



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

LEARNING TO BE A HEADTEACHER FOR WALES

A review of the National Professional Qualification for
Headship in Wales

Abstract

A review to evaluate the preparation and qualification of headteachers, particularly by eliciting the views of those involved, in order to determine ways in which it could be more effective for both the individual and the education system

Professor Mick Waters

March 2023

Learning to be a headteacher for Wales: Executive summary

A review of the National Professional Qualification for Headship in Wales

Professor Mick Waters

Abstract

The National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH) should continue to be a pre-requisite for headship in Wales but the programme needs significant revision. Existing methods of supporting, appointing and mentoring new headteachers need to change to take account of the revision.

The current programme

The current programme is the result of the priorities in place at the point when it was remodelled.

The driving force for the current programme was to offer appropriate support to encourage people to approach the NPQH assessment with confidence at the beginning of the education reform agenda process.

Following the adoption of recommendations of 'Successful Futures', the first step on the road to reform had been the Professional Standards for Teaching and Leadership and these became the bedrock of the NPQH from that time. There was considerable effort to ensure equity and fairness for candidates and the programme developed was generic with the same experience offered to all candidates.

The current programme is well managed within its scope. It is organised on a national basis by the regional consortia which collaborate to provide a programme of generic content. Leadership Coaches work to help candidates apply the generic nature of the programme to their setting.

The weakness in current arrangements lies more in what is not included: it is the inadequacy of the content rather than the failure of management. There is nothing bespoke or personalised about the programme, with little recognition of the circumstances of schools of a religious character or of Welsh-medium schools, special schools or Pupil Referral Units, nor even significant differentiation between primary and secondary phases.

The programme is not 'active' or sufficiently applied in the sense of being about the practical world of headship. Nor is research applied to embed leadership practices. The programme is almost entirely reflective and passive with little application of theory to practical realities.

There is a perceived lack of sufficient attention to the managerial aspects of leadership with much left to local authorities as part of a variable induction process on appointment.

The programme leaves many prospective headteachers feeling under-equipped for the role.

Substantial revision is needed.

The NPQH programme needs to focus upon quality. Sufficient headteachers need to be recruited without jeopardising the credibility of the qualification. If the standard falls short, the brand is

tainted and so it is vital that quality must prevail. The programme needs to carry weight with all stakeholders and the NPQH regarded as a prestigious qualification.

The proposed revisions to the programme

The programme and qualification should operate at a national level, under the auspices of the Welsh Government. Quality Assurance should be managed by National Academy of Educational Leadership and move from compliance checking against requirements for Masters Teaching Level 6 to matching analysis of candidates' needs to provision through stringent evaluation and moderation while maintaining rigour at the required level.

The structure and content of the programme should change.

The programme should be seen as part of a wider preparation for headship to which all communities in Welsh education contribute. The NPQH programme should be a formal preparation, adding to career long experience and support.

The NPQH programme should be of two years duration and be open to candidates able to demonstrate their experience and awareness of leadership and the commitment to learn with the assumption that they will be ready for headship at the end of the programme.

Assessment of suitability for headship should be at the beginning of the process and include 360° feedback, testing each candidate's willingness to learn. Acceptance to the programme should imply readiness for headship in two years subject to all elements of the programme being completed successfully with evident progress in the development of leadership capabilities.

The programme should include involvement in required elements plus any elective elements defined through the initial assessment audit. The programme should be active and practical where possible, immersing candidates in leadership with the expectation of feedback being provided from which they will articulate learning and act. At the same time, the demands of leadership require robust interrogation of theory and practice. The programme should be based in empirical evidence and engage candidates with theoretical perspectives in tight connection with applied and practical work.

The required elements of programme content should be:

- A comprehensive analysis of the Welsh Education Reform agenda, *where feedback will address understanding and awareness of how various policy developments affect practice in school.*
- A significant analysis of the issues of equity, in particular additional learning needs, adverse childhood experiences and adverse adolescent experiences¹, *with feedback on the extent to which schools need to respond positively to the needs of all pupils.*
- A 'live' school improvement project, supporting another school and carried out in collaboration with another colleague on the programme and supervised by the leadership

¹ Adverse Adolescent Experiences: with adolescence beginning at an earlier stage and lasting longer than previously, young people face risks to set against the opportunities of our age. Schools are major influencers in helping young people take responsibility for their own actions, a fundamental of the four purposes of the Curriculum for Wales.

coach and the host headteacher. *Feedback should focus on analysis, use of data, problem solving, strategic planning, innovation, communication and monitoring.*

- ❑ Attendance and full participation at six leadership coaching network sessions. This will involve preparatory reading, research or analysis. *Feedback should focus on understanding, critical insight, synthesising issues, skills of debate and argument.*
- ❑ Participation in an Estyn school inspection, meeting all requirements in terms of preparation, involvement and follow up. *Feedback should focus on insight, observation, analysis, reporting, teamwork, contribution and influence on the perception of inspectors.*
- ❑ Engagement with the foundation programme on managerial aspects of headship, available and presented online. *Feedback should reflect the extent of knowledge of the legal and statutory expectations and boundaries and responses to a range of potential problems that headteachers can face.*
- ❑ Engagement with the programme on school governance and accountability. *Feedback should focus on responsibilities, duties and relationships.*
- ❑ Engagement with any elective deemed essential in the audit on entry to the programme. *Feedback should be structured to build upon the objectives of the specific element.*

Further revisions

The serving headteacher for each NPQH candidate on the programme should take a three week 'wider opportunity' sabbatical to allow the candidate the opportunity to manage the school on the day-to-day basis. The headteacher sabbatical should provide opportunity for refreshment, reflection and restatement of purpose.

Leadership coaches should be trained and should guide groups of candidates through the programme.

Upon completion of the programme, each of the verified candidates should be provided with a sponsor who will work with them to identify approaching headship vacancies and their suitability for them.

Upon appointment, a new headteacher should be allocated a trained mentor who will have served between three and six years in post.

The appointment process for headships also needs revision. The process needs to focus upon selecting the right candidate for the school in its community rather than revisiting the sorts of leadership tasks that should be accepted as competently addressed through the NPQH programme.

List of recommendations and suggestions in the report.

Recommendation 01

The NPQH should be a single national programme provided and recognised under the auspices of government.

Recommendation 02

The organising body should articulate the clarity of purpose for the qualification and build the experiences and assessments, mechanisms and materials to make the programme as effective and economic as possible using expertise from a range of collaborating agencies of government and other providers.

Recommendation 03

The National Academy for Educational Leadership should assume responsibility for the quality assurance of the programme. This should include moderation, evaluation and on-going modification to content.

Recommendation 04

Estyn should evaluate the effectiveness of the school's support of all staff for leadership development as part of school inspection. That is, the extent to which the headteacher and governors deliberately and strategically enable teachers at different career stages to accumulate and use leadership experiences.

Recommendation 05

The NPQH programme should be of two years duration and end with verification.

Recommendation 06

Each candidate should access the programme through an assessment centre process.

Recommendation 07

The EWC should be asked to use the central register of all holders of the NPQH to track their development over seven years. The emerging data should be used to inform future programmes and policy as well as support local authorities in their recruitment efforts.

Recommendation 08

If, at the end of the four years after the award of the verified NPQH, the individual has not applied for headship, the qualification should lapse. Exceptions due to extenuating personal circumstances should be permitted and approved as part of quality assurance processes.

Recommendation 09

The significant point of assessment for the NPQH should be at the beginning of the programme. Following rigorous assessment, the successful candidates should be seen to have gained the NPQH (provisional) with verification occurring at the end of a two-year programme, subject to them completing all required elements of the programme to the required standard and demonstrating progress in preparedness.

Recommendation 10

Leadership coaches should be appointed to the role on the basis of clear criteria. They should be invited by application and committed to online training and briefing. Regular observation and moderation sessions should be a feature of their involvement.

Recommendation 11

Leadership coaches should work with a group of a maximum of eight candidates. The role and responsibility of the leadership coach should be carefully specified and articulated and should include oversight of each individual's progress through the programme and producing timely reports. Some elements of written 'coursework' will be assessed by leadership coaches not connected with the candidate to enable moderation.

Recommendation 12

The programme should comprise required elements and elective elements.

Recommendation 13

Those taking part in the NPQH programme should be encouraged and expected to identify and follow elective as well as required elements of the programme that give them opportunity to experience some aspects of headship and purposeful engagement with the headteacher community. In doing so, they should be supported as much as possible by their current school in terms of flexibility to provide opportunity for engagement.

Recommendation 14

For verification of the NPQH, all required elements and negotiated electives should be completed to the expected standard and the candidate should be able to offer a summary of the progress made in developing their leadership capabilities over the course of the programme with reference to each of the five leadership standards.

Recommendation 15

Recognition should be conferred on candidates with the verified NPQH at an annual and significant celebratory presentation, open to all candidates and their guest, with high level representation from the Welsh Government.

Recommendation 16

Those with the NPQH should be allocated a sponsor headteacher who will liaise with them over their next career step.

Recommendation 17

Headteacher appointment processes should accept the verified NPQH and be concerned with interviewing appropriate candidates on the basis of securing the best candidate for their school and community. The NPQH should remove the need for multiple tasks in a headship appointment assessment centre.

Recommendation 18

The validity and reliability of the NPQH should be accepted by appointing bodies as indicators of the individual's credibility and suitability for headship. The appointing body should accept this and limit their considerations to determining which candidate is best suited to their own school's circumstances.

Recommendation 19

Two years after verification, holders of the NPQH who have not secured a headship post should be expected to attend an updating programme annually as a condition of continuing registration.

Recommendation 20

Immediately upon appointment to a first headship, it should be incumbent upon the new headteacher to secure a mentor who advises from the point of appointment and before taking up the post and for the following two years. That mentor should be selected, subject to a maximum caseload, from a central directory of headteacher colleagues who are between three and six years into their own headship career. The newly appointed headteacher should inform their local authority and Chair of Governors who they have selected and the reasons for that selection.

Recommendation 21

Serving headteachers with between three and six years' experience should expect to act as mentor to a newly appointed headteacher, with training and support, as part of their own further professional development.

Recommendation 22

As well as the allocated mentor, new headteachers should be encouraged to seek the intermittent support of a very experienced headteacher, perhaps a recently retired one, to whom they can turn for sage advice born of there being little left to surprise them.

Recommendation 23

Each serving headteacher who has a member of staff taking part in the NPQH programme should be entitled and expected to take a three week 'wider opportunity' sabbatical away from their post at a suitable point during their colleague's engagement in the programme.

Recommendation 24

The issue of appointment to headship in Wales without QTS should be 'shelved' for five years when the matter can be re-visited if appropriate.

Recommendation 25

The Welsh Government should ensure the availability to all headteachers of a confidential supervision service. Headteachers should also be able to arrange a formal supervision for any colleague affected by a traumatic incident.

Suggestions

Suggestion 01

The Welsh Government could explore with interested parties the potential for using an algorithmic method to recommend vacant headship posts to prospective candidates.

Suggestion 02

Local authorities could commit to annual informal career conversations with potential headship candidates with the NPQH (provisional and verified) about the realistic possibilities for them in their community. This should be done without infringing equal opportunities legislation, for example by offering the opportunity to all candidates.

Suggestion 03

The Independent Welsh Pay Review Body (IWPRB) could be asked to consider what can be done to support schools, and particularly small schools, in more rural parts of Wales in their attractiveness to potential headteachers. This could be more subtle than financial incentives, including job share arrangements where the co-headteacher shares a role with a colleague in larger settings, or guarantees relating to regular support to offer experiences elsewhere with the school managed by a peripatetic headteacher. Similarly, a fixed-term headship appointment with a genuine offer of a post in a larger school, negotiated beforehand, providing succession planning for schools where retirement is predicted, could be considered.

Suggestion 04

The IWPRB could be asked to consider the impact of salary differentials on recruitment.

Suggestion 05

Programme organisers for the NPQH could agree on a range of approaches to recording experience and learning which will enable candidates to engage fully with the programme with added value gained through communities of interactive reflection and recording.

Suggestion 06

There is a need to look at provision for headteachers beyond the first few years. Possibilities such as fixed term secondments to a widening range of middle tier placement opportunities would refresh individuals and widen their understanding and engagement within Welsh schooling. Such fixed-term placement secondments could be built into the staffing establishment of all middle tier organisations and be part of the planned experience of

headship. The system should be mature enough to ensure that they remain fixed-term secondments rather than allow them to become rehearsals for permanent positions.

Suggestion 07

The viability of the headship of a school being 'shared' on a part-time basis in a phased retirement of the substantive headteacher with a deputy headteacher leading the school on an interim basis should be considered by relevant stakeholders.

Suggestion 08

The Welsh Local Government Association and ADEW could consider nominating each of the local authorities as the national champion for an aspect of the managerial role of the headteacher. This champion would maintain a national guide to necessary statutory and legislative practices, lead regional dissemination (optional and compulsory) of new or prevalent management practice likely to trouble headteachers and use colleagues in other local authorities to support their efforts. These people would become the 'last word' on difficult issues and would be respected for their authoritative expert knowledge.

Suggestion 09

The IWPRB could be asked to consider appropriate provisions for headteachers in rare situations where their appointment has not worked. If, during the first eighteen months of headship, the signs are that the appointment was a mistake, it could be possible for the headteacher to request a return to the role of deputy headteacher and placement in another similar school locally or beyond without prejudice. The local authority would facilitate the move with the individual's salary pegged at its current level until salary rises and increments of the deputy headteacher overtake. The individual would be released from circumstances that have not worked with benefit to well-being and opportunity to rebuild personal professional credibility. The school would be more secure with new leadership.

Suggestion 10

One year after appointment, all deputy headteachers could undertake a basic preparation for headship programme which fits them for the role of Acting Headteacher, either in emergency in their own school or by placement elsewhere.

Suggestion 11

The Welsh Government could consider agreeing some protocols with local authorities to best manage the potential appointment of serving deputies to acting headship in their own schools.