



Executive Headteachers: What's in a Name?

Executive Summary

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Executive Summary

1. About this research: why do EHTs matter?

Executive headteachers (EHTs) are becoming increasingly prevalent as the self-improving school system matures; there are over 620 EHTs in the school workforce today¹; and the number recorded in the School Workforce Census (SWC) has increased by 240 per cent between 2010 and 2014. The role is still evolving locally and nationally and, as EHTs take responsibility for ever more schools in England, their role will be crucial to the effectiveness of multi-school groupings in the self-improving school system.

The literature and latest SWC define an EHT as a headteacher (HT) who has direct oversight of more than one school in a school grouping arrangement (DfE, 2015; Fellows, 2016). However, unlike HTs, there is currently no legal definition for EHTs, leading to multiple sector interpretations of the role. EHTs often work to oversee the transition and improvement of schools, as well as to grow partnerships between schools. They work across more schools and children than traditional HTs. The 2016 Education White Paper recognises that this 'require[s] a new and different mix of skills and experience' (DfE, 2016, p.42). But as yet there is no comprehensive guidance on the skill-set they need.

This study adds clarity to the evidence on the role and responsibilities of EHTs, the structural arrangements in which they work, and the skills and experience they need. It is based on a review of 15 HT and 15 EHT application packs, secondary analysis of the SWC, and 12 in-depth case studies with EHTs and their colleagues. It is a collaboration between the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER), the National Governors' Association (NGA) and The Future Leaders Trust (TFLT).

¹ Based on analysis of SWC and Edubase in 2016.

2. Key messages and recommendations

In this study, we found that the remit and responsibilities of individuals working as EHTs varies in terms of the number of schools they work with, the structure linking those schools, whether or not they have a substantive headship role, and the schools' strategic priorities.

We propose that an EHT be considered as a lead professional of more than one school; or who manages a school with multiple phases; or who has management responsibility significantly beyond that of a single school site. An EHT provides a leadership and management layer to increase strategic and collaborative capacity. Scale and size are important considerations; however, at what point another form of strategic leadership may be required, for example a chief executive officer (CEO) was outside the scope of this current study and needs further exploration.

Our study's focus on the difference between HTs and EHTs highlights that the roles of EHTs are distinctive from traditional HT roles in requiring higher levels of strategic thinking; greater emphasis on coaching, delegating and achieving change through others; and capacity to look outward.

Key recommendations:

- More clarity is needed at a national level around the true scale of the role and the purpose of EHTs in a school-led system.
- The DfE should facilitate a profession-led definition of executive headship with associated skills, competencies, organisational structures and indicative remuneration – allowing for a range of appropriate operating models.
- Workforce planning must ensure sufficient numbers of leaders progress upward to fill new EHT positions while also sustaining traditional HT positions and Head of School (HoS) roles.

- Governing boards should actively decide whether to add a level of strategic leadership, and whether this is structured as an additional layer or replacement for other forms of leadership (or a mixture). They must consider who will step into the HoS (or similar) role.
- Governors should be supported with guidance on what role an EHT might play, appointing procedures, indicative remuneration and job descriptions.
- More professional development and support networks for EHTs and aspirant EHTs are needed. Action is needed to increase the proportion of women in the role.
- The role and effectiveness of EHTs should be carefully evaluated and kept under review, as this new and expanding leadership role develops.
- National data recording systems need to be developed to more accurately record information about EHT posts and accountability arrangements.
- More research is needed to explore the role of Head of School (HoS) and CEO to further understand how they relate to EHTs.

3. Findings: Who and where are the EHTs in England?

According to the SWC, there were 20,560 HTs and 621 EHTs in schools in England in November 2014.

- Executive headteachers are experienced senior leaders, most of whom have been HTs.
- Almost all EHTs in the 2014 SWC have qualified teacher status.
- Executive headteacher positions offer higher pay than HT positions – reflecting the higher level of experience and responsibility associated with the role.
- Executive headteachers are likely to be slightly older than HTs.

- Women are under-represented in the EHT population when compared with women in the HT population, but the proportion of EHTs who are female has grown over time.
- There is currently a higher proportion of EHTs amongst the leaders of academies than in the maintained sector.

However, the many limitations associated with the data present a growing challenge in understanding the most senior tiers of school leadership.

4. Findings: Why have an EHT?

There are several drivers for including an EHT in a school grouping including: school improvement, leading partnerships, school expansion, and the increased capacity that can come from working across several schools. Compared with traditional HTs the EHT role was reported to entail higher levels of strategic thinking; greater emphasis on coaching, delegating and achieving change through others; ensuring consistency and collaboration across and between schools/sites; and a strong capacity to look outward. They currently work within a complex variety of contexts and governance and accountability structures.

5. Findings: facilitators, challenges and developing the EHT role

School grouping arrangements – whether as part of formal groups such as multi-academy trusts (MATs) or federations, or informal collaborations – are central to the self-improving school system. If schools continue grouping together at current rates, there may be a demand for between 3203 and 6786 more EHTs by 2022. Sustaining this growth will require system-level planning of the leadership pipeline and development for EHTs. Challenges to the development of the EHT role include:

- clearly defining and articulating the role in application packs, job descriptions and performance management arrangements
- clear division of leadership (between EHTs and others)
- well-informed governance and accountability arrangements
- balancing the needs of multiple schools
- recruiting individuals who are not only great HTs but have the higher level skills and competencies required for executive headship.

There is little formal CPD and few qualifications available for EHTs. Support and training should foster and capitalise on informal and formal networks, with CPD covering areas such as building partnerships and business management. Aspiring EHTs identify a need for further experience working across larger organisations, multi-school and multi-phase contexts.

6. Concluding comments

Our findings highlight the strategic role that EHTs play in the school leadership landscape and their growing importance as more schools form multi-school groupings. More clarity is needed at a national level around the true scale of the role and the purpose of EHTs in a school-led system. Careful planning is needed at a local level to ensure that every EHT has a clearly defined role in their context, which recognises the additional value they bring, distinct from a traditional HT. Further research needs to consider: the effectiveness and impact of EHTs, including better understanding the circumstances under which EHTs generate efficiencies in the system, and whether particular EHT models or types of individual are more, or less, effective. In addition, the relationships between HT/EHT at one end of the scale/size spectrum and EHT/CEO at the other, need further exploration.

References

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Department for Education (2016). *Educational Excellence Everywhere* (Cm. 9230). London: DfE [online]. Available: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/508447/Educational_Excellence_Everywhere.pdf [10 June 2016].

Fellows, T (2016). *What Makes a Headteacher 'Executive'? The Role and Responsibilities of Executive Headteachers in England*. Birmingham: NGA [online]. Available: <http://www.nga.org.uk/getattachment/News/NGA-News/Executive-headteachers-research-reveals-confusion/Exechead-report-final.pdf> [17 June, 2016].

Outputs suite

A Full Report of the Findings

The full report of findings, including key messages and recommendations for policy and practice, why executive headteachers (EHTs) matter, the distinctive characteristics and distribution of EHTs, the circumstances under which schools appoint an EHT, and the facilitating factors, challenges, and development of the EHT role.

How to cite this publication:

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Executive Summary

A two-page concise summary of the full report.

How to cite this publication:

Theobald, K. and Lord, P. (2016). *Executive Headteachers: What's in a Name? Executive Summary*. Slough, Birmingham and London: NFER, NGA and TFLT.

Technical Appendix

The technical appendix provides a detailed account of the methodology used to obtain the data on which the full report is based.

How to cite this publication:

Harland, J. and Bernardinelli, D. (2016). *Executive Headteachers: What's in a Name? Technical Appendix*. Slough: NFER.

Literature Review

The literature review encapsulates existing research on the EHT position in England. It covers three main areas: the history of EHTs in England; the skills, qualities and motivations identified in EHTs; and the governance and school structures associated with EHTs.

How to cite this publication:

Fellows, T. and Odell, E. (2016). *Executive Headteachers: What's in a Name? A Review of the Literature*. Birmingham and London: NGA and TFLT.

Case Study Compendium

The compendium provides an overview of each of the 12 case studies that were conducted as part of the research. Each case study includes a description of the setting, the purpose of appointing an EHT, the focus of the EHT role, qualifications of the EHT and replicable features.

How to cite this publication:

Wespieser, K. (Ed) (2016). *Executive Headteachers: What's in a Name? Case Study Compendium*. Slough: NFER.

Infographic Poster

The infographic poster – included in the full report - displays quantitative data about the distinctive characteristics and distribution of EHTs.

All outputs are available from the following websites:

www.nfer.ac.uk

www.nga.org.uk

www.future-leaders.org.uk

About the organisations who carried out this research



The National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) is the UK's largest independent provider of research, assessment and information services for education, training and children's services. Our purpose is to provide independent evidence which improves education and training for children and young people.

The research team at NFER for this project included: Daniele Bernardinelli, Jennie Harland, Pippa Lord, and Karen Wespieser.

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The National Governors' Association (NGA) is an independent charity representing and supporting governors, trustees and clerks in maintained schools and academies in England. The NGA's goal is to improve the wellbeing of children and young people by increasing the effectiveness of governing boards and promoting high standards. We do this by providing information, guidance, research, advice and training. We also work closely with, and lobby, UK government and educational bodies, and are the only campaigning national membership organisation for school governors and trustees.

The research team at NGA for this project included: Ellie Cotgrave and Tom Fellows.

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The Future Leaders Trust's mission is to give children equal opportunities in life, regardless of background, by developing a network of exceptional school leaders. We run a range of leadership development programmes, providing a progression pathway from middle leadership right through to system leadership. All of the programmes are informed by evidence and the expertise of leaders within and beyond education. They all support participants to develop more effective leadership behaviours, so they can drive improvement in schools and multi-academy trusts and help close the attainment gap.

The research team at TFLT for this project included: Evan Odell, Katy Theobald and Rosaria Votta.

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