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Headteacher Recruitment, Retention and Professional Development in Wales: Challenges and Opportunities.

Abstract

This paper explores issues of headteacher recruitment, retention, and professional development in Wales, within the context of the wider educational policy reforms which, since 2011, have introduced greater external accountability into schools. The paper argues that these reforms have resulted in changes to headteachers' professional roles and identities and that some aspects have militated against headteachers' cultivation and exercising of their 'professional capital' (Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012). The data is derived from 30 semi-structured interviews conducted with headteachers, deputy and assistant Heads throughout Wales. Participants' accounts articulate concerns that greater accountability within the Welsh system is acting as a disincentive to headteacher recruitment, and that headteachers often lack independent sources of support, advice and mentoring, which they can access without the burden of additional scrutiny and accountability. The paper concludes by offering a series of observations and recommendations to inform recent renewed efforts to create a new support infrastructure and framework for the development of educational leadership in Wales.

Introduction

The role of the headteacher as a catalyst for school improvement has been celebrated in both academic and policy literature. This focus on leadership has become more intense within contemporary high-accountability policy contexts (Crow and Muller, 2017; Leithwood and Louis, 2012). Crow and Muller (2017) argue that research into educational leadership should be contextualised by an analysis of the wider policy reforms and initiatives which frame the professional role of headteachers. This paper contributes to these debates by assessing how policy reforms in Wales have altered Welsh headteachers' professional roles and how this may, in turn, have contributed to what has been described in media reports as a Welsh headteacher recruitment 'crisis' (BBC, 2016; Flint 2016). From this we will consider the professional support and development needs of headteachers in Wales.

The research this paper draws on is from a study into this alleged headteacher recruitment 'crisis' in Wales, which has been the subject of media coverage and some public debate (Lewis, 2017) - this has raised questions in relation to the recruitment, retention, and professional development of headteachers. The data is derived from 30 semi-structured interviews conducted with headteachers, deputy and assistant Heads throughout Wales, and the paper concludes by offering a series of observations and recommendations to inform recent renewed efforts to create a new support infrastructure and professional framework for educational leadership in Wales.

Political Context

Powers over almost all aspects of education policy were transferred to Wales following the first devolution settlement in 1999. Since then, differences in the political orientations of England and Wales towards education have resulted in the emergence of distinct policy landscapes in the two countries (Power, 2016). The most substantial difference relates to the Welsh system's renewed commitment to comprehensive education, and its rejection of UK policies driven by discourses of marketization and choice (Reynolds, 2008). With regard to the education workforce, Wales's efforts focussed on building an alternative relationship between practitioners and government, marked by notions of trust and collaboration (Power, 2016); however, this approach later came under increasing scrutiny due to the comparatively low performance of Wales, relative to other UK countries, in the international PISA rankings (Andrews, 2011; Andrews, 2014). This led to a shift in the discourse of trust towards greater accountability, with the introduction of a raft of new accountability measures, many of which were outlined in Leighton Andrews's 20 Point Plan (Andrews, 2011). This included numerous reforms, such as the reintroduction of a form of school grading described as 'banding'; and performance indicators and national tests for 7-11 year olds. Of these, school banding measures were perhaps the most divisive, somewhat inevitably drawing comparison with league tables due to their public comparison of schools (Evans, 2017). This introduction of banding for Welsh secondary schools was particularly sensitive since it was viewed as a retrenchment from previous disavowals of league tables which were a cornerstone of the Welsh 'producerist alternative' (Reynolds, 2008). School banding proved exceptionally controversial, not only from a political perspective, but due to the volatility and unreliability of some of the data generated. In response to this criticism a refined system of school categorisation for secondary schools was introduced in 2014 which would represent schools according to a 'traffic light system'; this was extended to Welsh primary schools in 2015. Despite attempts to frame these school grading mechanisms in terms of support, there remains the perception that these are primarily the reintroduction of levers of accountability into the Welsh system (Senedd Research, 2017).

A number of structural changes were also instigated as part of Andrews's reforms, including the establishment of four regional consortia, bringing together 22 local authorities into regional alliances to deliver the school improvement agenda (Welsh Government, 2012) and the formation of a School Standards and Delivery Unit within Welsh Government (WG) (Andrews, 2011). While the aim of these was to address problems in efficiency, in some cases, however, this has led to a tension between the roles of different meso-level actors (OECD, 2014; Hill, 2013), whilst presenting additional challenges for schools and headteachers (Authors, 2018). One of the main criticisms of these initiatives has been that the new accountability measures were introduced without the development of parallel, independent support structures which would enable schools to navigate and meet their requirements of the new measures (Authors, 2018).

Another criticism levied at Wales has focused on the lack of a leadership development strategy across the Education workforce (Hill, 2013; OECD, 2014). Whilst there have been several attempts, with varying degrees of success, to address the needs of new qualified teachers and those preparing for headship, Wales has not had a coherent and joined-up framework of support and professional learning for the building the leadership capacity throughout the system (OECD, 2014). Previous articulations of leadership development programmes in Wales have included multiple iterations of the National Professional Qualification for Headteachers (NPQH) and for a short time the Professional Headship Induction Programme (PHIP) and Leadership Programme for Serving Heads (LPSH). The current Welsh Government reforms place a critical importance on leadership and the need for leadership development across the system in order to support and enable the aspirations of the National Mission for Wales (WG, 2017a). To date this has been realised with the establishment of the National Academy for Educational Leadership and a refreshed set of professional standards for teaching and leadership (WG, 2017b) in an attempt to provide a clearer continuum for progression.

Professional capital, agency and accountability

In exploring the dynamics of headteacher recruitment and retention in this context, this paper has applied Hargreaves and Fullan's (2012) work on the professional capital of teachers to headteachers' professional capital. In their influential study Hargreaves and Fullan outline three forms of teacher professional capital: human, social and decisional. They define the first of these - human capital - as the knowledge base of individual teachers as professionals, including their research literacy, and understanding of and empathy with children, and their diverse cultural and personal backgrounds. Their framework argues that the second form of professional capital - social capital - includes

teachers' relationships and shared endeavour, as well as their ability to access mentoring, support and collaboration with fellow professionals to improve teachers' knowledge and develop a collective identity based on mutual obligation, reciprocity and trust. Ideally the development of social capital would foster a sense of 'collective capacity' and system-wide professional approaches. Finally, the third form of capital - decisional capital - relates to teachers' agency and their ability to make decisions within a collaborative, transparent and open environment (Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012, p. 5).

Fullan, Rincón-Gallardo and Hargreaves (2015) note that a hallmark of successful educational systems often lies in the building of such capital among teachers within schools. They further differentiate between internal and external accountability: the former, they note, relies on the kinds of group responsibility, shared commitment to improvement and collaborative endeavours which are enabled by strong professional capital. They define external accountability as system leaders instituting externally-motivated frameworks for monitoring, compliance, selective intervention and public transparency, characterised as being inimical to internal, more practitioner-owned accountability (Fullan, Rincón-Gallardo and Hargreaves, 2015 p.3). While their work focusses on teachers, this study will illustrate how Hargreaves and Fullan's tripartite of professional capital has relevance to the professional role and development of headteachers.

Headteacher Recruitment in Wales

The issue of defining precisely what constitutes a recruitment shortage or acute 'crisis' has been the subject of some commentary, with three common indicators frequently used to assess the vitality or otherwise of headteacher recruitment: namely the proportion of vacant posts to total posts; the number of applications received per vacant post; and the proportion of headteacher vacancies that are re-advertised due to a failure to recruit at the first attempt (Macbeath, 2009; Macbeath, Gronn *et al.*, 2009, Howson and Sprigade, 2010).

A report produced by NAHT Cymru (2016) considered these key measures of Headteacher recruitment during 2014-15, using data which was gathered via Freedom of Information requests to local authorities in Wales (18 of Wales's 22 local authorities provided such data) (*Ibid.*, p. [1]). The figures prompted concern and even suggestions in media reports of a 'crisis' in headteacher recruitment (BBC, 2016; Flint, 2016). The NAHT Cymru report noted that 18% of Headteacher posts were vacant across the local authorities for whom data was available, and it identified particular difficulties in a number of authorities, including Monmouthshire (with 42% of its Headteacher vacancies unfilled at the time), Cardiff (with 35%) and Carmarthenshire (with 30%) (NAHT Cymru, 2016), p.[8]). It also highlighted that

all but five of the Welsh local authorities for whom reliable data was available, had re-advertised Headteacher posts (*Ibid*., p.[10]), and that all but six authorities had reported that the majority of headteacher recruitment processes they had initiated in 2014-15 had not succeeded in drawing more than five applicants. Figures published by the Education Workforce Council also show that recent years have seen a substantial decrease in the average number of applications received per vacancy for headteacher or deputy headteacher positions (without a teaching commitment) in Wales. In 2012, an average of 29.5 applications were received per such vacant post – and by 2015 this had fallen to just 9.6 applications per vacancy (Education Workforce Council, 2017a: p.[17]. In the secondary and middle phases specifically: 18.5 applications per such post were received in in 2014, compared with just 5.6 per vacant post in 2016 (Education Workforce Council, 2017b, p.[14]).

Headteacher Recruitment 'crises'

Studies of school leadership recruitment consistently emphasise that periodic recruitment difficulties, and in some cases acute 'crises', can be observed across a range of international contexts with schools and local authorities struggling to recruit teachers to headship roles (Kwan and Walker, 2009; MacBeath, 2009; Rhodes and Brundrett, 2009; Gronn and Rawlings-Sanaei, 2003; Winter and Morgenthal, 2002).

MacBeath (2009, p.407) terms this the 'policymaker's puzzle': namely that, in such contexts, the requisite experience, skillset and qualification base may well be present in the profession at large, but that eligible people seem to outnumber unfilled vacancies. MacBeath (2009, p.407-09) further puts forward the notion of the 'career deputy', a senior leader within the school, who for host of reasons has not progressed, and may not wish to progress, to headship. He argues that the work of headteachers is highly visible to teachers within their schools, and that this 'front row seat' in observing the stress, workload, 'multiple accountabilities' and the unpredictability of headship and may act as a powerful deterrent to headship for some.

Accordingly, studies conducted in Scotland and in England have sought to explore this persistent recruitment deficit of school leaders against advertised vacancies, as well as identifying the specific barriers and disincentives that variously block or dissuade middle leaders and deputy heads from progressing to headship (Macbeath, Gronn *et al*., 2009; Tunnadine, 2011). In their study of headteacher recruitment and retention in Scotland, Macbeath, Gronn *et al*., (2009) identified a range of disincentives that featured prominently in teachers' own accounts of why they did not aspire to headship. These included a perception that the role of the headteacher became increasingly distant

from the locus of teaching and learning, responsibilities for finance and budgeting, workload and poor work-life balance, external pressure and accountability, managing disciplinary issues, having a more visible profile which would involve public speaking and an increased exposure to litigation (*Ibid*., p. 48-9). By contrast, when deputies and principal teachers were asked about the aspects of their jobs which made them content in their current roles, they cited salary, work satisfaction, an identification with the school's values and direction, in addition to their connection with pupils, and pupils' families (*Ibid*. p. 48). Thomson (2009, p. 6) argues that such pragmatic and ostensibly rational professional decisions will remain a powerful barrier to recruitment while potential candidates fear the impact headship will have on their health, families, workload and security.

Rhodes and Brundrett (2009, p.385) suggest that some teachers may also be reluctant to progress to headship on account of not wanting to assume a 'new professional identity': headship perhaps being viewed as an altogether different category of professional role, rather than one that is characterised by the competencies which many teachers see as core to their own professional identities. They also cite a lack of confidence as a barrier to teachers aspiring and progressing to headship. However, Macbeath, Gronn *et al*., (2009: 49) found that teachers, when asked to assess their confidence in areas of competence related to headship (such as providing strategic focus and direction, managing staff, dealing with stress and solving problems), were largely confident in their own abilities, suggesting 'unexploited or hidden capital' in the system. 'Managing school budgets' was found to be the area in which teachers felt the least confident, although the same study also suggests an over-estimation on the part of many teachers as to how much of headteachers' time is taken up by financial planning, and an underestimation of how much time headteachers typically devote to activities relating to teaching and learning (Ibid. p. 24-5).

Mentoring and Supporting Headteachers

The myriad of challenges facing many new headteachers can be overwhelming and are often not central to what new incumbents feel they 'signed up for' in taking on a headship role: these include isolation, time management issues and prioritising, and dealing with a vast array of competing priorities (Hobson et al., 2003; Bolam et al., 2000), coupled with the arbitrary and often unpredictable nature of the competing priorities and challenges. This can then be magnified with the increasing perception of public scrutiny and accountability (Rhodes and Fletcher, 2013), exacerbating such feelings of isolation.

Rhodes and Fletcher (2013) suggest that mentoring can help offset some of these challenges and can encourage new head teachers to feel proficient in the role. This in turn can support new headteachers' self-belief, which could be important in countering the narratives of "career" deputies, (MacBeath, 2011, p. 105) who can be fearful of the stress and increased workload associated with new headship. Similarly, Crawford and Earley (2011) argue that mentoring can assist new leaders in the development of confidence in their own capabilities, as well as supporting the acquisition of technical and role-specific related skills and knowledge. This builds on Gilmour and Kinsella's (2009) advocacy for mentoring in supporting decision-making skills which are critical to the headteacher role. Hobson and Sharp's (2005) examination of the literature on mentoring for headteachers, also reported on the multiple benefits specifically in relation to wellbeing: these include a decrease in feelings of solitude; improved self-assurance; less role-related stress and anxiety; and the ability to transition and recalibrate their professional identities to their new roles. Broader benefits related to problem-solving, communication skills and the speed of picking up new learning and associated ideas and concepts were also reported.

Significantly for this paper, Orr (2006, p. 1393) identified that leaders most valued mentoring arrangements that provided "a safe space" to explore ideas and challenges that they faced in the role. Key factors identified by Hobson and Sharp (2005) that affected the impact of mentoring for new headteachers included: ring-fenced time for mentoring; sensitive matching of mentors and mentees; quality of mentors – specifically possessing the attributes of trust, sensitivity, effective communication; and, finally, whether mentors themselves accessed professional learning in relation to their role. Authors (2017) expand on the values needed to underpin mentors' own professional learning especially when operating in challenging and high-stakes environments, to include: challenging ideas of consistency; prioritising diversity; an inclusive design; embracing complexity and adopting an inquiry stance – all necessary to support HT mentors in working with new headteacher mentees to build resilience and pursue agentive goals.

Methods

This was a qualitative study using semi-structured interviews with 30 head and deputy headteachers throughout Wales. The sample for the study drew on two sampling frames. The first of these was a wider multi-cohort, longitudinal study of Welsh schools which has been ongoing since 2012 (n=12). Within the latest phase of data gathering (2017) interviews were conducted with all headteachers within these case study schools. These schools have been sampled to reflect linguistic provision, school size and socio-demographic profile. The second, purposive sampling strategy drew on the data

released in relation to headteacher shortages in Wales. Drawing on this we created a sample based on those local authorities which were identified as having the highest rates of unfilled headteacher vacancies (NAHT Cymru, 2016): these were Carmarthenshire (30%); Cardiff (35%); and Monmouthshire (42%). A total of 18 interviews were conducted within these areas, 10 of which were with headteachers and 8 with deputy or assistant heads.

		Headteachers	Deputy and Assistant Headteachers
Multi-cohort, longitudinal study of Welsh schools	12	12	0
Purposive Sample from three local authorities	18	10	8
Total	30	22	8

Within the total sample of schools within the research five were Welsh-speaking the remainder were English-speaking schools. In the data we identify participants as either headteacher (HT); deputy headteacher (DHT) and their phase of schooling by primary (P) and secondary (S). Many of our respondents had engaged in a version of the NPQH programme which has been mandatory in Wales since 2005. We acknowledge that a comparatively small sample of respondents, such as this, does impose some limitations on the extent to which these findings can be extrapolated with confidence beyond the sample. And, in keeping with the qualitative nature of the study, this analysis makes no claims about demographic generalizability.

All the interviews were recorded with the participants' consent. These interviews were then transcribed while Welsh language interviews were then translated to allow to analysis as the research team were made up on Welsh and English language speakers. The team then met to develop coding themes, drawing on Miles, Huberman and Saldaña's (2014) coding protocols for analysing qualitative data. We then met on three subsequent occasions to develop these coding themes and relate these to wider issues in relation to the recruitment, retention and professional development of headteachers.

Findings from this Study

Headteachers' Perspectives on Accountability

When explaining the alleged 'crisis' in the recruitment and retention of headteachers in Wales respondents identified increased accountability as fundamental to reframing the professional role of

Welsh headteachers. However, respondents' positions on the issue of accountability were complex and nuanced, and accountability as a concept was certainly not dismissed out of hand - in fact, many respondents expressed the view that accountability was both a necessity and an inevitability for those in positions of leadership. Yet, when respondents spoke of such 'necessary' accountability it was almost always expressed as an intrinsically generated sense of professional responsibility, anchored in their own sense of their obligation to the communities, children and parents that they served, and the colleagues they led.

> 'There should be accountability, that's the other thing, you know? […] we should be accountable to parents, to children's families […]' (S-DHT)

> 'You've got a really good accountability structure with… within the school, and I think it… and the other thing is I think it's… it's about, um, how you, um, portray yourself and what you do, and you say what you do, so… and it's how involved you are as a Head Teacher as well.' (S-HT)

Yet, some drew a clear distinction between such accountability, and that which is divorced from teachers' contexts of practice:

> 'I think, you know, people should be accountable. [...] However, there's accountability and accountability for accountability's sake.' (P-HT)

Respondents expressed concerns at systems of external accountability which were variously described as multiple, shifting, overlapping, inconsistent and consequently, sometimes incoherent. They often noted the difficulty of satisfying the demands of multiple external accountabilities, whilst maintaining a clear focus on their own school vision as headteachers, and resisting the strategizing that such external systems can encourage.

> 'I am concerned that the government is changing things – for instance – next year I'm not sure how they're going to be measuring us. They haven't decided.' (P-HT)

Not only do these intensified accountability mechanisms pose a practical challenge; in some accounts they also posed a challenge to the very professional identity of some headteachers. The following extract demonstrates a commitment from one headteacher to keeping teaching and learning at the heart of their professional work and identity, despite increasing pressure to prioritize the managerial and administrative aspects of their role:

'I always say I'm a teacher first and foremost. Pressure is causing heads to be stuck in an office - office and admin role. You can become obsessed with paper work. Children are the important thing not what is in a file.' (P-HT)

Both deputy and head teachers expressed the central concern of this paper, namely that external accountability structures were having an impact on recruitment, through acting as a disincentive to those considering progression to headship.

'[I} can understand why lots of people would be put off from wanting to be a Head Teacher because of those accountability measures, absolutely.' (S-DHT)

The public-facing nature of some accountability mechanisms, most notably school categorisation, was seen as a risk to the reputation of the school, potentially leading to the loss of pupils.

'We get punished for bad results – we're put in categories – these are published. [. . .] It comes out in the papers when this happens – easy to lose children to the bigger schools …' [S-HT]

Interestingly, this participant describes the stigma of categorisation following poor results as a 'punishment', which runs counter to the official narrative of categorisation being used as a tool to enable the provision of appropriate support.

Mentoring and Professional Support

In order to counter some of the pressures, challenges and anxieties that participants articulated around the role of headship, many highlighted the need for mentorship that sat separately from the accountability and challenge mechanisms already in place. There was a widely held view that such mentors should be external to the local authority and regional consortia and should include a clear remit to provide both practical and pastoral support.

'there should be a formal system of mentoring.' (P-HT)

'Definitely should be a HT mentor to provide pastoral support.' (P-HT)

'there should be a formal system of supporting Head Teachers' wellbeing. I wonder who would do the referral for me to occupational health, should I, you know, well should god forbid anything happen to me.' (P-HT)

This final piece of data illustrated the sense of isolation that some headteachers felt – the perception that there would be no one looking out for them. There was a belief that the formal support arrangements in place for all other staff were not as prominent or present for headteachers. It also reaffirms concerns deputy headteachers articulated in relation to the headteacher role impacting negatively on their personal health and relationships (Thomson, 2009). This sense of isolation at the apex of what are becoming increasingly hierarchical work organisations was a consistent theme throughout the data. Both headteachers and deputy headteachers argued that to ameliorate this formal mentoring structures needed to be put in place:

'[you need] someone to be on your side' (P-HT)

'I think there should be someone, you know, you could call out and they'd come and have a meeting with you and you can sort ideas and problems through.' (P-DHT)

Participants felt existing mentor support was perceived to be at best *ad hoc* and piecemeal and at worst non-existent. Attention was also drawn towards the differing levels of support given to a newly qualified teachers, compared with newly appointed headteachers.

'I had no mentor' (P-HT)

'What's interesting is when you're an NQT, … you've got all that support around you going new into a job, but being a new Head Teacher is a new job, isn't it?' (P-HT)

Where there was support, it seemed to be where schools made their own arrangements and paid for mentoring which was delivered through consultancy organisations or was delivered by 'individual heroes' whose endeavours, whilst to be admired, seemed to be filling an apparent void in coherent and planned support structures for headteachers.

'I wouldn't say there's anybody that has helped … what you do need, you do need somebody who is prepared to be a mentor, don't you…? … but that's not been there. I'd have to find that person myself.' (S-HT)

'I really had to seek out the support for myself which was fine because I had some contacts, I'd had some good people who I could phone up … it was incredibly reactive. I felt as if I was a rabbit in the headlights for a lot of the time.' (P-HT)

'we get an associate [mentor] that meets with us every half term, about all of the things we're doing with school improvement - that's quite good because there's no accountability there, you know? It's not like a Challenge Advisor …' (S-HT)

'There is one HT who visited other schools and their headteachers in his own time.' (P-HT)

Given the perception of numerous and interrelated accountability arrangements the data emphasised the need for mentors to be independent, supportive and enablers of 'safe spaces' where headteachers could seek advice and assistance – without being judged or criticised or left feeling vulnerable to increased scrutiny. This related strongly to the Orr (2006) finding that 'safe spaces' were valued highly and necessary. Those headteachers who had made their own arrangements identified that one of the affordances of such collaborative relationships was that they provided support, and an internally-motivated mechanism for building professional capital (Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012), but were independent to external accountability structures: someone 'at the end of the phone' that you could share 'confidential things with' (P-HT); or 'a point of contact where you feel comfortable with that person and you can actually say: "Look, I really haven't a clue what I'm doing."' (P-HT). These respondents called for an uncoupling of formal support from informal mentoring:

'. . . it's maintaining that informal nature of it because I think there's a tendency all the time [for] it to become formal … and then you're thrown in … you have that authoritative person come in telling you you're not doing your job properly.' (P-DHT)

'I think you do need that person between a Head and a challenge advisor. You need a step where you can just discuss things and you're not accountable to them, you can just talk to them and air your concerns and even if you've just had a bad day in the office, you can just go aagh, you know' (P-DHT)

*'having that confidential friend to speak to, definitely… because I think there can be, um,
situations where people think they're helping by telling somebody else and [laughs] it just
makes it worse. They think oh they're struggling and I'll throw everybody in to help but it just
makes…it adds, kind of, fuel to the fire kind of thing. But, definitely having that friend, you
could speak to.' (P-DHT)*

The quality of mentoring was seen as being particularly important with participants commenting on
both inconsistencies in experiences and the benefits of effective mentoring in shaping how they felt
about undertook the role of headship <u>– this included mentoring provision as part of the National
Professional Qualification for Headteachers (NPQH).</u>

*'mentoring…needs to be looked at to make sure there's consistency in what they've got to do
and what they do, because I think there's people out there who go above and beyond and then
you've got others who want the title but don't really want the workload'. (P-DHT)*

*'I was very lucky that in my first full-time Headship I had, an outstanding mentor who had
recently retired . . . who was able to work alongside me . . . I was lucky to be able to get
someone who was interested in developing me as well as the school I was working at.' (S-HT)*

This data emphasises the need illuminated by Hobson and Sharp (2005) for professional learning for
the mentors themselves and should be the necessity for this to be developed around the principles of
inclusion and diversity together with challenging the notions of consistency and embracing complexity
– all necessary to promote resilience and an agentic approach to leadership (Authors 2017).

The role of the head

As noted above, headteachers and deputies noted a number of disincentives (Macbeath et al., 2009)
which prevented deputies from applying for headship. A frequently-raised issue was a perceived
mismatch between the skills of a teacher and a headteacher. The move to headship required the
adoption of a new, unfamiliar professional role. The job of the headteacher was considered to be
detached from the role of the teacher, necessitating a business minded and managerial approach:

'You need to be business minded' (P-HT)

'I just see it as so much a buildings and a business management role - so much pressure with HR and H&S.' (P-HT)

There was also a sense that that deputies might not see the role as being particularly attractive as it took them away from their strengths and required them to take on a post with a high-level of responsibility and risk in an area which they had little interest and a limited skillset. This was seen to be particularly problematic when deputies were not given the opportunities to develop the managerial skills needed to progress into headship.

*'But inevitably in a small school, I always had a full-time teaching role, very limited non-contact time and therefore I just didn't have exposure to lots of the things that you…you have to do as a Head Teacher…' (*P-HT)

The gap between the role of teacher and headteacher was also exacerbated by a perceived lack of training on the managerial aspects of the role, such as finance management. Without previous experience in their teaching role, or training in preparation for the headteacher job, it was seen as too much of a risk:

'the other aspects of the job are within your experience as a teacher – you deal with children, parents, curriculum, but not finance until you're the head. You get some training on this as part of qualification. But it's not real money in those workshops so in terms of finance that's the real fear. If you don't spend money in right way doesn't help children, results fall, standards fall. If you could get thorough detailed training then more might go for it. But the accountability is at every level.' [S-HT]

One of the fundamental critiques offered by headteachers was the lack of clarity in relation to responsibility for sanction and support. There was a recognition that the system had moved away from what was perceived, in the initial phases, as an overly-censorious approach. However, there was concern that the measures of success were both ephemeral and were primarily a tool for judging, rather than a means of support.

'[. . .] um, you never know from sort of one year to the next, you know, what those accountability measures are going to be really, and how they're going to play out.' (S-DHT)

Respondents indicated that the lack of stability within assessment metrics reflected wider system-level overlap, particularly at the meso-level within the Welsh education system where the boundaries and responsibilities of local authorities, regional consortia and the schools' inspectorate needed to be clarified.

Having recognised these various and, at times, overlapping accountability structures, the data suggests that some head teachers were aware of WG's attempts to create models of partnership working and felt that the accountability structures do allow for an element of negotiation and agency on the head teachers' part:

> *'I think the school-to-school working is excellent, we've gained as a school here; we've gained an awful lot, and you're learning all the time [. . .] there is always that idea that there's somebody that you can ring.' (P-HT)*

> *'a few years ago people were getting sacked left, right and centre, in schools […] and now the approach seems to have changed a little bit and, you know, there's a bit more of a… a kind of supportive…' (S-DHT)*

However, both the forced nature of this collaboration and the tensions between the rhetoric of collaboration and competition were highlighted as presenting challenges to this way of working as some collaborative relationships didn't feel authentic.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This paper has considered how the putative headteacher 'crisis' in Wales can, in part, be explained by the changing nature of the headteacher role, precipitated by recent education policy changes. A key element within this has been the introduction of increased and public accountability into the Welsh system. The data suggests that while there is evidence of some head and deputy teachers embracing these new roles, the majority felt that some of the more managerialist articulations did not align with their innate professional values, or act as a catalyst for cultivating professional capital (Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012). As a result of this, we contend that there has been an increased number of unfilled headteacher vacancies due to: increased exit rates; reluctance of deputies to take headship roles; and increased levels of strategizing around in an attempt to mitigate personal and professional risk.

The sense of risk and vulnerability has been amplified by both the pace and number of educational policy reforms within Wales resulting in overlap in both policy and structures (Ball, Maguire and Braun,

2012). A consequence of these overlaps has been uncertainty amongst headteachers in relation to realising performance metrics. This was particularly acute in relation to meso-level accountability and support structures: while there have been attempts to address both Hill's (2013) and OECD's (2014) concerns by providing clearer delineation within these, more clarity is needed in relation to where sanction and support rests. Indeed, the overwhelming view of headteachers who participated in this study was that challenge and support needed to be uncoupled to provide them with a 'safe space' and independent advocacy to whom they could turn for professional support, without the additional burden of further scrutiny and accountability. These increased accountability frameworks generated administrative work in relation to the creation and monitoring of data which impacted upon headteachers' ability to realise what they view as their 'core' responsibilities. This may be partially mitigated by WG's commitment to appointing business managers to support headteachers with the increasing financial and administrative burdens of headship. However welcome this is, it does not by itself address the fundamental issue of the professional and leadership role of the headteacher having moved away from the locus of teaching and learning; an issue, we contend, which can only be addressed through a reframing of the headteacher role itself.

When designing models of professional development for headteachers in Wales one can draw on Hargreaves and Fullan's (2012) models of capital. At a system-level Wales wants to attract the best potential headteachers into the role and address the perennial issue of the 'career deputy' (MacBeath, 2009, 2011). This, however, may call for a realignment in what the role of headship actually is. Key to this is moving headship away from narrow managerialist conceptions and promoting the agency of headteachers. Of course professional development should seek to foster human capital in relation to the knowledge-base needed for contemporary headship - such as managing data. However, as authors have argued (2017) in relation to teachers, professional development should encourage the ownership and critique of data throughout the system: data should be used to drive improvement through the creation of (Head)teacher-owned systems of internal accountability (Fullan, Rincón-Gallardo and Hargreaves, 2015). The newly instigated National Academy for Educational Leadership is well placed to act as a collegial forum which has the potential to realise Hargreaves and Fullan's (2012) conception of professional capital: human capital could be fostered through developing teachers' knowledge base and attracting talented teachers into headship; social capital through fostering collegial working and providing safe mentoring spaces; this would facilitate the fostering of headteachers' decisional capital and sense of professional agency (Authors 2017; 2018).

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