Exploring the role of Executive Headteachers

Research information sheet

What is the project about?

Executive headteachers form a key part of the school leadership landscape (NCSL, 2010) and the role has become increasingly prevalent within schools’ management and governing structures in recent years\(^1\). However, there has been little research on the nature of the role, the qualities and competencies required, and the range of structures and contexts in which executive headteachers work\(^2\).

This collaborative research project aims to better understand the prevalence and nature of the executive headteacher role – in order to inform policy and practice, including implications for governing bodies appointing to the role, and development support for the role.

Who is conducting the research?

This study is being carried out by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER), the National Governors’ Association (NGA) and The Future Leaders Trust (FLT). The three organisations are combining their research interests, in order to inform a range of policy and practice developments relating to executive headteachers.

What are the research aims?

This project will explore the following three main questions:

1. What are the characteristics and distribution of executive headteachers (e.g. gender, ethnicity, pay, qualifications, school type) compared to the profile of other headteachers?
2. What are the distinguishing features of the executive headteacher role (e.g. qualities required, key features and challenges, leadership structures associated with the role) as compared with more traditional headship?
3. What are the distinctive aspects of appointing to the executive head role (e.g. how and why governing bodies appoint to the role, associated governing structures, and recruitment criteria), as compared with traditional headship?

What will the study involve?

The study will involve a thematic analysis of headship and executive headship application packs, secondary analysis of the School Workforce Census data, and case study interviews with executive headteachers and their colleagues in schools.

---

\(^1\) In 2010 there was an estimated 450 executive headteachers in England, compared to just 25 in 2004 (NCSL, 2010)

When will the study happen?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>December 2015 – January 2016</td>
<td>Thematic qualitative study of headship and executive headship application packs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January – February 2016</td>
<td>Secondary quantitative analysis of School Workforce Census data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February – April 2016</td>
<td>Case study telephone interviews with up to ten schools (up to three representatives per school)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April – May 2016</td>
<td>Analysis and reporting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 2016</td>
<td>Publication and dissemination</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

How will schools benefit from taking part?

Leadership is one of the most influential factors on student outcomes\(^3\). This research will inform understandings about effective recruitment, deployment and leadership structures associated with executive headteachers, contributing to improved leadership and learning for children in England. Participants involved in case studies will have an active role in informing the findings.

How will NFER and partners use and protect the data collected?

All data gathered during this project will only be used for the purposes of this evaluation. It will be treated in strict confidence and will be collected and held in line with the Data Protection Act 1998. Research participants will be afforded informed consent to their data being shared by NFER, NGA and FLT for the purposes of the research. Qualitative data will be anonymised. No individuals will be identifiable in any report arising from this evaluation.

How will the findings be used?

The findings will be published in a report in June 2016. This study will provide evidence-based implications for policy and practice, including, for example: the implications for supporting governors’ roles in appointing executive heads; and for supporting the further development of the executive head role. The findings will be of interest to Government, schools, academy chains, local authorities, governor associations, school leadership professional bodies and organisations providing leadership training and development.

Who can I contact for more information?

For more information please contact: Pippa Lord at NFER (01904 567633, p.lord@nfer.ac.uk); Tom Fellows at NGA (0121 237 3780, tom.fellows@nga.org.uk); Katy Theobald at FLT (020 3116 6311 katy.theobald@future-leaders.org.uk).

\(^3\) Leithwood et al. (2006)