

National College for School Leadership  
1<sup>st</sup> Invitational International Conference  
October, 2002

## **Beginning Headship in England: Building the Evidence Base**

**Trevor Male**  
International Leadership Centre  
University of Hull

Correspondence: Trevor Male  
International Leadership Centre,  
University of Hull,  
Cottingham Road,  
Hull, HU6 7RX  
ENGLAND.

Telephone: +44 (0)1482 465224  
Email: [tmalehull@aol.com](mailto:tmalehull@aol.com)



## **Beginning Headship in England: Building the Evidence Base**

Trevor Male, International Leadership Centre, University of Hull

This paper reports on the development of a planned survey that will investigate the challenges of the role for those entering the headship for the first time in England and their self-determined training, development and educational needs. The findings and conclusions build upon a range of activities undertaken by the author in concert with colleagues from other countries since 1996 and with the National College for School Leadership in England since 2001. The paper pre-empted the circulation of a self-completion questionnaire, devised from previous research and collaboration in the field, to all headteachers in England who took up their post in the current academic year.

### **Introduction**

Headteachers are one of the most elusive groups of potential data subjects (Cohen & Mannion, 1994). This is not a surprising conclusion given the pressures of the position which has, since the Education Reform Act of 1988, located headteachers at the front of a national drive for enhanced performance of schools in the maintained sector. Central to that drive for improvement has been the principle of pupil driven finance for schools, based on the notion of open enrolment contained within the 1988 Act. The market oriented approach to school effectiveness that evolved from the legislation (Ball, 1994) has been matched by a move to increased accountability that has manifested itself in a variety of ways, but principally through the publication of student performance on tests at the end of key stages in a national curriculum. One major consequence has been an increase in the administrative burden on headteachers that has shifted their attention away from educative to functional issues in the day to day management of the nation's schools (Southworth, 1995; Lomax, 1996; Bullock & Thomas, 1997). Such has been the pressure that central government and its agencies have worked assiduously in recent times to reduce the administrative burden. Moves to limit the amount of documentation going into schools, much of

it requiring a response, has led firstly to central government recognition of the problem (e.g. a determination to reduce the volume after 3000 documents into schools during the first 1000 days of government following the 1997 General Election) and latterly to the establishment of collaborative discussions between government agencies to determine the volume of hard copy that can be permitted to go into schools. This response from the Department for Education and Skills (DfES), the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA), Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) and the National College for School Leadership (NCSL), as the principal agencies concerned, has been matched by a determination by the leading headteacher professional associations, the National Association for Headteachers (NAHT), Secondary Headteachers' Association (SHA) and the National Union of Teachers (NUT), to limit the demands on headteachers exhibited.

The consequence has been a reluctance to ask serving headteachers to engage in research activity concerning the nature of their role. This has exacerbated the traditional difficulty of getting headteachers to respond to surveys, especially where participation is voluntary. The outcome has been a paucity of research findings into the headship role, particularly since the introduction of site based management, through the Local Management of Schools contained within the 1988 Act. There have been only a limited range of studies, generally of a small scale nature, since this ground breaking legislation (e.g. Southworth, 1995; Male, 1996).

Subsequent independent efforts to improve the body of knowledge of beginning headteachers have been isolated (e.g. Dunning, 1996; Draper and McMichael, 1998; Gunraj and Rutherford, 1999; Squire and Blandford, 1997) or limited in size (e.g. Daresh and Male, 2000; Male and Merchant, 2000). Meanwhile government sponsored evaluations have either been a by-product of other services or remain unpublished. Potentially rich sources of government data have not reported on the nature of headship itself, although many interesting

statistics have emerged from the work of departmental and non-departmental government bodies. Statistics on education are published annually by the DfES, for example, as is the report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector (HMCI). Neither publication focuses on nature of headship itself, however, and both need separate analysis and interpretation for those seeking to inform themselves on developments in headship. Where empirical research was commissioned by government agencies the data or findings have generally not been made available for public scrutiny. The formal evaluation of the NPQH scheme, for example, undertaken by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) during 1998, has never been published, nor have Ofsted investigations into the scheme been made public, although a resumé of the Ofsted findings from the inspection into the first seven cohorts of NPQH and the induction of new headteachers was contained in the HMI report on leadership and management training for headteachers (Ofsted, 2002). Similarly the Teacher Training Agency (TTA), responsible for headship training and development from 1994-99, did not publish any of its findings from a wealth of data that has been collected as a by product of its activities in the field during this time. Despite the fact that all Headlamp funded activities have to be evaluated by the participant, for example, none of this data has ever been made available and we have no feedback on the reviews of the training provision and assessment processes which were systematically conducted by the TTA as a part of its quality control procedures, although a brief selected summary of findings was included in the NCSL review of Headlamp (Newton, 2001). The total of evaluation of the Headlamp scheme available for public inspection, meanwhile, has been just three paragraphs in the annual report of HMCI in 1996-7 (Ofsted, 1998: paras 292-294). In 1998, the TTA commissioned an independent evaluation of Headlamp which was completed and submitted to the TTA in September of that year and was due for consideration at the November meeting of the Board. The publication of the Green Paper (*Teachers: Facing the challenge of change*) intervened, however, and the report was shelved and remains unavailable to the public.

Two notable exceptions to this pattern have been the investigation into the role of headteachers conducted by the Parliamentary Select Committee (House of Commons, 1998) and independent research conducted by the author resulting in a National Headteacher Survey conducted in 1999 and reported subsequently (Male, 2000; Male and Hvizdak, 2000; Male, 2001a; Male and Male, 2001; Male, Bright & Ware, 2002). The work conducted by the Select Committee resulted in responses from all interested parties, including government agencies, resulting in the publication of a report that provided the clearest picture of the nature of the role, and the associated training, development and educational needs of the nation's headteacher workforce, that has been available to date. The National Headteacher Survey conducted by the author, meanwhile, provides the biggest data set ever accumulated nationally on the perceptions of the nation's headteachers (Mansell, 2002).

On a wider stage the International Beginning Principals Study (IBPS) sought to investigate and report on the experiences of beginning headteachers and principals during their first two years in post, gathering data through a self-completion questionnaire administered to a sample of headteachers in England and principals in Belgium, Canada, Netherlands and USA who took up post in September, 2000. Six research questions underpinned the design of questionnaires used in all countries, thus allowing for data to be compared across the countries whilst each questionnaire reflected the linguistic, cultural and structural differences between school systems. Initial findings from the IBPS were reported to the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association (e.g. Barnett, 2001; Berg, 2001). The author of this paper was responsible for data collection in England for the IBPS and presented aspects of the England at the same meeting (Male, 2001b; Male, 2001c).

On the back of that research record the author was engaged by the NCSL in 2001 to begin work on devising a questionnaire that would investigate the challenges facing newly appointed headteachers in England following appointment and reveal their personal training, development and educational

needs. Work on the content and design of the questionnaire continued throughout the latter months of 2001 with a view to administering the questionnaire in February, 2002. The project fell foul of the government agencies' system of managing the volume of documentation into schools, however, and was shelved until the current academic year when work was scheduled to resume on the project with a view to administering the questionnaire in February, 2003 to those who had taken up post since September, 2002. Sadly, however, the project was once again shelved by NCSL in deference to the principle of not over burdening headteachers with administration. At the time of writing, if the project is to go ahead it will do so without the support of central government agencies, including the NCSL..

### **The Challenges Facing Beginning Headteachers**

The challenges facing beginning headteachers have been reasonably well documented in empirical research conducted in England over the last 15 years at least (e.g. Weindling and Earley, 1987; Jones, 1987; School Management Task Force, 1990; Bolam et al, 1993; Male, 2000; Earley et al, 2002; Day et al, 2002) and in the USA (e.g. Daresh and Playko, 1990; Male and Merchant, 2000; Barnett, 2001). The major challenge lies within the field of professional socialisation although the development of certain key skills still remains a central issue (Male, 2000) as does the need for continued support of those in the first years of headship (Daresh and Male, 2001).

Socialisation theory, which conceptualises the manner in which new members of an organisation deal with the realities of the job, has been touted as a useful way to capture how new headteachers are inducted into the profession. Merton (1963) distinguishes between two overlapping phases of the socialisation of the new leader to the school, organisational and professional. Organisational socialisation is the process by which one learns the knowledge, values and behaviours required to perform a specific role in a particular organisation; professional socialisation involves learning what it is to be a headteacher. In

examining these processes Weindling (2000: 1) suggests that organisational socialisation can only, by definition, take place after appointment whilst professional socialisation can be learnt, at least in part, prior to taking up role and, for that reason, it becomes important to study the preparation period prior to headship. The process of professional socialisation does continue into headship, however, as Duke argues:

School leaders do not emerge from training programs fully prepared and completely effective. Their development is a more involved and incremental process, beginning as early as their own schooling and extending through their first years on the job as leaders. Becoming a school leader is an ongoing process of socialisation. (Duke, 1987: 261)

The early stages of headship tend to be dominated by organisational issues and require considerable learning on the part of the new headteacher as they encounter the people and the organisation and attempt to focus on rational interpretations and understandings that people construct (Hart, 1993). This is a period which Louis (1980) called 'sense-making' and is one that lasts for approximately the first six months in post (Gabarro, 1987).

The process of professional socialisation also continues throughout this same period, however, and is often characterised by 'surprise' (Louis, 1980) where there is considerable difference between the job as expected and as experienced. The surprises for new headteachers emerging from the empirical data of Draper and McMichael (1998), for example, were categorised in terms of role perceptions, the majority of which had not eliminated the 'shock' of the actual job. More than half of new headteachers featuring in the research were surprised to find, for example, that procedures that had worked for them in their previous school did not work in their new school, whilst a majority were surprised by the respect given to them (Draper and McMichael, 1998: 207-8).

Researchers have attempted to understand this transition as new principals are inducted into the profession. Recent examples include empirical data dealing

with the perceptions of new principals about what they gain and lose by taking on the role (e.g., Draper and McMichael, 1998), the surprises of the job (e.g., Daresh and Male, 2000), and the stages of professional socialisation they experience (e.g., Weindling, 2000).

Despite these investigations, however, there is a lack of generalisable, empirical data available to reveal the challenges of moving into headship and to determine the training, development and education needs of the nation's headteacher workforce as we enter a new millennium. The truncation of the planned NCSL funded investigation is a blow to any aspirations of fulfilling ambitions in that direction, but not a terminable one. Funding for the project will be forthcoming from the University of Hull.

### **The Research Issues**

Finding the potential respondents is the central issue related to any research data in this field. The history of recent research projects has been characterised by an inability to generate a central database of newly appointed headteachers. Where central registers have been compiled these have been unavailable, for political reasons, to researchers, including the author who has been the most active member of the research community in England in this regard. No central record of beginning headteachers has been available, with both central and local government officials seemingly unable or unwilling to provide the information which would allow the identification of those new to post. The challenges facing any prospective researcher are perhaps best illustrated by the history experienced by the author in relation to the IBPS project in 2001.

Requests were made to the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) on several occasions throughout the later stages of IBPS project in 2000 for details of names and school addresses of newly appointed headteachers. After what seemed to be initial agreement to release the names, prevarication was followed (in January, 2001) by refusal to release the details to the research team.



The frustration caused by this was intense, especially as the team had been asked at one stage to provide guarantees that the release of the personal information to the research team would not compromise the DfEE registration under the Data Protection Act. Instead the team was supplied with the details of the contact person within each local education authority (LEA) who supplied the DfEE with details of newly appointed headteachers to the high profile annual induction conference for beginning headteachers (*Leading for Excellence*) held in London. Each LEA representative was contacted within the region where the English research team had determined to locate its investigation with limited success in most instances, although four LEAs were extremely supportive.

Another possible source of support was the Headteacher Leadership and Management Programme (Headlamp) which is available to all first time appointees to headship. This is a grant worth £2500 (US\$4000) to be spent on their own professional development through the first two years of their post. This grant is administered on behalf of the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) by an externally contracted service and requires voluntary registration by the post holder. Attempts were made to elicit the necessary details from the Headlamp administration unit, again without success, nor would they agree to act as a mailing service for the project. Until 1999 the unit used to provide up to date lists of all newly appointed headteachers to approved providers (with whom 80 per cent of the Headlamp funds must be spent). With the sponsors of this research recognised as one of the 400 authorised providers the details sought for this project would have automatically been available to the research team. With the change of control of Headlamp moving between central government agencies during 1999, following the quinquennial review of the Teacher Training Agency (DfEE, 1999), this procedure was terminated. Enquiries directed to the Headlamp administration unit in January, 2001 confirmed that this information was no longer available to approved providers, even on request.

Outside of government agencies the principal weekly educational newspaper had records of headteacher vacancies but no central systematic database. An extensive list of advertised vacancies was purchased from a private organisation and was used to cross check and confirm data from other sources. This data revealed which posts had not been re-advertised from which the team were able to assume that the post had been filled. However, the data did not give the name and personal contact details of the new post holder nor did it indicate whether the 'new' post holder was in fact a headteacher in their second or subsequent headship, an acting headteacher or a seconded headteacher .

The most profitable source of information turned out to be the delegate list for *Leading for Excellence* conference held in November, 2000, for which the team was eventually able to gain a copy. Even so, information on the delegate list was incomplete. The list did not include school addresses, LEA name or location. As a result the research team spent over 30 hours cross referencing school names with an Internet map database (LYCOS) and the published education directories in order to match delegate and school names with specific contact information. The possible survey population from this list was 250. After eliminating those on the delegate list who had been in service for a substantial period (and who had attended the conference as expert practitioners) and those who had been appointed before September, 2000 (all headteachers appointed in 2000 were invited as were some from 1999 who had missed the previous conference), this total was finally reduced to 69 through identification of post holders in the geographical location chosen by the research team. A further 18 potential respondents were also identified courtesy of the four LEAs who co-operated with the team's search, leaving the team with a potential survey population of 87.

Each potential respondent was mailed a pack which explained the purpose of the project, identified the research team and detailed the extent of their commitment if they were to join the project as a respondent. Subsequently each was telephoned to establish both their eligibility to be part of the survey population

and their willingness to participate. A number were found to be ineligible because they were internal appointments who actually had been up graded to the substantive post in May or June 2000. In the main, however, the response from the schools was excellent, with only four outright refusals to contribute. The remainder of non-respondents mainly cited pressures of work as their reason for not being able to take part. It is worth recording that the vast majority of those who were either ineligible or who felt unable to contribute asked to be kept informed of the project outcomes in the future.

A total of 50 questionnaires were mailed in mid-February, with each participant having been briefed by telephone conversation as to the demands of the questionnaire – particularly the time needed to answer the questions which was estimated at between 60 and 90 minutes as a result of piloting of the instrument. The mailing was timed to precede the mid-term break as it was anticipated that a number of respondents would prefer the opportunity of filling in the questionnaire during a period when the school was not in session. 35 completed responses were received by June, 2001, a response rate of 70 per cent. The rate of return reported here compares favourably with the vacancy rate in the LEAs within the geographical area selected for this study from which the respondents came. Within those LEAs there were 144 vacancies. The 35 respondents for this survey thus represent a 24 per cent sample of the total population.

## **Discussion**

This lengthy account of the IBPS experiences is included to demonstrate, firstly, the difficulty of obtaining the personal details of potential respondents and, secondly, to illustrate that even when such details are known high response rates are difficult to obtain from one of the busiest groups of senior professionals in state education. There remains, however, a willingness to participate in research activities by a significant proportion of the headteacher population as can be demonstrated by both the National Headteacher Survey (with a response rate of 62 per cent) and from the English part of the IBPS project (with a response rate

of 70 per cent). High response rates have been achieved in both instances through careful management of the projects that included alerting potential respondents in advance of mailing questionnaires, investing in good design and print quality of questionnaire forms, paying attention to detail in tracking responses and follow-up procedures and through providing written feedback to all respondents.

The major difficulty has become obtaining the names and mailing addresses of potential respondents from the headteacher population. Where a random sample of all serving headteachers is to be conducted, as was the case with the National Headteacher Survey, no help is necessary from central or local government agencies as the details are already in the public domain. As soon as a specific variable is introduced to the whole population, however, locating potential respondents becomes very difficult without the assistance of other agencies. Two barriers currently stand in the way of those agencies providing assistance to a third party wishing to use the information for another reason, in this case to conduct research. The first is the Data Protection Act which legally binds those collecting the data not to reveal it to a third party unless such provision is contained within the original registration. The second is the recent move by central government agencies, who are also under pressure from the professional associations, to restrict the level of administrative demands on serving headteachers. If the second point is also accompanied by the inability of local government agencies to provide information as the pressure mounts on them to reduce personnel levels in support of greater financial delegation to schools, then the possibility of an independent researcher finding potential respondents is seriously compromised.

None of these difficulties is insurmountable, however, and nor should they be. Firstly, research should not be viewed as administration – especially when it is voluntary. To locate a genuine attempt to gather data in the interests of a group of educationalists as administration is tantamount to the infantilisation of those in

role. All members of the teaching workforce have the capability to make their own decisions, none more so than headteachers. Further, it is contended, engagement in the process of research should be perceived as a professional responsibility by those who occupy such roles. The labelling of research as administration takes away that responsibility. Secondly, the process of data registration could be reviewed to allow for the release of names to other agents where applicable and appropriate. Many commercial organisations address this issue successfully (if often in a dubiously moral way) through providing the option to opt out of receiving follow up material after an initial transaction. It should not be beyond the wit of government agencies, central and local, to legislate for such possible data transfer.

The importance of liberating the potential respondent lists to third parties lies, in this case, with the paucity of research into headship. The absence of representative, and thereby generalisable, studies means that programmes of training, development, education and support are working on a limited view of needs. In pulling out of the planned survey of beginning headteachers the NCSL, for example, is limiting its information base and will, presumably, be making decisions and provision for those headteachers through supposition and limited data sources, some of which may be biased. Gathering evaluative data of beginning headship from those who engage in the New Visions programme, for example, will be confined to those who chose to volunteer for that programme. Whilst useful in helping to evaluate the programme on offer, such data does not inform the NCSL of the needs of those beginning headship who have not engaged in New Visions. Similarly, the use of a questionnaire only distributed to NPQH candidates to judge their ability to act in a transformational leadership manner (as is the present case) tells us nothing about the needs of the whole population of the next generation of headteachers.

The challenge offered in this closing discussion is to government agencies, especially the NCSL, to address the issues highlighted in this paper in order to

improve the veridicality of the data available to them to guide decision making and future provision. Without rigorous, representative and generalisable data all government agencies are, at best, working on limited data and, at worst, failing to meet the needs of a proportion of the population they purport to be serving.

## References

Ball, S. (1994). *Education reform: A critical and post-structural approach*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Barnett, B. (2001, March). *Beginning principals in Colorado: Their understanding and ways of interacting with organizational boundaries*. Paper presented to the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Seattle, USA.

Berg, J. (2001, March). *International Beginning Principals Study: Beginning Principals in Rhode Island*. Paper presented to the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Seattle, USA.

Bolam, R., McMahon, A., Pocklington, K. and Weindling, D. (1993). *National evaluation of the headteacher mentoring pilot schemes: A report for the Department for Education*. London: HMSO.

Bullock, A. and Thomas, H. (1997). *Schools at the centre? A study of decentralisation*. London: Routledge.

Cohen, I. and Mannion, L. (1994). *Research methods in education (4<sup>th</sup> Edition)*. London: Routledge.

Daresh, J. and Male, T. (2000). Crossing the border into school leadership: Experiences of newly appointed British headteachers and American principals. *Educational Management and Administration*. 28 (1), 89-101.

Daresh, J. and Male, T. (2001, November). *Pluses and minuses of British headteacher reform: Towards a vision of instructional leadership*. Paper presented to the annual meeting of the University Council for Educational Administration, Cincinnati, USA.

Daresh, J. and Playko, M. (1990). *The professional development of school administrators: Pre-service, induction and in-service applications*. Needham Heights, Massachusetts: Allyn and Bacon.

Day, C., Harris, A., Hadfield, M., Tolley, H. and Beresford, J. (2000). *Leading schools in times of change*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Department for Education and Employment (1999). *Quinquennial review of the Teacher Training Agency*. Annesley: DfEE Publications.

Draper, J. and McMichael, P. (1998). 'Making sense of primary headship: The surprises awaiting new heads'. *School Leadership & Management*, 18 (2), 197-211.

Duke, D. (1987). *School leadership and instructional improvement*. New York: Random House.

Dunning, G. (1996). 'Management problems for new primary headteachers'. *School Organisation*, 16 (1), 111-128.

Earley, P., Evans, J., Collarbone, P., Gold, A. and Halpin, D. (2002). *Research report 336: Establishing the current state of school leadership in England*. Norwich: HMSO.

Gabarro, J. (1987). *The dynamics of taking charge*. Boston: Harvard Business School Press.

Gunraj, J. and Rutherford, D. (1999). A preliminary evaluation of the Headlamp programme for newly appointed headteachers. *Educational Management & Administration*, 27 (2), 143-154.

Hart, A. (1993). *Principal succession: Establishing leadership in schools*. New York: University of New York Press.

House of Commons Select Committee on Education and Employment (1998). *Ninth report: The role of headteachers*. London: HMSO.

Jones, A. (1987). *Leadership for tomorrow's schools*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Lomax, P. (1996). Site-based Managers or Educational Leaders? *Management in Education*, 10 (2), 25.

Louis, M. (1980). Surprise and sense-making: What newcomers experience in entering unfamiliar organisational settings. *Administrative Science Quarterly* 25 (2), 226-251.

Male, T. (1996). Making time to manage. *Management in Education* 10 (5), 15-16.

Male, T. (2000b, March). *Beginning headship: Findings from a national headteacher survey conducted in 1999*. Paper presented to the quadrennial BEMAS Research Conference, Cambridge, England.

Male, T. (2001a) Is the National Professional Qualification for Headship making a difference? *School Leadership and Management*, 21(4), 463-477.

Male, T. (2001b, April). *External influences impacting on beginning headteachers in England: Findings from the IBPS project*. Paper presented to the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Seattle, USA.

Male, T. (2001c, April) *The professional induction of headteachers in England: Findings from the IBPS project*. Paper presented to the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Seattle, USA.

Male, T., Bright, T and Ware, N. (2002, September). *The professional socialisation of headteachers in England: Further findings from the National Headteacher Survey*. Paper presented to the annual meeting of the British Educational Research Association, Exeter.

Male, T. and Hvizdak, M. (2000, April). *The effects of pre-service training and experience on preparation for the principalship in England*. Paper presented to annual meeting of American Educational Research Association, New Orleans, USA.

Male, T. and Male, D. (2001). Special school headteachers' perception of role readiness. *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, 16 (2), 149-166.

Male, T. and Merchant, B. (2000) 'Chief executive or lead professional?' in Stott, K. and Trafford, V. (eds.) *Partnerships: Shaping the future of education*. London: Middlesex University Press, 140-158.

Mansell, W. (2002, 13<sup>th</sup> September). New heads frightened by challenge of top job. *Times Educational Supplement*, 4498: 7.

Merton, R. (1963). *Social theory and social structure*. New York: Free Press.

Newton, P. (2001). *The headteachers' leadership and management programme (Headlamp) review*. Nottingham: National College for School Leadership.

Office for Standards in Education (1998). *The annual report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools: Standards and quality in education 1996/97*. London: HMSO.

Office for Standards in Education (2002). *Leadership and management training for headteachers: Report by HMI*. London: Office for Standards in Education.

School Management Task Force (1990). *Developing school management: The way forward*. London: HMSO.



Southworth, G. (1995). *Talking heads: Voices of experience*. Cambridge: Cambridge Institute of Education.

Squire, L. and Blandford, S. (1997, September). *The impact of the headteacher leadership and management programme (Headlamp) on LEA induction and management development provision for new headteachers*. Paper presented to the annual meeting of the British Educational Management and Administration Society, Cambridge, England.

Weindling, D. (2000, April). *Stages of headship: A longitudinal study of the principalship*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New Orleans, LA.

Weindling, D. and Earley, P. (1987). *Secondary headship: The first years*. Windsor: NFER-Nelson.