Reinventing school leadership – back to the future in the UK?

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There have, over the last 15 years, been many UK government initiatives aimed at improving the leadership and management of schools but there has never been any compulsion to receive training either before or after taking up post as a headteacher (principal). Greater responsibilities at the school level have resulted in greater pressure from a wide range of sources, including government and the teaching profession, for a more coherent approach to leadership and management development for both middle managers and for headteachers. Examines the initiatives which have been introduced in the last 15 years. Then discusses the need for and the development of the National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH) which is being trialled and piloted across England and Wales from 1996-98.

Introduction

There have, over the last 15 years, been many UK government initiatives aimed at improving the leadership and management of schools but, unlike the situation in the USA, there has never been any compulsion to receive training either before or after taking up post as a headteacher (principal).

There is now much wider responsibility and accountability at the school level through site-based management in the form of local management of schools (LMS), grant-maintained status (GMS) and the city technology college (CTC) initiative. This has led to pressure from a wide range of sources, including the government and the teaching profession, for a more coherent approach to leadership and management development for both middle managers and for headteachers. There is also a recognition that the position of headteacher is not necessarily the most appropriate for some in the profession. As Williams wrote:

The assumption that those who are good teachers will automatically become good heads will be even more dangerous than it has been in the past. Both the selection of headteachers, and the training given to them and others in senior management positions, will need to be far more carefully planned and more systematically structured than has been the case up to now (Cooper and Shute, 1988, p. xi).

This article examines the initiatives which have been introduced in the last 15 years and the need for and development of the National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH) which is being trialled and piloted across England from 1996 to 1998.

The context of headship, 1981-96

In the early 1980s there were initiatives in some areas by which some financial decision-making powers were delegated to schools but the bulk of financial resourcing and staffing powers were controlled by the local education authorities (LEAs). In secondary schools the curriculum was flexible for pupils aged up to 14 but, thereafter, was dominated by the requirements of the examination boards. In the primary sector the curriculum and approach to classroom organisation were largely determined at the school level although some LEAs were more directive than others.

The 1986 Education Act altered the composition and operation of school governing bodies but it was the 1988 Education Reform Act (ERA) which introduced LMS, GMS and CTCs, thus significantly altering responsibilities at the school level and, hence, the role of the headteacher. Subsequent legislation or the enactment of the Secretary of State’s rights which are enshrined in ERA have served to strengthen the reforms. The changes include: a national curriculum; national testing; teacher appraisal (evaluation); site-based financial decision making including responsibility for hiring and firing staff; per-pupil funding and parental choice linked to accountability at the school level for results and value for money.

All secondary schools and most primary schools have now been inspected by teams of inspectors accredited by the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED). Despite government and media concern about the quality of teachers and of teaching, most lessons inspected through the national system have been found to be satisfactory or better.

Teaching has moved during this period to become a graduate-entry profession with the phasing out of the Certificate in Education. The role of the head has become greater and more complex, thereby increasing the need for a comprehensive and consistent training and development programme.

The route to headship

In England and Wales, the term headteacher, as opposed to principal, is used in most
The headteacher normally has a first degree but, increasingly, especially in the secondary sector, has a masters degree which has been gained, often by a part-time route, during the teaching career. The masters degree is often an MEd or an MA in Education and has a curricular or pedagogical slant. Increasingly, aspiring heads are studying for leadership and management qualifications such as MSc in Management and Management (Administration) or, in a few cases, the more expensive option of a general MBA in a business school.

In contrast, the US principal will normally have a masters degree in educational administration and will have decided on an administrative role as opposed to a teaching role quite early on. He/she must have an administrator's certificate in addition. He/she will usually move from post to post more frequently than in the UK in order to gain experience and, often, to enable him/her to move on to a senior role in the school district. Qualifications and licences are the route to the top, rather than excellence in the classroom.

### Development opportunities, 1981-96

**Funding for courses**

The pattern of one-year secondments to courses in higher education (largely in the area of curriculum) which had been common in the 1970s was rejected in favour of a number of shorter courses. Government-funded national strategies to support headteacher and other senior management training programmes resulted in the one-term training opportunities (OTTO) as well as basic 20-day courses. These programmes were attended by 11 per cent of heads and deputies between 1983 and 1988. There was no consistency across the country in what was covered by the courses. An evaluation of one of the first cohorts of “OTTO” heads was carried out by Hellawell and concluded that such an opportunity gave heads the chance to reflect “on the particular nature of the job of headteacher and the individual’s particular ways of carrying out that job” (Hellawell, 1988, p. 229). He concluded that the OTTO experience considerably aided the heads to manage themselves and others better. Of those interviewed, Hellawell noted that they “felt very strongly that one lesson of the term for them was the need to delegate more, and the term’s experience appeared to have given them greater self-confidence, in that they felt more able to do this” (Hellawell, 1988, p. 234).

Maw (1984, p. 8) outlined concerns about the one-term courses, highlighting concern over the “centralised pronouncements on preparation for headship” which “have concentrated more on the professional than the managerial aspects of the role”.

The system of Grant-related In-service Training (GRIST) and, later, Local Education Authority Training Grants (LEATGS) provided government funding via the local education authorities (LEAs) for staff development in a number of annually determined priority areas. Management training (not just for heads and deputies) was a major area, funded at £4 million in 1987-88 rising to £10 million in 1990-91. This amount was supplemented at LEA level in order to qualify for the grants. LEATGS were replaced by Grants for Education Support and Training (GEST) again with management training as a priority category and with the requirement on LEAs to contribute a higher percentage of the resourcing than previously. With both of these initiatives, the earmarking of funding meant that the training actually did take place with the more enlightened LEAs and schools supplementing the funding from other sources. Alterations to the GEST funding system provided for a category “school effectiveness” which allowed for a more varied range of activities; the result was that money could be used more creatively than simply on management training. Also, by this time, much of the grant had to be delegated to the school level (and in GM schools it all reached the schools via SPG(D) – the Special Purpose Grant for development). Many schools spent less on management development and more on equipment in order to supplement the capital budget. Cooper and Shute (1988, p. 5) criticised the lack of a coherent system:

As it now stands, the training efforts are a hotchpotch of one-day, one-week, short-term, or year-long programmes which hardly fit together into a coherent testimony to the preparation of school heads, officers, and other senior school staff.

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Although he was referring in particular to GRIST provision, Williams’ comment could be applied to all activity in this category: … trends in Grant-related In-service Training (GRIST) are likely to encourage an approach to headteacher training that concentrates on techniques and tools of the trade … But running a school is surely more than having a lot of technical skills … (Cooper and Shute, 1988, p. xii)

The School Management Taskforce
The School Management Taskforce (SMTF) was set up on 1 January 1989 in order to report on the provision for and needs of those with responsibility for management in schools, especially since the implementation of the Education Reform Act. Following consultations, the members (largely headteachers or former headteachers) put forward a range of practical measures and suggested how these might be promoted and supported. They recommended induction and succession planning for all levels of management. They proposed that, for all levels of management, development activities should move from:
  • tutor directed;
  • off-site;
  • predetermined times;
  • teaching;
  • provider-determined;
  • knowledge acquisition;

to:
  • self-directed;
  • school-based (or near);
  • flexible times;
  • distance learning and study packs;
  • customer-driven;
  • performance enhancement.

They concluded that:
• although specific development activities were needed for heads, they should not be seen as a group far removed from everyone else but as part of the team;
• the heads should integrate their personal development plans with the work of the school;
• the link with governors is important;
• heads need opportunities to visit the wider public and private sector and to study with those who work there.

There was no wide support for the concept of a staff college but, rather, the Taskforce recommended regional support for self-directed study:

There is little support for the establishment of a formal national co-ordinating body. The service has a clear preference for “bottom-up” local development (DES, 1990, p. 21).

In addition, they felt that there is little support for the production of a detailed national syllabus for school management training (DES, 1990, p. 27).

As a result of the report, a number of regional projects were set up and funded by the DES although many have not had a memorable impact. One aspect of DES-funded research was carried out by Bolam et al. into the effective management of schools. This project found that “many of the headteachers in the sample had leadership qualities which went beyond technical managerial competence”, that “a clear vision for the school’s future was important”, although teachers had had little involvement in this formulation, and that “team management was a characteristic feature in the sample” (DFE, 1993, p. 46). The researchers felt that “all three broad conclusions have considerable implications for the selection and training of headteachers”.

Among other conclusions that are relevant to this paper are:
• comments about the lack of effectiveness of governors;
• the importance of vision;
• the importance of an open and positive school climate or culture;
• the desirability of firm leadership along-side consultation on policy;
• the need for consistency between the rhetoric on values and the reality;
• personal and professional values lie at the heart of educational leadership in the self-managing school.

The headteacher mentoring scheme
The School Management Taskforce recognised that a school-based approach to development would be more difficult for the person “at the top” of the school as they have no one to act as a guide. The Headteacher Mentoring Scheme was introduced in order to overcome this problem. This involves the linking of an experienced and an inexperienced head in an area so that the former can guide the latter.

The concept of mentoring is now recognised to be valuable and continues in many schools at various career levels.

Appraisal
The appraisal of teachers was one of the outcomes of the 1986 Education Act although this aspect was not implemented until the early 1990s. The system involves a two-year cycle and, although it is not necessarily a line-management model, it is likely that deputy heads would be appraised by the headteacher. In the case of heads, there is one peer head and one other, normally an LEA inspector or someone of similar experience. In most schools the focus is still as originally agreed with the teacher unions, i.e. on professional
development rather than on performance management.

The National Educational Assessment Centre
The National Educational Assessment Centre (NEAC) was set up using an adaptation of the National Association of Secondary School Principals model for competence assessment. It was used by LEAs as a way of assessing their good deputies so that they could then be mentored towards headship. The system has now been extended to cover middle managers and, now that funding has moved away from LEAs to schools, cheaper ways of carrying out the process have been developed. The process is being used for the assessment component in one of the NPQH regional pilot schemes.

The Management Charter Initiative (MCI)
The MCI has been in operation since 1988 and it aims to set out standards of competence for occupations and management levels. The model provides very detailed specifications of what has to be done in a job and includes statements for each element of the standard and a range of circumstances in which the competent performer must be able to carry out these element sub-tasks. MCI Senior Management Standards (Management Charter Initiative, 1995, p. 6) are structured as follows:

- **Key purpose statement**: To develop and implement strategies to further the organisation's mission.
- Performance standards are grouped into four main areas of action:
  1. Understanding and influencing the environment.
  2. Setting the strategy and gaining commitment.
  3. Planning, implementing and monitoring.

Within each of the areas there are a number of units, each being made up of more detailed elements.

The model is both logical and systematic, and provides a comprehensive guide for development and assessment, but the number of elements for a job competence is so detailed that it may seem to a learner too fragmented and to take a lot of time for assessment. For example the MCI specification for senior managers comprises 33 elements. The approach has been criticised because it assumes static jobs and aims at minimal standards. It is seen as inflexible and prescriptive, failing to recognise the diversity of managers' tasks and roles, and many believe that it seems better suited to measuring competence at lower managerial levels. The standards are pitched at threshold performance and are less appropriate for job situations where knowledge, attitudes, and autonomy to make discretionary decisions are part of the job (see Trotter and Ellison, p. 1997). Arguably, it is impossible to measure management competence objectively and reliably in this fragmented fashion. The MCI guidelines have not been extensively used in their "pure" form although many organisations have adapted them.

Other provision
There has also been (and continues to be) a wide range of short courses from a range of providers, both from a traditional education background and from the non-educational sectors.

In addition, during this period, many heads and deputies have been enrolled on award-bearing courses (mostly part-time) through traditional higher education institutions (HEIs) and the Open University.

**The important role of the head**
Evidence over the last 20 years has consistently pointed to the fact that "the most important single factor in the success of these schools is the quality of leadership of the head" (DES, 1975, p. 36). Sammons et al. (1995) have recently collated the research on effective schools and listed 11 indicators which can be summarised as follows:

1. firm and purposeful professional leadership;
2. shared vision and goals;
3. orderly learning environment;
4. focus on teaching and learning;
5. well-organised teaching;
6. high expectations;
7. positive reinforcement;
8. monitoring progress;
9. students' rights and responsibilities;
10. home-school partnerships;
11. schools as learning organisations.

This list can provide part of the agenda for any programme of headship preparation or headteacher development.

**The way forward**
Prior to LMS schools were "highly autonomous and headteachers appeared to carry out their role in isolation, aloof from the external environment" (McHugh and McMullan, 1995, p. 23). With the changes under the Education Reform Act, "the headteacher's job is now widely regarded as being primarily a managerial post" (McHugh and
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In addition to the issue of in-service training, research interviewees commented, with the benefit of hindsight, on the perceived advantages of pre-appointment training. It would appear that at present, few, if any, potential headteachers receive training which adequately prepares them for the new responsibilities which they assume on their promotion to positions of headship. Thus, it is suggested that a systematic approach be adopted to the development of individuals who aspire to positions of headship. Such an approach requires the commitment and support of those involved in the formulation and implementation of educational policy (McHugh and McMullan, 1995, p. 24).

A similar plea for pre-appointment training is made by the National Commission on Education which notes “a rather ad hoc system of headteacher preparation” and “haphazard practices in the selection of headteachers in this country” (National Commission on Education, 1993, p. 230).

Warnings about the focus of such training have been given by Williams (Cooper and Shute, 1988, p. xii) who wrote that “those who run schools effectively need to understand what they are doing as well as know how to do it!”, and by Glatter:

The danger of concentrating on skills and techniques is that this will reinforce the view of the administrator as primarily a technician … such deeper understanding, no less than skills and techniques, must be transmitted through the medium of concrete administrative settings rather than predominantly “classroom” settings (Glatter, 1992, p. 9-10).

Further support for school-based development came from the Taskforce which concluded that:

Learning from experience means learning on the job as well as learning about the job ... positive experiences of successful management are the backbone of personal development (DES, 1990, p. 25).

Williams (Cooper and Shute, 1988 p. xii) proposed on-the-job training and a wide range of courses so that prospective heads could learn about the underlying principles of school leadership and meet others:

...the single “staff college” approach may result in one recognised approach to leadership which risks laying the dead hand of a single orthodoxy on all our schools (Cooper and Shute, 1988, p. xii).

Bolam et al. commented on the content of any headship development programme:

...the vitally important contribution of such factors as leadership, vision, culture, collaborative decision-making and the like should surely figure prominently in training and development activities ... they should also inform the on-the-job development programmes and appraisal schemes within each school and LEA ... the findings should be taken into account in the formulation of competences for headteachers and other school managers (DFE, 1993, p. 129).

Cooper and Shute (1988, p. 7) go beyond most authors in proposing training for those in post and those aspiring to headship with various organisations co-operating to offer training towards a certificate. This process would be overseen by a body to set standards, review candidates, issue the certificates and accredit providers:

What we propose is the certification by an official body of the preparation and credentials of senior school staff, testifying to the qualifications of those who lead the schools of Great Britain (Cooper and Shute, 1988, p. 4).

Although there are some conflicting perspectives, the key points relating to a programme of preparation for headship seem to be:

• a significant school-based element;
• understanding as well as doing;
• the importance of vision;
• a systematic approach;
• a focus on leadership.

While there is a consensus that some formal preparation is required, there is little general support for:

• a staff college;
• a national curriculum;
• rigid national standards;
• a purely theoretical course.

Any system of headship preparation must be seen in the context of a continuum of staff development:

The ultimate aim of staff development is to improve the quality of teaching and learning. The immediate aim is to improve the performance of those with teaching and management responsibilities (Bolam, 1987, p. 2).

Teacher Training Agency (TTA)

This was established in September 1994 with the following key functions:

• the funding of teacher training;
• the accreditation of providers of initial training for school teachers;
• providing information and advice about teacher training and teaching as a profession;
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The qualification is being introduced to try to give some measure as to the potential performance of the aspiring headteacher when taking up a post in a new school. Such performance is more than mere efficient management; it is "the consistent ability to produce results over prolonged periods of time and in a variety of assignments" (Drucker, 1989, p. 156). While the NPQH cannot replace the interview or guarantee that the holder will be successful in headship, the qualification can give some assurance to governing bodies that the candidates have met a level of competence which demonstrates that they have the potential for headship. Not only will the assurance be on a job-specific or local level, but it will be a measure that governors can apply using national comparisons because those with the qualifications will have proven evidence that they meet the criteria for aspiring headteachers. Governors can then be assured that candidates not fit for the single most important job in the school cannot attain the qualification of the NPQH.

The TTA believes that it has identified clear objectives for the qualification which should:
- be targeted on school improvement;
- ensure that only those ready for headship gain the qualification;
- be based on agreed national standards;
- signal readiness for headship but not replace the selection process;
- provide a focus for aspiring headteachers' continuing professional development;
- provide a baseline from which newly appointed headteachers can continue to develop their leadership and management abilities (Teacher Training Agency, 1996a, p. 2).

For the first time, those looking to headship as a career progression have a clear set of guidelines demonstrating the competences they will be expected to demonstrate prior to taking up headship. The qualification is not compulsory (although the new Labour Government has proposed that it should be) but it is hoped that most people seeking their first headship will look to the qualification as a sensible preparation for the demands of the job. The qualification is not intended to replace the need for mentor training after appointment, nor does it replace the need for further training in the early years of taking up a first headship (which has recently been supported by the HEADLAMP scheme).

Many research projects have shown that the most significant influences on the school come from the leadership of the headteacher. The NPQH places great emphasis on the competence of the head as leader and the training and development associated with the
qualification will have to address the issue of leadership training. The NPQH also places great emphasis on the assessment of skills and abilities within the context of school improvement. This model would be supported by Covey (1992) who sees the application of competences through principles across different situations as a fundamental feature of senior or management:

Without understanding the principle of a given task, people become incapacitated when the situation changes and different practices are required to be successful (Covey, 1992, p. 25).

The NPQH is different from competence-based models in two distinct ways. Firstly, it aims to measure potential and, as such, cannot resort to a tick-box style of experiences recorded by the individual. Secondly, in looking at accrediting past performance, it places emphasis not just on experience but achievement relevant to improving pupil performance.

There are limitations to the use of a competence-based model for the professional qualification but measuring an individual’s performance against the generally accepted demands of the job through a careful analysis of the headteacher’s role must lead us to a better state of affairs than a declaration that the task is not possible. While the use of competences cannot be flawless, it can form a very useful and important guide towards the required levels of skills, knowledge and abilities for the improved leadership of schools. It is in this context that the qualification is framed.

It is also important to recognise that the competences required of headteachers will alter over time. The role of headteachers has changed significantly over the past decade in terms of the varying influences and increased accountability placed in their hands:

• School administration now takes place in an increasingly turbulent, politically charged environment; bluntly, running schools has become a tough job which involves more knowledge and skill than it did even a decade ago (Beare et al., 1989, p. xi).

The NPQH must ensure that candidates cannot simply present a “public performance of competence” but must truly be able to demonstrate their ability to achieve the skills level required by the qualification either through past performance or through simulations designed to test potential.

This is complicated by a number of factors. The most significant is the cultural context of the headteacher’s job within the school environment. It forms an important dimension to the understanding of the application of the standards set out in the qualification. As such, careful recognition of the impact of the cultural context in the working environment must be a significant feature of the assessment of the aspirant headteacher in the development of his/her level of competence within the system.

The new qualification sets out to keep a clear focus on the core purpose of headship which involves establishing the strategic direction and leadership of the organisation. In this respect, it tries to assess the potential of the candidate in bringing about this aspect of a headteacher’s role through the demonstration of the application of theoretical concepts to the practical situation. It has been indicated above that the complexity of the task is not made easier by cultural and contextual issues. This takes it beyond the limits of masters degree type programmes and beyond the competence-based assessments of NVQ to a qualification which tries to pull out the best of both in that it focuses on the application and the potential application of the necessary skills and abilities required for headship in the school setting.

Fullan (1985) argues that heads must address four issues of process to give meaning to effective school needs. These, he claims, are designed to enhance the ethos and image of the school and are fundamental in bringing about purposeful and effective change. He lists them as:

• a feel for the process on the part of leadership;
• a guiding value system;
• intense interaction and communication; and
• collaborative planning and implementation... (Fullan, 1985, p. 499).

His terminology of having a “feel” for the process of leadership emphasises the intangible measurement of effective leadership in a conventional and formal process. Just as Jenkins (1991, p. 3) reminds us of the fact that “traditional models of leadership are incapable of meeting the challenges schools are facing”, so too we find that conventional models of assessment are inappropriate to measure the current ability or potential of the NPQH candidate to demonstrate effective leadership. Yet, leadership of the school for continuous improvement is at the heart of this qualification. It has to be measured by its impact and effect on others, as does the overall effectiveness of the candidate in bringing about the right culture to promote improvement.

There are, therefore, four issues to be addressed by the new qualification:

1. Headship requires strong leadership and sound management qualities which need to be developed through training.
2. The training aspect must focus on the needs of the individual with each candidate viewed in the context within which they are operating if the qualification is to predict potential in an equitable and meaningful manner.

3. It is important to recognise that there are often contexts which are inappropriate for the good preparation of potential headteachers - namely, poor schools or those with unsupportive heads; means to overcome such hurdles will be required through the flexible application of the qualification if those candidates are not to be denied access to the NPQH.

4. Assessing the competences must be undertaken in a cost-effective manner so that there is no bias in favour of the funding of the assessment process to the detriment of the training and development needs of aspiring headteachers.

The consultations
An extensive consultative exercise was carried out by the Teacher Training Agency. This involved a two-phase written consultation process as well as a series of regional conferences. The TTA Board, the CPD Committee and the NPQH Advisory Group spent a considerable time on the proposals.

In order to begin the process of establishing a new professional qualification, it was decided that representatives of the education system should be asked their initial views on the standards that the TTA should be looking for in a candidate seeking headship. This proved to be a very informative process. A series of issues was raised and some guidance about essential aspects of the qualification were suggested. Those responses were considered in detail by the National Advisory Group for the National Professional Qualification for Headship (NAGNPQH).

At this stage, the level of support for the NPQH was widespread, yet there was a strong view that the qualification should be of a high quality. In addition to this, several responses highlighted the link between the professional and the personal qualities required in successful headship:

The qualification should reinforce the importance of educational leadership, have rigour and be based on national standards.

Many respondents emphasise the need for cognitive and personal capabilities as well as performance competences (Teacher Training Agency, 1996b, p. 1).

Issues regarding the personal and the contextual aspects of the aspirant head were echoed in the discussions of NAGNPQH which expressed concern that those aspirant heads were hard to identify when working in poor schools.

The main components were formulated and a tentative list developed including new references to the relationship between the head and the governing body. Apart from the content of the qualification in terms of the competences to be assessed, further concerns focused on the funding arrangements, access for candidates and the context of this qualification in the range of professional development activities for the teaching profession. Each of these issues was discussed further in the NAGNPQH.

The balance between training and assessment is a fine one in that the purpose of the qualification is to prepare aspirant headteachers better for the next step in promotion as well as assessing their potential for success. There was some anxiety about the goals being unattainable or that something would be missed. It was decided that there would be a full national consultation and that a managed pilot programme would be established to avoid any glaring errors.

The draft standards were written and modified for the launch of the process of national consultation. All schools were invited to ask for a full copy of the consultation paper. At the same time, a further letter was sent to a sample of schools, professional associations, higher education institutions, LEAs, and governor representative groups, among others. This letter invited comments, clearly establishing a timescale and the format for responses. This was a major exercise and was enhanced by a series of regional conferences seeking debate and interactive discussion on the nature and format of the new qualification.

There were nine regional consultation meetings involving a total of 620 delegates. In addition, written responses were submitted (see Table I).

The consultation paper acknowledged the changing demands of headship and the fluidity of the NPQH:

| Table I |
| Written responses to regional consultation meetings |

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</tr>
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<td>Others (mostly individuals)</td>
<td>44</td>
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Source: Teacher Training Agency, 1996c, paragraph 4
... the specific knowledge and understanding required will change over time, and therefore need to be reviewed on a regular basis... (Teacher Training Agency, 1996b, p. 11).

Views are particularly invited on ... whether it is necessary to differentiate the standards by phase or size or type of school, or whether the emphasis on performing tasks in context allow for a generic set of standards as presented (Teacher Training Agency, 1996b, p. 4).

Emphasis was placed on the leadership role and the importance of the head to make sure that “the school development plan identifies appropriate priorities and targets for improvement and relates to overall financial planning” (Teacher Training Agency, 1996b, p. 6). It recognised the need for teamwork and working with the governing body. In the section on skills and abilities, the listing echoed the set of competences from NEAC but failed to include “teaching” among the requirements for candidates to have to prove. This omission was raised as a concern by many respondents and demonstrated the desire for balance between the managerial and the professional, pedagogic aspects of the headteacher’s role:

At the heart of the organisation ... are the dynamic interactions between teaching and learning ... research suggests that heads of schools that achieve excellent results ... are almost obsessed by issues of teaching and learning (Higher Education respondent to National Consultation, 1996).

There was overwhelming support for the key principles which “were welcomed and judged to be comprehensive and helpful” (Teacher Training Agency, 1996c, paragraph 6).

While many wanted to see full funding of actual costs, common sense prevailed as “there was a realisation that, as demand was likely to outstrip the supply of funds, limited funding for the many was preferable to the full funding of a few” (Teacher Training Agency, 1996c, para. 25).

On access, it was felt that, in order to avoid inequity for prospective candidates, measures should be developed to ensure that gatekeepers such as LEAs operated a fair system (Teacher Training Agency, 1996c, para 25). The issue of access felt most strongly by aspiring heads was about the role of their headteacher as “gatekeeper” whose “lack of encouragement” was seen “as an impediment to their own CPD (continuing professional development)” (Teacher Training Agency, 1996c, para 14). Candidates working in smaller schools were deemed to be most at risk. Rural schools were also felt to be in this category ... there should be a serious commitment to equal access throughout the country; the isolation of rural schools was especially mentioned (Teacher Training Agency, 1996c, para 22).

There was “comparatively little support for a qualification which specifies phase or type of school; it was thought that the context in which the person worked would be sufficient indication to users of the individual experience and skills of the candidate” (Teacher Training Agency, 1996c, para 6).

In relation to content, the central role of headteacher as teaching leader was emphasised by one respondent who argued for excellence in the classroom as a prerequisite for the qualification:

Primary headteachers as direct curriculum leaders must be excellent classroom practitioners. This requirement should be added to the qualification (Response of Primary headteacher, 1996).

The emphasis on a compulsory module focusing “on those aspects of leadership and management which even experienced headteachers find difficult” (Teacher Training Agency, 1996b, para 40) led many respondents to support “a central compulsory module concerned with strategic direction and development and covering the implementation, monitoring and reviewing of policies and practices” (Teacher Training Agency, 1996b, p. 11). However, concern that the qualification may simply focus on the theoretical aspects of the headteacher’s role was voiced by a number of respondents:

There was also wide advocacy for a qualification that had a distinctive bias towards practice rather than theory (Teacher Training Agency, 1996c, para 14).

and

... there was a fear, widely expressed, that the award would be over-theoretical (Teacher Training Agency, 1996c, para 14).

Such was the fear of a purely theoretical qualification that strong recommendations about demonstrating improvement within the candidate’s own situation were made to ensure that the practical application of the theoretical work was carried through:

... many of the headteachers and governors responding were clear that they would expect anyone with the qualification to have caused some improvement within their current school ... All candidates will therefore be required to show evidence that they have caused improvement in their current school before gaining the qualification (Teacher Training Agency, 1996c, para 46).

This reinforces the Secretary of State’s desire for the qualification to be rooted in school improvement.
Part of the development of the new qualification was to recognise the work of areas outside education so, consequently, it was not surprising to see the TTA taking a strong line on this in the establishment of regional centres: it will be a condition of contract that the provision at the NPQH Training and Development Centres draws on the best practice from outside education as well as from inside the profession (Teacher Training Agency, 1996c, para 36).

It was also not surprising, considering the reservations that many teachers and heads have about the application of management techniques from the business world cited above, that the following response was made: I support the principles identified but any management practice drawn from outside education should be positively appropriate to the task of educating children and young adults and not simply to running a production, industrial or manufacturing company (Response by primary headteacher, 1996).

The important relationship with the governing body also demanded a response which aimed at highlighting the importance of developing a positive working relationship: While fully supporting the proposals we feel that greater emphasis should be placed on the head’s relationship with the Board of Governors and the factors that make this partnership fruitful (Response by governor, 1996).

In the final draft standards, the reference to the expectation that the headteacher works with the governing body, while previously emphasised in the wording prior to the Stage Two Consultation, is further established in bold type (see Teacher Training Agency, 1996c, p. 19).

The qualification has, in response to these views, made changes to the tone and nature of the standards and the manner in which they are to be assessed.

Implementation

The TTA has established a set of ten regional centres in England for assessment and for training and development. Each centre is under the control of the TTA and accountable to the board. In addition to the development centres, a series of distance learning materials will provide an alternative means of study so that issues of access are not a prohibitive aspect for candidates. The compulsory core will focus on “strategic direction and development ... implementation, monitoring and reviewing of policies and practices” (Teacher Training Agency, 1996c, p. 11). The qualification will be gained within one to three years with funding “channelled as a grant to the successful candidates through LEAs for those in LEA-maintained schools and through the NPQH Assessment Centres for those in grant-maintained schools” (Teacher Training Agency, 1996c, p. 14).

The trial phase in the first half of 1997 has resulted in modifications to the delivery of the programme and it is inevitable that the qualification will continue to evolve and be subject to constant review because it is a professional qualification, setting out to enable the effective training and development of suitable candidates for school leadership. As schools and their social and political contexts grow and develop, so the qualification itself will have to evolve and transform to meet changing demands.

With the introduction of the NPQH, supported by the Government and developed collaboratively through the educational sector by the TTA, we may have plugged the gap in training our school leaders. The qualification must now gain a reputation as a rigorous measure of potential in aspirant headteachers as a sure guide to governors and a clear programme for the development of future school leaders. It should then be possible for individuals to gain credit towards higher degrees for some of the work which they have been carrying out for NPQH.

References


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