



Academi Genedlaethol ar gyfer
Arweinyddiaeth Addysgol Cymru
National Academy for
Educational Leadership Wales

A Well-being Entitlement for Educational Leaders in Wales

Ysbrydoli Arweinwyr - Cyfoethogi Bywydau
Inspiring Leaders - Enriching Lives



Ariennir gan
Lywodraeth Cymru
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Introduction

The National Academy for Educational Leadership's mission is, 'Inspiring Leaders – Enriching Lives' with the aim of bringing clarity and coherence to educational leadership in Wales. The organisation works to ensure that practitioners have access to the most relevant, meaningful and inspiring professional learning.

If leaders are going to be able to achieve their purpose of 'enriching lives', then care must be taken to prioritise the Well-being of these leaders. Our commission group was well aware of the significant responsibility associated with this topic. We were not researching an abstract topic, we were researching an issue that was very personal to every leader interviewed and indeed to those leaders conducting the research. We had a moral imperative to ensure that we represented clearly and loudly, the views of educational leadership to reflect the current situation regarding the Well-being of leaders – we were not there to present our own views. We hope that we have achieved this.

As a result of our research and during our focus groups meetings, it became clear that the matter of 'audience' was not straightforward. It is important that we make it explicit here that this report is for those leaders at each tier of the Welsh education system with a responsibility for school-based leaders (including Welsh Government and Local Authorities) and all school leaders. There are many tiers and layers in the Welsh education system that contribute to issues that impact on the Well-being of School Leaders and this needs to be recognised and acted upon.

What is also apparent is that the findings contained in this report cannot be separated from the research on Recruitment and Retention. If we cannot work together to make progress to improve the Well-being of leaders, then we are hurtling ever closer to a significant crisis in educational leadership. We hope that our recommendations stimulate further discussion and prompt action that will lead to national improvements in the recruitment and retention crisis and instigate a Wales-wide approach to tackling the improvements needed. The well-being of educational leaders should not be determined by a 'lottery' of financial, geographical or scale/size related issues.

Our group was determined to adopt a positive approach to the commission and to be solution-focused rather than provide a list of topics and issues that affected the Well-being of leaders. We recognise that our recommendations are ambitious and aspirational, but we sincerely believe that they are achievable. Welsh Educational Leaders showed just what was possible in our whole-scale response to the Covid Pandemic. Welsh Government worked in collaboration with local authorities to ensure terms and conditions were re-written, policies updated, roles and responsibilities and job descriptions re-drafted and Well-being prioritised over accountability and compliance issues. Whilst the pandemic was not referenced at any point during our focus group meetings, we use this example to illustrate how reactive, responsive and effective we can be as a workforce when we work together. This commission report will explore and recommend the best ways to do this.

Recommendations

1. Support for school leaders' emotional, physical and mental well-being to enable them to thrive in their role

- 1.1 *Access to supervision, coaching, mentoring and counselling via a single point of contact.*
- 1.2 *The development of protocols to ensure that School Leaders are treated with dignity and respect.*
- 1.3 *An annual health care check for all Leaders.*
- 1.4 *Dedicated, uninterrupted 'leadership time' to be taken each week during the school day. This should be written into the terms and conditions of all School Leaders and upheld by Local Authorities and Governing Bodies*
- 1.5 *Establish and promote clear expectations around working hours, arrangements and conditions for School Leaders. with protected time when not 'on-duty'.*

2. Reduce bureaucracy to allow leaders to focus on the strategic direction of their schools

- 2.1 *Audit the current roles and responsibilities of leaders and remove elements that detract from the core purpose of School Leaders*
- 2.2 *Provide highly trained personnel to support School Leaders in dealing with specific issues not directly related to Teaching and Learning such as School Business Managers, HR Managers and Health and Safety Compliance Officers.*
- 2.3 *Undertake Workload Impact Assessments at all levels for all future initiatives, policy changes, and reforms*

3. Effective succession planning to enable successful recruitment and retention

- 3.1 *Head teachers are models for behaviour and must play a key role in creating a positive working environment where Well-being is prioritised.*
- 3.2 *Improve national opportunities for progressive professional learning beyond NPQH*
- 3.3 *Develop a career pathway and System Leadership approach, to share and retain leadership expertise in the Welsh education system.*

To achieve our recommendations, the commission group sets out an imperative three-point call to action:

- 1. **Conduct an urgent review of school leaders' terms and conditions, to make changes that will impact positively on school leaders' Well-Being.**
- 2. **Ensure appropriate funding is provided to give school leaders' Well-being the focus it needs and deserves, to help prevent ongoing burnout and further exacerbate recruitment and retention issues.**
- 3. **Ensure that all levels of the education ecosystem take full responsibility for their role in making positive change a reality. This particularly rests with Welsh Government, Local Authorities and school leaders themselves. It also includes a responsibility on parents and carers, to ensure they engage respectfully with schools.**

The commission group strongly believe that only when there is a commitment to the three point plan above, will things stand a chance of improving. Without whole scale systemic change, the current Well-being crisis of School Leaders will be exasperated further and ultimately have a detrimental impact on the whole education system.

Setting the scene

A group of Associates from Cohort 5 of the National Academy for Educational Leadership were commissioned to explore a Well-being Entitlement for Educational Leaders in Wales.

This report has been authored by seven Associates of Cohort 5 of the National Academy for Educational Leadership, working across Wales representing sectors including primary, secondary, special schools, Welsh language and bilingual schools. Each of the authors has at least a decade of experience at senior leadership level in the Welsh education sector.

Our aim was to explore a 'Well-being Entitlement for School Leaders' through the lens of optimism and to be solution focused. We used the Insight Series Paper, 'More than a sticking plaster' by Dr. Ali Davies as our starting point in considering what key changes needed to take place to allow school leaders in Wales to thrive in their role.

Definition of Well-being

For this commission we have used the definition of Well-being as set out in the 'More than a sticking plaster' paper.

'The core conditions which determine whether an employee may thrive; these relate to factors such as having a sense of safety, participation, feeling valued, treated fairly and emotionally intelligent leadership.'

(Highfield and Neal, 2021)

Definition of Educational Leaders

We recognise that in our schools we encourage and nurture leadership at all levels. However, in the context of this report we define leaders as Senior Leaders within an educational setting, i.e. Headteachers, Deputy Headteachers and Assistant Headteachers.

Whilst the focus of our commission is to look at a 'Well-being Entitlement for School Leaders', we are very mindful of the importance of looking after the well-being of all members of staff in our schools. School leaders who are thriving are far more likely to lead school communities where all thrive too.

What does the data tell us about the current wellbeing of education leaders?

The research is stark and troubling.

'Senior leader stress stands at 89 per cent this year. Within that group, 95 per cent of headteachers described themselves as stressed. One in five leaders (24 per cent) identify as acutely stressed. These numbers are high and go some way to explaining the rise in leaders leaving the profession. The proportion of leaders experiencing mental health issues each year appears to have plateaued at a high level.'

The proportion of senior leaders (89 per cent) reporting stress is the highest we have yet recorded. The level of staff who experienced mental health issues due to their work is the highest we have ever seen (39 per cent). 40 per cent of senior leaders report signs of burnout this year.'

We anticipate that this population will experience negative physical and mental health outcomes as a consequence of these working norms.'

Teacher Wellbeing Index 2023

https://www.educationsupport.org.uk/media/0h4jd5pt/twix_2023.pdf

Recruitment and Retention of Education Leaders

In light of the data on the Well-being of School Leaders, the attrition rate of School Leaders comes as no surprise. Analysis of Department for Education (DfE) data by the National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT) revealed that more than 1 in 3 (37 per cent) of headteachers and close to half of middle leaders (44 per cent), leave the profession within 5 years.

‘Recent member survey data from NAHT showed steeply rising levels of dissatisfaction among school leaders, with the number who would recommend school leadership as a career falling by over a third (36 percent), from 47 percent to 30 percent between 2020 and 2021. More than half of assistant and deputy heads (53 percent) said they did not aspire to headship (up from 40 percent in 2016) and 23 percent said they were undecided.’

New data reveals sharp increase in number of school leaders leaving the profession within 5 years (naht.org.uk)

NAHT Press Release – April 26th, 2023

Focus group research was conducted using the following methods:

- Face-to-face meetings (Long table discussion)
- Online meetings (General discussion)
- Survey (using Google or Microsoft forms)

Following the focus group sessions, each associate summarised the qualitative information collected to find common themes and recommendations.

The commission group analysed and discussed the results of the engagement sessions with stakeholders. Prior to finalising the recommendations, the group presented to the National Academy for Educational Leadership focus group, the National Well-being conference and National Academy for Educational Leadership scrutiny panel.

Focus group: The well-being of educational leaders consultative group consisted of 50 headteachers from across Wales. The group was used to inform the National Academy for Educational Leadership's work on the well-being of leaders.

Scrutiny Panel: As part of the Associate commission process, the draft report is shared with a group of educational professionals to critique the work. The feedback is then used to develop the commission report.

Timeline

February/March 2023

Start of commission

April 2023

Initial meeting (Gathering ideas, identifying stakeholders, preparing areas for discussion, setting questions)

June 2023

2nd Meeting (Sharing ideas and feedback, identifying additional areas to explore following research, future planning)

October 2023

3rd Meeting (Feedback from engagement meetings, conversations and surveys)

December 2023

4th Meeting (Analysis of results and information. Commencement of draft report writing)

January 2024

5th Meeting (Development of overall recommendations – continuation of report writing)

March 2024

6th Meeting (Refinement of overall recommendations from feedback, and continuation of report writing)

April 2024

Scrutiny panel (feedback on the draft report, from a panel of representatives with an interest in leaders' Well-being)

April 2024

7th Meeting (discussing and using feedback from the scrutiny panel to refine the report further)

June 2024 – Final Edit

Monthly update meetings were also held with National Academy for Educational Leadership staff.

Key findings from focus groups

The following key questions were asked of all focus groups:

Is there provision out there already which works well?

- Why does it work well?
- Who is this available to?
- Did you have to ask for this support?

Most respondents referred to the following as being effective current practice:

- Support from colleagues e.g., Headteacher and/or Deputy Headteacher groups.

Respondents referred to the following practices as having been effective in supporting their Well-being in their context:

- Support from experienced Headteachers/Leaders
- Local Authority (LA) welfare support e.g., 'Medra', Education Support, Occupational Health
- Professional support from both LA and Consortia e.g., in preparation for or on entering leadership positions.

What else would you like to see?

Respondents referred to the following as being likely to effectively support their Well-being:

- *National dedicated leadership time with an additional allowance for new Headteachers, ensuring all are able to reflect, research and network.*
- *Establish and promote clear expectations around working hours, arrangements and conditions for leaders, to secure uninterrupted leadership time during the school day, with the option of working away from the school site.*
- *Systems and support provided by LA allow leaders to remain comfortably within the confines of their job description whilst providing them with the 'tools' to manage effectively and efficiently, for example, employment of business managers reducing bureaucratic burden on all school leaders.*
- *Effective and confidential support at each stage of the leadership journey, for example, supervision, mentoring, coaching.*
- *Improvement in the incentives for members of staff as they move into leadership positions, for example, sabbatical entitlement, leisure and/or health packages.*
- *Effective support available for leaders when making complex decisions and/or when expert advice is needed.*
- *Effective promotion of confidential welfare support available to leaders. Safe spaces available for all.*
- *Better funded schools allowing improvements in provision and allowing for the protection of leaders' working conditions, for example, adequate non-contact time provided for all leaders allowing them to successfully fulfil their roles.*
- *Expectations placed upon schools and school leaders to appropriately reflect the resources available, for example, time, finance, training.*
- *Effective attention given to recruitment and retention of teaching staff thus reducing this significant burden disproportionately falling upon leaders.*
- *Establishing appropriate local, regional, and national forums allowing school leaders opportunities to share experiences and influence the direction of developments in the sector.*

- *Parity for School Leaders nationally, for example, Well-being provision, expectations and responsibilities for School Leaders should not be determined by geography, size or financial context of local authorities.*

Should any framework for the provision for Well-being for school staff and School Leaders, be compulsory, with a clear expectation that all tiers of education in Wales engage, i.e. LA, consortia?

Should any provision through a Well-being Framework be compulsory / statutory / or optional as a ‘there if you need it’ support for School Leaders?

- Whilst there were mixed feelings deriving from the concern that a compulsory Well-being Framework would increase school leaders’ workload, the majority felt it necessary to establish a compulsory entitlement, including basic provision strengthened further by additional optional services and support.

Focus

The focus for this commission has been on ‘school leaders’ as defined at the start of this report. The report has therefore only focused on a small proportion of the education workforce. This has allowed our work to be focused and has resulted in carefully considered recommendations based on research and discussion. As leaders from across Wales with varied experience of many years of school senior leadership, we have, as commission authors, been well placed to have understood and collated the information shared with us by other leaders.

Keeping a narrow focus though, has not allowed for specific consideration to be given to those senior leaders who work in other educational roles outside of school settings.

Recommendations

The National ‘Well-being Entitlement for School Leaders’ in schools must include:

1. Support for school leaders’ emotional, physical and mental well-being to enable them to thrive in their role

1.1 Access to supervision, coaching, mentoring and counselling via a single point of contact

Whilst there were mixed feelings in relation to making supportive elements, such as supervision, coaching and mentoring, compulsory activities for School Leaders, participants did agree that it was important that these services are readily available to all. A key issue that stops school leaders seeking support is the perception that seeking support means inviting greater scrutiny, when what they really need is good, sound, confidential advice. Most leaders also agreed that this access should be centrally available, to ensure equity and quality of provision across Wales. It is important to School Leaders that access to this support is available at the point of need, is not bureaucratic and does not require complicated referral processes. School Leaders stated that they were more likely to seek support on their own terms and would value high levels of quality and confidentiality when doing so.

Supervision

‘Supervision’ is an emerging term in relation to education in Wales, and one that does not appear to be fully understood by all. It is, however, something that many other professions, particularly those dealing with frontline issues, already benefit from.

There is no one definition for supervision, however, in relation to education, Nikki Lawrence defines it as, ‘a nonjudgemental, collaborative process where education practitioners are supported to reflect on their practice, relationships, the emotional demands of their work and the impact of these and the wider education system on their psychological wellbeing’

(Lawrence, 2020, p. 57).

Furthermore, the principles of supervision can be described as follows:

‘Supervision is based on mutual trust and respect. Supervisees are offered a choice of supervisor to secure a good match on a personal level, an expertise match and to meet cultural needs. Both supervisors and supervisees have a shared understanding of the purpose of the supervisory sessions.’

(HCPC standards, 2023). Available at: <https://www.hcpc-uk.org/standards/meeting-our-standards/supervision-leadership-and-culture/supervision/approaching-supervision/key-characteristics-of-effective-supervision/>

Supervision should therefore be viewed as a proactive measure rather than reactionary. It is not something that should be accessed just when things have gone wrong, or when an individual is feeling overwhelmed. It should be used as a professional, nonjudgemental space, to reflect and discuss the complexities of school leadership, away from any accountability pressures.

It is important to acknowledge that supervision of School Leaders does not necessarily need to be facilitated by an educational practitioner, although where appropriate training and time is given, may be undertaken by peers. Within supervision there is no hierarchy in the relationship between supervisor and supervisee, with the supervisee very much leading the content of the sessions.

There is emerging research to demonstrate the benefits of supervision, in supporting School Leaders to thrive. Bainbridge et al. state, “participants found supervision to be a powerful and restorative experience, professionally, personally and emotionally” (2022, p. 550). Cairns et al. also agree, stating that, “supervision can give space to HTs [sic] to discuss and reflect their current situation and the impact of their role on well-being” (2023, p. 27).

It is noted that there are examples already of supervision being offered to School Leaders within Wales, some of which has been funded by Welsh Government. However, there is no universal entitlement and current offers are limited in their capacity. Current models also rely on individual leaders seeking their own support, and while many leaders preferred this autonomy, it was argued by some that this could result in support being accessed too late. A universally encouraged entitlement to supervision would therefore be a preventative and supportive measure for all School Leaders, thus normalising this form of support.

Coaching

As with supervision, definitions for coaching can vary. A suggested definition is that it is a holistic approach which focusses on specific areas for improvement and is often as much about personal as professional development (Academi Wales, 2023). In essence, a coach will not give answers but will instead help a coachee to personally reflect and adopt a solution focus approach, to achieve goals and improve professionally. They will ask questions to challenge thinking and promote reflection, however, they do not need to share the knowledge base of the person being coached to do so. Coaching can be of benefit at any point of an individual's career and can focus on different aspects. Whilst there are many opportunities to access coaching, and indeed train as a coach, there is no one consistent or universal offer, resulting in quite a sporadic coaching experience for School Leaders across Wales.

Mentoring

Mentoring differs from coaching in that the mentor will offer more direct guidance, to support the individual to grow in their professional role. A mentor should have relevant and similar experience to the person being mentored, act as a model and be able to offer advice.

The key principles of mentoring are similar to coaching and in an educational context, include:

- a learning conversation
- reflection and sharing
- agreed outcomes
- focus on learning and teaching
- mutual benefit
- support and challenge
- confidentiality

Both coaching and mentoring describe a two-way proactive process through which the person in the role of coach/mentor, uses questions, discussion and guided activity to help the person being coached/mentored to solve problems, address issues and complete tasks to a higher standard than would otherwise be the case. The aim is to improve performance and make a direct contribution to the person's learning and development. This support will give School Leaders confidence in their roles which, in turn, should improve their overall Well-being.

Counselling

Counselling can be defined as, "talking therapy that involves a trained therapist listening to you and helping you find ways to deal with emotional issues" (NHS, 2023).

Counselling differs from supervision, coaching and mentoring in that it is usually reactionary and accessed when an individual reaches burnout and is overwhelmed. It is hoped that the commission's overall recommendations will holistically support school leaders' well-being, if fully implemented, but there also needs to be clear and consistent processes if issues become insurmountable. It is therefore imperative that there is universal single point of access to fully trained counsellors at the point of need for School Leaders across Wales. The role School Leaders play in supporting the Well-being of others is clear, but in order to do so effectively, they also need to be suitably supported.

In summary, it is imperative that all School Leaders have equal access to high quality emotional and developmental support, in the form of supervision, coaching, mentoring and counselling from a single point of contact, and that this offer is communicated effectively across Wales. This would avoid a ‘post code’ lottery of support and ensure that School Leaders know these services are there and feel they can access them without issue or judgement.

1.2 The development of protocols to ensure that School Leaders are treated with dignity and respect.

A common theme across all focus groups was the perceived erosion of respect for school staff and headteachers. Many School Leaders describe situations where they feel bombarded with negative communication from individuals or groups of parents and carers regarding both the strategic organisation and day-to-day running of the school. Leaders describe this as becoming increasingly more frequent. Whilst all School Leaders accept their public role and accountability to their communities, the personal attacks that some leaders must endure is not acceptable and can often border on abusive.

It was agreed that the development of a National Parent Protocol and publicity campaign highlighting the vital role that schools and School Leaders play in their communities, need to be key priorities. Following consultation, Welsh Government need to take ownership of this protocol.

In addition, School Leaders did not feel listened to by Welsh Government, Local Authorities and middle tier groups, creating culture of doing to, rather than doing with. A culture of trust needs to be developed where it is recognised that School Leaders are doing their very best under challenging circumstances.

1.3 An annual health care check for all Leaders.

The Education Workforce Well-being Index 2023 indicates that 35 percent of education staff experience symptoms that are the signs of burnout (7 percent increase on 2022). The signs of burnout were highest amongst school leaders at 40 percent (an increase of 3 percent on 2022).

As part of the focus group discussions, many participants disclosed that they did not prioritise their own health needs. Many examples of School Leaders not making medical appointments due to work pressures, were provided. School Leaders described ignoring signs and symptoms of stress and burnout until, in many cases, they were too unwell to carry on.

‘Headteachers are the worst at managing their own well-being – they look after everyone else first.’

Secondary School Headteacher.

Examples were also provided of School Leaders having to ask their Chair of Governors’ permission to make a personal occupational health referral. This created a barrier to seeking support due to the worry that others would think that the leader was not coping.

‘I wasn’t allowed to contact Occ Health for personal support – I had to go through the Chair of Governors, which I didn’t want to do – This support should be available.’

Recently Retired Headteacher

‘The core conditions which determine whether an employee may thrive; these relate to factors such as having a sense of safety, participation, feeling valued, treated fairly and emotionally intelligent leadership.’

(Highfield and Neal, 2021)

When we consider the above definition of Well-being as set out in the ‘More than a Sticking Plaster’ document, we recommend that the health needs of school leaders are prioritised through regular health checks.

This proactive measure would support school leaders to recognise the physical symptoms of stress and burnout and take preventative steps to prioritise their own health and wellbeing needs.

At the focus groups, School Leaders were enthusiastic about and welcomed the opportunity to have a confidential annual health care check performed by a health professional. It would help School Leaders feel valued and cared for, as well as identifying potential health issues at an early stage thus preventing potential future long-term absence and improving retention.

‘Other organisations such as Estyn, support the Well-being of their Inspectors well ... they have an annual Well-being week which includes a health check and no inspection activities ... they just have time together.’

Headteacher, Secondary School Association member

‘Health care provision would be very useful and an important way for LEA/Welsh Government to show they value the profession.’

Headteacher, Secondary School

‘A regular health check for all leaders would be gratefully received.’

Feedback from a school leader at the National Academy for Educational Leadership Well-being Conference, January 2024.

1.4 Dedicated, uninterrupted ‘leadership time’ to be taken each week during the school day. This should be written into the terms and conditions of all School Leaders and upheld by Local Authorities and Governing Bodies

Nearly all School Leaders reported the challenges they faced in securing uninterrupted leadership time during the school day. They reported the need to ensure that pupil and staff Well-being along with the day-to-day running of the school took precedence at all times. As a result, School Leaders found it challenging to protect time for strategic thinking and school improvement. A few School Leaders shared innovative agreements they have secured with their Governing Body enabling them to have uninterrupted Leadership time, often away from school premises. In these examples, School Leaders reported that their own Well-being is being looked after. And they can focus on complex strategic tasks away from the busy and demanding school environment. As a result, they then feel more present when in school, and have greater capacity to support their school community. Leaders also reported that they feel strongly about the importance of role-modelling active work-life balances with their staff resulting in a more cohesive and stronger workforce.

‘The role does need to change. We are responsible for things that we can’t control which makes the role more difficult, for example, funding cuts. We are forced into making decisions which will negatively affect staff and pupils.’

‘Would a day a week at home really work? It would be useful to complete paperwork but what would be the impact on the rest of the staff? Attitudes would need to change to allow this – of staff, pupils, parents and carers. This would be something that would have to happen everywhere and consistently.’

‘The Deputy Headteacher would need to be free from timetable on days the Headteacher was not in school.’

Retired headteacher, Secondary School

1.5 Establish and promote clear expectations around working hours, arrangements and conditions for School Leaders, with protected time when not ‘on-duty’.

A significant factor impacting on Well-being highlighted in the focus groups, is the lack of guidance around working hours for School Leaders. Whilst working hours for teachers are clear, the arrangements for School Leaders are far less explicit.

‘Not being able to switch off is draining.’

Recently retired Secondary School Headteacher

‘The terms and conditions must change as currently School Leaders are expected to be available for 364 days of the year. What other profession stipulates this?’

Secondary School Headteacher

Excerpt from School Teachers pay and Conditions 2023

50. Working time

50.1. Nothing in this Document is to be taken to conflict with Council Directive 93/104/EC of 23 November 1993 concerning certain aspects of the organisation of working time⁽¹⁸⁾.

Working days

50.2. A teacher employed full-time must be available for work for 195 days, of which:

- a) 190 days must be days on which the teacher may be required to teach pupils and perform other duties; and
- b) 5 days must be days on which the teacher may only be required to perform other duties; and

those 195 days must be specified by the employer or, if the employer so directs, by the headteacher.

50.3. Paragraph 50.2 does not apply to a teacher employed full-time wholly or mainly to teach or perform other duties in relation to pupils in a residential establishment.

Specified working hours

50.4. The provisions of paragraphs 50.2 to 50.12 do not apply to:

- a) headteachers, deputy headteachers, assistant headteachers, teachers on the pay range for leading practitioners or teachers in receipt of an acting allowance for carrying out the duties of a headteacher, deputy headteacher or assistant headteacher pursuant to paragraph 23;

This lack of clarity around working hours has led to an expectation that School Leaders and particularly Headteachers, are available during the evenings, weekends and school holidays. This perception significantly impacts on the work-life balance of School Leaders and is a considerable contributory factor to stress and burnout.

'I would like to see time away from office/school built into terms and conditions – we should not feel guilty about this time away.'

Secondary School Headteacher

The Education Support report, '1970s Working Conditions in the 2020s: Modernising the professional lives of teachers for the 21st century' (June 2023), explores how the responsibilities for those working in education have evolved significantly since the 1970s, yet the uncapped number of undirected hours has eroded work-life balance driving them out of the profession.

1970s-working-conditions-in-the-2020s.pdf

In the focus groups, many School Leaders discussed how they were working late each evening, at weekends and throughout the school holidays. When explored further this is, in part, due to the demands of the role but also due to expectations of the availability of the Leader from others including colleagues, parents, carers and LA officers.

'I am regularly contacted in the evenings, early mornings and at weekends by staff and parents. I even had a parent wait for me outside my gym class on a Sunday morning. I understand that everyone perceives their issue to be important but in reality, none of them are urgent and could have waited to be dealt with when I am in school. It makes switching off from work really difficult... as soon as I receive a message it mentally puts me in 'work mode''

Primary School Headteacher

Participants in the focus groups all recognise that as school leaders we need to be contacted in an emergency. However, it was strongly felt that there should be an agreed definition of what constituted an emergency, for example a major safeguarding issue, fire or flood.

This recommendation is echoed in the recent 'National Academy for Educational Leadership Wales paper on the Recruitment and Retention of School Leaders in Wales.' This paper also recommends the need to, 'define clear expectations of acceptable working hours.'

'Quite a few participants felt that clearer expectations for the working hours of headteachers and senior leaders needed to be set out at a national level, to enable a healthier work-life balance. They felt that existing policies were not workable as they may set out clear limits to working hours, but these are often not feasible when considering the tasks they are expected to accomplish within that time.'

'Recruitment and Retention of Senior School Leaders in Wales' - Ekaterina Aleynikova, Jasmin Rostron, Sophie Kitson (National Institute of Economic and Social Research) & James Zuccollo, Eva Jiménez (Education Policy Institute).

Nearly all secondary School Leaders agree that the administration of GCSE and A Level Qualification results in August, has a significant impact on their ability to take a mental, physical and emotional break over a significant part of the summer holiday. Equally, initiatives such as School Holiday Programmes lead to an expectation that the school leader is to be on call as duty holder over the summer holiday.

It is vital that School Leaders are afforded proper breaks to recharge and recuperate from the significant mental, physical and emotional demands of the role.

2. Reduce bureaucracy to allow leaders to focus on the strategic direction of their schools

2.1 Audit the current roles and responsibilities of leaders and remove elements that detract from the core purpose of School Leaders

School leaders have found themselves responsible for carrying out tasks and performing roles that do not and should not lie within the core purposes of their duties. Whilst there were differences between LAs, members of focus groups shared the following common examples:

- General school repairs and maintenance e.g. boarding windows, changing fuses, cleaning areas of the building, unblocking drains/toilets.
- Caretaking responsibilities e.g. litter picking, moving furniture, opening/closing buildings during school term, weekends and school holidays, covering requests for annual leave during term time, out of hours responsibility as a key holder
- Property management e.g. advising on all aspects of health and safety, attending asbestos training and ensuring compliance with the guidance, completing fire risk assessment checks, procurement of waste management, liaising with contractors, project management.
- Site management e.g. gritting safe routes to school entrances, garden repair and maintenance, performing the duties of traffic warden, school crossing patrol and/or parking attendant.
- Human Resources e.g. performing overly bureaucratic HR processes including appointing/terminating contracts and management of staff absences.
- Administrative e.g. minuting meetings, responding to Local Education Authority requests for information often already held by the wider Local County Council.
- Enforcing school policies designed to protect staff members from aggressive and/or unacceptable behaviour by parents, carers or members of the public.

School staff and pupils should be provided with the resources and conditions to grow, learn and develop. School leaders felt grossly over-burdened by the time spent and lack of support in providing, monitoring and maintaining those conditions. These additional, onerous responsibilities detract significantly from school leaders' ability to plan strategically, drive improvements, collaborate with each other and sadly, to spend time with pupils.

2.2 Provide highly trained personnel to support School Leaders in dealing with specific issues not directly related to Teaching and Learning such as School Business Managers, Human Resources (HR) Managers and Health and Safety Compliance Officers.

'I would like help when solving problems. Someone to talk to, with experience and expertise, who can offer solutions that are 'do-able' and can have an impact.'

Secondary Headteacher

School leaders said that they often felt isolated in their posts and sometimes poorly equipped to deal with specific, and often very technical, problems. Many headteachers felt that they had no-one to turn to when they had to make difficult decisions which could have significant consequences.

Many School Leaders noted that there is an expectation that headteachers are ultimately responsible for aspects that they have little training in, such as Health and Safety. Specific examples were provided, including headteachers in some local authorities being required to complete short training courses on asbestos management, followed by a test which they were required to pass. School Leaders felt that these specific responsibilities should rest with the LA, allowing headteachers to focus on their role of being a leader of education and not a site manager. Trained personnel should support schools with issues such as these.

The support from LA officers available to headteachers differed across each LA. Some headteachers are very happy with the support they receive in specific areas, but this varied significantly. Many headteachers felt that they were provided with poor support in significant areas, stating that it was often very difficult to receive quick responses to queries, phone calls or emails, which were often time sensitive. The absence of timely, expert advice places additional pressure on headteachers and School Leaders already making difficult decisions. The absence of this specialist advice could potentially make headteachers vulnerable.

‘The school support officer in LA was available as a sounding board but unable to provide expert advice at all times. We need someone we can contact for advice with complex situations.’

Retired Headteacher

A strong theme that emerged from discussions with focus groups was the lack of support available, particularly in smaller schools, when dealing with finance and HR issues. Smaller schools without business managers or HR officers noted that they had to take on these roles. This diluted their time, reducing their ability to lead in their specialist areas of teaching and learning and pupil and staff well-being.

‘In smaller schools, leaders wear a significant number of ‘hats.’ Wearing so many hats doesn’t allow me to reach my potential in my areas of strength. It doesn’t allow me to employ or deploy people in their area of strength as school requires staff and leaders to do so much. This impacts productivity and creativity.’

Primary Headteacher

Many Senior Leaders during focus groups, spoke of being frustrated that they were not able to get on with their role effectively. This was because of expert advice not always being readily available and/or having to complete roles which should be delegated to other specialists, such as school business managers or HR experts. Support with non-teaching and learning specific issues should also be provided for all headteachers regardless of the size of their school and/or school budget.

‘LAs should work more effectively to ensure that Headteachers and Leaders are able to stick to their job description. LAs should be ensuring that all leaders and schools have ample ‘tools’ to provide for the pupils and school community.’

Primary Headteacher

2.3 Undertake Workload Impact Assessments at all levels for all future initiatives, policy changes, and reforms

A concern raised by many School Leaders in focus groups was the impact of the fast-paced, ever-changing nature of the education sector set against high expectations and considerable accountability. This ‘Work Intensification’ (as distinct from workload) refers to the increasing number and complexity of the tasks Headteachers are expected to complete; coupled with unrealistic expectations on work/task completion times; high levels of scrutiny of, and accountability for, those tasks; along with constant calls to be available to all stakeholders, all of which leads to an acute intensification of the professional role.

‘Recent studies have further explored principals’ complex and demanding role and the multiple and competing responsibilities associated with the position in contemporary times. The increasingly stressful working conditions of the principalship are further exacerbated by growing bureaucracy, excess paperwork, unplanned interruptions, severe budget cuts, and encroachment on their professional autonomy’

(Pollock, Wang, & Hauseman, 2018).

Such a work environment has the potential, without greater control and regulation is certain to have an adverse impact upon staff Well-being at all levels. School Leaders have the greatest accountability for the duty of care of staff and will often take on the responsibility of reducing the burden upon others. However, this often comes at the expense of their own workload and Well-being.

Following assurances from Welsh Government, School Leaders consider it essential that all future reforms take full account of the potential impact upon workload and work intensification.

‘This (...the introduction of a workload impact assessment) will be at the forefront of Welsh government policy development and will ensure appropriate consideration of workload implications and union engagement early in the policy making process.’

NAHT

3. Effective succession planning to enable successful recruitment and retention

3.1. Head teachers are models for behaviour and must play a key role in creating a positive working environment where Well-being is prioritised.

Senior Leaders clearly feel burdened by their current duties and responsibilities. Education Support demonstrates in the latest Well Being Index that 95 percent of Senior Leaders feel stressed in their role. Much of this stress comes from not being able to focus on the things that are most important – pupils and learning.

For things to improve, there must be commitment to change at all levels. Senior Leaders also play a role in ensuring this. Senior Leaders are the ‘weathervanes’ of the organisation - teams look to them for direction and to model behaviour. Senior Leaders therefore need to feel that they can prioritise their own well-being, and in turn, this will give others permission to do the same. The analogy of putting on your own oxygen mask first is an important one. Unless our Senior Leaders are looking after themselves, they will not be in a position to support others.

Senior Leaders therefore need to feel that they have the right to question decisions made by other organisations that impact on their role, rather than accepting elements being constantly added. Leaders need to feel that they can give themselves space to think, reflect and recharge during the evenings, weekends and holidays. By doing so, and by being visible in doing so, School Leaders will support others in the organisation to feel that they should prioritise their own Well-being to avoid burnout.

3.2 Improve national opportunities for progressive professional learning beyond NPQH

One of the things that developed from discussions is the fact that Senior Leaders do not feel that they have a consistent offer of professional learning beyond NPQH. Many Senior Leaders feel that they learn ‘on the job’ without a clear pathway for professional learning.

Whilst there is a National Approach to Professional Learning (NAPL), and national programmes delivered through regional consortia such as the ‘Newly Appointed and Acting Headteacher Programme’ and ‘National Experienced Headteacher Programme’, there appears to be limited understanding of these offers and some inconsistency in access and delivery across Wales. The ‘Experienced Headteacher’ programme is advertised as suitable for headteachers with five or more years’ experience, but there is no programme to follow on from this. Therefore, it was felt that a more progressive professional learning offer is needed.

‘There are too many vague offers of professional learning, and I don’t know what to invest in. I want something that can move my leadership skills on... 5, 10, 15 years down the line.’

Primary Headteacher

The commission group believes that the National Academy for Educational Leadership has a key role to play in developing the professional learning of Senior Leaders across Wales and should develop this area further to ensure it is embedded and accessible to all.

A sustained, professional learning path which is consistent across Wales, will help senior leaders to develop key leadership skills in areas such as coaching to help develop the system leaders of the future.

Furthermore, beyond NPQH, there should be opportunities for School Leaders to connect and network across Wales. Apart from the National Academy for Educational Leadership, the opportunity for Leaders to network beyond a LA or region is very limited. Greater collaborative working, like that offered by the National Academy for Educational Leadership's associate model, would build purposeful professional relationships that could aid professional learning.

3.3 Develop a career pathway and System Leadership approach, to share and retain leadership expertise in the Welsh education system.

A worryingly common theme in many of the focus group discussions was the number of School Leaders actively looking to leave the role as they felt the job was unsustainable. For some participants this entailed exploring the opportunity to take early retirement, for others it was to apply for roles within the LA or the middle tier, for a few it was to leave the profession altogether. Many expressed a concern that there were no career progression pathways beyond securing a headship post. This leads to some colleagues feeling trapped professionally and financially.

'I had always planned to be a headteacher until I retired at 60. However, I am no longer sure that this is achievable. Some days I wonder how much longer I can carry on. I am in my early 50s and have started to think about my exit plan.'

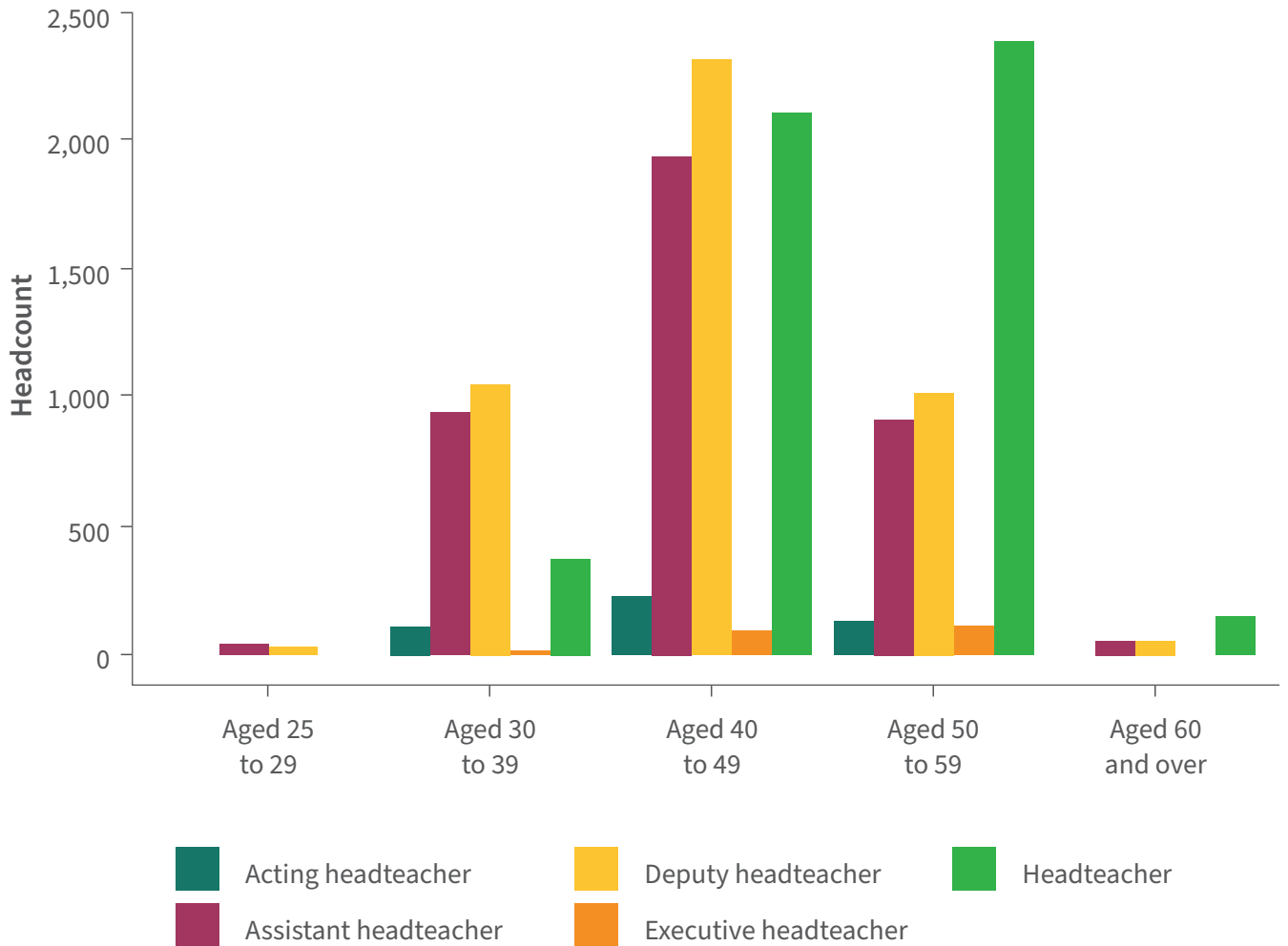
Primary School Headteacher

The retention issue is further compounded by the fact that school leaders are getting older.

'The number of senior leaders aged 50 to 59 has been increasing since 2019 and the number aged 30 to 49 decreasing. This suggests that higher proportions of turnover might occur in future years as more people, particularly headteachers, retire.'

'Recruitment and Retention of Senior School Leaders in Wales' - Ekaterina Aleynikova, Jasmin Rostron, Sophie Kitson (National Institute of Economic and Social Research) & James Zuccollo, Eva Jiménez (Education Policy Institute)

Figure 12. Headteachers are closer to retirement than other senior leaders



In some areas of Wales, experienced headteachers had the opportunity to apply for Executive Headship roles in federated schools. However, there is not a national professional learning offer to support School Leaders taking on this role. Equally, not all School Leaders aspire to an Executive Headship role.

In the focus groups there was consensus that it would be beneficial for experienced headteachers to be deployed as System Leaders supporting early career headteachers as mentors as well as supporting headteachers dealing with challenging situations. This aligns with the current review of the National Professional Headteacher Qualification (NPQH) review.

‘Recommendation 20

‘Immediately upon appointment to a first headship, it should be incumbent upon the new headteacher to secure a mentor who advises from the point of appointment and before taking up the post and for the following two years. That mentor should be selected, subject to a maximum caseload, from a central directory of headteacher colleagues who are between three and six years into their own headship career. The newly appointed headteacher should inform their local authority and Chair of Governors who they have selected and the reasons for that selection.’

LEARNING TO BE A HEADTEACHER FOR WALES A review of the National Professional Qualification for Headship in Wales March 2023

Nearly all School Leaders referenced the support received from fellow experienced colleagues as invaluable, both professionally and personally.

‘Support from fellow colleagues is best, having an experienced headteacher as a link has been very useful.’

Headteacher, Primary school

‘The opportunity to have discussions with other headteachers – both professionally and personally, are very valuable.’

Headteacher, Secondary School

School Leaders did express concerns that any System Leadership role had to be fully funded so that time could be properly dedicated to the role. There should not be an expectation that this becomes yet another additional responsibility for School Leaders to fit into an already challenging workload.

Conclusion

This commission has sought to provide ambitious yet realistic and achievable recommendations to support the Well-being of School Leaders in Wales. The evidence outlined about the Well-being of School Leaders is troubling and this coupled with the data on recruitment and retention emphasises the need for immediate action by all concerned parties. The strength of feeling and strong emotions heard and witnessed during focus group discussions demonstrated to the commission that action must be taken immediately.

Welsh Government, Local Authorities, Senior Leaders and the middle-tier, all have a duty to the education sector to ensure that the situation improves.

The recommendations are all important and one should not be prioritised over another. Achieving one recommendation will often rely on another being achieved, in a co-dependant manner. However, the commission is clear that, in order to achieve the recommendations, an urgent review of the terms and conditions of School Leaders and the funding of schools, must be completed.

A review of the terms and conditions would enable the identification of non-core aspects of the role of a headteacher, allowing them to fully focus on those areas of their work which has the greatest impact on supporting the Well-being of the school community and progress of pupils. Allowing School Leaders to work in these conditions would greatly improve their well-being and, the commission believes, improve retention rates.

It is clear that schools in Wales are facing a funding crisis, compounding pressures on leaders. For these recommendations to be achieved, a funding review must be undertaken. Funding for these recommendations should not be from school budgets or force leaders to have to prioritise between provisions.

Whilst this report focuses on School Leaders, we recognise that many of these recommendations should also apply to all school staff.

When School Leaders flourish, learners flourish.

Associate Details

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