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What makes a headteacher "executive"?

The role and responsibilities of executive headteachers in England

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National Governors' Association

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Introduction

Executive headteachers have often been defined in the literature as either substantive or strategic headteachers of more than one school (Chapman et al 2008; Harris et al 2006; NCLS 2010; Hummerstone 2012). This generally means that an executive headteacher either:

(1) becomes the substantive headteacher[1] of more than one school;

(2) remains the substantive headteacher of his or her current school whilst becoming the strategic leader of one or more other schools; or

(3) has no substantive headship in any school but remains the strategic leader of a chain, federation or collaboration of schools.

However, educational stakeholders such as the National Governors' Association (NGA), the National Association of Headteachers (NAHT) and the School Teachers' Review Body (STRB) have raised concerns that there is a lack of understanding and consistency in the deployment, structural arrangements and role of the executive headteacher on the ground.

This is because there are many examples of headteachers of one school going by the title of executive headteacher, and headteachers who are in charge of more than one school (either as part of a MAT, federation of other collaborative arrangement) being employed under the title of headteacher or CEO (Hummerstone, 2012). This raises problems for schools looking to appoint an executive headteacher. Specifically, there is discrepancy around the stages at which a school should appoint a headteacher or executive headteacher; what an executive headteacher is expected to do beyond that of a traditional headteacher; and what the formal leadership structure in an executive headteacher model should look like. One of the groups to suffer the most from this lack of clarity is school governing boards who have appointed, or are looking to appoint, an executive headteacher. This report aims to scope the role and deployment of executive headteachers in English schools and consists of a desktop review of 15 executive headteacher application packs from the *Times Educational Supplement (TES)* website. The findings add weight to the argument that the role of the executive headteacher, and the structural arrangements in an executive headteacher model, are inconsistent. This paves the way for further research into the role of executive headteachers and a review of the accepted definition in light of its practical application.

Background

Although the first executive headteachers appeared in 2004, the concept of the role was initially suggested by New Labour nearly two decades ago. In 1996 the Prime Minister Tony Blair, speaking at Ruskin College Oxford, announced a new policy that would allow outstanding headteachers 'to take over schools that local education authorities identify as heading for failure'. These headteachers would 'effectively be running two sites' until the time that the 'less successful school would be able to stand on its own two feet again' (Blair, 1996). Although this initiative did not materialise as the government had envisioned (see Araujo, 2009 for an

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[1] The term 'substantive headteacher', according to the school teachers' pay and conditions document (STPCD), refers to any person who is 'appointed as acting headteacher to carry out the functions of a headteacher pursuant to section 35(3) or 36(3) of the Education Act 2002 but not a teacher who is assigned and carries out duties of a headteacher without being so appointed'.

overview of what became the *Fresh Start* programme), the idea of headteachers running multiple schools has become a reality over the past ten years. A review of executive headship (NCSL, 2010) found that there were an estimated 25 executive headteachers across England in 2004 which, by 2010, had risen to 450.

Since this time, the evidence suggests that the number of executive headteachers has continued to rise. The Education Act 2002 gave schools greater autonomy to formally work in partnership under multi academy trust (MAT) and federation arrangements and, subsequently, the Academies Act 2010 removed many of the legal barriers for maintained schools looking to convert to academy status. Although there are no official statistics on federations, figures as of July 2015 from the Department for Education (DfE, 2015) show a rise in the number of academies. There are now around 4725 academies across England, 1423 of which are in a sponsored academy arrangement (mostly MATs). In order to implement a shared vision, Howarth (2015) found that federations and MATs often appoint an executive headteacher to work across multiple schools.

Literature Review

Despite the increase in the number of executive headteachers over the last decade, and the likely increase in the future, the current literature on the roles and responsibilities of an executive headteacher is sparse. Chapman et al (2008) outline that it 'provided only a partial account of developments on the ground' and that it tended to be 'descriptive rather than analytic'. Since this, the most substantial report on executive headteachers, written by the National College for Leadership of Schools and Children's Services (NCLS), was published in 2010. The findings were based on 15 face-to-face interviews with executive headteachers and a survey of executive headteachers, governors and other stakeholders.[2] Although a valuable contribution, the report did not make it clear what governors should expect from an executive headteacher when they are recruiting and interviewing candidates; how governance should operate within an executive headship model; and what governors can expect from an executive headteacher once in post. The current literature is particularly weak at addressing the skills needed to be a competent executive headteacher and the governance and leadership arrangements in an executive headteacher model.

The four points below summarise the various different interpretations of the skills that governing boards should be looking for when appointing a candidate:

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[2] The report did not specify how many executive headteachers, governors or stakeholders were interviewed.

(1) The ability to operate and think strategically (NCLS, 2010; Barnes, 2006; Barnes et al, 2005).	(2) Having the ability to forge strong relationships (Harris et al, 2006; NCLS 2010; Hummerstone 2012).
The NCLS (2010) outlines the need for executive headteachers to stay focused on performance. Hummerstone (2012) takes this further stating that executive headteachers must demonstrate an ability to move away from operational management. Harris et al (2006) also notes the importance of executive headteachers being able to evaluate and plan for whole schools.	This includes the ability to communicate effectively (NCLS 2010; Hummerstone 2012) and forge collaborative partnerships with others (Harris et al, 2006; Hummerstone, 2012). Hummerstone (2012) further notes the need for executive headteachers to have 'entrepreneurial and political skills' to create links and consolidate views amongst different groups.
(3) Certain moral and personal attributes (NCLS 2010; Barnes 2006; Hummerstone 2012).	(4) The ability to shape the direction of the school, secure change and drive through a moral purpose (Hummerstone 2012; Barnes 2006; NCLS 2010).
The NCLS (2010) and Barnes (2006) note that resilience is a necessary attribute for executive headteachers. Barnes also outlines that executive headteachers need to be optimistic, uncompromising and put faith in others. Hummerstone (2012) states the need for executive headteachers to show the 'mature behaviours of self-worth, patience and genuine humility'.	Barnes (2006) outlines a need for 'modelling' and 'shaping direction'. Others highlight the ability to 'signal moral purpose and secure momentum' in some form or another (Hummerstone 2012; NCLS 2010). Harris et al (2006) state that an executive headteacher should be able to change the school culture, establish rapid change and build leadership capacity.

There were several key attributes which were picked up in some studies but not others. The NCLS (2010) highlights the need for the executive head to 'balance between standardisation and respecting difference', with Barnes (2006) stating that executive headteachers need a 'strong vision'. The NCLS (2010) also noted the importance of being 'even handed between schools' and to 'work closely with governors' and Hummerstone (2012) emphasises that executive headteachers should have exemplary 'system leadership skills' so that they are able to digest complex situations and see links across the system.

Nevertheless, this simple set of skills does not take into account that the role varies considerably based upon the context in which an executive headteacher is employed. According to the NCLS, there are five specific reasons for recruiting an executive headteacher. These are:

    (1) because of underperformance or other failures within the school;

    (2) because local or national circumstances (whether political or financial) make it necessary;

    (3) a wish for greater 'multi-agency' local or municipal collaboration;

    (4) when schools form part of a partnership or federation and;

    (5) when schools look to form a multi-academy trust (MAT)

Each of these comes with its own distinct set of skills. Indeed, an executive headteacher employed to address underperformance in another school will need to have the ability to make rapid changes and challenge staff weaknesses, whereas an executive headteacher employed to work with multiple agencies in the community will need excellent negotiation and collaboration skills to build strong partnerships and/or forge community cohesion. In addition, the size and scope of the role also impact the skills needed. On one end of the spectrum, a pair of small schools that join together for greater sustainability may have an executive headteacher whose role differs little from that of a headteacher of a single large school. In contrast, the executive headteacher of a large chain of secondary schools may take a far more strategic role, spend little time in his/her schools and require a completely different skillset.

As well as a lack of consistency in the literature around the skills needed to be an executive headteacher, another problem facing governors recruiting executive headteachers is the lack of clear direction as to the most effective structural arrangements in an executive headteacher model. In England several types of school structure have emerged that go beyond the traditional single school model, most of which require some form of joint leadership such as a joint governing board and an executive headteacher. Academies have several different structures that they can employ when seeking formal collaboration, but schools do not have to have academy status in order to form groups and can instead form federations as local authority schools. Federations include shared leadership, one single overarching governing board and, in many cases, an executive headteacher.[3]

As federations have only existed since 2002 and, in the case of MATs, only became commonplace over the past five years, they are a relatively new phenomenon in the education world and at times collaborative arrangements are experimental. The different school models outlined above have not adequately been explored in relation to executive headteachers, particularly as most of the research is outdated. When the NCLS report was published in 2010 there was little data on academy trust arrangements and, at the time, the NCLS found that the majority of executive headteachers operated in schools that did not share a formal collaborative structure. Only 31.3% of executive headteachers operated within a federation; 36.5% of executive headteachers operated in an informal collaboration or partnership of schools; 17.4% of executive headteachers were performing an interim role within another school; and 3.2% operated in informal school clusters. The size and scope of these structures also varied. The NCLS reported that 90% of executive headteachers were responsible for two schools, with the remaining 10% responsible for either three or four schools.

The current literature suggests that structure impacts upon the formal relationship between the executive headteacher and the governing board(s) in a school collaboration. The NCLS report did not find a consistent contractual arrangement between the governing board and executive headteacher. The report outlined that contractual arrangements could either be in the form of a single contract or a formal agreement between

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[3] Although the terms 'soft' and 'hard' are sometimes used to describe federations, this report will not use this distinction. As per the legal definition, all federations should be considered 'hard' (i.e. formal arrangements that include one governing board with authority over multiple schools). Soft federations, which do not require schools to relinquish their individual governing boards, will be covered under collaborations.

multiple schools. Alternatively, a joint governing board may employ the executive headteacher directly and have responsibility for governance in all of the schools in the group. In MATs, the arrangements between the executive headteacher and the governing board are further complicated. The government has left the responsibility for deciding the level of delegation for schools within a MAT to the trustees (DfE, 2014). If governors, trustees or members do not understand what to expect from an executive headteacher they cannot be expected to delegate responsibility across their schools effectively. The lack of clarity around structures and the formal arrangements in an executive headteacher model can cause anxiety and hostility from governing boards and, in turn, executive headteachers. A survey of primary governors and headteachers conducted by Barnes (2006) found that governors felt 'nervous' and 'anxious' about setting up formal collaborations. This anxiety, according to Barnes, can lead to hostility from the governing board towards newly appointed executive headteachers. In one case, only after the governing board had received assurances from the local authority, had acknowledged the financial benefit of collaboration, and had experienced first-hand the success of having an executive headteacher did they fully accept the arrangement.

From reviewing the literature around the role and skills of an executive headteacher, and the structural arrangements in an executive headteacher model, it is clear that more needs to be done to understand these complexities. In particular, given the changes to the education system since 2010 it is important to understand the role as it is now, especially because of the many changes since NCLS published its report. For governors, getting the right leadership model to match the right school structure is crucial to forging a robust leadership team. It is also important for governing boards to understand the scope of the executive headteacher's role, the specific authority that comes with the position and how (and which) governing boards can hold executive headteachers to account for specific actions in a school. This paper signals the start of a wider study into executive headteachers. Although touching on these issues, its primary aim is to expose the need for further work in this area.

Methodology

15 executive headteacher application packs were subject to a desktop review exercise in order to find out more about the types of schools/groups that employ executive headteachers, the role an executive headteacher is expected to fulfil and the skills they need to in order to meet the expected standards.

The application packs were taken from a sample of those available online between 2013 and 2015. Most of the application packs came from the *Times Educational Supplement (TES)* website, however there were others from school and council websites. The sample was taken predominantly in December 2013 and January 2014, with one application from 2015.

The data was supplemented with information from the DfE Performance Tables website and school (for groups of schools) websites in order to find out more about the context and leadership arrangements in the schools analysed. The following questions guided the research agenda of this preliminary piece:

- What does the executive headteacher role involve?

- Do different schools have different ideas of what is included in the role?
- How does the role of executive headteacher differ from that of a 'traditional' headteacher?
- What is the senior leadership team staffing structure under an executive headteacher?

The structure of the schools analysed

The structures of the schools analysed in this study varied considerably (see appendix one), with a mixture of MATs, federations and standalone schools. From the application packs and school websites it is clear that:

- there was variety in how many schools the executive headteacher would oversee
- despite all of the schools being part of a group, trust or federation, in some the successful candidate would operate in a single school only

From across the 15 application packs, several different models for the scope of the role were identified. First, two schools advertised for a headteacher of a single school with two sites, claiming that they did this based on the fact that the school was split across different locations. Second, three of the schools advertised for an executive headteacher who would only have oversight of one school. Nevertheless, the scope of the role in each of these involved either some (or at least some proposed) collaborative work, or some work beyond that of a traditional headteacher. This included driving improvement across other schools within a group, and also in anticipation for expanding the remit of the role from one to two schools. The most common model was, however, consistent with that outlined in the NCLS report, with most executive headteachers having leadership responsibility in two or more schools. Nine of the schools/groups advertised for an executive headteacher to oversee two schools and one of the schools/groups advertised for an executive headteacher to oversee three schools.

The pay differed considerably but generally reflected the size and scope of the role. Pay started at £48,991 for small primary collaborations and went as high as £106,137 for the executive headteacher of a large all-through school.

Qualifications, professional experience and skills of the executive headteacher

As would be expected, the recruitment packs specified that executive headteachers needed to have a certain level of experience prior to taking on the role. All of the schools were looking for a candidate with a background in education and teaching, with the application packs leaving little scope for leaders outside of education to apply. Executive headteachers were expected to have specific academic qualifications and professional experience. The qualifications asked for included:

- An undergraduate degree (discipline not specified in any application pack) and in some cases evidence of further education at postgraduate level. Three schools specifically requested a first class degree whereas the others simply required a degree. One third of the person specifications outlined that it would be desirable for the candidate to have postgraduate qualifications such as a masters or other 'evidence of further study'.

- To be a teacher. All of the application packs requested that the candidate should have Qualified Teacher Status (QTS).
- The national professional qualification for headship (NPQH). The need for the NPQH was less common across the 15 schools. Four schools/groups outlined that it was essential that the candidate had either taken or was taking the NPQH, whereas four others stated that it was desirable. Five schools did not specify the need for the NPQH and one school stated that it was not necessary if the candidate was already a headteacher.
- One group requested that the candidate should have experience as a national or local leader of education or of school-to-school support.

The professional experience needed to be an executive headteacher involved having a proven track record of effective senior leadership (generally at a headship level) with an emphasis on strategic leadership and school improvement. This included 'successful and wide ranging experience as a member of the senior leadership team' or 'recent management experience and associated development/training (at least 3 years)'. One school went further than this, specifying that it wanted an individual who had experience in 'successful senior leadership resulting in measurable long term improvements'. A two school federation specified the need for candidates to have 'experience of managing and supporting staff' with another federation wanting to see 'evidence of effective management of [the] senior leadership team'.

Further to this, nearly all of the person specifications asked for a candidate to have a 'demonstrable' or 'proven' track record in, or experience of, strategic leadership and management. Many of the person specifications implied that this experience should be from a school setting, specifically referring to a track record in school improvement. Indeed, schools were looking for past experience in improvement planning including improving schools, developing operational plans and setting key performance indicators. Despite this, however, many of the schools had differing views on what experience they specifically wanted a candidate to have in terms of strategic leadership. For instance, one academy trust stated that it wanted an executive headteacher who could show evidence of having driven change and of raising standards. Others wanted a candidate who could demonstrate the ability to sustain standards.

The level of professional experience extended beyond leadership experience, with applicants generally expected to have a certain level of experience in the classroom. In roughly half of the person specifications it was required that an executive headteacher should have exemplary teaching experience. One trust wanted their candidate to have 'a minimum of 5 years' teaching in a challenging school with demonstrated exemplary results', with another requiring their candidate to be an 'effective and creative classroom practitioner with teaching experience in the primary sector'. One special school requested that the candidate show 'evidence of teaching 'Outstanding' lessons' and at least 'two years FTE [full time equivalent] experience of teaching in a special school for pupils with SEBD [Social, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties]'. Some specifications also outlined specific teaching criteria needed for the role. This included, in one primary collaboration, having 'substantial, successful teaching' experience including 'successful experience of leading one or more subject areas', 'teaching experience in at least 2 of the 3 key stages: in

primary schools', 'curriculum leadership in one or more core subjects' and 'experience of teaching in more than one school'.

Executive headteachers were also expected to 'demonstrate a range of high quality communication skills' both in and outside their school(s). This should include 'written, oral and presentation skills', having the 'ability to communicate diplomatically at an appropriate level and manner' and being capable in communicating with a 'range of audience[s]' which included staff, pupils, parents and governors. Specific communication skills included being effective at influencing, negotiating and engaging with others, and having a management style which was enthusiastic, motivational and inspiring. Executive headteachers should be able to 'inspire, motivate, enthuse and empower both staff and pupils' and encourage 'enthusiastic and positive attitudes' in others. This involved, as requested by one school, 'inspirational leadership with a "can-do" attitude' and, in another school, the 'ability to delegate, motivate, mediate, consult and encourage the school community'. Other similar phrases included 'fostering...enthusiastic and positive attitudes in others', being inspirational, having a 'winning attitude' and possessing 'exceptional interpersonal skills in managing and coaching individuals at all levels to out-perform against their targets and objectives'.

In addition, one of the most important skills that all schools and groups were looking for from an executive head was for them to have expert knowledge of the field of education. Candidates would need to show 'knowledge of current education legislation' and 'in depth knowledge and understanding of national education priorities'. Apart from this, schools asked for:

- knowledge and experience of Ofsted at senior level
- knowledge and understanding of teaching quality
- to understand new technologies and their 'use and impact', including new media and ICT
- understanding of education specific to phase/type of school (e.g. strong knowledge of Special Educational Needs and knowledge of early years or sixth forms where applicable)
- knowledge and experience of working within a federation/academy trust model
- knowledge of good curriculum implementation

Finally, some of the person specifications emphasised that the executive headteacher needed to show commitment to diversity, student development and behaviour management. This included being able to 'foster a culture of respect, fairness, openness and self-discipline', showing 'commitment and [being an] advocate for equality principles and the principles of inclusion' and promoting 'integrity, compassion and tolerance'. In terms of student development and behaviour, candidates were expected to be able to demonstrate the ability to 'promote achievement, good behaviour and discipline'.

The role of the executive headteacher

From the application packs it was clear that executive headteachers would generally have some form of strategic role within their organisation. In addition, all of the executive headteacher packs stated that the role would include overseeing, reviewing and evaluating the effectiveness of teaching and learning,

resources and behaviour. The executive headteacher would also remain in overall control of the organisation of the school(s) in some form or another and have overall responsibility for the structure of the staffing team. However, the operational role differed significantly depending on the type of relationship the executive headteacher had with his/her schools; how many schools were part of a collaboration; and what the governing board wanted to get out of the relationship with the executive headteacher. Subtle but important differences lay in whether the executive headteacher or the head of school was responsible for the day-to-day running of the school (including hiring, training and holding to account staff below senior leadership level), general administration and pastoral responsibilities, setting the curriculum, and implementing the school improvement plan on a daily basis.

Although many of the application packs were vague as to whether the executive headteacher would take responsibility for a particular task or delegate it elsewhere, it was possible to identify some of the core features of the role of the executive headteacher. This section will focus on the key requirements of the executive headteacher role.

Strategy development and implementation

The role of the executive headteacher includes:

- Working in collaboration with the governing board, the executive headteacher will be expected to help set the vision and strategic direction for his/her school(s). The wishes of the governing board, and whether the school has another level of strategic management (such as a Chief Executive), will dictate how much of an influence the executive headteacher has over setting the strategy and vision. This may include the fulfilment of a number of core objectives (e.g. to bring about school improvement).
- Translating the vision and the strategy into workable operational plans. The executive headteacher should lead on the implementation of these plans.
- Expanding the scope and reach of the trust or group of schools and increasing the prestige of the organisation on a local and, in some cases, national stage.

Commentary

The application packs placed an emphasis on candidates having the necessary skills and experience to lead on strategy and to implement effective operational plans. This included, in all cases, having strong organisational skills. Many of the application packs expanded upon this point, emphasising the ability to prioritise tasks, manage time effectively and 'initiate, plan, monitor and evaluate school improvement and change processes'. Indeed, one group of non-federated church schools highlighted the importance of having the 'ability to organise work, prioritise tasks, make decisions and manage time effectively' and a two school federation commented on the need to 'plan, organise and evaluate the work of the federation and prioritise areas for development and improvement'. Possessing the ability to think creatively and openly was also important, with some schools wanting candidates to show evidence of innovation and openness to ideas through being able to 'think and plan strategically and creatively'. In order to show that they are effective strategic planners executive headteachers should, in general, be able to demonstrate in their application and

interview that they have a clear strategic direction for the school/group, showing 'evidence of a clear vision for the future of the federation' and 'communicate a clear vision … and how it will develop over the next three years to achieve outstanding status'.

These skills are essential for an executive headteacher who is expected to contribute to a 'compelling vision, supported by a clear strategic plan'. Yet not all executive headteachers had the same amount of influence in forming and deciding the strategic vision. The majority of application packs fell on a spectrum ranging from wanting the executive headteacher to work 'with the Trust to provide a strategic lead' to wanting a candidate who would act as 'a professional advisor … and to supply … [the governing board] … with information with which to fulfil their strategic leadership'. In some cases, the school(s) explicitly wanted an executive headteacher who would 'articulate and share a vision underpinned by targets and goals and aligned with an ability to empower others', including 'empowering all pupils and staff to excel'. In a number of cases, however, the school(s) outlined preferred strategic priorities which they would want the executive headteacher to implement. For instance, a small Catholic primary collaboration wanted a candidate who would follow the 'preferred future, expressed in the strategic vision and development of a Catholic school'. Another academy trust listed the strategic priorities that it wanted the executive headteacher to focus on, which included to '(1) ensure that every child receives high quality education and achieves academic and social success; (2) fully engages the community in all aspects of the schools; (3) manages the Trust's resources efficiently and effectively, ensuring good value for money; (4) provides educational leadership to all of the Trust schools; and (5) contributes to school improvement across the local area'. In addition, some groups gave a role to the headteachers of individual schools, as well as the governors and the executive headteacher, to set the strategic vision. Indeed, a two school multi-academy trust wanted the executive headteacher to work with the 'trust, governors and headteachers of each institution' to set the strategic direction, whereas another also gave a role to the wider community, with the executive headteacher expected to create 'a shared vision and ethos with internal and external stakeholders'.

As well as helping to formulate the strategy, the executive headteacher would also be tasked with creating operational plans. As many of the application packs outlined, this involved 'translat[ing] the vision into agreed objectives and operational plans across each school site' and, as further expanded upon by two federations, ensuring that 'the Federation Development Plan and School Development Plan supports and develops the federation's core values and aims'. The aim of this, according to one application pack, would be to 'promote and sustain school improvement'. Executive headteachers were expected to work with a number of stakeholders to ensure that the operational plans were implemented effectively, including the 'head of each institution' (where applicable) and 'the school community'.

Finally, many executive headteachers were given the strategic task of expanding the scope and resources of their Trust, federation or group. This may include 'deliver[ing] on opportunities for the expansion of both the Trust and … [the two schools in the trust] … in line with the vision and values of the Trustees and the Governing Bodies', 'secur[ing] strong links with other key partners who are supporting the Academy's development', or hosting 'networking opportunities'. Other application packs went further, with one requiring the executive headteacher to 'position the Trust at the forefront of what is taking place around

multi-academy trusts and where it can take advantage for the benefits of the schools' communities'. In one instance, it was made clear that the executive headteacher was not the chief representative of their group of schools and should 'deputise for the Chief Executive as required'.

Using data effectively

The role of the executive headteacher includes:

- Having knowledge of and, in some cases, a proven track record in utilising data effectively. Specifically, to identify areas for improvement, ensuring that the school is 'data rich' and relay information about the school to a wide range of stakeholders.
- Competency in self-evaluation and being able to identify and act upon problems, ensuring that the improvement plan and the work towards the strategic direction of the school(s) is on track.
- Monitoring specific areas such as the quality of staff, the effectiveness of the improvement plan and institution and classroom practice.

Commentary

Just as data is an important part of any senior leader's role within a school, the application packs placed a strong emphasis on the importance of the executive headteacher being able to utilise data effectively. This generally included the ability to 'understand, analyse and make effective use of a wide range of data' and use this 'data strategically in order to identify issues and make appropriate interventions'. Specifically, the schools/groups wanted executive headteachers to use data for the purpose of developing strategic plans, establishing benchmarks, setting institution wide improvement targets and monitoring and evaluating progress towards each of these measures. It was commonly requested that the executive headteacher had 'experience of using national, local and school data to monitor and improve school performance'. It was stated that data should be used 'to inform practice' at 'all levels of management'. In order to ensure that there was enough data for the executive headteacher to complete this role, one group specifically requested that the executive headteacher ensure that 'the school is data rich … [and] … the culture is one of finding the right piece of data which … [is] … relevant and makes a difference'. Once again, it was made clear in a number of application packs that the executive headteacher needed to relay data to a wide range of internal and external stakeholders.

In order to use data in a meaningful way, executive headteachers were also generally expected to be competent in self–evaluation. In other words, executive headteachers were expected to be capable of collecting meaningful information themselves and developing this into strategies and priorities. Some application packs requested that candidates have a 'proven track record' or 'experience' in 'managing successful self-evaluation' and 'whole-school self-evaluation and improvement strategies'. One application pack stated that, during the recruitment process, candidates should 'demonstrate how rigorous review and evaluation of whole school staff performance management leads to school improvement, raises achievement and brings about high expectations of success'. Across the application packs, executive headteachers were expected to 'improve the organisational and management efficiency of each school site';

ensure that 'the school performance plans [are] based on evidence'; further develop improvement strategies; and ensure that 'progress against targets and objectives is reviewed regularly'.

Some of the areas that schools wanted their executive headteacher to monitor and evaluate include:

- Monitoring the quality of staff. As outlined by a number of organisations this meant 'ensur[ing] staff accountabilities [are] clearly defined, understood, agreed and…subject to rigorous appraisal, review and evaluation'.
- All of the executive headteacher job descriptions tasked the candidate with monitoring and 'continuously reviewing' the effectiveness of the improvement plan and strategy. This included monitoring, reviewing and evaluating 'policies, priorities and targets on the standards and quality, and take any follow-up actions as may be necessary'.
- Monitoring institution and classroom practice. The application packs asked for an executive headteacher who would 'support the head of each institution to monitor, evaluate and review institution practice and promote improvement strategies'.

Using this data, executive headteachers were expected to 'set stretching targets' for schools and monitor these; promoting the 'governing body's commitment to the setting of high expectations and stretching targets for each institution's community'.

Recruiting and training staff

The role of the executive headteacher includes:

- Recruiting, or ensuring the successful recruitment of, high quality members of staff. Some application packs suggested that the executive headteacher would have more responsibility for recruiting staff than others. However, all executive headteachers would retain responsibility for recruiting senior leaders within the school.
- Leading by example by acting professionally and efficiently and expecting the same of colleagues. This included being proactive in terms of personal development and workload.
- Facilitating the training of staff and, in some cases, doing this in-house.

Commentary

Nearly all executive headteachers were tasked with recruiting and retaining high quality members of staff. However, there was variation as to who the executive headteacher would be responsible for recruiting. At one end of the spectrum, the executive headteacher would 'produce, maintain and review job descriptions and personnel specifications for all staff' and 'lead … [on] … hiring and evaluating the performance of all staff members'. At the other end, it was not clear whether the executive headteacher or another member of staff would have overall responsibility for recruiting and retaining staff. In the majority of cases, the executive headteacher would 'help the governors [or trustees] to recruit, retain and deploy staff', including the 'recruitment of [a] high-quality leadership and teaching team'. Yet, in other specifications, it was implied (but not explicitly stated) that the responsibility for recruiting staff would be delegated elsewhere, with the

executive headteacher 'in conjunction with the governors [being] responsible for and implement[ing] the recruitment, induction and retention policies for the school'.

In terms of managing staff, executive headteachers were tasked with leading by example by acting professionally and efficiently. This included, in many cases, being autonomous in terms of personal development and workload as well as taking responsibility for their own self development. For example, one trust wanted a candidate who would lead by example and manage his/her own workload. The executive headteacher was also tasked with ensuring that there is 'an atmosphere of support' and that 'everyone feels … valued'. Executive headteachers should develop a culture of 'high expectations' and 'lead and inspire a lively, welcoming and effective teaching and learning atmosphere'.

Some job descriptions also required the executive headteacher to train, or facilitate the training of, other members of staff in-house. One executive headteacher of a single large secondary school was tasked with acting 'as a professional mentor for new headteachers' within the academy trust. Similarly, another standalone school wanted the executive headteacher to build the capacity for leadership within the school, with another looking for an executive headteacher who would 'be responsible for the development of in-service training and staff development'. The executive headteacher of two schools within a small MAT was required to 'coach, develop and grow leaders from within the organisation'.

Management of the school(s)

The role of the executive headteacher includes:

- Implementing the operational plans and creating an effective staffing and organisational structure to action these plans. The day-to-day management was either done by the executive headteacher or by another member of staff (presumably the head of school).
- Being responsible for the management of staff and deployment of staff in the school.
- Being responsible for ensuring that an effective curriculum was being delivered. However, how much influence the executive headteacher had in planning the curriculum varied between institutions.
- Controlling the delegation of the budget and, with oversight from the governing board, ensuring that all of the schools under their leadership remained financially robust.

Commentary

There was variation between application packs regarding how much of the day-to-day management would be done by the executive headteacher. Some wanted the executive headteacher to have direct involvement in the management of the school/group. One school expected the executive headteacher to implement the strategy, and others required the executive headteacher to 'assume overall responsibility for the day-to-day running of the school'; 'lead all operations at the school sites'; or to be 'the leading professional' across a number of school sites. Other schools/groups, particularly larger institutions, gave the executive headteacher less responsibility for the day-to-day management of the school/group. In one large secondary academy, for instance, the executive headteacher was simply tasked with being 'responsible for the Academy's management … development and all its resources' and 'ensur[ing] that suitable strategies are

implemented' to fulfil the trust's vision. Executive headteachers who did not manage the school on a daily basis were generally tasked with taking on a more strategic management position. For instance, in one school, the executive headteacher's role included supporting 'the school leadership team to fulfil their responsibilities … [and to] … carry out their duties'.

In general, candidates were expected to:

(1) Secure effective teaching and learning in all of their schools.

This included 'work[ing] with the governors to secure and sustain effective teaching and learning' and establishing 'creative, responsive and effective approaches to learning and teaching'. One school listed seven areas which the executive headteacher should oversee in order to 'secure and sustain effective inclusive learning and teaching'. This included developing the curriculum and ensuring effective recording and reporting of pupil assessment.

(2) Have an input into the formulation of the curriculum.

Some application packs were rather specific as to what they wanted the executive headteacher to focus on regarding the curriculum. One application pack emphasised the need to use the 'latest technology to support learning' and, in another school, a commitment to 'out-of-hours activities'. How much emphasis was placed on the curriculum in the recruitment packs, it appears, depended on whether the school wanted to implement a new curriculum or not. One federation wanted its executive headteacher to 'demonstrate a clear vision for the implementation of a new curriculum' and another school wanted the executive headteacher to 'plan a curriculum'. Another was expected to 'provide an outstanding curriculum including high standards in the basic skills of numeracy and literacy in the context of a creative curriculum'. In contrast, the actual input of the executive headteacher into the curriculum formulation of a large secondary school was far more strategic. Indeed, the job description outlined that the executive headteacher's role was to 'monitor and evaluate the curriculum for both quality and value for money' and to 'ensure that the curriculum delivered matches the needs of all students and is supported by high quality teaching'.

(3) Retain some control over the budget for their school(s).

Some job descriptions, particularly those that concerned appointments within MATs, limited the executive headteacher's financial role. In one academy trust, the executive headteacher was expected to work with the 'operations and finance team' of the academy trust to set the budget. Another executive headteacher, whose school was part of a MAT, was given an advisory role in formulating the budget, working to give 'advice to the Academy Trust and Academy Governing Body on the formulation of the annual and projected yearly budgets'. However, this was not always the case in MATs and some gave the executive headteacher responsibility to 'manage the Trust's financial and human resources effectively and efficiently to achieve the school's educational goals and priorities, ensuring systems are in place for the effective administration and control of school budgets'. This would be done by preparing and maintaining 'for the Trustees a balanced budget which matches the Trust's vision and the priorities within the improvement plans'.

Aside from MATs, other schools and groups also wanted the executive headteacher to ensure that (s)he could create a fiscally robust budget which matched the vision of the governing board. This included setting 'annual budgets for the schools' [presumably signed off by the governing board], 'setting appropriate priorities for expenditure and allocating funds accordingly', 'manag[ing], monitor[ing] and review[ing] the use of all available resources' and 'secur[ing] value for money'.

Because of the executive headteacher's budgeting responsibilities, all of the schools/groups requested that candidates have some experience in budgeting and financial management. This included a 'clear understanding and knowledge of budget management' and 'proven effective management of resources and funds'. A number of schools/groups wanted their candidates to show experience of understanding and managing 'large, complex budgets' with some being more specific, including one request for the executive headteacher to have 'experience of managing an income and expenditure budget of £3m plus'. In one academy trust, robust financial management included the 'implementation of effective business systems that ensured proper stewardship of school funds'. Specific experience included having astute financial management ability and being able to 'make use of stretched resources'.

(4) Have experience in human resources; correctly managing staff and pupils across the school(s).

The person specifications indicated that schools/groups wanted the executive headteacher to be effective in managing people, including possessing expertise in 'teamwork, empowerment and CPD'. Executive headteachers should have 'effective experience of staff management, appraisal, performance management and disciplinary procedures' and, in all of the schools/groups analysed, it was a priority that executive headteachers be competent in safeguarding and have an 'understanding of, and commitment to, safer recruitment and child protection procedures and the ability to ensure their implementation'.

(5) Pastoral responsibility

Some schools/groups also specifically requested that the executive headteacher ensures that pastoral policies are up to date.

Accountability

The role of the executive headteacher includes:

- Being both accountable to the governing board, chief executive (where applicable) and, in some cases, also the local governing body.
- Holding others within the organisation to account. This included ensuring that 'staff accountabilities are clearly defined, understood and agreed and are subject to rigorous appraisal, review and evaluation'.

Commentary

As already discussed the lines of accountability, both above and below the executive headteacher, varied from one organisation to the next. Dual accountability existed in a number of organisations. In one primary collaboration, for instance, the executive headteacher was accountable to two different governing bodies

due to 'commitments arising from contractual accountability' and, in another, it was noted that the executive headteacher should be 'accountable and responsible to the Directors of … [the] … Academies Trust and the Local Governing Body for the effective administration, management and performance of the School'. Executive headteachers would generally be expected to 'report to the governors regularly on the performance management of teachers at the school in relation to the STPCD'.

Schools and groups also wanted the executive headteacher to hold other staff to account within their organisation, ensuring that 'staff accountabilities are clearly defined, understood and agreed and are subject to rigorous appraisal, review and evaluation'. In a number of application packs the executive headteacher was expected to 'ensure that all staff have a clearly defined and agreed set of responsibilities'. Rigorous appraisal, review and evaluation might involve 'implement[ing] sound recording systems which inform the appropriate members of the school communities and beyond' and 'ensur[ing] all staff recognise their accountability for the success of the … [school/group]'.

Working with the wider community

The role of the executive headteacher includes:

- Acting as an ambassador for the collaboration, trust or federation and looking to expand its scope/resources in the future. Whether the organisation had a chief executive would decide whether the executive headteacher would act as its figurehead.
- Executive headteachers were also expected to facilitate integration and joint practice between the different schools/school sites under their remit.

Commentary

Schools/groups wanted to see that candidates had experience in community relations, effective partnership building and creating links with local and national stakeholders. Across all of the application packs, it was common for candidates to need to show experience in developing partnerships, including working with: parents, families, other schools, services, professional organisations, local authorities, employers, businesses and government agencies. Schools with specific requirements (such as special schools) may request that a candidate has experience of working with specialised external agencies yet, in general, schools/groups did not differ greatly in terms of what they wanted out of the partnerships, with all wanting positive relations with families and the local community. This could include collaborative working with other schools, a 'commitment to multi agency working and networking' and 'maintaining and developing links' with local institutions. Some schools/groups went further, specifying that the executive headteacher should have experience in 'development and implementation of effective community cohesion strategies'. In addition, the executive headteacher was also seen to be accountable to wider stakeholders, including parents, by 'develop[ing] and present[ing] a coherent, understandable and accurate account of each of the schools' performances to a range of audiences including governors, parents and carers'. Similarly schools/groups wanted their candidate to be accountable to the governors for the performance of the school and 'ensure that parents and pupils are well-informed about the curriculum, attainment and progress and about the contribution that they can make to achieve the schools targets'.

Three schools/groups expected candidates to market the school/group and increase its prestige. It was an essential criteria in one academy that the executive headteacher was able to create 'strategies for marketing the school' and, in another, that the executive headteacher was able to 'develop and oversee the successful expansion of the Trust's activities'. One of the key roles played by an executive headteacher, which was mentioned in all of the application packs, was the expectation that they would act as an ambassador for the group, trust or federation. This role included 'community-based learning experiences', the promotion of 'community cohesion' and to 'create and maintain effective partnerships with parents, governors and the local authority'. For example, a small primary collaboration wanted a candidate who would 'build a relationship with the local churches and parish communities, seeing participation in the celebration of the Eucharist as a crucial point of reference and stability'.

Finally, executive headteachers were also expected to facilitate integration and joint practice between the different schools/school sites under their remit. This, in some cases, included the 'integration of the two school communities into one unified learning community', 'shar[ing] effective practice' amongst institutions and for the executive headteacher to 'establish innovative and effective working relationships … particularly with the head of each institution, to ensure that the vision for the institution can flourish'.

Conclusion

This study has confirmed that there is inconsistency in the role and deployment of executive headteachers in England. Even in a small sample it was possible to find several examples of executive headteachers operating in a single school only, going against the commonly accepted definition that an executive headteacher requires oversight of two or more institutions. Although it remains unknown without further qualitative research why these schools did not simply employ headteachers, it can be suggested that there are differing interpretations as to what is takes to make a headteacher "executive". Indeed, the application packs seemed to point to extra training, mentoring and/or work within a wider group of schools as being activities which go beyond that of a traditional headteacher. In addition, the commonly accepted definition of an executive headteacher does not take into account the size and scope of the role. Appendix one shows that the leader of the 'application pack nine' group would qualify as an executive headteacher under this definition, despite having fewer than a quarter the number of pupils of 'application pack eight' (for the executive headteacher of a single school).

As for lines of accountability, the example of an executive headteacher signing separate contracts with two different schools for the same role is potentially problematic. In addition, not being clear which members of staff the executive headteacher is directly responsible for within the school could cause similar difficulties below the executive headteacher level, in particular where it is unclear whether the head of school or the executive headteacher is responsible for the management of the senior leadership team in the school.

More consistency can be found in the role of the executive headteacher. It is clear that executive headteachers have to undertake a strategic role within their organisation. This includes helping the board to set the vision (in some capacity), creating operational plans and continuously monitoring and reviewing these plans through self-evaluation. All of the application packs stated that the executive headteacher would

recruit some staff, although in some cases only at senior leadership level. Candidates would need to be able to lead by example and to be able to put an effective, motivated and competent staff team in place to meet the aims of the governing board. There was some inconsistency as to how much day-to-day management the executive headteacher would undertake, including some variation in how much experience they would need to have in teaching and curriculum formulation. Regardless of this, all executive headteachers would be ultimately accountable and responsible for the school(s) under their leadership. Even those that had little input in day-to-day management would be expected to put in place an effective system for which they would then be answerable.

This study highlights the urgent need for further exploration of the role and distribution of executive headteachers. In particular further work is needed to: provide clarity on the current demographics of executive headteachers across England; understand the distinction between the role of a headteacher and executive headteacher; and understand the executive headteacher's role when in post. The NGA will be working with the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) and the Future Leaders Trust (FLT) to explore these three areas further during the first half of 2016. The study raises the following questions which will need to be explored further:

1. Is it the number of schools, or the size of the cohort, that determines the scope of the role of the executive headteacher? For instance, is the scope of the role in two small primary schools less demanding than the role of an (executive) headteacher in a single, larger school?
2. Does an executive headteacher need additional skills and qualifications to those of a traditional headteacher. If so, what are these and why are they important?
3. Where an executive headteacher is accountable to more than one governing board and/or chief executive, how does this work in practice?
4. How much of the day-to-day management is done by a head of school in an executive headteacher model?
5. How much of the strategic management is done by the executive headteacher if they are answerable to a chief executive?

The NGA will be working with the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) and the Future Leaders Trust (FLT) to answer some of these questions, with a report due in summer 2016.

Appendix One

Below is information about each of the 15 schools/groups analysed for this report. The following information is taken from the application packs and the DfE School Performance tables. As most of these application packs are from between 2013 and early 2015, pay is based upon the leadership scale in the 2013/14 STCPD. Therefore, pay should be seen as an estimate not as an accurate figure.

APPLICATION PACK	STRUCTURE OF SCHOOL/GROUP	PHASE	NUMBER OF SCHOOLS*	NUMBER OF PUPILS*	PAY
ONE	SPONSER LED ACADEMY	PRIMARY	ONE (WITH THE POSSIBLITY TO EXPAND)	413	£57,520 - £66,623
TWO	MULTI-ACADEMY TRUST	MIXED	TWO	1460	N/A***
THREE	FOUNDATION SCHOOL	MIXED	ONE (TWO SITES)	1472	£91,473 - £105,502
FOUR	MULTI-ACADEMY TRUST	PRIMARY	TWO	c.772**	N/A***
FIVE	LA MAINTAINED SCHOOL	PRIMARY	ONE (TWO SITES)	1021	£96,249 - £106,137
SIX	LA FEDERATION	PRIMARY	TWO	387	£48,991 – £67,290
SEVEN	MULTI-ACADEMY TRUST	PRIMARY	TWO	559	N/A***
EIGHT	MULTI-ACADEMY TRUST	MIXED	ONE	1448	N/A***
NINE	INFORMAL PARTNERSHIP	PRIMARY	TWO	356	£56,109 - £65,011
TEN	LA FEDERATION	PRIMARY	TWO	775	N/A***
ELEVEN	MULTI- ACADEMY TRUST	MIXED	TWO	c. 150**	£71,701 - £79,081
TWELVE	NON- MAINTAINED SPECIAL SCHOOL	MIXED	ONE	85	£64,036 - £85,384
THIRTEEN	MULTI-ACADEMY TRUST	PRIMARY	TWO	c.840**	N/A***

| FOURTEEN | MULTI-ACADEMY TRUST | PRIMARY | THREE | 1451 | £75,900 - £87,229 |
| FIFTEEN | LA FEDERATION | PRIMARY | TWO | 666 | N/A*** |

* Number of Schools and number of pupils under the remit of the executive headteacher.

**Schools only recently opened and there is no information on the DfE Schools and College Performance tables. Figures taken from expected intake outlined in the schools' funding agreement.

***Pay not specified in the application pack.

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Further reading

- *The Road to Federation* http://www.nga.org.uk/Guidance/Research/The-Road-to-Federation-(1).aspx

- *What governing boards should expect from school leaders and what school leaders should expect from governing boards* http://www.nga.org.uk/getattachment/6e5d9511-1a78-4f56-8b15-13f6e9764cdc/Agreement-on-roles-NGA-ASCL-NAHT-2015-final

- *Twenty key questions for the governing board to ask itself* http://www.nga.org.uk/Guidance/Workings-Of-The-Governing-Body/Governance-Tools/Twenty-Questions.aspx

- *Twenty-one questions for multi academy trust boards* *http://www.nga.org.uk/getattachment/News/NGA-News/21Q/21-Questions-for-Multi-academy-Trusts-FINAL-(1).pdf*

- *A Framework for Governance* *http://www.nga.org.uk/getattachment/Guidance/Workings-Of-The-Governing-Body/Governance-Tools/Framework-for-Governance-(1)/PE-6189-Govenors_Report_FINAL_new.pdf*