KEEPING OUR HEADS – UNLOCKING THE POTENTIAL OF OUR HEAD TEACHERS
How to support, nurture and inspire healthy leaders and leadership within education

The National Standards for Head teachers have now been revised. Their stated purpose is:

“To inspire confidence in Head teachers, raise aspirations, secure high academic standards in the nation’s schools and empower the teaching profession”

In expanding on the role of the Head Teacher the standards also state that Head teachers:

“Are accountable for the education of current and future generations of children. Their leadership has a decisive impact on the quality of teaching and pupils’ achievements in the nation’s classrooms ... Head teachers, together with those responsible for governance, are guardians of the nation’s schools.”

It is clear that the standards are aspirational and are designed to guide the profession towards securing greater outcomes for our children.

The purpose of this White Paper is to raise awareness as to the true nature of Leadership within schools with specific reference to the expectations, requirements, responsibilities and realities of the role of Headship. It will consider the impact these factors have on the wellbeing and effectiveness of those employed to deliver a first class educational provision throughout England and Wales. Through doing so, and having raised many of the issues pertaining to the above, a number of actions and strategies will be proposed for consideration and action.

This White paper will also argue that for the new standards to have their desired impact, consideration will need to be given to:

1. The realities of Headship
2. Developing an accurate understanding of the full support needs of Head teachers, so that their well-being is maintained and they can deliver on what is expected of them.

The recommendations will state the case for placing coaching at the heart of initiatives for:

• Supporting work with the New Standards for Head teachers
• Supporting recruitment and retention
• Securing Cultures of High Expectation

1. The Realities of Headship

When considering the role of the Head teacher in our schools it is essential to reflect upon the Philosophical, Moral, and Professional imperatives that are at work and all feed the strong commitment, to and belief in, a Duty to the children and communities that they serve. This level of personal and professional commitment is not something to be taken for granted.

Indeed, the ‘National Standards of Excellence for Head teachers’ (2015) states that;

‘Head teachers occupy an influential position in society and shape the teaching profession. They are lead professionals and significant role models"
within the communities they serve. The values and ambitions of Head teachers determine the achievement of schools.’

This paper will clarify the imperatives for change based on the Moral Duty of Care which those leading education at a National and Local level have (and the reasons for this) as well as the Economic and Operational realities for the efficient and effective delivery of an experience of education to be proud of.

Head teachers lead their Learning Communities with integrity, care compassion and high expectations. This is evident on an hourly basis in any school and education setting daily. Whilst expectations of our Head teachers, from Government departments, are growing exponentially, the care, support and integrity with which Head teachers are treated is sadly lacking. Head teachers daily model compassion, empathy and concern for others. They deliver high degrees of challenge and expectation and achieve results based on the trust which they inspire in others. In 2000 an influential and detailed comparative study of Head teachers in UK schools and senior executives in private enterprises was conducted by the Hay group (a leading management consultancy) entitled ‘The Lessons of Leadership’. The findings of this study had a significant impact on approaches to leadership in schools and successive government policy. The report acknowledged that

‘Head teachers are creating a more motivational climate than business leaders’

And that they,

‘Tend to use a broader range of leadership styles than business leaders ... (which)... creates a more effective and motivational climate’

Also,

‘Perhaps this versatility derives from the wide range of constituencies and audiences a Head teacher must deal with’

And,

‘They are genuinely interested in the development of their staff. They create opportunities for people to learn and practice new skills, and they are prepared to let someone make their own mistakes and learn from the experience’

Given the above, the question of why there is a recruitment and retention crisis in school leadership is puzzling, but the following begins to answer it.

Challenges that Need to be Addressed
The Association of School Leaders (ASCL) Conference Survey (2014) asked 25 questions of 898 school leaders working as Head teachers, Deputy Head teachers and Assistant Head teachers, their responses are illuminating.

There has been a stark contrast between the professional tone setting at school level with the rhetoric of the Political and governmental leaders of the system. Perhaps it is significant that the creators of the latest National Standards for Head teachers felt the need to state in the first paragraph of their ‘Purpose’ (2015)

‘These standards are designed to inspire public confidence in Head teachers’.

In response to the statement ‘The government is supportive of the teaching profession’, 91% of respondents disagreed with 61% selecting ‘Strongly Disagree’.

The pace and volume of change in educational policy over the last five years has led to increased ambiguity, inconsistency and therefore insecurity. The role of Local Authorities (LAs) in the oversight, support and development of the schools in their geographical sphere of responsibility, has been significantly reduced through the drive to convert schools into academies and the advent of Free Schools and University Technical Colleges. Yet LAs are still held directly to account for the educational standards of all schools in their mandated areas regardless of category and the resources which they have to service their needs.
The lack of oversight and strategic planning of school places with Free Schools and University Technical Colleges (UTCs) being approved, in areas of overcapacity, and Independent Schools able to become Free Schools places extra strains on those striving to provide an outstanding education for the communities they serve. Parents are confused, staff feel insecure. An Ofsted judgement of ‘Requiring Improvement’ or below is followed by the Regional DfE officer requiring a meeting with the Head teacher and Chair of Governors to discuss the conversion of the school to Academy Status. This often leaves the Head even more vulnerable.

When asked ‘What impact do you think the government’s academisation policies have had on overall standards of education?’ (ASCL 2014) 67% respondents responded in the categories ‘None’ (29%), Slightly Negative (20%) and ‘Very Negative’ (19%).

56% Respondents answered that they were ‘Not as Happy’ in their job as ‘Compared to 12 months ago’.

Greater autonomy for Head teachers in decision making inevitably results in significantly increased accountability, yet also a significant diminishing of the amount of support available for them, especially from the Local Authorities which know them and the needs of the communities they serve most completely. Whilst the role of Governance has been made more explicit within successive Ofsted frameworks, in reality, the responsibility and accountability for the success or failure of any education setting is the Head of that institution, they are the ones who could, and often do, lose their livelihoods, when academic expectations have not been met.

**Recruitment and Retention**

66% of Deputy Heads, Assistant Heads and Vice Principals when asked whether they were more or less likely to apply for Headship than 12 months ago replied that they were less likely to. 72% cited workload as a factor in this decision, 41% lack of job security, 40% the threat of an Ofsted Inspection and 38% changes to examinations and curriculum. 61% of these respondents indicated that they are not considering headship in the ‘next few years’

37% of Heads and Principals responded that they would not recommend Headship to colleagues with a further 17% being ‘unsure’. This is hardly a ringing endorsement of the morale of school leaders and triangulates concerningly with the figure of 68.5% ‘considering leaving the profession before normal retirement age’ 72% of whom cited workload as a factor, 23% job security and 43% changes to examinations and curriculum.

Thus the leadership capacity within our education system is under strain and threat in terms of its diminution and lack of effective succession planning.

**The Role of Governors**

School governors have a key role to play in the recruitment and retention of Head teachers. The role that they play could be further strengthened if current inconsistences and anomalies within school governance were addressed. The House of Commons Education Committee (HOCEC) in its report ‘The Role of School Governing Bodies’ (2015) stated;

‘There was a general sense amongst witnesses that school governance was in need of ‘clarity of purpose, expressed through statutory responsibilities’

And that witnesses including the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) and the National Governors Association (NGA)

‘Referred to regulations and other legislative requirements which confuse dividing lines between the responsibilities of governing bodies and Head teachers’.

Indeed in this report it was explained that ‘There is no requirement at present for either chairs or Head teachers to undertake training’.

The Education Minister consulted by the House of Commons Education Committee stated;
'We are not rushing to be more centralist in our approach to education' and that 'it is for governing bodies to review the (training and development) opportunities available in the market and identify and select the most suitable for their need and budget'.

This reinforces the inconsistencies that exist in the governance of our schools and educational settings, as there is no body, or means, through which to effectively monitor or assess/evaluate the quality of their governance. Consequently, the consistency of safeguarding and support for Head teachers becomes even more variable in quality and quantity. Similar to the greater freedoms afforded to Head teachers, referred to earlier, the espoused freedoms for governing bodies results in inconsistent levels of support and accountability for Head teachers.

The Academies Commission (HOCEC 2015) 'has recommended that the appointment process for chairs of governors should become more professional and rigorous in order to ensure the recruitment of high quality chairs'.

The role of Head teacher, and therefore leader of the institution, its public face and interface with all external agencies, the one who sets the tone, models professionalism and insists on the highest expectations, is the only role that is appointed solely by non-professionals (governors). In areas of greater Socio-Economic deprivation and disadvantage it is often challenging to find impartial governors committed to the role for the right reasons and those with appropriate experience and knowledge.

Therefore, a thorough and rigorous review of the state of governance within schools and all education settings in England and Wales is required. This could be conducted with specific reference to Head teacher support and wellbeing or extended more widely to all staff in headship or Senior Leadership posts.

In order for this to be of genuine value and benefit it will need to representative of all education settings and contexts.

**Desired Outcomes**

The value and impact of this work alongside the other, measures to be proposed will be measurable through retention rate, reduction in the early retirement of Head teachers and Senior Leaders, sick leave and increased ease of recruitment to such positions. In addition, the opportunity to introduce greater national coordination and leadership of governance will lead to greater consistency of operation and the safeguarding for Head teachers.

All of the above is placed in stark relief when considered against the demoralising changes to the Teachers’ Pension Scheme which requires new, and many existing, colleagues to work until the age of 67 before receiving their Teachers pension.

Within this context there is a need for a more compassionate approach to strategies for supporting the recruitment and retention of our Head teachers. Corporate executives have space for “lessons learned” and continuous improvement between projects. Head teachers need something similar.

To understand what this should look like, first we need to consider the support needs of Head teachers that the system is currently overlooking.

**2. Developing an Accurate Understanding of the Support Needs of Head Teachers**

Whether Heads are new in post or are well established and long serving, too often the predominate type of support that they receive is that which is concerned with meeting the strategic and operational aspects of the role. Their emotional needs are often neglected and this is where support fails, because there are no clear systems and structures through which this can be achieved and consequently, governors, Local Authorities and Academy chains are failing in their duty of care for Head teachers.

Head teachers often sacrifice the meeting of their own needs in order to meet the needs of those they serve. This level of constant giving, without moments built into their leadership life to
replenish, often leads to illness and for some burn out. Along with increased levels of public scrutiny and personal accountability, neglect in meeting Head teacher’s psychological and emotional needs have become a major contributing factor to Head teacher attrition and early retirement.

**Promoting and Developing Healthy Engagement**

To prevent this phenomenon Head teachers need to be supported to address and engage with their roles in new ways. These new ways ought to include the prioritisation self-awareness, self-management and self-compassion.

If Head teachers are to fulfil their ambitions for themselves, their schools, families and communities, then they need support that helps them to reflect on their strengths and areas for development in a holistic and supportive way. So that they are able to model positive and effective behaviours, inspire them in others and remain connected to their initial vision and passion for the role.

Wherever Head teachers are in their careers a new paradigm needs to be established to:

‘...address leadership in a more fundamental way and ... attack the foundational belief that we are somehow rational computer like beings and deal with the whole person.’

Hamill (2014)

Support must be given to Head teachers to allow them to explore three core aspects of personhood i.e. what it means for them to be human.

1. Understanding Self and personal core motivations
2. Being not just doing
3. Identifying one’s core purpose in challenging circumstances

**1. Understanding Self and Personal Core Motivations**

“Who and how do I need to be to secure my vision for my learning community?”

This is the question that leaders in education must be encouraged to ask of themselves if they are to fulfil their potential, and live mentally and emotionally healthy lives. When an individual is asked the question ‘Who do I need to be? They set in motion an internal process that shifts the mind’s awareness away from the immediate towards consideration of their motivations, moral and social purpose. This enables them to learn about themselves at a much deeper level.

**The Self and Our Emotions**

Head teachers need to be secure in themselves, their motivations, abilities and needs. They need to be supported to feel secure in asking for support for their needs and knowing that this will be honoured.

When such support is made available, Head teachers start to create a new narrative about the challenges they face and redefine how to respond to the demands of school leadership.

**2. Being not Just Doing**

Fundamentally, the education system needs to recognise that just as their schools are in the process of becoming something better, something greater, so are their Head teachers. Their appointment to the post is not the final destination on their leadership journey. It should be seen as the beginning or the continuation of a personal development process for which they need not only strategic and operational support, but psychological and emotional support too.

The system continually talks about what Head teachers and school leaders should be doing to raise standards, to tackle underperforming staff and to build good relationships with their communities. Frequently, these discussions take place with little or no regard for how these constant demands impact on a Head teacher’s sense of self. In education it is as though we have become:

“Hooked on the notion that commitment and activity are inseparable”

Jaworski (1996)

A point has to be reached where commitment and activity can be separated. Constant activity
simply sends the body into overdrive, and with it a reduction of the mental and emotional faculties that a leader needs to be able to deliver effectively on his or her commitments. When a person is in a state of constant doing, it is only a matter of time before both the mind and the body say, ‘Enough.’ The relationship between the mind and the body are well documented and when stress levels rise, the mind plays an acute role in communicating to the body how to respond.

A truly compassionate and humane approach would recognise that every school leader is on a journey towards fulfilling their own potential. They need support that helps them to process the deep philosophical and psychological questions that are part of the process.

3. Identifying One’s Core Purpose in Challenging Circumstances

Much of a Head teacher’s every-day life is spent seeking to understand and interpret a range of difficult circumstances, processes and outcomes, for which they are ultimately responsible for resolving.

These circumstances can range from dealing with the collective emotional fallout following an OFSTED inspection to the death of a child.

When circumstances like these arise, Head teachers search for meaning and a way to protect the well-being of their learning communities, but they do not necessarily seek to find ways to protect their own. If they receive appropriate support and guidance, they can realise how their values provide understanding and guide others with confidence, even in the most challenging of times.

Relationships Add Meaning

When faced with increased levels of public scrutiny and personal accountability, Head teachers now find that they have a reduced number of professional relationships of mutual trust and respect that they can draw upon. Increased competition between schools has resulted in a level of distrust across the profession. As a result Head teachers have become increasingly isolated, not only physically through the breakup of Local Authorities and the rapid rise of Academy chains, but emotionally too. There is often an unmet need that Head teachers have for connection and the desire to find a shared sense of meaning and well-being as part of a community, based on mutual trust and support.

Head teachers and other leaders in the public sector are often too busy and feel undervalued to realise their own needs until it is too late. The rate of stress related illness; physical, emotional and mental are testimony to this.

Recommendations

Employers and governors need to be facilitated to meet their duty of care towards Head teachers and support them to perform to the expectations as contained in the Head teachers standards. This paper recommends that coaching is promoted as a frontline early intervention development and support strategy for Head teachers.

The Business world has long realised that coaching is essential and invested heavily in providing this as an entitlement for leaders. In 2014, research from the Henley Business School found that 83% of organisations intended to use coaching for executive and senior managers. Researchers and authors from the Harvard Business school, such as Daniel Goleman and Richard Boyatzis have researched, recorded and described the impact that coaching has in developing Emotionally Intelligent Leaders who are able to successfully lead their businesses on to achieve efficiency, effectiveness and success.

In Education, there is now a desperate need to take this good practice from the business world to help provide the type of support that our Head teachers are clearly in need of. Recognition of the relevance and importance of practices in business on public sector leadership has existed before and since the Hay McBer report of 2000, referred to earlier in this White Paper.

It is our belief that if coaching could play a key role in:

1. Supporting work with the new Standards for Head teachers
2. Supporting recruitment and retention
3. Securing Cultures of High Expectation

1. Supporting Work with the New Standards for Head Teachers

“Self-development is key to the development of a Head teacher. These standards can be used by Head teachers as a framework for such self-development, for them to consider what they have done already or need to do going forward to move closer to the aspirations set out in the standards. They may choose to seek feedback from colleagues and governors based on the standards.”

The National Standards for Head Teachers (2015)

‘Self-development is key to the development of a Head teacher’, but schools need to know what processes effectively support self-development. For Head teachers coaching can be one of the most powerful processes for supporting self-growth, knowledge and understanding.

When Head teachers regularly engage in coaching conversations not only are they committing to their own self development, they are also committing to the development of their staff and students. As a process, coaching helps them to continually re-connect with their vision, passion and purpose. When they are regularly engaged in such conversations their thinking processes change, as do the actions that they take for achieving their goals. Self-development takes on deeper meaning, as they see the connection between how they seek to fulfil their own needs and aspirations and those of their school community.

Without this understanding, there is a danger that self-development as defined within the standards could be seen as a perfunctory activity limited to the giving and receiving of feedback. There is, consequently, a misunderstanding between professional and personal development and the line management and performance management relationships and roles.

2. Supporting Recruitment and Retention

As the stakes continue to rise for Head teachers, so too do the numbers of individuals for whom headship is no longer seen as an attractive post to aspire to. Deputies, Assistant Heads and Vice principals, see the level of stress that those above them have to deal with; they see the increased levels of attrition when the full complement of support is not forthcoming, and make the decision not to climb any further up the ladder.

When Head teachers are assisted through coaching to find healthy ways to address the demands of the job, they send a very powerful message to their peers, to future school leaders and their staff. The message that they send is: you cannot do this job alone, to survive and thrive you need a confidential space that is your own. In that space, you can come out from behind your defences and be set free from the weight of absolute responsibility and accountability, which characteristically becomes a heavy burden that ultimately distracts from the well-being of the individual and the community they serve.

If school governors adopted coaching as part of their recruitment and retention packages and detailed the benefits, it is our belief that the profession would see an upturn in individuals putting themselves forward for the post, and a downturn in those making an early exit from the profession.

3. Securing Cultures of High Expectations

Head teachers achieve results though people. It is the relationships that they form through leading others that determines both the culture of their school and the educational standards that are achieved.

Within the current education context, we are in danger of seeing a passion for excellence, rigour and high standards as being mutually exclusive to compassion, humanity and hope. It is our belief that these values are not distinct and separate from one another, but rather mutually supportive and symbiotic.
Children and adults thrive in environments where they are valued, trusted and respected. When their emotional needs are met, learning takes place within a whole new dimension. It moves beyond the superficial, the memorisation of facts and the regurgitation of data to something far more meaningful and long lasting. Learning becomes that which is integrated into a person’s sense of self. Meaning is attached to new knowledge and experiences. As a result an individual adopts the mind-sets and behaviours that promote lifelong learning.

We believe that Executive Coaching should be provided for those entrusted to lead and educate the future citizens of this country. Much is made of the responsibilities and accountabilities of these remarkable individuals, but no provision made for their encouragement, support and nurture.

Executive coaching is a means through which this can be provided, not as an adhoc response to extreme needs, but as an inalienable right throughout a school leader’s career in educational leadership.

If we accept that Head teachers set the tone for the cultures of their schools, then we have to accept that it is their emotional needs that must be met to facilitate the creation of positive school cultures in which all members of the community thrive.

Our children deserve the best care and education, and our Head teachers deserve the best care that can be provided, so that they can fulfil society’s hope and dreams for our future generations.

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After 30 years in the Teaching Profession the last 12 of which have been as Head teacher of a secondary school, Mike Tull has been Chair of the Lancashire Association of Secondary Heads and worked with the Central Office for Information (COI), the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF), Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO), the Department for Education (DFE), and led National and Regional Conferences across the country on Preventing Violent Extremism in Schools.

His last school was the subject of 5 ‘File on Four’ radio programmes and Mike has appeared on National Television and Radio on a number of occasions when his opinion of education related matters has been sought.

Mike currently runs Tull Education Ltd an education consultancy which seeks to support Individuals, and all education settings, Schools, Academy Chains and Local Authorities in guaranteeing the best for all members of their Learning Communities.

Viv Grant
Viv Grant has been in education for over twenty seven years. A passionate advocate for the promotion of coaching in schools, she is the Director of Integrity Coaching, the UK’s leading provider of coaching support for Head teachers and senior school leaders. Her book “Staying A Head” is the seminal work in the field. She has contributed to various books and periodicals on the subject, most recently, “Mental Health and Well Being in Teaching and Learning Environments” Her contributions have been featured in The Guardian, London Live and Radio Four, Woman’s Hour.

She has worked as a lead consultant for the Institute of Education, the National College, the National Union of Teachers (NUT) and the Department for Education (DfE) on a wide range of leadership and school improvement initiatives. Previously she was a Head Teacher in a South London Primary School.