The Mentoring of New Headteachers/Principals

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Challenges faced by heads

‘Leading has become a high wire act that only the most skilled are able to perform successfully over a protracted period of time’. (Kellerman, 2015, p.263)
High autonomy-high accountability

‘Heads should: exercise their autonomy to innovate in response to parental needs, whilst at the same time meeting centrally prescribed targets and requirements; improve literacy and numeracy scores every year, whilst maintaining a broad and balanced curriculum; close attainment gaps, while pushing the brightest and the best; and collaborate with their peers to develop skills and capacity, while competing to ensure that their schools move up the local hierarchy’.

(Greany and Earley, 2017, p4)
Research questions

• What are the challenges of new headteachers?

• What difference does the provision of a mentor make?
## Base study 2016


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Numbers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jan</td>
<td>Interviews with key stakeholders</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan</td>
<td>Focus group of new heads</td>
<td>15 Heads</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feb-Mar</td>
<td>Survey for HMC heads. 47% return rate</td>
<td>155 Heads</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mar-Apr</td>
<td>Survey for chairs of governors. 25% return rate</td>
<td>84 Chairs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jan-March</td>
<td>3 Focus groups of heads</td>
<td>56 Heads</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March</td>
<td>Discussions with governors at AGBIS conference</td>
<td>20 Chairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March</td>
<td>Focus group - HMCPD Committee</td>
<td>18 Heads</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mar-Apr</td>
<td>Interviews with a sample of survey respondents</td>
<td>10 Heads, 5 Chairs</td>
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## Mentoring 2018/19 - qualitative

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2018/19</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Numbers</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sept</td>
<td>Interviews with mentors</td>
<td>8 mentors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oct</td>
<td>Interviews with new heads</td>
<td>15 heads</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feb</td>
<td>Focus groups of new heads</td>
<td>20 heads</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June</td>
<td>Interviews with mentors</td>
<td>8 mentors</td>
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</table>
| June/July   | Interviews with new heads              | 15 heads }
Challenges faced by HMC heads

Note: Heads were each invited to choose 3 main challenges from a selection. 155 responses in 2016
Prospective heads need to ‘up-skill themselves on finance, strategy, accountancy, marketing, etc. If you don’t have a clue it’s very difficult and you need to understand at least the basics of everything even if you have very skilled business managers, finance officers and marketing people. Being a head of an HMC school is about running a business.’
## Challenges - experienced / new heads

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Challenges</th>
<th>Experienced heads (114)</th>
<th>New heads (41)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pupil recruitment</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>44%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Staff recruitment</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changing culture</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HR issues</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changing regulations</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial issues</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>41%</td>
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</table>
Workload was a challenge that many heads identified

• ‘Being too busy on a daily basis; too many emails; trying to be perfect’
• ‘Workload – this is just enormous at any one stage’
• ‘The job is all consuming and one is constantly working at the very edge or beyond one’s capacity’
• Look after yourself, look after yourself and what are you doing about it?
Workload

‘Much of this extra work is hidden from public view in the additional hours at home, not just on weekday evenings but also at weekends and on ‘holiday’. If leaders do not do this then the job begins to run away from them. So a Catch 22 situation can develop, where work requires unsustainable hours if individuals are to keep on top of it, but where the job becomes unsustainable if they do not’ (Bottery, 2016)
How well do you manage the following?
(1=very well, 4=badly) weighted average of 155 responses

- Time management: 1.92
- Workload: 1.96
- Stress: 1.77
- Professional isolation: 1.95
- Worklife balance: 2.77
How well does the Head deal with...?

Chairs of Governors' (n=79) and Heads' (n=155) Views Compared

- **Time management: CoGs**
- **Heads**
- **Workload: CoGs**
- **Heads**
- **Stress: CoGs**
- **Heads**
- **Professional isolation: CoGs**
- **Heads**
- **Work/life balance: CoGs**
- **Heads**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>CoGs</th>
<th>Heads</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Time management</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Workload</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stress</td>
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‘The isolation can be overwhelming and it sneaks up on you at funny times. We all know that there is "loneliness in headship", but I don't think I have a clear idea of why the loneliness appears at certain times and not at others.

‘Headship is like a powerful drug to which you can get addicted and it’s tricky coming down from it’
Mentoring of new heads

• Mentors - recently retired heads, one day’s training
• Heads choose from a brochure of mentors. Some chose people they knew or knew of; others deliberately chose a stranger. A female head chose a female mentor deliberately and said that it was important to have that choice.
• Allocated 6 days over 2 years – first contact in term before they start. Confidential in perpetuity.
Suggestion

Have a list of mentors’ experiences/skills

• Boarding
• Expulsion
• Recruitment difficulties
• Handling the media
• Staff disciplinary actions
• Regions worked in
• Size of school
• Historic abuse cases
Mentors overwhelmingly positive

• It’s such a privilege to work with these new heads.
• I’m stunned by their skills.
• Better than I ever was.
• I love it!
Heads’ views of mentoring are positive

• reassuring; uplifting; validating; encouraging
• Mentors are sympathetic; very knowledgeable; massively professional; good listener
• It’s good to feel cared about;
• I know I could contact them at any time
• The mentoring relationship is perfect. I feel very happy. I'm very lucky
Almost everyone said that they understood the mentoring role but variations in practice suggested that this was not the case:

- Appraisal
- Meeting chair and partner
- Running training for staff
Models of contact

• As well as a tour of the school, many mentors met key people. Sometimes this was informal and at others it was formalised.
  • staff given slots with the mentor alone to give confidential feedback on how they thought the head was doing. The mentor then summarised the key points for the head.

• Some mentoring happened at the mentor’s home or at another location. ‘It’s a good opportunity to get out of school – immerse yourself in a mentoring day’. ‘You have to be able to leave the school – tearing yourself away is definitely a good thing’.
Peer support

I have long felt that there is room for a more developed peer support system or even something similar to the process of supervision used by counsellors.

Too much is left to serendipity and the good fortune of a head to have a supportive partner, good governing body or SLT.

It's the wisdom of fellow heads (who become firm friends) brought together by HMC that counts most for me.
Conclusion

‘school leaders need high levels of self-efficacy, resilience, self-awareness and judgement in order to cope with the emotional demands and complexities inherent in school-based ethical decision-making’

Lovett et al. (2015, 138)
Supported reflection

• ‘in practical terms, the most powerful basis for learning is supported reflection – support being provided through coaching and mentoring, the use of a reflective journal, structured reading to inform review and, perhaps most importantly, peer review and feedback on actual practice’

Nicholas and West-Burnham (2016, 22)
References


