

Earley, P and Weindling, D (2007) Do school leaders have a shelf life? Career stages and headteacher performance, *Educational Management, Administration and Leadership*, Vol. 35, No.1. pp73-88.

Do school leaders have a shelf life? Career stages and headteacher performance

Peter Earley and Dick Weindling

Institute of Education, University of London and Create Consultants

Contact address:

Prof Peter Earley

Institute of Education

University of London

20 Bedford Way

London WC1H 0NT

02076126824 (w)

02076126366 (f)

p.earley@ioe.ac.uk

Do school leaders have a shelf life? Career stages and headteacher performance

Abstract

This paper explores several issues about school leaders, career stages and performance. It draws upon various pieces of research, including the longitudinal study of secondary heads which began in the early 1980s at the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER), to raise some key issues about headteachers' careers, the various stages of headship, and the relationship between length of tenure and school leader performance.

The paper concludes with some thoughts regarding the future of headship and what needs to be done to ensure that the quality of leadership remains as good as it should be. If leadership at the apex of organisations is as crucial as all the research and inspection evidence suggests, then what needs to be done to ensure a longer 'shelf life' for school leaders and is the notion of a limited or fixed-term contract worth revisiting?

Keywords

Headteachers, career stages, leadership development, performance management.

Do school leaders have a shelf life? Career stages and headteacher performance

A large body of work exists, drawn mainly from the non-educational sector, which proposes stage theories to explain the transition phases experienced by leaders. There are a number of models or frameworks in the educational management literature which consider headteacher careers. A problem with much of the previous research on organisations be they schools or businesses is the lack of a sufficiently long time frame to see all the phases or stages of development: hence the value of the NFER longitudinal study of secondary heads.

This unique longitudinal study of secondary heads began in the early 1980s at the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER). The initial study, entitled '*Secondary Headship: the first years*' (Weindling and Earley, 1987), was based on the experiences of all secondary heads (about 220 of them) who took up their first headship appointments throughout England and Wales in 1982-3. The initial study lasted three years and used a combination of national surveys and detailed case studies of 16 secondary schools. The researchers returned to find out more about these same heads about five years later in 1989 and again just over ten years later in 1994. More recently, in 2003, attempts were made to re-establish contact with those same heads - the 'NFER heads' - to try and find out where they were 20 years after taking up their initial headship (Earley and Weindling, 2004). The paper draws on this unique study and others to explore issues about school leaders, career stages and performance.

Career stages of headship

The NFER results and the work of other authors have been used to produce the following model, which maps out the stages of transition through headship. The

timings are approximate. Essentially the model or framework of heads' career stages looks like this:

Stage 0 - Preparation prior to headship

Stage 1 - Entry and encounter (first months)

Stage 2 - Taking hold (3 to 12 months)

Stage 3 - Reshaping (second year)

Stage 4 - Refinement (years 3 to 4)

Stage 5 - Consolidation (years 5 to 7)

Stage 6 - Plateau (years 8 and onwards)

- *Stage 0 - Preparation prior to headship*

Throughout their career people develop a conception of headship during their professional socialisation which is learned through both formal and informal processes. The NFER heads said they learned about headship throughout their career, from both good and bad headteacher role models, but they particularly stressed their experiences as deputies which provided them with a wide variety of experience, a period as acting head, and working with heads who delegated and saw deputy headship as a preparation for headship.

Some heads spoke highly of management courses that they had attended as deputies, but most agreed that off-the-job training and development complemented the experiences gained as a deputy working with 'a good practitioner'. The gulf from deputy to head was, nevertheless, seen as enormous: 'no course or reading matter can really prepare you for the job'.

- *Stage 1 - Entry and encounter (first months)*

The first few days and weeks are a critical period when the new head's notions of headship meet the reality of a particular school. It is a time of 'surprise' and the importance of sense-making is highlighted as organisational socialisation begins and the new head attempts to develop a cognitive map of the complexities of the situation, the people, the problems and the school culture.

- *Stage 2 - Taking hold (3 to 12 months)*

The newcomer strives to 'take hold' (Gabarro, 1987) and the new heads begin to challenge the 'taken for granted' nature of the school introducing a number of organisational changes. They develop a deeper understanding and their diagnosis of key issues during this stage was used to decide priorities.

This is also part of the 'honeymoon period', when staff are more lenient and open to change. In the NFER study we found that all new heads had such a period, though some did not realise it! The length of time varied, from about a term to a year. It was often ended suddenly by negative staff reaction to an action of the new head such as an internal appointment.

- *Stage 3 - Reshaping (second year)*

After a year in post most heads felt more confident and were beginning to feel that they could take off their 'L' plates! They had experienced a complete annual cycle of school events and learned about the strengths and weaknesses of the staff. Conversely, the staff had also learned about the new head's strengths and weakness, and their mutual expectations had become more realistic. The seeds planted in the previous stage produced the

implementation of major changes to reshape the school. This was the period of major change.

- *Stage 4 - Refinement (years 3 to 4)*

After two years many of the structural changes were in place. But during this stage further curriculum changes were introduced and a number of refinements made. Previous innovations were fine-tuned and heads felt they were 'hitting their stride'.

- *Stage 5 - Consolidation (years 5 to 7)*

After about five years a period of consolidation seems to occur after the heads had introduced most of their planned changes. However, in the NFER study this was affected by the introduction of a plethora of legislative and external change. These unanticipated changes, as Gabarro (1987) similarly found, required attention as their impact may affect the school during any of the stages.

- *Stage 6 - Plateau (years 8 and onwards)*

The NFER heads suggested that about seven years in one school was sufficient to see through a cohort of pupils and to have initiated most of the changes they wanted. About a third of the headteachers felt they had reached a plateau after ten years but that this was far less likely if they had moved to a second headship. Those in their second headship move back to Stage 1. Motivating heads who stay in one school until the end of their career can be a problem, though many of the NFER heads said they still enjoyed their work and, despite the changes to the role, still considered it to be the 'best job in education'.

The above model is in the form of an ideal type and some caveats are necessary. Clearly the time periods attached to each stage must be treated as approximations. For example, if the school is in 'special measures' following an Ofsted inspection, the head has an external mandate to change and will move forward much more quickly. Also, different heads move at different speeds, internally appointed heads tended to make fewer changes and to move more slowly than external appointees. Interestingly, the proportion of heads that were appointed internally to their posts has changed considerably over the last 20 years. In the early 1980s about one in ten secondary heads were internally promoted but this figure had increased to about one in five by 2001 (Earley et al, 2002). This is possibly due to the increased role of the governing bodies in the selection of heads.

Whereas the NFER heads (1982-94) were able to introduce many changes internally, today's headteacher has to manage major multiple initiatives which originate externally, while at the same time, attempt to integrate themselves and shape the culture of the school. It seems likely that primary heads can move through the stages more rapidly than secondary heads due to the smaller size and the less hierarchical structures of primary schools. They are also more likely to move schools rather than stay in the same post – see Table 1 (Howson, 2005).

Insert Table 1 about here

It is the last phase of the model – stage 6: the plateau stage – that requires more detailed examination. Other authors, such as Day and Bakioglu (1996), Parkay and Hall (1992), Gronn (1999), Ribbins (1998), Reeves et al (1997) and Fidler and Atton (2004), refer to this stage as 'plateaued' or 'disenchantment' or 'time for a change'. This usually follows a period of consolidation or refinement or being 'at the summit'

and, after plateauing, leads to a further stage which is often referred to as 'letting go', divestiture, moving on or preparing for a fresh start. As Ribbins notes moving on or leaving headship may involve divestiture for the disenchanted or reinvention for the enchanted.

This raises the question of whether heads, or indeed any leader, has a 'shelf life'? What options are available other than early retirement, for heads and how can they remain motivated to give of their best and stay 'enchanted'?

Do school leaders have a 'shelf life'?

To begin with, why do some heads choose to stay at one school rather than seek another headship? Fidler and Atton (2004) mention heads who state that they had vaguely thought about moving but 'there was always something else that needed doing in their current school, something that had kept them motivated, and the time had passed so quickly they had not really realised how long they had been there' (p.180). They add that there are 'advantages that come with long experience – detailed knowledge of the community and its people, an understanding of the decisions made earlier and the successful reputation already built up' (p.180).

It seems that it is often easier to stay than to move. Howson's work on headteacher appointments suggests that only about a fifth are filled by existing heads changing schools rather than first-time appointments (see Table 1). However there is a growing body of evidence that long periods in the same post lead to deterioration, both in levels of job satisfaction and job performance (Fidler and Atton, 2004, p.194). What can we glean from the research about this issue?

Length of tenure

Howson's survey for the National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT) suggests most headteachers – slightly more primary than secondary – do not move on to subsequent headships (see Table 1) although it is not known how many retiring heads in Howson's survey had held more than one headship.

In the NFER study, after five years, the vast majority (82%) of heads were still in the same school, about one-tenth (11%) had moved to a second headship, and very few had taken up another post in education (3%) or had retired (4%). At the ten year point, one-third of the entire cohort of 204 (34%) were still in their first school, 11 percent were in their second headship, about three percent were in other education jobs, and the rest (52%) did not reply and we assume most had retired.

In 1989 the NFER heads were asked about their predecessors. It is not known how many of the NFER heads' predecessors had previously held other headships, but less than one in five (18%) went on to a second (or subsequent) secondary headship, whilst five percent took up other posts, usually related to education. The majority of the previous heads (71%) had taken some form of retirement with about one in six heads leaving their posts because of ill health (Earley et al, 1990, p6). The norm was, therefore, that the new post holder followed a previous head who had been at the (secondary) school for a considerable period of time (17% had been in post for 20+ years) until they reached the end of their careers.

Attempts were made to re-establish contact with the NFER heads who had responded to the 1994 survey in 2003, nearly 20 years after the first survey. As might be expected, only a handful (5) were still in their first headship post. The vast majority had retired although a small number had become consultants or taken up other jobs in education (see Table 2). What the data reveal however is that secondary heads do

not in the main move on to second or subsequent headships, an area which until very recently was relatively unexplored territory (Fidler and Jones, 2004). The majority of secondary heads, once appointed, remain in the school for the rest of their careers, although a small-scale research study has identified a recent trend where more heads see themselves as 'portfolio' heads, willing to do a job for a certain number of years only before moving on to pastures new (Flintham, 2004).

Insert Table 2 about here

It could be argued that the statistics from the longitudinal study create a static and rather disheartening picture in terms of current heads using their experience and expertise across a number of schools during their working lives. This is also the picture emerging when data regarding career preferences are compared with a large scale survey of heads undertaken in 2001 for the DfES (Earley et al, 2002) (see Table 3).

Insert Table 3 about here

As might be expected, the older respondents were more likely to express a future preference to seek retirement or early retirement; however, nearly a third (30%) of those heads citing this preference were under 50. In addition, 63 percent of those considering leaving education altogether were under 50 (Earley et al, 2002).

The above findings suggest that attention needs to be given to finding ways in which the experience and expertise of serving heads may be used more creatively and flexibly. This is linked to the NCSL's notion of the fifth stage of leadership - the consultant head or consultant leader (NCSL, 2001). The key question however concerns length of tenure and performance. What do we know about this?

Leader performance

Do school leaders have a 'shelf life', or is it more likely to be the case that the constantly changing educational environment in which they now work means that few get the chance to 'plateau out'? This was an issue explored with the NFER cohort of heads (Earley et al, 1990). Did they feel there was an optimum period in post – say a 5-7 year cycle – as has been suggested by some, after which leaders were not so effective?

In 1982 newly-appointed heads commented on what they regarded as a reasonable period of time to be in post in any one school. The most common response was to suggest an optimum period of between four to ten years, with many seeing seven years as about the right length of time. Yet 70 percent were still in the same school after ten years – and (at least) five percent after 20 years.

Heads who were approximately 50 years of age remarked how they were 'too old', although it was noted that there was no necessary relationship between age and performance. Of more importance was the willingness and ability to take on a fresh challenge. Headship was not seen as a job for those whose enthusiasm and energy had waned or weakened.

They also remarked that at a time of major educational reform it was not necessary to move posts in order to rejuvenate themselves or acquire new challenges and, in the current situation, schools required stability not more change. Many could see the advantages that a limited term contract could bring, both for themselves and their schools, provided that proper guidance was available and that alternative career avenues (e.g. LEA officers and advisers) were viable options. Salary differences

between sectors and the constraints of pension arrangements were also mentioned. The following extracts from the interviews with the NFER case study heads are illustrative of the range of views expressed (Earley et al, 1990 pp.9-12):

In terms of planning one's career it would be reasonably useful as an idea to have a limited contract...I usually find myself looking for fresh challenges after six or seven years. I think that's about the right time to see a whole cohort through and then a short time for evaluation.

I hope the days of 10 to 15 year headships are numbered. There is a point of staleness. It is only when you move into the next one that your energy comes back. The majority of heads are pretty good, but there should be an escape clause for those who are not so good.

I've always said if a school is not going forward it is actually going backwards. So a change is crucial and if you've been in post 12 or 13 years it is difficult to maintain the momentum.

I don't think ten years is too long, given the role of the head, provided you can renew other areas of the school and you don't run out of steam, that you have energy still.

Limited tenure?

If they have a shelf-life, should headteachers therefore be appointed, like many of their counterparts in business and commerce, on short term contracts (say of five years' duration)?

Over the years there have been continued calls from educationists and others to introduce short-term renewable contracts for headteachers. In 1988, for example, David Hargreaves suggested that heads be appointed for three years in the first instance and then perhaps for subsequent periods of five years (*The Independent*, 1st November, 1988). In fact, 1989 saw the first limited period headship advertised. The post, a junior school headship in a Conservative controlled metropolitan district in the West Midlands, had to be re-advertised and it is not known how many applications were received. The teacher unions advised their members to boycott the post and the successful candidate was given dispensation to apply by his professional association, as he was the school's acting head. The contract was for a five-year period and attracted a salary approximately ten percent higher than that normally received for the size of the school (*Times Educational Supplement*, 6th October, 1989).

But does it really matter how long heads serve? The response to this question largely depends on whether or not there is a negative relationship between length of tenure and levels of performance. There has been very little research into this key question. A study of school effectiveness in 50 primary schools in London, undertaken by Mortimore and colleagues in the early 1980s (Mortimore et al, 1990) suggested that primary heads in mid-term (i.e. 3-7 years) tended to have the most positive impact on their schools. A correlation (but not a causation) was found between effectiveness and primary heads' length of service. However, no details were given about the strength or statistical significance of the correlation. One of the authors, Pam Sammons, has recently said:

We found long serving (primary) heads were associated with less effective schools - of course this does not mean all schools with long serving heads

were less effective, it was a trend across our sample. Long serving heads were those with 11 or more years in the same post. We also found new heads were generally less effective (first 3 years). Mid term heads were associated with most effective schools (3-7 years in current post).

With long serving headteachers the task is different and the implication for LEAs (and governing bodies) is that they need to find ways of supporting those heads and if possible of rekindling their energy and enthusiasm. In this situation many school boards in the US or Canada, heads would simply be transferred from one school to another. In England, where heads have tenure within their schools, this is not possible. (Personal communication, March, 2003, cited in Earley and Weindling, 2004).

In addition, the 'School Matters' study commented on the potential role of headteachers' centres and support networks linking new and experienced heads, ex-heads and advisers and the need for suitable training in management and leadership, which as Sammons (2003) notes, are 'ideas which in the 1990s 'took off' with the London Leadership Centre and the National College and special qualifications for heads (NPQH) and so on'.

John Howson (2003) conducted a study for the NCSL that attempted to investigate the relationship between heads' length of service and school performance and assessment (PANDA) grades (the latter refer to grades given to schools by Ofsted inspectors and relate to their performance, particularly in relation to pupil attainment). Unfortunately this study has several methodological weaknesses, for example, it used time periods between headteacher advertisements as a proxy for length of service, and it had overlapping categories for the data sets i.e. the three length of service periods were - 'up to 3 years'; 3-6 years and '6 years and over'. Also no significance tests were carried out on the differences.

Howson found that schools that scored highly on their PANDA grades (A* & A) had the greatest percentage of heads that remained in post for 6+ years and the lowest percentage that stayed in the same post for less than three years. By contrast, unsurprisingly, the E* & E category, had the lowest percentage of 6+ year heads and the highest for those in post for less than three years. This was the case for both primary and secondary sectors.

As Howson notes there are many factors that may affect a headteacher's length of service at any one school. School performance is but one. Performance at work is, of course, a notoriously difficult area to research. There is now more information on the performance of schools and their leadership than ever before. The two are linked but because a school is poorly performing it does not necessarily mean the same is true of its headteacher.

The NFER study gathered views about how the heads themselves perceived their performance ten years after their initial appointment. They were asked whether they felt:

- a) they were continuing with the same enthusiasm as when they first became heads
- b) they had reached a plateau
- c) they were able to face the challenges that lay ahead for the school.

Just over 60 percent stated that they were working with the same enthusiasm as when they first started as heads, whilst about three out of ten (31%) commented that they were not. For the other questions, 30 percent noted that they had reached a plateau - 'had given of their best', but the majority (83%) felt they were still able to face the challenges that lay ahead for the school.

Some made reference to such factors as age or the need to pace oneself: 'age is taking its toll on energy'; 'the enthusiasm is still there but not always the energy'; 'I'm aware I don't have the same energy as I had ten years ago'; 'I'm slower than I used to be'; 'fatigue does impair performance'. Others remarked how their motivation and enthusiasm had been negatively affected by years of constant change, initiative fatigue and 'poorly planned and faulty legislation'. One said, 'I am fed up with what I see as constant threatening political pressures, such as league tables and inspection'. Of course, since the time of this survey accountability measures and high stakes testing have significantly increased.

The strength of the senior management team was also seen as crucial: 'with a good SMT I'm sure we'll survive'. Governors were also seen to be useful here in providing different perspectives and acting as constructively critical friends.

A number of heads made reference to how their enthusiasm had been rejuvenated or rekindled and 'plateauing out' avoided by the wealth of legislative change (e.g. 'It would be impossible to remain on a plateau in the present educational climate!'). Similarly, the role of headship was constantly changing (e.g. 'the job has radically changed therefore enthusiasm continuing') and, for some, the school presented fresh challenges. However, the changes in the role of headship were not always welcomed. Several heads reported that their enthusiasm and performance 'waxes and wanes', 'varies from day to day' or was dependent on so many different factors. One head remarked: 'maybe my performance is OK but I feel my own enthusiasm has gone; the job is now a chore not a challenge'.

Professional refreshment

Very few of the heads in the NFER study had had the opportunity to work outside of headship. Some had worked in LEA advisory services before moving back into headship and noted how stimulating this break from headship had been, providing as it did both personal and professional refreshment (Earley et al, 1995). Sammons is of a similar view:

One way of helping would be for LEAs to provide sabbaticals of a term, or even a year, to [long-serving] headteachers. Whilst out of their schools they could visit other schools, follow academic courses, or use the time to reflect on their aims and the changes that have taken place in education and in society, since they first became a head. When they returned to their school it is hoped they would have developed new ideas and enthusiasm. (Personal communication, March, 2003, cited in Earley and Weindling, 2004).

The choices of future work preferences made by the heads (see Table 3) raise further interesting questions. For example, one-fifth of headteachers in the 2001 DfES study mentioned becoming a consultant or trainer and about one tenth becoming an inspector or HMI. To what extent is the current system sufficiently flexible to allow, indeed encourage, school leaders to become involved in these activities, particularly on a part-time basis?

It is known, for example, that by 2003 over 400 heads had been trained as 'consultant leaders' to engage in a range of NCSL 'level 5' activities, such as NPQH tutoring or coaching and mentoring. It is not known what proportion of those undertaking activities such as Ofsted inspectors, threshold verifiers and performance management consultants are serving headteachers. The only area where accurate data exists concerns external advising to governing bodies, where about 40 percent of all External Advisers are currently serving heads and 29 percent were previously

headteachers (Crawford and Earley, 2004). Other opportunities for 'level 5' heads or consultant leaders have grown considerably (Fidler and Atton, 2004).

Why heads leave or remain in headship is an important but unexplored area and was the subject of several recent small-scale projects by NCSL research associates. Woods (2002) looked at why heads stay in post and interviewed eight long-serving primary heads (all had been in post at least 15 years) to explore further the idea of 'enchantment'. These heads were found to be proud of their schools:

Their pride was in the achievements of their children, their awe at the skill and craft of their teachers and the tremendous support they had received from parents and governors (p3).

The heads were close to the children and had a passion for teaching and learning. They were skilled at building teams and developing staff. While acknowledging problems they viewed change optimistically. Woods concludes that this group of 'enchanted' primary heads had been able to sustain their commitment and enthusiasm over a long period.

Flintham (2003), in a report entitled '*When reservoirs run dry: why some heads leave headship early*', interviewed 14 recently departed primary and secondary heads and divided them into three types – which he called the 3 Ss:

- * 'Striders' - who move on in a planned way to a new challenge;
- * 'Strollers' - who retreat but in a controlled way; and
- * 'Stumblers' - who leave headship defeated, perhaps with ill-health retirement.

Flintham also reports:

a recognition of the emergence of a plateau effect after 7 to 10 years in headship with a potential decline in effectiveness which might have been overcome by the availability of re-energising professional development opportunities that could in some cases have prevented early departure (2004, p.4).

Flintham argues that these should be a formal entitlement and be 'funded and legitimatised reflection opportunities, part of the leadership entitlement package available to all heads'. It appears that the loneliness and isolation of headship identified in the initial 1980s NFER study (Weindling and Earley, 1987) remains a key issue.

What mechanisms then are currently available in English schools for considering the performance of headteachers and their on-going professional development and refreshment during the course of their tenure?

Performance management and heads

Studies of headteacher appraisal have noted how heads do not easily fit into schemes of staff appraisal or performance management (PM) because, like other chief executives, they do not have any direct superordinate. Under the 1990s appraisal scheme in England, headteacher review was undertaken by an official from the LEA and a peer head. In 2000 a new PM scheme was introduced which gave governing bodies a key role in headteacher appraisal, who along with an External Adviser, were charged with helping to set the head's performance objectives which in

turn were linked with pay. New inspection arrangements also give greater importance to school self-evaluation, which includes the performance of leaders.

As Fidler and Atton note:

The new pattern of inspections and more emphasis on school self-review will put the onus back on the governors to be proactive if the head seems to be losing the motivation or the energy to keep the school moving forward. (2004,p.68).

External Advisers (EAs) work with governors to help set objectives and evaluate the headteacher's performance. Recent research on the PM process for heads suggests that between five and ten per cent were perceived by EAs as ineffective, with the governors sometimes being aware of the weaknesses, sometimes not (Crawford and Earley, 2004).

It is not clear if the present role of the EA will continue as the government is currently piloting a 'New Relationship with Schools' where they are proposing a 'single conversation' with a 'School Improvement Partner', a form of critical friend. It is suggested that for the secondary sector a group of practising heads spend up to 40 days per year as SIPs (DfES/Ofsted, 2004) – yet another new opening for those heads seeking life after or during headship. Whether this will lead to a considered and rigorous appraisal of a head's performance is not known.

Rejuvenating school leaders can be achieved in a number of ways, for example sabbaticals and secondments can be helpful (e.g. Clayton, 2001) as can a range of other activities, such as overseas visits and study tours. The growing opportunities for consultant leaders can also help prevent stagnation.

Ways forward

It is clear that heads do not readily move on to other headships (or other posts) especially in secondary schools. Howson (2005) states that heads are now serving for an average of ten years but this average masks important differences between primary and secondary schools. 'Portfolio' heads (Flintham, 2004) are not becoming the norm and although 'headship as the acme of a long career is becoming a thing of the past for some' (Parkin, 2005), it is important to emphasise that a long period in the same post is still common for most secondary heads.

Is it fair to expect people to do such a high powered and demanding job for a number of years and to do it well? Probably not. This has been the case traditionally and in our view it must change. It is unsurprising then that there are difficulties of recruitment – headship is not the attraction that it once was.

As Fidler and Atton (2004) say, if headship is to be seen as more attractive and more manageable – and heads less likely to suffer from performance dips - then the following need consideration:

1. Reducing the demands of the job and providing more assistance
2. Better preparation before headship
3. Support and development in the job
4. Recognition of the limited length of effective working life.

Headship may become more appealing if prospective heads do not see themselves having to work through to the age of 60 or 65. There is a greater recognition now that some headships are short-term (e.g. turning round a failing school) and Flintham

(2004) has identified a group of short-term or 'portfolio' heads for whom a fixed-term contract might be attractive. But should all headships be seen as temporary or based on short-term contracts?

The notion of short term contracts was explored 15 years ago with the NFER heads and as has been shown their views were mixed, but perhaps the time is right to revisit this notion. Interestingly Fidler and Atton conclude by suggesting the need for such a contract. They state that if heads:

are seen as indispensable for the success of the school everyone concerned will be reluctant to think of periods of secondment or part-time temporary activities since they will take the head out of the school. But in the medium- and long-term heads will be less effective if they are not developed and refreshed by these out-of-school activities (p231).

Fixed term contracts therefore may be required to facilitate greater movement. Fidler and Atton advocate this for two main reasons:

1. The short-term needs of the school may not be the same as the long-term needs. Heads therefore have to be capable of adapting or the fit between the school and the head begins to deteriorate.
2. Heads need a change from time to time to refresh and recharge, to look at the school with fresh eyes, to be remotivated, etc. Research evidence suggests a change of school can be very beneficial.

Not spending too long in any one headship is partly a matter of expectations. Currently in small primary schools there is an expectation that heads will move, often for the purposes of promotion. Fidler and Atton suggest there is a need to spread this

so there is an expectation that heads do not spend all their working life in the one school. They conclude that there is a case for reconsidering the idea of fixed-term contracts for heads 'as a way of making it "normal" for heads and schools periodically to think about changing their headteacher' (2004, p236). Any fixed term contract would need to be a considerable one since schools need a lengthy commitment and deep-seated educational change is slow. However:

...the period cannot be too long if it is to facilitate movement. One possibility is to have a period of say five years which can by mutual consent be renewed once to make a ten year period, but not normally longer than that (Fidler and Atton, 2002, p236).

Fixed-term contracts are commonly found in the corporate or business worlds but there are few educational examples. New Zealand had such a system but this was replaced after opposition. In parts of the USA, Canada and Australia, the School District appoints its principals for short periods (3-5 years) and reallocates them to other schools as it sees fit. However, the career stages model suggests that at least five years are needed to work through the initial stages of headship and make a difference to the school. As LEAs in England become increasingly marginalised and schools and governing bodies gain greater autonomy perhaps central guidance will be needed on the matter of tenure. Something radical does need to be done however as it is not in the long-term interest of schools or headteachers themselves for them to be in the same post for long periods.

The notion of a shelf-life for school leaders and the relationship between length of tenure and workplace performance is clearly in need of further research. For the benefit of future generations of learners it is necessary to ensure schools are well led

and managed. The NCSL's strap-line of 'every child in a well-led school, every leader a learner' is, however, less likely to be realised unless the above issues are tackled.

References

Clayton, J (2001) Sabbaticals – expectations and rights, *Professional Development Today*, 5 (1): 27-32.

Crawford, M, and Earley, P (2004) Headteacher Performance Management: an investigation of the role of the External Adviser, *School Leadership and Management*, 24 (4): 377-389.

Day, C and Bakioglu, A (1996) Development and disenchantment in the professional lives of headteachers. In Goodison, I and Hargreaves, A (Eds.) *Teachers Professional Lives*. London: Falmer Press.

DfES/Ofsted (2004) *A new relationship with schools*, available from DfES or Ofsted website.

Earley, P, Weindling, D and Baker, L (1990) *Keeping the raft afloat: Secondary headship five years on*, Slough: NFER.

Earley, P, Evans, J, Gold, A, Collarbone, P and Halpin, D (2002) *Establishing the Current State of School Leadership in England*, London: DfES.

Earley, P and Weindling, D (2004) *Understanding School Leadership*, London: PCP/Sage.

Flintham, A (2003) *When reservoirs run dry: why some heads leave headship early*, Nottingham: NCSL.

Flintham, A (2004) Postmodernist portfolio people: Sustainability and succession in school leadership, *Management in Education*, 18 (3): 16-19.

Fidler, B and Atton, T (2004), *The Headship Game: the challenges of contemporary school leadership*, Routledge Falmer: London.

Fidler, B and Jones, J (2004) Second headships, Paper presented at the SCRELM/BELMAS research conference, St Catherine's College, Oxford, July.

Gabarro, J (1987) *The Dynamics of Taking Charge*, Boston: Harvard Business School Press.

Gronn, P (1999) *The Making of Educational Leaders*. London: Cassell.

Howson, J (2003) The relationship between headteachers' length of service in primary and secondary schools and selected PANDA grades, Nottingham: NCSL.

Howson, J (2005) *The State of the Labour Market for Senior Staff in Schools in England and Wales*. Haywards Heath: NAHT.

Mortimore, P, Sammons, P, Stoll, L, Lewis, D and Ecob, R (1988). *School Matters: The Junior Years*, Somerset: Open Books.

National College for School Leadership (2001) *Leadership Development Framework*, Nottingham: NCSL.

Parkay, F and Hall, G (Eds) (1992) *Becoming a Principal*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Parkin, J (2005) 'Heads don't hang about', *Times Educational Supplement*, 14th January.

Reeves, J, Moos, L and Forrest, J (1997). The school leader's view, in: Macbeth, J (Ed) *Effective School Leadership*, London: Paul Chapman/Sage.

Ribbins, P (1998) On ladders and greasy poles; developing school leaders' careers. Paper presented at the Third ESRC Seminar, Milton Keynes, June.

Weindling, D and Earley, P (1987) *Secondary Headship: The First Years*. Windsor: NFER-Nelson.

Woods, R (2002) *Enchanted Headteachers: sustainability in primary school headship*. Nottingham: NCSL.

Table 1: Heads' destinations on leaving a school – 2003-2004 NAHT survey

(Howson, 2005)

<i>Destination</i>	<i>Primary Heads (%)</i>	<i>2ndry Heads (%)</i>
Another headship	22	18
Another post in ed	11	14
Post outside education	4	3
Retirement at 60+	18	22
Retirement before 60	36	36
Other	9	7
	N = 994	N = 189

Table 2: Current status of NFER heads in 2003 (Earley & Weindling, 2004)

Retired	60
Still in post	5
Died	4
LEA/HEI/self-employed	4
Professional association	2
Unobtainable	6
Don't know	19
	N = 100

Table 3: Future work preferences of serving headteachers

<i>Preference (%)</i>	<i>1980s NFER 2ndry HTs</i>	<i>2001 Primary (DfES)</i>	<i>2001 2ndry (DfES)</i>
Remain at present school	57 (60)	60	59
Retirement/early retirement*	-	35	38

Move to a different school	51 (42)	30	29
Become a Consultant/Trainer		18	24
Leave ed for employ elsewhere	13 (19)	15	10
Take up an LEA post	17 (15)	10	6
Become an HMI/Inspector	13 (6)	7.5	10
Become a University lecturer	6 (6)	4	3
Other*	12 (16)	5.5	5.5

N = 139

N = 612

(Percentages do not add up to 100 as more than one response could be made)

(Figures in brackets for the new heads are from the 1988 NFER survey)

* The 1980s study did not include this preference but 'Other' could include early retirement.