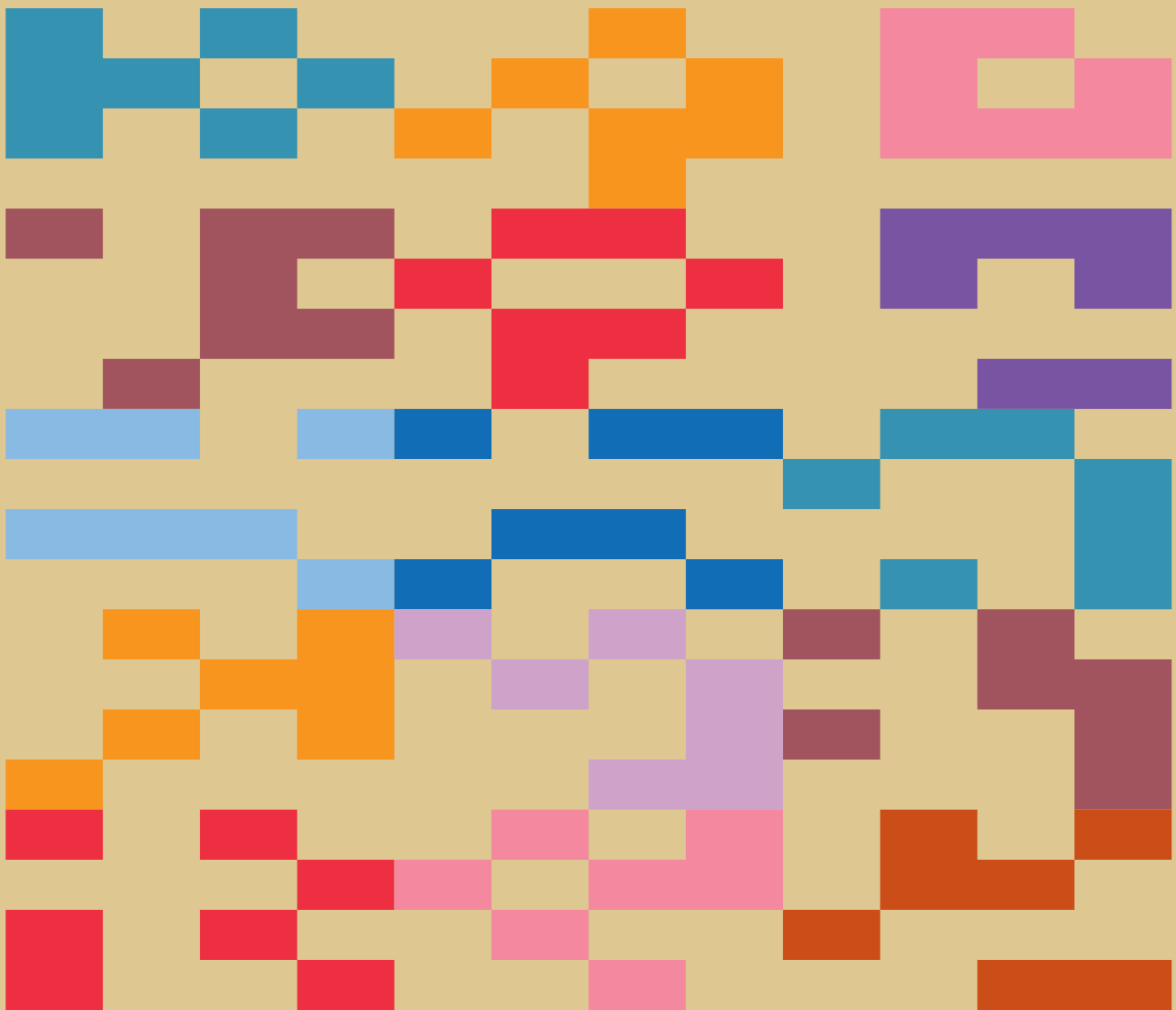


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Inspiring leaders;
improving children's lives

➔ A life in the day of a headteacher

A study of practice and well-being
The Practitioner Report



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Introduction

This report examines the working lives and practices of headteachers in England, based on a sample of 34 current heads – new and experienced – from primary, secondary and special schools and in a cross-section of locations.

The study came about, in part, as a result of National College for School Leadership (NCSL) regional conferences in 2005, at which relentlessness, accountability and complexity of headship emerged as major issues facing the profession. The study focuses, in particular, on the concepts of well-being, work–life balance, stress and job satisfaction.

Knowledge of these issues in relation to headship is sparse, largely because research has tended to focus on the teaching profession in general. Some previous studies have explored the well-being of heads specifically, but the role has altered significantly since then: the tasks that headteachers are expected to undertake have changed greatly and their work is increasingly perceived as pressured.

This study, therefore, provides timely evidence on contemporary practice and on the underlying issues that shape the working lives of headteachers today.

➔ Methodology

Data was compiled from a journal of headship, completed over the course of two weeks, plus observations of heads at work and interviews with them. Besides recording details of their daily lives, the headteachers were asked in particular to highlight critical incidents: points during the working week that were highly stressful and potentially most threatening to their overall well-being.

➔ Analysis

1. How heads divide their time

When the journals were analysed, they revealed 54 distinct areas of activity in which heads are involved, which were then grouped into eight categories.

Heads spent almost a quarter of their time on **administration**. General administration and before- and after-school clubs were the most time-intensive areas of work, although time spent on the latter varied between respondents.

Meeting the demands of **external stakeholders** was the second most time-consuming activity, accounting for 17 per cent of working time. Around one-third was centred on networking with other schools, though governor meetings also took up a significant proportion of time.

Management-based activities took up 15 per cent of time on average, with just under half related to the **management of staff**, although, again, this varied between individuals.

Internal stakeholders and **continuous professional development (CPD)** activities each accounted for nine per cent of the headteachers' working lives.

Personal issues took up four per cent of heads' time and **unspecified tasks** accounted for around 14 per cent.

Strategic leadership accounted for only seven per cent of their daily activities. Approximately one-third of this was centred on strategic planning, with a similar amount dedicated to leadership meetings.

Figure 1: Proportion of headteacher time for each broad task group



Note: Figures do not sum to 100 per cent due to rounding

2. Descriptions of the day

More detailed analysis of the information gathered from journals, interviews and observations revealed five further themes.

Demanding and pressured

The most commonly cited factor contributing to a view of the job as demanding and pressured was long hours. The 48-hour maximum working week, as specified under EU legislation, appeared to be exceeded by 70 per cent of heads. In the two-week research period, heads worked an average of 52.9 hours, rising in one case to 105.6 hours.

Women worked an average of 55.4 hours, slightly longer than men (50.3 hours). There were also differences in the hours worked between phases. The three special school participants worked 69.7 hours, compared with 50.1 hours for their colleagues in primary schools and 54.3 hours for those in secondary schools, although the low number of special school participants in the study means that this finding should be treated with caution.

The work pattern for all of the 34 heads involved long hours during the working week with, typically, one late evening meeting or event. They also spent some time working at the weekend.

More broadly, a third of heads described their workloads as highly demanding and their days as 'fast-paced'. The same number saw their workload as stressful and draining. Roughly one-sixth characterised it as relentless.

No typical day

Half the heads in the sample highlighted the fact that there was no such thing as a typical day. One noted how activities in his day ranged from 'picking up litter to professional development discussions'.

Many described the work as varied and felt that they needed to be flexible and able to respond to unexpected challenges. Multi-tasking was the norm for many.

For some it was a source of frustration; others viewed the variety with enthusiasm:

- *Gruelling week, next week does not promise much different. Despite this I wouldn't do anything else!*

In some cases, the unexpected demands – problems with student behaviour, such as the exclusion of a student with a knife, staffing issues regarding sickness or parental complaints about bullying, for instance – had the potential to dominate the day and overshadow other priorities.

Personal relationships

The traditional view of the headteacher, which is adhered to by children, staff and parents, had a definite impact on the time that heads spent on personal relationships. For instance, some participants had unscheduled meetings with students, sent to them for completing a good piece of work. Similarly, parents attending the school were often likely to ask for the headteacher, even though discussions with the classroom teacher may have been just as, or even more, worthwhile. The headteacher's symbolic value here was critical.

Heads generally drew considerable support from other staff. Many in the study relied significantly on their administrative staff, for example, and support staff generally often acted as an important filter, reducing the pressures on the head by dealing with visitors, parents and paperwork. Delegation of activities to other colleagues helped reduce the workload to a more manageable level and allowed the headteachers to focus on areas of greater priority. As one head noted:

- *You'd be crazy not to delegate. And I think that's where a lot of my colleagues are getting bogged down, in that admin and data handling work, instead of being out with the children and the team where it matters.*

Management and leadership

Many heads stressed the importance for leadership to have a high profile within the school, both for students and staff alike. They arrived early at school, took walkabouts during break-time and at the start and end of the day. Such strategies provided opportunities for informal discussion with staff, parents and children, but also for participants to model desired behaviour and help to establish the 'right' ethos in the school.

Other issues

Most noteworthy here was the emotional nature of the job. Many participants demonstrated a considerable personal commitment to their work, with the result that headship was often something of an emotional rollercoaster with distinct highs and lows. Children were invariably core to these contrasting views, with heads deriving considerable satisfaction from seeing them achieve and develop, and from simply being in their company.

3. Rewards of the job

Three aspects emerged as most satisfying:

- being child centred
- developing good relationships
- achieving things

Developing children

One of the most rewarding aspects of the job, for around four-fifths of heads in the study, was its child-centred nature and the chance to contribute to children's progress, development and success:

- *Simply having the children here, seeing them succeed and prepare to be citizens of the 21st century is really rewarding. To see them go home at the end of the day and [know that] they've really learnt something that they couldn't do when they arrived is really good.*

Developing staff

Supporting teachers and staff was rated by almost half of the participants as providing a high degree of reward and satisfaction, both personally and professionally:

- *It's empowering people to go and do it and ... you're pushed to develop yourself as well as the children in your care. That you're in a position to be able to do that for people really is one of the buzz factors in this job.*

The nature of the job

Half of the participants found great satisfaction in 'achieving things'. For some, being busy, carrying out a variety of tasks, resolving issues and enjoying high levels of autonomy and control all contributed to their satisfaction:

- *It's like being a film director – you have the world in microcosm, you have the power to play with all the pieces.*

Some regarded the pace and unpredictability of the job as both challenging and enjoyable.

Leading the strategic direction of the school and its improvement was seen as being especially satisfying and rewarding for more than a third. Around a quarter of participants stated that receiving positive feedback – from parents as well as external praise from Ofsted – was rewarding and satisfying.

Many participants felt that having a moral purpose provided a degree of reward and satisfaction:

- *Liking what I do and thinking the work the [headteacher] does is important work makes me think what I do is worthwhile and this increases my sense of well-being.*

Personal relationships

Half of those interviewed felt that good relationships were an important factor in making the job a satisfying one. A number of heads said good staff relationships had been especially important during difficult times, which suggests that sometimes the best parts of the job are also closely associated with its worst aspects:

- *It's frequently in the crisis that you see the strength of the people that you work with.*

Several heads also regarded their senior leadership teams as being especially important to them in terms of support and comradeship.

Resolving parental issues, welcoming parents to the school and being able to show off the positives were also pinpointed as important for some.

4. Which elements of the job are least rewarding?

Key areas were:

- negative staff issues
- parental matters
- pupil behaviour
- bureaucracy

Negative staff issues

Almost three-quarters of heads in the study felt that dealing with staff problems was the least satisfying aspect of the job. The issues fell loosely into two categories: those relating to organisational or management issues; and those relating to relationships. Of the former, the most significant were restructuring and teaching and learning responsibility (TLR) payments, supply cover issues and staffing cuts and resignations. Relationships predominantly focused on providing difficult and negative feedback to staff and dealing with competency matters:

- *The lowest points of the job are obviously to do with people. Internal applicants applying for jobs that they do not get is something I find very difficult to deal with.*

A number of participants said that the feeling of being let down by colleagues, for instance those who were not fully committed to the school, had low expectations of pupils or were unenthusiastic, had a negative impact on them personally and on their role as headteacher.

Parental matters

Negative parental issues added to the tensions of school life and offered little reward or satisfaction for around two-fifths of heads. In particular, they highlighted key areas as unrealistic and differing expectations of parents, the aggressive behaviour of some parents and the lack of support for the work that the school was doing.

Pupil behaviour

Almost a third of headteachers regarded pupil behaviour as an issue and those who elaborated tended to focus on exclusions, violent or aggressive behaviour and bullying by pupils. One participant expressed concern about the ongoing challenge of pupil behaviour and its potential impact on teachers, pupils and school culture. Another expressed feeling a sense of failure at having to resort to excluding a child:

- *Our policy is to try to keep kids in school at all costs – however difficult they may be, however challenging their behaviour. There's a low if you've got to go to the governors and say we don't want this pupil in our school any more.*

Bureaucracy

More than a third of participants felt that demanding and relentless bureaucracy, including government initiatives, accountability and paperwork, contributed to the pressure and imbalance in their working lives, increased their workload and damaged staff morale. Some pointed to a lack of support from government, particularly in relation to data collation.

The accountability of headship and the target-driven culture of schools were seen to offer little reward and satisfaction, although the heads concerned did not indicate that targets and accountability measures should be withdrawn altogether. Instead, they felt that broader and more diverse qualitative measures should supplement the reliance on narrow quantitative ones.

5. What would headteachers change about their job?

Three specific issues emerged:

- accountability, bureaucracy and external demands
- capacity and support
- professional development

Accountability, bureaucracy and external demands

Several heads raised the demands of Ofsted inspections as something that they would like to change. Preparation for inspection was seen as too time-consuming and the inspection itself was considered to be based on a punitive, rather than supportive, philosophy. League tables were also viewed by a number as evidence of this negative approach and as a cause of increasing both competition between schools and deterrents to collaboration. On the positive side, the greater emphasis on self-evaluation in inspections was seen as a good thing, though still demanding for schools.

Some heads pointed to new initiatives and changes in government policy as increasing the burdens on schools. Combined with the Ofsted requirements, they felt that such burdens lead to a stifling of creativity and innovation.

Governing bodies were another area thought to be in need of change. For some heads at least, they generated extra work and frustration and used time that could be better spent on strategic planning for the school.

Other sources of pressure included bureaucracy, duplication of form filling for different bodies and general policy document overload by email.

Capacity and support

More money for general staffing would help to increase capacity for just under a third of the participants, with many heads mentioning extra administrative staff in particular. Others highlighted the benefits of having expert support in fields such as grant application writing and personnel management.

Professional development

More opportunities for professional development, with time away from school to reflect on the challenges of headship and to network, would be welcomed by just under a fifth of participants as a way of supporting heads' well-being.

Changing the culture of headship

At the heart of the issue of culture change was a desire to move away from heroic models of leadership towards a culture where leadership is shared more broadly across the school:

- *Heads are important, I don't deny that for one second, but there is something about the leader, the figurehead, which I don't think is very helpful. It's at odds with the notion of shared leadership.*

6. What contributes to a positive work–life balance?

In psychological terms, the methods used by the heads in the study for maintaining work–life balance are a mix of two types of coping strategy.

- **Direct action techniques:** direct action involves getting a clear idea of the source of stress so that stress can be eliminated. Once the source has been established, changes can be made to a person's role or environment to ensure that the stress does not reoccur.

- Palliative techniques: palliative techniques do not deal directly with the source of the stress, but instead seek to reduce the feeling of stress in an individual.

The coping strategies used by heads fell into roughly four categories:

- health and hobbies
- family, friends and personal support
- strategies for managing work
- personal philosophy

Health and hobbies

Heads listed health and fitness activities, including alternative therapies, such as acupuncture and reflexology, and sports, as a way of finding a balance. Increased exercise for one head had been highly beneficial in improving energy levels and reducing tension. Another stressed the need for ‘a wide range of experiences’, referring to reading, the theatre and playing golf. One pastime mentioned by several participants was music, either playing an instrument or playing music in the office and around the school to create a calm atmosphere.

Family, friends and personal support

Family support was seen by many as an important factor in maintaining a good work–life balance, as was the backing of friends. Supportive networks of colleagues were viewed as positively contributing to work–life balance by some participants:

- *Family is very important to me but at work it is undoubtedly the quality of colleagues. Shared senior leadership has a huge advantage ... They're there advising and supporting. Whenever important decisions are made, we always reach them collectively.*

Other support networks included governors acting as critical friends, local authority link inspectors and administrative staff, plus networks of colleagues outside their own schools.

Strategies for managing work

For some, a positive work–life balance depended on effectively prioritising, recognising that the school cannot do everything and focusing on those things that are most likely to improve learning:

- *We've got the confidence with government initiatives to take it or leave it ... We've become good at filtering, not allowing government initiatives and bureaucracy to wear us down.*

Other key strategies included school diaries, notebooks and logs, diaries shared with secretaries, parental logs and 'week beginning' sheets.

Implementing rules and limits on workload and working practices was mentioned by just under a third of participants. Some admitted going into school at the weekend and preparing for Ofsted over half-term; others worked late during the week, sometimes until 7pm in order to get things done and ensure that their weekend is free.

One head pursued a very different strategy:

- coming in early but rarely taking work home
- not coming in during holidays, apart from examination week and one day during half-term
- ensuring that the weekly senior leadership team meeting finishes by 5pm
- ensuring that meetings last a maximum of one hour and take place only if absolutely necessary
- going to a gym and encouraging others to do the same

Delegating, as far as possible, was essential for half of the heads in the study. One head said:

There are very few bits of the job I do without consultation or discussion with the deputies. I could be out of the school for a week and the deputies would probably run the school just as well as I do, if not better. They would know exactly what to do, dealing with individual children, teachers, personnel issues and parents.

Besides assigning responsibility to staff, some considered handing responsibility to expert external providers as another way of delegating effectively. One participant said:

- *I've been into schools where I've seen headteachers fixing the taps. There is so much that only you can do – somebody else could fix the taps! It's about doing the things that take your training and understanding and experience ... that only you can do.*

Personal philosophy

Personal philosophies that enable headteachers to maintain and sustain a sense of work–life balance were important according to half the heads in the study. A strong mental attitude and training oneself not to succumb to stress were fundamental, said one.

Another dimension was religious belief. One practising Christian felt that her headship was based on vocation and mission and that that conviction helped sustain her in the early days of her headship:

- *My first three years here were an absolute nightmare. There were incredible difficulties. I had really difficult staff and there were times when I'd go home and cry and think 'why am I doing this job?' But I knew in my heart that it was where God wanted me to be and I carried on.*

Linked to religious belief was the idea of a moral purpose and personal values and 21 per cent of heads felt that making a difference to pupils' lives helped to both drive and sustain them.

Many also spoke of the idea of protected time, where heads consciously set aside time for themselves and their families or to be with staff, for example making sure that staff all sit down together at lunchtime to eat.

Lastly, for just under half of the participants, having a positive outlook and a sense of humour was felt to sustain a positive work–life balance.

7. What hinders work–life balance?

The picture that the heads described was by no means entirely rosy. Around 15 per cent said they did not strike a good work–life balance. One described his as 'rubbish' and, at times, 'absolutely appalling'.

Altogether, heads in the study raised 19 different issues in response to this question. The answers illustrate five key themes:

- work demands
- paperwork
- lack of opportunities for delegation
- need for control
- staff issues, including unionisations

Work demands

This was an issue for more than a third of heads. For one participant, accountability and external pressures revolved around the pressures of standard attainment tests. Others listed accountability issues such as Ofsted, health and safety, and Every Child Matters (ECM).

Paperwork, lack of opportunities for delegation and a need for control

A few participants admitted to being too hands-on with administration, feeling accountable and unable or unwilling to delegate. One suggested that it was easier to handle administrative tasks themselves rather than delegate. For some, it was important to feel in control by checking through documents from meetings and arrangements for school visits. Others were sometimes drawn into potentially exciting, external projects that, in reality, only added to an already heavy workload.

Staff issues

Some participants cited unions, absenteeism, competency and demands around sensitive child—parent issues as hindering work—life balance. One head highlighted a conflict between parental and professional views of learning priorities:

- *Parents today feel they are consumers and that the school should meet their needs; they have their own agenda and this often [involves] them putting their children under pressure.*

Other issues

Insufficient support was also raised as undermining work—life balance. Some participants felt that there should be special recognition of the particular expectations facing a head who is new to a school.

8. Ways to improve work–life balance

Key themes, drawn from the many ideas put forward by heads in the study, were:

- administrative support
- delegation
- reduced dependency on the head
- improved professional development
- reduced working hours
- dedicated leadership time

Administrative support

More administrative support would help to improve the work–life balance for just over a fifth of heads in the study, while others cited a need for more teaching cover or additional leadership posts. Both were closely linked to the desire for a bigger budget.

Delegation

Some said their work–life balance would be improved by more delegation and distributed leadership. One head described a need to ‘reduce the culture of reliance among staff and introducing effective remodelling to promote the delegation of work’.

Reducing dependency on the head

Both of the above points were related to reducing dependency on the head. Some heads felt that a strategic approach, to areas such as management of premises and information and computer technology (ICT), could further reduce staff and school dependency on the headteacher and so facilitate work–life balance.

Better continuous professional development

Some felt that new professional development options for heads, such as compulsory sabbaticals and headship secondments, could also help serving heads to maintain a better work–life balance.

Reduced working hours

The issue of number of working hours was mentioned by several heads. Suggestions included capping the hours that heads can work and encouraging heads to manage their time more effectively. Others pointed out that heads need to develop an ability to say 'no' to some requests.

Dedicated leadership time

Allied to effective time-management was the need for dedicated leadership time, such as finding time in the day when heads would work on strategic issues. One participant said:

- *For teachers, things have improved. Why can't the same thing happen for heads?*

Other issues

Other issues raised were:

- swifter resolution of staffing issues, particularly a quicker way of dealing with underperforming teachers
- increased support from government in relation to Ofsted
- changes to the school year, enabling heads to pace themselves over equal length terms and 'avoid the exhausting autumn term'

➔ Conclusions and implications

As is well documented, a national shortage of headteachers is looming, which the College and others are taking steps to address. The key factor in the prospective shortage is the retirement bulge – the high number of heads due to retire in the next few years. But it is exacerbated by other factors, such as heads leaving the profession prematurely due to the demanding nature of the job and negative perceptions of the job as relentless, bureaucratic and all-consuming, which deter potential leaders from coming forward.

One striking conclusion to emerge from this study is that for some heads, despite its challenges, headship is the best job that they could do. It is even, in some cases, a vocation. Such dedication will go some way to delivering retention in the profession and those individuals may also have a positive influence on those coming up through the ranks.

The factors that heads find appealing or unattractive vary between individuals. Paradoxically, for some participants, the most demanding aspects of their work – the variety, complexity and accountability – are the very things that others find most rewarding.

The study findings also demonstrate that, for some participants, a healthy work–life balance is achievable, while for others it is not, despite similar demands, workloads and pressures. The key coping strategies identified in this study offer some insights into how and why some headteachers achieve a work–life balance.

Some headteachers are prepared to make difficult choices and brave decisions that are ultimately in the best interests for them and their schools. But questions remain as to why some participants had not developed coping strategies that would support work–life balance. Does this finding indicate that there is a specific personal development need for these participants, or that conditions have proved to be obstructive despite their attempts?

Most of those who relish the challenges and enjoy the variety of the role – and also achieve a positive work–life balance – had several things in common, including:

- distributed leadership across and within the school
- ability to prioritise their personal and professional lives
- ability to deal confidently and comfortably with negative staff, parent and pupil issues
- involvement in supportive networks or collaboratives
- positive and active life outside school

Distributed leadership

The distribution of leadership requires headteachers to be able to delegate leadership to others, albeit within a framework of accountability and clear roles and responsibilities. The evidence from this study suggests that headteachers who successfully distribute leadership within their schools will be in a better position to take control of both their lives and their work, enjoying the challenges and variety of the role.

Some heads may be unwilling to let go of the reins, fearing loss of control or a potential fall in standards. But it may also be that some headteachers are simply unsure about how to address the distribution of leadership and to develop it within their school.

It would seem appropriate that **distributed leadership should be given a renewed or higher profile within current and future leadership programmes**. Hitherto, work has tended to focus on what distributed leadership is and what the benefits of distributed leadership might be. But the study indicates that it would be useful for future leadership development to focus on how heads develop and engage in distributed leadership in their schools, and to provide further guidance and support for those leaders who wish to pursue it.

Prioritise personal and professional lives

Some heads do manage to maintain a good work–life balance by keeping a clear focus on strategic leadership, distributing leadership to others and prioritising their work. There is also evidence in the study to indicate that the prevailing perception of the head as the school figurehead for students, parents and staff makes it harder for heads to delegate and prioritise their work in the way that they would choose.

It suggests there might be a need to change the perceptions of staff and parents in terms of the demands they place upon heads.

But there is also a need for heads themselves to demonstrate and make clear the limits of expectations. In addition, **the development of specific strategies for prioritising work should be further explored** and shared with school leaders, alongside coaching and mentoring opportunities and interpersonal, negotiation, time-management and organisational skills.

Providers of leadership development programmes should consider the stage of leadership development at which these specific training opportunities would be most appropriate.

Equally, many of these training opportunities would provide a suitable collaborative project for colleagues in networks.

Dealing confidently with negative staff, parent and pupil issues

Delivering bad news to staff, dealing with negative parental views and pupil behaviour issues were often a source of stress and dissatisfaction for the heads in the study. It seems sensible, therefore, to include **appropriate training for interpersonal negotiation and feedback skills to headteachers at national or local level**. The training should cover ways to equip headteachers with the confidence to take control of these exchanges and see such situations as creative challenges.

Supportive networks and collaboratives

Many participants found networks and collaborative ways of working, personal and professional, to be good ways to cope with the everyday pressures and issues of school life and ultimately to achieve a better work–life balance. Increased opportunities for headteachers to engage in networks, and the likely benefits, should be highlighted, fostered and encouraged by all those who work with headteachers, including local authorities and those engaged in providing leadership development programmes.

Positive and active life outside school

Diaries often painted a picture of long hours, complexity and accountability, with little time left at the end of the day or during weekends for other activities. But, for some participants at least, the picture was very different, with them participating in numerous interests and regular health and fitness activities, and going away at weekends. These participants were aware of and prioritised time for pastimes and activities that provided a mental, as well as sometimes physical, change from school life and enabled them to keep a balance, recharge their batteries and re-energise themselves.

Not unsurprisingly, these tended to be the headteachers who had effective organisational systems and processes in place, who had distributed leadership within the school and who were able to prioritise their workloads.

An increasing number of headteachers are now offering practical strategies to support the well-being of teachers, such as relaxation and alternative therapies. This is an area of school life that has the potential to make a large and effective difference to work–life balance, and yet it is one that has received limited recognition or attention.

The possibilities to **think creatively about the opportunities** should be grasped by all those involved in leadership development and by headteachers themselves.

Headteachers have a crucial role to play in this area through modelling and leading by example. Taking time for personal as well as professional interests and pastimes, making time for holidays and breaks away and being seen to leave school early at some time during the week send positive messages to others within the school that it is all right for them to do the same.

System-wide implications

The issues outlined above are not insurmountable. Indeed, in many ways, they seem relatively easy to address if given a little focus and some collaboration and sharing of expertise and knowledge among relevant providers of leadership development opportunities and headteachers themselves.

However, underpinning these implications there are a number of bigger, **system-wide issues**.

When participants were asked what they would change about their jobs, they cited accountability, bureaucracy and external demands, capacity and support, and improved professional development.

In light of these findings, it is debatable whether additional staff capacity would make a significant difference to the working lives of some headteachers. Headteachers who are unable or unwilling to delegate leadership would be likely to face similar difficulties with work–life balance irrespective of the number of additional staff.

However, there are issues that warrant further attention, including:

- volume and frequency of government initiatives, which are seen to add to headteacher workload and which have undermined morale
- the amount of paperwork that is needed to be completed by schools
- the levels and types of accountability faced by heads

A number of participants suggested that the need to duplicate information for different forms and initiatives could be eased if all forms used the same headings, to make cross-referencing simpler.

Bringing headteachers and school leaders together with policy-makers and national organisations to review current practices could generate more such practical solutions. The frequency of initiatives is another area that needs to be addressed at government and national level, which again could be informed by headteachers and school leaders.

Interestingly, heads did not suggest that accountability measures and targets should be withdrawn completely, but rather that the reliance on narrow, quantitative measures be supplemented by **broader and more diverse qualitative measures**. This may be addressed to some extent by the schools self-evaluation process but it is nevertheless an area for further discussion by headteachers themselves and at local and national level.

Issues of improved professional development included the potential for **secondments and opportunities** to engage in system leadership. Opportunities to engage in professional development do exist however: system leadership opportunities include consultant leaders, school improvement partners (SIPs) and national leaders of education (NLEs). Secondments could be negotiated with governors and local authorities, and research grants and fellowships can also be sourced by headteachers. It may therefore be simply a case of **making school leaders more aware of the potential opportunities** available to them while, at national level, considering further opportunities in recognition of length of service or achievement.

Future research

The overall finding from this study is the need for further empirical research into the specific characteristics of current headteachers' perceptions of their workloads, well-being and job satisfaction. Such research might also take into account the balance between the roles of leading professional and chief executive in a school, as well as the new models of headship, including co-headship, federations and executive headship, and the new roles and responsibilities that heads are assuming under ECM and other agendas.

This would enable NCSL and other agencies to provide bespoke leadership development opportunities. It is only through activities with headteachers in a variety of contexts and phases that a clearer understanding of the issues surrounding recruitment and retention of headteachers can be found.

NCSL has embarked on a second, quantitative, large-scale follow-up study to explore these issues further.

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