

## **New pathways into headship?**

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National College for  
Teaching & Leadership

# **New pathways into headship?**

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## Executive Summary

There continues to be something of a conundrum in the recruitment of headteachers in England. While “a very large majority of headteachers report being satisfied with their jobs” (Micklewright et al 2014: 17), headteacher recruitment and retention remain major challenges for school governors and policy makers.

In this context, the *New Pathways into Headship* project was commissioned by the National College for Teaching and Leadership (NCTL) in January 2013. Tasked with considering new or alternative pathways into headship, the project focused on three research groupings of headteachers. These were defined as:

- **‘Fast Trackers’**, who had participated in an accelerated leadership development programme prior to achieving headship;
- **‘Young Heads’**, who had achieved headship before they were 35 years old in primary schools and 40 in secondary schools (without participating in an accelerated development programme);
- **‘Career Changers’**, who had pursued another career before working in schools and achieving headship.

The aims of the research set out by NCTL were to:

- analyse the size and demography of the three research groupings;
- identify their career pathways towards headship;
- explore the school leadership practices of each group.

Responding to these aims, a mixed-methods research approach was adopted. This comprised secondary data analysis, two questionnaire surveys and 15 case study visits. The research design is discussed in Chapter 1. In Chapters 2-5 we set out the research findings across four themes. Summarized below, these are:

- the demography of each research group and the schools they serve;
- their career progression and leadership development experiences;
- the challenges they faced in being recruited to headship; and

- their school leadership practices.

## **i) Demography and schools served**

### **The three research groups**

Using a set of characteristics defined in Chapter 2, Fast Trackers, Young Heads and Career Changers are shown to comprise just over 10% of primary and 7% of secondary school heads within the 2011 School Workforce Census (DfE 2012). Fast Trackers were the smallest group, comprising 0.25% and 0.5% of primary and secondary heads. Young Heads comprised 2.3% of primary and 5.1% of secondary heads. Career Changers comprised 7.8% of primary and 2% of secondary heads.

Demographically, all three research groups were found to predominately reproduce, and in some case deepen, the existing under-representation of women, minority ethnic groups and disabled people in headship. Less than 20% of Fast Trackers and Young Heads in secondary schools were women, for example, compared to nearly 40% in the total secondary head population.

A notable difference in relation to gender was Career Changers. Eighty-eight per cent of primary and 52% of secondary career changers were women, in comparison to 69% and 38% of all primary and secondary heads respectively. Overall in the total headteacher population, 10% of all women primary and 3% of all women secondary heads were identified as Career Changers. We conclude Career Changers contribute to an identified narrowing of the gender gap among older headteachers (Earley et al 2012).

A key component of the Career Changer sample was also of women who, often after raising their own children, became mature entrants to teaching and gained qualified teacher status (QTS) before progressing into leadership positions. This is in contrast to an image of career changing popularized by PWC (2007) of individuals without teaching experience transferring directly into senior school posts from leadership positions in other sectors. Among our Career Changers sample, 93% gained QTS prior to achieving headship.

## **Their schools**

In the primary phase, each of the three research groups of headteachers was over-represented in schools with above average re-advertisements rates. This rate calculates how many times the headteacher post was advertised prior to an appointment being made. Compared to a third of primary heads nationally, for instance, just under half of Young Heads and Fast Trackers were appointed in schools that had already decided *not* to appoint to an advertised post.

While this helped schools overcome prior failure to recruit, this finding may also reflect governor concerns about appointing candidates from shorter or 'non-traditional' career pathways. The schools appointing Young Heads and Fast Trackers, in particular, had already spent an above average period of time with a vacant or temporary filled post. This may have influenced governor decision-making about whom they were subsequently willing to appoint.

In the secondary phase, all three research groups were over-represented in sponsored academies and Young Heads and Fast Trackers were over-represented in schools with above average student eligibility for free school meals (FSMs). It was notable that half of Young Heads and two-thirds of Fast Tracker survey respondents reported that serving a deprived community was an important factor in where they applied for headships.

Considering the sponsored academy finding, we recognize that a higher than average number of sponsored academy posts may have been advertised during the period when the research groups were appointed. That half of all Fast Trackers were appointed in sponsored academies, however, compared to one-in-ten among the wider headteacher population, was particularly notable.

This suggests that contemporary accelerated leadership development programmes are aligned to serving specific networks of academies, with inter-linkages between the aims of the development programmes and the 'types' of leaders, values and training sought out by particular academy chains. (We discuss further evidence for this in Chapter 4.)

## **ii) Career progression and leadership development**

Our second focus concerned the career progression and development of Fast Trackers, Young Heads and Career Changers.

## Speed of career progression

All three research groups were found to progress quickly to headship. There has historically been a relatively consistent average length of time spent in teaching prior to taking up a headship in England, of between 18 and 20 years. Fast Tracker and Young Head survey respondents were found to achieve headship on average eight or nine years faster, or in just over half the time of other headteachers in the same phase. A similar timescale was found among a sample of Career Changer case study heads.

## Support for development

In the context of rapid career progression in schools, support for leadership development was seen to be imperative. The most important forms of support identified by survey respondents included having in-school opportunities to take on leadership roles and specific whole school responsibilities, opportunities to discuss their learning with both peers and an informal in-school mentor and opportunities to engage in formal learning, including through the National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH) and Masters courses. These findings reinforce established research evidence that effective leadership development *combines* experiential, collaborative and formal learning (Bush 2008, Wallace 1991).

A majority of Fast Tracker and Young Head respondents had found it important to recruit 'career champions' who could provide help, opportunities and occasional shortcuts. Commonly this was their headteacher but also included local authority advisors. Respondents had often worked explicitly on their professional identity as leaders by finding time and space to reflect on their practice, seek feedback and work to build their credibility as leaders.

## School settings

Rather than these opportunities occurring in specific pathways within particular types of schools, all three research groups benefited from support in a diversity of school settings. Only one-fifth of Fast Tracker and less than one-tenth of Young Head respondents had moved to a federation or academy chain to support their career progression.

This reinforces the role of all schools in supporting potential and emerging leaders as a regular and routinized whole school activity (Gu et al 2014). Elements of whole school activity that were found to be important for emerging school leaders included:

- involvement in the management and day-to-day running of the school, with discrete areas of whole school leadership responsibility;
- experiences of managing and coaching people and working with parents/carers and external agencies;
- discussions with and mentoring by their headteacher, to jointly consider whole school management issues and dilemmas;
- time to reflect on and research leadership practice and theory, and to undertake formal learning, such as NPQH and Masters programmes;
- opportunities to visit other schools to observe leadership practice and to analyse the relevance of contextual knowledge.

Distinguishing who gained leadership development opportunities, headteachers working with aspiring leaders reported that there was no single formula for identifying potential leaders, but that it was important for a teacher to already be an excellent practitioner in the classroom.

Being a qualified teacher who could model outstanding lessons and lead teaching and learning was also seen by the vast majority of case study school staff to be an essential component of school leadership. It was notable that one-half of Young Heads and Career Changers and a third of Fast Trackers reported that gaining sufficient opportunities to observe effective leadership of teaching and learning in practice had been a challenge.

### **iii) Recruitment challenges**

In addition to seeking out leadership development and support, two further challenges were commonly identified by our survey respondents as important influences on career progression towards headship.

#### **Responsibilities and accountability**

The first concerned the demands of developing as a leader while responding to both the breadth of school responsibilities and to high stakes accountability. Ninety three per cent of Fast Trackers and Young Heads and 77% of Career Changers reported that balancing strategic and operational demands on their time was a challenge throughout

their school leadership careers. Developing an effective approach to managing external accountability was a challenge for approximately two-thirds of each group.

Respondents clarified the need for government to take seriously the impact of work-life balance issues on recruitment and retention. A combination of frequent policy changes, pressures related to accountability and the personal and career risks associated with headship were seen by a majority of case study heads to impact negatively on decision-making about aspiring to headship. We recommend there are number of areas in which government policy should be developed. These include clarifying:

- the forms of support new headteachers can expect to receive everywhere (Earley et al 2011);
- how policy seeks to enable headteachers to achieve a work/life balance (Edge 2013);
- specific actions to reduce the personal and career risks of taking on a first headship (Lightman 2013).

## **Doubt**

The second set of challenges concerned the level of doubt (and related suspicion) that was seen to exist in schools about whether rapid career progression to headship is desirable. A third of Fast Trackers, Young Heads and Career Changers reported that a significant challenge was being viewed as a less experienced leadership candidate in comparison to peers who had pursued longer career pathways in schools.

For Fast Trackers and Young Heads, a distinct but sometimes related challenge concerned perceptions about age. A fifth of Young Heads and a quarter of Fast Trackers reported being less well supported in their development due to their age. A fifth of Young Heads and two-fifth of Fast Trackers reported that feedback on unsuccessful applications for headteacher posts specifically mentioned their age. In practice, case study heads noted the difficulties peers and governors could face in differentiating between leadership potential, inexperience and age-based stereotypes.

The headteacher appointment process and the role of governors has been identified as a barrier for aspirant heads from 'non-traditional' career pathways (Earley and Weindling 2004). Case study governors in our research, who had appointed Fast Trackers, Young Heads or Career Changers, reported how they had found it helpful to

draw on external support in their appointment process and to clarify their school priorities and what they were looking for in a headteacher.

The fit between school priorities and the candidates' perceived strengths was commonly expressed through a focus on school improvement. Experience of leading improvement successfully in a school in a similar context, including as the school's acting headteacher, was highly valued by governors. This broadly reflects wider trends in the total headteacher population, with approximately a third of heads achieving their first headship in their existing school (Sprigade and Howson 2012).

#### **iv) The practice of leadership**

Our fourth focus concerned the leadership practices of Fast Trackers, Young Heads and Career Changers.

##### **Similarities**

While no single style emerged among each research group, a widely shared set of leadership and management priorities was identifiable. These included a focus on: the quality of learning and teaching; whole school consistency of practice; raising student attainment; and the professional development of school staff.

A number of common approaches to leadership were also identified. These included: sharing a clear whole school vision about teaching and learning; developing internal communication to reinforce the vision in practice; combining student level data with professional knowledge and judgment to identify and share priorities for teaching; distributing aspects of leadership to engage staff and work towards a participative ethos.

##### **Subtle differences**

A number of subtle differences also emerged, however, particularly among Young Heads and Fast Trackers. In comparison to headteachers who had taken a longer pathway to headship, Fast Trackers and Young Heads perceived themselves to be more closely involved in teaching and learning including by often being in classrooms and modelling practice. They also reported being more likely to spot and nurture leadership potential and having to work harder to demonstrate their credibility as a leader.

Strikingly, a significant minority of Fast Tracker and Young Head survey respondents perceived themselves to be part of a new generation of heads, reflecting not only their age but also the era of their professional socialisation. This new generation was characterised by respondents as having an ‘expectation of external change’, a pragmatic approach to leadership and a focus on impact.

While it was difficult to disaggregate whether these perceived differences reflected an era of professional socialisation or more simply the practices of newer and less experienced headteachers, there was a clear tendency among case study Young Heads and, in particular, Fast Trackers to align themselves with a ‘no-excuses’ approach to school leadership. In Bottery’s terms (2007), these identities could lead more readily to Young Heads and Fast Trackers becoming policy ‘conformers’ rather than policy ‘mediators’.

In comparison, Career Changers survey respondents commonly perceived themselves to be able to draw on experiences of working in other sectors to support innovation, involve staff in decision-making and manage people and policy. While noting the pervasive influence of external accountability, case study Career Changers commonly perceived that they were able to draw on their prior experience to clarify their own values and to act more as ‘policy mediators’.

## **New pathways?**

Locating our analysis in points of comparison, we conclude that the three research groups have both subtle differences to the wider headteacher population but also strong similarities. As such, it may not be helpful to conceive of Fast Trackers, Young Heads and Career Changers as entirely distinct ‘new pathways’ to headship.

Accelerated development programmes are perhaps the clearest new pathway to headship. However, while often providing a programmatic vision, peer group identity and additional forms of leadership development, such programmes have commonly supported existing school career paths, rather than recruiting people not already aspiring to senior leadership. Case study Fast Tracker heads noted, for instance, how their programme had helped to “provide an access route to that final stage of acceleration” but how “you make yourself the head ... that comes from within”.

The contemporary growth of Young Heads is perhaps best understood to reflect the demographic shifts taking place among the teacher and the English population more



widely, coupled with headteacher recruitment and retention challenges and a recent focus on local succession initiatives.

Career Changers, as a majority, are individuals who enter teaching as mature entrants and become newly qualified teachers before progressing through middle and senior leadership roles. These later entry points to teacher training were found to be particularly attractive to women and supportive of women achieving headship, while only a very small proportion of career changer headteachers did not have qualified teacher status.

In these ways, a majority of headteachers in all three research groups had significant periods of professional socialisation in the state school system. Perhaps as a result, their leadership practices were found to broadly reflect existing findings that school leaders aspire to focus on leading learning, on providing a clear vision for the school and on enabling staff to participate (sometimes partially) in decision-making processes.

While high stakes accountability and the pressures and responsibilities of the role were widespread challenges, a majority of the headteacher respondents was clearly motivated to effect change for students and had worked hard on their credibility and authenticity as school leaders.

## Chapter 1: Introduction

Contemporary education policy in England has undergone and created a period of substantial change. There has been a rapid increase in the number of schools that are academies. The Ofsted inspection framework and national performance indicators have changed. The role of local authorities has altered significantly in response to the number of academies and significant funding cuts (Hastings et al., 2012). The number of national agencies has been reduced, with government advocating instead a 'self-improving' school system (DfE 2010), comprised of teaching school alliances, academy chains and a stronger market in improvement services (Smith, 2012, Higham 2013, Higham 2014). A guiding theme has been for greater school autonomy combined with renewed accountability and a mix of competition and collaboration between schools (Higham and Earley 2013).

In the context of these changes, however, there continues to be something of a conundrum in the recruitment of headteachers. While "a very large majority of headteachers report being satisfied with their jobs" (Micklewright et al 2014: 17), headteacher recruitment and retention remain major challenges for school governors and policy makers, including for reasons of workload, accountability and vulnerability (Thomson 2009; Howson and Sprigade 2010, 2012). Reflecting earlier on the issue of 'headteacher supply', the National College for School Leadership (NCSL) (2005: 6) argued the school system as a whole:

... needs to look at the rewards and challenges of headship, needs to communicate the satisfactions and achievements more effectively and needs to consistently identify, nurture and guide leadership talent from the very earliest stages of teaching careers.

As part of this focus on headteacher succession planning, contemporary government policy has highlighted the importance of new pathways or routes into headship (DfE 2010). The concept of ‘new routes’ has most commonly concerned the acceleration of an individual’s leadership career progression, both among existing teachers and, to a lesser extent, career changers into teaching. Government funded programmes – including the Fast Track Teacher scheme<sup>1</sup>, Tomorrow’s Heads<sup>2</sup> and Future Leaders<sup>3</sup> – have sought to support the earlier identification of ‘potential leadership talent’ and provide coaching, mentoring and opportunities for identified individuals to take on leadership roles in their own and other schools (NCSL 2008:15).

In addition to accelerated leadership programmes, there has been recognition that a growing number of young leaders may be progressing rapidly to headship under their own steam. Earley et al (2012), for instance, analysing the first School Workforce Census (SWC) in 2010, found not only a higher proportion of headteachers aged 55 years old and over, in comparison to a decade ago in 2000, but also a higher proportion of younger headteachers – a trend confirmed in the 2012 SWC (SWC 2012, table 4). Earley et al (2012: 33) concluded that this emerging bi-modal age distribution reflected relatively “large numbers of first promotions to headship from the late 30s onwards”.

There has also been encouragement from government for people to career change both into teaching and directly into school leadership. Teaching is reported to be the second most common destination for career changers in England (Hilpern 2008). In-school teaching qualifications, including the Graduate Training Programme (GTP), have

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<sup>1</sup> The Fast Track Teaching programme was developed by the DfES in 2001 and led by NCSL from 2005. Entrants were initially drawn substantially from outside teaching, career changing into teaching, but from 2005 the programme was restricted to participants already in teaching. The programme ended in August 2009 having served 2300 participants, 82% of whom were under 34.

<sup>2</sup> Tomorrow’s Heads, started in 2010, as a 3-year programme to support candidates to NPQH. The programme ended in 2012. By 2012, from 260 participants, 16 had achieved headship.

<sup>3</sup> Future Leaders was developed in 2006 by Absolute Return for Kids, NCSL and the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust. With a secondary focus, Future Leaders grew from 20 participants in London in 2006 to 150 in 2012 located in London, North West, West Midlands and Humber. By 2012, 32 participants had achieved headship. From 2013, Future Leaders included primary schools. Further details on each programme are set out in Annex 1, page 8/9.

provided new pathways into teaching. To increase career changes directly into senior school leadership, there have been arguments, including by PWC (2007), for more schools to be led by headteachers who do not have qualified teacher status (QTS) or classroom experience. The requirement for headteachers to possess QTS ended in 2001.

These developments have led to a range of debate. There was long standing debate, for instance, over the proposed removal of the QTS requirement for headteachers. “The great majority of witnesses” to a parliamentary select committee inquiry into school leadership in 1998 stated “that to be an effective headteacher, one needed to have experience of teaching – even if it was not in a school classroom” (House of Commons 1998: 91). More recently, reports have suggested schools are “shunning” senior leadership applicants who have achieved NPQH but are from non-teaching backgrounds because schools “are extremely sceptical about their aptitude” (Barker 2011: 1).

A range of concerns have also been expressed about rapid promotion or accelerated development towards headship. Nye (2008) argues that gaining core skills and experience is vital to effective leadership but that it can take time for leaders to develop ‘contextual intelligence’. Glatter (2009: 227) identifies similarly the need for school leaders to develop a maturity of judgment, informed by and “tested against stored memory and ordered experience”. The Hay Group (2008) have reported a difference between established school leaders – who showed strengths in political awareness, indirect influencing, alliance building skills and long term thinking and planning – and emergent leaders and those on fast track programmes, who often did not.

More broadly, research on the long-term supply of potential headteachers has stressed how, in addition to the need for a wide range of meaningful leadership development opportunities (Bush 2008), a number of factors can act as key negative influences when potential leaders begin to decide on whether or not to pursue promotion to headship (Thomson 2009). These include, the workload of headship, the nature of the work, its impacts on personal and family life, the pressures of accountability and career vulnerability following a poor Ofsted report (Smithers and Robinson 2007; Higham et al 2008, Lightman 2013).

## 1.1 The new pathways research project

In the context of these developments and debates, the New Pathways into Headship project was commissioned by the National College for Teaching and Leadership (NCTL). The project took place over 12 months from January to December 2013 and was undertaken by research teams from the London Centre for Leadership in Learning at the Institute of Education (IOE), University of London and Sheffield Hallam University (SHU).

The project focused on three research groupings of headteachers:

- **'Fast Trackers'**, defined as headteachers who have participated in an accelerated leadership development programme prior to achieving headship;
- **'Young Heads'**, defined as headteachers who have achieved headship outside of an accelerated development programme before they were 35 years old in primary schools and 40 in secondary schools;
- **'Career Changers'**, defined as headteachers who pursued another career before working in schools and achieving headship.

The aims of the research project set out by NCTL were to:

- analyse the size and demography of these three research groupings of headteachers;
- identify the progression pathways towards headship of each grouping, including the challenges and barriers each grouping faced and the choices made to achieve progression;
- explore the school leadership practices of the three groups, including the extent to which their practices are similar and/or different to headteachers who develop in "traditional apprenticeships";
- consider the implications for the recruitment and leadership development of these "new groups" of headteachers.

## **1.2 The research approach**

Responding to these aims, a mixed-methods research approach was adopted. The research design included several overlapping phases of data collection and analysis.

### **Phase 1: A literature review and interviews with policy makers and stakeholders**

A review of existing evidence relating to leadership development, the three research groupings of headteachers and their pathways into headship was undertaken. The literature review can be found in Annex 1 of this report. In addition, 14 semi-structured face-to-face or telephone interviews were conducted to explore policy makers' and stakeholders' views on contemporary school leadership recruitment and retention and career paths towards headship. A convenience stakeholder sample was developed to include organisations and individuals who are involved in relevant policy-making, programme administration and/or the contextual mediation of policy. Interviews were undertaken with senior staff from: the school leadership policy team at the Department for Education (1); NCTL (2); headteacher associations (2); a teacher union (1); a school governors' association (1); organisations providing support to Fast Trackers or Career Changers (4); a local authority (1); as well as, a serving headteacher (1); and a serving chair of governors (1).

### **Phase 2: Analysis of secondary data**

Analysis of existing data sets enabled the three research groupings of headteachers to be defined empirically and the demography of individual headteachers and the characteristics of the schools they serve to be investigated. The 2011 School Workforce Census (SWC) provided data on the demography of headteachers, including on grade, age, gender and ethnicity. The Database of Teacher Records (DTR) provided data on the number of years headteachers had been in teaching. Data on Fast Track participants was provided by NCTL and the Future Leaders Trust. The 2012 School Census (DfE 2012b) provided data on the schools Fast Trackers, Young Heads and Career Changers serve, including on their governance type, location, student attainment and the proportion of students eligible for free school meals. Each dataset was matched to the SWC 2011 using unique teacher and school reference numbers. The analysis provided a snapshot of the school system at the start of the academic year 2011/12.

### Phase 3: Quantitative surveys

Two surveys were undertaken to explore the career progression pathways, leadership development experiences and views of Fast Trackers, Young Heads and Career Changers. NCTL specified, on the basis of resource limitation, that the Career Changer survey needed to form a sub-section within the National College Annual Survey of School and Children's Centre Leaders 2013. The research team designed the survey questions and BMG Research administered the survey. In total 143 headteachers self-identified themselves as Career Changers (out of 752 headteacher survey respondents within the Annual Survey).

Second, a separate Fast Trackers and Young Heads survey was developed by the research team and administered as an online survey by NCTL. Links to the survey were sent via email to headteachers identified in Phase 2. Survey links were also emailed to NCTL members and included in a weekly newsletter of the Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) and the National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT). In total, 392 Young Heads and 90 Fast Trackers completed the survey.

Both the Career Changer and Young Heads and Fast Tracker surveys included filter questions to determine the eligibility of potential respondents. The analytical definitions developed for each research group are discussed further in Chapter 2. The filter questions were as follows:

- for Young Heads: "At what age were you appointed to your first headship?"
- for Fast Trackers: "Have you participated in any of the following accelerated leadership development programmes? [list]"
- for Career Changers: "Did you pursue another career before you began working in schools?; and, if 'yes', "Which sector or sectors did you work in before you began working in schools [list of sectors]?"; "For how many years in total did you work in this sector or sectors?".

Both surveys also contained a range of similar nominal and Likert response scale questions to enable cross-group analysis. An important limitation was imposed here by NCTL in terms of a restriction on the number of questions that could be included in the Career Changer sub-section of the National College Annual Survey of School and Children's Centre Leaders 2013. There are therefore a number of thematic areas in this report where only Young Heads and Fast Tracker survey data are reported.

## Phase 4: Case studies and interviews

Fifteen case studies were undertaken, five for each of the three research groupings, to develop a detailed perspective on the work and experiences of Fast Trackers, Young Heads and Career Changers in context. To support the identification of respondents, NCTL sent an email to its members explaining the research. Thirty headteachers and senior leaders responded as volunteer case study respondents. Members of the research team also sent a similar email to schools within their university departments' local school networks and a further ten headteachers volunteered to take part in the research. Fifteen case study headteachers and schools were then sampled purposively to include a variety of individual, school and contextual characteristics. Table 1 sets out the settings in which the case studies were undertaken.<sup>4</sup>

Each case study included interviews with the headteacher, the chair of governors, a senior leader and two teachers.<sup>5</sup> The focus of the interviews was on the leadership development and career progression of the headteacher (the headteacher interview), their appointment to the school (the headteacher and the governor interview) and their practice as a school leader (all the interviews).

Nine interviews were also undertaken with senior leaders who were progressing towards headship, three within each of the three research groupings. This 'aspirant head' interviewee sample was developing through the same purposive sampling process employed for the case studies selection. Each interview included a telephone interview with both the 'aspirant head' and, separately, their current headteacher. The focus of the interviews was on the leadership development of each 'aspirant head', the support they had received, the challenges they faced and their career pathways towards headship.

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<sup>4</sup> A very small proportion of the headteacher characteristics reported in Table 1 have been changed to protect the anonymity of respondents. In the Table, FSM stands for student Free School Meals eligibility.

<sup>5</sup> In four of the case studies the chair of governors was not available for interview. In five cases the school was not able to make available all four staff members on the research day.



**Table 1: The case study sample**

|                       | Region             | School type          | School phase | Ofsted grade | % FSM | Gender of head | Ethnicity of head |
|-----------------------|--------------------|----------------------|--------------|--------------|-------|----------------|-------------------|
| <b>Young Head</b>     | North West         | Community school     | Primary      | 1            | 3     | F              | White British     |
|                       | East Midlands      | Voluntary-aided      | Primary      | 2            | 5     | F              | White British     |
|                       | Greater London     | Sponsored academy    | Secondary    | 1            | 53.6  | F              | Indian            |
|                       | North East         | Community school     | Special      | 1            | 55    | F              | White British     |
|                       | Greater London     | Community school     | Secondary    | 2            | 32.4  | M              | White British     |
| <b>Fast Tracker</b>   | Greater London     | Community school     | Secondary    | 2            | 44.6  | F              | White British     |
|                       | Greater London     | Sponsored academy    | Secondary    | 2            | 47    | M              | Black Caribbean   |
|                       | East Midlands      | Voluntary-controlled | Primary      | 2            | 4.1   | F              | White British     |
|                       | Yorkshire & Humber | Free school          | Secondary    | n/a          | n/a   | M              | White British     |
|                       | Yorkshire & Humber | Convertor academy    | Secondary    | n/a          | 23.6  | M              | Indian            |
| <b>Career Changer</b> | South East         | Community school     | Primary      | 2            | 5.7   | F              | White British     |
|                       | Yorkshire & Humber | Voluntary-aided      | Primary      | 3            | 34.8  | M              | White British     |
|                       | Yorkshire & Humber | Community school     | Primary      | 3            | 35.6  | F              | White British     |
|                       | North West         | Sponsored academy    | Secondary    | 2            | 19.5  | M              | White British     |
|                       | South East         | Sponsored academy    | Primary      | 3            | 60.2  | M              | White British     |

### **1.3 The structure of the report**

The report begins by analysing, in Chapter 2, the demography of the three research groupings of headteachers and the characteristics of the schools they serve. The analysis is situated within the total population of headteachers in England to provide a comparative perspective.

In Chapter 3, our analysis progresses on to the leadership development of Fast Tracker, Young Head and Career Changer survey respondents and case study headteachers. The chapter explores the leadership roles these three research groupings of headteachers took on prior to headship and the support and challenges they considered important.

In Chapter 4, the career decisions of Fast Trackers, Young Heads and Career Changers are analysed, including their motivations to achieve headship, the types of schools they aspired to lead and their experiences of the headteacher appointment process, including the role of governors.

In Chapter 5, the school leadership practices of each research grouping of headteachers are analysed, including the challenges they faced in their first year of headship and the approaches to leadership and management they have subsequently developed. In Chapter 6, the conclusions and the implications of the research are discussed.

## Chapter 2: Demography and school characteristics – identifying the three research groups

### Introduction

We begin in this chapter by defining the three research groups of headteachers - as Fast Tracker, Young and Career Changer Heads. We then analyse the demography of the headteachers in each group as well as the characteristics of the schools in which they serve. We situate this analysis within the context of the total population of headteachers in England, in order to provide a comparative perspective on each research group.<sup>6</sup>

A number of national comparative trends, identified in existing research, are important here (see Annex 1 for further details). First, on demography, while teaching remains a female-dominated profession, smaller proportions of women than men move into each stage of senior leadership (Coleman 2005, McNamara et al 2010). Similarly, while 10% of teachers are from minority ethnic groups, this is true for only 5% of heads (Earley et al 2012). Second, on school characteristics, there is a growing diversity of state school governance types in England and a wide variation in the socio-economic composition of student bodies. Schools also face varying degrees of challenge in recruiting headteachers, including with significant variation by school type, context and location (Higham et al 2008).

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<sup>6</sup> We explored comparing the three research groups to all other 'recently appointed headteachers' (i.e. heads appointed during a 10 year period prior to the SWC 2011). Within the SWC 2011, however, we were unable to identify, with sufficient reliability, which headteachers were in their first headship. The most appropriate data variable was 'the start date of contract', which is usually the date a headteacher was employed on their current terms and conditions. This created several limitations. No information is provided, for instance, on: how long a headteacher may have served in a different school before starting their current contract; or whether their terms and conditions changed if and when their school converted to academy status. Given these limitations we decided not to pursue this second 'recently appointed' comparator group analysis.

Nationally, the headteacher vacancy rate remained at under 1% over the decade between 2000 and 2010 (Earley et al 2012).<sup>7</sup> Data on the re-advertisement of headteacher posts points, however, to a long-term increase in the proportion of school re-advertising (that is, schools that have not recruited a headteacher after their first advertisement). In primary schools, from 19% in 1993/4, the re-advertisement rate has trended upwards to a high of 40% of schools re-advertising in 2009/10. The rate in 2010/11 was 38% (Howson and Sprigade 2012). In secondary schools, from 15% in 1993/4, the re-advertisement rate has also trended upwards to a high of 36% in 2004/5. The rate in 2010/11 was 24% (ibid). There are also significant regional variations (see Annex 1).

In situating our analysis within these demographic and school characteristics of the total population of headteachers, we consider the extent to which Fast Trackers, Young and Career Changer heads reflect, deepen and/or buck these trends.<sup>8</sup>

## 2.1 Defining the three research groups

To define the three research groups of headteachers, data from the Schools Workforce Census (SWC) 2011 were matched with data from the Database of Teacher Records 2011 and data on Fast Tracker programme participants. The analysis reported here is thus a snapshot of the school system at the start of the 2011/12 academic year.

### Fast Trackers

The research group 'Fast Trackers' was defined as headteachers who have participated in a development programme designed to accelerate their school leadership career

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<sup>7</sup> It is important to note that the data collection timing of the School Workforce Census changed in 2010 from January to November, so that pre- and post-2010 data are not comparable. The 2010 Statistical First Release on the School Workforce in England (provisional) (DfE 2011) reported that the headteacher vacancy rate in locally maintained schools was 0.7% in 2010 (January) compared to 0.9% in 2000. The temporary filled rate for full time headteacher posts in locally maintained schools was 2.5% in 2010 (January) compared to 2.3% in 2000. After the data collection date change, the 2013 Statistical First Release on the School Workforce in England (DfE 2013) reported that the headteacher vacancy rate in publically funded schools was 0.2% in 2013 (November) compared to 0.1% in 2010 (November).

<sup>8</sup> Where variations between the three sample groups and the rest of the headteacher population are found to be statistically significant, this is reported at  $p < 0.05$  (the 95% confidence level).

progression. The programmes included were the Fast Track Teachers scheme (FTT), Tomorrow's Heads and Future Leaders.<sup>9</sup> Lists of participants in each programme were provided by NCTL and the Future Leaders Trust and individuals who had subsequently achieved headship were identified (using unique teacher reference numbers) wherever possible with the SWC 2011. A total of 65 Fast Tracker Heads was identified. Forty-three were headteachers in primary schools and 22 in secondary schools. The average age of Fast Trackers was 38 years old (38 in primary schools and 39 in secondary schools) and the age-range was between 28 and 56 – reflecting both recent appointees and those who achieved headship earlier following participation in FTT.

## Young Heads

The research group 'Young Heads' was defined by the age an individual was first appointed as a headteacher. The original specification for the research proposed this age might be 35 years old. In reviewing existing research on appointments, however, we found considerable variations by school phase. Earley et al (2012), for instance, found in analysis of the first SWC 2010 that 2.2% of primary headteachers (c400) were appointed under the age of 35, while across secondary schools this was only 0.4% (c20). To reflect these variations, we defined Young *Primary* Heads as those appointed to their first headship under the age of 35. Within the SWC 2011, this produced a sample of 375 headteachers, 2.3% of the primary school population. Young *Secondary* Heads were defined as those appointed under the age of 40, producing a sample of 158 headteachers, 5.1% of the secondary school population.

## Career Changers

The research group 'Career Changers' was defined as headteachers who pursued an alternative career before entering teaching. As data on prior careers are not collected nationally, we needed to use a proxy variable to identify the Career Changer sample. The Database of Teacher Records collects data on length of service (from which an individual's age at the start of their teaching career can be calculated).<sup>10</sup> To allow

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<sup>9</sup> Teaching Leaders was also included, but did not have a headteacher graduate at the time of the research.

<sup>10</sup> The overall 'length of service in teaching' was matched in the SWC using the teacher reference number. It is noted that there was missing data in DTR. Matching 'length of service' data was possible for approximately 85% of headteachers in the SWC. It is also noted that the DTR measure contains any

sufficient time for a headteacher to have pursued an alternative career, we defined the entry age of Career Changers into their first school job as 35 and over. In comparison to the average age of new qualified teachers (NQTs) in England, this allowed for an approximate ten-year period during which a prior career could have been pursued.<sup>11</sup> This analytical definition produced a sample of 1115 primary Career Changer heads, 7.8% of the primary school population, and a sample of 51 secondary Career Changers, 2% of the secondary school population.<sup>12</sup>

## 2.2 The demography of headteachers

Having defined and identified Fast Trackers, Young Heads and Career Changers, we analysed these three research groups demographically, by gender, ethnicity and disability, and compared the results to the rest of the headteacher population in England.

### Gender

Analysis of gender found significant variations in the representation of women. As Table 2 sets out, in comparison to the wider population of headteachers, women were significantly underrepresented among the Fast Trackers and Young Heads research groups in both the primary and secondary phases.

Among primary school headteachers, for instance, 57% of Fast Trackers were women, compared to 70.9% among the wider headteacher population. In secondary schools,

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service completed in terms of days. Days not worked by part-time teachers are excluded. It was not possible to analyse when or for what period of time a teacher may have been part-time during their career.

<sup>11</sup> We note that this secondary data analysis Career Changer sample might be appropriately termed 'mature entrants', as we do not have direct data on whether individuals undertook a career prior to entering teaching. We recognize this as an important limitation to the analysis.

<sup>12</sup> Given this variation in the proportion of Career Changers within primary and secondary schools, we modelled primary Career Changers at both age 35 and over and at age 37 and over. The absolute number of heads reduced from 1115 (7.8%) to 665 (4.7%). The demographic and school level findings remained, however, consistent across these two age ranges.

19% of Fast Tracker headships were filled by women compared to 37.6% among the wider headteacher population. Similar levels of under-representation were found among Young Heads.

Among Career Changers, conversely, a significantly higher proportion of women headteachers was found. In primary schools, 87.9% of Career Changer heads were women, compared to 68.8% among the wider headteacher population. In secondary schools, 52% of Career Changer heads were women, compared to 37.8% among the wider headteacher population.

**Table 2: Representation of female headteachers in each research group, compared to the rest of the headteacher population, by phase.**

|                        |                  | Research sample |          | Rest of population |          |
|------------------------|------------------|-----------------|----------|--------------------|----------|
|                        |                  | total           | % female | total              | % female |
| <b>Fast Trackers</b>   | <b>Primary</b>   | 42              | 57%      | 16,571             | 70.9%    |
|                        | <b>Secondary</b> | 21              | 19%      | 3,038              | 37.6%    |
| <b>Young Heads</b>     | <b>Primary</b>   | 375             | 59.4%    | 16,237             | 71.1%    |
|                        | <b>Secondary</b> | 157             | 19.7%    | 2,911              | 38.5%    |
| <b>Career Changers</b> | <b>Primary</b>   | 1,113           | 87.9%    | 13,110             | 68.8%    |
|                        | <b>Secondary</b> | 50              | 52%      | 2,441*             | 37.8%    |

Source: School Workforce Census 2011

Note \*: The Career Changer sample was identified using the overall 'length of service in teaching' data within the DTR. As noted in footnote 9, there was missing data within the DTR so that matching the 'length of service' data into the SWC was only possible for approximately 85% of headteachers. As result, the 'rest of the headteacher population' reported for Career Changers is approximately 15% lower than for Fast Trackers and Young Heads. This is true for each of the data tables in Chapter 2.

## Ethnicity

Analysis of ethnicity found similar proportions of White British headteachers among the Young Heads and Career Changers research groups in comparison to the wider headteacher population. As Table 3 sets out, among primary schools, 96% of Young

Heads were White British, compared to 93% among the wider headship population. In secondary schools, 89% of Young Heads were White British, the same proportion as among the wider headship population.

Among the Fast Tracker research group, a lower proportion of White British headteachers was found. Within secondary schools, in particular, 62% of Fast Tracker Heads were White British, in comparison to 89% among the wider population. Three specific minority ethnic groups were found to explain the majority of the difference – although it is noted that the actual sample numbers here were very small. The three groups were White Irish Heads, White Other and Asian/Asian British (which comprises the groups Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi and ‘any other Asian background’.)

**Table 3: Representation of White British Heads among the three sample groups, compared to the rest of the headteacher population, by phase.**

|                 |           | Sample | Rest of population |
|-----------------|-----------|--------|--------------------|
| Fast Trackers   | Primary   | 83%    | 93%                |
|                 | Secondary | 62%    | 89%                |
| Young Heads     | Primary   | 96%    | 93%                |
|                 | Secondary | 89%    | 89%                |
| Career Changers | Primary   | 90%    | 93%                |
|                 | Secondary | 84%    | 89%                |

Source: School Workforce Census 2011

Note: percentages in the table have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

## Disability

Analysis of disability found that no headteacher reported having a disability among the Young Heads and secondary school Career Changers samples. This compared to 0.5% of headteachers among the rest of the populations respectively. The exception was Career Changers in primary schools, among whom 0.7% reported having a disability, although this difference was not statistically significant. Disability data were not available for Fast Trackers. (We note that caution is needed here as reporting rates on



disability are low with the SWC 2011, with only 50% of teachers reporting their disability status.)

## **2.3 The schools appointing headteachers in each research sample**

The analysis also considered the schools in which Fast Trackers, Young Heads and Career Changers were appointed as headteachers. The school level variables included: (i) the governance type of each school; (ii) the percentage of students eligible for free school meals (FSMs); and (iii) the number of times the school had re-advertised the current headteacher's post prior to appointment. The analysis is presented with reference to primary and secondary schools, as important variations were found by school phase.

### **2.3.1 Primary heads**

#### **School type**

The school governance types in which *primary* Fast Trackers, Young Heads and Career Changers serve as headteachers were compared to the rest of primary school population. As Table 2.3 sets out, there was a slightly lower proportion of all three research groups in community schools, in comparison to the wider primary headteacher population. A slightly higher proportion of Fast Trackers in voluntary-controlled and foundation schools and of Young Heads and Career Changers in voluntary-aided and voluntary-controlled schools was also found. These differences were not however statistically significant.

**Table 4: School governance type, primary heads**

|                           | <b>Converter Academy</b> | <b>Sponsored Academy</b> | <b>Community</b> | <b>Foundation</b> | <b>Free School</b> | <b>Voluntary-aided</b> | <b>Voluntary-controlled</b> | <b>N=</b> |
|---------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|------------------|-------------------|--------------------|------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------|
| <b>Fast Tracker</b>       | 2.3%                     | 2.3%                     | 50%              | 9.1%              | 0.0%               | 15.9%                  | 20.5%                       | 42        |
| <b>Rest of Population</b> | 4.4%                     | 0.0%                     | 56.6%            | 3.2%              | 0.1%               | 21.3%                  | 14.4%                       | 16,583    |
|                           |                          |                          |                  |                   |                    |                        |                             |           |
| <b>Young Head</b>         | 2.9%                     | 0.8%                     | 52.0%            | 2.4%              | 0.5%               | 23.7%                  | 17.6%                       | 375       |
| <b>Rest of Population</b> | 4.4%                     | 0.0%                     | 56.7%            | 3.2%              | 0.1%               | 21.2%                  | 14.3%                       | 16,246    |
|                           |                          |                          |                  |                   |                    |                        |                             |           |
| <b>Career Changer</b>     | 3.5%                     | 0.0%                     | 50.9%            | 3.8%              | 0.0%               | 22.8%                  | 18.8%                       | 1,115     |
| <b>Rest of Population</b> | 4.4%                     | 0.0%                     | 57.5%            | 3.1%              | 0.0%               | 21.1%                  | 13.8%                       | 13,114    |

Source: School Workforce Census 2011, School Census 2012

## Free school meals

The schools in which primary Fast Trackers, Young Heads and Career Changers serve were also analysed by the percentage of students eligible for free school meals (FSM) – as a proxy for local deprivation. In comparison to the rest of the primary school population, higher proportions of both Young Heads and Career Changers were found to be located in schools with *below* average FSM eligibility. As Table 5 sets out, 29% of Career Changers are located in the least deprived quartile of schools, compared to 25% among the rest of the population. This difference was found to be statistically significant. Among Fast Trackers, no statistically significant differences were found.

**Table 5: Free school meals eligibility quartiles - primary heads**

|                           | Least deprived | Lower middle | Upper middle | Most deprived | N=     |
|---------------------------|----------------|--------------|--------------|---------------|--------|
| <b>Fast Tracker</b>       | 29.3%          | 24.4%        | 17.1%        | 29.3%         | 41     |
| <b>Rest of Population</b> | 25.2%          | 25.0%        | 24.8%        | 25.0%         | 15,963 |
|                           |                |              |              |               |        |
| <b>Young Head</b>         | 27.8%          | 25.8%        | 24.7%        | 21.6%         | 356    |
| <b>Rest of Population</b> | 25.2%          | 25.0%        | 24.8%        | 25.0%         | 15,644 |
|                           |                |              |              |               |        |
| <b>Career Changer</b>     | 29.0%          | 24.5%        | 21.2%        | 25.2%         | 1,055  |
| <b>Rest of Population</b> | 25.1%          | 24.9%        | 25.2%        | 24.9%         | 12,653 |

Source: School Workforce Census 2011, School Census 2012

## Re-advertisement rates

The analysis also considered whether Fast Trackers, Young Heads and Career Changers were more likely to have been appointed in schools that had faced challenges in recruiting their current headteacher. Re-advertisement data were used as a measure of challenge – calculating how many times the post of the current headteacher had

been re-advertised prior to the appointment being made. A significant variation in re-advertisement rates was found between all three groups and the wider primary school population. As Table 2.5 sets out, Fast Trackers, Young Heads and Career Changers were more likely to have been appointed in primary schools that had needed to re-advertise their headship post. Among Young Heads, for instance, 48.7% were appointed in primary schools that re-advertised their headship post at least once, in comparison to 37.4% of schools in the rest of the primary population.

**Table 6: The number of re-advertisements – primary schools**

|                           | Number of re-advertisements |       |       |      | N=     |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------|-------|-------|------|--------|
|                           | 0                           | 1     | 2     | 3+   |        |
| <b>Fast Trackers</b>      | 53.7%                       | 24.4% | 12.2% | 9.8% | 41     |
| <b>Rest of Population</b> | 62.1%                       | 24.0% | 8.7%  | 5.1% | 13,041 |
|                           |                             |       |       |      |        |
| <b>Young Heads</b>        | 51.3%                       | 32.2% | 8.3%  | 8.3% | 339    |
| <b>Rest of Population</b> | 62.4%                       | 23.8% | 8.7%  | 5.1% | 12,742 |
|                           |                             |       |       |      |        |
| <b>Career Changers</b>    | 58.6%                       | 25.4% | 10.6% | 5.4% | 992    |
| <b>Rest of Population</b> | 63.4%                       | 23.7% | 8.3%  | 4.6% | 10,167 |

Source: Vactrack, Education Data Services.

Note: Vactrack re-advertisement data during the period 2002-2012 was analysed to calculate, for each research sample headteacher, the number of times their current post was re-advertised prior to their appointment. The national average for the 'rest of population' was calculated for the same 10 year period for all schools to which we were able to match Vactrack data.

## 2.3.2 Secondary Heads

### School Type

Among *secondary* school headteachers, there was a significant variation between Fast Trackers, Young Heads and Career Changers and the rest of population, by school governance type. As Table 7 sets out, there was an over-representation of all three groups in sponsored Academies. Among Fast Tracker heads, 50% served sponsored

academies, compared to 9.5% of the wider secondary headship population. Among Young Heads and Career Changers the percentages were 20.3% and 13.7% respectively. There were also lower proportions of all three groups in community schools (particularly Fast Trackers and Career Changers) and in converter academies (particularly Fast Trackers and Young Heads) in comparison to the wider secondary headteacher population.

**Table 7: School governance type, secondary heads**

|                           | <b>Converter academy</b> | <b>Sponsored academy</b> | <b>Community</b> | <b>Foundation</b> | <b>Free school</b> | <b>Voluntary-aided</b> | <b>Voluntary-controlled</b> | <b>N=</b> |
|---------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|------------------|-------------------|--------------------|------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------|
| <b>Fast Tracker</b>       | 9.1%                     | 50.0%                    | 18.2%            | 18.2%             | 4.5%               | 0.0%                   | 0.0%                        | 21        |
| <b>Rest of Population</b> | 37.1%                    | 9.6%                     | 28.2%            | 12.2%             | 0.3%               | 11.1%                  | 1.4%                        | 3,043     |
|                           |                          |                          |                  |                   |                    |                        |                             |           |
| <b>Young Head</b>         | 30.4%                    | 20.3%                    | 25.9%            | 8.2%              | 1.6%               | 13.3                   | 0%                          | 158       |
| <b>Rest of Population</b> | 37.5%                    | 9.5%                     | 28.2%            | 12.5%             | 0.2%               | 10.9%                  | 1.5%                        | 2,915     |
|                           |                          |                          |                  |                   |                    |                        |                             |           |
| <b>Career Changer</b>     | 35.3%                    | 13.7%                    | 19.6%            | 15.7%             | 0.0%               | 13.7%                  | 2.0%                        | 51        |
| <b>Rest of Population</b> | 38.6%                    | 5.1%                     | 30.3%            | 12.8%             | 0.1%               | 11.4%                  | 1.6%                        | 2,443     |

Source: School Workforce Census 2011, School Census 2012

## Free school meals

There was also a statistically significant difference between Fast Trackers and Young Heads and the wider secondary school population with reference to FSM eligibility. As Table 8 sets out, 77% of Fast Trackers and 33.3% of Young Heads were located in the most deprived quartile of schools, compared to 24.5% among the wider secondary population. Among Career Changers, no statistically significant differences were found.

**Table 8: Free school meal quartiles, secondary heads**

|                           | Least deprived | Lower middle | Upper middle | Most deprived | N=    |
|---------------------------|----------------|--------------|--------------|---------------|-------|
| <b>Fast Trackers</b>      | 4.5%           | 0.0%         | 18.2%        | 77.3%         | 22    |
| <b>Rest of Population</b> | 25.6%          | 25.0%        | 25.0%        | 24.5%         | 3,022 |
|                           |                |              |              |               |       |
| <b>Young Heads</b>        | 15.4%          | 23.1%        | 28.2%        | 33.3%         | 156   |
| <b>Rest of Population</b> | 25.9%          | 24.8%        | 24.8%        | 24.5%         | 2,896 |
|                           |                |              |              |               |       |
| <b>Career Changers</b>    | 22.9%          | 16.7%        | 31.3%        | 29.2%         | 48    |
| <b>Rest of Population</b> | 26.6%          | 26.2%        | 24.7%        | 22.5%         | 2,427 |

Source: School Workforce Census 2011, School Census 2012

## Re-advertisement rates

The analysis also considered re-advertisement rates. As Table 9 sets out, little variation was found between Fast Trackers, Young Heads and Career Changers and the wider secondary school population. While Fast Trackers were slightly more likely to be

appointed to headships in schools that did *not* need to re-advertise their post (78.9%), this was not found to be significant in comparison to the rest of the population (69.3%).

**Table 9: The number of re-advertisements – secondary schools**

|                           | Number of re-advertisements |       |      |           | N=    |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------|-------|------|-----------|-------|
|                           | 0                           | 1     | 2    | 3 or more |       |
| <b>Fast Trackers</b>      | 78.9%                       | 10.5% | 5.3% | 5.3%      | 19    |
| <b>Rest of Population</b> | 69.3%                       | 21.7% | 6.7% | 2.4%      | 2,456 |
|                           |                             |       |      |           |       |
| <b>Young Heads</b>        | 69.5%                       | 21.3% | 7.1% | 2.1%      | 141   |
| <b>Rest of Population</b> | 69.5%                       | 21.5% | 6.7% | 2.4%      | 2,343 |
|                           |                             |       |      |           |       |
| <b>Career Changers</b>    | 62.8%                       | 25.6% | 9.3% | 2.3%      | 43    |
| <b>Rest of Population</b> | 70.6%                       | 20.9% | 6.2% | 2.4%      | 1,981 |

Source: Vactrack, Education Data Services.

Note: Vactrack re-advertisement data during the period 2002-2012 was analysed to calculate, for each research sample headteacher, the number of times their current post was re-advertised prior to their appointment. The national average for the 'rest of population' was calculated for the same 10 year period for all schools to which we were able to match Vactrack data.

## Discussion

This chapter has sought to analyse the demography of the three research groups of Fast Trackers, Young Heads and Career Changers and the characteristics of the schools in which they serve. A comparison has also been made between each research group and the rest of the headteacher population.



The importance of this analysis is twofold. First, it defines the research groups analytically and defines their size relative to the total headteacher population. Second, it explores demographic patterns and school characteristics in the context of on-going concerns over the supply of headteachers in England. This enables in particular consideration of whether, and if so the extent to which, each research group: is enabling a wider demographic pool of teachers to achieve headship; and/or is serving schools facing challenges associated with either deprivation or headteacher recruitment.

Regarding the sample size of each research group, Fast Trackers, Young Heads and Career Changers were shown to comprise just over 10% of primary heads and 7% of secondary heads – with the significant caveat that these proportions are influenced by the definitions used to identify individuals in existing datasets. Fast Trackers were the smallest group, comprising approximately 0.25% and 0.5% of primary and secondary headships respectively. Young Heads comprised 2.3% of primary and 5.1% of secondary heads. Career Changers comprised 7.8% of primary and 2% of secondary heads.

On demography, Fast Trackers, Young Heads and Career Changers were shown to predominately reproduce, and in some case deepen, the existing under-representation of women, minority ethnic groups and disabled people in headship in England. As such, (as we will explore in the next chapter), while the research groups may speed up career progression towards headship, they were not found to diversify headship itself. In other words, relative to the total population of heads, the three sample groups were found not to draw more effectively on underrepresented pools of potential leadership talent.

There were two exceptions to this main finding. First, among the secondary school Fast Tracker sample, a significantly lower proportion of 'White British' heads was found in comparison to the wider headteacher population. This was partly explained by a higher proportion of 'White Irish' and 'White Other' heads in the Fast Tracker sample. However, there was also a higher proportion of Asian/Asian British heads, compared to the wider population.

Second, among the Career Changer sample, a significantly higher proportion of women was found in comparison to the wider headteacher population, in both school phases. We explore in later chapters the choices made by Career Changers about entering teaching as well as the complex factors that relate to the under representations of women in senior leadership. We note here the potential significance of career changing to the progression of women into headship.

Using our definition (of entering teaching at or over 35 years of age), 10% of all women primary heads and 3% of all women secondary heads were Career Changers. Earley et al (2012: 39) found gender differences between teachers and headteachers were most pronounced in the age range 30-39, while by their 50s (50-59) “women had caught up a little”. Our findings suggest that while age (and its association with decisions about child bearing and raising) may well be significant in these trends, career changing may also been a contributing factor, enabling women to draw on experiences in other sectors to support their teaching and school leadership careers.

As we will explore later, it is important to note that a key component of the Career Changer sample was of women who, after raising their own children, became mature entrants to teaching and gained qualified teacher status before progressing into leadership positions. (This is in contrast to an image of career changing popularized by PWC (2007), of individuals transferring directly into senior school leadership posts from similar positions in a different sector).

Concerning the schools served by each sample group, Fast Trackers, Young Heads and Career Changers were on average appointed disproportionately in schools that faced specific challenges associated with either deprivation and/or headteacher recruitment – although these varied by school phase. In the primary phase, while under-represented in more deprived schools, all three research groups were over-represented in primary schools with above average re-advertisements rates.

Interpretation of this finding needs care. While all three research groups can be seen to be contributing to a reduction in the number of headteachers posts that are vacant or temporarily filled, this may also reflect governor concerns over appointing candidates who progress towards headship through new, shorter (and hence ‘non-traditional’) career pathways. Just under half of Young Heads and Fast Trackers were appointed in schools that had already decided not to appoint to an advertised post. These schools had thus already spent a period of time with a vacant or temporary filled post, which may have influenced governor decision-making at the second or third attempt to appoint. (We explore further the role and perspectives of governors in the appointment process in subsequent chapters.)

In secondary schools, all three groups were over-represented in schools with above average FSM eligibility rates and in sponsored academies, but under-represented in schools with above average re-advertisement rates. We explore the free school meals/deprivation finding further in later chapters, including by considering the factors that influenced survey respondents’ decisions on where to apply for headships. (Half of

Young Head and just under two-thirds of Fast Tracker survey respondents reported, for instance, that serving a deprived community was an important factor in where they applied for a headship.)

With regards to the sponsored academies finding, it is recognized that, in comparison to the wider headteacher population, a higher number of sponsored academy posts may have been advertised during the time period when the three research groups of headteachers were appointed.

The very strong over-representation of Fast Trackers in sponsored academies, in particular, however, may also suggest one of two things. Either, that particular types or networks of academies have been more effective at recruiting participants from accelerated leadership development programmes and/or that contemporary accelerated leadership development programmes are more effective at serving particular types or networks of academies, rather than the wider range of schools that could also benefit from increased headteacher applicant pools.

In summary, then, all three research groups were found to predominately reproduce existing patterns of headship, while offering particular and partial responses to specific demographic and systemic recruitment challenges. In the chapters that follow we consider these issues further by analysing the leadership development, career pathways and experiences of headship among Fast Trackers, Young Heads and Career Changers.

# Chapter 3: Developing as a school leader: support and challenges

## Introduction

There has historically been a relatively consistent average length of time spent in teaching prior to taking up a headship in English state schools. In an early investigation into school leadership careers in England, Weindling and Earley (1987) found the average age at appointment to headship among a sample of 188 new secondary heads was 42 and the average number of years in teaching prior to headship was just over 19. In 2002, Earley et al found the average years in teaching prior to headship in a sample of 758 headteachers was just under 20 years.

More recently, in 2012, Earley et al found broadly similar patterns analysing the School Workforce Census 2010 – with an average age of first promotion to headship of 42 in primary and 45 in secondary schools. Sprigade and Howson (2012), drawing on a sample survey, reported on the age and teaching experience of headteachers appointed in the time period between September 2011 and May 2012. In primary schools, 67% of appointed heads were aged 40 or over. Fifty two per cent had more than 15 years teaching experience (and 84% more than 10 years). In secondary schools, 86% of appointed heads were aged 40 or over. Seventy eight per cent had more than 15 years teaching experience (and 94% more than 10 years).

In this chapter, drawing on survey and case study data collected within this research project, we analyse the leadership development of Fast Trackers, Young Heads and Career Changers. We consider, first, the school leadership roles these three research groups of headteachers took on prior to headship. Second, we consider the forms of school leadership development support they received. Third, we explore the challenges they faced as they worked to develop as school leaders.

## 3.1 Progressing towards headship

The Fast Tracker and Young Heads survey collected data on the number of years respondents spent working in schools prior to achieving their first headship.

Within *secondary* schools, Young Heads were found to achieve headship after, on average, 13.5 years working in schools and Fast Trackers after 11.5 years. Both groups

were on average aged 38 years old at the time of their first headship. As Table 10 sets out, Young Heads and Fast Trackers achieved headship substantially faster and at a younger age than in comparison to the wider headteacher population, including as evidenced in Weindling and Earley's (1987) original career path analysis and by Earley et al's (2012) School Workforce Census analysis.

Weindling and Earley (1987) was one of only a small number of the studies reviewed that considered the length of time secondary headteachers spent in other school leadership roles prior to headship (see Annex 1). They found 97% of their mid-1980s sample spent on average 6.5 years as a deputy head and 86% spent on average 6.4 years as a head of department.

Within our Young Heads and Fast Trackers survey, while secondary school respondents had taken a range of paths to and roles prior to headship, the length of time they had spent in middle and senior leadership roles prior to headship was, where comparable, considerably lower. A majority of secondary school Young Heads had spent on average 2 years as a classroom teacher, 3.5 years as head of department, 2.5 years as an assistant head and 4 years as a deputy head. Secondary school Fast Trackers had spent on average a year less at both assistant and deputy headship posts.

**Table 10: Years to headship and school posts held, secondary schools**

|   | Weindling and Earley (1987) |                   | Young Heads – secondary (2013) |                   | Fast Trackers – secondary (2013) |                   |
|---|-----------------------------|-------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------|----------------------------------|-------------------|
|   | % of cohort                 | Average no. years | % of cohort                    | Average no. years | % of cohort                      | Average no. years |
| <b>Age at first headship</b>                            | 100%                        | 42.1              | 100%                           | 38                | 100%                             | 38                |
| <b>Total years working in schools prior to headship</b> | 100%                        | 19.1              | 100%                           | 13.5              | 100%                             | 11.5              |
| <b>Years as a deputy head</b>                           | 97%                         | 6.5               | 100%                           | 4                 | 90%                              | 3.5               |
| <b>Years as an assistant head</b>                       | n/d                         | n/d               | 95%                            | 2.5               | 100%                             | 1.5               |
| <b>Years as a faculty head</b>                          | n/d                         | n/d               | 58%                            | 2.5               | 65%                              | 2                 |
| <b>Years as head of department</b>                      | 86%                         | 6.4               | 74%                            | 3.5               | 73%                              | 3.5               |
| <b>Years as head of year</b>                            | 44%                         | 4.4               | 60%                            | 2                 | 36%                              | 0.5               |
| <b>Teaching with no other responsibilities</b>          | n/d                         | n/d               | 100%                           | 2                 | 100%                             | 2                 |

Note: The total number respondents among: Young Heads was 74; and Fast Trackers 11.

Note 2: 'no data' is represented as n/d

Note 3: The 'average number of years' in each post is calculated as follows. First, the '% of cohort' column calculates the proportion of respondents who took on each specific post. Second, the 'average number of years' column calculates the average years spent in post for only those respondents who took on that specific post.

Within *primary* schools, Fast Tracker and Young Heads achieved headships even more quickly. As Table 11 sets out, Young Heads spent on average 10 years working in schools prior to achieving headship and Fast Trackers on average 9 years. Young Heads were aged on average 32 and Fast Trackers 35 at the time of their first headship. A majority of Young Heads spent on average 3 years as a classroom teacher, 4.5 years as a curriculum and/or key stage co-ordinator and 3 years as a deputy head. Fast Trackers spent on average a year less than Young Heads as classroom teachers and as curriculum/key stage co-ordinators.

**Table 11: Years to headship and school posts held – primary schools**

|   | Young Heads – Primary (2013) |                   | Fast Trackers - Primary (2013) |                   |
|---|------------------------------|-------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------|
|   | % of Cohort                  | Average no. years | % of Cohort                    | Average no. years |
| <b>Age at first headship</b>                            | 100%                         | 32                | 100%                           | 35                |
| <b>Total years working in schools prior to headship</b> | 100%                         | 10                | 100%                           | 9                 |
| <b>Years as a deputy head</b>                           | 99%                          | 3                 | 95%                            | 3                 |
| <b>Years as an assistant head</b>                       | 53%                          | 1                 | 65%                            | 1.5               |
| <b>Years as head of year</b>                            | 46%                          | 1                 | 44%                            | 1                 |
| <b>Years as curriculum or key stage coordinator</b>     | 87%                          | 4.5               | 88%                            | 3.5               |
| <b>Years teaching with no other responsibilities</b>    | 93%                          | 3                 | 93%                            | 2                 |

Note: The total number respondents among: Young Heads was 234; and Fast Trackers 43.

Note 2: The ‘average number of years’ in each post is calculated as follows. First, the ‘% of cohort’ column calculates the proportion of respondents who took on a specific post. Second, the ‘average number of years’ column calculates the average years in post for only those respondents who took on that specific post.

The Career Changer survey did not replicate these questions on career paths – due to the restriction on the number of questions that could be included in the National College Annual Survey of School and Children’s Centre Leaders 2013. (This was discussed as an limitation to the research in Chapter 1.) The case studies, however, provided a perspective on five individual Career Changer heads and one Fast Tracker head who had also career changed into teaching. As Table 12 sets out, each of these six case study heads made rapid progress to headship, within similar timescales to the Young Heads and Fast Trackers reported above.

**Table 12: Years to headship and school posts held, Career Changer case studies**

| Phase  | Primary                            |               |                      |                      |                          | Secondary                          |
|--|------------------------------------|---------------|----------------------|----------------------|--------------------------|------------------------------------|
|  | Professional scientific, technical | Manufacturing | Wholesale and Retail | Wholesale and Retail | Health and Social Care * | Professional scientific, technical |
| Age at first appointment to a school post        | 39                                 | 35            | 28                   | 35                   | 38                       | 31                                 |
| Gender   | Female                             | Female        | Male                 | Male                 | Female                   | Male                               |
| Age at first headship                            | 49                                 | 45            | 33                   | 42                   | 44                       | 39                                 |
| Total years working in schools prior to headship | 10                                 | 10            | 5                    | 7                    | 6                        | 8                                  |
| Years as a deputy                                | 2                                  | 2             | 2                    | 1                    | -                        | 3                                  |
| Years as an assistant head                       | 3                                  | 1             | -                    | 2                    | 5                        | -                                  |
| School business manager                          | -                                  | -             | -                    | -                    | -                        | 5                                  |
| Curriculum or key stage coordinator              | 4.5                                | -             | 2                    | 1                    | 0.5                      | -                                  |
| Teaching (no other responsibilities)             | 0.5                                | 7             | 1                    | 3                    | 0.5                      | -                                  |

Note: \* This case study participant was a Fast Track participant who had also pursued a prior career before teaching.

Note 2: Where respondents had not taken on a specific post, this is represented as an '-'.



Reflecting the potential reasons discussed in Chapter 2 for the over-representation of women among Career Changers (as identified in the secondary data analysis), each female Career Changer case study head had decided to train as a primary teacher after observing and gaining an interest in the primary education of their own children.<sup>13</sup> Each Career Changer primary head had also achieved qualified teacher status (QTS) and taught in classrooms throughout their school career. The one exception was the secondary case study head who progressed from a school business manager post to headship without QTS.

The Career Changer survey confirmed that achieving headship without QTS was a minority experience. Among our respondents, 93% had achieved QTS. The survey also identified the sector(s) in which Career Changers worked prior to entering teaching. Three quarters of the 146 respondents had worked in six sectors. These were:

- Public administration – 18%
- Financial and insurance activities – 14%
- Wholesale and retail trade – 14%
- Health and social work – 12%

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<sup>13</sup> As reported in Chapter 2, due to the absence of a national dataset on Career Changers, we used a proxy measure of ‘length of service in schools’ to conduct the secondary data analysis. Within the Career Changer survey, however, we were able to ask all headteachers in the National College Annual Survey whether they self-identified as career changers into education. We were also able to apply a further filter to select only those respondents who had worked in a different sector for a minimum of three years prior to working in schools. We thus note that the Career Changer survey sample and the Career Changer secondary analysis sample represent two differently defined and drawn samples. This is recognized to be a limitation of the research. (Within Chapters 3-5 we report only on the Career Changer survey sample). We also note one significant compositional difference between the two Career Changer samples, which concerns gender. Within the secondary data analysis, 87% of Career Changers were found to be women (as reported in Chapter 2). Within the survey sample, 61% of Career Changers were found to be women – which was more broadly representative of the wider national average reported in Chapter 2. Analyzing this further, however, we found that among survey respondents who had worked in another sector for 10 or more years before entering teaching, the proportion of women increased to 74%. As we suggested in Chapter 2, we conclude that mature entrants to teaching (who career change aged 35 and over) are more likely to be women, including those who enter teaching after raising their own children.

- Professional, scientific and technical – 11%
- Arts, entertainment and recreation – 7%

In summary, as each these career paths suggest, the leadership development of Fast Trackers, Young Heads and Career Changers was often characterised by regular promotions to new posts. As we will explore, sometimes promotions had been deliberately sought, but frequently, in the early school career stages especially, it was commonly a case of respondents being in the right place at the right time. Anne's experience, for instance, highlights how opportunities for promotion could arise out of staff turnover, the nurturing of potential leaders and wider school succession planning.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Throughout this report pseudonyms have been used for case study and interview participants.

### **Anne's development as a school leader: a Young Head in nine years**

Anne achieved her first headship when she was 31, after nine years in teaching. In her first year as a newly qualified teacher, Anne taught a year 1 class to cover a colleague on maternity leave. In her second year she moved schools and became a year 2 teacher. In her third year she taught year 4 and became the school's science coordinator. Anne noted "there had been a huge turnover [of staff] and lots of NQTs who [the headteacher] couldn't delegate responsibility to, so I was actually a member of staff who was relatively senior very quickly, because of this turnover".

In her fourth year Anne also took on the SENCO [special educational needs coordinator] post that was part of the school's senior leadership team (SLT) and continued in that role in her fifth year. In her sixth year she was appointed to an Assistant Headship post responsible for assessment. The assistant headship post was created as part of succession planning in the school. Anne recalled that "they knew the deputy was looking to move on, so I was appointed by governors and the headteacher as an internal appointment – so for that year [the school] had an assistant, deputy and headteacher".

In her seventh year Anne moved schools to teach year 6 and was appointed to a deputy headship post. During her first term as deputy, "a lot went on". A local authority inspection put the school into an improvement category and the headteacher went on long-term sick leave at Christmas. The following term, Anne was appointed the acting headteacher. She was 29 years old. Anne undertook the acting head role for 15 months. In her ninth year, when the governing body advertised the substantive headship post, Anne applied and was successful.

Reflecting back on her career path, Anne felt that she had been placed in new posts and succeeded in them without having actively sought promotion: "I sometimes felt that I was being put in a position to do whatever the headteacher wanted me to do ... without really thinking about where I wanted to be – my vision was I wanted to be key stage leader in key stage 1. ... I look back now quite kindly though in a way that I had those opportunities to showcase what I'm able to do."

Anne also considered her personal characteristics were important: "I'm the sort of person who will take on those challenges, despite the fact that I had a lot to juggle, I'm always willing to give something a go. ... I was able to take on responsibility and manage my time effectively to keep my teaching outstanding, to lead subject coordination, and be somebody new members of staff could come to."

## 3.2 Support for leadership development

Reflecting on their often rapid career progression into headship, Fast Trackers, Young Heads and Career Changers identified a range of factors that had supported their development as leaders.

The Young Heads and Fast Trackers survey respondents, as Table 13 shows, reported that the most important forms of support included having in-school opportunities to take on both leadership responsibility (99% and 100% respectively) and additional whole school responsibilities (97% and 99%). These work-based or experiential forms of development combined, for the majority, with opportunities to discuss their learning with both peers and an informal in-school mentor. They also reported that they had commonly been identified as a potential leader early in their career. For almost two-thirds of respondents, opportunities for formal learning, through for example NPQH and with a formal mentor or coach, were also important to their development as school leaders.

**Table 13: Factors that were important in supporting Young Heads' and Fast Trackers' development as school leaders**

|   | <b>Young Heads</b> | <b>Fast Trackers</b> |
|---|--------------------|----------------------|
| Opportunities to take on leadership responsibility          | 99%                | 100%                 |
| Taking on additional whole school responsibilities          | 97%                | 99%                  |
| Discussions with peers                                      | 79%                | 85%                  |
| Being identified as a potential leader early in career      | 78%                | 96%                  |
| Support and guidance from informal mentor within school     | 78%                | 87%                  |
| NPQH  | 58%                | 69%                  |
| Receiving formal support from a mentor or coach             | 47%                | 82%                  |
| Leadership experience gained in other areas                 | 41%                | 59%                  |
| Being part of a peer group or network of developing leaders | 39%                | 69%                  |
| Formal career planning with senior colleagues               | 36%                | 65%                  |
| A higher degree   | 33%                | 35%                  |
|   | N= 392             | 90                   |

Note 1: Important includes 'very important' or 'moderately important' as opposed to 'of little importance' or 'unimportant'.

Note 2: Reflecting the smaller population of Fast Tracker headteachers identified in the secondary data analysis, the Fast Tracker survey sample size is smaller than the Young Heads sample. This may place additional limitations on the range of social and professional experiences that the Fast Tracker survey is able to report.

These findings reflect wider and established evidence on the importance of a balance of work-based and experiential, collaborative and formal learning opportunities within leadership development (Bush 2008) as well as evidence on the confidence that can result from an individual being identified as a potential leader (Barber et al 2010).

Within this broad consensus, there were also several subtle differences across the three research groups. Among Career Changer survey respondents, a similar level of importance was attached to undertaking NPQH (77%) and other school leadership development programmes (70%) as it was to gaining leadership opportunities (70%) and additional responsibilities (66%). This may reflect the importance attributed to

formal knowledge on educational leadership among headteachers who are predominately mature entrants to teaching, potentially as a means to compensate for more limited in-school experience and/or because they may have gained experiences of managing and leading in a prior career.

Among Fast Trackers, in comparison to Young Heads, greater importance was attached to receiving formal support from a mentor or coach (82%), being part of a peer group or network of developing leaders (69%) and formal career planning with senior colleagues (65%). This may reflect the additional forms of support available within the offers of accelerated leadership development programmes. For Liz, a case study primary Fast Tracker, for example, formal coaching within the Fast Track Teacher scheme:

... meant I had another person coming into school telling me ... how to generate a whole school activity, this time developing writing across the school. ... [R]eflecting on what I was doing, and having time for conversation, was therapeutic and helpful.

Reflecting on their specific accelerated leadership development programme, Fast Tracker respondents were asked to review their experience against a set of factors Darling-Hammond et al (2007) identify as being associated with effective school leadership preparation programmes. As Table 14 sets out, the majority of Fast Tracker Heads reported their programme had provided a range of relevant support. To enable direct comparisons to be made between programmes percentages are given in brackets although it is noted the number of Tomorrows Heads and Future Leaders in the sample is very low.

**Table 14: Extent to which each Accelerated Leadership Programme provided support**

| <b>Factors adapted from Darling-Hammond et al (2007)</b> | <b>Fast Track Scheme</b> | <b>Tomorrow's Heads</b> | <b>Future Leaders</b> |
|--|--------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|
| A powerful, guiding vision                               | 44 (85%)                 | 7 (100%)                | 10 (100%)             |
| Rigorous selection procedures                            | 51 (98%)                 | 6 (86%)                 | 9 (90%)               |
| Focused on teaching and learning                         | 40 (77%)                 | 7 (100%)                | 8 (80%)               |
| Intensive and focused induction                          | 33 (63%)                 | 6 (86%)                 | 9 (90%)               |
| Cohort structure with mutual support                     | 35 (67%)                 | 7 (100%)                | 10 (100%)             |
| Sufficiently lengthy school placements                   | 26 (50%)                 | 6 (86%)                 | 8 (80%)               |
| Realistic, stretching leadership work                    | 41 (79%)                 | 6 (86%)                 | 9 (90%)               |
| Regular support from expert coaches                      | 39 (75%)                 | 6 (86%)                 | 10 (100%)             |
| Regular support from mentors                             | 36 (69%)                 | 5 (71%)                 | 10 (100%)             |
| N=   | 52                       | 7                       | 10                    |

Case study Fast Tracker heads were also predominately positive about the development programmes they had participated in. John, a secondary head for instance, reported that Future Leaders “was excellent... you receive a coach, you get to lead a study tour abroad, you get to work with an experienced head [and] in a different area”. Peter, also a secondary head, noted how “without Future Leaders I would have just mimicked, to an extent, what I had seen through my own experience... Future Leaders broadened my expectations ... it also demystified a lot of things for me”. Both were keen to stress, as John argued, that the programme “provided an access route to that final stage of [career] acceleration” but that “you make yourself the head... that comes from within and your own personal drive”, in the context of one’s wider socialisation in schools. Peers on the Future Leader programme who had “an assumption about progression in the programme” were seen, Peter argued, to be those that did not subsequently secure headship posts.

While not participating in explicit fast track leadership development programmes, case study Young Heads and Career Changers had commonly sought out development

programmes relevant to their needs. For instance, Joanne, a Young Head of a secondary school, reflected that a ‘real turning point’ in her leadership development had occurred through a combination of working beyond the school in a local authority project – her first chance to “really think strategically” – and then enrolling in NPQH, which had helped develop her confidence, provided focused learning days and coaching and “provided the opportunity to create a network of colleagues who had shared the experience”.

The importance of this common combination of experiential, collaborative and formal learning opportunities was echoed by the headteachers of aspiring heads. (By way of reminder, in addition to the case study data, we interviewed nine senior leaders who identified themselves as aspiring to headship, as well as their current headteachers). Their current headteachers identified a common set of school level factors that were seen to support the preparation of aspirant heads. These included:

- involvement in the management and day-to-day running of the school, with discrete areas of leadership responsibility;
- a blend of academic/curriculum and pastoral experience that includes experience of working with parents/carers and external agencies;
- discussions with and mentoring by their headteacher, to jointly consider whole school management issues and dilemmas and to practice and develop analytical thinking;
- experience of managing and coaching people, including teams beyond direct line management, who may have different priorities;
- availability of time to reflect on and research leadership practice, and to undertake formal learning, such as NPQH and Masters programmes;
- opportunities to visit other schools to observe leadership and management styles and to appreciate the relevance of context and situation for effective leadership.

Distinguishing who gained these opportunities, the headteachers (of aspiring heads) argued there was no simple or single formula for the identification of potential leaders, but that it was essential for a teacher to be an outstanding practitioner in the classroom. As one headteacher described:



When looking for leadership potential, the school first looks for high quality teaching and then whether the teacher is achieving well against the teachers' standards. Where a teacher shows ability and promise, the next step is to find out whether they can take on the responsibility of leading others and so through the appraisal process colleagues are encouraged to apply for internal or external opportunities that may arise.

The aspirant head interviewees who had worked in less supportive school environments (than those described above) reinforced the importance of these opportunities – as Ben's experience highlights.

#### **Ben's career path: experiencing different leadership development cultures**

Ben, currently a senior leader preparing himself for headship, felt he had received little support or encouragement for career progression in the first three schools in which he had taught. Throughout this period Ben felt colleagues gained promotion if they were close to members of the senior leadership team rather than through a transparent process. There was little focus on providing feedback to aspiring leaders or looking to develop talent. Ben felt career progression was unavailable to him and considered leaving the teaching profession. It was only when he moved to his current school as head of department that a leadership career seemed possible. To Ben, it was clear that the development of people was one of the school's guiding principles. Ben reported that the systems appeared fair and people were trusted and encouraged to experiment and to identify their career plans. In particular, school leaders reinforced the notion that all staff could make a difference to the lives of the students in the school.

### **3.3 Challenges**

As well as benefiting from support, rapid leadership development and progression commonly incorporated a range of significant challenges. Fast Tracker, Young Head and Career Changer case study respondents commonly reported how they had been 'dropped in at the deep end' and made mistakes that they needed to learn from quickly. The survey respondents were asked to consider the extent to which they had faced a range of specific challenges. As can be seen from Table 15, respondents within each

research group identified four important leadership development challenges. We can differentiate within these between two main types of challenge.

First, the two most commonly reported challenges reflected key contemporary challenges among school leaders more generally (Earley et al 2012). 'Balancing strategic and operational demands on your time' was reported as a challenge by 93% of Fast Trackers and Young Heads and 77% of Career Changers during their school leadership career. 'Developing an effective approach to managing external accountability' was a challenge reported by approximately two-thirds of each group.

Both echo evidence that achieving a balance of focus across key areas of leadership responsibility and managing high stakes accountability are significant challenges for headteachers in England (Higham and Earley 2013). This was corroborated by the aspirant head interviewees, who noted, as Seema described, "the difficulty of doing the day job while pursuing a major leadership development programme and maintaining any kind of work-life balance" in addition to "the pressure of factors external to school, such as the political context".

For a majority of the aspirant head interviewees, working through these challenges had clarified their motivations to become a head. This was not always the case, however. Three of the nine leaders, who had aspired to headship, described how they were currently questioning their motivation and desire to take on a headship role in the context of a high stakes external accountability culture. Mary, for instance, a secondary deputy head, had been "wrestling with this issue since beginning the NPQH" because, while feeling she could make a positive difference to student learning, she saw the current context as "creating job insecurity for headteachers" and was not prepared to put her family "in a position of risk for the sake of the job".

**Table 15: The extent to which each research sample of heads faced the following challenges within their school leadership career**

|   | <b>Young Head</b> | <b>Fast Tracker</b> | <b>Career Changer</b> |
|---|-------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|
| Balancing strategic and operational demands on your time  | 93%               | 93%                 | 77%                   |
| Developing an effective approach to managing external accountability                                  | 63%               | 63%                 | 69%                   |
| Gaining sufficient opportunities to observe effective leadership of teaching and learning in practice | 46%               | 36%                 | 58%                   |
| Being viewed as a less experienced leadership candidate than 'traditional peers'                      | 31%               | 37%                 | 38%                   |
| A lack of career support and advice   | 20%               | 17%                 | n/d                   |
| Unable to access relevant CPD activities and resources  | 8%                | 9%                  | n/d                   |
| Career stalling due to break down in relationship with your headteacher                               | 6%                | 5%                  | n/d                   |
| Limited opportunities for progression   | 6%                | 11%                 | n/d                   |
| N=  | 392               | 90                  | 122                   |

Note: 'no data' is represented as n/d

The second set of leadership development challenges concerned opportunities to develop and progress as school leaders. Mirroring the strong range of support identified above, only a minority of survey respondents felt that limited opportunities for progression or little access to relevant continuing professional development (CPD) activities had been a challenge. (It is noted that the context to these findings was that all survey respondents had already successfully progressed to headship.)

Approximately one-half of Young Heads and Career Changers and a third of Fast Trackers, however, reported that 'gaining sufficient opportunities to observe effective

leadership of teaching and learning in practice' was a challenge. This is notable given evidence that effective leadership of learning is a key means through which headteachers effect improvement in student outcomes (Robinson et al 2009). We note that defining what effective leadership of learning might mean in practice is likely to be contested or debated (Gunter 2005; Smythe and Wrigley, 2013).

Case study and interview participants across all three research groups also noted that gaining experience across a diversity of school leadership roles and responsibilities was difficult given the rapid rate at which they had been promoted. Headteachers of aspiring heads also identified how rapid career progress could mean leaders "missed a broad range of experience of different leadership posts and responsibilities". This meant they had "possibly a lack of experience in dealing with people and situations" and "did not stay in a role long enough to maximise the impact that a team can have on the lives of young people". Similarly, Earley and Jones (2010) noted among participants of accelerated leadership development programmes a range of experience but a lack of depth in specific leadership tasks – terming this phenomenon 'mile wide, inch deep'.

One headteacher of an aspiring secondary head argued that this could lead to concerns about the readiness of rapidly promoted leaders:

There can be suspicion they have moved into leadership roles too quickly, that they are not adequately prepared for leadership and therefore lack experience. This is often because of the strength of belief in more traditional routes to headship requiring potential leaders to advance through career stages over an extended period of time.

Reflecting this perspective, one third of Fast Tracker, Young Head and Career Changer survey respondents identified that a further challenge had been 'being viewed as a less experienced leadership candidate' than peers who had taken a longer (and hence more 'traditional') career pathway.

Exploring these issues, a majority of case study heads reported that their own headteachers had been supportive of their leadership development but that several 'other colleagues' had not. For a minority of case study Young Heads and Fast Trackers a lack of support was experienced as being shunned or hearing malicious gossip. John, a secondary Fast Tracker, had "felt ostracised by colleagues" when he told them of his plans to become a head: "it was seen as being quite arrogant ... not one of us ... it wasn't seen as something positive". For Joan, a primary Fast Tracker, a big challenge had been colleagues who talked about her as being "big-headed".

For two of the five Career Changer case study heads, a lack of support expressed itself as an unwillingness to recognise skills developed in other sectors (what David called “a professional snobbery”). For Jenny, a Fast Tracker secondary head – and a returner-to-teaching after a decade pursuing charity work – this was seen less as snobbery and more as a strong sense of wanting to know potential school leaders and managers had sufficient understanding of classroom life: “I was seen as something as an oddity... As a profession, teaching has a number of traditions and orthodoxies... if you don’t have the battle-scars of the classroom, you can’t get anywhere... but I had different battle-scars”.

The Fast Trackers and Young Heads survey also asked respondents about the extent to which they felt less well supported in their development as a leader, in comparison to other colleagues, due to their age, gender or ethnicity. This provides a perspective on the extent to which respondents perceived they had faced discrimination based on age, gender or ethnicity, in terms of the opportunities and support they received to develop as a leader.

As Table 16 shows, a quarter of Fast Trackers and a fifth of Young Heads reported feeling less well supported, in comparison to other colleagues, in their development as a leaders due to their age. One in ten respondents in both research groups reported feeling less well supported due to their gender. Among female survey respondents this proportion rose to 15%. Indeed, gender discrimination was reported almost exclusively by female heads.

Three per cent of Fast Trackers and 2% of Young Heads reported feeling less well treated due to their ethnicity. The numbers of Black Minority Ethnic (BME) respondents in both survey samples were very small. Among Fast Trackers, 2 out of 88 respondents were from BME groups. Both BME respondents (n=2) reported feeling less well supported in their development as a leader due to their ethnicity.

Among Young Heads, 4 out of 384 respondents were from BME groups. Eight respondents were White Irish or White Other. None of these respondents reported feeling less well supported due to their ethnicity. The 2% of Young Head respondents who did report feeling less well supported due to their ethnicity were all White British.

In reporting these responses, we note that discrimination based on gender, ethnicity, race and age (as well as on disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, religion and sexual orientation) is against the law, as established in the Equalities Act 2010.

**Table 16: A perceived lack of support for their development as a leader due to age, gender and ethnicity – Young Heads and Fast Trackers**

|                | <b>Young Heads</b> | <b>Fast Trackers</b> |
|----------------|--------------------|----------------------|
| Your age       | 20%                | 26%                  |
| Your gender    | 10%                | 10%                  |
| Your ethnicity | 2%                 | 3%                   |
| N=             | 384                | 88                   |

Note: The table reports ‘very much’ and ‘a fair amount’ responses. The other potential responses were ‘very little’ and ‘not at all’.

## Discussion

The three research groups of Fast Trackers, Young Heads and Career Changers were found to progress quickly to headship. The average time spent in teaching prior to headship in England has historically been approximately 18 to 20 years. Fast Trackers and Young Heads achieved headships on average eight or nine years faster – or approximately in half the time of headteachers in the same phase. Among Career Changers a similar timescale was found among a small sample of case study heads. Notably only a small minority (7%) of Career Changer survey respondents achieved promotion to headship without QTS – that is, through the managerial entrance to senior school leadership proposed, amongst others, by PWC (2007).

A range of concern has been expressed about rapid promotion to headship. Nye (2008) argues that gaining core skills and experience is vital to effective leadership but that it can take time for leaders to develop ‘contextual intelligence’ – what Glatter (2009) refers to as a maturity of judgment, informed by and “tested against stored memory and ordered experience”. The Hay Group (2008) identified a difference between established leaders - who showed strengths in political awareness, indirect influencing and alliance building skills and long term thinking and planning - and emergent leaders and those on fast track programmes, who often did not.

These challenges were recognized by the Fast Tracker, Young Head and Career Changer case study respondents and the aspirant head interviewees. The demands of developing as a leader, while formulating authentic approaches to the breadth of school leadership responsibilities and to high stakes accountability and policy change, were

seen as key challenges. This had led a minority of aspirant heads to choose not to pursue promotion to headship. For the majority of Fast Trackers, Young Heads and Career Changers, however, a common perception was that one could be “ready without being fully prepared” for leadership promotion – as long as you were able to respond quickly and positively to steep learning curves in post.

The right support for leadership development was seen as vital for career progression. Fast Trackers, Young Heads and Career Changers reinforced established knowledge that effective leadership development combines experiential, collaborative and formal learning. The categories of on-the-job, close-to-the job and off-the-job development or learning opportunities (Wallace 1991) remain useful here. Headteachers had often been key mentors enabling Fast Trackers, Young Heads and Career Changers to gain leadership opportunities in practice, to reflect upon and discuss their learning and to pursue external training. Mentored in these ways, a majority of all three groups commonly felt that had been supported in their learning and development.

The research suggests, however, that there remains a level of suspicion in schools about whether such rapid learning and progression is desirable in practice. A third of Fast Trackers, Young Heads and Career Changers felt that an important challenge in their development as a leader had been ‘being viewed as a less experienced leadership candidate’ than peers who had taken a longer (and hence more ‘traditional’) career pathway. For case study heads it could in practice be difficult to disaggregate whether different treatment – where it had occurred in relation to leadership development or other career opportunities – related to perceptions about inexperience or to discrimination based on age or both. A fifth of Young Heads and a quarter of Fast Tracker had felt less well supported in comparison to other colleagues, in their development as a leader, due to their age. A sixth of female Young and Fast Tracker Heads had felt less well supported due to their gender. In the next chapter we explore how Fast Trackers, Young Heads and Career Changers sought to navigate these potential challenges within their own career pathways.

## Chapter 4: Entry to headship: career choices and decisions

### Introduction

Reflecting on the *Making of Educational Leaders*, Gronn (1999: 27) notes that the idea of a 'career' has often been seen as a "desired, vertical, ladder-like movement through age-related and time-phased stages". Care needs to be taken however, Gronn argues, not to "impose an order and logic to an individual's experience for which there is not evidence". Accident and chance or serendipity can play a role in promotion. There are also critical turning points, temporary setbacks and different enablers, including key personnel with organisational power and influence who can provide support, advice, brokerage and short cuts. In these ways, Gronn argues, a smooth career pathway is rarely the norm.

Notwithstanding these complexities, Gronn (1999) proposes a model of school leadership as a career in four stages: formation, accession, incumbency and divestiture. Reviewing the accession stage, Gronn and Lacey (2004: 412) argue a key activity for aspirant heads will be 'positioning'. Individual leaders will be developing and questioning their self-belief, including their self-esteem and efficacy. They are likely, Gronn and Lacey argue, to be "preoccupied with factors to do with ambition, career goals, motivation, ... and whether or not they believe they 'have what it takes' to do what they want to do". Leaders will also be considering which people they need to "convince that they 'have what it takes' and what they need to be able to do to be judged as convincing and acceptable in respect of the goals they have set themselves".

In this chapter, drawing on survey and case study data, we analyse the decisions and actions Fast Trackers, Young Heads and Career Changers took as their careers progressed and they worked towards and entered headship. We consider career decisions whilst in senior leadership roles and the motivations to achieve headship and how these informed the types of schools Fast Trackers, Young Heads and Career Changers aspired to lead. Finally, we explore the applications process and the key role of governors in making appointments.



## 4.1 Developing a career path

Negotiating challenges and seeking out support, the three research groups of Fast Trackers, Young Heads and Career Changers were rarely passive about their careers, although it is useful to differentiate between their early years in teaching and their progression into senior leadership. As we noted in Chapter 3, the early years were often characterised by opportunities, encouragement and to some extent serendipity – ‘being in the right place at the right time’ – rather than planning. As Penny, a young secondary head, described for example, she “had no real sense of a career path in her early years”, other than wanting to do her best in whatever post she held. “It was important that I gained the confidence and skills at each stage before moving on”. She then looked for the next challenge and “tended to accept whatever post was offered”.

As Fast Trackers, Young Heads and Career Changers entered into middle and senior leadership they often began to take active career decisions, with guidance and encouragement from their line managers. There were still elements of good fortune but also increasing ambition to achieve senior roles. Thinking strategically about their careers included consideration of the leadership and management experiences they needed to gain, how to secure support and when and where to achieve the next career step.

Reflecting on these decisions, respondents to the Young Head and Fast Tracker survey identified a range of actions that supported their progression towards headship. As Table 17 sets out, the most important of these was having a ‘senior colleague acting as a champion for their career’. For 83% of Fast Trackers and 68% of Young Heads, this had been a senior leader in their school. For 41% and 34% respectively, this had (often additionally) been a senior leader in their local authority. Among case study and interview participants, career champions had often emerged out of earlier relationships with headteachers or coaches. Where they had not, case study heads had sought out mentors or advocates.

Three-quarters of Fast Tracker and over one-half of Young Heads had also worked purposefully to develop ‘their professional identity, so colleagues more readily recognised them as a leader’. Case study heads described how this included: finding time and space to reflect on their practice; considering what kind of a leader they wished to be seen as; actively seeking feedback, including by asking “what is the next step to make me better, what do I need to do?”; developing specific leadership skills; and building their credibility as a leader – including by “determining what the key

priorities are for the school and of the job and ensuring that everything I do is geared to achieving those priorities”.

**Table 17: Factors considered important in supporting career progress towards headship**

|   | <b>Young Heads</b> | <b>Fast Trackers</b> |
|---|--------------------|----------------------|
| Having a senior colleague in your school acting as a champion for your career                           | 68%                | 83%                  |
| Working to develop your professional identity so that colleagues more readily recognise you as a leader | 57%                | 77%                  |
| Having a senior colleague in your local authority acting as a champion for your career                  | 34%                | 41%                  |
| Delaying or choosing not to start a family to achieve career progression                                | 25%                | 24%                  |
| Moving to another region to help achieve promotion to deputy headship or headship                       | 24%                | 24%                  |
| Moving to work as a middle or senior leader in a school judged to be outstanding                        | 14%                | 30%                  |
| Moving into a school federation or academy chain  | 9%                 | 16%                  |
| N=  | 392                | 90                   |

Note: The table reports ‘very important’ and ‘moderately important’ responses. The other potential responses were ‘of little importance’ and ‘unimportant’.

A quarter of respondents had also found it important to ‘delay or choose not to start a family to achieve career progression’. Among Fast Trackers, all those to have delayed or chosen not to start a family were women – representing 40% of all female Fast Trackers (a proportion that rose to 60%, when women who did not think this question was applicable are excluded). Similarly, among Young Heads, 84% of those who had delayed or chosen not to start a family were women – representing 40% of all female Young Heads (and 65% of those who thought this question was applicable).

A significant minority of respondents had also moved schools and were geographically mobile to progress their leadership careers. A quarter of Fast Trackers and Young Heads had moved regions to achieve promotion to deputy headship or headship. Half of those to have done so were women. A third of Fast Trackers had also found it important to move to a school judged by Ofsted inspectors to be 'outstanding', and just under a fifth to a federation or academy chain. Young Head were less likely to have considered these moves important.

Case study heads described a range of reasons for moving schools. For Fast Trackers, in particular, movement was either expected as part of their accelerated leadership development programme and/or a means to gain wider experience. Sometimes this involved rapid change. Jenny, a Fast Tracker secondary head – and a returner-to-teaching – reported how “I moved schools three times and I moved boroughs [and] had long journeys [to work]”. She undertook “four different senior leadership team roles in two years”. This, Jenny argued, was “invaluable” to provide a breadth (but perhaps not depth) of experience as she “pushed herself” after completing Future Leaders to secure a headship.

Viewed over the course of a senior leadership career, as Josh’s experience highlights, the importance of career champions or sponsors, preparing one’s leadership image, making decisions about family life and choosing if and where to move to, often combined and crystallised in particular moments and contexts.

### **Josh's career path: making decisions about progression**

On joining Future Leaders (FL), Josh went directly from being a head of department with 6 years' teaching experience, to an associate senior leader post in another school. He described giving up his permanent job to join the FL programme as 'a risk', as there was no guarantee of a job at the end. "I was younger then, no family or mortgage so felt it was an opportunity worth exploring".

For his one year internship/placement Josh was placed in a school with an "outstanding head" who was also a Future Leaders Leadership Development Advisor. Josh felt while other Future Leaders had had to prove themselves within their schools, his headteacher already understood the programme. He reflects he was "thrown in at the deep end" filling the job of a SLT member who had left at the end of the previous year. He felt this meant he could "demonstrate impact, gain credibility, was challenged, made mistakes and learnt a lot from them".

Despite the possibility of a senior leadership post at the end of his internship/placement year, he decided he wanted to move back to his home city for family reasons. His former principal – at the school in which he had been head of department – offered Josh an assistant principal post in a school that had recently joined the lead school's emerging academy chain. He spent almost four years in the academy and found his time there equally "complex and rewarding". He perceived that staff were wary of the academy chain, and that he had moved from a positively received role into one that knocked his confidence. At times he considered giving up because it was so "tough, relentless and stressful", but also reflects that this experience taught him resilience and lots of skills, including those relating to change and people management.

He then applied for three deputy headships but struggled to be shortlisted. He believed his limited experience and the focus of his assistant principal role on the school's specialism, which did not allow him to demonstrate significant impact, meant that his applications were not strong enough within a competitive field for external jobs. Within his academy chain, however, an opportunity for progression became available. The chain was to open a new school and Josh was internally appointed as the headteacher.

## 4.2 Motivations

As Fast Trackers, Young Heads and Career Changers navigated their progression into senior leadership posts they also began to clarify their motivations for aspiring to headship. Reflecting on this, survey respondents identified that the moral purpose and potential impact of the headteacher role had been among their primary motivations for aspiring to headship. As Table 18 shows, over three-quarters of Fast Trackers and Young Heads reported their motivations included having ‘the chance to make a bigger difference to children's lives’ and a similar proportion identified having ‘the chance to shape the strategic vision of the school’.

Professional fulfilment was also important, with over two-thirds of both groups identifying ‘stretching myself’ as an important motivator. Pay and conditions were less important, reported by only a third of Young Heads and less than a fifth of Fast Trackers.

Earley and Weindling (2004) distinguished between teachers with a clear and predetermined career plan (‘to achieve headship by the time I am 40’) and those who ‘fall into the role’ as a job becomes available. Among both Fast Trackers and Young Heads approximately one-third reported that they had had a predetermined career plan to achieve headship. Young Heads were more likely, however, to have become a headteacher without it being carefully planned.

**Table 18: Motivations to become a headteacher: Young Heads and Fast Trackers**

| Motivations  | Young Heads | Fast Trackers |
|--|-------------|---------------|
| The change to make a bigger difference to children's lives | 83%         | 88%           |
| The chance to shape the strategic vision of the school     | 81%         | 69%           |
| To stretch myself  | 63%         | 70%           |
| The encouragement of a headteacher or senior colleague     | 56%         | 52%           |
| The variety and flexibility of the role                    | 50%         | 41%           |
| It has always been my career plan to be a headteacher      | 34%         | 38%           |
| An opportunity arose - it was not carefully planned        | 32%         | 16%           |
| Better pay, reward or conditions                           | 30%         | 19%           |
| Other key reasons  | 6%          | 6%            |
|  | N= 392      | 90            |

Note: respondents could select more than one motivation

Guided by these motivations, Fast Trackers and Young Heads weighed up a range of factors when deciding where to apply to achieve promotion to headship. As Table 19 sets out, over three-quarters of both Fast Trackers and Young Heads looked to 'work in a school whose values aligned with their own'. For case study heads, this often meant finding out about the history and character of a school and the communities it served, so as to make a judgment about the extent to which their professional values aligned with those of the school.

Just under two-thirds of Fast Trackers and one half of Young Heads 'wanted to serve a deprived community' when applying for headships. (The higher proportion of Fast Trackers (62%) compared to Young Heads (48%) mirrors the findings on the characteristics of appointing schools outlined in Chapter 2.)

Travel and family were also a common consideration, with over half of both Fast Trackers and Young Heads 'wanting to work close to where they lived'. Valerie, a

primary Career Changer, noted for instance her rule was that, due to family commitments, she needed to be able to travel to work in 45 minutes and that it was unlikely that she would ever relocate for a job. She recognised this had potentially limited or restricted the headship opportunities available to her.

A third of survey respondents had submitted a range of applications to increase their chances of gaining a headship. Avoiding particular pressures – such as sustaining an outstanding judgement or facing accountability pressures – were however less significant influences here, reported by less than a fifth of heads. Similarly, joining a school federation or an academy chain was not a common choice – with a quarter of Young Heads and a fifth of Fast Trackers actively choosing to *avoid* such schools.

Fast Trackers were more likely, however, to choose a federation or a chain (1 in 10). Among those that had, a majority reported doing so because of ‘a close fit of vision and ethos between the federation/chain and their leadership development programme’. They also perceived benefits of gaining support on matters of finance and human resources.

A similar perspective was reported by the leader of one of the accelerated leadership development programmes, interviewed as a policy stakeholder in phase 1 of the research. For programme graduates, the leader argued, there was the potential of a federation or academy chain “providing a safety net to a new headteacher”, including on issues of “finance, HR [human resources], child protection”. Academy chains, the leader argued, were also “quite attracted to someone ... who is potentially more up for being shaped ... not coming in saying this is how I do things ... more likely to be able to fit with the ethos of the chain”.

(As noted in Chapter 2, Fast Trackers were found to be strongly over-represented in sponsored academies. Here our findings suggest there may be inter-linkages between the ‘types’ of leaders, values and training sought out by particular sponsored academy chains and the aims of specific accelerated leadership development programmes. Given the recent development of academy chains, however, this is presented as a subject for further research.)

**Table 19: Important factors influencing decisions on where to apply for a headship**

|  | <b>Young Heads</b> | <b>Fast Trackers</b> |
|--|--------------------|----------------------|
| Wanting to work in a school whose values aligned with my own                             | 82%                | 74%                  |
| Wanting to work close to where I live  | 63%                | 51%                  |
| Wanting to serve a deprived community  | 48%                | 62%                  |
| Wanting to achieve promotion to headship so applied to a range of schools                | 33%                | 36%                  |
| Wanting to work in a school that is not within a federation or chain                     | 28%                | 20%                  |
| Wanting to avoid the pressure of trying to sustain an existing outstanding judgment      | 16%                | 18%                  |
| Wanting to avoid working in a school likely to face significant accountability pressures | 14%                | 9%                   |
| Wanting to work within a school federation or academy chain                              | 4%                 | 9%                   |
| N=   | 392                | 90                   |

Note: The table reports 'very important' and 'moderately important' responses. The other potential responses were 'of little importance' and 'unimportant'.

### **4.3 Applying for headships**

Having decided on where to apply, Fast Trackers and Young Heads were often appointed after making only a small number of headship applications. Fast Tracker survey respondents made on average two applications for headship posts and attended one or two interviews prior to appointment. Young Heads made on average just over two applications and attended one or two interviews.



Approximately half of both groups had requested feedback on their unsuccessful application(s). As Table 20 shows, the feedback received related predominately to their experience, including a perceived lack of experience in managing external accountability and policy and/or in leading teaching and learning. Both groups also reported that their age had been specifically noted in feedback – particularly among Fast Trackers (41%). (As noted in Chapter 3, discrimination on the basis of age (but not on a lack of experience) is against the law, as established in the Equalities Act 2010.)

Governors' concerns over age and experience were also noted among case study and interview participants. For example Beth, an aspiring headteacher interviewee working in a secondary school, researched several schools with a view to moving into headship and was interviewed for one post. She was unsuccessful and gained the impression during feedback that the appointment panel was concerned her age might make it difficult for her to manage certain members of staff in the school.

**Table 20: The characteristics to which feedback on unsuccessful headship applications applied, among Fast Trackers and Young Heads**

| Feedback  | Young Heads | Fast Trackers |
|---|-------------|---------------|
| My experience of balancing strategic and operational demands  | 23%         | 8%            |
| My experience of effectively leading teaching and learning  | 22%         | 14%           |
| My age at the time of my application  | 21%         | 41%           |
| My experience of managing external accountability   | 21%         | 19%           |
| My overall level of teaching experience at the time of the application                                  | 16%         | 24%           |
| My experience of managing changes to educational policy   | 16%         | 19%           |
| The extent to which fast track leadership programmes are effective in preparing candidates for headship | n/a         | 14%           |
| N=  | 159         | 37            |

Note: Respondents could select more than one feedback theme.

Notwithstanding these experiences, case study governors who, it is noted, *had* appointed a Fast Tracker, Young Head or Career Changer, outlined a number of common reasons for doing so. Primarily, these concerned the close fit between the priorities they had identified for their school and the applicant headteacher’s perceived strengths at interview.

In a majority of cases, governors described their priorities as developing a clearer focus on school improvement and student attainment and appointing a headteacher with “new ideas” and “fresh thinking”. Within a third of the case studies, for example, the governors noted the need for rapid improvement, including in the face of the school being placed in an Ofsted or local authority improvement category. In another third of

schools, the focus, as one governor described, was on a new headteacher being able to take “the school from ‘good to great’”.

For these reasons, having experience of leading improvement in a similar context to the appointing school was identified by governors as a strongly valued attribute among headship candidates. It was also helpful to be an internal candidate following a successful period as acting headteacher – either after initial appointment as acting head or more commonly having ‘acted up’ from a deputy head post. A third of case study heads had undertaken an acting headship. Similarly, among survey respondents, a quarter of both Fast Tracker and Young Heads had taken up an acting headship prior to progressing to a permanent post.

Reflecting on the appointment process, as John’s experience of appointing Sarah as a Young Head highlights below, case study governors commonly perceived their decision-making had focused on the ability and potential of candidates rather than their age or career background. The ability of candidates to do the job was often reported to be paramount. One governor of a Fast Tracker secondary head described, for instance, how: “if I felt for one minute that [he] wasn’t right or couldn’t do the role, we would have gone for an alternative or re-advertised”.

A minority of case study governors also noted the potential advantages of appointing Fast Trackers, Young Heads or Career Changers. The governor of a school with a Career Changer head, for instance, described how “I can see the advantages of someone coming to headship with [a] range of organisational experience outside education”. For the governor of a Young Head, the fact that the headteacher:

was the youngest candidate [demonstrated] we may have her as headteacher for 20 years and if these good things [that she had demonstrated as acting head] could be built on, that is a longevity that puts the school in a good situation, compared with someone 40 or 50 years old who may be around for 5 years, then leave.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> We note that, as above, discrimination on the basis of age contravenes the Equalities Act 2010 provisions on age discrimination.

In making their decision to appoint, governors had often found it helpful to draw on the support and training of their local authority in developing their appointment processes and, in particular, in clarifying their school priorities and what they were looking for in a new headteacher.

**A chair of governor's view: John's experience of appointing Sarah, a young primary head**

"We were clear that we wanted the very best for the school. It was clear Sarah [the deputy and acting head] wasn't a shoe in for the role. When we advertised we needed to make sure we got a candidate list representing the best of what was available for us. The view was: Sarah will have a better feel for the school; but at the same time others will have broader experiences that the governors may think is what we really want. So we were open-minded."

At interview Sarah "gave a clear, achievable path of how to get to [our goals]. Her vision fitted with ours as governors in terms of the attainment focus, embracing all children irrespective of religion, SEN – all viewed the same – and she delivers that and reflects that". Her age, with Sarah appointed at 28 years old, "was not viewed from a negative viewpoint as – oh, she's really young – it was more about experience rather than age. Some governors said, well she was a class teacher, then [key stage 2 coordinator], then quickly assistant, then deputy, so it was more – [does she have sufficient] longevity of experience in these roles rather than being 27 or 28 years old".

"To be honest, by the time the interview process was happening, the governors had seen Sarah in action during that period of the school being in [a local authority improvement category]. And unless you've experienced that - of going from [a] top primary ... to [the local authority] piling in – it was a real culture shock for staff, parents and governors. Sarah had to manage that, and going through that, she had demonstrated a skill set above and beyond the others, and so you could see having gone through that it didn't matter if she was 28 or 58 she had handled it and coped with it. So age wasn't a factor positive or negative – it was what it was."

## 4.4 Achieving headship

Having succeeded at interview, Fast Trackers and Young Heads achieved their first headship in three main locations. As Table 4.5 sets out, one-third of Young Head and one-quarter of Fast Tracker survey respondents were appointed in their existing school. This reflects the proportion of internal candidates and acting heads identified above.

Providing a comparative perspective, Sprigade and Howson (2012) found similar proportions of internal appointments among a sample survey of all headteachers appointed in England and Wales between September 2011 and May 2012. Twenty seven per cent of primary schools and 33% of secondary schools had appointed internal candidates. Considering these internal appointments by gender, Sprigade and Howson (2012) found 80% of all internal appointments were women.

Among our Young Heads sample 60% of internal appointments were women. In other words, female Young Heads (41%) were more likely than men (30%) to be appointed in their existing school, and hence less likely to have moved schools. Among Fast Trackers, however, female heads were as likely as their male peers to have moved to be appointed to a headship.

Among our survey respondents who did move schools, Young Heads were distributed fairly evenly between joining another school in the same local authority as their existing school (31%) and a school in a different local authority (30%) – within only a very small proportion joining a federation or chain (2%).

Fast Trackers were more likely to both move to a school in another local authority (37%) and to a federation or chain (5%). (Both reflect the greater willingness and/or ability of Fast Trackers to move geographically and to join federations/chains identified earlier in this chapter.)

**Table 21: School in which their first headship was achieved, among Fast Trackers and Young Heads**

|   | <b>Young Heads</b> | <b>Fast Trackers</b> |
|---|--------------------|----------------------|
| Within your existing school                   | 34%                | 23%                  |
| Within your existing federation or chain      | 2%                 | 5%                   |
| At another school in the same local authority | 31%                | 30%                  |
| At a school in a different local authority    | 30%                | 37%                  |
| Other   | 3%                 | 5%                   |
| N=  | 392                | 81                   |

## Discussion

In a similar manner to headteachers more broadly (Earley et al 2012), the three research groups of Fast Trackers, Young Heads and Career Changers were found to commonly take active decisions about their senior school leadership career. To support progression towards headship, a majority of survey respondents had found it important to recruit champions or sponsors who could provide help, opportunities and, in some cases, shortcuts in their career progression. They had also worked explicitly on their professional identity as leaders by finding time and space to reflect on their practice, seeking feedback and working to build their credibility as school leaders. In deciding where to apply for headships, Fast Trackers and Young Heads commonly sought out schools with values that aligned with their own, that were located near to their home and that served a deprived community.

The headteacher appointment process – and in particular the role of governors in appointments – has been identified as a particular barrier for aspirant heads. Reviewing the experience of fast track candidates, for instance, Earley and Jones (2010) questioned whether governing bodies are prepared commonly to take the ‘risk’ of selecting a young senior leader who had experienced rapid promotion and ‘not served their time’. Coleman (2005) also reports the concerns of female headteachers that governing bodies can be perceived to be looking for a male headteacher – with the

most common example of sexism in interviews relating to questions about the family commitments of the women.

There was evidence that age and/or gender had been a concern for a minority of governors in schools where Fast Trackers and Young Heads had not been appointed after attending an interview. However, they had often been appointed after making only two or three applications and attending one or two interviews. For governors who *had* appointed Fast Trackers, Young Heads or Career Changers, the fit between the priorities for the school and the perceived strengths of the headteacher had been the key factor and was central to the appointment process, commonly expressed through a focus on school improvement. For these reasons, experience of leading improvement successfully in a school in a similar context was highly valued among governors.

# Chapter 5: The practice of headship: undertaking the role

## Introduction

Research on new headteachers has commonly found that “[n]o amount of experience or preparation... can provide a sufficient induction to what is a demanding and complex job” (Weindling and Dimmock, 2006: 338). Earley et al (2002), for instance, reported from a survey of 758 headteachers in England that only one-in-eight heads felt well prepared when they commenced headship. Stevenson (2006: 417-8) argues that becoming a headteacher for the first time “is the moment when school leaders really have to confront the difficult questions, but they often do so without the experience, the networks of support and the reservoirs of loyalty that more established principals can draw on”.

The process of ‘becoming a headteacher’ has also commonly been understood to involve two forms of socialisation (Crow 2006). First, professional socialisation of the headteacher, which concerns learning what it is to be a headteacher, prior to taking up the role, through personal experience of schools, teaching and leadership, formal courses, modelling and mentoring. Second, organisational socialisation, which concerns the learning and experiences gained from a particular role in a specific school, including the knowledge, values and behaviours required to undertake the role. Earley and Weindling (2004: 23) note there is often a two-way interaction between these processes. Both the new headteacher and the school’s institutional culture can be seen to be trying “to change and influence the other”.

In this chapter, drawing on survey and case study data, we analyse the experiences and leadership practices of the three research groupings of headteachers. We consider, first, the challenges faced during their first year of headship. Second, we explore the leadership and management approaches Fast Trackers, Young Heads and Career Changers have subsequently developed. Third, we consider how prepared they felt, on reflection, to undertake specific headship tasks.

## 5.1 Challenges during the first year of headship

I wasn’t expecting the breadth of the role... that was quite a surprise... I felt I had bitten off more than I could chew. (John, a Fast Tracker head)



The steep learning curve of new headteachers has been found to include a relatively common set of core challenges (Hobson et al 2003; Weindling and Dimmock 2006; Earley et al 2011). Asked to reflect on the extent to which they had confronted these challenges in their first year of headship, Fast Trackers and Young Heads survey respondents identified a broadly similar pattern of experience. Table 22 sets out the findings – where respondents reported they had faced each challenge ‘to a large extent’.

Echoing John’s experience above, the breadth of the headteacher role – incorporating ‘dealing with multiple tasks, managing time and priorities’ – was a challenge for approximately two-thirds of both Fast Trackers and Young Heads. Half of Young Heads and two-thirds of Fast Trackers had also been challenged by the need to ‘improve teaching and learning’ and ‘improve pupil progress and raise standards at a rapid pace’. Doing so, a further half of both groups had found leading and managing change a challenge – among staff and in light of the ‘style and legacy of the previous head’. A third of both groups had found specific management tasks such as managing finance and the budget, governors and buildings a challenge. Over a third had also found the emotional dimensions of headship challenging.

**Table 22: The extent to which Fast Trackers and Young Heads faced a common set of challenges in their first year of headship**

|  | <b>Young Heads</b> | <b>Fast Trackers</b> |
|--|--------------------|----------------------|
| Deal with multiple tasks, managing time and priorities         | 66%                | 61%                  |
| Improve teaching and learning                                  | 57%                | 67%                  |
| Improve pupil progress and raise standards at a rapid pace     | 57%                | 67%                  |
| Deal with the legacy and style of the previous head            | 55%                | 46%                  |
| Deal with 'ineffective staff'                                  | 50%                | 52%                  |
| Develop emotional resilience to cope with difficult situations | 48%                | 41%                  |
| Manage staff who thought the school was better than it was     | 48%                | 41%                  |
| Restructure the leadership team                                | 41%                | 38%                  |
| Manage the school budget                                       | 40%                | 38%                  |
| Deal with problems with buildings and site management          | 35%                | 37%                  |
| Learn to work effectively with the governing body              | 32%                | 33%                  |
| Feelings of professional isolation                             | 31%                | 18%                  |
| N=   | 392                | 90                   |

Note: The table reports on the proportion of respondents who reported facing each challenge 'to a large extent' as opposed to 'to some extent', 'to a little extent', and 'not at all'. The challenges are adapted from Hobson et al 2003, Weindling and Dimmock 2006 and Earley et al 2011.

Note 2: The table provides an overview of challenges experienced in the first year of headship. It does not report on whether respondents felt prepared to respond to these challenges. We report on perceived preparation for headship later in the chapter.

We note that there is no directly comparable data with which to draw a comparison here, in part as most recent research on new heads in England has been qualitative. Earlier research, during the 1990s, did report on the problems new heads faced. Bolam et al (1993), for instance, found within a sample of newly appointed heads in both

school phases, that 60% or more had found a range of 'serious' or 'moderately serious' problems. These included: difficulties relating to the practice and style of the previous head; time management and priorities; school budget; and dealing with 'incompetent' staff.

Weindling and Earley (1987) undertook a survey with a sample of secondary heads and found the majority had found the following problems 'very serious' or 'serious': difficulties caused by the style and practice of the previous head; the school buildings; communication and consultation with staff; creating a better public image of the school; coping with a weak member of the senior team; dealing with incompetent staff; and low staff morale. Earley and Weindling (2004) revisited their research sample at five-year intervals and found that over time most of the reported problems lessened. However, "dealing with ineffective or incompetent staff remained a key challenge and the management of time and priorities and working with governors became more challenging as the length of time in post increased" (Earley et al 2011: 12).

## 5.2 Leadership approaches

Having experienced many of these first year challenges, our case study heads sought to develop their leadership approach to headship in response to both the values they had established during their teaching career and their school's context. As Sue, a Young Primary Head, described, this process often involved learning about and receiving feedback from staff:

When I first arrived in post I was quite directive. I said we are going to do this, this and this and it's going to be done my way. Once I'd experienced both simmering resistance and mere compliance, I learnt to understand more about where people were coming from and to respect their experience.

In other contexts, the reverse was also true, in that new headteachers had wanted to distribute leadership but felt they could not do so in practice, either because of the situation of the school (such as it being in an Ofsted improvement category) or because they did not know their staff and their individual capabilities well enough.

Reflecting research on school leadership more generally (Earley et al 2002), no single or 'identikit' style emerged from this interaction of professional and organisational socialisation (Crow 2006). The case study headteachers did, however, report a

relatively widely shared set of leadership and management priorities. These included five common priorities for:

- **a focus on learning and teaching:** with an emphasis on classroom practice and leading the school's approach to pedagogy, curriculum and assessment. Informed by Ofsted's inspection framework, case study heads also commonly sought to develop a clear working definition of effective teaching in the specific context of their school.
- **consistency of practice:** with a focus on evaluation, review and feedback to develop "effective and consistent practice, day in and day out". This included working with other leaders in the school to identify 'unsatisfactory' teaching practice, provide feedback and oversee support and improvement.
- **raising student attainment:** with the drive for consistency often part of a focus on standards. Reflecting the different contexts in which case study heads worked, different motivations were reported, including: to 'respond to external accountability'; to achieve a 'good' or 'outstanding' inspection judgment; "to close [attainment] gaps and build social capital".
- **professional development:** to support the focus on teaching and learning. The commitment to professional development and learning was often reported as being "central and taken extremely seriously" and included coaching, mentoring, learning groups, action research and the strategic use of external programmes.
- **staffing:** where professional development was not successful in improving teaching practice, case study heads also commonly reported being "willing to use discipline". This had led to "people moving on" and the "recruitment of new staff". Sometimes this was explicit: "I ... have a very 'if you don't like it, move on' approach". More usually, however, heads reported working hard to support teachers through regular lesson observation and feedback.

Leading these priorities, a set of broadly conceived leadership approaches was also identified by case study heads as being characteristic of their practice. These included:

- **sharing a vision,** to guide practice and learning. There were different balances between 'setting out a vision' and 'developing it democratically with staff'. A common position was that "the vision is mine, but it has to be seen as shared. It's got to be developed by enabling others to buy-in".

- **clear internal communication**, to realize the vision in practice. This included being accessible to staff, visible in the school and regularly sharing a strategic perspective of change with staff to reinforce the school’s vision and values.
- **using student level data**, to identify and share priorities for teaching and to set and monitor progress towards attainment targets but, as several heads noted, not using data “at the expense of [professional and] practical knowledge”.
- **distributing leadership**, to engage staff and share leadership, where staff demonstrated readiness and within a framework of priorities and expectations. A common approach was described as “‘watchful confidence’ – independence within a level of monitoring and scrutiny”.

Asked to also reflect on the daily practice of their headteachers, a minority of teachers interviewed in case study schools gave examples of how tension and conflict had arisen. This included tensions that related to the purpose and speed of intended change and the authoritarian style of the headteacher. It was notable that where such tension was reported, Ofsted and/or the local authority had commonly identified rapid improvement as a priority. For example, in one case study school, while the two teachers interviewed noted how tensions had occurred over the pace of change and how ‘the school is not a happier place now’, the chair of governors reported how governors had sought out specific aspects of the head’s approach, including:

... experience in action planning, working to targets and being accountable ... . We were after a head who could make things happen quickly, who would be good at prioritising improvement strategies and working with the [local authority] and Ofsted.

Notwithstanding these possibilities for tensions and conflict, a majority of staff interviewed in schools led by the case study heads recognised the leadership priorities and approaches described by their headteachers. In particular, staff commonly noted of their headteacher:

- a clear vision and high expectations: and “an absolute fundamental belief in having the right expectations of pupils and staff and why we are here”.
- moral purpose: including “the moral imperative to do what she believed was in the best interests of the children in the school”.

- openness and trust: that "her door is always open - she knows what's going on" and "The staff trust her - she's very well respected which gives her huge credibility".
- leadership of learning: "she promotes and participates in teacher learning and professional development".
- determination and resilience: including the ability to "pick yourself up off the mat after a fall".

### 5.3 Strong similarities, subtle differences

In these ways, there were strong similarities between the practices of the case study heads in our research and evidence on effective school leadership practice more broadly (Earley et al 2002; Leithwood and Riehl 2005; Day et al 2009; Robinson et al 2009). Drawn on to differing degrees, a combination of Transformational, Distributed and Instructional (or learning-centred) leadership approaches was commonly reported to have been refined in particular contexts and informed by the case study heads' and other staff's professional values and beliefs.

When asked if they perceived their leadership approach to be different to headteachers who had taken a longer (and hence more 'traditional') career pathway, it was interesting to find survey respondents' views divided evenly three-ways. Approximately, a third of Fast Trackers, Career Changers and Young Heads reported there were no differences; a third felt there were differences to some extent; and a third reported significant differences (with Fast Trackers the more likely to do so). Those who reported differences 'to some extent' or in 'significant way' were asked in an open-ended question to describe what these perceived differences related to.

In comparison to the other headteachers they had observed, Young Head survey respondents commonly perceived themselves to be more:

- directly and closely involved in teaching and learning - including by being in classrooms and modelling good practice.
- open to new ways of working ("as long as they are right for the school") and to external change.

- likely to spot talent and ensure leadership potential is nurtured, including by distributing leadership and empowering staff.

They also felt they had to strive for a faster pace to change, with energy and drive – which could sometimes create tensions with existing staff – and they had to work harder than their headteacher peers to demonstrate to staff their credibility as a leader – including while sometimes being themselves the youngest member of school staff.

Fast Tracker survey respondents commonly perceived themselves to:

- have higher expectations of staff and students – which could “cause some difficulties as I can be uncompromising”.
- hold staff more accountable for student progress.
- strive for a faster pace of improvement with the “desire to make an impact quickly”.
- focus more directly on teaching and learning.
- develop a more business or ‘corporate’ like approach.
- identify potential leaders and be more likely to rapidly promote them.
- more often have to convince others they were skilled enough to be the headteacher.

A common perception, among a significant minority of both Young Head and Fast Tracker survey respondents, was that they were part of a different and new generation of headteachers – reflecting not only their age but also the era of their professional socialisation. As one Young Head survey respondent reported:

I'm very much a 'new' head - very clear on data, focused on Teaching and Learning and improving outcomes, engaging parents, not so worried about other issues.

Responding to change was an important part of this perspective. One Fast Tracker respondent argued, for instance, that:

[I'm] not as bothered [with] all the changes taking place as [I] have never been used to anything else.

There were respondents who did recognise how longer serving headteachers had valuable experience to learn from – including especially in managing external change. One Young Head survey respondent, for example, noted that:

I hate to say I have had more regard for governmental directives than other more long serving colleagues. I now occasionally smile to myself that they were right!

However, a more common perspective, set out by another Young Head survey respondent, was that:

I am unafraid of changes to education ... [I'm] pragmatic with my approach to leadership rather than being ideologically set.

Teachers interviewed in case study schools also noted, particularly of Fast Tracker heads, as one teacher described, “a more black and white way... there is little grey ... they just say ‘let’s get the job done’”. This was seen to provide clarity and direction, but also potentially to leave unresolved any competing priorities among staff over the purposes of schooling.<sup>16</sup>

By comparison, Career Changer survey respondents commonly perceived themselves, in relation to the other headteachers they had observed, to be more likely to draw on the experiences they had of working in other sectors. This, they reported, included the willingness to:

- ensure risk taking and innovation were allowed.
- develop a realistic view of what employers wanted from young people.
- have higher expectations for student achievement and wellbeing.
- distribute leadership and “include staff in decision-making”.

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<sup>16</sup> In two case study schools, there was also concern over the recruitment of Future Leaders by Future Leader heads. Several staff in one school with four Future Leaders in the senior leadership team argued that, while this might build capacity, it sent out a message to other aspiring leaders about who was seen to be effective, creating an ‘us and them’ mentality.



Case study Career Changers also commonly felt that they drew on prior experiences of managing people and understanding how people work effectively and that this influenced their practice as headteachers. Beth, for example, a Career Changer primary head, described how she drew on her prior career experience to develop an insight into and an understanding of human resource practice, something she felt many headteachers initially lacked. “It's important”, Beth argued, “that you can deal with people and employment law, not just teaching pupils”.

In these ways, while the Career Changer case study heads had also often progressed rapidly to headship, they reported – in comparison to Young and Fast Tracker heads – having a wider set of life and prior career experiences to draw on when making difficult decisions and in judging how to respond to external policy change and high stakes accountability. Importantly, for the vast majority of both case study and survey respondent Career Changers, these judgments also included drawing, in addition, on their socialisation as qualified teachers.

## 5.4 Prepared for specific headship tasks

Looking back on their experiences, survey respondents were asked to reflect on how well prepared they had been to lead on a range of headteacher tasks. As Table 23 shows, Fast Trackers and Young Heads *did* feel well prepared to lead teaching and learning and to lead and manage staff. They also felt prepared to manage change and use evidence or data to improve student outcomes.

There were four areas where Fast Trackers and Young Heads reported feeling less well prepared (i.e. ‘very little’ or ‘not at all’). The first was to achieve a work/life balance. Here case study heads also often reported making an immense commitment to their work. For example, one Fast Tracker primary head described how: “Others see me as a workaholic, but I love my job”; and a Young secondary head noted how “I just work ridiculous hours, I am very, very passionate”. Teachers in their respective schools expressed admiration for such commitment (“She lives it, she's driven”), but also expressed concerns about their wellbeing (“she needs to delegate more ... she could burn out”).

The second area where survey respondents felt less well prepared concerned the specific task of ‘managing the school budget’, reported by one-half of Young Heads and a third of Fast Trackers. Case study Fast Trackers and Young Heads also noted how

financial management, bidding for funding and managing and financing buildings were areas of challenge where they had “some support but limited preparation”.

The third area concerned ‘managing external accountability’ – a concern for a quarter of Young Heads and approximately a sixth of Fast Trackers. This was linked, for case study heads, to a “realisation about one’s vulnerability” – especially to a low Ofsted grading or a poor set of exam results. Case study heads also made connections here to managing very difficult and unexpected issues – including among staff and on child safety matters.

The fourth area concerned ‘working with governors’, reported by a quarter of both groups. Among case study Fast Tracker and Young Heads, where governance was reported as a challenge, this commonly concerned the power and influence of the governing body and forming appropriate and supportive relationships. This was noted in a range of contexts but especially in smaller rural primary schools.

For Susan, for example, a Young Head in a small village primary school, the challenges presented by governors included reading their motives, dealing with the dynamics, tensions and personalities within the governing body and feeling excluded from a dominant group of governors who socialised outside school and brought those relationships to meetings. Susan reflected that this had made her feel uncomfortable to the extent that she “stumbled through meetings”. This was compounded by her feeling of being under-prepared in understanding the roles and procedures of school governance and, in particular, the law, the role of the clerk to the governors and auditing procedures.

**Table 23: The extent to which Young Heads and Fast Trackers felt unprepared for certain aspects of the headteacher role**

|  | <b>Young Heads</b> | <b>Fast Trackers</b> |
|--|--------------------|----------------------|
| To achieve a work/life balance                         | 52%                | 44%                  |
| To manage the school budget                            | 47%                | 37%                  |
| To manage external accountabilities                    | 25%                | 15%                  |
| To work with governors                                 | 22%                | 23%                  |
| To deal calmly with difficult situations               | 16%                | 14%                  |
| To exercise a maturity of judgment based on experience | 16%                | 10%                  |
| To use evidence or data to improve student outcomes    | 16%                | 8%                   |
| To manage change and bring staff along with you        | 13%                | 9%                   |
| To command authority and respect in the school         | 7%                 | 6%                   |
| To lead and manage school staff                        | 6%                 | 7%                   |
| To lead teaching and learning                          | 2%                 | 1%                   |
| N=   | 392                | 90                   |

Note: The table reports on the proportion of respondents who felt ‘very little’ and ‘not at all’ prepared for specific aspects of the headteacher role, as opposed to those who felt ‘very much’ prepared or ‘a fair amount’.

In the context of these challenges, it was notable that Career Changers frequently felt well prepared to manage finance and administration. Case study Career Changers commonly identified feeling well prepared to manage budgets, human resources, “administration and bureaucracy”. Similarly, reflecting on the experiences and skills they felt they brought from prior careers into teaching and school leadership, three-quarters of Career Changer survey respondents identified ‘managing people’ and one-half identified ‘managing change’, ‘using data’, ‘marketing and PR’ and ‘managing budgets and accounting’.

Staff interviewed in the schools of Career Change heads also reported that their headteachers' prior experience was often valued, but noted more broadly their perception that this should not be at the expense of gaining teaching experience. Being a qualified teacher, who could model outstanding lessons and lead teaching and learning were seen by a majority of staff to be *essential features* of school leadership. The importance of leading teaching and learning was also recognised by Adam, the one Career Changer case study head who did not have qualified teacher status.

### **Adam's approach to headship: a Career Changer without QTS**

Adam career-changed directly into school leadership when he took on a school business manager (SBM) post in a secondary school. During 5 years in the SBM post, Adam was encouraged to undertake NPQH and was subsequently internally promoted to a deputy headship. After three years as a deputy, Adam made three applications for headteacher posts but was never short-listed, a fact he felt was linked to "the perceived risk of appointing a non-QTS applicant".

Adam was then contacted by the chair of governors at a school conducting a recruitment search following their headteacher's resignation. The chair of governors noted the school was "not necessarily looking for an educationalist, but someone who could lead the school through a difficult period and bring about rapid improvement". Adam was offered the post following an interview process. However, the fact that he "did not have QTS influenced the decision to make an acting appointment in the first instance with the possibility of becoming permanent at a later date".

Adam saw the role as 'high stakes' – being appointed on a one-year contract while the school was also being monitored by Ofsted following a 'notice to improve' inspection judgement. He described developing a school improvement approach with a clear focus on the quality of teaching and learning, including with: an intensive programme of classroom observations (teachers interviewed reported being observed seven times each); the development of a whole school approach to lesson delivery; a professional development focus on assessment for learning and in particular the marking of work, feedback to pupils (as "a number of staff were not marking pupil's work") and the monitoring of student progress.

Adam expressed his own concerns about not having QTS, particularly in terms of building credibility with teaching staff. He believed, however, that the professional aspects of teaching and learning were well led by the school's leadership team as a whole. In particular, Adam had appointed a senior deputy head with experience of improving teaching and learning in a similar context. That had happened a term after his appointment and the deputy head had subsequently led the observation and professional development improvement strands.

Adam reflected that his first year had been a difficult year, with a number of teachers deciding or being asked to leave. Staff interviewed recognised improvements had been made, however, and reported feeling "now part of the school" and "able to contribute". Staff also described Adam as "very focused, fairly relaxed, with a keen sense of humour [and] good rapport with students" and that "he makes expectations clear, is very straight, a good communicator and not afraid to seek help".

## Discussion

The three research groupings of Fast Trackers, Young Heads and Career Changers were found to commonly face a steep learning curve on appointment to headship. This reflected existing findings on the experience of new headteachers more generally, including those of Weindling and Dimmock (2006: 338) who argued that a steep learning curve is to be expected given the nature and complexity of the role:

A major and essential part of learning to be a headteacher is acquired through living the experience. This has to be so. There are few, if any, shortcuts; and the most valuable learning is bound to take place through socialisation while in the role.

For Fast Trackers and Young Heads, the most commonly reported challenges on appointment to headship concerned the breadth of the role, including 'dealing with multiple tasks, managing time and priorities'. They had also faced the challenges of needing to 'improve teaching and learning', 'improve pupil progress and raise standards at a rapid pace' and leading and managing change in practice.

Reflecting research on school leadership more generally (Earley et al 2002), no single or 'identikit' style emerged among the case study heads. Fast Trackers, Young Heads and Career Changers commonly recognised that their analysis of the context of the school and its capacity for change influenced their leadership approach (Earley et al 2011). There was, however, a widely shared set of leadership and management priorities. Case study heads reported that these focused on: the quality of learning and teaching; whole school consistency of practice; raising student attainment; and professional development.

Case study heads also identified a number of common leadership approaches. These included: sharing a clear whole school vision to guide practice and learning; developing clear internal communication to reinforce the vision in practice; using student level data to identify and share priorities for teaching; distributing leadership to engage staff and share leadership. In these ways, a combination of Transformational, Distributed and Instructional (or learning-centred) leadership approaches had commonly been refined in particular contexts and informed by the case study heads' and other staff's professional values and beliefs.

While reinforcing these strong similarities to evidence on effective school leadership, survey respondents also suggested a number of subtle differences. In comparison to headteachers who had taken a longer (and hence more 'traditional') career pathway to headship, Fast Trackers and Young Heads perceived themselves to be more closely involved in teaching and learning including by being in classrooms and modelling good practice. They also perceived themselves to be more likely to spot and nurture leadership potential and to have to work harder to demonstrate their credibility as a leader.

A significant minority of Fast Tracker and Young Head survey respondents also perceived themselves to be part of a new generation of heads, reflecting not only their age but also the era of their professional socialisation. This was characterised as an 'expectation of external change', a pragmatic approach to leadership and a focus on impact (in the context of a national standards agenda). Exploring these survey findings among case study heads, it was difficult in practice to disaggregate whether these perceived differences reflected a new era of professional socialisation and/or more simply the practices of newer and hence less experienced headteachers. The latter would imply Young and Fast Tracker headteachers were keen to enact rapid change and could thus be more instrumental and pragmatic than peers who have had more time to think through and embed their own philosophical ideas in practice.

There was clearly a tendency among case study Young Heads and, in particular, Fast Trackers to align themselves with a 'no-excuses' approach to school leadership and to work on developing their leadership identities as such (as explored Chapter 4). In Bottery's terms (2007), these identities could lead more readily to Young Heads and Fast Trackers becoming policy 'conformers' rather policy 'mediators' (Hoyle and Wallace 2007; Bottery et al 2013).

There was also evidence, however, that a minority of Young and Fast Tracker case study heads were looking to "sift through" policy and protect teachers from external change. It will thus be important for further research to consider whether the reported values and practices that relate to a perceived 'new era of socialisation' will be sustained over time or whether these in fact change as Young Heads and Fast Tracker become more experienced – including, in particular, in their political awareness, alliance building and long term thinking and planning (Earley and Weindling 2004, Stevenson 2006, Hay Group 2008, Higham et al 2009).

In comparison, Career Changers survey respondents commonly perceived themselves to be able to draw on the experiences they had had of working in other sectors, including to support risk taking and innovation, to distribute leadership and include staff in decision-making and to manage people well. While also noting the influence of high stakes accountability in their professional socialisation, case study Career Changer heads more commonly perceived that they drew on their prior career experience to clarify their values as leaders and to act more clearly as 'policy mediators'.

Staff interviewed in the schools of Career Changer heads also reported that their headteachers' prior experience was often valued, but noted more broadly their perception that career changing should not be at the expense of gaining teaching experience. This fit broadly with the survey and case study findings that the vast majority of Career Changers had developed a professional identity as a teacher before becoming a school leader, including after having gained QTS as mature entrants to teaching.

Finally, on reflecting on how well prepared they had been for headship, the vast majority of Fast Trackers and Young Heads felt confident about their preparation to lead teaching and learning and manage change. However, there were two main areas where they did not feel well prepared. The first concerned achieving a work/life balance. While recognizing that this might be associated with a particular phase of establishing themselves as a headteacher, concern was expressed about both the intensity and pace of headship and vulnerability to external accountabilities. Similarly, while

recognizing that their headteachers were often passionate about their role and the school, a range of staff interviewed in case study schools felt that their headteacher's current workload could lead to 'burnout'. The second area concerned specific management tasks including managing finance and budgets and managing governors. It was notable that, in comparison, Career Changers frequently felt better prepared to manage finance and administration.



## Chapter 6: Conclusions

This report has developed an analysis of three research groupings of headteachers identified by NCTL as Fast Trackers, Young Heads and Career Changers. In this final chapter we consider the main findings and implications across four key themes. These themes are: the demography and schools served; leadership development and career progression; the challenges of recruitment to headship; and the leadership practices of respondent headteachers.

A recurring issue of interest is the similarities and differences that emerge from the analysis both: between the three research groupings; and, in comparison to headteachers more generally. In summarising our findings, we seek to draw out these similarities and differences and to consider the wider implications for policy.

### 6.1 Size, demography and school characteristics

We begin by analysing the demography of Fast Trackers, Young Heads and Career Changers and the characteristics of the schools in which they serve. In a context of on-going concern over the willingness of teachers to become headteachers in England, the importance of this analysis is twofold. First, it enables the research groups to be defined analytically. Second, it explores the demographic patterns and school characteristics of each research group and compares these to the total population of headteachers.

Regarding the size of each research group, Fast Trackers, Young Heads and Career Changers comprise just over 10% of primary heads and 7% of secondary heads – with the significant caveat that these proportions are influenced by the definitions we used to identify individuals in existing datasets. Fast Trackers are the smallest group, comprising approximately 0.25% and 0.5% of primary and secondary headships respectively. Young Heads comprise 2.3% of primary and 5.1% of secondary heads. Career Changers comprise 7.8% of primary and 2% of secondary heads.

On demography, Fast Trackers, Young Heads and Career Changers predominately reproduce, and in some case deepen, the existing under-representation of women, minority ethnic groups and disabled people in headship in England. This is the first broad similarity to the total population of headteachers. The three research groups do not draw more effectively on underrepresented pools of potential leadership talent. There are two exceptions to this. First, among secondary school Fast Trackers, there is a significantly lower proportion of 'White British' heads, in comparison to the wider

headteacher population. Second, among Career Changers there is a significantly higher proportion of women, in both school phases.

Several implications stem from this analysis. Inclusion and diversity in school leadership remain key issues. A range of research has highlighted specific challenges for women and minority ethnic groups in progressing to headship (Coleman 2005; Bush et al 2005; McNamara et al 2009; McNamara et al 2010; Earley et al 2012). The issues reinforced here include the importance of family-friendly schools, particularly given the timing of entry to senior leadership and choices over starting a family. Forty per cent of our female Fast Tracker and Young Head survey respondents found it important to ‘delay or choose not to start a family to achieve career progression’. A minority of young female heads reported facing gender discrimination. Discrimination based on ethnicity was also reported by black and minority ethnic (BME) Fast Tracker survey respondents although the numbers of BME leaders identified were too small to reach firm conclusions.

A notable difference, however, relative to the total population of heads, is the case of Career Changers and the progression of women into headship. Using our secondary data analysis definition (of individuals entering teaching at or over 35 years of age), 10% of all women primary heads and 3% of all women secondary heads are Career Changers. In terms of the headteacher gender gap, Earley et al (2012: 39) found gender differences between teachers and headteachers were most pronounced in the age range 30-39, while by their 50s (50-59) “women had caught up a little”. Our findings suggest that while age (and its association with decisions about child bearing and raising) are significant in these trends, career changing is a contributing factor to narrowing the gender gap among older headteachers. In particular, career changing enables women – often after raising their own children – to draw on experiences in other sectors to support their teaching careers.

We also highlight that a key characteristic of Career Changers is that they are, as a majority, mature entrants to teaching who gained qualified teacher status (QTS) before progressing into school leadership positions. This is in contrast to an image of career changing of individuals transferring directly into senior school leadership posts from similar positions in different sectors, as characterized by PWC (2007). Ninety three per cent of our Career Changer survey headteachers respondents gained QTS prior to achieving headship.

Regarding the schools headteachers serve, all three research groups are appointed on average in schools that face specific contextual challenges – although these vary by school phase. In the primary phase, the three research groups are over-represented in

schools with above average re-advertisements rates. As we noted, the interpretation of this finding, however, needs some care. While the researched groups are contributing to a reduction in the number of vacant or temporarily filled headteacher posts, this may reflect governor concern about appointing 'non-traditional' candidates. Just under half of primary Young Heads and Fast Trackers, in particular, were appointed in schools that had already decided not to appoint to an advertised post. The fact these schools had already spent a period of time with a vacant or temporary filled post may have influenced governor decision-making in subsequent recruitment attempts.

In secondary schools, all three research groups are over-represented in sponsored academies and Young Heads and Fast Trackers are over represented in schools with above average student eligibility for free school meals. While the free school meals eligibility finding may be influenced by the differential choices available to governors in schools serving deprived areas, it was notable that half of Young Head and two-thirds of Fast Tracker survey respondents reported that serving a deprived community was an important factor in where they applied for a headship.

Considering the sponsored academy finding we recognize that a higher than average number of sponsored academy posts may have been advertised during the period when the research groups were appointed. The very strong over-representation of Fast Trackers in sponsored academies however suggests that accelerated leadership development programmes may be particularly aligned to serving networks of academies. It is notable, for instance, that a majority of Fast Tracker survey respondents who applied for a headteacher post in a federation or an academy chain reported doing so because of the close fit of vision and ethos between federation or chain and their accelerated development programme. Similarly, the leader of one accelerated development programme argued that academy chains were "quite attracted to someone ... who is potentially more up for being shaped ... more likely to be able to fit with the ethos of the chain". In these ways, there may be inter-linkages between the 'types' of leaders, values and training sought out by particular academy chains and the aims of specific accelerated leadership development programmes.

In summary, all three research groups were found to predominately reproduce existing demographic patterns of headship, while offering particular and partial responses to systemic recruitment challenges. To support future research on these issues, we note that there is a need for additional national data and better record keeping. We found no final data set on Accelerate to Headship participants and an incomplete record of Fast Track Teacher participants. Research and monitoring would also be enhanced by the

inclusion of a small number of additional questions in an annual survey or census (such as the School Workforce Census) so that Fast Trackers and Career Changers could be identified directly within these annual datasets.<sup>17</sup>

## 6.2 Leadership development and career progression

Our second thematic focus concerned the career progression and leadership development of Fast Trackers, Young Heads and Career Changers

All three research groups were found to progress quickly to headship. The average time spent in teaching prior to headship in England has historically been 18 to 20 years. Fast Trackers and Young Heads achieve headships on average eight or nine years faster – or approximately on average in half the time of teachers in the same phase. Among Career Changers a similar timescale was found among our sample of case study heads. This is perhaps the most distinct difference between the three research groupings and the wider population of headteachers in England.

In the context of this rapid career progression, support for leadership development is seen to be vital. The most important forms of support that survey respondents identified included having in-school opportunities to take on leadership responsibility and whole school responsibilities, opportunities to discuss learning with both peers and an informal in-school mentor and opportunities to engage in formal learning, including through NPQH.

Several subtle differences emerged in the relative importance of specific support. Career Changers were more likely to stress the importance of formal learning. Fast Trackers were more likely to consider formal support from a coach and being part of a network of developing leaders as important, potentially reflecting the additional opportunities they received to access these activities through participation in an accelerated development programme. Young Heads and Career Changers had not participated in explicit accelerated programmes; however they had often actively reached out and found development opportunities relevant to their needs.

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<sup>17</sup> To identify career changers in the National College Annual Survey, we developed the following filter questions: “Did you pursue another career before you began working in schools?; and, if ‘yes’, “Which sector or sectors did you work in before you began working in schools [list of sectors]?”; “For how many years in total did you work in this sector or sectors?”.

To support their career progression towards headship, a majority of Fast Tracker and Young Head survey respondents had found it important to find or recruit career 'champions' or sponsors who could provide help, opportunities and, in some cases, shortcuts in career progression. Most commonly this was their headteacher, but sponsors also included local authority officers or advisors. Survey respondents had also worked explicitly on their professional identity as leaders by finding time and space to reflect on their practice, seeking feedback and working to build their credibility as leaders. While a third of leaders had moved schools to gain leadership opportunities and/or to achieve promotions, internal promotion had also provided rapid career development, particularly when combined with opportunities to work and lead beyond the school.

In deciding where to apply for headships, Fast Tracker and Young Head survey respondents commonly sought out schools with values that aligned with their own, that were located near to their home and that served a deprived community. For case study governing bodies who had appointed Fast Trackers, Young Heads and Career Changers, the fit between the priorities for the school and the perceived strengths of the headteacher had been central to the appointment process, commonly expressed through a focus on school improvement. For these reasons, experience of leading improvement successfully in a school in a similar context – including as the school's acting headteacher – was highly valued among governors. This finding broadly reflected trends in the wider headteacher population, that approximately a third of headteachers achieve their first headship in their existing school (Sprigade and Howson 2012).

Several implications stem from this analysis. Fast Tracker, Young Head and Career Changer respondents all reinforced established research findings that effective leadership development *combines* experiential, collaborative and formal learning. It is an amalgam of 'on-the-job', 'close-to-the-job' and 'off-the-job' experiences (Wallace, 1991). Rather than this occurring in specific pathways within particular types or favoured groups of schools, however, all three groups of headteachers had benefited from a range of opportunities for progression in a wide diversity of schools.

This finding reinforces the role of existing headteachers in developing potential and emerging leaders, as a regular and routinized whole school activity as captured in the concept of Greenhouse Schools (NSCL 2007) and as noted in the interim findings of the Teaching Schools Evaluation (Gu et al 2014). Elements of whole school activity that were found to be important here included the early identification of potential leaders through transparent processes and the provision of leadership opportunities so that as

individuals progressed through middle and senior management they were able to benefit from:

- involvement in the management and day-to-day running of the school, with discrete areas of whole school leadership responsibility;
- experiences of managing and coaching people and working with parents/carers and external agencies;
- discussions with and mentoring by their headteacher, to jointly consider whole school management issues and dilemmas;
- time to reflect on and research leadership practice and theory, and to undertake formal learning, such as NPQH and Masters programmes;
- opportunities to visit other schools to observe leadership practice and to analyse the relevance of contextual knowledge. It was notable, for instance, that one-half of Young Heads and Career Changers and a third of Fast Trackers reported that 'gaining sufficient opportunities to observe effective leadership of teaching and learning in practice' was a challenge.

The principles of developing leaders and local succession planning are argued by government to have been embedded in the design and purpose of teaching schools and teaching school alliances. This includes the aims of putting into place processes across teaching school alliances (TSAs) to "identify leadership talent in areas of need", to develop "leadership talent within and across their schools" and to "take positive action to help diversify senior leadership" (St Helens Teaching School 2014:1). A key role for the government will be to ensure that this activity is inclusive of and benefits a wide range of schools and especially schools serving disadvantaged areas and those that are not engaged in national policy networks or TSAs (Higham and Earley 2013).

Emphasizing the wide diversity of school contexts in which leadership development occurs, only one-fifth of Fast Tracker and less than one-tenth of Young Head survey respondents had moved to a school federation or academy chain to support their career progression. Moreover, only a very small proportion of respondents (4% of Young Heads and 9% of Fast Trackers) reported that they had wanted to join a federation or a chain as a headteacher. This reflects the small proportion of schools in federations and chains (found by Earley et al to be 9% and 1% of schools respectively in 2012). In addition, a quarter of Young Head and a fifth of Fast Tracker survey respondents had actively sought not to join a federation or a chain as a headteacher.

## 6.3 Recruitment challenges

In addition to seeking out leadership development and support, two further challenges were commonly identified by our survey respondents as important influences on career progression towards headship.

The first concerned the demands of developing as a leader while formulating authentic approaches to both the breadth of school leadership responsibilities and to high stakes accountability and policy change. (It is important to re-emphasize that our findings relate to a sub-group of existing headteachers as well as a small number of senior school leaders contemplating headship.)

In the face of the perceived demands and accountabilities of headship a minority of the aspirant head interviewees had chosen not to pursue promotion to headship or were currently put off by worries about the impact headship would have on their families. The majority had worked through these challenges to clarify their motivations to become a head. These motivations often included the potential of have a wider positive influence on children's lives, coupled with the support and encouragement of their contemporary headteacher. In considering where to apply for promotion to headship, fourth-fifths of headteacher respondents reported that avoiding particular accountability pressures had not been important factors, while approximately one-fifth had sought to avoid these pressures.

A related important issue for headteacher respondents was the need for government to take seriously the impact of work-life balance issues on headteacher recruitment and retention. This can be seen as a broad similarity to the wider headteacher population, where workload data show how heads regularly work a 55-60 hour week during term time (Earley et al 2012). A combination of the rate and frequency of policy change, the range of responsibilities and pressures related to accountability and inspections and the personal and career risks associated with headship were also seen by a majority of our case study heads to impact negatively on career decision-making about headship among middle and senior school leaders.

The second challenge to progression towards and recruitment as a headteacher concerned the level of suspicion that exists in schools about whether rapid leadership development and career progression is desirable in practice. This can be highlighted as an important difference between the three research groups and wider population of headteachers. A third of Fast Trackers, Young Heads and Career Changers felt that a significant challenge in their development as a leader had been 'being viewed as a less

experienced leadership candidate' than peers who had taken a longer (and hence more 'traditional') career pathway. A distinct, but in practice sometimes related, challenge concerned perceptions about age. A fifth of Young Heads and a quarter of Fast Trackers reported being less well supported in their development due to their age. Feedback from unsuccessful applications for headteacher posts was also reported by a fifth of Young Heads and two-fifth of Fast Trackers to concern specifically their age at the time of application.

It could in practice, as case study heads described, be difficult to disaggregate whether differential treatment – where it had occurred in relation to leadership development or career opportunities – related to perceptions about inexperience or to discrimination based on age. For instance, case study Fast Trackers and Young Heads noted the difficulties peers and governors could face in differentiating between leadership potential, inexperience and age-based stereotypes.

The headteacher appointment process – and in particular the role of governors – has previously been identified as a particular barrier for aspirant heads who are young, female, from minority ethnic groups and/or from 'non-traditional' career pathways (Earley and Weindling 2004). Case study governors who had appointed Fast Trackers, Young Heads or Career Changers, reported that they had often found it helpful to draw on support and training in developing their appointment processes and, in particular, in clarifying their school priorities and what they were looking for in a new headteacher. The local authority had provided this support in three of the 11 case study schools (in which governors were interviewed), as well as other relevant training in a further two schools. In a system with an increasing number of academies, it will be important to ensure governors continue to have access to appropriate advice, support and training, particularly to support equitable appointment processes.

Several further implications emerge from the wider findings on progression to headship. In developing approaches to succession planning and school leadership, there are a number of areas in which government policy may usefully be developed – in addition to communicating more clearly the satisfaction many headteachers derive from the role. These include demonstrating:

- the forms of support new headteachers can expect to receive everywhere (see Earley et al 2011);
- how policy seeks to enable headteachers to achieve a work/life balance (see Edge 2013);



- specific actions to reduce the personal and career risks of taking on a first headship (see Lightman 2013).

There also appears to be a need to analyse the effectiveness of headteachers who participate in rapid leadership development and/or progress to headship through shorter or 'non-traditional' career pathways. As this was beyond the scope of this report, a recommendation for future research is to study leadership effectiveness among a matched sample of Fast Trackers, Young Heads, Career Changers and headteachers who progress to headship in a nationally average length of time.

## 6.4 The practice of leadership

This leads finally to the leadership practices of Fast Trackers, Young Heads and Career Changers. While no single or 'identikit' style emerged among each of the three research groups of case study heads, a widely shared set of leadership and management priorities was identified. These included a focus on: the quality of learning and teaching; whole school consistency of practice; raising student attainment; and the professional development of school staff.

Case study heads also identified a number of common approaches to leadership. These included: sharing a clear whole school vision to guide teaching and learning; developing clear internal communication to reinforce the vision in practice; combining student level data with professional knowledge and judgment to identify and share priorities for teaching; distributing aspects of leadership to engage staff and work towards a participative ethos. In these ways, there were strong similarities between the reported practices of case study heads and evidence on headteachers more widely.

A number of subtle differences did emerge however particularly in the case of Young Heads and Fast Trackers. In comparison to headteachers who had taken a longer (and hence more 'traditional') career pathway to headship, Fast Trackers and Young Heads perceived themselves to be more closely involved in teaching and learning including by being in classrooms and modelling good practice. They also reported that they were more likely to spot and nurture leadership potential and to have to work harder to demonstrate their credibility as a leader.

Strikingly, a significant minority of Fast Tracker and Young Head survey respondents perceived themselves to be part of a new generation of heads, reflecting not only their age but also the era of their professional socialisation. This was characterised as an

‘expectation of external change’, a pragmatic approach to leadership and a focus on impact (in the context of a national standards agenda). While in practice it was difficult to disaggregate whether these perceived differences reflected a new era of professional socialisation or more simply the practices of newer and hence less experienced headteachers, there was clearly a tendency among case study Young Heads and, in particular, Fast Trackers to align themselves with a ‘no-excuses’ approach to school leadership.

In Bottery’s terms (2007), these identities could lead more readily to Young Heads and Faster Trackers becoming policy ‘conformers’ rather policy ‘mediators’. As such, it will be important for future research to consider whether the reported values and practices that relate to a perceived ‘new era of socialisation’ will be sustained over time or whether these change as Young Heads and Fast Tracker become more experienced headteachers (Weindling and Earley 2004, Stevenson 2006, Hay Group 2008).

In comparison, Career Changers survey respondents commonly perceived themselves to be able to draw on the experiences they had of working in other sectors, including to support risk taking and innovation, to distribute leadership and include staff in decision-making and to manage people effectively. While also noting the influence of high stakes accountability in their professional socialisation, case study Career Changer heads more commonly perceived that they drew on their prior career experience to clarify their values as leaders and to act more clearly as ‘policy mediators’.

It was notable that prior work and life experiences frequently informed the leadership approaches of Career Changers who commonly felt well prepared to manage administration, finance and people. In comparison, reflecting back on their preparation for headship, Fast Trackers and Young Heads reported that managing finance and budgets and managing governors were common development needs. An implication here is that formal leadership development programmes need to help participants to be “aware of the full extent of their statutory responsibilities and should offer practical sessions on finance, human resources and legal issues” (Earley et al 2011: 7).

## 6.5 New pathways?

Locating our analysis in points of comparison, we have shown how the three research groups have both *subtle differences* to the wider headteacher population but also *clear similarities*. By way of conclusion, therefore, we argue that it may not be helpful to

conceive of Fast Trackers, Young Heads and Career Changers as entirely distinct 'new pathways' to headship.

Accelerated development programmes are perhaps the clearest new 'route' or pathway to headship. However, while often providing a programmatic vision, peer group identity and additional forms of leadership development, contemporary programmes have most commonly supported existing school leadership career paths, rather than recruiting people not already aspiring to senior leadership. Case study Fast Tracker heads commonly noted, for instance, how their programme had helped to equip them for their next post, and had "provided an access route to that final stage of [career] acceleration" but how "you make yourself the head ... that comes from within and your own personal drive".

The contemporary growth of Young Heads is perhaps best understood to reflect the demographic shifts taking place among the teacher, and indeed the English, population more widely, coupled with a recent focus on local succession planning initiatives. Career Changers, as a majority, are individuals who enter teaching as mature entrants by undertaking teacher training and become newly qualified teachers before progressing through middle and senior leadership roles. This later entry point to teacher training was found to be particularly attractive to women and supportive of women achieving headship, while only a very small proportion of career changer headteachers did not have qualified teacher status.

In these ways, a majority of headteachers in all three research groups had significant periods of professional socialisation in the state school system. Perhaps as a result their leadership practice broadly reflected existing research findings that school leaders commonly aspire to focus on leading learning, on providing a clear vision about student learning and on enabling staff to participate (sometimes partially) in key decision-making processes. A majority of headteachers in the three research groups was also clearly motivated to effect change for students, had actively sought out leadership development and career progression opportunities and had worked hard on their credibility and authenticity as school leaders.

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