

Independent Review of Leadership

Final Report

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Lastly, the review team would like to thank the 169 senior leaders who completed the on-line survey that was conducted and analysed by organisation. Some of their findings appear in this report. Also huge thanks to the 132 respondents who participated in the interviews and focus groups as part of this review. The evidential base for this independent report includes all the interview and focus group data collected by the team from March 1st to 11th May 2021 excluding the Easter holidays.

1.0 Executive Summary

1.0 In February 2021, the Minister for Education, Kirsty Williams MS, announced an independent review of leadership provision¹ in Wales. The announcement² stated that there would be -

- ‘A strategic review of support for leadership in Wales that includes consideration of the NPQH, the funding model for leadership support, succession planning and our expectations of leadership’s role in realising the curriculum.
- A critical independent review of the roles and responsibilities of all the agencies in the system that provide support for leadership and how they interact to achieve the best solutions for a typical school leadership team including Headteachers, Deputy Headteachers and Assistant Headteachers

This will result in advice from the review team in respect of the roles of each of the agencies and how they will need to interact and the development of a leadership action plan. This Leadership Independent review will inform future developments and provide clarity on the support we have for school leaders across the system, and the support they will need to enable them to realise the new curriculum.

¹Leadership provision and leadership offer are terms used interchangeably within this report to encompass the training, support, professional learning and professional development on offer to senior leaders in Wales.

² Written Statement: Leadership Review (9 February) GOV:WALES

To undertake the review, I will engage a team of experts. I have asked Professor Alma Harris, a specialist in the field of Leadership from Swansea University, to lead the review. Professor Harris will lead a team of partners from HE and practice in Wales in undertaking the review. Professor Carol Campbell of the University of Toronto Ontario has also agreed to support the review, bringing an international perspective and critical objectivity; acting as critical friend to the group. The review will be undertaken between February and April; with the report available later in 2021’

1.1 This report outlines the key findings and advice from over 120 hours of interviews time with key stakeholders throughout Wales (Appendix A). It also reflects the responses from 169 senior leaders in Wales to the on-line survey which was analysed by an independent company (Annex 1). It is important to note that this review was undertaken against the backdrop of COVID 19.

1.2 Professor Carol Campbell, OISE, University of Toronto was an external, international adviser to the review team and provided feedback at various key points in the review process.

1.3 This executive summary outlines the main findings, from the independent review, based on data collected between March and May 2021. Overall, the evidence shows that the emphasis placed on leadership development, support and training is an important and widely valued aspect of the Welsh policy context.

1.4 As outlined in ‘Education in Wales-Our National Mission³’ and reinstated in the update in 2020⁴, the core aspiration is for all leaders in Wales to be inspirational and ‘supported to lead

³ <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2018-03/education-in-wales-our-national-mission.pdf>

⁴ <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2020-10/education-in-Wales-our-national-mission-update-october-2020.pdf>

their organisations through the changes ahead.’ A range of external perspectives suggest that Wales is a system on the move, particularly but not exclusively in terms of curriculum reform⁵.

1.5 High quality leadership, at all levels in the system, will be essential to help schools implement and realise the new curriculum. Building leadership capacity, at all levels of the system, therefore, is an essential component of the continuing improvement journey in Wales.

1.6 This independent review has taken a broad and informed critical look at leadership provision in Wales. In the short time allocated to complete this review, a fully comprehensive account of all aspects of leadership provision in Wales was clearly not possible. The tight timescale meant that it an extensive consideration of the funding arrangements for leadership development and training could not be undertaken. The team fully acknowledge and accept any limitations that time constraints and the available resource placed upon the review process. What follows in this report, therefore, is a summary of the findings based on the data collected within the time span of this review.

1.7 There is no virtue in critique without evidence and there is no merit in change that is not evidence informed. Successful education systems depend on honest, reliable, evaluative feedback to guide every phase of development and to inform the next set of changes⁶. Such education systems are engaged in constant review processes to guide further improvement. Within successful systems, it is both acknowledged and accepted that no part of the system is more important than the whole.

1.8 This independent review is intended to help the Welsh education system move to the next level of performance. It is important to acknowledge the successes and achievements of the leadership provision within the system to date, but this review, in line with the Ministerial

⁵ <https://www.oecd.org/publications/achieving-the-new-curriculum-for-wales-4b483953-en.htm>

⁶ <https://ncee.org/center-on-international-education-benchmarking/top-performing-countries/>

statement, is about looking ahead. Inevitably, this means offering some informed critique and advice to the system based on the data the team collected. Focusing on future possibilities and directions for leadership development presents the possibility of further strengthening leadership capability and capacity within the Welsh system.

1.9 As an independent review team, we have learned a great deal in the past few months. We remain enormously impressed by the commitment, dedication, and professionalism of those leading, at all levels, within the Welsh education system. What follows in this review, therefore, is a consideration, based on evidence, about the ways in which leadership provision in Wales could be even stronger and more impactful. The review is not a critique of any organisation (s) or group (s) within the system but rather offers a summary of the evidence we heard from a wide range of respondents.

1.10 As a review team we have stayed within the remit outlined by the Minister of Education on the 9th of February 2021 and ensured that our methodology has focused primarily on those aspects highlighted in the Ministerial statement. To ensure that our processes and reporting have been independent, rigorous, and appropriate, we have had the benefit of external scrutiny and feedback from Professor Carol Campbell, OISE, University of Toronto.

1.11 The following findings are intended to be constructive and helpful, to the new Minister, in deciding a future course of action that will set Wales firmly on a route to even further improvement. They are based on the data we collected during the course of the review.

1.12 The international evidence⁷ repeatedly, and consistently underlines the centrality of effective leadership, at all levels, to improve learning and teaching. The positive influence of effective leadership on learner outcomes is empirically, very clear. Therefore, improving

⁷ Leithwood, K., Harris, A., & Hopkins, D. (2020). Seven strong claims about successful school leadership revisited. *School leadership & management*, 40 (1), 5-22.

leadership capability and capacity, even further, in the Welsh system is critical to securing better school and system performance.

1.13 Overall, the review team found a deep consensus, from those interviewed, about the need to improve the quality of leadership provision in Wales, even further. The review team was impressed by the professionalism, commitment, and dedication of all those interviewed, this is unquestionably a strength of the system.

1.14 The main findings from the independent review are outlined in this executive summary and substantiated in subsequent parts of the report.

- The Welsh Government's commitment to, and investment in, leadership provision is widely recognised and appreciated across the system.
- Provision for senior leaders in Wales is currently extensive, varied, and wide ranging. There has been a steady expansion of leadership provision generally, within the system, in recent years.
- The regional consortia receive the largest proportion of Welsh Government funding⁸ for leadership training and development, including the regional delivery of the National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH). The National Academy for Educational Leadership (NAEL) also receives direct funding from the Welsh Government.
- Expansion of provision for senior leaders has inevitably followed funding allocations and the contours of policy priorities. In some cases, additional provision has created some over-supply and duplication in the system.

⁸ Approximately GBP 1 million (recurrent grant) directly to fund the National Academy for Educational Leadership (NAEL), GBP 0.4 million for the delivery of the Academy Associates programme (for serving head teachers to support NAEL), GBP 1 million to fund accredited leadership programmes, and GBP 0.7 million to regions for delivery of the National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH)

- The unevenness and bulking of leadership provision, in some parts of the system, means that the leadership offer is not always consistent or clear to senior leaders.
- Current levels of support for leaders around curriculum preparation, implementation and realisation is an issue. Cross regional professional learning focused on curriculum support is being rolled out in 2022
- Regional consortia differ markedly in terms of structure, culture, and capacity. National programmes offer some consistency, through a common design, as does cross regional working, but the quality of delivery and support is variable at a regional and local level.
- Impact assessment models differ widely across current providers and programmes. Impact assessments processes are not consistent nationally, there is an over-reliance on self-report.
- A comprehensive, coherent, and well understood system overview of all training, development, and support for senior leaders would be beneficial.
- The leadership opportunities offered by organisations within the middle tier are not always clearly differentiated or indeed, complimentary.
- The NPQH is generally viewed as an important threshold qualification. An external review of the current NPQH model is both important and necessary to ensure it remains fit for purpose and meets the needs of school leaders in the future.
- Senior leaders outside the mainstream school sector. (e.g., senior leaders in special schools, faith schools, further education, those with business responsibilities those with governance roles and those in independent schools) feel that they are not well catered for in term of bespoke, contextualised, sector specific, leadership development.
- The courses and programmes of practical support offered by Unions and Professional Associations tend to be valued and appreciated by senior leaders.

- The leadership support and training offered by local authorities is contextually based, and locally informed. Some LA provision is aligned to the regional offer, some of it is not.
- There is a tension between local, contextualised approaches to leadership provision and the need to ensure cost effectiveness and efficiency through streamlined national provision.
- The National Academy for Educational Leadership (NAEL) is making progress in establishing itself as the national body with strategic responsibility for educational leadership.
- The NAEL's endorsement and associate programmes have had some traction in the system.
- Whether the NAEL has the capacity and resources to fully deliver the remit set out by Welsh Government remains a matter of debate.

1.15 Within Wales, there is a system-wide commitment to delivering a wide-range of leadership development opportunities. The review findings reinforce that there is a large amount of training provided for senior leaders, some of which is valued and useful. The senior leaders we spoke to, however, highlighted how they feel they are responsible for navigating their own way through a set of developmental and training opportunities which are complex, convoluted, and sometimes confusing. Senior leaders spoke of being 'very unsure' about the quality of the training available to them.

1.16 Senior leaders, in our sample, expressed some concerns about the current lack of quality training and support focusing explicitly on preparing for the new curriculum. Cross regional provision that focuses on 'Curriculum for Wales' will come on stream in 2022 and is part of a wider offer of professional learning.

1.17 The review found, generally, that the impact of leadership provision is not consistently or reliably assessed within the system. How and to what extent, current provision for senior leaders impacts positively upon standards and learning and teaching in Wales, is an important consideration going forward. The challenge of measuring the impact of leadership provision is not unique to Wales but addressing this issue, at a system level, could be an opportunity not only to improve current practice but also to lead the way, internationally.

1.18 The next section offers some responses and reflections based on the data collected as part of this independent review. Where appropriate it connects and cross-references to the survey findings undertaken by an independent company.

1.19 The review team were asked to offer advice to the Minister based on the data collected, and this is contained in the section that follows.

2.0 Responses and Reflections

2.1 Across the globe, educational leadership has become a central policy priority⁹. In 2017, an OECD report pressed for a greater focus on leadership development in Wales and the speeding up of the development of new, leadership standards¹⁰. The establishment of a ‘National Academy for Educational Leadership’ (NAEL) in 2018 was the clearest signal yet of the system-wide commitment to supporting and developing educational leaders, at all levels, in Wales.

⁹ Pont, B. (2017). School Leadership for Equity: A Comparative Perspective ☆. In *The impact of the OECD on education worldwide*. Emerald Publishing Limited.

¹⁰ <https://www.oecd.org/education/thewelsheducationreformjourneyarapidpolicyassessment.htm>

2.2 The establishment of the ‘National Academy for Educational Leadership’ (NAEL) underlines the priority placed by Welsh Government on leadership throughout the Welsh system. This investment is based on a strong belief, heavily supported in the international literature, that positive school and system outcomes can result from investment in high quality and impactful leadership provision.

2.3 Evidence, from this independent review, suggests that there is considerable energy, commitment, and engagement, from all parts of the system, to provide a high-quality offer to all leaders in Wales, including senior leaders. Greater collaboration and partnership between all agencies providing leadership development, could potentially ensure that the leadership provision in Wales is more impactful and equitable.

2.4 To make a real and lasting improvement to leadership provision in Wales will require all parts of the system to work together in a coherent way to offer greater clarity, quality, and consistency in the leadership offer, at the system level. The National Masters is a recent example of successful collaboration among universities and could offer a potential model to follow.

2.5 Based on the interview and survey data collected for this independent review, the following responses and reflections are offered. The core aim of this section is to suggest areas for positive action and improvement.

In summary:

1. Support An Enhanced System Wide Approach

- It is fully acknowledged that a great deal of positive work is happening to support leaders in Wales, nationally, regionally, and locally. An enhanced system wide

approach could, however, streamline current provision even further and ensure that entitlements to leadership development and training are clear, coherent, and equitable.

- An enhanced system wide approach constructed *within* the system *for* the system, could be beneficial, particularly if it was focused upon addressing the needs of leaders in a variety of different contexts.
- A national leadership conversation, involving all relevant agencies, could further improve leadership provision in Wales.
- Some overlap and duplication of leadership provision within the system needs to be addressed through greater alignment, co-ordination, and the rationalisation between different providers.
- More cross-system cooperation and collaboration between agencies, particularly in the middle tier, could help reduce some of the differences and inconsistencies in the current provision.
- The experience of COVID-19 would also suggest that there are now far more digital opportunities to deliver programmes collaboratively and in partnership.

2. Develop and Review National Leadership Programmes

- The new curriculum is high on the educational agenda in Wales but leaders in this study reported that current provision is sometimes uneven, patchy, and in some cases, not always meeting their needs.
- A new *system-wide* programme of support for leaders, involving local, regional and national agencies, focusing specifically on curriculum implementation and realisation was considered by respondents to be important.

- A national professional qualification for headship (NPQH) has been in place for many years in Wales, although the model of engagement and delivery has changed. An external review of the current NPQH model might now be appropriate and timely.

3. Prioritise Leadership Development Opportunities that meet the needs of Senior Leaders

- The data highlight the importance of meeting the real rather than perceived needs of senior leaders operating in very different contexts, sectors, and situations.
- Needs-based assessment and the involvement of senior leaders in the development and design of future leadership provision would therefore, seem to be important.

4. Strengthen Quality Assurance and Impact Assessments

- Future funding arrangements ideally, should incentivise and facilitate the improvement of the quality and impact of provision for leaders in Wales.
- Greater cross-regional and cross-agency collaboration could potentially reduce within-system variation in leadership provision.
- Effective, reliable, and respected system-wide quality assurance processes could be considered and potentially deployed to further improve the quality of leadership provision throughout Wales.

5. Use Research and Evidence to inform Leadership Development in Wales

- Research-informed leadership provision is a feature of many effective education systems and is an established way of improving the quality of leadership.
- Greater use of international evidence in leadership programmes, therefore, could ensure that school leaders in Wales benefit from programmes based on cutting edge research.

- Leadership programmes that have a solid research foundation and are internationally recognised as excellent should be the benchmark for future provision in Wales.
- Research evidence suggests that learning from other sectors is an important part of highly effective leadership provision, as it brings in different perspectives and new knowledge. Programme design, involving evidence from other sectors (e.g., business, health, sport) could offer a way to bring fresh perspectives into future leadership provision in Wales.

3.0 Key Findings

Introduction

3.1 Leadership continues to be at the epicentre of Welsh education policy. In the past decade, Wales has embarked on an ambitious reform of its school system, most recently centred on a new curriculum in Wales designed to deliver a broad and balanced education for young people. The reforms underway seek to create an education system that enables “all children and young people in Wales to become ambitious, capable learners, enterprising, creative contributors, ethical, informed citizens and healthy, confident individuals”¹¹

3.2 The central role that leaders play in achieving system reform has been clearly underlined by the Welsh Government. Leadership is one of the main enabling objectives to support the introduction of the new curriculum and is a critical part of the on-going reform journey in Wales.

3.3. In February 2021, the Minister of Education requested an independent review of leadership. The remit for the independent review has been outlined earlier in this report but its stated purpose was to ‘inform future developments and provide clarity on the support we have for school leaders across the system, and the support they will need to enable them to realise the new curriculum’.

3.4 To deliver the new curriculum in Wales will require a huge shift in the learning and teaching processes within the system. To realise the new curriculum is now critically important

¹¹ <https://gov.wales/curriculum-wales-overview>

and the evidence from this review suggests that this is a recognised priority for many providers and for Welsh Government.

The Review Process

3.5 This section of the report briefly outlines the methodology that underpinned the review process. The limitations of time and resource are clearly acknowledged and accepted in this review. With any research process, there are always limitations and constraints, and critique. In the time available, however, the team collected evidence from 132 respondents through interviews or focus groups with the core team. It is accepted that this could be considered a small sample, but all main agencies and providers were included. (Appendix A contains a list of respondents categorised by type and organisation.

3.6 An interview schedule was designed for the main providers of leadership training, support, and development in Wales. This interview schedule reflected the main lines of enquiry set out in the Ministerial statement. This interview schedule was piloted, and minor changes were made based on expert feedback. A practitioner interview schedule was also developed for use in focus groups of headteachers, deputy headteachers and assistant headteachers. This interview schedule covered the same areas of enquiry. All participants received the questions in advance of the data collection, no comments about the questions were raised by participants prior or during the interview/focus group data collection process. All participants had the opportunity to offer the review team supplementary evidence through a pro-forma, some completed this form others did not.

3.7 A core team member was present at every interview and focus group, mostly there were two core team members present at each data collection point and where possible, all four core team members were present. Members of the practitioner team were present for the interviews with school leaders. All interviews except one or two, were recorded with the explicit

permission from participants, and used only for the purpose of the review. The principles of confidentiality and anonymity were established prior to the data collection with participants. It was confirmed by Welsh Government that all digital recordings would be destroyed once the review process was over. Extensive notes were taken by the core team following each interview and focus group and a member of Welsh Government attended every interview in a non-participatory role.

3.8 Prior to each interview and focus group, an information pro-forma was sent to each interviewee. Before the interviews took place, all completed information sheets where they were available, were considered by the team and retained as important background information.

3.9 An independent, on-line survey was developed to capture the views of more practitioners in the system. This was disseminated through DYSG, the regional consortia and Twitter. The survey was aimed only at senior leaders in the system. The design of the survey was informed by the review questions but the data-collection and analysis was undertaken by a private company. A summary of the findings appears in Annex 1. The survey findings were incorporated into the thematic findings from the interview and survey data.

Findings

3.10 The review team was impressed by the professionalism, commitment, and dedication of all those interviewed, this is unquestionably a strength of the system. Overall, the review team found a deep consensus, from those interviewed, about the need to further improve the quality of leadership provision in Wales.

3.11 What follows, therefore, is intended to be constructive and helpful. In any research or evaluation process it is imperative to reflect what the data show, and to follow its contours as closely as possible. Hence in this findings section we represent that data, so that the voices of those who participated in the evidence gathering can be heard. In the findings that follow,

therefore, the aim is to reflect key themes, by drawing upon the evidence collected from interviews, focus groups and the independent survey. All quotations are deliberately anonymous as this was the guarantee that the review team gave to participants at the outset.

3.12 The findings broadly follow the lines of enquiry requested in the review process outlined in the Ministerial statement in February.

3.13 Senior Leadership Provision

3.13.1 The review evidence highlighted that the current leadership provision for senior leaders in Wales is extensive, varied, and far reaching. There are numerous programmes, training routes, national courses, packages, and support opportunities open to senior leaders across Wales at a national, regional, and local level. The survey evidence noted that respondents had accessed training from a ‘huge number’ of providers. Similarly, the interview data highlighted that while there was a great deal of training on offer, it was sometimes confusing and ‘difficult to navigate’.

3.13.2 The significant expansion of provision for senior leaders, in recent years, has been fuelled by new funding allocations and by market forces. While most of this extra provision has been welcomed by senior leaders, it has also resulted in some over-supply in parts of the system and, as the survey data highlight, in some cases a duplication of provision. From the evidence collected, the greatest concern raised by the senior leaders in the sample, was the current quality of provision. While the team heard many positive accounts of useful courses and valuable training, it also repeatedly heard concerns about the quality of provision. The quotes that follow offer some insights into the strength of feeling on this issue.

‘in terms of training for headteachers in Wales, the training is very poor’ - a real lack of quality. We need better programmes for headteachers. We are not building the leaders we need or want. Most of the training is process driven or functional -instrumental not emotional’.

‘The leadership terrain in Wales is very research poor – how do we know the leadership development on offer has any basis in research?’

‘There is no intellectual basis to current leadership provision -lots and lots of stuff happens but is it really what headteachers want?’

‘Huge void in provision at present’ – headteachers are trying to fill that gap themselves by hiring a coach or buying in bespoke private training or support.’

‘Many of the courses on offer for senior leaders, tend to be procedural and pedestrian, full of ‘information sharing and in too many cases, lacking in any deep intellectual foundation’.

‘There is variability in the quality of provision and a paucity of good quality, relevant leadership training and support opportunities.’

3.13.3 The regional consortia currently offer a large share of current leadership training with local authorities and other middle tier providers, including HEIs and Unions, offering a wide range of other leadership development opportunities. Overall, the views about the quality of regional training from senior leaders in the sample tended to be mixed. Some strong reservations were expressed.

‘Regions are the main players, but they are variable in quality in terms of value for money and impact’.

‘The capacity to deliver currently varies from region to region, exacerbating differences in the nature and quality of the leadership development experiences on offer to senior leaders.’

How far the current provision meets the actual needs of senior leaders, was frequently raised issue by the practitioners we interviewed. There was a common view from senior leaders in our sample that future provision should be far more needs-based and that senior leaders should have a key role in identifying future areas for support, training, and development.

‘There is a need for co-construction of training between headteachers and regions - how do regions know what they provide is what headteachers want?’

3.13.4 The data revealed quite marked differences in regional delivery models, and in their respective capacity to deliver leadership programmes, including those at a national level.

3.13.5 The unevenness and bulking of some leadership provision, within the system, was also highlighted in the data. There would appear to be a tension between local, contextualised approaches to leadership provision and the need to ensure cost effectiveness and efficiency through streamlined national provision.

3.13.6 It was also noted by some respondents in the study, that the current provision for senior leaders tended towards ‘homogeneity and reflected an approach that does not encourage creativity, innovation or risk-taking’. It was proposed, by some headteachers, that the current leadership provision needs upgrading and refreshing to meet current needs, particularly around the new curriculum.

‘We are literally a year away from delivering a new curriculum and the training does not reflect this. Where is the curriculum leadership provision, it’s just not there! Surely this has to be a national priority right now not school improvement?’

‘There is a new national coaching and mentoring programme but how will that help us deliver the new curriculum. We seem to get what is offered but not what we need.’

3.13.7 While there was a great deal of positive support for the leadership offer in the regions, some of the senior leaders we spoke to, raised issues about the scope and range of delivery.

‘Most good heads just look elsewhere including commercial organisations for their training and support. What we have is piecemeal, variable quality and it is not hitting the mark, it is instrumental and top down. Yet, the current policy framework (curriculum reform, SLOs etc) requires much more enabling and inclusive forms of leadership’.

‘The regions have a monopoly but that doesn’t always guarantee good quality. ESTYN-like quality assurance mechanisms should be in place to guarantee that all the leadership courses on offer are proven to be effective and impactful.’

More cross-organisational cooperation and collaboration could be a positive way to address any differences and inconsistencies in current provision. The experience of COVID-19 would also suggest that there are now far more digital opportunities to deliver programmes in partnership.

3.13.6 Many of the senior leaders the team interviewed, spoke about an ‘credibility gap’ in the training on offer.

‘Leadership programmes are delivered by people who are not headteachers themselves-who do not understand the role. How can this be helpful to us?’.

‘Too many providers are too distant from the classroom – more concerned with feeding the machine than meeting the real needs of headteachers’.

It was noted by many school leaders that the regions tended to provide leadership opportunities that predominantly focused on school improvement issues and that many other areas of headship (e.g., finance, HR, crisis management) were not covered in quite as much depth.

3.13.7 The survey analysis revealed that most of the courses undertaken by the respondents, who were mainly headteachers, focused on critical areas of the job (e.g., grievance, delegation, trauma, and finance). A number of headteachers we interviewed commented that they went to their Union or Professional Association for ‘good quality, practical courses’. The survey also noted the importance and value senior leaders placed upon peer training and support. This included on the job training, through deputy headship roles that give senior leaders supported development opportunities from headteachers. It also included approaches such as secondments, where participants were able to learn in new school environments or contexts. Respondents also valued formal support from peers through mentoring programmes or approaches. Other respondents felt more informal arrangements where they would discuss and share ideas on general leadership and practice with colleagues (both externally and internally_ could be ‘extremely valuable.’

3.13.8 Cross-regional working was generally welcomed by senior leaders, and the national programmes were seen as an important way of streamlining leadership provision and providing greater consistency. While some respondents stressed support for the national programmes, others highlighted certain equity issues.

‘The national programmes may be the same, in principle but the delivery differs locally. Much depends on where you are in Wales’.

‘The quality of leadership training varies, at the point of contact, from region to region.’

‘Training is a post-code lottery it depends on where you are and who you are working with’.

‘My regional consortium is great but other headteachers tell me a different story, what you get depends on where you live.’

3.13.9 The survey data also highlighted that some senior leaders felt that the consistency of training provision was an issue.

‘Many noted that the training available varied a great deal depending where in Wales respondents were based and which organisations they had access to.’

While the programmes may be the same in each region, the team heard that regional differences in personnel, context and need etc. could make the quality of the learning experience different.

3.13.10 Local training, offered by the local authorities, was generally viewed favourably, by the senior leaders we spoke to because they said it was ‘bespoke and context specific’. The local flavour of the training was deemed to be particularly important for new headteachers who were ‘getting to know the patch’. The opportunity to network with other headteachers in the same setting or context was also seen as strength of the local authority support. The peer-to-peer network support was also highlighted favourably, in the survey, along with the support from local authority challenge advisers.

3.13.11 Generally, the response to local authority training was positive from the senior leaders, we interviewed, as was the peer training provided by ESTYN. Many school leaders articulated that the ESTYN peer training was ‘the best training on offer’ because they considered it to be directly relevant to their work, needs based and delivered by experts who actually ‘understand the job’. In the survey, the views on ESTYN support were more mixed.

‘The ESTYN webinars and releases have been limited in terms of their helpfulness as they are simply reporting back on information, they have gleaned from us as schools as to what has been going on in schools throughout the pandemic’.

Many of the senior leaders we interviewed said that it would be very useful to have a national ‘system-level’ roadmap of all leadership provision in Wales that could be clearly understood and followed.

3.13.12 While the accumulation of provision in recent years for senior leaders was generally welcomed, it was noted by those we interviewed that the hallmarks of quality assurance have sometimes been lacking. One headteacher commented,

‘We keep doing what is cheap and ineffective, we need to invest in effective training, whatever it costs.’

The need for better quality provision, carefully targeted and relevant to senior leaders’ needs and experiences was a recurrent theme from the interviews. Clearer mechanisms of quality control and assessment, it was suggested, are needed that are reliable and robust. ESTYN was mentioned by several respondents as needing to play a more extensive role in quality assuring senior leadership provision, as ultimately, ‘the quality of leadership in our schools will be inspected’.

3.13.13 Given the major challenges associated with curriculum reform, it was felt by some senior leaders that we interviewed that a coherent system-wide package of support and training was important to help leaders prepare for the new curriculum.

‘Headteachers are the leaders of learning and yet, the whole leadership discourse is not focused on leading curriculum change’.

‘We are asked to implement a new curriculum but where is the national training that focuses explicitly on leadership?’

The independent review team were aware of a range of professional learning courses focused on curriculum issues at local, regional and national level including the forthcoming cross-regional offer in 2022.

3.13.14 It is unclear, to many of the senior leaders we interviewed, how and indeed whether, the many leadership opportunities available to them join up in any coherent way. They highlighted the need for clearer communication about the pathways to headship.

3.13.15 Research evidence highlights the importance of supporting newly qualified and experienced school leaders so that they can continue to make a positive difference to their school, their learners, and their community. Possibly, the leadership provision on offer to those newly appointed to headship and those established in post, could be expanded.

3.14 Impact Assessment

3.14 While there are impact assessment approaches in place for different leadership development and training programmes, many of these approaches rely on self-report and thus depend solely on the views of the individuals involved. The review team learned that many of the programme evaluations, including some national programmes, are undertaken by the providers themselves, calling into question the degree of independence.

‘We don’t know enough about the quality of leadership provision or the impact it is having.’

‘We ask leaders to reflect on their own learning and we use self-report as the main impact assessment tool.’

‘All leadership training and development is routinely evaluated, and participants’ views and reflections are captured.’

3.14.2 The review team learned that the regional consortia have been addressing the issue of impact assessment in their different ways. For example, the EAS uses a process known as FADE to capture high level evaluation. In September 2019, the University of South Wales was selected, through a competitive tender process, to work with the EAS and several schools to support the development of a revised professional learning impact and quality assurance model. This quality assurance model incorporates a set of quality indicators for professional learning delivery that align to the National Approach to Professional Learning (NAPL), the Professional Standards for Teaching and Leadership and Schools as Learning Organisations agenda.

3.14.3 The Kirkpatrick model was mentioned by some ERW regional respondents as their adopted approach to programme evaluation and impact assessment. The Kirkpatrick approach was developed more than 70 years ago and has been widely used to evaluate medical education programs. Interviewees who mentioned this model did not elaborate on the way it was used to improve provision or the types of data that informed the four levels (see footnote).

3.14.4 The ‘National Coaching and Mentoring Programme’ is currently being delivered by the Results Driven Group (RDG¹²). RDG are the private management training company, based in Derbyshire, who have been contracted to develop and deliver the National programme. The company offer Chartered Management Institute¹³ accreditation and City and Guilds ILM¹⁴ qualifications. The impact assessment and evaluation process of this programme is being jointly led by RDG and the regions. A questionnaire has been devised by both parties and has been disseminated by regional leads. RDG will be collating that data into a final report which they are contracted to deliver.

¹² <https://www.resultsdrivengroup.co.uk/Home.aspx>

¹³ <https://www.managers.org.uk/>

¹⁴ <https://www.cityandguilds.com/members>

3.14.5 On balance, the review found that impact assessment processes vary across all providers within the system making it difficult to gauge, with any degree of certainty, how far the leadership programmes collectively are making a real difference to standards, teachers, and learners in Wales.

‘There are gaps in provision -lots and lots of very busy activity but many of the courses make little if any difference to my practice let alone my students’.

‘It is questionable what impact, if any, current leadership preparation and development is having on learners- after all they should be the starting and end point.’

3.14.7 Research evidence consistently shows that school leadership has an indirect but positive effect on students’ learning outcomes. Consequently, it would seem important to assess the impact of leadership provision on pupils, their learning, and the quality of the teaching they receive. Deploying data capture models that can do this effectively and consistently could potentially be part of a future system wide development.

As one respondent noted ‘leadership development should be judged not what I say on a happy sheet or in my reflection but in terms of how the most marginalised pupils in my school are affected by my leadership training and development’.

3.14.8 Effective, well-respected, and independent quality assurance processes therefore present one area for future consideration.

3.15 Current Leadership Providers

3.15.1 As noted earlier, the current leadership provision for senior leaders in Wales is wide-ranging, with a great deal of strengths at the local, regional, and national level. Senior leaders we spoke to, noted that a huge amount of training was on offer but that it was difficult often, for them to navigate their way through the proliferation of different options. Outside

mainstream education, leaders in special schools, further education, those governance roles or local authority roles, emphasised that they had far fewer leadership development opportunities than school leaders.

3.15.2 In terms of the private sector, the review team heard that certain commercial organisations (e.g., Toyota) are involved in bespoke forms of training and this is viewed very positively. As already noted, the ‘National Programme of Coaching and Mentoring’ programme commissioned by the consortia is being delivered by a private organisation located outside Wales. In general, however, private sector involvement in leadership training and development in Wales remains relatively modest.

3.15.3 The review panel heard how local authorities continue to play a key role in offering leadership support and training that is contextually based and locally informed. Some of this provision is aligned to the regional offer, some of it is not. Most of the senior leaders we spoke to value the contextualised nature of the support from local authorities and appreciated their links with other local schools. Local authority provision was generally felt by respondents to be an important arm of support for new and more experienced headteachers.

3.15.4 Networking with other schools locally was viewed by respondents as uniformly positive and a support mechanism that senior leaders currently rely upon. The survey similarly noted that there was an ‘appetite for greater opportunities for informal, practice-based forms of training and support, such as networking, coaching and mentoring’.

3.15.5 Middle tier engagement in leadership development is part of current provision. There was a positive view from respondents that the middle tier is beginning to work in a more joined up way and that there is more collaboration between parts of the middle tier than there was previously.

‘I think we’re much more collaborative and integrated than we ever were because we actually have the opportunity to share what we’re doing, and organisations are more open.’

Senior leaders acknowledged that there was more co-operation in the middle tier that was visible and tangible but noted that while there has been significant progress in recent times, ‘there is still a need for further clarity and clarification of roles and responsibilities in the middle tier.’

3.15.6 Other views from senior leaders we spoke to, suggested that because the middle tier has been constructed over time and therefore, is not one coherent space, this impacts on the clarity of purpose and the nature of their provision.

‘There is too much silo working in the middle tier between different organisations and a lot of them have some overlap in what they do.’

The survey also noted responses such as:

‘I feel this ‘middle tier’ is flooded and has added to the pressure on school leaders as we try to establish which meetings/webinars/seminars are essential or worth linking with. The consortium is using schools across the region to share practice which is not always of the highest quality’.

3.15.7 Without question, the middle tier, of which higher education is part, is a complex ecosystem and some respondents we spoke to proposed that it is ‘too overcrowded’. Respondents from schools noted that understanding and navigating their way through the leadership offer from those within the middle tier was a challenge. Some school leaders spoke about being ‘overwhelmed and confused’ by the different offers from middle tier agencies.

‘The middle tier doesn’t join up-it is a patchwork – it isn’t systemic or useful’.

‘Support is very hit and miss, the middle tier is part of a wider structural problem that contributes to the disparity in provision.’

‘It is important that Middle Tier developments are viewed as inter-related not separate- it is important to see the links. This requires a different way of working – it requires co-construction, collaboration and leadership’.

The comments the review team heard about the middle tier would suggest the need for greater clarity around roles and responsibilities, in relation to leadership provision, and possibly some rationalisation of provision through greater partnership working.

3.14 National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH)

3.14.1 The National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH) in Wales is widely accepted and acknowledged as an important quality benchmark that has a strong currency as a threshold standard into headship. The views on NPQH from the evidence collected were divided. Some senior leaders felt that it was a sound qualification in its current form and that the NPQH currently acts as a quality assurance badge of confidence.

‘It is rigorous, and I think we need that quality assurance so that when governors are appointing headteachers, they know that the people sitting in front of them are proven by their peers to be effective practitioners.’

The survey findings also revealed mixed reviews about the NPQH from respondents. There was some conditional support for the qualification along with the recognition of the importance of preparation for leadership. In contrast, some survey respondents felt that the qualification and overall approach could be improved by more focus on practice and making greater use of mentors.

‘With so little opportunity to prepare for headship I feel this needs to be maximised. Maybe not in its current form but through a coaching and mentoring system where a candidate works in partnership with serving HTs from their sector to see the reality of the job and develop their skills to undertake it’.

The interview and focus group data highlight the example of people taking on complex and difficult acting head roles, and then waiting to complete the NPQH, or grappling with it while undertaking their existing role. There were also views that the previous model of NPQH was better. Frequently across the interviews, senior leaders commented positively about the previous NPQH noting that it gave them the chance to develop a support network. There were also some concerns, from senior leaders, that the NPQH assessments could be repeated until candidates were successful.

‘It’s just about getting people to jump through hoops – people can be successful at NPQH because they are good at filling in the form and talk a good talk.’

‘Everyone is just thrown in to try to answer the same questions – a predictable and a low-level tick box exercise. If you fail you just try again, until you get the answers right’.

The previous NPQH had rigour, you had to learn stuff, you were put through your paces, now you just work through the assessments until you learn to jump the hoops.’

‘It’s probably time for a review – it is very much a paper exercise.’

3.14.2 There was also a view, largely but not exclusively from headteachers, that the NPQH was primarily about management and not leadership. As an assessment process, many headteachers felt the NPQH was simply a mechanistic exercise, a managerial task rather than

an exercise in authentic leadership. It was also noted by some headteachers that NPQH was ‘creating compliance in the system rather than sparking innovation’.

3.14.3 Based on the evidence gathered, the review team suggest that an external review of NPQH could be both helpful and timely for the system.

3.15 National Academy for Educational Leadership (NAEL)

3.15.1 As a relatively new middle tier organisation, the National Academy for Educational Leadership (NAEL) has contributed to system level provision primarily through its endorsement programme and the Associates’ Programme. It has recently, launched a new website¹⁵ (May 2021) that reflects all its current activities. On its website, the NAEL is described as an arm’s length organisation although its funding and remit comes directly from Welsh Government.

The NAEL’s stated main purpose¹⁶ is to:

- ‘Contribute to the development of the professional capabilities of current and aspiring leaders across the education system by providing coherence and quality assurance for the range of educational leadership development opportunities available in Wales.
- Act as a thought leader; developing, articulating, and implementing a vision and strategy for educational leadership in Wales.
- To be a respected and active member of the education middle tier, the first point of contact for the educational workforce in regard to leadership matters.

The Leadership Academy is a central feature of the education reform journey set out in ‘Education in Wales: Our National Mission, update October 2020, where it is identified by

¹⁵ <https://nael.cymru/>

¹⁶ <https://nael.cymru/about/>

Welsh Government as a key driver of Enabling Objective 2: Leadership working collaboratively to raise standards’.

3.15.2 It was noted by some senior leaders we spoke to, that they felt that the NAEL had made good progress, particularly during the COVID period, with its concentration on well-being and the provision of opportunities for leaders in schools to connect with one another. It was also noted that the webinar series has demonstrated that the NAEL ‘can reach out productively to a greater range of senior leaders and be useful to them.’ The sheer scale of the task facing the Academy was also noted.

‘The Academy is a new organisation and progress is certainly being made but there is a big job to do moving forward’.

3.15.3 As a small organisation, there are clearly issues of capacity within the NAEL to meet the many demands and expectations placed upon it. One potential way forward, suggested by some respondents, could be for the NAEL to work more closely and effectively with other organisations, within the system, particularly in the middle tier, to form strategic and operational partnerships. Such partnerships, it was suggested, could focus on key areas of the NAEL’s remit such as communication, planning, research, policy, and engagement. Working in partnership and forming closer alliances with other parts of the system, could provide NAEL with the extra capacity it needs to fully deliver its remit.

3.15.4 The NAEL’s Academy Associates programme brings in serving head teachers who are expected to support other leaders in the education system. There is now a third cohort of associates, and an independent evaluation of the Associates programme has recently been commissioned.

3.15.5 Questions were raised by some senior leaders, about the Associates' Programme which receives £0.4m of the Academy's budget annually.

'The Associates' Programme is a good opportunity for the individuals involved – but how exactly does impact on the system?'

'Many headteachers do not know about the NAEL or the Associates programme- yet the Academy is supposed to be for us!'

3.15.4 Many respondents, including those who completed the survey, suggested that they remain unclear about the NAEL's role and expressed concerns that the NAEL was poorly understood by schools. Survey respondents offered mixed reviews of NAEL and many respondents were not aware of NAEL, or the support it is able to offer:

'The NAEL has had no impact on me in my role. If I did not see the occasional tweet or mention in the CSC bulletin about them, I wouldn't even notice that they exist'.

The interview and focus group data highlighted similar views about the visibility of the NAEL.

'Many within the profession, remain unclear about the Academy's role.'

'The Academy's role is indistinct in the mind of the profession. The NAEL need to get a sense of brand and purpose nationally.'

'Many teachers still don't know about the NAEL - we can be doing fantastic things but if people don't know about it- it just falls on deaf ears.'

'There are a lot of people who don't understand the role of the Academy.'

'We should be able to say quite clearly as school leaders really what the National Academy does, what it stands for, how it delivers and the interactions we have with it, and I can't say that right now.'

3.15.5 As noted already, the Academy is a symbol of the commitment by Welsh Government to building leadership capacity for further system improvement. The review evidence would suggest that, based on the data we heard, the potential of the NAEL has yet to be fully realised.

3.15.6 Some senior leaders suggested to the team that the NAEL and the regional consortia sometimes appeared to be in competition with each other in terms of leadership support to senior leaders. The regional consortia and the NAEL tend to be viewed by senior leaders as separate rather than part of a holistic and integrated system of leadership support. Clarifying the mandates and boundaries of organisations that offer different types of leadership provision could present new opportunities for growth and improvement within the system.

4.0 An Enhanced System Wide Approach

4.1.1 Our independent review findings suggest that an enhanced, system wide approach to leadership offer in Wales, involving all agencies, could offer greater clarity, coherence, and programme alignment. Based on our data, the leadership offer in Wales is currently viewed to be in the ‘hands of too many competing bodies’.

‘In a self-improving system who is leading on leadership? At present, in Wales, the answer is everyone and no-one.’

4.1.2 As an independent review team, our conclusions are based solely on the evidence we received in the time frame allocated. We have duly acknowledged the limitations of this review earlier in the report. It is fully accepted that we do not, and cannot have, have perfect knowledge of all parts of the system and all contributions. The intention of this independent review was to offer advice to the Minister not to present a comprehensive compendium of all leadership provision and activities. Based on the evidence we collected, we conclude as a review team that an enhanced system-wide approach to leadership development in Wales could prove to be beneficial.

4.1.3 As noted earlier, our review did not focus on funding arrangements as forensically as we anticipated or hoped. The evidence we collected, however, would suggest that funding arrangements for leadership development in the future might need to reflect and support a more coherent and enhanced system-wide approach to leadership development.

‘There is a golden opportunity to do more to collectively and considerably move the leadership agenda forward in Wales, but this means losing huge swathes of useless courses.’

4.1.4 Going forward, a system-wide leadership approach that is clear and well understood by the profession, could be constructed *within* the system *for* the system. The collective engagement of all stakeholders will be an important consideration in addressing some of the issues this review has highlighted. Possibly, a purposeful, collaborative but time-limited, leadership conversation among core players in the leadership arena could productively re-shape, redefine, and re-ignite leadership provision in Wales.

‘It is important not to compartmentalise the issues- collaboration and working together more will generate the direction we want to go in, for leadership provision throughout Wales’.

‘There has to be clear leadership from the Minister – the incentivisation of collaboration through funding mechanisms and the devaluing of competition.’

4.1.5 An enhanced system-wide approach could result in a clearer ‘leadership offer’ that meets the contemporary needs of all leaders in Wales. As all providers acknowledged, equity and quality should be the core drivers of leadership provision both now and in the future.

4.1.6 As a small system, programme coherence, alignment, and rationalisation should all be perfectly possible in Wales. A comprehensive research-informed approach, underpinned by systematic and valid quality assurance and impact assessment processes, could further build upon the considerable leadership capability and capacity in Wales. A system-wide approach

that draws on the considerable strengths within the system could produce synergies and efficiencies.

4.1.7 In summary, a system wide approach to leadership provision, has the potential to galvanise positive changes in system performance quickly. Such an approach will require collaboration and greater synergy between all parts of the system.

‘It is important to think about the system, not just your patch’.

‘If we want Wales to take the next step, we need confident, empowered leaders, at all levels of the system, –all pushing in the same direction at the same rate’.

‘This is not just about investment in leadership, it is an investment in building the capacity for change and improvement in the Welsh system, so that every young person benefits.’

4.1.8 To conclude, as a self-improving system, Wales needs leaders who have moved from passive engagement to dynamic empowerment through being more self-reflective, more critical and more research informed. There are unquestionably, many positives in the current leadership provision within the Welsh education system, locally, regionally and nationally. The purpose of this review was to reflect the views we heard, and to offer informed challenges to the system and advice based on the data that we (and others) collected. The prime aim of this review is to help the Minister and the Welsh Government consider options around leadership provision that could have a dramatic and positive impact on the Welsh education system in the future.

Appendix A

Organisation	Number of people	Notes
Trade Union Reps	4	Senior Leaders
Unions	3	Directors
Regional consortia Managing Directors	5	ERW has two joint chief officers
Welsh Government	3	Deputy Directors, Headteachers of Branch and Senior Manager
Welsh Government Deputy Director	1	
Regional Consortia Professional Learning Leads	6	Professional Learning Leads
Regional Consortia Leadership Leads	6	Regional Leads

Estyn Headteacher peer inspection group	17	Headteachers
External Professors	2	
Estyn	3	CEO and Directors
Education Workforce Council	1	CEO
Special school headteacher	1	Head
Practitioner focus groups	40	Varied Senior leaders – deputy headteachers, assistant headteachers and headteachers
Local Authority	3	Director and Headteachers of Service
OECD	1	
External expert	1	
ADEW	4	Directors
Welsh medium school headteacher group	5	Headteachers
Diocesan Education Directors	8	Directors
CEO National Academy for Educational Leadership	1	CEO
National Academy for Educational Leadership Assistant Directors	2	Assistant Directors
National Academy for Educational leadership Associates	5	

National Academy for Educational Leadership Chair & Board members	7	Chair and Board Members
Higher Education Institutions	3	

□

Annex 1



Leadership Review Survey Analysis

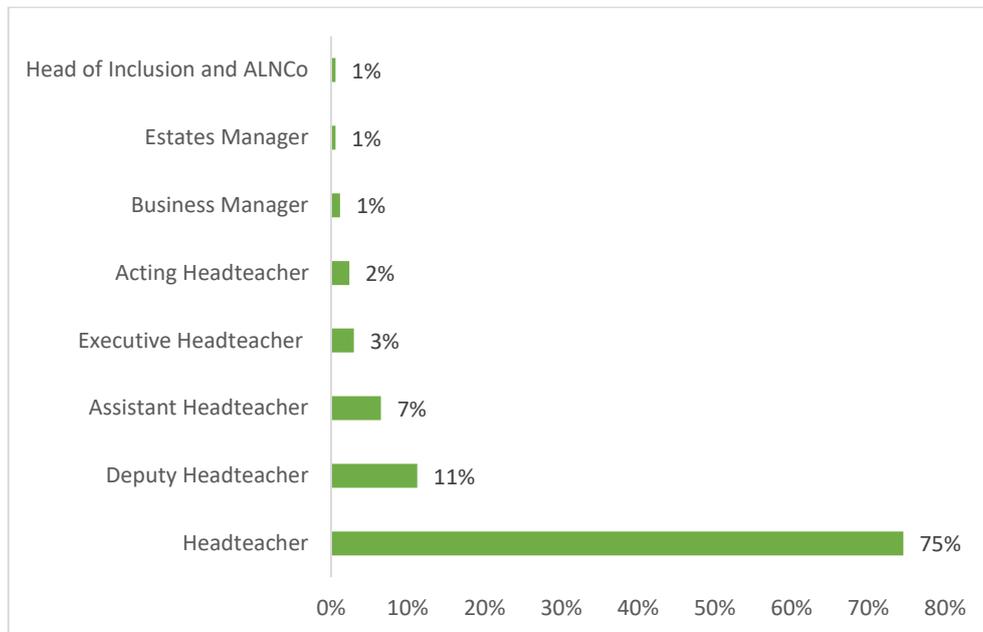
This report provides an independent analysis of responses to a survey distributed as part of the leadership review. The survey was distributed to senior leaders across Wales and explored their views towards training and support available to them. Across the survey, respondents were asked a range of open questions designed to illicit views and experiences of leadership training and support. This report communicates the main themes emanating from responses. It is intended to complement and support broader analysis presented within the leadership review.

Responses

The survey was distributed to senior leaders working in schools across Wales. The majority of those responding to the survey were headteachers (75 percent, N= 126). Deputy headteachers and

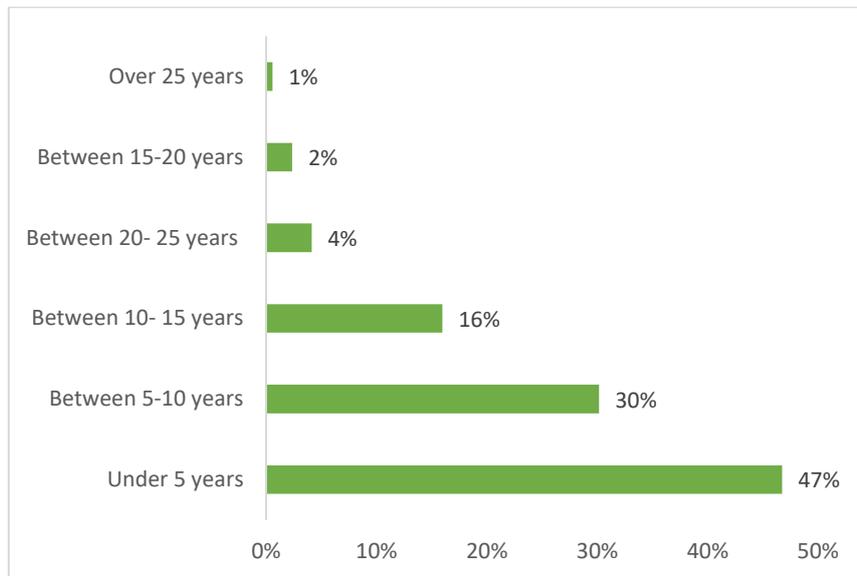
assistant head teachers made up 11 percent and 7 percent of respondents respectively (N= 19 and N= 11). The remaining respondents were involved either in assistant, executive or other specialist management roles:

Figure 1. Respondents and current senior leadership roles (N=169)



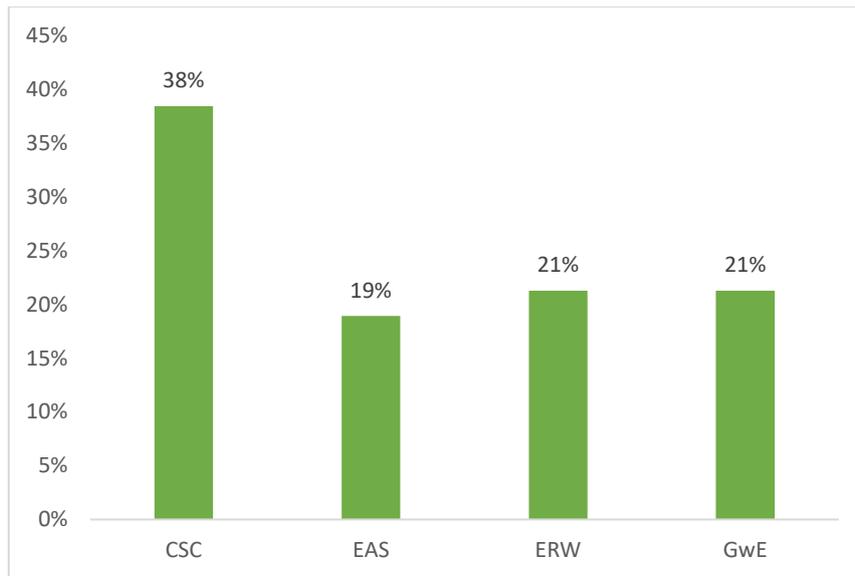
Just under half of all respondents had been in their roles for 5 years or less (47 percent, N=79). With increasing time in post, the overall proportion of respondents falls, with one percent of respondents being in post for over 25 years:

Figure 2. Respondents and length of time in their current post (N=169)



Respondents also work in schools across the four Consortia areas in Wales. Central South Consortium is well represented within the sample (N= 65) with equal number of responses from ERW and GwE (N=36), and 32 responses from EAS:

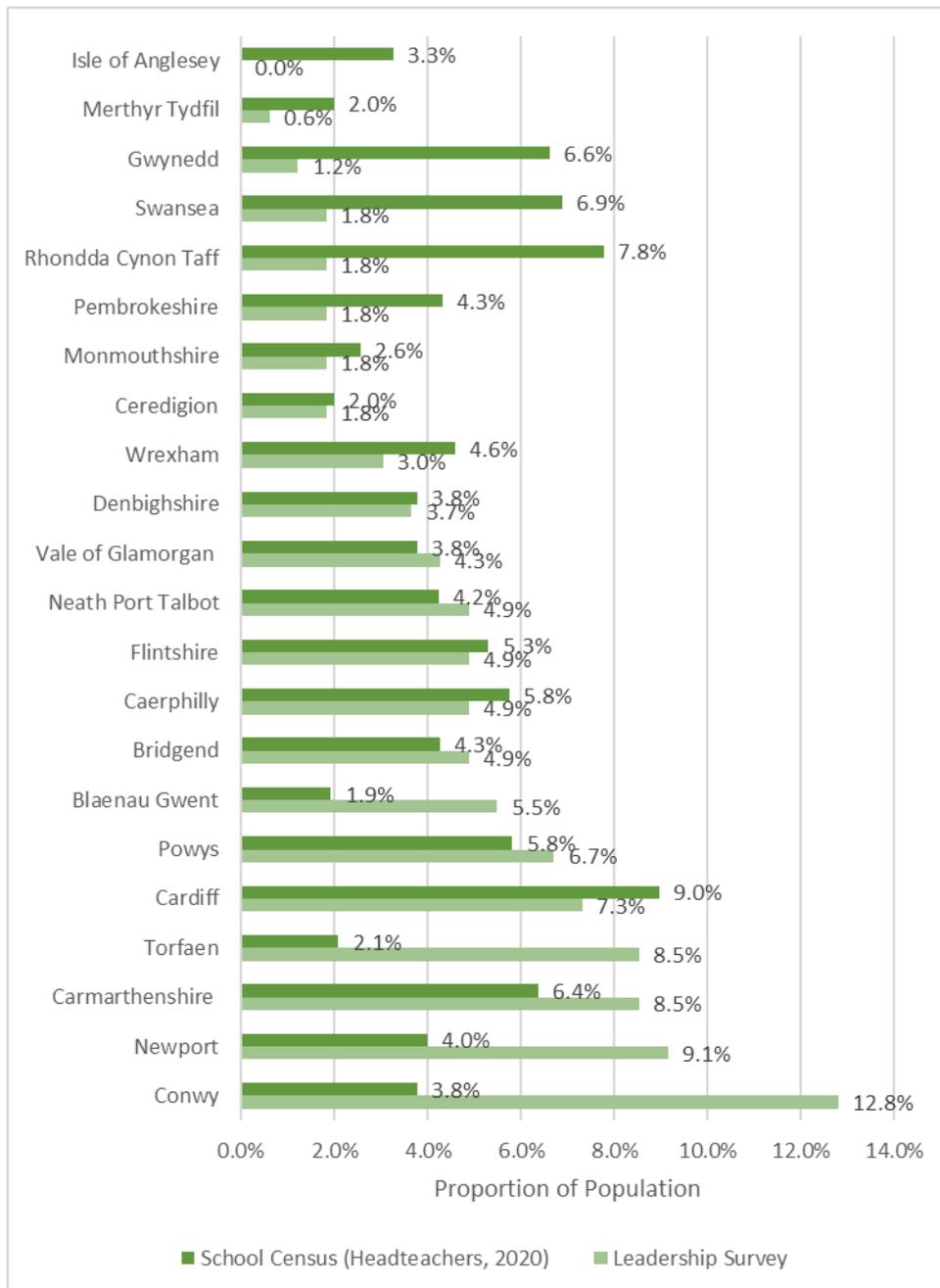
Figure 3. Respondents and Consortium area (N=169)



Respondents were also asked which Local Authority area the school in which they work resides. Comparing this information to school census data on the numbers of headteachers across Wales, most Local Authorities are well represented within those who responded to the survey.¹⁷ There are a number of Local Authorities that are either under or overrepresented within the sample of respondents. Anglesey, for example, did not receive any responses, and has 3.3 percent of all headteachers in Wales.

Figure 4. Graph to show in which Local Authority participants schools are located (N=164)

¹⁷ StatWales (2020) [Full-time equivalent teachers by local authority, region and category](#)



Approach

Information provided by respondents was analysed using thematic and sentiment analysis. This approach systematically analyses each response, exploring and drawing out the general sentiments and themes that they raise. Data was analysed using NVivo, a software package that supports the rigorous analysis of qualitative information.

Limitations

There are a number of limitations with regard to this analysis that are important to note. The respondents who kindly took the time to complete the survey may not be representative of the broader community of senior leaders from across Wales. Therefore, this analysis provides an important, however partial, account of the views and experiences of senior leaders in Wales towards training and support.

Navigating this Document

In communicating the findings of the analysis, this report follows the broader structure of the survey. Each question receives in-depth analysis of the views of respondents, before offering some brief, overarching observations across responses within the conclusions.

1. Leadership Training and Support

Within the survey, respondents were first asked:

- What leadership training or support they had found particularly helpful in their current role,
- To explain who provides this training, and
- How it had helped them.

Training and Support

Respondents highlighted a range of substantive topics covered within training and support that they had found helpful. This included general leadership training, focusing on general aspects of the role, through to more focused training exploring specific aspects or issues leaders must navigate in their roles.

General Training and Support

More general leadership training and support described by respondents itself included a diverse range of courses and types of support. It included more formal qualifications and training, such as through postgraduate qualifications in education leadership and management. It also included short courses that were general in nature, covering aspects of effective leadership.

A key theme in responses was also the importance and value peer training and support. This included on the job training, through deputy headship roles that give senior leaders supported development opportunities from headteachers. It also included approaches such as secondments, where participants were able to learn in new school environments or contexts. Respondents also valued formal support from peers through mentoring programmes or approaches. Others felt more informal arrangements where they would discuss and share ideas on general leadership and practice with colleagues both externally and internally as being extremely valuable:

Pan gychwynais fel pennaeth 20 mlynedd yn ôl, roedd cwrs mentora yn cynnwys yr holl brifathrawon newydd o Geredigio a Sir Gâr. Bydden ni'n cwrdd bob hanner tymor, gyda dau ymgynhorydd her. Bydden ni'n trafod yr heriau oedd yn ein wynbeu ac yn amlach na pheidio bydde'r un themau yn codi. Trefnu hyfforddiant perthnasol wedyn ar gyfer yr hanner tymor i ddod. Rydw i dal mewn cyswllt gyda'r penathiaid hynny, ac yn teimlo ei fod wedi ei deilwra yn arbennig i'n anghenion ni.

When I became head teacher 20 years ago, a mentoring course included all the new headteachers from Ceredigion and Carmarthenshire. We met every half term, with two challenge advisers. We would discuss the challenges that faced us and more often than not the same themes would arise. We would arrange relevant training then for the coming half term. I'm still in touch with colleagues I met 20 years ago, and feel it has been invaluable.

Headteacher, Pennaeth, Translated from the original.

Focused Training and Support

Respondents also talked about the value of more focused training and support on more specific issues and challenges surrounding leadership approaches. This included, but was not limited to, a diverse range of substantive topics:

- Wellbeing: Exploring how senior leaders support the wellbeing to staff.
- Difficult Conversations: Training in how to undertake/ deal with difficult conversations.
- Trauma: Training/learning to help deal with trauma in the school community.
- Finance/budgets: Training to help support issues around budgeting and finance.

- Profession standards: Training on professional standards.
- Dealing with conflicts/complaints: Training to support dealing with conflicts and complaints within schools.
- Grievance Training to support with dealing with grievance procedures within a school.
- Delegation and coaching: Improvements to team leading through training focused on effective delegation, in economic and efficiency terms, as well as training on coaching.
- Human Resources: Training focused on improving human resources systems, including on motivation.
- Dealing with change: The benefits of change management training were highlighted by many respondents.

Respondents described a diverse range of approaches to exploring these topics, including online resources, webinars, and seminars:

Inhouse training provided by my local authority on different aspects of my leadership role. eg safeguarding responsibilities, staffing policies and procedures, governing body responsibilities.

Headteacher, Pembrokeshire

Training Providers

Respondents described accessing training and support from a huge variety of providers and organisations. This included intensive postgraduate degrees at research institutions, through to discrete webinars and training sessions delivered by Consortia or other organisations supporting schools. Organisations offering and delivering training included public sector organisations, such as middle tier organisations including Estyn, NPQH, SIA, NAEL, LPSH, and SEF. It also included third sector organisations with an interest in supporting schools, such as local dioceses, and private providers and consultants.

Respondents also highlighted that training was either facilitated, supported and funded by the school itself, or through their own initiative, including in committing time and funding.

Limited Opportunities and Barriers to Training

Some also took the opportunity to highlight a paucity of good quality, relevant leadership training and support opportunities available to them. Others also highlighted significant barriers to engaging with training and support. Whilst these were more peripheral themes raised by small numbers of respondents, they did suggest some may experience barriers to professional development:

None. 2nd Headship and not had any time to access any of it during what has been a very intense year and what little I have seen has not seemed relevant.

Headteacher, Flintshire

How it Helped Respondents

This element of the question received the least attention in responses. Where respondents did highlight the impact of training, these tended to centre on three overarching themes, including improvements in self-efficacy and knowledge gains that ultimately lead to more effective leadership.

Improving Self-efficacy

Those discussing the impact of training and support often talked of how it helped them build confidence, or self-efficacy in the role. This enabled them to engage in leadership challenges in their schools:

Experienced headteacher programme, provided by [GWE], really challenged me and pushed my boundaries. Hugely improved my confidence and self-esteem. Coaching through GWE and through leadership coaching external provider hopefully leading to a ILM qualification. has helped me develop a coaching culture within my school and also in my other roles e.g. leadership coach and new HT mentor, peer inspector...

Headteacher, Wrexham

Improving Knowledge and Skills

Training and support also helped respondents to build a diverse range of applied knowledge in how to approach a particular leadership topic:

The programmes I undertook were useful to my role as I was able to explore the leadership standards and work towards improving skills and knowledge within each area. Having the opportunity to speak to other leaders and hear first hand from those currently in leadership roles made it real and gave a context to build conversations and discussions. The majority of my leadership courses have been inspiring the thought provoking. I also found the action research projects within the NPHQ process invaluable as it enabled me to become even more self reflective about my leadership role.

Deputy Headteacher, Merthyr Tydfil

2. Quality and Extent of Provision

Respondents were then asked for their views on the general quality of training and support provision offered to senior leaders overall, and if they perceive any gaps in provision.

General Sentiments

On the whole, respondents were generally positive about the quality of training and support provision they have received. Together, 62 respondents offered moderately positive perspectives, whilst 28 were very positive. A further 88 respondents offered neutral perspectives, and 46 offered negative perspectives. This included 22 respondents who offered moderately negative perspectives, and 24 that offered very negative reflections.

Quality of Provision

For those offering more positive perspectives, they tended to cite issues such as the broad range of training and support on offer. This included provision that helped them navigate the challenges surrounding the disruption they faced to teaching and learning over the last year. From these perspectives, respondents also expressed that the training and support had been effective and valuable:

I really rated the LPSH programme for Serving Heads.

Headteacher, Bridgend

Those offering more conditional or mixed responses tended to view that the quality and consistency of training could be highly variable. Many noted that the training available varied a great deal depending where in Wales respondents were based and which organisations they had access to. From these perspectives also, they offered suggestions on specific topics that were missing from provision:

More opportunities for those heads who have been in the role 4+ years in developing other aspects. Preparing potentially for systems leadership etc

Headteacher, Merthyr Tydfil

Conditional responses also included those who felt they were not in a position to comment. These respondents often cited that they had not accessed training or support recently, or had not received any training in preparing them for senior leadership.

Those offering more negative perspectives tended to highlight the poor nature of much of the training that they had accessed. This included perspectives that felt much training was abstract or theoretical, when they felt more practice orientated approaches may be more helpful. Some felt that there were extremely limited opportunities to engage in professional development, or that they had experienced significant barriers to engagement. Others felt that there was considerable duplication in the opportunities available, but significant gaps in provision on certain topics.

My experience was that it was non-existent or rubbish for headteachers but this may have changed now. Training for senior leaders and middle leaders is better but still not world class no matter what the OECD says. Senior leaders need to know how about HR, budgets, property management, staffing concerns as well as well as strategic direction and curriculum.

Headteacher, Denbighshire

Gaps in Provision

There were also varying perspectives on the quantity of provision. Some felt that there are many training opportunities available to leaders, but this created its own challenges:

I could go on but personally I feel this 'middle tier' is flooded and has added to the pressure on school leaders as we try to establish which meetings/webinars/seminars are essential or worth linking with. The consortium is using schools across the region to share practice which is not always of the highest quality.

Headteacher, Caerphilly

Others noted specific gaps in the topics covered within existing opportunities. Many noted the lack of training opportunities in more practical questions or challenges that they faced, including in dealing with difficult situations, or more management questions such as HR and finance. There were also gaps highlighted in topics such as systems leadership and curriculum design.

Rwy'n teimlo'n gryf bod bod penaethiaid angen llawer mwy o arweindad / hyfforddiant ar faterion rheolaethol. Gormodedd, absenoldebau staff, materion cyllidol a llywodraethu effeithiol ayyb. Yn aml y materion hyn sy'n dwyn amser Pennaeth o ddydd i ddydd.

I feel strongly that headteachers need much more guidance/training on management issues. Redundancies, staff absences, budgetary issues and effective governance etc. It is often these issues that headteachers encounter day-to-day.

Headteacher, Gwynedd, Translated from the original

Another finding is that there was extensive appetite amongst respondents for accessing greater opportunities for formal and informal peer led forms of training and support, such as networking, coaching and mentoring. Many felt that this was extremely valuable in helping them to discuss and explore particular challenges that they were facing.

I think on the whole the training is continually improving - having seen the impact of coaching I would say that a coaching approach and access to coaching right from the first stages of leadership would have a big impact

Headteacher, Flintshire

Others felt that provision could do more to differentiate teaching and learning based on experience. This was tended to be expressed by more experienced leaders, who felt there were limited opportunities available.

3. The Role of Middle Tier Organisations

Respondents were then asked for their views towards the role middle tier organisations play in training and supporting senior leaders. Middle tier organisations include, for example, Estyn, Qualifications Wales (QW), National Academy for Educational Leadership (NAEL), regional consortia, and universities.

General Sentiments

There were diverse and often strong feelings on the role of organisations in the middle tier. In terms of the general sentiments of respondents, again on the whole they felt positively about the role and contribution that middle tier organisations in supporting them. This included 70 respondents that offered moderately positive views, and a further 36 that offered very positive reflections. 76 respondents offered neutral reflections, and 45 and 23 respondents offered moderately or very negative perceptions respectively.

Key Themes

Respondents offering positive perspectives tended to focus on the quality of provision, citing specific instances or organisations where they had positive experiences. Some felt that established

relationships with organisations were important in understanding and drawing on support. This included Consortia and LAs:

Mae ganddom berthynas dda gyda'r consortia lleol ac mae'r swyddog cefnogi gwelliant yn gefnogol.

We have a good relationship with the local consortia and the school improvement officer is supportive.

Headteacher, Denbighshire, Translated from the original

Sometimes, respondents offered conflicting viewpoints around the effectiveness of support from different organisations. This may suggest that respondents had different preferences, aims, or learning styles that informed their experiences of accessing training. One respondent, for example, felt that:

Estyn very supportive - the others are viewed as being either too elite, a closed shop or plain irrelevant.

Headteacher, Vale of Glamorgan

Conversely, other respondents expressed different perceptions of specific organisations:

The ESTYN webinars and releases have been limited in terms of their helpfulness as they are simply reporting back on information they have gleaned from us as schools as to what has been going on in schools throughout the pandemic.

Headteacher, Caerphilly

Others noted the important role of middle tier organisations in ensuring senior leaders are kept up to date with the latest information and guidance. Another broader theme is the importance of coherence surrounding support offered by these organisations. Some felt that the organisations also created barriers to leaders accessing CPD opportunities:

Whilst probably well-intentioned, the constant bureaucratic demands placed on school leaders by these organisations (particularly GwE and Estyn) make it difficult to spare any

time for leadership development. Estyn in particular are often the problem rather than the solution.

Headteacher, Denbighshire

4. National Academy for Education Leadership

Respondents were then asked for their views on the role and contribution of the National Academy for Educational Leadership (NAEL) in supporting senior leaders.

General Sentiments

In terms of general perceptions of NAEL, the majority of respondents offered neutral views (N= 106). This was due, at least in part, that many respondents were not aware of the NAEL and were not in a position to comment on its potential role and contribution. Of those that held more firm views, 35 respondents were moderately positive, with a further 5 offering very positive views. Conversely, 12 respondents offered moderately negative views, and 12 offered very negative views.

Awareness of NAEL

A key theme was limited awareness of NAEL, what it offers and the role it could play in supporting senior leaders:

The NAEL has had no impact on me in my role. If I didn't see the occasional tweet or mention in the CSC bulletin about them, I wouldn't even notice that they exist.

Headteacher, Cardiff

Positive Perspectives

For those more aware of the NAEL, its objectives and the training and support it is able to offer, they were likely to offer conditional views: recognising its potential value but offering caveats. These tended to focus on how NAEL operates coherently within the support mix offered to senior leaders:

It is fairly new and has had a pandemic in a fairly critical part of its journey forward, to develop a more cohesive base for all leaders to access resources, support and insight into developing leadership throughout schools. However is it another layer and could we be utilising the skills of all excellent leaders in a more cohesive network facilitated approach?

Headteacher, Pembrokeshire

Where respondents had accessed NAEL support, they tended to hold more positive perceptions. They noted the quality of the training and support from the Academy, including in promoting best practice, facilitating networking and peer learning, and in opening access to professional development opportunities.

Early signs are really positive for us here. We are running a NAEL funded project looking at the impact of twice daily mindfulness sessions for all KS2 pupils, and then staff. This has been really helpful for us, putting us in touch with researchers and developing capacity in the staff to carry out research at a more academic level that we have done in the past.

Deputy Headteacher, Newport

5. Views towards the HPQH

Respondents were then asked for their views towards the the National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH).

General Sentiments

In terms of the general sentiments of respondents towards the qualification, the majority of respondents offered neutral views (N= 88). There were those who felt the qualification was helpful (N= 40), in which 5 respondents were very positive and 35 were moderately positive. There were also pockets of dissatisfaction with the qualification, with 18 respondents offering moderately negative perceptions, and 12 respondent offering very negative views. A further 7 respondents offered conditional support for the programme, where they felt that there was room for improvement.

Key Themes

Those offering more positive perspectives tended to think that it presented a good starting point for thinking about leadership. For those offering conditional support for the programme, they often recognised the importance of training and preparation for leadership, however felt that the qualification and overall approach could be improved. This included a greater focus on practice, with more participatory approaches and peer led training and support, and making greater use of mentors:

With so little opportunity to prepare for headship I feel this needs to be maximised. Maybe not in its current form but through a coaching and mentoring system where a candidates works in partnership with serving HTs from their sector to see the reality of the job and develop their skills to undertake it.

Headteacher, Rhondda Cynon Taff

Those who were negative believed that the course did not provide senior leaders with enough of a grounding, including in the practical challenges they are likely to encounter as they move into new roles.

6. Challenges Ahead and Conclusions

Respondents were finally asked what they felt were the main leadership challenges they would likely encounter over the coming months and years.

Respondents offered a diverse range of challenges that they anticipate in the near term. A key theme included the introduction of the new curriculum, with its greater emphasis on leading curriculum design processes and pedagogical innovation. This also included upcoming reforms to assessment and qualifications arrangements. From these perspectives, supporting and training senior leaders to effectively implement the new curriculum will be key to its success.

Another key theme is responding to the disruption caused by COVID-19, and in supporting staff to effectively respond to learners needs. This includes the concern that some learners have fallen behind, including basic skills development and in preparation for qualifications. Respondents also highlighted additional, including budgetary pressures and compliance issues that will demand their attention over the coming months and years. Respondents offered a diverse range of support that they would find useful, including around training but also more practical suggestions such as reducing bureaucratic burdens such as inspections.

Closely linked these challenges, respondents also highlighted a diverse range of specific challenges that they felt under. These included, but were not limited to:

- Lack of resources, including funding and time.
- Parental engagement and managing expectations, especially as a consequence on transitions to remote learning.
- Responding to greater challenges presenting in learners generally, including transitions into social work.
- Unable to fill vacant posts, especially in Welsh medium schools.
- Generally high workload, paper work, and increased bureaucracy
- Pressure of Inspections

Training and advice will certainly have a role to play in supporting senior leaders to address some of the challenges they highlight. Overall, the general perception of training and support was positive. Many respondents understood the value of training and support in developing skills and expertise, and on the whole most respondents could identify at least some provision or support that they had found helpful.

Where there were suggestions on how training and support could be improved, this tended to centre on issues surrounding the coherence and consistency of the offer. Responses did suggest that for a minority there remained barriers to engaging with professional development opportunities, including in time and availability. Many respondents highlighted that they valued, or would like to see more, peer learning as a route to leadership development.

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