

# Aspirations to headship?: The views of Experienced Deputy Headteachers in Scotland

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## **Abstract**

A number of education systems are grappling with the issue of recruiting sufficient numbers of teachers with the required skills and experience into principal or headteacher posts. This article examines the question why some suitably qualified and experienced deputy headteachers choose not to move into headship. The article reports the findings of an investigation into the career aspirations of experienced deputy headteachers as part of a wider study on the recruitment and retention of headteachers in Scotland. A sample of nineteen deputy headteachers who had not progressed to headship was interviewed. The article begins with a review of studies regard-

ing aspirations to headship, followed by an overview of the research study. The findings are discussed around a number of themes: career pattern, the role of the deputy headteacher, incentives to remain as a DHT, incentives and disincentives related to progression to headship. The data indicates that aspirations to headship are complex and there is often the intersection of personal and professional circumstances shaping career paths.

**Keywords:** headship, career aspirations, career paths, recruitment of headteachers

## **Introduction**

The recruitment of sufficient numbers of teachers to headteacher/principal<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The terms 'headteacher', 'deputy headteacher' and 'headship' will be used when referring to the research conducted in the UK; elsewhere the terms 'principal', 'vice principal' and 'principalship' are used.

posts is a challenge for different education systems, for example: Australia (Lacey, 2003), USA (DiPaola et al., 2009), Israel (Oplatka and Tamir, 2009), Ontario, Canada (Williams 2003), New Zealand (Brooking et al., 2003) and Hong Kong (Kwan, 2009, 2011). Cranston (2007) argues that this issue of recruitment is not simply a question of the quantity of candidates but is also a question of the quality of possible candidates particularly where there is evidence of that suitably qualified and experienced teachers are choosing not to apply for principal posts. This article examines the question of aspirations to headship. It draws from a wider study in Scottish education which explored issues related to the recruitment and retention of headteachers (Macbeath et al., 2009). The strand reported here provides a useful case study of this question of why there seems to be a reluctance on the part of suitably qualified and experienced teachers to seek headteacher positions investigating the reasons why a group of DHTs have not progressed to headship. This is an continuing issue in Scottish education. In a recent survey of the local authorities in Scotland (ADES 2013) (the local councils have responsibility for local educational provision), a number reported difficulty in recruiting headteachers in challenging schools or smaller schools.

The article begins by reviewing studies from the international literature related to the challenges of the recruitment of headteachers. The article then turns to the specific issue of the reluctance on the part of

experienced deputy headteachers (DHTs) who were deemed 'ready for headship' to progress to that role. A sample of nineteen suitably qualified and experienced DHTs in primary, secondary and special schools in Scotland who had not moved into headship. The findings indicate that a complex intersection of personal circumstances and professional experiences and aspirations have shaped the career paths of these DHTs and that there is a mixture of incentives to remain in a DHT role and disincentives to progress to headship.

### *Recruitment to headship*

Of the growing number of studies internationally related to the challenges of recruiting headteachers, a focus of some studies is the identification of significant factors influencing aspirations to headship across the teaching profession while a smaller number deal specifically with deputy headteachers/vice principals (DHTs/VPs) who have chosen not to progress to headship. Some of the factors identified are context specific but there are also a number of common issues reflecting that the difficulties of recruitment are not related to a specific educational system. Instead this trend of what Gronn and Rawlings-Sanaei (2003) describe as "a form of leadership disengagement" (p172) has arisen because of changing role of headteacher evident in many systems. Gronn and Rawlings-Sanaei propose three different dimensions to leadership disengagement: first, the increasing de-

mands of policy context; second, personal factors including occupational orientation and identity - though this can change over time and third, situation and localized influences which shape aspirations. Recurring themes in the literature reflect these dimensions and include the pressures of the role of headship and the image of headship; preparation and application for a post; and career patterns shaping aspiration and threaded through these themes is the influence of gender on aspirations.

### *Pressures of the role*

Watson (2007) argues that there is substantial evidence of the significant changes to the role of principals over the last 20 years with the range of responsibilities expanding and the intensity of accountability, especially around pupil performance increasing. Thompson et al. (2003) found that headship as a highly pressured and demanding role was a dominant image in media and this reflects experiences reported in a wide range of studies (Gronn and Rawling-Sanaei, 2003; Earley et al., 2002; DiPaola and Tshannen-Moran, 2003). Neidhart and Carlin (2003) argue that the image of headship and changes in the role because of external pressures have acted as a disincentive for both some men and some women who wanted to exercise a different form of leadership. Hewitt et al. (2009) in survey of teachers in Arkansas who had been identified as potential leaders, noted that the dominant reasons for not considering a move into principal-

ship related to the pressures of the role. Consistently three factors were cited: the testing/accountability demands were too great, the role was too stressful and demanded too much time. As Hewitt et al. conclude: "it would appear that the job is just too stressful is the single largest factor in deterring those teachers" (p.12-13). Given these demands, Cranston (2006) reported that with the perceived demands there was a concern about maintaining work-life balance. Family circumstances was a factor in determining whether a teacher aspired to take on the demands of the role particularly in relation to women teachers. Lacey (2003) found that there was a relationship between career progress and family decisions, for example with some women delaying application for promotion until they had finished their child care responsibilities while other women sought to establish themselves in their career before having children.

While some studies reported that the pressures of the role were a disincentive for some teachers, other teachers expressed an ambition or at least an interest in school leadership. Pounder and Merrill (2001) noted this mixture of desirable aspects and disincentives. The time demands of the job was a significant concern and then to a lesser degree the range of challenging situations faced by principals but found teachers were still attracted to the role because firstly, of a desire to influence and improve education and secondly, the increased benefits includ-

ing salary. In a large-scale study in Ohio, Howley et al. (2005) also reported that some teachers showed interest in principalship particularly teachers with less experience, who valued career advancement and who have undertaken programmes to achieve their qualifications for a management role. Hancock and Muller (2010) compared USA and Germany where there are different entry routes to principalship. The study highlights some contextual differences but there were similar motivators and inhibitors with regard to aspirations to principalship reported by teachers in each system. Echoing Earley et al. (2002), among the inhibitors were paperwork and bureaucracy as well as increased commitments. However, Hancock and Muller also noted that for some German and American teachers a positive factor was the professional dimensions of leadership. The key motivators were the opportunity to impact positively on students and staff, to enhance learning and to achieve change to support learning. A sense of challenge personally and professional was also found to be important. De Angelis and Kawakyu-O'Connor (2012) also indicated that the non-financial rewards were more influential in shaping aspirations.

### *Perception of the role*

There seems to be important differences in perceptions of the role of headteacher between serving headteachers and those not in that role. Lacey (2003, p. 28) reported that the perception of prin-

cipalship by those not principals was an issue: "only those who had acted as principals could describe the role in anything other than negative terms". Looking specifically at women teachers, Smith (2011) also found a sharp contrast between the perception and enthusiasm of serving women headteachers for their role and the negative views of non-promoted women teachers. Among the headteachers there was a greater tendency to view headship as an opportunity to enact an ethic of care and work on pupil-centred values fully. In contrast, the teachers saw their role underpinned by values relating to pupil learning and well-being and the headteacher role as distant from this, being in their view, largely about control and restrictions and was an isolated role. Again, while the teachers saw the 'toughness' needed for headship as undesirable leading to a loss of popularity, the headteachers characterised this as 'standing up for the school'; further whereas teachers look for others to affirm their suitability for such roles, serving principals focused less on themselves and more on the role.

### *Preparation and application for headship*

Preparation for headship has become a significant issue in efforts to address the recruitment of principals. Informal approaches remain influential. Young and McLeod (2001) found that the administrative role models women were exposed to were important in aspirations to an administrative career route, along with exposure

to transformational leadership styles and the perceived support they receive when entering administration. De Angelis and Kawakyu-O'Connor (2012) highlighted the positive influence that encouragement by professional colleagues had on applications for and acceptance of job offers.

Many systems have formal preparation programmes – some compulsory, some advisory and some self-directed (Bush, 2008; Forde 2011). Here opportunities to progress to headship can be determined by the nature and access to preparatory programmes. Williams (2003) raises the question about whether such programmes act as a barrier however, where such programmes are part of a wider succession planning strategy, progress to headship was more evident than in programmes into which individuals had self selected (Lacey, 2003). Dorman & D'Arbon (2003) highlight the negative impact that the lack of succession strategies can have on recruitment.

The time lapse between completion of a preparatory programme and opportunities to progress to headship varied and the immediacy of opportunities seems to be important. Di Paola and Tschannem-Moran (2003) in the USA, report that the longer the period of time after completing the licensure for principalship, the less likely a participant will move to principalship. However, De Angelis & Kawakyu-O'Connor (2012) examined the move from certification to principalship noting that in Illinois, USA

there were more teachers certified for principalship that positions available and so there would be a proportion of potential candidates who did not progress to a principal position. The majority of respondents (69.3%) did apply within two years but only a third secured a position and over a six year period applications had increased to 74.9%. Only three quarters of this group were offered a position. Here issues were raised about the application process which chimes with Lacey's (2003) study where respondents reported that applying for posts was "time consuming, demanding and traumatic" (p. 31) and carried a great deal of emotional issues for both women and men especially the fear of rejection and the unknown all of which added to a lack of confidence about progressing to headship. Pounder and Merrill (2001) also noted that possible candidates' expectations of being considered a viable applicant influenced whether they decided to go forward.

### *Contextual issues*

Though difficulties in recruiting headteachers are reported across many educational systems, within each system there may be differences in attracting candidates to particular schools or particular types of schools. Roza et al. (2003) argue that there is not shortage across all sectors in a system but "where there have been reductions in the number of certified candidates these conditions are distinct and even school-specific and more pro-

nounced at secondary that the elementary level” (p. 7). Barty et al. (2005) found that difficulties of recruitment could be related to contextual issues such as location, size and local politics determining the attractiveness of a particular school to a potential candidate. Low levels of student achievement make schools ‘less attractive’ (Hewitt et al., 2009; Winter and Morgenthal, 2003). Schratz and Petzold (2007) in Austria also report difficulties in recruitment in rural and remote schools and this is the case also in Scotland (Macbeath et al., 2009; Draper and McMichael, 2003). Neidhart and Carlin (2003) reported there were disincentives for women applying for headship in the Roman Catholic sector in Australia. Some of the disincentives were similar to other contexts: concerns about the personal and family impact of the role and the difficulties posed by the selection and appointment process. However, there was a strong sense on the part of women surveyed that they were disadvantaged because of the influence of the parish priest on the appointments panel, who, it was believed, was more likely to favour a male appointee. In another study Australia by D’Arbon et al. (2002) argue that after family commitments and an “unsupportive external environment” (p. 480), the third inhibitor in this sector was the specific expectations on the role of the principal in a Catholic school.

### *‘Career depute’*

A smaller number of studies have examined why those in vice/assistant principal (VP/AP<sup>2</sup>) roles chose not to progress to a principal post. Lacey (2003) makes the point that the role of AP “was believed to be a transitional one, preparing aspiring leaders for principalship” (p. 25) and underpinning studies on especially experienced VPs’ aspirations is a construction of leadership careers as always having a leadership trajectory to headship. There has always been a proportion of promoted staff in senior positions (VPs or DHTs) who did not seek headship but now there is a debate about whether this number is increasing (Oplatka and Tamir, 2009). An early American study by Austin and Brown (1970, cited Oplatka and Tamir, 2009) found 80% of vice principals indicated they wanted to progress to a principalship but more recently, Garret (1999) in England found that this perception of the deputy headteacher role being transitory was rejected by over 44% of respondents in their study. This debate about the proportion of VPs wishing to progress is difficult to determine definitively given the importance of contextual issues (Pounder et al. 2003) but a sense of reluctance on the part of a proportion of experienced DHTs/VPs has been reported across a number of systems.

Cranston’s (2007) term ‘career de-

<sup>2</sup> There is slippage in the terms used - vice or assistant principal or deputy headteacher are used variously to describe the role of the next most senior leader after the principal or headteacher.

pute' highlights that for some a DHT post is not a stepping off point to headship but an end in itself and this is significant in Oplatka and Tamir's (2009) study of female DHTs who had chosen not to progress to principalship: for this group deputy headship is not a transitional but a terminal post. This sense of the intensification of the role of headship has been found to have an impact on how VPs see their role. Thus VPs report that their roles are already highly demanding and to add anything further would make this too much (Walker and Kwan, 2009; Hausman et al., 2002; Cranston et al., 2004). Nevertheless, the quality of the experience as a VP or DHT is crucial in building aspirations to headship. Kwan (2009) pointed to the importance of positive experiences in the VP role in building aspirations, that if "vice-principals find their job energizing and rewarding and believe that the stress and challenges of the job are well worth it, they will be more willing to assume principalship" (p. 212). Overall, the findings suggest "that VPs sense of efficacy was the most influential factor in determining their desire for principalship" (Kwan, 2009, p. 214), findings evident in other studies (Sutter, 1996; Lacey and Gronn, 2005). Positive experiences were equally important in building aspirations among senior staff in Scottish schools who have taken on acting headteacher roles to cover long term absence (Draper and McMichael, 2003).

While studies highlight some of the negative reasons for deputy headteach-

ers not progressing to headship, there are also some positive factors in the role of the deputy headteacher valued by the incumbents. Oplatka and Tamir (2009) found that main motives for wanting to remain in the role of DHT were positive: high job satisfaction, a sense of autonomy and self-efficacy in their current role where they had a great deal of expertise and a sense of having an impact. For these VPs "Headship is perceived to focus on administration rather than instruction and pastoral education, aspects that according to their outlook, are integral to their role" (p. 226). In Lacey's (2003) study of women teachers, their reasons for not going forward to a principal post centred on the satisfaction in their current role given that their interpersonal relationship with pupils and teachers were among their top satisfiers. Thus, these studies found that there were positive aspects of their current role and these are significant in DHTs/VPs deciding to remain in that role.

### *Scottish study*

A study of the recruitment and retention of headteachers in Scotland (Macbeath et al., 2009) included the question of aspirations to headship. The study had a number of different components including a specific investigation into the reasons why some experienced deputy headteachers did not seek headteacher posts. This article draws on the findings from this strand of the study. A sample of twenty deputy DHT from a range of local authorities

**Table 1.** Sample - gende

Primary: 14		Secondary: 4		Special: 1	
Female: 14	Male: 0	Male: 0	Male: 0	Female: 1	Male: 0

**Source:** own research

was interviewed. (The recording failed for one interview and so this analysis is based on 19 cases.) These were experienced DHTs who had been identified by the Local Authority Officer as having the prerequisite experience and skill to move into headship but who, to that point, had not applied for headteacher posts. The selection attempted to be as representative as possible by region, school type and gender. However, though there is a gender balance in the secondary sample, there are no male DHTs included in the primary sector reflecting the much smaller number of male teachers in that sector.

All but five of these were telephone interviews lasting between approximately 25 minutes to 45 minutes. The interviews

were audio recorded, transcribed and analysed thematically. The key areas included the participants’ career routes to deputy headship, their current role as a DHT, their perceptions of headship and their reasons for not choosing to progress to headship.

*Perspectives of the Deputy Headteachers*

*Career Pattern*

Career patterns reflected the changes in management structures following a major review of the teaching profession in 2000. The extensive management structures of all sectors were reduced. Details are set out in Table 2.

For the primary deputy headteachers

**Table 2.** Management Structure: Pre and Post 2001

Pre-2001		Post-2001	
<i>Primary (including Primary Special)</i>	<i>Secondary (including Secondary Special)</i>	<i>Primary (including Primary Special)</i>	<i>Secondary (including Secondary Special)</i>
<i>Headteacher</i>	<i>Headteacher</i>	<i>Headteacher</i>	<i>Headteacher</i>
<i>Deputy Headteacher</i>	<i>Deputy Headteacher</i>	<i>Deputy Headteacher</i>	<i>Deputy Headteacher</i>
<i>Assistant Headteacher</i>	<i>Assistant Headteacher</i>	<i>Principal Teacher</i>	<i>Principal Teacher</i>
<i>Senior Teacher</i>	<i>Principal Teacher</i>	<i>Teacher</i>	<i>Teacher</i>
<i>Teacher</i>	<i>Assistant Principal Teacher</i> <i>Senior Teacher</i> <i>Teacher</i>		

**Source:** own research

the first move was into a senior teacher role. Encouragement at this early point was important particularly for those primary interviewees who had moved up through the ranks of their school. The other notable feature in career patterns particularly of the primary sector interviewees is the length of time in one school. The career progression of the secondary sample was through a more tiered management hierarchy from senior teacher to a principal teacher role and two of the sample were previously assistant headteachers. Two of the secondary DHTs and 4 of the primary DHTs had had periods of being an Acting Headteacher covering a vacant post or illness.

Importantly across the sample of DHTs, as with the serving headteachers, there was not a typical career pathway. While some respondents moved progressively from a teaching post through to management, another notable feature of this sample is the variation evident in career paths. Given the number of women in the sample it is not unsurprising that many had career breaks for up to periods of ten years early in their career as well as periods of part time and supply work both at the beginning of their careers and following their return from a career break. However, during these 'career breaks' to raise children, five worked on a part time basis in other sectors of education, for example, adult literacy, further education and urban aid multi agency projects. In addition, eight other participants (both primary and secondary) had out of school

roles as a Local Authority staff tutor or development officer leading initiatives including curriculum development and probationer support across schools. Four interviewees indicated that they would not consider applying for a headteacher post presently for personal reasons but did not rule this out as a possibility in the future. Three of the sample who were in their late fifties indicated that they felt it was too late in their careers to consider a move into headship. In addition, six of the sample had completed or were following the headship preparation programme, the *Scottish Qualification for Headship*, and though one interviewee was concerned with the workload attached to it, others had found this a very useful professional development opportunity strengthening them in the role of DHT.

### *The role of the DHT*

There were significant areas of satisfaction for the DHTs in their current role; nevertheless these were demanding roles. There were differences between the remits of primary and secondary DHTs but across both sectors consistent themes are the extensive nature of the remits of the DHTs and the close connection with pupils and teachers. In the secondary sector remits included curricular responsibilities related to the Curriculum for Excellence (SE, 2004) (the curriculum in Scotland for ages 3 to 18), year group responsibilities such as co-ordination, pastoral care, linking to specific subject areas or aspects of

pastoral care, external links, timetabling, national examinations. In the primary sector some DHTs had a class commitment ranging from 0.8 teaching commitment to shorter periods, routinely working collaboratively in classrooms with teachers, taking groups for support for learning and providing cover for teachers so they could have their 2.5 hours weekly preparation time. This latter was particularly demanding for many primary DHTs taking up to a half of their week. In larger primary schools where there was more than one DHT, there would be a departmental responsibility split between early years including nursery and upper primary or in the largest primaries this might be split even further. Monitoring and leading initiatives were other major roles noted by many interviewees and this included class observations, working in classrooms with groups, reviewing teachers' plans, pupil work and assessment outcomes and leading curriculum development activities. A number of DHTs in primary and secondary were responsible for additional support needs provision (ASN) and that included liaison with external agencies, coordinating support in school and in the primary sector providing additional support for specific groups of pupils, for example, number recovery with groups of older primary pupils. The DHTs across all sectors also reported that they had considerable administrative duties.

Most interviewees reported that they worked long days, usually starting before 8am, leaving school between 5pm and

6pm, taking work home in the evenings, often returning to run extra curricular events, local events or parents meetings in the evening and many reported spending at least part of the weekend on work and part of the summer vacation. These are roles which are busy, challenging and enjoyable with varied responsibilities: *"I'm pushing forward things like European links in the school, I'm pushing forward a curriculum for excellence, I'm also pushing forward GLOW [educational intranet in Scotland] and IT and so I could fill my days up many times over with what I should actually be doing"* (Int 4) and *"I'm mentor for a probationer... I do monitoring... I'm taking pupils out to talk with them ...class observations ... management meetings ... I do tracking of national assessment ... I also do support for learning so I meet with teachers once a month..."* (Int 9). These roles are demanding in terms of energy, commitment and the ability to deal with complex situations. Particularly in the primary sector there are the demands of covering classes as well as fulfilling their management remit *"If I am in class for the best part of the day then obviously I then have to come and pick up my remit which is from 3pm onwards... I rarely get home before half past 5 at night and again I need to take in documentation...I do a lot of reading of documents in the evening"* (Int 10). Notwithstanding these extensive remits and the typical long hours, the DHTs expressed a strong sense of satisfaction with their current role and context.

*Remaining as a DHT*

Most interviewees reported that they worked long days, usually starting before 8am, leaving school between 5pm and 6pm, taking work home in the evenings,

When asked about their career aspirations with regard to headship, the DHTs gave a mix of reasons, some related to negative reasons for not progressing while others related to the positive dimensions of their current DHT role. The reasons for remaining a DHT relate to the satisfaction in their current role *“I’m always able to find a challenge ... I’m never at the stage where I think this is not enjoyable”* (Int 4) and *“I’ve just never felt the need to make the final step ... I like being with the children. I like the school environment”* (Int 5). Many participants saw being a DHT gave them sufficient variety and scope *“It’s a real sort of mix and match job, there are elements of the job I really enjoy and it’s nice to get into classrooms and work with children ...there are admin jobs to be taken care of”* (Int 12). Indeed they see they have the opportunity to take forward initiatives that is not necessarily available to headteachers particularly with regard to teaching and learning: *“...my job is great. I’ve got the power that I want...I’ve got the freedom, the flexibility”* (Int 9). It is evident from the data that the interviewees derived substantial rewards from this element of their work and to which they displayed a high degree of commitment: *“the role I have enables me still to have real contact with*

*real children and parents and professionals who are trying to all work toward the end of making things better for children and making their experience during their school years as good as it can be”* (Int 14). These DHTs were able to combine *“the best of both worlds in the position I’m in. I still have a lot of contact with children...which I don’t always feel that heads do”* (Int 10).

Many of the interviewees were long established in the school and there is a ‘settled’ feel to their role. A number spoke of the convenience of the location of the school but this is accompanied by a strong sense of commitment to their school and that they had invested considerable time and effort in contributing to its development. One participant reported that she had been asked why she was not applying for headship and in her response her sense of satisfaction and achievement in this setting as a DHT is clear: *“The school was moving forward and I was given autonomy and I was working with a very good team of people and I just consider the school is one of the best schools in the area and why would I leave”* (Int 13). Another participant reflected similarly but here we see the mix of satisfaction with the current context and a concern about moving to another school: *“I would like to think I had a hand in shaping how the school has gone forward in the last few years and it’s a good school. I have the respect from the children”* (Int 19). This DHT related that with new initiatives she would take an ac-

tive role and so had been able to build up credibility: *“I have a bit of credence in the school whereas if you go somewhere else also there’s so much time is spent on establishing what I’ve already got here”* (Int 19). These DHTs were well known in the community and had considerable credibility with staff *“I’ve got a headteacher who listens to me. I’ve got a staff who listen to me and to whom I listen, so between us we manage it quite well and at the moment everything is OK”* (Int 9).

The strength of relationships in their current context was an important factor in these DHTs remaining. Some participants had worked with the same senior management colleagues including the headteacher for many years (one as long as 19 years in the same SMT of three) and so the relationship with their current headteacher was important, the sense of being part of a team with complementary roles and skills. Indeed a change of headteacher was one of the circumstances where participants indicated that they might consider seeking a headship in another school. For some of the primary respondents there was a strong sense that they were in a good school and a risk of moving elsewhere *“There’s a lot to be said for staying where you are when things are working extremely well”* (Int 7). A particular issue highlighted by four DHTs in large primary schools was that if they were to become a headteacher it would be in a much smaller school: they felt better suited to the larger context and indeed a smaller school would be in some

ways a step down: *“At one point, yes I would have probably thought seriously about going for headship but... when I looked at schools that came up I always thought I’m going to a smaller school and I’m going to a lesser school. Do I really want this?”* (Int 15). This partly relates to an issue particular to Scottish education. As a result of the job sizing process which had been conducted as an outcome of the *Teachers’ Agreement* (Scottish Executive, 2001) where salary was determined by the size of the school resulting in DHTs in larger primary schools earning more than headteachers in medium and smaller sized primary schools.

#### *Dissatisfactions in the role of DHT*

Importantly, while the DHTs were able to highlight many areas of satisfaction they also identified challenges in their current role. For many primary DHTs the demands made on them to cover classes to ensure classroom teachers’ preparation time. They also pointed to the demands posed by constant change including the Curriculum for Excellence, the inclusion agenda, and the need to address several different areas at the same time. A significant issue among serving headteachers was the pressure exerted by external demands. However, being ‘one removed’ the DHTs were less concerned directly with demands from Local Authority and government policies than headteachers with only one respondent speaking negatively about a ‘blame culture’ in the Lo-

cal Authority. While some DHTs reported that there had been considerable pressure and stress related to inspections, a number indicated that this had not been an issue, reflecting their efforts in development and the standing of the school (and so had strengthened the incentive to remain as a DHT in that school).

### *Reasons for not progressing to headship*

The interviewees were clear about the importance of the headteacher role “*the glue that sticks all the other bits together*” (Int 15) and indeed saw it as a “*really privileged role*” that was “*very, very difficult*” (Int 2). The participants were able to detail the kind of profile a headteacher would need with strong ‘people skills’ and the importance of having a vision and taking people with them the major attributes. Nevertheless there were a number of factors that inhibited their aspirations to headship. Their perceptions of the demands of the role were crucial: the sense of overall responsibility of the role was a strong theme which many respondents found daunting: “*can be very draining and very demanding and that aspect of it I would not relish*” (Int 1) and “*You never know when you come in the door what’s going to be coming your way and you have to be ready for everything firefighting, troubleshooting and then the HMI [Her Majesty’s Inspectorate for Education] box lands on your lap*”. (The pack sent to schools before an inspection). The role of their headteachers was frequent-

ly seen as administratively heavy with responsibilities for the budget, for the school building and facilities especially in public private partnership schools, paperwork such as report writing for Local Authority and other forms of accountability: “*the huge amounts of paperwork, huge amounts of returns that have to go in every month ... having to justify what she’s spending her budget on*”. It was not only the nature of the demands, but these also were seen to distance headteachers from particularly pupils and their learning and so these demands acted as a further disincentive.

Like others outside the role of headteacher, the perceptions of these DHTs were often negative: “*you don’t hear very positive things from a head*” (Int 18) and “*people will say it’s a thankless task and I think it is*” (Int 18). These perceptions are critical in shaping aspirations: one DHT talked of the difference between their former headteacher now that she was in another role in the Local Authority: more confident, less stressed. There were also personal reasons why the DHTs were reluctant to progress particularly questions relating to work/life balance, not only the unrelenting demands but that they would put themselves under pressure to try to achieve these demands: “*I actually would take too much home with me and too much on board and there’s nobody else to pass it on to*” (Int 11) and “*My downfall is that I want to do things really to an exceptionally high level and I put too much commitment to it and that would*

*be the danger I think if I became a headteacher” (Int 15). It is this concern that the job would become all consuming for them that was significant: “I’ve got high expectations. I think I carry that around with me a fair bit of the time, whereas I can walk away from here and think I’m not the ultimate responsibility” (Int 15).*

The approach to their career progression was a factor: a small number indicating that they had no career plan but had moved into management because the opportunity had arisen in their school or nearby and they had been encouraged to go forward: *“each one that I moved for has really just because the opportunity had arisen and I’ve liked the look of the people, the school, the ideas, the values... there’s been something that’s hooked me, it’s captured my interest and I thought yes, I could do that” (Int 2).* Three participants (1 secondary and 2 primary) indicated that they felt it was too late in their career to go into headship but one secondary participant reflected that if there had been encouragement earlier she might have considered this: *“I never actually saw myself...I think maybe if my own headteacher had said to me ‘right now that you have done this [Scottish Qualification for Headship, the headship preparation programme] you must be applying for jobs”.*

*Acting up’: experiences of a temporary headship*

Six of the sample had had periods as

an Acting Headteacher covering either a vacant post, long-term illness or secondment. The period varied between a term to one exceptional case of four years. This was for some: *“a shock to the system” (Int 7)* and a concern that novice DHTs being asked to take on this role. Out of the six, four reported they felt there was a lack of support for them in that role particularly when dealing with crisis situations, behaviour or additional support needs. However, others reported that they had received support from both the Local Authority and fellow headteachers. For one who had had a long period as Acting Headteacher, she had derived a sense of satisfaction of having taken on the role of headship for this period but no aspiration to seek a permanent position: *“I actually I can be a headteacher, I’ve done it for four years and my question to myself was ‘Is this what you want to continue to do for the rest of your career?’ and I thought, no it’s not but I’m satisfied and so glad I’ve done it”.* She reflected further on some of the disincentives in the role of headteacher which reflects the concerns of a number of the respondents: *“the job of the headteacher has evolved in change so much over the years that some days it was actually at times quite lonely because I could have, because of the volume of work in front of me, I could be in the office all day” (Int 12).*

## *Conclusions*

Overall, the study highlights a complex interplay between personal circumstances, professional aspirations, opportunities which may evolve over time. From one perspective this study reveals a very positive picture of the role of the DHT as part of an established and successful management team from which the respondents derive satisfaction and from which the school has benefitted considerably. The demands and width of the role are noteworthy but for these DHTs, this is balanced with a strong sense of commitment and a sense of achievement particularly in being able to have an impact on pupils, staff and parents. However, a number of issues have been identified in this study that need to be addressed if more suitably qualified and experienced DHTs are to progress to headship including questions related to the perception of the role, the potential of action headteacher posts and preparation and support in the early years of headship.

The difference in perceptions of the role between headteachers and the DHTs is an issue and Lacey (2003) offers a partial explanation of this difference: "A finding not found in other research was the view held by principals that the sources of job dissatisfaction were extrinsic visible and well known to staff, whilst the sources of job satisfaction were intrinsic, invisible and unknown to most teachers" (p. 25). However, across this sample of DHTs many were able to point to incen-

tives to become headteachers. Though there were issues regarding salary, it was the professional dimensions that were more frequently cited as an incentive to move to a headteacher post particularly the opportunity to talk forward their own vision for a school. However, for these DHTs it was the administrative demands of headship around dealing with budgets, paperwork and the high level of accountability that concerned them. Strategies to enable experienced DHTs to get 'inside headship' through opportunities such as workshadowing (Simkins et al., 2009) and acting headteacher posts (Draper and McMichael, 2003) are necessary. However, such opportunities need to be structured with support readily available especially in dealing with some of the dilemmas headteachers have routinely to face.

While some interviewees had not ruled out applying for headship in the future, nevertheless it was a daunting task. Further, the concern that they would put themselves under considerable pressure points to the need to adopt a more structured approach not only in the preparation but in the early years of headship. The importance of induction is suggested here but this needs to move beyond induction into the administrative and legal demands of the role of the headteacher as is provided by many local authorities. The personal dimensions of leadership particularly the building of confidence, resilience and the ability to manage pressure all seem important aspects, which could be devel-

oped through more structured induction programmes and supported through mentoring and coaching. These can form part of a more systematic succession planning approach where structured pathways to headship are part of an overall leadership development strategy. However, in this we should be cautious of constructing a leadership pathway as simply progression up a management ladder.

Marshall *et al.* (1992) in an early study explored the position of the assistant principal and argued that we should not see this as a role where either the incumbent chooses either to progress to principalship or remain as an assistant principal. Instead they highlight the different combination of individual aspiration and circumstances, which may or may not facilitate the move into a principal position. The incentives to remain as a DHT related to the satisfaction derived from their current role and the sense of impact they were having, personal circumstances too had shaped career choices: family commitments, the location of the school and the demands of their current role were important incentives to stay as a DHT. Given the proportion of women is increasing in the teaching profession (Tett and Riddell, 2006) there is a need to construct a teaching career as being more varied. Though many of the interviewees had been in the same school for a long period, they had previously had other wider professional experiences working in educational projects or for the Local Authority in development roles. Therefore, at this

point in their careers, for this group of DHTs, being a DHT is a positive choice.

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