, promotion to senior teacher or being asked to take on a temporary acting role was significant for all of the heads. Their narratives reveal a need to believe that they could become a head before embarking on either SQH or NPQH. This could take the form of support from mentors, formal or informal in schools, or experience of success. One head sums this up thus:

The head that was appointed was very forward thinking, very dynamic and fabulous to work for and she encouraged me to take on management qualifications and to go for the SQH. If it hadn't been for her I don't know if I'd have pursued that route and I hadn't exactly planned my career. I had a senior teacher post in support for learning which again it was my boss who pushed me for that and I wouldn't have gone for promotion otherwise so I feel my

career path is more to do with the people above me, so that is how I came to apply for the SQH.

Head 5

'More to do with the people above me' was also borne out by the other headteachers who cited other colleagues, family and their headteachers as significant in progressing them towards headship qualifications.

Although these personal narratives reveal different career paths, only one individual appears to have focused on becoming a headteacher at an early stage in her career, pointing perhaps to the complex relationship between gender and becoming a headteacher. Although the others had engaged in continuous professional development and some had gained extra qualifications to become better at the jobs they were doing, these courses were not undertaken with career advancement in mind and they had not planned their career in any coherent way. When pressed on when and why they decided they wanted to become headteachers, the new heads found it difficult to explain. They talked about variety and challenge, making a bigger contribution and looking for more 'than simply being in the class.' Most said that they had not initially wanted to become a head but that they had always wanted to make a difference. Motivation was expressed in term of professional satisfaction gained through experience in posts with enhanced responsibilities and a growing realisation that they could actually make a difference.

As Head 5 put it

I think I enjoyed elements of responsibility and I think probably being able to see things that needed to be improved. In any establishment I've been in I can see how things needed to be moved or changed and I've been lucky enough to have heads or line managers who have allowed me to say and encourage me to take these things forward.

How they got involved with the programmes is important, and relates to their reflections on early headship.

Reflections on early headship

The programmes in general

Both the NPQH and the SQH attempt to provide opportunities for aspiring headteachers to develop and practice the skills and abilities required to deal productively and confidently with the issues they are likely to face on appointment to headship. The narratives suggest that the programmes had been particularly helpful in this regard. The responsibilities of headship did not come as a surprise to these new heads. Given that most of the heads had been encouraged into considering becoming headteachers, experiences in their first year appear to be tied up with being credible as a headteacher, and the preparation programmes and qualifications appear to have given them a head start in this respect:

I would say that (the programme) has given me a lot of insight into things that as a senior teacher or assistant head I wasn't party to. Within schools there seems to be this information barrier of things you need to know and things you don't and there are a lot of things I became party to through the SQH that I probably wouldn't have known about.

Head 2

Participation in the SQH and NPQH means that aspiring headteachers engage in a programme that they make their own in their particular contexts and through "personal formation" (Daresh, 2002). The SQH requires participants to integrate academic theory and personal and professional knowledge practice, underpinned by professional values and commitment. This is less true of NPQH. The narratives suggest that this is a powerful model. The new headteachers talked about how reading and reflection on reading confirmed inherent preferences for collegial approaches, encouraged them to behave in a collegial manner, and sometimes challenged the ways in which they managed. For example:

I had two members of staff say to me within three weeks within getting post, 'it's your school, do with it what you want. You make the decisions'. But then I said, 'it's not my school, it's our school, these are joint decisions. It affects you more than it affects me because you are in the class with the children so this has to be something that works for us'. So that collegiate approach has been

to me the thing that really stands out. And the thing I have to say about the number of schools and the number of colleagues I know that hasn't happened in our schools. I know it hasn't happened in the school that I'm in and when you do ask them they get a look of shock on their faces wondering why they are being asked. But gradually, and it's only been since November, but you can see that they are saying, 'now right we are being asked for our opinion', so I think that's been the biggest thing for me to come out of SQH.

Head 2

When asked to talk about aspects of the programme that they found helpful, the new heads could not be pinned down to specifics. Although some mentioned specific content areas such as financial management and education and the law, there was more talk about principles, reflecting on purposes, values and learning needs and about overall approaches to management, integrating theory and practice, developing skills, abilities and confidence. The overall influence appears not to be related to specific areas of content but to processes that helped construct their identity as headteachers. The SQH programme structure means that participants identify a personal learning plan and develop themselves while leading and managing work based projects located within the school's development plan and because this contributes directly towards the school's agreed development priorities, this helps legitimate the work they undertake as an SQH candidate. This built in design feature establishes and reinforces the right of SQH participants to practice leadership and management (Reeves and Forde, 2004) and it is this aspect that participants appear to value rather than particular content areas. One, for example, said although 'there were lots' of aspects that she had found helpful, it was the overall programme structure that was the most important influence on her:

'because I planned it from my own learning (needs) and also planned all the projects to take part in the school development plan so that it was a learning experience for me and a learning experience for staff but it also allowed me to use management skills that I wouldn't have used previously. The amount of CPD I got from the SQH I would never had got through our own school in terms of course content and personal development'.

Head 5

This emphasis on learning needs in the SQH is in contrast to the male head from England who suggested that it was practical ‘tips’ that he took from the qualification:

Overall, all the NPQH was useful, but the budget part was the real eye opener. However, I’ve had to relearn the knowledge from the NPQH in this headship.

This is in contrast to Scotland, where there appears more of a blend of the academic and professional practice. For example, while indicating that ‘it was hard to reflect on the whole thing’, taking forward part of the development plan was helpful for another new head because it:

made you take things on in more detail perhaps or probably in a better way when you had to write up all these huge plans for your project.....I’m not quite sure I’d do it quite as thoroughly now but I think it’s a good process to go through and really think about your aims and objectives and that was good. I think I learned something from all of this.....It made you reflect on things. Then obviously doing the reading and professional reading related to that when you were writing up your assignments and relating what you were doing to the Standard for Headship.’

Head 1

Perhaps equally importantly, however, both programmes and their related reading initiated new headteachers into new forms of language and new understandings and helped validate their new professional identity.

Language and Professional Knowledge

In looking at the social processes involved in work based learning in the context of the SQH Reeves et al. (2003) talk about the authority of the language of the SQH and the power of the Standard and how this appeared to be important for programme participants in re-configuring their professional identity. The narratives discussed here support this view. One head, for example, was now able to engage directly with the HMI in ways that would previously have been inconceivable:

I think I’m more confident. Our SQH Co-ordinator asked me back two weeks ago to speak to candidates who would like to go on the SQH. There were 50 candidates there and a depute director of education and before I would have

said 'no way' and she asked me and immediately said, 'yes I'd love to do it'. And what I said when I was talking to potential SQH candidates was that we had an integrated inspection by HMI in November and the inspector said to me, 'what is your vision for the school and your values for underpinning it?' And that summed up what the SQH had done for me. An HMI visit before would have totally freaked me out and I thought, 'No. I know what we want to do here and what we've still got to do, and we had things in place to show we had certain aspects that needed to be covered and we were aware of them'.

Head 5

Another head (Head 4), who had some difficulty with the amount of reading and writing involved in the programme, also alluded to the significance of language:

In hindsight now I know I did moan and groan about the paperwork side of it and having to evidence everything and all the reading that you did, but it did give you the language you had to use, which proved very useful when I went for the headteacher's job.

Stronach et al. (2002) discuss how professional knowledge is constructed through working out tensions at different levels of experience and about how identity is constructed and this is reflected in the narratives discussed here, The tension for Head 7, who had come into headship through youth and community work with disaffected youth, and had taken over a pupil referral unit which was then turned into a school was that she did not 'feel like a head'. This links with Gunter's suggestion (1999, p. 230), that the headteacher's professional identity may be an intrinsic part of the person's life more generally. Head 6, in England was one of the first NPQH candidates, and completed the three year route in 2002. This was some time before he became a head, and as the qualification has changed, he is not sure of its relevance now. He did not discuss professional knowledge in the same terms as the others. He put it pragmatically:

More of a preparation for me I think was setting up the new school, and networking with other Deputies. My time as interim head was very useful in terms of preparation for headship, as I had to work with a variety of stakeholders, which gave me an insight into the more formal side of headship.

No, the most useful preparation was setting up the new school, and being a deputy without a class, which allowed me to see the strategic side of headship.

In all seven narratives, there is a sense in which the new heads' identities as headteachers, which were developing at different levels of experience before and during the preparation programmes, were affirmed through gaining the qualification, '*providing a means of entry into a particular social status*' (Reeves and Forde, 2004, p .9). Reeves and Forde argue that the power and language of the SQH empowers programme participants because it reflects a privileged managerial discourse, which is endorsed by the Scottish Executive (now the Scottish Government). This could also be said of England. The narratives in our study suggest that this new discourse and the related knowledge has indeed empowered the new heads, a process which appears to be reinforced and confirmed through experience in post as the associated concepts are put into practice. It would seem that participation in the preparation programme has helped the new heads to '*hit the ground running*' on appointment, and allowed their confidence in post to continue to develop:

I think I'm still on edge a little bit because something makes me think it can't be as good as this but I'm gradually becoming a bit more relaxed.....My confidence is growing and I am becoming a bit more confident that things are going to be all right.

Head 1

I think I'm more confident in doing the job as there is always that doubt about whether you are up to the job and you can do it so I think I have certainly gained in confidence.

Head 3

However, this was not the case for Head 6, our only man, who commented:

I've found that the staff and the personalities therein have been some of my greatest challenges, the governors were relieved to appoint a man, perhaps because they had an old fashioned expectation of what was needed to bring about improvement and the NPQH was not very relevant with these

expectations and personalities – people management when you want to change things.

Taking up a headship position presents individuals with new challenges that no programme can fully prepare them for. The narratives reported here, however, suggest that participation in preparation programmes had developed participants' confidence and belief that they could engage with the demands of the job. The narratives also suggest that the supportive groups established during the preparation programmes were significant and that these continue to play a developmental role. We discuss this below.

Networks

Our analysis suggests that working with each other within the preparation programmes has helped develop the professional identity of the new headteachers. Through collaborative activity and networking with colleagues a sense of trust appears to have been developed which allows the new heads to share and learn from each other's experience. These networks appear to have developed beyond the term of the preparation programme and developed into something approaching small communities of practice in which there is *'a set of common approaches and shared standards that create a basis for action, communication, problem solving, performance, and accountability'* (Wenger, et al., 2002, p.38). For some, these enduring networks appear to provide a conduit through which new learning is developed and knowledge is shared. For others, the collaborative networks have the potential to extend their learning.

I think one of the best things about SQH was the cohort and that it gave you a network of people and we still have that network of people that we can turn to.

Head 2

You build up a network over the years and I now have a number of colleagues who I know and trust and can run ideas past them. I think that group of friends is the reason we managed to go through the SQH.

Head 5

The people that I was on the SQH with, we can phone each other and talk about the things we are not getting on well with.

Head 1

The NPQH has been so useful for networking, as I've kept up links with others on the qualification.

Head 7

Communities of practice may be defined as '*groups of people who share a concern, set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis*' (Wenger et al., 2002, p. 4). In this sense they are more than support groups. If we regard schools as being part of a wider organisation, this suggests that the influence of preparation programmes may be systemic, going beyond individual school boundaries and focused on creating new knowledge and improved outcomes. Our analysis suggests that the individuals, their schools and their local authorities would benefit if these high trust supportive networks were enabled and encouraged to develop into deeper communities of practice.

Conclusion: making connections

We have already referred to some of the connections between our participants in this study. In terms of personal narratives, there are clear connections between them in terms of developing an identity as a headteacher, separate from any professional programme. However, the professional programme may serve to embed and enhance this identity. Identity seems very important to all the heads that we met with. Hargie and Dickson (2004, p. 226) argue that there is an ongoing tension between private self and group identity, and that an important part of self is the idea of 'place identity'. This has three components based around insideness:

- 1 *Physical insideness*: Knowing your own environment in terms of physical details and having a sense of personal territory.
- 2 *Social insideness*: Feeling connected to a place where you know people well.
- 3 *Autobiographical insideness*: Knowing 'where you come from', and 'who you are' (original italics).

(Based on Hargie and Dickson, p. 226)

In terms of Hargie and Dickson's components, the headteachers can be seen to have developed strong place identity, as part of self, which the headteacher qualification has confirmed and reinforced. This place identity and self is well illustrated by Head 2, who noted:

SQH gave me the ability to phone the department and ask for advice rather than push things under the carpet so we ended up with a huge amount of assistance coming into the school and I have to say that within six months the school was not recognisable as the same place I walked into and that was the result of staff working hard and trying out new ideas even when one member of staff said we have tried it and it didn't work well were trying it again and I was sad to be leaving the school as I had turned it around, the children were much happier and they were being treated with much more respect and I wouldn't have managed it without SQH as I wouldn't have had that network of people to fall back on. When I left there was also a very good school board. A school board that I heard had been very difficult. It was a very satisfying learning curve and there were times in the year I thought that I couldn't do this and then something would happen that would make me say no I'll stick with it.

This is important because new heads need a sense of self-belief and self-efficacy if they are to negotiate a successful transition to the role of headteacher (Gronn, 1999, pp. 79-80). The narratives explored here suggest that the new heads have been able to assume new identities with relatively high levels of confidence in relation to key aspects of their role, without the "attachment loss" and shock of the new experienced by new headteachers in a previous study in Scotland (Draper & McMichael, 1998, p. 207).

What is also important is the extent to which the expectations of the new heads are fulfilled following their appointment. Draper & McMichael (1998, p. 199) found a mismatch between the role expectations of new headteachers and their post-appointment experiences, and that many new heads were ill prepared for the 'bumpy ride of reality'. Networking appears to be very significant in this regard. Although Head 2 says that '*wouldn't have managed it without SQH*', the connections between heads, in terms of networking beyond participation in the programme, seem to have helped confirm their new identities and to be an important aspect of confidence and

sustainability in the first year of headship. It is the relationship of these headteachers with others in a similar situation that assumes greatest importance.

To what extent then does the pre appointment experience of aspiring headteachers prepare them for the reality of life as a school head? Our analysis is based on self reported data and our sample sizes are too small and gender biased to allow us to generalize or come to any definitive conclusion. Women appear to have particular occupational and professional challenges within both their personal lives and current policy contexts effecting both how they are viewed, and how they view themselves as leaders (Fitzgerald, 2003). Our small sample features diverse career pathways to the post of headteacher among women, which may or may not, be reflected in the general headteacher population, and this would be an interesting avenue for further exploration, in terms of life story research. However, although it is too early to say definitively, what we can say is that the preparation programmes appear to provide a grounding in the identity of 'being a headteacher' and that they allow participants access to supportive networks which are or have the potential to become communities of practice.

What also seems to be significant in this study is the appropriation and use of a social language pertaining to the respective programmes. In both England and Scotland, the need to adhere to defined standards for headteachers may encourage aspiring heads to configure their professional identities in ways that are consistent with the features of 'new managerialism', but this too may be inhibiting. While a '*dialect of managerialism*' (Reeves and Forde, 2004) may enhance the credibility of the new headteachers and be used to allow increased control over practice, it may also be disabling because it may '*blinker them to a particular point of view and set of values*' (Reeves and Forde, 2004, p. 96). In Scotland, the universities have the dominant role in designing and delivering the programme, which means that although the programme is set within prevailing orthodoxies, programme participants are encouraged to question and to look outward to hard social and political issues. As postgraduate students programme participants are required to adopt a critical approach. This is not the case in England presently.

Communities of practice may also become inhibiting and if networks of new headteachers are to be encouraged or facilitated, care may need to be taken to ensure that new headteachers continue to be open to change and encouraged to question accepted notions and assumptions. In contemporary society, '*in which complexity is the*

key, the content of socialization must involve an orientation and openness to change – change in personal identity, change in the priorities of the principal's tasks, and change in what constitutes an effective organization' (Crow, 2006, p. 319).

What seems clear is that no preparation programme or experience can quite prepare people for the experience of headship and what it feels like to be a new headteacher. Our analysis therefore suggests a need to build on the preparation experience of new heads and pay more attention to their support and development needs and to the socialization processes involved (Crow, 2007, Walker & Qiam, 2006).

However, the rise of new public management, with its emphasis on performance management, has created a complex context of reform and accountability (Clarke and Newman, 1997) and new headteachers can be unwittingly caught in the 'complicated nexus' (Stronach et al., 2002) that we referred to earlier. We also noted earlier that headteacher preparation and induction is located within the debate about the nature of contemporary professional identity. In our previous article (Cowie and Crawford, 2007) we argued that standards can be seen as a controlling mechanism and a means of limiting the discourse surrounding what it is that headteachers do. However, there are opposing narratives within both standards and there is tension between their underpinning values and principles. Although one narrative is to do with accountability and policy implementation the other is about developing capability and improving practice. This raises fundamental questions about how headship is conceptualised in Scotland and England, how the leadership and management of headteachers is measured and assessed, and the extent to which headteachers are free to act in principled and innovative ways. It also raises questions about the purposes of preparation programmes and about who is responsible for their design, development, delivery and accreditation.

In Scotland, although SQH participants are encouraged to interrogate their own position and perspectives, it remains to be seen if programme participants will remain open to change and develop as confident professionals, willing to exercise agency and able to deal effectively with the multiple accountabilities of headship and the complexity of management and leadership (Hage and Powers, 1992; Friedman, 2005).

Although the narratives reported in this study suggest that preparation for headship may be a crucial aspect of professional development and progression, helping to develop the professional identity of aspiring headteachers, broaden their outlook and develop confidence and self-belief, our findings are perhaps not surprising or particularly incisive. What we do not know (and remain concerned about) is the extent to which engagement with participation programmes in either setting is developing headteachers unwilling to settle for managing schools as mandated and directed by central government, with the strength of purpose required to challenge prevailing orthodoxies and work towards renewed schools centred on educational values (Gleeson and Husbands, 2003).

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