

# **Leading appointments**

**The selection and appointment of headteachers and senior leaders:  
a review of the literature**

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## Introduction

“Show me a good school and I’ll show you a good school leader... when you poke into the inner workings of a successful school, you will find without fail... a skillful leader who understands how to transform educational practice, not just transacts educational business.” (Crews and Weakley, 1995, p 5)

The selection and appointment of headteachers should be understood within what is often referred to as a recruitment and retention crisis – an issue which has now assumed a global dimension. While its effects play out differently in different countries, its origins lie in demographics and social transformation, in the decentralisation of decision-making and in the changing nature of school leadership. The term ‘recruitment crisis’ recurs frequently in literature from many different countries, although more optimistic commentators prefer the term ‘challenge’. Certainly, it is easy for the media to sensationalise the issues involved.

In simple terms, the challenge is that the number of headteachers leaving the profession exceeds the number entering. This is in part a consequence of the job being seen as increasingly less attractive and also a function of what the literature refers to as the ‘greying’ of the profession. In some countries, three-quarters of heads and principals are likely to retire within the next three years. In the UK, 34 per cent of headteachers are over 55. This may be treated as problematic or as an opportunity for new blood, fresh thinking and career advancement. However, those who leave may take with them 20 or 30 years of experience and expertise, while many of those who enter profess themselves barely equipped to take on what has become a more daunting role than ever before.

Couched in terms of intellectual and social capital, a school’s capital drains away with the departure of its appointed leaders, while new generations of headteachers are faced with building anew. Schools have not, by and large, been good at succession-planning and only recently have they begun to recognise the importance of strategies which will keep effective leaders in post and in conditions that make the job a satisfying one by achieving a balance between support and challenge.

This document reviews current and recent literature which throws light on recruitment and retention issues. It draws on research and analyses of the issues in the UK and in other countries. Its compass is greater than schools and education as there are clearly lessons to be learned from experience in other fields reflected in a substantial body of business literature.

## The literature search

Our literature search was guided by the following questions:

- What is the nature of headteacher recruitment and selection in the UK?
- What is the legislation governing recruitment, selection and appointment?
- What challenges do schools and school systems face?
- Why do heads leave their schools?
- What do schools do to retain effective headteachers?
- What makes heads stay?
- What are the role, expertise and training needs of governors in headteacher appointments?
- What do we know about good and bad practice in governors' appointments?
- What can be learned from the business sector?
- What is good practice in recruitment and what criteria would define it?

## Sources of evidence

Reviews of the literature pursued numerous avenues of inquiry:

- A request to 30 well-known authorities on educational leadership in 10 countries to nominate one or two key texts on headteacher and principal recruitment and retention.
- A search of electronic databases, for example, ERIC, BELMAS and *Education-line*, as well as Google, which give access to a range of leadership and management websites around the world. Keywords used for the search were 'recruitment', 'selection', 'governor's role', 'headteacher', 'retention and shortage', 'selection and appointment'. These led to a secondary level of search with words such as 'principals', 'CEOs', 'succession-planning' and more. A Google search under 'shortage of school leaders' alone produced 679,000 hits.
- Library and bookshop searches for books, chapters in books, journal articles and conference papers on educational administration, management and leadership.
- Unpublished articles and relevant Master's and PhD theses.
- Government policy documents, government-commissioned research as well as quasi and non-government agencies (DfES, Ofsted, TDA, NCSL).
- Documents from professional associations, for example NAHT, ASCL and NUT.
- Local authority guidelines and policy documents.

The main ideas emerging in each of the documents were summarised and compared, enabling us to extract and summarise key messages from the literature and suggest the most helpful and accessible sources for follow-up reading.

**Books.** There are few books that focus specifically on headteacher recruitment and selection, retention and appointment in England and the UK. While there are many sources on staff recruitment, these tend to focus more on teacher recruitment, with relatively little attention given to headteachers. Widening the search internationally adds to the literature; while going beyond the limited educational texts into human resources management in the business sector uncovers a bewildering variety of books of varying quality, accessibility and relevance.

**Journal articles.** A survey of educational journals provides a much richer seam on recruitment and retention – especially when North American and Australasian sources are taken into account – although much less on selection and appointment. These include papers from national and international conferences. This search produced a plethora of papers and research reports from a range of countries.

**Documents** on government and professional association websites cover a range of sources, including statistics, research summaries and policy papers. These provide a useful backdrop to the analysis.

**Local authority guidelines** are a valuable source of guidance on the process of recruitment, selection, interviewing and governor training. They offer, for example, practical steps, good ideas, pitfalls, exemplars and protocols for advertising and search strategies.

**Media.** While we did not set out to search newspapers or popular magazine articles, these pop up in any web search and often provide a useful pointer to primary sources. They also provide a dramatisation of issues and an editorial spin which has to be treated with caution. Analysis of media imagery of recruitment and retention is the subject of a treatise in itself (see, for example, Thomson et al's analysis of the US context, 2003).

## A matter of terminology

Although most terms seem, at first sight, no more than common sense, language used in this area can be confused or generic; some clarification of terms may therefore be helpful.

**Recruitment and selection** are integrally related but not synonymous. Guillory, for example, defines recruitment as a process of generating a large applicant pool, and selection as a process of getting these applications “narrowed down, or screened, to a reasonable number for interviews”. Other commentators define selection as “the elimination of candidates whose values, interests, needs, and abilities, having been carefully analysed, fail to satisfy the requirements for a particular role.” (See Figure 1)

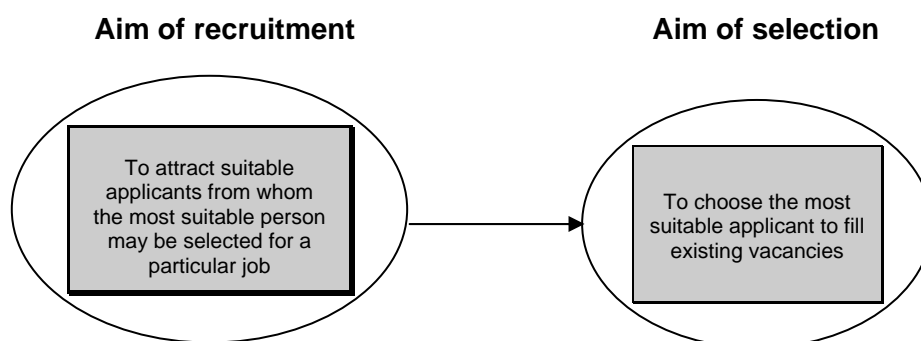


Figure 1: Relationship between recruitment and selection (Source: Oduro, G, 2003)

**Retention** refers to the conditions under which headteachers are motivated to stay in post and provide continuity of leadership and management. A range of strategies are used to this end, such as mentoring, coaching, continuing professional development, and incentives like salary, improved working conditions and other forms of administrative support.

## What's the problem?

"Headship appears to be less attractive than it was," concluded Draper and McMichael in their 1998 study of headteacher recruitment. This appears to summarise a global concern and encapsulates what has become a recurrent theme in the United Kingdom today. In England and Wales in January to April 2004, 1,428 headteacher posts were advertised, compared with 1,160 in the same period the previous year. Of those, 13 per cent of primary posts and 14 per cent at secondary level had to be re-advertised (Curtis, 2004). At the 2004 annual conference of the National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT), the then general secretary, David Hart, remarked as follows:

"Headteacher turnover is reaching critical proportions. Vacancies for headteachers have reached the highest level in seven years and are 20 per cent up on this time last year... Heads are suffering from football manager syndrome. But there the comparison ends. There are not the candidates queuing up to replace them." (Curtis, 2004, p 1)

In 2005–06, Education Data Surveys (Howson, 2006) reported that 28 per cent and 22 per cent of primary and secondary headteacher vacancies respectively remained unfilled (30 per cent of special school posts), suggesting this situation is getting worse. In a study for the National College for School Leadership (NCSL), management consultancy McKinsey & Company forecast the trend would rise to around 3,500 vacancies in 2009.

Seven years ago, the NAHT described a haemorrhaging of talent in English schools as primary and secondary school headteachers sought early retirement (Draper and McMichael). A 1998 study sponsored by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) reported a generally low response to headship advertisements, varying significantly according to geographical region and school phase. In the same year, this trend was corroborated by the Parliamentary Select Committee on Education and Employment. In their Ninth Report they cited Howson's 2002 study for NCSL which found that, on average, primary schools in London received only five applications for each post, while only 5 per cent of London primary schools received more than 10 applications. Some 98 per cent of London primary schools interviewed no candidates at all from their first round of advertising, and 63 per cent of schools surveyed in London had to re-advertise compared with 25 per cent in the Home Counties and 22 per cent elsewhere. Howson's 2006 study recorded an average of 4.8 applications per post in primary and 15 per post in secondary.

Regional variations were also evident in the secondary sector. While 62 per cent of secondary schools in the Home Counties and 57 per cent in other regions received 20 or more applications, in London the figure was 29 per cent. The range of applications from school to school throws into sharp relief the differential attractiveness of jobs in different parts of the country and in varying locations. Applicants for primary headship ranged from none to 156 and those for secondary headship from six to 200. For special schools the figures were one to 80 (Earley, Baker and Weindling, 1995, Earley et al, 2002).

The data reveal that gender emerges as a continuing issue. In England, far fewer women than men applied for headship positions, especially at the secondary school level. As an example, a metropolitan district in the North West attracted 40 applications from men and only two from women. Data from Fidler and Atton from 2001 reported a ratio of 70:30 women to men for appointments in primary schools and an almost mirror image (31:69) in secondary schools.

Retention is a related but different issue. It refers to people already in post who may have been serving for 20 years or more and who have found that the nature of the job has changed significantly in this time. Many discover either that it is not the job they came into teaching for, or they feel ill-equipped to cope with new forms of demand. Retention rates differ between rural and urban locations and between the type of school involved. In England, it was found that retention varied significantly according to school performance (Howson, 2002). Schools with A and A\* grading had the highest percentage of headteachers staying in post for six years, while schools with E or E\* grading had the lowest percentage of heads staying that long and the highest percentage of heads staying for less than three years. Studies of schools in challenging circumstances (Cullen et al, 2003, Harris and Chapman, 2002) illustrate the complex array of day-to-day issues that senior leaders face, all of which mitigate against long-term survival and increase the likelihood of burn-out. To remain in post in such volatile and draining circumstances, authors point out, requires exceptional dedication, resilience and vision. Recent projects focusing on school leadership, such as the Model of School Leadership in Challenging Urban Environments and the Future Leaders programme, emphasise resilience, adaptability and focus in the attributes they seek and develop.

Recent data (MORI, 2006) suggest that many headteachers continue to find satisfaction in their role but that these benefits are not communicated to, or observed by, other staff, leading to a perception that headship is unattractive. In the words of one head quoted in the survey: "You hear 'I wouldn't do your job for anything.' Staff see headship as heavy workload, extreme/total responsibility, a lonely job... not all of this is true." Or, as another says: "They see the management load rather than strategic leadership and the joys this brings." However, some 72 per cent of heads did report high levels of stress in the same survey.

## **We are not alone**

The difficulties in recruiting and retaining headteachers in the UK are paralleled in many other countries. In New Zealand, for example, a 1999 study (Wylie) found that less than half of then-serving principals planned to be in their job in five years' time and that in rural areas the recruitment issue was at crisis point. Brooking and colleagues (2003) also report principal retention as being particularly acute in small primary schools where self-management, it is claimed, has reduced time for professional leadership. Writing on leadership succession in Australian catholic schools, Dorman and d'Arbon (2001, p 1) observe that: "Many potentially good candidates are not applying for principalship." Studies in New South Wales and Victoria report a combination of explanatory factors – the ageing of the profession, early retirement incentives and lack of forecasting – all working together to feed a recruitment and retention crisis. The Australian researcher, Gronn (2003), draws close parallels with the situation in Ontario, Canada, where the replacement of retiring principals by "very inexperienced" new recruits is creating "an ongoing, massive professional development challenge" (Williams, 2002, p 25). Normore (2004) cites the Canadian Association of Principals' contention that: "Despite the millions of dollars invested in leadership development programs... [an] increasing shortage of adequately prepared administrators continues to loom in the face of challenges confronting public schools."

The United States Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates that, over the next decade, 80,000 principals will either retire or leave the profession. Half of the 400 superintendents that were surveyed in the US reported trouble filling principal vacancies (Educational Research Service, 1998), although, as in the UK, there are significant variations from one area to

another. Hard-to-staff schools tended to be characterised by high-poverty students, low test scores, high staff turnover and unusually large numbers of inexperienced teachers – either provisionally certified or teaching out of their specialist field. A study of recruitment and retention in New York City reported a flow of urban principals to schools with higher test scores, better-qualified teachers and a lower proportion of students on free meals, leaving inner city schools with less-qualified principals.

In South Africa, less than one in three qualified candidates intended to enter principalship within the next five years (Pounder and Merrill, 2001). In other African countries, recruitment issues appear in differing forms. Writing in the Ghanaian context, for example, Oduro (2003) describes the reluctance of women to apply for jobs in rural areas where disincentives considerably outweigh the attractions.

Scandinavian countries, in which similar problems have not been in evidence in the past, now appear to be entering the age of mobility and instability. The emergence of the self-managing school, and the emerging priority of school effectiveness and improvement, have changed the balance of power and the conditions of work for school leaders. Principals and deputy heads in Denmark, Norway and Sweden have, in the past five years, come to see their new roles as less inviting and less in tune with the democratic traditions of those Nordic countries (Moos, Moller and Johanssen, 2001). In Sweden, in particular, this is exacerbated by an acute teacher shortage (OCED, 2004).

Similar problems of recruitment and retention are not apparent in Asia-Pacific countries. There, the prevailing concern is over the quality of applicants for principalship and, in some cases, the quality control over those entering teaching. Korea, for example, has an oversupply of teachers and has only recently begun to develop criteria for leadership rather than promoting by length of service. In Japan, similar concerns are being expressed over the quality of leadership and the bureaucratic nature of promotion procedures. The average age for promotion in Japan is the early fifties for primary and lower secondary schools and the late fifties for upper secondary school principals.

In Singapore and Hong Kong, where shortages are also rare, there is a similar concern over the quality of staff applying for principalship (Walker, Stott and Cheng, 2003). In Singapore, strong central forecasting and direction from the ministry ensures a continuous supply of principals, identified early and trained to fill vacant posts. However, cultural expectations of compliance and conformity are seen as hindrances to the quality needed for Singapore's changing schools. Stott (2004) contends that a priority for Singapore principals is a challenge to "stability and linearity", that old forms of thinking and old forms of success are no longer relevant to the new and complex agendas of a new age. These concerns are mirrored in China, Korea, Japan and Thailand (Hallinger, 2003). In Hong Kong, where recruitment problems have not surfaced, there is, unlike Singapore, little central control over recruitment and over 400 recruitment agencies operate with their own selection and quality criteria. The challenge there is to develop coherent standards and to assure quality through more rigorous self-evaluation and review (Pang, 2004).

These issues are not simply just school-related, but, rather, are aspects of a globalisation that is affecting public agencies and private companies all over the world. McKinsey & Company (Michaels et al, 2001) identify this as a consistent and accelerating trend. Companies that once had a pipeline full of talented people are now finding it not only harder to recruit the quality of applicants they need, but also much more difficult to keep the people they already have. This is found to be not only true of high-tech companies, but also of more traditional industries such as banking. The McKinsey studies add that lots of large or decentralised companies don't know how many people they are losing, or if they're losing

good people, where these people are going or why they are leaving. Almost all of the successful companies studied, write McKinsey, were starting to take non-traditional approaches to recruiting and offering large incentive bonuses both to recruit and to retain talented people. In England, the National College for School Leadership is addressing these issues through the Leadership Development Framework, which sees leadership as a continuum designed into its development programmes so that the transition from middle leadership or senior leadership to headship is a smoother, less daunting process.

While in most countries, as in the UK, these issues are being addressed by professional development, a number of questions remain. There are issues of quality and incentives and questions as to whether and how much untapped talent may be out there. There are questions of centralisation and decentralisation. Is the best choice made by those closest to the ground, or by more distanced and disinterested authorities? While recruitment and selection in individual schools is able to take into account context, community and history, decision-making at central or intermediate – local authority, district or cluster – level can balance needs and deployment with a broader overview. In his study of sustainability, Andy Hargreaves (2004) underlines the damaging effects on schools of local competition, the poaching of staff, pupils – and their parents – and thereby the diminishing of the capacity of some schools while others benefit. Sustainability, he argues, is a systemic issue and made possible only when there is a collaborative approach among schools at a cluster or district level. The question is what kind of balance needs to be achieved between a more centralised forecasting and mediation of the market on the one hand, and individual school initiative and autonomy on the other?

## **What are the causes?**

A range of different causal factors for the recruitment and retention crisis are cited in the literature, many of which relate to the changing nature of societies and global market forces. Not surprisingly, therefore, causes specifically relating to the education sector also appear to be common across national boundaries. In Ontario, for example, Williams produced a list of 22 'dissatisfiers', with time, change, support, resourcing, accountability and parent demands heading the list. These same issues resonate throughout the literature. They touch all the four member countries of the United Kingdom as well as countries of the Pacific Rim, Australasia and North America – while increasingly affecting many European countries which had previously been immune. School leadership, it seems, is no longer what it was.

## **The changing nature of headship**

It is widely agreed that the nature of headship has changed. One of the primary causes is a worldwide devolution of decision-making to school level, creating a whole new raft of demands as well as new freedoms. As power is pushed down accountability is pushed up and paradoxically, while enjoying more power, headteachers are reporting less room for manoeuvre. School leadership, it is claimed, is changing in ways that for many people have proved discomfiting. The discomfort of change is, however, explained in varying ways. One prevalent explanation is that headteachers are increasingly focused on management and consequently lose contact with students. A quite different reason proposed is a greater focus on collaborative or shared leadership, which hems in what Gronn (2000) calls 'visionary champions' – people who are keen to put their own personal stamp on the school but find they have to accommodate to a more consensual or democratic approach. Wallace and Hall (1994) describe this as a "high gain, high pain strategy" which, by empowering others, diminishes the power of the headteacher.

An ambivalence in depictions of leadership is highlighted by Thomson and her colleagues (2003) who find, in the media accounts, two contrasting images of school leadership: on the one hand, the “overworked, underpaid and undervalued victim principal”; and on the other, the “saviour principal... who is able to create happy teams of teachers, students and parents for whom all reform is possible” (2003, p 128). Both images may be true and may simply reflect the different contexts in which headteachers find themselves. There are clear distinctions to be made between schools in which it is easy to attract high-quality staff, high-achieving students and supportive parents, or schools with a degree of stability and continuity, compared with schools in which there is a constant turbulence and struggle for survival. A 2004 World Bank report on struggling schools in Ukraine and Bulgaria finds that school leaders spend 70 per cent of their time on raising finance and the remaining 30 per cent on conflict resolution. Such a picture would not be unfamiliar to headteachers in the most disadvantaged areas in England.

Whether in privileged or disadvantaged circumstances, it is widely agreed that the task of leading a school in the 21st century can no longer be carried out by the individual heroic leader, single-handedly turning schools around. Such a model is, says Gronn, “greedy work” and all-consuming, demanding unrelenting peak performance from super-leaders and, he concludes, no longer a sustainable notion.

### **Unrelenting change**

Unrelenting change is a story told in many different places as policy initiatives flow across the headteacher’s desk in a seemingly endless stream (Mulford, 2003). It is the multiplicity and simultaneity of initiatives – along with perceived incoherence and conflict among them – that school leaders found most difficult to accommodate. The problem is framed less in terms of change per se, but, rather, change as driven by external sources, seen as undermining the power and discretion of school leaders to lead. Instead, they find themselves delivering agendas decided elsewhere for which they are nonetheless held to account. Spillane et al’s 2001 study of Chicago schools provides evidence of resistance to change that is perceived to be externally driven, while change is embraced when it arises from teachers’ own work, even though much of what is embraced may have its roots in an external mandate.

### **Stress**

Stress is one of the strongest recurring themes in the literature. Its source is ascribed directly to change and the evolving nature of the job. Decentralisation and local management place greater responsibility on heads, with the competitive nature of a market economy, headteachers find themselves working harder, longer and for progressively higher stakes. Much of the stress is explained in terms of heads carrying individual responsibility for the success or failure of their schools and taking on too much themselves. “The causes of pressure and stress are attributed to the principalship now having more responsibilities than power,” write Thomson and colleagues (2003). As research shows – for example, Martin, 1997 – the strongest correlate of stress is the feeling of being out of control. The 2004 Commons Select Committee report quotes NCSL’s Heather Du Quesnay as saying: “One of the issues that affects headteacher morale and possibly demotivates them from time to time is that they do not feel a sense of control and an ability to shape their work.”

In Boyland’s study of 266 principals, 71 per cent of long-term absences for men over 45 were attributed to stress, while for women in the same age group the figure was 58 per cent (quoted in Mulford, 2003). A survey of 800 teachers by the International Stress Management Association (ISMA) found substantially different responses between English and French

teachers. While 22 per cent of sick leave in England was attributed to stress, in France it was 1 per cent. More than half of the English teachers compared with a fifth of the French sample reported recently having considered leaving teaching. Common to both countries, English and French teachers cited classroom behaviour, low social status and a lack of parental support as causes of stress (cited in the newsletter of the ISMA).

## **Workload**

The issue of workload is closely related to reports of stress and appears to be common to many countries. Jones's 1999 study, *The impact of change in education on the nature of headship in the UK*, finds close parallels with Livingstone's study in the same year entitled *A survey of the workloads of primary school heads in New Zealand* and with Australian research into the capacity of the principals and the dilemmas they face (Louden and Wildy, 1999). One effect is for school heads to devote less time to the core business of teaching and learning and more time to administrative tasks. For example, in a New Zealand study in 1997, Wylie reported that principals' workloads resulted in less direct, professional leadership and more management and administration. Time, it is argued, has become fragmented; the demands of the urgent leaving inadequate space for reflection on the important, or for discussion with colleagues.

The 1998 Parliamentary Report on Education and Employment concluded that: "The extra responsibilities that go with being a head in a primary school contributed to primary headship not being an attractive option." In that same report, the then deputy general secretary of the National Union of Teachers (NUT) claimed that:

"The reason why people are not applying for headteacher posts is that it is an enormously high-stakes, high-risk job... Basically, no one knows what the ground rules are when they apply for a headteacher post. That is the big issue." (Ninth Parliamentary Report on Education and Employment, 1998, Item 166)

## **Accountability and bureaucracy**

Feelings of stress and workload are closely related to issues of accountability and bureaucracy. Shen, quoting Portin (2004), describes the principalship in the United States as "a powerless position mired in bureaucracy". Half a decade earlier, in the UK, accountability and attendant bureaucracy were identified in Draper and McMichael's 1998 study as significant disincentives to applying for headship. While headteachers widely recognise the importance of accountability, it is the bureaucratic associations of it that appear to demotivate, such as excessive form-filling and paperwork combined with a constant pressure to justify actions taken and the feeling of not being in control of your own destiny. Giving testimony to the Parliamentary Select Committee, Professor Peter Mortimore said: "The responsibilities are pretty daunting and chances are you are going to be blamed and shamed for things which perhaps are out of your control" (Parliamentary Report, Item 167). Blame and shame is also cited as demotivating principals in New Zealand (Livingstone, 1999), while in the United States, the added threat of litigation is seen as compounding the problems. Accountability (referred to as 'sudden death accountability' by Thomson et al, 2003) has acquired negative connotations, researchers conclude, because it is not only highly demanding but often directed at the wrong things.

## **Personal and domestic concerns**

Many of those who go into teaching do not see themselves as managers or leaders. Commentators (for example in Tucker and Coddling, 1999) describe the challenges of “crossing the professional border” into school leadership and cite anxiety and information perplexity as explaining the reluctance to put oneself forward. For many teachers, it would seem that the balance between classroom teaching and family life is threatened by the burden of headship. Researchers in both the UK (James and Whiting, 1998) and Australia (d’Arbon et al, 2001) suggest that many teachers are content to remain as classroom teachers because headship implies not only longer hours, but possibly also greater time outside school when they may not want to be separated from the children. In the Australian study, for instance, it is reported that:

“A real concern of the respondents was that if they become a principal, then they would lose the close relationship with children and colleagues.” (d’Arbon et al, p 12)

‘Trailing the spouse’, sometimes involving the dislocation of family and home, or temporary separation, are cited as further disincentives. The decision to apply for headship positions is for many prospective school leaders determined ultimately by their reflection “on the balance of lifestyle” and the weighing-up of incentives and disincentives in the job, conclude James and Whiting (1998).

## **Salary**

Salary is frequently cited as an issue in headship, often when comparing the responsibilities of school leadership with leadership in other occupations. The NAHT has argued strongly that although “pay is not the only element,” it does nonetheless discourage people from applying for headship positions. “It is a very key element... the current pay does not adequately recruit or retain headteachers.” The then schools minister is reported to have concurred with the association’s view by noting that “primary headship was ‘not attractive’ financially” (Parliamentary Report, Item 167). While the salary level of headteachers in England may be less of an issue than elsewhere, perceptions of reward are determined by the benchmark applied. Comparisons were made with similar positions of responsibility in industry or commerce, “where the management of human and material resources was seen as equivalent but not as highly recompensed” (d’Arbon et al, p 12). Headteachers, it is claimed, also earn less per hour than their staff as they work 30 per cent more hours in a week. In recent years, however, headteacher salaries – especially at the secondary level – along with other public sector incomes, have become more competitive with private sector possibilities. Difficulties at the primary level, and in terms of the differential with other senior leaders in school – compared to the additional scrutiny and responsibility – remain.

A similar trend is reported in Australian literature: “Disaffection with the salary of the principal rated strongly as a deterrent to persons applying for the principalship” (d’Arbon et al). The researchers report that people’s perceptions about salary ranged from the lack of sufficient differential between positions of responsibility and the salary being based on the size of the school rather than on the level of responsibility.

## **Social factors**

At a time when many view schools as one of the few intact social organisations, students themselves arrive with very different attitudes, motivations and needs than previous generations, says Normore (2002). We are, argue social commentators, living in a society where social relationships, parenting and the attitudes of young people are undergoing dramatic and often unforeseen changes. The increasing diversity of the student population, the multiplicity of languages and ethnic backgrounds, refugees, the casualties of war, the transience of the student body, concentrations of poverty in inner cities and depopulated rural areas, all bring their own formidable challenges. Problems such as drug abuse, intimidation and violence create dilemmas which are often beyond the power of leadership to resolve but which have repercussions within the school walls. For schools, particularly in challenging circumstances, there is an increase in the incidence of confrontation and conflict, heightening the need for mediation and intervention and negotiation with parents and other social agencies (MacBeath and Galton, 2004) and, it has been found, headteachers in urban schools spend proportionately more time outside their school than their counterparts in other locations.

## **The teacher supply line**

As headteachers are sourced from the ranks of teachers, a decline in teacher recruitment therefore poses a challenge to headteacher recruitment and selection. As Dorman and colleagues argue: "If there is a shortage of teachers, then it is logical that there will be a shortage of principals" (2001, p 4). This is echoed in the 1998 Select Committee on Education and Employment's Ninth Report to Parliament, expressing a concern over the repercussions of failure to attract people into teaching. A 2002 report by the General Teaching Council for Wales (GTCW) reported a crisis in teacher recruitment, with one in ten posts remaining unfilled. Its chief executive claimed: "Clearly heads don't believe they have enough choice of applicants to make the appointments they want... In some cases, they had no choices at all."

The literature on teacher recruitment covers an immense range and is beyond the compass of this study. However, its impact on headteacher recruitment and retention is highly significant. Leaders have to understand and accommodate a changing profile of the profession and the nature of teachers' career paths. As Susan Moore Johnson (2004) finds, in the US context teaching is no longer a career for life, no longer necessarily for first career entrants prepared for the job in traditional ways, operating privately and autonomously in their own classrooms. Between 24 per cent and 40 per cent of teachers in her study, depending on the area, were mid-career entrants. Those who came from industry looked for opportunities to work in teams and to have expanded influence. The inflow and outflow of staff, is, she argues, an expression of a shifting socio-economic situation but one that can be effectively addressed by school leaders attending to the expectations that teachers bring with them.

A US study by Ingersoll (2003) reports that 30 per cent of teachers leave within three years while 50 per cent leave within five. Ingersoll offers a reminder of how vulnerable organisations are to mobility of personnel, arguing that a key issue governing their resilience in a time of change is substitutability. He points out that schools – and, in particular, secondary schools – are in many ways unique institutions in the specificity of roles they require. Teaching is a profession that loses new recruits very early on and schools are, he says, victims of the 'revolving door syndrome', and lack flexibility in their ability to address the issues creatively. There are things that enlightened leaders can do, suggests Johnson. The

hiring of staff needs to be 'information rich'. Heads need to offer new entrants appropriate and fair teaching assignments. This needs to be accompanied by collegial support, professional development and an infrastructure that allows them opportunities to share the problems they face, especially when it comes to discipline.

At the same time, however, keeping teachers in place for purely pragmatic reasons can lead to stagnancy: a degree of turnover is necessary to counter what Johnson describes as a "school organised for a retiring generation". Herein lies a classic dilemma for headteachers in self-managing schools.

### **Intensification**

The changing social context, the revolving door of staffing, workload, stress, personal issues and perceptions of unfair remuneration cannot be treated singly as causes. They exist together and may be summarised as an intensification of the headteachers' role. The result is more than the sum of parts. The implications for school leaders are: "To give more of themselves to their work; to give more time, to give more energy, to identify strongly with the goals and needs of the organization, and to learn how to collaborate effectively with co-workers" (Barker, 1999, p 1). In summary, says Gronn (2003), "it changes what it means to be a professional", and he goes on to argue that this implies a reconstruction of professional identity and career trajectory. In the world of 21st century schooling, argues Hess (2003 p 1), leaders must be able to: "Leverage accountability and revolutionary technology, devise performance-based evaluation systems, re-engineer outdated management structures, recruit and cultivate non-traditional staff, drive decisions with data, build professional cultures, and ensure that every child is served". He adds that teaching experience or traditional preparation programmes do not equip candidates for these challenges, which demand a paradigm shift in how leadership is conceived, supported and rewarded.

These are systemic rather than simply individual issues because such intensified job roles are highly vulnerable. Over-reliance on 'superheads' not only saps the resilience of the organisation itself but damages the system as a whole. Glatter (2006) stresses that there is too much focus on the actors and not enough on the stage, reinforcing points made by Gladwell (2002) that leadership is a quality of the organisation as much as of the individual. Southworth (2002) concludes that, in the light of the overwhelming body of evidence on new leadership, the construction of the professional identity of school leaders inevitably becomes a systemic policy issue:

"We believe that rather than systems trying to recruit people into what is seemingly both an unattractive job and a heroic mission, perhaps some work needs to be done on rethinking the work of principals. To do this though would require that systems develop different priorities... now is the time to engage in fundamental rethinking of the principalship." (Thomson et al, 2003, p 129)

## Matters of legislation

Recruitment in most countries, according to a 2000 International Labour Organization (ILO) working paper on the recruitment of educational personnel, “is based on strict regulations drawn up by the competent education authority, be it centralised (national, federal) or decentralised to a lower administrative level (regional, communal, etc)”. In this light, recruiters in the educational sector, like those in other sectors of the economy, are required to manage recruitment and selection within some formal, clearly defined procedures. Some of these standard recruitment procedures are prescribed by legislation, while others are spelt out in an organisation’s recruitment policies (Middlewood and Lumby, 1998). The key legislative issues that recruiters in the UK are legally bound to adhere to are underpinned by fairness and equal opportunities, as prescribed in the Sex Discrimination Act 1975 (amended 1983), the Race Relations Act 1976 and the Disabled Persons Employment Acts. Recent legislation on age discrimination [which came into force in October 2006] will also have a significant impact on the definition and criteria for professional experience; recent European Court judgements on the matter, for example, make career advancement – and reward – by length of tenure much harder to justify. Schools also face extra, and in the wake of the Soham murders and the Bichard Inquiry, intensified requirements to screen employees in relation to child safety and protection. New guidance has been produced by the government to this effect (DfES/1568/2005).

Discrimination, as defined in these acts, is classified into two sorts: direct or indirect. Direct discrimination focuses on acts against an individual. It occurs when a person is treated less favourably than another person because of his or her sex, marital status, race, colour, nationality, age, and ethnic or national origin. In contrast, indirect discrimination involves setting conditions that are unfair to some groups. An employer is said to have discriminated indirectly where an unjustifiable requirement or condition is applied equally to all applicants but which has a disproportionately adverse effect on a section of the applicant population (Bray, 1991; Cook, 1993; Hackett, 1992; Gerard, 1994; Boella, 1996).

Boella (1996) explains that the legislative framework within which employers operate covers five different but interrelated issues: recruitment, selection, placement, pay and termination (p 195). (See Figure 2)

Figure 2: Areas of employment regulated by legislation in the United Kingdom

Pre-employment	Start of employment	During employment	Pay and fringe benefits	Termination
<p><b>Discrimination:</b> Sex, race, disability, colour, ethnic, religious discrimination. Eg, advertising and interview, etc</p> <p><b>Overseas applicants, employment agencies, disabled workers:</b> Removing impediments to their employment</p> <p><b>Trade union membership:</b> Freedom to belong or not to belong</p>	<p><b>Contract of employment:</b> Certain terms and conditions to be documented</p> <p><b>Health and safety:</b> Induction for employee</p> <p><b>Employer's liability insurance:</b> Insurance needed to indemnify employees in case of accidents at work etc</p>	<p><b>Disciplinary procedures:</b> Need to be communicated and fair</p> <p><b>Health and safety at work:</b> Range of health and safety measures</p> <p><b>Time off:</b> Sickness, maternity, jury service etc</p> <p><b>Trade union membership harassment:</b> Employer to prevent harassment</p> <p><b>Discrimination:</b> Eg, in promotion</p>	<p><b>Equal pay:</b> Pay to be equal for men and women; statutory pay for sickness, maternity</p> <p><b>Taxation and National Insurance deductions:</b> Lawful and unlawful deductions</p>	<p><b>Resignations and dismissals:</b> Written reasons for dismissals</p> <p><b>Transfer of undertakings:</b> Protection of employment</p>

Source: Boella, (1996). 'Law of employment', *Human resource management in the hospitality industry*, p 195

Any breaches of these legislative obligations could lead to an employee suing the employer for damages, where an injury is sustained, or even to resign without notice and to sue for unfair constructive dismissal – where an employer creates circumstances in which an employee feels justified in resigning. Employees, for their part, are obliged by law to serve the employer according to the terms of their employment contract: “To work competently, to work for the employer in good faith, which includes not taking secret profits or commissions, to keep confidential information and not to set up in competition” (Boella, p 196).

## **Headteacher recruitment: policy and practices in England**

Within the framework of the Education Act of 1988, school governors have the responsibility for recruiting and selecting headteachers. Although, under the 1986 act, the local authority and the governing body were to have equal numbers on the selection committee, the 1988 act gives to governors the power to appoint the headteacher while the local authority only has the right to refuse the appointments if that person is not technically qualified. Where the local authority is the employer – in community schools, for example – the director does have a duty to give advice before the selection of a head is made (Fidler, 1998 p 13). Where the governing body is the employer – in voluntary-aided (VA), voluntary-controlled (VC) and foundation schools and in academies – they may confer an advisory right on the authority, and often do, but are under no obligation to do so. In such schools, other agencies such as the diocese and, increasingly, academy sponsors, often play a significant role.

Governing bodies now control the entire headteacher recruitment process. Their employment role includes notifying the local authority of a headteacher vacancy and appointing a selection panel to plan the whole process of recruitment and selection. Local authorities are obliged to appoint the candidate selected by the governors but, for many schools – as set out above – they have the right to attend relevant meetings of the selection panel to offer professional advice, which the governing body is obliged to consider before finalising the appointment. In foundation and aided schools, the legislation still makes it mandatory for the governing body to notify the local authority of headteacher vacancies, although the decision remains with the governing body unless the candidate “fails to meet legal requirements on qualifications or health, or is barred from teaching”.

### **Professional development programmes**

It is clear from a wide range of literature that professional development is a key strategy in preparing for headship but one that is often either missing, or simply ineffective, preparing principals for obsolete work environments, as some commentators describe it. Many countries have been moving in recent years to national programmes or academies for preparing future school leaders, sometimes administered by government, sometimes by arms-length agencies or entrusted to universities. These include Asia-Pacific countries such as Singapore, Hong Kong and Thailand, and European countries such as Sweden and Austria.

Huber and West's 2002 study of ten countries examined aims, content, methods and the voluntary/compulsory status of such programmes, differentiating these into centralised and decentralised approaches. They defined France, Germany, Hong Kong and Singapore as centralised, and England and Wales, the US, Canada and Australia as decentralised – with the Netherlands and New Zealand described as entrepreneurial. The international literature does however reveal a greater complexity than this simple model allows. For example, leadership programmes in England and France are centrally prescribed and devolved or franchised to either regional centres or private sector providers. In Germany, as in Canada, the US and Australia, education policy is a state or province matter and practice varies widely on a national basis, running alongside a range of entrepreneurial approaches by private providers and universities. In Scotland, there has been a national programme for a number of years but which, like Sweden, is delivered through universities. Ongoing discussions in Scotland are proposing the creation of a national leadership academy, but this is being conceived more in terms of a network rather than as a central geographical location.

In England, the establishment of the National College for School Leadership (NCSL) was in recognition of the disparate nature of provision and the nature of the gap that existed between theory and practice. It is an attempt to bring greater coherence to leadership development, to bridge the divide between theory and practice and to broaden the base for recruitment with a range of tailored programmes such as Leading from the Middle, which is concerned with retention, sustainability and succession. Programmes such as talk2learn are an integral part of the NCSL Learning Gateway, the College's online arena for the professional development of school leaders. NCSL combines research into leadership, communication and the commissioning of development programmes. Development takes place against a defined framework of career stages, from middle leadership to senior leadership, headship and beyond – consultant heads and system leaders. As well as generic offerings, it also provides more precisely targeted offerings on topics such as the leadership of ICT, diversity and established leaders who wish to remain at their current level rather than advance to headship. A key component of NCSL's provision is the mandatory qualification for headship – the National Professional Qualification for Headship. NCSL has also recently taken on a remit for leadership succession planning.

There is a potential catch-22 in leadership programmes: their very effectiveness may both solve and create problems. On the one hand they can provide the support and stimulation for heads to remain in their schools with renewed vigour and commitment but, on the other hand, they may provide an incentive to move on either to other schools, to positions in local authorities or into private consultancy. Alan Flintham, a consultant headteacher for Nottinghamshire, presenting his research at an NCSL conference argued that: "Some heads today do not choose to spend an extended time in headship. They wish to explore other avenues in their education career, including advisory, consultancy and school improvement roles" (Education, 158, 2004). Retention clearly has a systemic dimension – it is good to keep talent in the system as a whole, and energised, by providing a breadth of opportunities – which may at times conflict with the interests of the individual school.

In Scotland, Cowie (forthcoming) found that the extra workload involved in leadership programmes and qualifications could compound problems for already overworked headteachers, especially in challenging circumstances, to the detriment of work-life balance. Cowie concludes that success and failure is linked to the context and culture of their schools. The professional development opportunity is, he suggests, 'a double-edged sword' because, while of clear benefit to schools, without adequate support and sensitivity to context it may be counter-productive to the individual. "Even exceptionally able participants may find it difficult to survive in stagnant schools with poorly developed systems and impoverished culture."

## **Selection: school level decision-making**

Selection is widely described as the most challenging aspect of the governing body's task. The selection process is described by Castetter (1992) as 'the key activity' in securing the most qualified and capable person for the vacant position.

### **Steps 1 and 2: preparation and definition**

The early steps in the process, suggest Hay Group, are preparation and definition. Preparation involves assigning roles and responsibilities and auditing and acquiring skills and resources. Questions of definition include:

- What sort of leadership does our school need now and for the future?
- What are we looking for in our candidates?
- How do our culture and values affect what we're looking for?
- How do the National Standards help us define our selection criteria?

There are differences of emphasis in the literature as to person or job specification. Taylor and Hemingway (1990), for example, advise a: "focus on the job to be done, not on the person who used to do it, on the needs of the children and the community... in the light of your educational aims and the school's development plans" (p 8). Establishing the needs of the school prior to the description of the tasks to be performed by the prospective appointee is akin to practices in the business sector. The term 'job design' is used by Boella (1996) to emphasise the balance between person specification and the needs of the organisation. Effective job design does three things, he suggests: satisfies the individual applicant's needs, takes into consideration the needs and expectations of the client – in this case, parents and students – and attends to the personal and professional needs of staff currently in post. Plumbley (1976) suggests:

"Anyone undertaking recruitment must first acquire a clear understanding of the job to be filled... it is pointless to embark on a recruitment programme without having established, in the first place, what human qualities make for success or failure in the job to be filled." (p 16)

Hay Group studies into job design suggest that particular dimensions of a role can affect both its feasibility and attractiveness to the role-holder and its effective contribution to the wider organisation. The size of a job – breadth and scale of accountabilities – in relation to other jobs affects the quality of joint decision-making; the shape of the job – the balance between creativity and problem-solving – affects significantly the qualities required to succeed.

The search for the right candidate needs to be guided by recognition of the specific context and culture of the school and a consideration of a best fit. In other words, the search is not simply for the best headteacher around, but the one most likely to be the right person in the right place at the right time. Fidler and Atton (2004) suggest that the question should be 'who is the most appropriate headteacher in the particular circumstances of the school?'

The response to this question can, of course, be conservative and cosy, unless the fit is framed in terms of questions such as: 'Who is best-placed to take us on from where we are? Who can challenge and lead practice in a way that can be heard and owned by staff?' To appoint someone who may shake staff out of complacency or lead the school in a new direction presumes that there is a vision, an embracing of change and that future thinking is shared by the appointing body.

### Step 3: attraction

“Effective recruitment is central to the day-to-day functioning of any organisation.”  
(Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, 1997, p 1)

In Hay Group’s seven-step model, attraction assumes that recruitment is led by a set of predetermined criteria and rests on questions such as:

- How can we communicate our expectations and offer to attract not only sufficient volumes of applicants but the right sort of applicants?
- What is our school’s particular identity and how can this be promoted accurately and clearly?

Attraction covers a wide range of initiatives: advertising, targeting, marketing and promoting schools in what has become an increasingly market-driven milieu. An organisation’s ability to recruit new employees largely depends on how best it is able to market itself, suggest Fidler and Bowles (1991), while Torrington and Hall (1998) describe recruitment advertising as the creative key to attracting potential applicants in a competitive environment.

One of the first questions to be asked in attracting people to the job is whether the field of most suitable candidates is within the organisation or outside it. Finding the balance between the talent without and the ‘treasure within’ (Delors, 1996) is widely seen as the challenge that schools face in ensuring the next generation of leaders. The balance to be weighed up is familiarity against fresh thinking, predictability against surprise, and continuity against change. These decisions are specific to the state of a school’s development and its future goals and defy easy generalisation. It is, however, not a matter of either/or and most commentators agree that it is vital to develop talent from within as well as knowing what lies beyond the school walls. Without progression and opportunity for those who deserve it, the culture of the school, its focus on performance and its ability to attract talented staff suffer regardless of who ends up in the top job.

Internal candidates are often discouraged from applying because of the high visibility of the headteacher’s job, concerns about their relationships with peers and because of perceived stress and workload. The pressures of headship can be made explicit by what school heads themselves say about the pressures of their job. This, claim numerous commentators, is a disincentive to internal recruitment. Shen and colleagues (2004), for example, identified eight salient factors in the US context which dissuaded teachers from applying, which included workload, the constraints and stress of the position, the consequent impact of the position on individual and family life, the status of the position and autonomy in exercising it, the work environment, location and size of the school, the nature of the community served by the school, and safety and support. These perceptions may, however, be jaundiced by a lack of broader knowledge, a lack of alternative perspectives and by a school climate that has not attended to the needs of the next generation of leaders.

Data from 1998–99 quoted by Fidler and Atton (2004) show the ratio of internal to external appointments in primary schools to be 27:73, while for secondaries the figures are very similar – 24:76. Statistics of Education (DfES 2002) show that 80 per cent of internal appointments were from the post of deputy head. “There is more to selection than being good at the present job,” warn Fidler and Atton, as deputy headship may not in itself qualify someone for the very different and demanding role of headship. The potential pool within a school may be wider and deeper. At the same time, encouraging people to apply for vacant

posts without knowledge of their readiness or competence for the job has to be guarded against in advice to governors.

An examination of local authority materials on the appointment of headteachers lays greater emphasis on external recruitment advertising than on internal recruitment. There is a legal requirement in the Education Reform Act for governors to place advertisements of posts for head and deputy head nationally in England and Wales, but, as some commentators point out, this may send a message which discourages internal applicants unless positive moves are made to encourage them. In accordance with the Discrimination Act, the literature suggests that job advertising should be undertaken in a way that will encourage candidates of both sexes, different ethnic groups and others to apply.

Whether internal or external “all recruitment episodes should start with a job profile or person specification, stating the necessary and desirable criteria for selection,” says the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, while Boella adds that it is not only “having the proper information available, including a job or role description, a personal specification”, but also a knowledge of the labour market (p 62). Looking beyond the school walls but with a lack of knowledge and research into what’s out there is a significant impediment to success.

Plumbley (1976) advises recruiters to view the advertisement stage as an integral part of the recruitment process, not a separate activity to be rushed through before the real business of selecting people begins. Instead, it should convey information that stimulates a positive response, directed precisely at the type of person defined in the person specification. Governors should also recognise that the quality of the advertisement – and any subsequent documentation, like application packs – reflects not only the quality of the job but the image of the organisation.

This process has to be carefully thought through in order not to place too restrictive boundaries around the potential field. The proper selection of headteachers can take place only when “an adequate applicant pool” is attracted, say Pounder and Young (p 286). The adequate applicant pool “depends on both the actual numbers of high-quality candidates and the multicultural and gender diversity of candidates”. When pools are too restricted, “multicultural and gender diversity” are often neglected. Although a large pool of applicants “does not automatically ensure a proportionate increase in the quality of applicants for vacant administrator position”, they conclude it is more likely to do so than a small applicant yield ratio. They are of the view that the larger the applicant pool, the more likely it is that those appointed to school leadership positions would represent the “multicultural and gender diversity of candidates”.

The data on gender and ethnic balance in senior leadership positions points unequivocally to a need for some form of targeting to attract under-represented groups to consider headship as a realistic option. The case is made in Earley and colleagues’ 2002 study which reveals a significant imbalance in English schools towards white ethnic women in primary and white ethnic men in secondary schools. Initiatives to target minorities include advertising, using recruitment agencies, intelligence networks and access courses such as Women into Management and, much more commonly in the US, courses for emergent leaders from black and ethnic minority backgrounds. Targeting has also to recognise that this applies as much to the untapped internal resource as to the external world. Programmes in other parts of the public sector, like the NHS Breaking Through scheme, also approach diversity from the angle of building the confidence and skills of specific groups to seek senior positions.

In a time of shortage it is also important to think creatively. This is advocated by numerous sources who question the assumption that only former teachers can do the job, and make a

plea for strategies to identify non-traditional candidates. Hess (2003), for example, argues that many individuals with leadership skills acquired in other fields would be willing to tackle a school principalship if they were not barred by traditional certification requirements. It is further argued that revisiting alternative pathways or doing away with certification rules altogether could dramatically expand the talent pool. The idea of heads who are not qualified teachers draws mixed responses. In the UK, the Association of School and College Leaders has publicly advocated it as a strategy, while the National Association of Head Teachers rejects the idea. Alistair Ross, writing in *The Guardian* on 10 October 2006, highlights it as one potential response to the shortfall of headteacher candidates, but warns: "Headteachers without teaching experience would mean an enormous cultural shift in the profession. Such a path would deprive ambitious teachers of an important route for progression... Heads would rapidly become characterised as 'administrators', out of touch with the professional realities of the classroom."

Roza and colleagues (2003) found that, in the US, superintendents valued other qualities ahead of teaching experience. Responding to a forced-choice question, 83 per cent chose 'experience leading professional colleagues' as the most important requirement, whereas just 14 per cent chose classroom teaching experience. The researchers did not, however, ask superintendents whether they would consider hiring a principal with no teaching experience. At the University of Washington, Portin and colleagues (2003) interviewed principals from a wide spectrum of schools and concluded that the single most important leadership skill was diagnosing and acting on the needs of the school. While some leadership functions require special knowledge, these could be exercised by others in the school. The principal's job was to see that the job got done, not to personally accomplish it.

Other alternatives that have been suggested, and in some cases successfully implemented (Court, 2002), are co-headships where two or more people share the position of head or principal on a part-time or full-time basis. Those in co-headship positions, it is found, experience less isolation and stress. Federations of schools, with an executive principal and head of school positions, also provide alternatives to both the isolation of stand-alone headship and the skills required.

#### **Step 4: selection**

In Hay's seven-step process, selection is the fourth step. It addresses two key questions:

- How can we reliably spot our chosen criteria in the candidates available?
- What are the different techniques available and how do they differ in terms of cost and effectiveness?

References play an important role in selection but are not without problems. Barone (1994) warns employers of the dangers of misleading references, coded words or phrases that "should send up a red flag" and suggests that referees may be phoned and asked to elaborate on key points in their references. Barone also suggests visiting the shortlisted candidates on their home turf.

Morgan et al (1993) make distinctions between three kinds of references: substantive, problematic and corroborative. The first of these is designed to help discriminate among candidates. The second is where Barone's red flag suggests further checking-out, while the third, corroborative, may be used to seek a second or third opinion where selectors are already positive but wish to test their judgement against another source. Further sources of evidence may not simply be other referees but HMI, Ofsted or local authority reports. Fidler

et al (1998) add a cautionary note that Ofsted judgements should not be treated as definitive but more as indicators for further probing, either at interview or prior to selection. References are generally used towards the end of the selection process, although seeking them earlier could enable them to play a more substantive role in decision-making.

It appears to be generally agreed that screening should use a standardised system to rank applicants systematically before issuing invitations for interviews in order to reduce bias, and that this should be done individually and privately before rankings are shared.

Governing bodies are presented with different kinds of challenges when there is a shortage of supply and the choice of the right person is a high-stakes decision. The decision may require governors to: choose the most capable person from numerous applicants to fill one vacancy; choose the right job for an applicant, or several applicants, from a number of vacancies; decide – where there is only one applicant for a vacancy – whether or not to appoint the person. At the same time, there is the challenge of ensuring that the selection process is “carried out in a fair and non-discriminatory manner”. (ECC, p 19)

Indecent haste in filling vacant posts, claim Draper and McMichael (2003), is inimical to good selection and constrains proper appointment procedures: impatient authorities are, in many cases, not allowing adequate time for preparation and, in their desire to simply keep the school running, may opt for the lowest common denominator – a safe pair of hands. While their comment is made about Scotland, where authorities have a more powerful role than in England, impatience may be endemic to other situations.

A Canadian study (Williams 2003) finds evidence of cronyism and warns of screening out candidates for the wrong reasons. This applies to individuals who are seen to be critics of the status quo, thereby potentially losing creative and challenging candidates and “allowing the nature of the future to be determined by a combination of strategic default and expedient hiring” (p 167). Expediency, safe hands, favoured candidates and default positions may be watched for, signalled and pre-empted in a well-designed process of selection.

Middlewood and Lumby (1998) offer corroboration of selection panels being swayed by factors that may not relate directly to the competencies required for the job. They argue that without providing selection panels with training for developing the skills for objective judgement, subjectivity can mar the process of shortlisting and selection because:

“One selector may be in favour of one candidate because he or she has a particular qualification rather than another. Alternatively, too much weight may be given altogether to academic achievement at the expense of other qualities which might be more relevant to effective performance on the job.” (p 6)

Detecting the presence of particular criteria within the candidates requires a particularly high level of discernment in two circumstances – one, where candidates are markedly similar and two, where candidates are markedly different. Where there are, say, ten criteria these may be scored independently and then totalled so that a ‘winner’ emerges. This additive process does not, however, always lead to a satisfactory outcome and may effect a compromise rather than the best decision. It can, however, be a useful starting point for discussion and negotiation. The following is one set of procedures suggested in Scotland for the training of members of school boards (SOEID, 1996); although it should be noted that, in Scotland, selection is based on the interview alone. In England, other selection activities may be used, and the problem of weighting the evidence from each emerges.

1. Members of the interviewing committee each have the set of criteria before them, previously agreed.
2. There is time for reflection and discussion of the criteria with openness to some minor addition/deletion or refinement.
3. Members are reminded of legal and ethical guidelines and types of question that can and cannot be asked.
4. The chair invites and allocates questions to members of the committee.
5. Candidate 1 is interviewed.
6. No discussion takes place after the interview. Members have five minutes or more to grade the candidate on the criteria and add comment. These are not discussed.
7. The rest of the candidates are interviewed following the same protocol.
8. After all candidates have been interviewed members of the appointing board share their criteria item by item.
9. Members are invited in turn to nominate their chosen candidate with justification for selection. Those with the least prior knowledge of the candidate go first.
10. At this point it may be helpful for the appointing board to split into smaller groups of three allowing more opportunity for deeper and less constrained discussion.
11. Open discussion in plenary takes place, taking into account referee's comments.
12. The appointing board may choose to recall one or more candidates.

Writing a number of years ago in a different policy climate, Holroyde (1974) emphasised the importance of being open to surprise. In his appointment to Sidney Stringer College in Coventry, he was the 'black swan' in a field of very similar white swans. He brought something unexpected and challenging to preconceptions of what would be best for the school. This may become a more salient issue as a pool of candidates who have all experienced NPHQ, LPSH or other national programmes make discriminating choice increasingly difficult.

Clearly cost and time are limiting factors in the differing processes and various stages of selection. Cost has to be measured in both financial and human terms for candidates, school and appointment board members alike. In respect of the following techniques for selection, judgements of relative cost have to be considered by weighing up the inputs of time, energy and finance against the critical importance of getting the right candidate.

### **Techniques for selection**

Numerous practical guidelines exist for selection, many of these issued by local authorities (for example, Hampshire, 2001, and Essex, 2000). Common to these is a set of procedures designed to minimise potentially costly mistakes.

- Interviewing can take a variety of forms and vary in length, but it is generally used as a complement to other sources of information and often as the last step in the process. It has the advantage of being well-established and flexible, but requires considerable skills and discipline to conduct effectively. Interviews alone have a relatively poor record in predicting on-the-job success.
- The use of bio-data to provide consistent supplementary information on each candidate against the defined criteria to facilitate comparisons. Examples are the CV and references. Quantitative or discrete measures are effective in shortlisting from among large volumes of candidates but seldom provide an adequate indication of excellence.

- A managed tour to ensure that candidates are provided with accurate, detailed information about the school, upon which they can match and demonstrate their skills during the selection process. An opportunity to meet other people may be appropriate to provide evidence of social skills. The use of tours and visits as selection criteria are problematic in terms of equal opportunities and consistency of assessment, but are effective in helping candidates make informed choices and to self-select.
- An oral presentation on a subject relating to a specific issue at the school which will help the selection panel to assess knowledge and understanding of one or more of the key tasks and overall presentation skills. Presentations can provide information for a range of potentially valuable characteristics, including analytical ability, strategic vision, impact and influence, credibility and empathy; it is easy, however, to attach too much weight to charisma, when other skills may be more important.
- A written task involving budget or data analysis to assess candidates' proficiency in the management and administration of budgets and analysing criteria, written communication skills, expertise, knowledge and relevance of thought. This may be done through a requirement of the statement in support of the application. As with oral presentations, care must be taken to attach the correct weight to the characteristics displayed, and to design an effective and credible task.
- An in-tray exercise to assess how potential candidates would prioritise and respond to a range of typical school issues. This is a more complex version of the written task, with the same merits and challenges; it adds an additional element of prioritisation and management of complexity, which is often a key feature of modern school leadership.
- Group discussion – structured or not – to assess group interaction, knowledge and possible leadership qualities. Although logistically difficult and requiring skills in observation, this can provide a powerful insight into behaviour in groups, particularly in an age where peer-to-peer collaboration and distributed leadership are common requirements of headteachers.
- An occupational personality questionnaire (OPQ) to inform on aspects of the candidates' personalities, motivation and preferred behaviour which are relevant to the selection criteria. A trained assessor is often required to interpret the results and provide a report to the selection panel. Some of these psychometrics have a well-established role in recruitment in other sectors. Care must be taken to ensure they are attached to actual role requirements; that time is provided for completion and that the conditions for completion are fair. It is hard not to attach a great deal of importance to such 'authoritative' sources of evidence but they must be taken as only one item among many.

Other strategies that may be used to complement interviews are asking for an analysis of problem scenarios, using performance simulation, watching and commenting on a classroom (Anderson, 1991); panels of staff, parents and pupils are increasingly popular, although still not very widely used.

Although the interview is the most widely used and most influential tool in hiring decisions, it is not always valid or reliable and mistakes can prove costly (Hobby et al, 2001). Studies suggest that interviewers may decide to hire or reject an applicant within the first five minutes of an interview (Anderson, 1991). Effective interviewing is an art and a number of sources

(for example, Winter, 1998) suggest training for interviewers, including qualities such as alertness to cues, sensitive listening, hearing nuances and making fine distinctions and the ability to suppress biases. Interviews should properly be seen as one part of an overall set of selection methods; it is not uncommon to deploy other techniques first and reserve the relatively expensive and time-consuming interview for a smaller set of candidates. Grieves and Hanafin (2005) worry that: “The lack of training in HR means that power can be abused either deliberately or unintentionally and that selection panels that fail to demonstrate their role of public scrutiny may make discriminatory attributions.”

The structure of the interview process varies from open-ended to adherence to a strict pre-determined format. Anderson argues that interviews are more effective and reliable when all candidates are asked identical, predetermined, well-thought-out questions. This may, however, prove too constricting if employers are looking for the individualistic or idiosyncratic candidate who needs greater scope to express himself or herself.

A critical first question is ‘who should be involved in interviewing?’ Only a few members of the interviewing team should conduct the initial interviews, suggests Raisch (1993), going on to argue that teachers should have an integral role in principals’ appointments. He also advocates that the interviewing team – for example, the board of governors – be divided into panels, with candidates moving from one panel to the next.

While there is little in the literature about students participating in the screening and selection process, it is becoming more common in English schools. Schools in which primary pupils or secondary students are involved in talking to and providing opinions on candidates consistently report benefits. There are also individual examples of students composing advertisements to attract the right kind of headteacher.

### **Step 5: appointment**

Appointment is the fifth critical step in the Hay Group model. It is underpinned by questions such as:

- What sort of packages and incentives will secure our chosen candidate?
- What are different sorts of headteachers looking for from their careers and chosen schools?
- How can we provide this with the limited resources available?

Appointment follows selection and decision-making and the power balance tends to switch from the appointing board to the candidate. It is the candidate who must now exercise discrimination and make the decision as to whether or not to accept the offer.

Appointment is the beginning rather than the end of the process. It is clear from the literature as well as from common knowledge that without the right kind of support headteachers are unlikely to remain, or to remain with the level of commitment

### **Incentives**

More is perhaps known about disincentives to accepting headship than about incentives that not only attract people to the job but are likely to make them remain in it. Heading lists of incentives tend to be those that focus on the conditions of work, support and continuing professional development. Headteachers need “time and space to become leaders rather than plagued by bureaucracy” writes Mulford (2003), and advocates a loosening of ties that

bind them to structures and systems which leave them little room for manoeuvre and professional sustenance.

Efforts to improve job conditions should not overlook the idealistic orientation of many educators, who entered the field because they wanted to make a difference, say Pounder and Merrill (2001). They found, for example, that when assistant principals were asked to consider the desirability of a high school principalship, they gave the most weight to psychological benefits, particularly the opportunity to influence education. From that perspective, the opportunity to lead a troubled school may actually be an incentive but only if the position provides the authority and support to focus on an improvement in teaching and learning.

Incentives that are common in the business world such as relocation assistance, reduced rent or utilities, reduced-price homes and tax credits, although rare in education, may also be necessary to encourage potential applicants to accept the appointment.

A summary of sources suggest the following incentives may be important in encouraging the preferred candidate to take up the job offer.

- Opportunities to lead and not simply manage
- A measure of independence from external control
- Flexibility and latitude for decision-making
- Recognition of professionalism of school leadership
- Time and space to focus on values and what matters in education
- Alliances and support from peers
- Opportunity to build and work with teams
- Opportunities for ongoing professional development
- Life-work balance
- Salary and reward

While salary figures at the bottom of this list, there is an optimum level at which it may act as either incentive or disincentive. Some commentators (eg, Gates et al, 2003) compare school leaders' salaries unfavourably with commensurate recompense in the business world, yet, they argue, headship is often more demanding, stress-inducing and intensive and carries greater responsibilities (see also Hobby et al, 2000). Headteacher and principals' compensation is also relative to teacher compensation and the nature of the gap is a sensitive issue: a large gap may simply accentuate the difference between management and staff, while a small differential may offer little incentive to move from teaching to headship. As Gates and colleagues suggest, teachers considering a move into senior leadership may be put off when they realise that the cost is longer hours and greater responsibility not commensurate with reward. In these sorts of instances, salary differentials have a symbolic as well as monetary value.

It is widely recognised as good practice to debrief unsuccessful candidates. This serves a number of purposes. It is important for the candidate psychologically and professionally to know the reasons for lack of success and what to do in the future. It helps to avoid resentment and rumour. It also helps to maintain the pool of potential applicants if they feel recognised and supported. It widens the knowledge base and may suggest alternative possibilities for good candidates who were not suitable for a particular school or were simply up against an even better candidate. A knowledge base may also, of course, provide information on people who appear totally unsuited to headship. Debriefing is particularly

important, and sensitive, for unsuccessful internal candidates, and could significantly affect their relations with the incoming headteacher.

## **Step 6: induction**

The induction questions posed in Hay Group's sixth step are as follows:

- How do we move from appointment to successful performance in the role?
- What are the needs of headteachers in their first few months in the job?
- How can we use the data gathered during recruitment to aid their development?
- How do the attitudes and activities of the governing body affect the retention of heads, for example, with regard to performance management and professional development? (See also the categorisation of governing bodies in Ranson et al, 2005).
- What strategies for induction should a governing body consider and incorporate into information about the school to make posts more attractive?

When properly planned, "induction enables new employees to become fully operational quickly", says the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (1997, p 2). If new headteachers are recruited with retention in mind, it is integral to the selection process to offer reassurance as to the conditions of work and support that a new head can expect. Appointment needs to be informed by a recognition that headship is a lonely job and that the first few months can be a particularly challenging time for new heads; he or she may have to work with unsuccessful candidates and, in some cases, deal with subversion or outright opposition from staff.

Fidler and Atton (2004) point to some of the dangers of new heads being pushed early after appointment to make decisions, sometimes a governor ploy to test the new headteacher or, more ingenuously, in expectation that the head will be fully operational at once. Particularly hazardous, suggest the authors, is to expect new heads to be involved in the appointment of staff before they have really got to know the school, become familiar with existing staff and have made an assessment of the school's needs. Insights into life cycles of leadership (for example Reeves et al, 1997; Weindling, 1999; Gronn, 1999) are useful in considering both appointment and induction. Leadership stages are usually characterised in terms such as the following:

- Entry, encounter, shock, sorting things out
- Initiation, idealism, uncertainty
- Adjustment, survival, taking hold
- Development, consolidation, integration
- Reshaping, refinement, educational leadership
- Plateau
- Letting go, divestiture, disenchantment
- Time for a change

It is common, suggest commentators (for example Earley, 2002), for headteachers to experience culture shock in adjusting to the exigent realities of their new role. In Earley et al's study they reported a small minority of headteachers – 17 per cent – saying that they had been prepared for the role, while only one in eight said they felt well-equipped to deal with the nature of issues they are presented with in school leadership and management. Acting headship is one form of induction that gives first-hand experience of the job, although as Draper and McMichael (2002, 2003) found it is just as likely to deter people from applying for

the job as providing a path into headship. Headteachers may, in a sense, become different people (MacBeath et al, 2004) as they come to recognise and assert their authority, developing the confidence to change things, to expect more of their colleagues and reshape the school environment. They may use a second or third posting to rise to new challenges and redefine themselves.

External support, argue Baker and associates (1991), is critical to induction and retention. This assumes myriad forms. The three most cited in the literature are mentoring, coaching and critical friendship. Each of these three forms of support now benefits from a substantial literature which shows how each of these, in different ways, are critical in helping headteachers to adjust, manage and grow in the job.

Boris-Schacter and Langer (2002), after interviewing hundreds of principals in the US, concluded that the job should be modified to alleviate some of the stress and time pressures that school leaders face, particularly in the early period of induction. They suggest that districts could spread the burden by reconfiguring the job description, either through a co-principalship, a rotating principalship, or some other form of distributed leadership. Different forms of co-principalship which are suggested by Court (2002) include job-sharing which relieves the full-time pressure on one person, dual leadership which is convivial and collaborative, or a more extended form of collective leadership.

### **Distributing leadership**

The recent interest and advocacy of distributed leadership (see, for example, Spillane et al, 2001; Gronn, 2003; Hobby, 2004) is in one sense a pragmatic response to the impossibility of individualistic, or heroic, leadership; it is also a recognition that schools cannot build capacity, sustainability or plan for succession without dispersing opportunities for leadership through the school community. Arguments are also made that distributed leadership can increase the effectiveness of schools through increased creativity, shared problem-solving and devolving decisions to the point of greatest knowledge; though concern is also raised about the increased demands for organisational and role clarity, and co-ordination (Hobby, 2004). The Parliamentary Select Committee on Education and Skills, the Education and Skills Committee in its Fifth Report of Session 2003–04, *Secondary Education: Teacher Retention and Recruitment*, argues as follows:

“It is crucial that heads do not feel expected to carry sole responsibility for all aspects of their school's activities, because such a load, in a large secondary school, is not sustainable long term.”[117]

“It is about developing leadership and harnessing energy at many levels, adapting structures, systems and cultures...In this model, even NQTs can take some leadership responsibility within their schools from the beginning of their career, maximising their opportunities to develop the skills that will make them outstanding school leaders in the future. And it gives heads the support they need to run a large and complex organisation.” [118]

The select committee concludes: “Reducing demands on heads to help keep their jobs manageable, and giving others responsibility from very early in their careers in order to motivate them and develop their skills, seems practical and worthwhile and is to be encouraged.” How this is achieved is less clear but there is emerging research in the US (Spillane, Halverson and Diamond, 2001), Australia (Gronn, 2003) and in England (MacBeath, Oduro and Waterhouse, 2004) which reveal its highly context-dependent nature and its sensitivity to the life cycles of leadership and school development. The latter study

suggests that distribution may, ironically, be most difficult when a head joins a new school as it is then that he or she is most likely to need to assert authority and to maintain the status quo, at least for a period. It is, this report suggests, with growing confidence and trust that distribution becomes incremental and opportunistic and shifts almost imperceptibly into a culture of mutual sharing and internal accountability.

### **Step 7: evaluation**

The two key questions in evaluating the approach to selection and appointment are:

- Is it working?
- How can it be improved?

Recruitment works when it results in the selection of the best available candidate – best in terms of ‘fit’ – without wasting resources. This is a test that can take a long time to emerge; success in role can also be driven by a range of factors outside of the recruitment process; and may, in any case, be contested. Without a sound evidence base it is difficult to identify answers to the second question – improvement – but sources of evidence may include:

- Evidence of selection criteria in action
- Evidence of school improvement
- Staff morale
- Inspection reports
- Governor reports
- School self-evaluation

### **Walking the talk**

While it has gained the status of a cliché, walking the talk is the test of a leader’s ability to translate the rhetoric at the time of selection and appointment into day-to-day action. A 1998 international study of leadership (MacBeath, 1998), including headteachers in English schools, compared heads’ espoused values in interviews with perceptions of them from the standpoint of teachers, parents and students. What heads said about their priorities was also set alongside what they did in response to the day-to-day challenges of the job, pinpointing disparities between the talk and the walk. This kind of exercise is a valuable part of school self-evaluation, in which governors may play an integral role.

### **School improvement and succession planning**

Headteachers often stand or fall by trajectories of improvement in attainment scores and are often hired specifically to raise results. As has been pointed out by John Gray and colleagues (1999) among others, this may be a weak and sometimes misleading measure of headship. Rather than a measure of capacity-building, raised test scores may conceal counter-productive tactical or short-term approaches (see Gray cited above). In the current policy climate the most stringent test of effective leadership is the ability to plan for the next generation of leaders and build the capacity of staff to both handle and initiate change.

Succession planning has long been a feature of the most successful companies (Collins et al, 1994, 2001). In the US, Anderson (1991) recommends developing a pool of qualified candidates inside the school by creating career ladders. For career ladders to work, he says, there must be adequate opportunities for individuals to enjoy a diversity of experience which qualify them for principalship. For example, he suggests that assistant principals should not

be treated as 'single-facet administrators', good only as disciplinarians or directors of activities, but be provided with opportunities to develop in a more rounded way. Barker (1997) advises school districts to be aggressive in identifying the professional and personal benefits of principalship and then selling those benefits to talented teachers. Researchers advise the selection of 'star administrator prospects' and preparing those people for principalship through full-time, paid interns. Internship, in the US, is where prospective principals continue to work in their own schools but with support and guidance from senior colleagues or external mentors.

## The talent enigma

Underlying recruitment and selection lie contrasting views on what constitutes talent and whether it is found or cultivated. McKinsey & Company's book *The War for Talent* depicts a corporate world in which exceptional leaders are in short supply and in which holding on to gifted managers and executives is the biggest challenge facing business sustainability. It finds a close parallel in much of the literature on the recruitment and retention crisis in school leadership. Like the long-standing nature-nurture contest, talent may be viewed from different perspectives as either inborn or inbred. The enigmatic question is: 'Do talented people create great organisations or do great organisations create talented people?' Taking issue with the McKinsey study, Malcolm Gladwell (2002) says this:

"The talent myth assumes that people make organizations smart. More often than not, it's the other way around."

Gladwell takes issue with the assumption that an organisation's intelligence is simply a function of the intelligence of its employees. People believe in stars, he says, because they don't believe in systems, and he concludes: "The organizations that are most successful at that task are the ones where the system *is* the star." This is a view that receives some support from major studies by Jim Collins and colleagues in their seminal texts *Built to Last* (1994) and *Good to Great* (2001). They argue that the principles of enduringly successful companies not only apply internationally in virtually every country of the world but across public sector agencies, including education:

"Gone forever – at least in our eyes – is the debilitating perspective that the trajectory of a company depends on whether it is led by people ordained with rare and mysterious qualities that cannot be learned by others." (1994, p 2)

A study of 1,000 leading professionals (Groysberg et al, 2004, p 2) found that top performers quickly fade after leaving one company for another:

"Most companies that hire stars overlook the fact that an executive's performance is not entirely transferable because his personal competencies inevitably include company-specific skills. When the star leaves the old company for the new, he also leaves behind many of the resources that contributed to his achievements. As a result, he is unable to repeat his performance in another company – at least not until he learns to work the new system, which could take years."

The authors conclude that companies should focus on cultivating talent from within and do everything possible to retain the stars they create.

The tension between the search for talent and the creation of talent from within are themes that run through the educational literature. Qualities of leadership are grown within institutions and retention issues do not simply apply to keeping good headteachers in post

but building succession by both recognising and nurturing talent. The literature on cultures which exceed the individual qualities of their members is vast and ranges over a wide field:

- Organisational learning (Senge, 1994, Perkins, 2004)
- Learning, Intelligent, Motivated Schools (Senge, 2000, McGilchrist et al, 2004, Maclean, 2004)
- Leadership for Learning (Knapp et al, 2002)
- School Culture (Dahlin, 1993, Walker and Dimmock, 2002)
- Knowledge creation (Hargreaves, D, 2002)
- Schools as learning communities (Mitchell and Sackney, 2002 )
- Communities of practice (Wenger, 1998)
- Teacher leadership (Liebermann, 2004, Johnson, 2004, Frost and Durrant, 2001)
- Sustainability and attrition (Hargreaves, A, 2004, Fink, 2003)

In the corporate sector a large-scale study (Michaels et al, 2002) of 13,000 executives in 120 companies, including 27 case studies of successful companies, arrived at seven key principles of induction and retention. All have some relevance for the educational sector, while some have particular relevance:

1. Instil a talent mindset at all levels of the organisation – beginning with senior management. This should be one that needs to be reinforced together with a rigorous and candid review to outline individuals' strengths and weaknesses and identify specific actions to address issues around underperformers.
2. Create 'extreme' employee value propositions (EVPs) that deliver on your people's dreams – capturing and retaining talent means having a compelling reason why a talented person would want to work for your company.
3. Build a high-performance culture that combines a strong performance ethic with an open and trusting environment.
4. Recruit great talent continuously – be always on the prowl for talent. Successful companies have a keen sense of who they are looking for, and they do their looking in new ways and in new places.
5. Develop people to their full potential. Effectively conceived jobs can be stretched. Coupling this with informal feedback, coaching and mentoring can be enormously developmental.
6. Make room for talent to grow – acting on the negative influence of underperformers, whether it is to a new position or out of the company, is both a difficult task and an obligation of leaders.
7. Focus on retaining high performers – simply helping high-potential people feel connected and vital to the future of the business can be a powerful retention tactic. Let them know they are wanted.

The authors add four further key elements:

1. A great company cares about its people who in turn care about the company. Trust and open communication are the fabric of each interaction.

2. Great leaders are those who treat people with trust and respect and honour the intelligence of all who contribute to the institution; who find the balance between giving people independence to accomplish great things and providing guidance to help them do it. They build the capacity to achieve results, knowing that they do this by unleashing the talents and work ethic of their people.
3. Great jobs. People have got to like what they do and the people they do it with. A great job is demanding and stretching and full of content that the individual finds interesting and important.
4. Attractive compensation: talented people expect their contributions to be acknowledged and their compensation to reflect their impact.

### **A final story**

A success story from a New York City school district is described by Darling-Hammond and Sykes (2003). In 1996, the new superintendent, Anthony Alvarado, put continuing professional development for teachers and principals at the centre of his recruitment and retention strategy, coupled with a relentless focus on teaching and learning. He recognised that little would change without more talented and committed teachers and effective principals. Backed by the teachers' union, he replaced nearly half the teacher workforce and two-thirds of principals over a period of years through a combination of retirement, pressure and inducements. Meanwhile, the central office carefully managed the recruitment, hiring and placement of new teachers and principals. It ended the hiring of less-qualified teachers and forged new partnerships for student teaching and professional development with a range of educational institutions. The district's growing reputation for quality also attracted other teachers. Salary changes were not within the district's purview but it put in place strategies to develop a pipeline of well-prepared teachers, supporting them with strong mentoring and professional development. As Elmore and Burney, (quoted in Darling-Hammond, 2003) conclude, it clearly relied on both a development and recruitment strategy working in tandem.

## Lessons from the literature

The literature offers a body of empirical evidence on the recruitment, selection and appointment of headteachers in an international context. A number of consistent messages emerge from those studies that not only broaden understanding and map the field but also suggest further fruitful avenues of inquiry.

- Selection and appointment have to be set within the wider context of a recruitment crisis. The nature and extent of the crisis is a matter of debate but has to be understood as a global issue as well as a national one.
- Disincentives to apply for headship and the dissatisfiers of those currently in the job are clearly interrelated and follow a similar pattern in different countries. This is largely due to the visibility of the head's task and the challenges it poses. Better knowledge of the inherent satisfactions of the role and how they may be promoted in selling headship is likely to provide and enhance the field for selection.
- Recruitment issues impact very differently in different areas of the country. This is related to perceptions of more and less challenging contexts. Schools in challenging circumstances have to work harder, more creatively and require added incentives to attract headteachers. Identifying where such schools are successful in attracting candidates carries important messages for the wider system. This also suggests the need for a flexible approach to recruitment and reward.
- Teacher shortages and reported teacher stress have a direct impact on the recruitment of headteachers if only by virtue of a diminishing supply line, shrinking the pool of potential applicants. Attention to support and professional development for new entrants is an obvious key to building capacity and vouchsafing succession.
- There is a considerable amount of work to be done with governors to help them set their strategies within a developed understanding of the systemic issues which constrain selection and appointment.
- Clarity in person specification is a critical first step but needs to be contextualised within the current development stage of the school and its particular needs. There is, however, a danger in playing safe, adopting a conservative position rather than one that may challenge precedent and convention.
- Some commentators argue that far too much attention is paid to generic skills and too little to the importance of individual school contexts and the role of the head within the leadership.
- Attracting external candidates has to be balanced with knowledge of internal potential, at the same time recognising the danger of favouring those who may not be ready for the responsibilities of headship.
- Discriminating among applicants with very similar profiles is a challenge for governors, matched by having to choose among applicants who bring very different qualities. The wider the opportunity for critical dialogue on criteria, the less the likelihood of compromise and the more informed decision-making is likely to be.

- References and interviews have proved to be slim bases for decision-making and there need to be more imaginative strategies such as practical tasks or visiting applicants on their home ground.
- Headteachers who have been successful in one school may not be successful in another. This means that generic person specifications and competencies are of themselves insufficient. NCSL guidelines need to be considered in this context.
- There are dangers in both the framing of advertisements and the selection procedures which restrict the pool of applicants and may disadvantage minority ethnic groups.
- The gender imbalance in primary and secondary schools has marginally improved in the last few years but remains a critical issue at every stage of recruitment, selection, appointment and induction. With recent research from the GTC (2006), for example, suggesting that women may be put off leadership roles by their impact on family life – 26 per cent of women, compared with 7 per cent of men, said their career had been limited by factors in their private lives – governors need to be aware of the different expectations and needs of men and women leaders. Ethnicity and the representation of minority groups within senior leadership positions remain significant concerns.
- The entry process to new headship can be a culture shock and requires, from the outset, strategies of support which may include forms of coaching, mentoring or critical friendship, opportunities for networking and peer exchange.
- Understanding of the cycles of headship and the differences brought by applicants in their first, second or third headship is critical both for appointment and induction but often neglected.
- Experimentation with co-leadership models of headship has been tried in other countries, with reported success. This may prove to be a viable strategy in some circumstances.
- It would be helpful for governors and applicants to engage in dialogues that explore their understanding of distributed leadership and its relation to capacity-building. A headteacher is not a leader in isolation from the capacity of their senior leadership team, which can both reinforce potential weaknesses and also require particular strengths.
- Consideration should be given to the involvement of students at some stage in selection procedures. While there is little empirical support in the literature, there are numerous anecdotal accounts of the perception shown by students in identifying the most suitable person for the job.

### **Gaps to be filled**

The literature is expansive on the subject of recruitment and the attendant challenges. There is less empirical evidence on what works in appointment and selection, although it is recognised that these issues are highly context-sensitive. Decisions made by a governing body may differ from those made at school district, local authority or national level. In the English context there is scant evidence of what might be considered best practice in selection by governing bodies.

It is also worth noting that the English system of selecting headteachers is, by comparison to many countries, highly decentralised and market-based. England lies to one end of the continuum of market versus planned approaches.

While the selection and appointment of headteachers has a long history, there is still much to be learned about how that process works to best advantage and what can be done to avoid costly mistakes.

In relation to the effects of leadership programmes such as LPSH, NPQH, EHP, for example, there is as yet little empirical evidence as to their effects either in raising the overall standard, providing a robust basis for decisions or for making differentiation more problematic by providing a standardised skill set.

Given the relative newness of the standards for headship there is as yet no evidence as to how these are used, how discriminately they are applied and adapted to different school circumstances and phases of development. This is an important area for inquiry.

It is early days for empirical evidence on students' roles in the attraction and selection of headteachers or senior staff; given the growth of practice in this area, it is an issue worth pursuing systematically. Indications from a survey of chairs of governors conducted in accompanying research for NCSL suggest that 25 per cent of schools have used students in recruiting their head and that 74 per cent found their involvement very helpful. Protocols for how to best use students need development, as structure for the involvement of all stakeholders is critical for success (Hobby et al, 2001).

## Useful sources

### ***The Headship Game: The Challenges of Contemporary School Leadership*, Brian Fidler and Tessa Atton, RoutledgeFalmer, 2004**

Fidler and Atton address a range of leadership themes in this book, but of particular relevance is Chapter 6 (pages 108–157), *Selecting and supporting headteachers*. It first of all examines trends in appointments in England over the last few years using statistics to illustrate internal and external appointments and the changing balance in gender. The selection process is described from the perspective of those appointing, the qualities and experience sought, and the nature of evidence assembled. Useful guidance is provided for candidates on what kind of evidence may be looked for. The chapter concludes with arrangements for the induction of heads and examines research on mentoring and considers the needs of mentors if they are to support heads effectively. There is useful practical guidance for governing bodies, including:

- formulating requirements and advertising
- shortlisting
- selection activities and making the choice
- debriefing unsuccessful candidates
- principles and practice of mentoring

### ***The New Work of Educational Leaders: Changing Leadership Practice in an Era of School Reform*, Peter Gronn, Sage Publications, 2003**

Peter Gronn provides a new framework for understanding leadership practice, describing the work of leaders as being increasingly shaped by three overriding but contradictory themes: design; distribution; and disengagement – the architecture of school and educational leadership. Disengagement is particularly relevant to this theme in which he explores how school systems anticipate leadership succession problems, projected shortages and recurring recruitment difficulties.

Though he is based in Australia, Peter Gronn is very familiar with the British education system, and he deals perceptively with themes of school leadership in the UK context.

### ***The Principal Challenge: Leading and Managing Schools in an Era of Accountability*, Marc Tucker and Judy Coddling (editors), The Jossey-Bass Education Series, 2003**

Based on two years of research supported by the Carnegie Corporation of New York, this edited book draws on research, theory and practice from not only from the United States but other countries including England. The authors analyse what it means to be a principal or headteacher in the current policy climate, what the military and business sectors do to create and support their leaders and what state-of-the-art professional development looks like and what other nations are doing to address the recruitment crisis.

### ***Leadership and Sustainability: System Thinkers in Action*, Michael Fullan, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, Centre for Teacher Development**

There is not much here on recruitment but a great deal on sustainability. Fullan identifies eight key areas for sustainability including networking, short- and long-term planning, intelligent accountability and what he calls 'cyclical energizing'. In the book he returns to many familiar themes such as 'the new work of educational leaders' and examines the success and shortcomings of large-scale reform with a specific focus on the numeracy and literacy strategies in England.

## **Business books**

### ***Good to Great*, Jim Collins, Random House Business Books, 2001**

Collins's study is now widely read among educators and school leaders because so many of its themes resonate with effective school leadership and challenge many myths and inert ideas of heroic leadership. "We don't have great schools principally because we have good schools," he claims in the third line of his opening chapter. His five-year study is based on an analysis of performance in 28 major companies and focuses on leadership practices in the extraordinarily effective companies. *Good to Great* offers an insight into how an effective organisation can become an unusually effective one. The Collins team suggests that merely good performance acts as a disincentive to the vision, decisions and risk-taking that can transform an organisation from effective to extraordinarily effective.

### ***Built to Last*, Random House Business Books, J C Collins and J I Porras, 1994**

This six-year study was a prelude to *Good to Great*. It set out to compare 18 good companies with 18 visionary companies that had endured over time, seeking to identify what it was that helped these companies to excel. While all had experienced setbacks and failures, they also displayed a resilience to bounce back from adversity, to learn from mistakes, but above all invested in their people. This is particularly apposite to the retention and sustainability issue and contains many relevant messages for school leadership.

### ***The War for Talent*, Ed Michaels, Helen Handfield-Jones and Beth Axelrod, Harvard Business School Press**

*Talent* is shorthand for employees who possess "a sharp strategic mind, leadership ability, communications skills, the ability to attract and inspire people, entrepreneurial instincts, functional skills, and the ability to deliver results". The authors surveyed 13,000 executives in 27 companies to identify the programmes and behaviours that helped firms attract and retain the best kinds of employees. The authors outline common imperatives in recruitment and retention.

## **Mentoring, coaching and critical friendship**

The literature on mentoring refers mainly to business and is predominantly American in origin. Most UK mentoring sources refer to teachers or students. One such source is P Tomlinson's *Understanding mentoring* (Open University Press, Buckingham, 1995). Mentoring across a range of students, teachers and headteachers can be found at <http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/management>

The book, *Coaching in Schools*, recently published by Mike Hughes (Education Training and Support, 2004), while mainly concerned with coaching as applied to teachers nonetheless contains many helpful generic principles

*InFORM 3* (October 2003) by Sue Swaffield, with a contribution by John Jones, summarises the literature in an eight-page document, comparing critical friends with others in similar roles, gives examples of critical friendship in practice and provides suggestions for further reading. (Available from the Anita Chapman Faculty of Education, Cambridge University).

## Journal articles and research reports

***School Leaders: Changing roles and impact on teacher and school effectiveness, Bill Mulford, OECD, 2003***

This is a rich resource on the impact of change in educational systems internationally. It deals with teacher as well as principal recruitment and retention issues and cites a very wide range of useful sources up to 2003.

***Staying Power: The relationship between headteachers' length of service in primary and secondary schools and selected PANDA grades, John Howson, National College for School Leadership, 2002***

This study, undertaken for NCSL, provides a great deal of interesting data and insights into both recruitment and retention issues, and informed the thinking of the Ninth Government Select Committee on Education and Employment.

***School Headship in the United States: a situation report, Marc Tucker and Judy Coddling, National College for School Leadership***

This summary, in four pages, provides a succinct and authoritative account from the National Center on Education and the Economy of recruitment and retention issues in American schools.

***Establishing the Current State of School Leadership in England, Peter Earley, Pat Collarbone, Jennifer Evans, Anne Gold and David Halpin, Department for Education and Skills, Research Report Number 336, 2002***

This study for the DfES is a very useful and much-quoted source, including helpful data on preparation for headship.

***Perspectives on factors influencing application for the principalship: a comparative study of teachers, principals and superintendents. In International Journal of Leadership in Education, Jianping Shen, Van E Cooley and Gary Wegenke, volume 7, number 1, January–March 2004***

This article, although reporting on a study conducted in the United States, gives valuable insights into the reasons why teachers are reluctant to apply for leadership positions and will resonate with readers in the UK.

***Performance Appraisal and Selection of School Leaders: Selection Processes and Measurement Issues, Kenneth Leithwood, Paul T Begley and J Bradley Cousins. In L Lashway, 1998, Measuring Leadership, Research Roundup, volume 14, number 2, winter 1997–98***

This paper, in an American journal, is one of many in a special edition which looks at selection issues in the US and Canada.

***Australian Journal of Education, volume 47, number 2***

This may not be the most accessible source but it is an excellent one containing a number of important papers dealing with recruitment and retention issues in the US, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Scotland, Singapore and Hong Kong.

***Cambridge Journal of Education, Special issue: The Changing World of Leadership, November 2003***

While not specifically addressing recruitment and retention, this collection of articles provides useful background information on school leadership challenges in the US, Canada, Australia, Denmark, Norway, Ghana and Hong Kong, as well as in the UK.

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