

Because the world
needs schools to thrive

THE NEW ART OF HEADSHIP 2023

A study of the changing
nature of headship in UK
independent schools



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WELCOME

Since 2009, our Executive Search team has supported the appointment of 483 Heads and deputies of UK independent schools and since 2002 my colleagues in our Strategy, Marketing and Research team have worked on an even greater number of strategic consultancy assignments.

We have seen up close how the world of independent schools has changed and how the skills and personal qualities needed to lead them have evolved. This report is a formal study of that evolution.

We first investigated this topic in 2013, when we published "The Art of Headship", a report looking at the ingredients of successful headship. The report is still available today and can be accessed [here](#).

Drawing on feedback from over 160 people across UK independent school communities, we developed a model of the ingredients of successful headship which we distilled into four quadrants:

We feel that our 2013 model stands the test of time, as do many of the examples, stories and advice from contributors' personal experience which the report contains. Indeed, many Heads and aspiring Heads tell us they continue to use it as a valuable reference and resource.

However, because the environment in which UK independent schools operate has changed so much since 2013, and not just in the last three or four years, we felt it was time to look again at the question of what makes an effective leader of a UK independent school.





A stylized, handwritten signature in dark blue ink that reads 'R. Speirs'.

RUSSELL SPEIRS
FOUNDER & CHAIRMAN,
RSACADEMICS

In this, our 2023 study, we wanted to understand the impact the changed environment has had on headship, exploring topics such as:

- The types of challenges that Heads face today.
- How Heads spend their time in new or different ways.
- How the skills and qualities required for success have evolved.
- What some of the implications might be for the recruitment and development of Heads in the future.

This report is all about the changing nature of headship

This report is, therefore, all about the changing nature of headship. We are not trying to describe again all the successful ingredients of headship, but rather our aim is to focus on what's different now compared with 10 years ago and how headship continues to change today.

We hope that this report increases awareness of the realities of modern headship and that it will help Heads and aspiring Heads reflect and develop personally and professionally. It should also give school governors additional insights into their crucial role in appointing Heads and, in particular, supporting their success. We believe our report also has important implications for the role of the Bursar and for the Head / Bursar relationship. And finally, of course, we plan to use the insights in this report to ensure that our services for Heads, other senior staff and governors remain at the forward edge of leadership advisory and appointments services, as well as strategic consultancy advice.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We are very grateful to the over 150 Heads and other experts who participated in our research. This includes those who completed our initial surveys and then participated in follow-up one-to-one discussions, joined focus groups or helped contribute case studies. Their names are included at the back of this report (See **Appendices** for details). We are also very grateful to the 100 plus current Heads who completed an anonymous quantitative questionnaire in May and June.

On a personal note, I would also like to thank my brother, Barry Speirs, for his outstanding work. He has led this study from the very start and been rigorous, thoughtful, patient and flexible throughout. Thanks Barry! ■

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



In 2013, we published “The Art of Headship”, our first research report looking at the ingredients of successful headship of UK independent schools. Ten years later, the schools’ environment is very different. Our new study explores how the role of Heads has changed and what new skills and support they need for success today.



To do this, we consulted over 150 Heads and other experts between January and June 2023 to explore these topics. Our overall conclusion is that there have indeed been important changes of emphasis in terms of the challenges facing Heads today and the skills they need for success. Whilst there are a few differences between different types of school, Heads have generally voiced consistent opinions and a number of clear themes have emerged from different locations and types of school and from Heads with different levels of experience.

If we were to summarise the whole study in a couple of sentences, they would be these:

In the last ten years, Heads have faced an increasingly complex and challenging environment in which expectations of many stakeholders across the school community have changed. As a consequence, headship in UK independent schools is generally more pressurised and demanding and requires greater emotional strength and resilience.

What are the new challenges and changed responsibilities of headship?

Whilst there are positive developments over the last 10 years included in our report, most of the key changes to headship which are described in our research stem from additional or greater challenges which Heads now face. We have identified nine major challenges which the modern Head faces more than before.

01 Responding to unprecedented financial and strategic pressures. Financial pressures are nothing new and there has always been a need for Heads to think strategically. However, many see the cumulative effect of Brexit, Covid, decreasing affordability and the financial pressures arising from a possible change of government as representing an altogether different level of threat to their school, perhaps even threatening its existence. This was perhaps the most tangible change to the schools' environment and is seen by the Heads we consulted as the single most challenging aspect of their changing role.

02 Parents' expectations have changed. A key finding of our research is that parents are generally more demanding, expect more personalised attention and are more likely to raise contentious issues. We found that...

... there has been a significant increase in the amount of time spent by Heads (and other senior figures) dealing with formal complaints and sometimes litigation, from a minority of parents.



03 Heads cannot simply manage their staff the way they themselves were managed earlier in their careers. As in other sectors, **staff attitudes and expectations have changed.** Staff are often less available or willing to take on additional duties and expect more focus on their own wellbeing. Heads report spending much more time on contentious staff issues than in the past. Heads told us they need to take a more robust, more procedural approach to managing people in order to comply with significant, additional, legal considerations. Some see a need for greater openness and transparency in how decisions are made, with staff often more aware of their entitlements and willing to make demands.

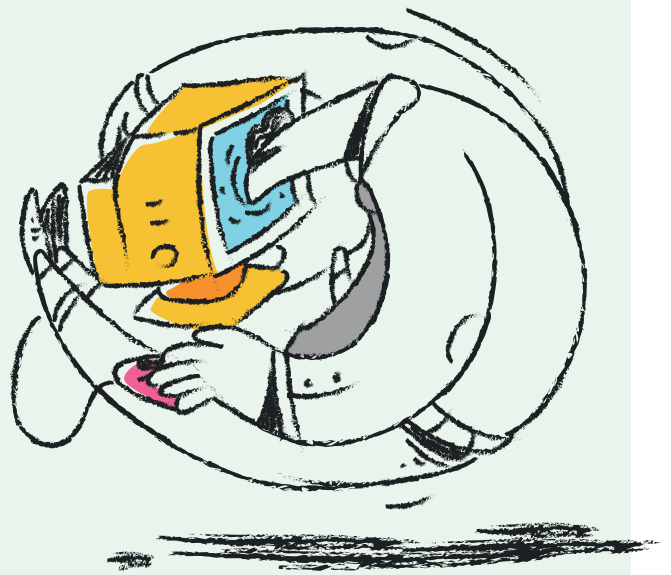


04 Supporting **student mental health** was chosen by the Heads we surveyed as the challenge where they have seen most change. This reflects the very significant increase in the incidence and awareness of student mental health concerns, with schools often becoming the front line of support due to overwhelmed public services. Many long-serving Heads saw this as completely different to when they started their headship. As well as putting in place several additional, proactive pastoral and educational measures, Heads also describe having to deal with situations for which they do not feel they have the necessary skills and knowledge.

05 Schools have increasingly found themselves at the forefront of societal changes relating to **Equality, Diversity and Inclusion**. Heads are expected to navigate and provide leadership in such areas and more responsibility is placed on schools to handle related, complex areas such as gender identity.

06 Running alongside all these changes is **omnipresent social media**, adding scrutiny, reputational difficulties and the potential for greater escalation of issues. Leading in the age of social media means schools are facing additional PR challenges and often have less control over the timing and content of communications and, of course...

■ ...the Head is so often in the “digital spotlight”.



07 Heads are now facing additional complexity and need additional resources to comply with changes to **regulations and inspection**. Statutory regulations are now broader in scope and more prescriptive across more areas of school management. Heads identified more potential pitfalls regarding regulation and inspection and a greater risk of getting things wrong.

08 Heads now spend more time on **external affairs** such as alumni relations, fundraising, the development of local educational partnerships, the recruitment of international students and working with international schools.

■ **In general, Heads' roles are more externally focused than ever before.**

09 A growing number of Heads are exploring opportunities to change dramatically aspects of education through **Artificial Intelligence**. Some are optimistic about the possibilities for efficiencies and improvements in teaching and learning although, of course, it is still very early days.



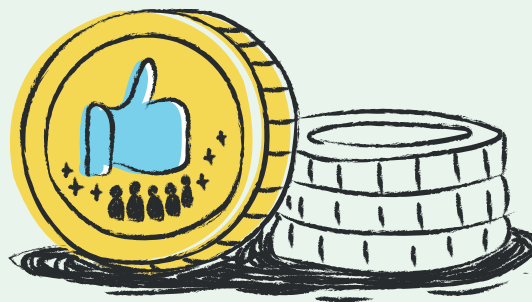
What skills do Heads need to face the new challenges successfully?

As a result of the new challenges and the changed responsibilities of headship, some skills and knowledge areas have become increasingly important:

→ In response to financial pressures, many Heads report needing to demonstrate greater **acumen for business, strategy and finance** as well as an up-to-date understanding of economic, legal, political and societal changes.

Heads need to apply this knowledge and develop strategic responses which are even bolder and more creative and which might fundamentally challenge their business model.

→ As the Head's role becomes more strategic and externally focused, there is an increasing need to **develop senior colleagues and delegate** to them. Many Heads have expanded their senior teams over recent years to engineer a complementary mix of skills. To support this, some Heads stressed the importance of adopting a less directive and more coaching style of leadership. Heads also identified the need to **manage stakeholder expectations, especially those of parents**, since the Head cannot personally be as available or as involved in the detail of school life as they were before.



→ The increased requirement for Heads to adopt an **external focus** requires them to develop an additional understanding of areas such as fundraising, a real determination and vision to establish new partnerships and even greater ambassadorial skills.

→ Much of what we discuss in our report involves Heads facing a **greater breadth of responsibilities and complexity** in their roles. This requires the development of better time management, adaptability and the ability to work sometimes with less control, leading more change and tolerating ambiguity. Increasingly, Heads cannot be experts in everything that goes on in their school. They therefore need to be more effective at obtaining specialist support and advice where required.

Success in headship nowadays is even more dependent on getting the best out of others and this includes working more collaboratively with the Board.



What are the implications for the recruitment, support and development of Heads?

The implication of these changes which was raised more than any other is the need for Heads to **build resilience and manage their own wellbeing**. Many successful and experienced Heads expressed the view that someone can possess the knowledge and skills but unless they can work in a sustainable way, they will not succeed as a Head in this increasingly pressurised environment.

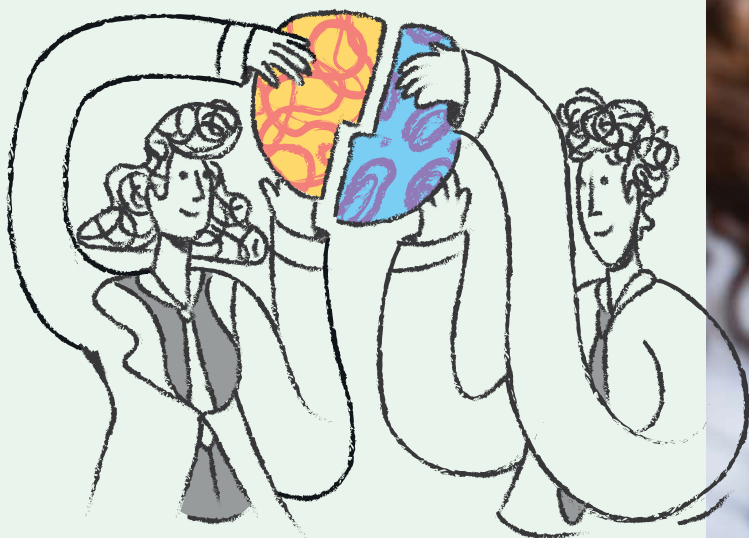
The increasing pressure and emotional burden of headship points to the need for a **Continuing Professional Development (CPD) model for Heads and aspiring Heads** focused on what we describe as “**leading self**” and “**leading others**”. It would have a greater emphasis on the more personal, interpersonal and emotional aspects of leadership, rather than the traditional focus on content and knowledge.

This suggested shift in CPD is reflected in the much **greater use of coaches** and mentors by Heads. Our suggestion is also in keeping with the view that the role of governing bodies needs to evolve. There should be a little less emphasis on holding Heads to account and a little **more emphasis on providing reassurance and support**.



Governing bodies will also need to adapt the way they recruit new Heads. In particular, **governors will need to change their approach to candidate assessment** to ensure it is nuanced and sophisticated enough. Governors will need to uncover the interpersonal skills and emotional resilience successful Heads require, along with the wide range of other skills which are becoming increasingly important.

As the challenges of headship increase and change, so the recruitment, support and development of Heads needs to adapt to ensure Heads and the schools they lead can thrive in this more demanding environment. ■



NEW ART OF HEADSHIP 2023



How is headship changing?

10 GREATER CHALLENGES

- 01 Complexity and urgency
- 02 Financial pressures
- 03 Demanding parents
- 04 HR & staff
- 05 Student wellbeing
- 06 EDI
- 07 Social media
- 08 Compliance
- 09 External focus
- 10 Artificial Intelligence

What skills are needed?

10 SKILLS INCREASINGLY REQUIRED

- 01 Business acumen
- 02 Strategic leadership
- 03 Horizon scanning
- 04 Resilience and self-management
- 05 Developing the SLT
- 06 Time management
- 07 Understanding technology
- 08 Understanding regulations
- 09 Ambassadorial skills
- 10 Handling complexity

10 recommendations for appointing and supporting Heads

GREATER EMPHASIS WHEN APPOINTING ON:

- 01 Resilience and self-management
- 02 Developing and delegating to others
- 03 Business skills
- 04 Creative strategic thinking
- 05 In-depth and personal assessment

INCREASING SUPPORT THROUGH:

- 06 Leadership coaching
- 07 Collaborative, nimble governance
- 08 "Leading self" training
- 09 "Leading others" training
- 10 Collaboration and reflection with peers



METHOD

Our research included four main steps:

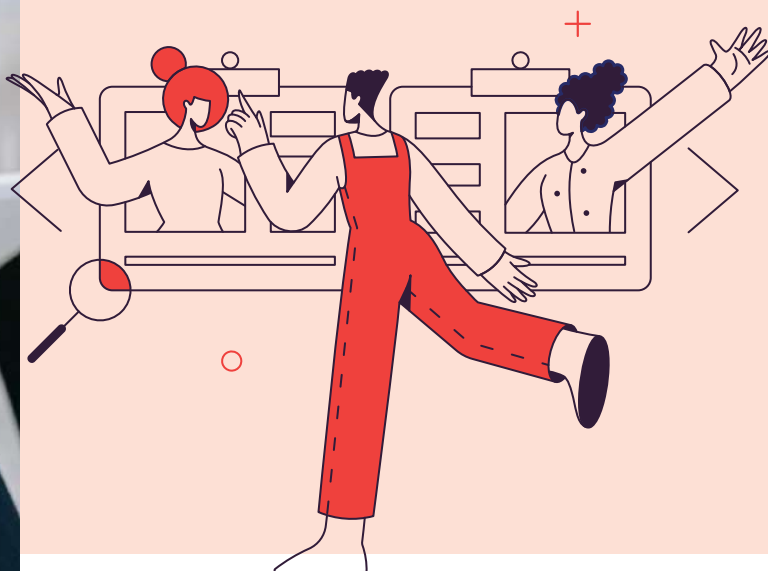
1. Detailed qualitative questionnaire and follow-up interviews

We started our research looking for depth rather than breadth. We asked 30 questions to 15 long serving Heads of UK independent schools, including some who had participated in our original 2013 research. A typical response resulted in 3-4 pages of notes which was followed up with one-to-one interviews allowing us to explore areas in more depth.

Appendix 4 provides a copy of the 30 questions.

2. Focus group discussions

We put together a summary of the themes emerging from the first stage of the research and discussed these in four focus groups, involving 24 people in total. To gather views from across the sector, as well as Heads, we also invited to the groups Chairs of Governors, coaches and senior figures from all the Heads' associations in the Independent Schools Council in the UK.





3. Quantitative survey

From these first two steps, we identified 13 aspects of headship and 16 skills that have changed. We then tested these in a survey among 104 Heads of UK independent schools, to understand which have changed the most and which were most important. The survey was an anonymous, quantitative survey and the respondents were randomly selected. Our sample included a range of types of UK independent schools to help us test for any differences in emphasis across different headship contexts.

The questionnaire and survey results are presented in **Appendices 2 and 3**.

4. Case studies

We have included in this report examples of good practice and personal insights into some of the key ways in which headship has changed. ■

We identified 13 aspects of headship and 16 skills that have changed.



15 questionnaires and follow-up interviews with Heads



4 focus groups with 24 Heads, Chairs, coaches and membership Association leaders




Quantitative research with 104 Heads



Good practice case studies

The changing nature of headship



An illustration featuring two hands, one light orange and one darker orange, holding a blue paintbrush. The hands are positioned as if about to paint. The background is a dark purple with large, flowing blue abstract shapes. The text is in a white serif font, located in the lower-left quadrant of the image.

In this section we will identify how headship has changed and continues to change, reporting on those aspects seen as most significant by Heads of different types of UK independent schools.

The positives

Whilst this report will focus on areas which have become more challenging for Heads of UK independent schools, many of our contributors wanted to emphasise that theirs is still, at its core, a great job and that some of what has changed in the last ten years has been for the better.

“It remains the best job in the world but you need to be very clear about what motivates you to want to do it, in order for it to be enjoyable and sustainable.”

“The changing nature of headship – it’s not negative – it’s just a different job.”

“I think one aspect to emphasise is that it is still a great job and there is a need to recognise that much stays the same. It is still great fun being a Head and it’s a privilege, too.”



When we specifically asked: “which aspect of headship that has changed do you feel most positive about?” nearly everyone responded. Below are some of the main changes Heads felt were positive:

- Many relish the challenges of **broader strategic thinking** and change management required in response to unprecedented financial pressures and future threats. It is certainly challenging but also stimulating and rewarding.
- The expansion and **development of senior teams** is a positive development, increasing capacity, and allowing Heads to become more discerning in their involvement in the day-to-day running of the school. Although it takes time and is not easy, it can be particularly rewarding both to the Head and to the senior team’s development.
- Similarly, the **professionalisation of support services** such as Fundraising/Development, Marketing/Communications and Human Resources has added value to schools, bringing them up-to-date with other sectors.
- The **increased recognition of Equality Diversity and Inclusion**, for example through responses to “Everyone’s Invited” and “Black Lives Matter”, has led to positive change in schools, often driven by the students themselves.
- Heads valued the ability to proactively **influence the wellbeing of pupils and staff**. Being able to talk more openly about this and provide additional support in this area was viewed positively, with Heads increasingly recognising they should also consider their own wellbeing.
- There was universally positive endorsement **of the value of coaching** for Heads, with this increasingly being seen as something successful Heads need, rather than a remedial intervention.
- The establishment of **meaningful partnerships** has provided benefits to staff as well as to pupils and communities. Schools are becoming less insular, with international links and improved alumnae relations also increasingly important. This greater external focus of Heads is seen by many as a positive change to their role.
- Whilst there are several continuing challenges resulting from Covid, positive consequences were also noted, such as **greater collaboration with other schools**, the **enhanced reputation of independent schools** and their leaders, use of technology, **improved channels of communication with parents**, and better **teamwork between senior leadership teams and with governors**. It was interesting to note how some Heads, including newly appointed Heads, felt their response to Covid had accelerated their trust and reputation within the school community.
- We also heard interest in exploring **technological advances** such as AI and the huge potential this offers for, amongst other things, teaching and learning and administrative efficiency. ■

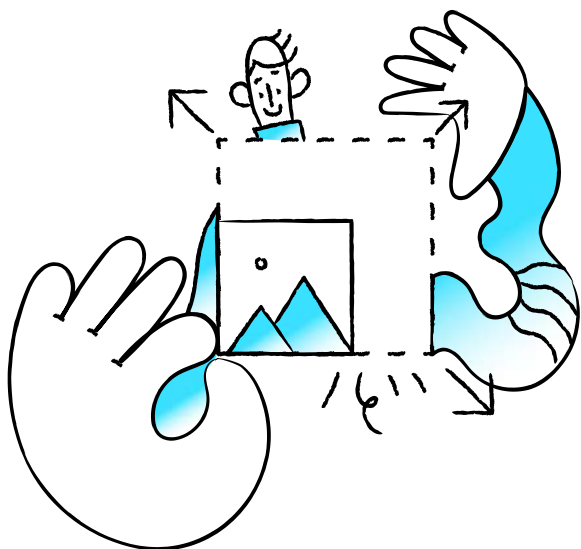


The changing context of headship



As we describe the changing nature of headship in the pages which follow, it is important to understand the changing context in which schools have been operating and Heads have been working. Economic pressures, political threats, societal changes and additional regulations have affected leadership positions in all walks of life, including headship.

“Society itself has drastically changed. I think all roles in society have changed and so headship has changed alongside this. The main issues are that Heads manage a range of stakeholders, and it seems that all stakeholders' expectations have changed, from parents and staff to ISI to partnership partners to unions to pupils to alumnae, so the change is compounded by the many different people who impact upon our role.”



Although some of these environmental changes are very significant, their impact on headship has been, for the most part, to change the emphasis of the role rather than to introduce completely new responsibilities. A good example of this is the increased financial pressures, seen by our sample of 104 Heads as the single most challenging aspect of their changed role. Financial pressures are nothing new to most schools, but they now present more of an existential threat and are thus a more prominent feature on the Head's agenda than ever before.

Of course, the Covid pandemic has also had a huge impact on schools. Whilst most Heads are proud of how they and their teams adapted to the challenge of Covid, the pandemic is thought to have accelerated or exacerbated several changes to what is on a Head's agenda. This has particularly been the case for financial pressures, the changing attitudes of staff and parents and the mental health needs of children. Some Heads look back on a time before Covid with nostalgia - a simpler time when they could focus on the internal, planned development of their school.

“Before Covid, headship was easier. I was focused on the education of students and improving that provision. Aspects that seemed challenging or put the leadership team in 'crisis mode' were all relatively minor compared to the challenges presented since March 2020.”

“I feel that, as Heads, we are all still dealing with the impact of the Covid period on our society.”



Some Heads look back on a time before Covid with nostalgia

Of course, every school operates in a different context and so one might think that the challenges which have changed the most for the Head of a boarding school, say, might be different from the changes in the role of the Head of a day school.

We tested this. One of the advantages of carrying out research among over 150 people and having quantitative survey data from over 100, is that it provides an opportunity to identify potential differences between different types of school and leader. We captured data on schools relating to their size, location, age-range, their boarding / day make-up and whether they were part of a group or stand alone. We also asked for information on the individual Head such as their current tenure, length of experience of headship and gender.

The overall picture is that whilst there are some differences in emphasis, all the themes identified in this report are relevant to all types of school. As we go through these themes, we will highlight any differences in the data we collected. ■

The key changes in headship

We will now look in depth at the main changes which have occurred in the role of a UK independent school Head, drawing on all of our research findings, qualitative and quantitative.



INCREASING COMPLEXITY, URGENCY AND EMOTIONAL BURDEN

A key thread running through many of the changes we will describe is the increasing pressure to deal with a greater number of things outside one's control: a sense of higher stakes, greater complexity and urgency.

“There is a sense of perma-crisis, so many things that need swift, measured and skilful manoeuvring.”

“My dashboard has more lights and dials on it than ever - and they all matter.”

“I may be quite good at running my school, but I am in crisis mode in dealing with all this. It is hit after hit.”

The Heads we talked with discussed the increasing emotional burden of headship – in particular, the emotional challenge of dealing with pressure whilst still needing to provide the reassurance and positive leadership required by others.

“Protecting others as part of the wellbeing agenda can mean even more work for Heads!”

“Nearly every deep challenge faced by a leader is an emotional one.”

“For me, it's the unremitting volume and breadth of the stuff that I am expected to handle that has been the biggest change. I used to be able to make time to get away from school to think, plan and walk, but not these days. The stakes currently, with so much uncertainty ahead, are higher than I've known in more than 18 years. That adds to the pressure in a way that is sometimes almost overwhelming.”

“Learning to drive, I was told never go below the red zone on the fuel indicator because there is a lot of sediment in the tank that you don't want in your system. I feel I am routinely using up the lowest quarter of the tank.”

“The need for Heads to be 'actors' in public, when inside they might be scared for their own jobs and the jobs of those they lead creates huge pressure. I have found this incredibly challenging.”

“Even when things are going well, emotional batteries are being drained. We are constantly having to be the person who is smiling, whilst being pulled in different directions and this intensity is something which wasn't there as much earlier.”

“You need to park your worries and be the person that people need – at least for a short time.”

“You also need to set the mood for the school. However you are feeling you mustn't panic or catastrophize.”

These comments are all from successful, experienced Heads. In the second part of this report, we explore the evolving skills needed nowadays for successful headship including resilience and coping with these increasing pressures. ■



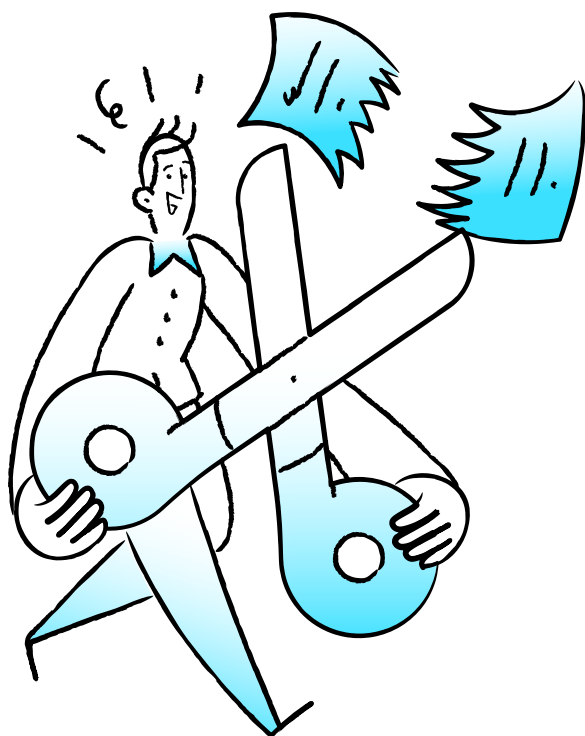
RESPONDING TO UNPRECEDENTED FINANCIAL PRESSURES

Of all the aspects of headship which have changed, responding to financial pressures was seen as the single most challenging one.

This mounting financial pressure has been caused by external changes such as:

- Additional costs of the Teachers' Pension Scheme (TPS).
- Covid, resulting in reduced or frozen fee income, alongside additional costs of infrastructure and Covid measures.
- Inflation of prices of energy, food and services etc.
- Pressure on salaries, due to inflation and staff shortages, including support staff shortages.
- Decreasing affordability of schools, with reductions in real earnings for many parents.
- The threat of the removal of some benefits of charitable status and the potential impact of the introduction of VAT on fees.

There is a cumulative effect. Just as schools were coming out of Covid, the cost-of-living crisis hit, and now schools are having to plan for future threats if there is a change of government.



Of course, financial pressures are nothing new in most schools, but many see the current situation as an existential threat. This means many Heads are having to lead strategic and creative responses which look at potential fundamental changes to their business model. They need to free up time to do this, demonstrate greater business acumen and broader strategic thinking, and at the same time provide reassurance to their community.

“It all feels rather existential and intense compared to managing internal matters . . . of course, these internal matters still exist, just with all the external uncertainty on top.”

“My own school lost £5 million in cash from the pandemic very quickly.”

“So much of my headspace and time is now focussed on how the school will manage these external threats, including scenario planning.”

“Even though my school is successful and the strongest in the region, these headwinds will challenge our existence.”

“We have run a similar model since the 1970s, putting up fees. But now the challenges cannot be met in that way.”



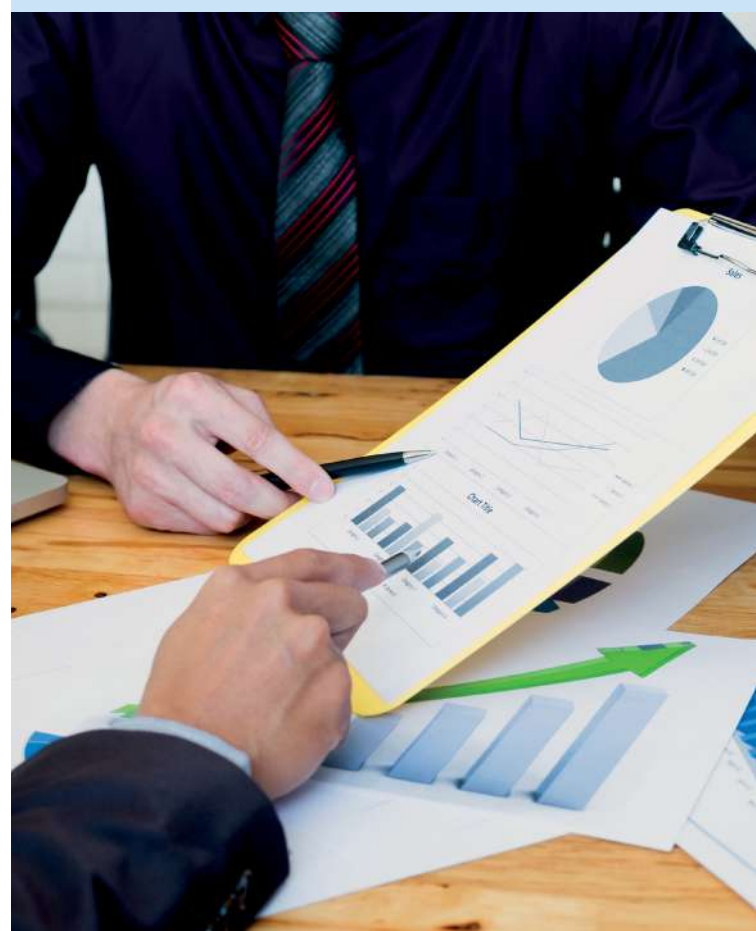
Heads are having to lead strategic responses which look at fundamental changes to their business model

Heads of smaller schools (with fewer than 700 pupils), which are not part of a school group, were the most likely to mention financial pressures as the single most challenging aspect of their role that has changed, and it was also slightly more of an issue for schools with boarding.

In the second half of this report we focus on the various implications of the changing nature of headship. However, it is worth mentioning here that it is the greater financial pressures of the role which influence, maybe more than any other change, how Heads spend their time and the skills required for success. ■

Financial pressures are seen by Heads as requiring:

- Additional strategic planning skills.
- Creativity and courage to develop bold solutions.
- Greater business and financial acumen.
- Effective relationships with governors to discuss and reach difficult decisions.
- Additional change management skills.
- The need to develop the senior team and delegate more of the day-to-day to free up time for strategy.
- The need for resilience to provide reassurance and positive leadership whilst considering difficult scenarios.



CHANGING PARENTAL EXPECTATIONS AND DEALING WITH MORE CONTENTIOUS ISSUES

Dealing with parents' changing expectations and the contentious issues they increasingly raise was seen as the most time-consuming of all the areas that had changed. In particular, the time required to deal with a small, but increasing number of parents who raise formal complaints, including litigation. Issues can escalate more quickly, more often, resulting in entrenched views - sometimes over what might have been quite minor matters.

“There has been a huge change in parental expectations, which everyone blames on Covid, but I believe has come more to the fore since the 2016 Brexit vote. Parents, on the whole, seem more angry, more inclined to use the complaints process, less inclined to pick up the phone, less inclined to be forgiving and more determined to get ‘value for money’.”

This aspect of headship was seen as having changed the most at schools based in London and the Southeast.

A Head of a small school said his school had been threatened with legal action four times in recent years for the tiniest issues, including one relating to a child not being selected for a sports team!

“There may be a kernel of truth, but often it is a study of obsession from parents who become entrenched.”

Although schools in general are more aware of the importance of inclusion and of listening to the views and perspectives of others, it seems that many parents have become less tolerant.



These complaints can have a huge impact on the school. In particular, on the time and emotional energy of the Head, senior staff and governors. In addition to the normal processes, the Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) has given parents an additional route to complain and social media can add further pressure or create what can feel like a parallel process.

Although schools in general are more aware of the importance of inclusion and of listening to the views and perspectives of others, it seems that many parents have become less tolerant. Or perhaps we are all more angry these days and quicker to complain? Certainly, some Heads think Covid has resulted in greater anxiety and higher expectations from parents, perhaps exacerbated by financial pressures and the greater sacrifices parents are having to make to afford school fees.

“More parents need support as well as students.”

“As parents’ sacrifices are greater to pay for schools, they are more and more demanding. They are much less tolerant of anything that goes wrong.”

We found many Heads, especially at prep schools, who reported over-involvement of parents as they try to protect children from any difficult experience. Communications in relation to a school trip, for example, can quickly get out of hand, and many Heads now try to influence parents' thinking before they do.

Some schools are looking to work proactively with parents to help them deal with difficulties which may arise in the future (we have included a case study in the second part of our report on **page 70** with some ideas). Some Heads are also considering how they might use the induction of parents into the school as an opportunity to instil in the parents the values they want for their children, such as tolerance and resilience.

“I write to parents every week and try to model some of the behaviours I want to encourage in children, such as having to do things you don’t want to do.”

“I sometimes think we have gone too far in some areas of parental involvement. I have learnt to set clearer boundaries around when I reply to parents and what is reasonable to expect.”

“My number one prediction for the future is more litigious parents. I can see a situation where all schools will have a permanent legal advisor full time on the staff.”

“Parents request online and remote learning when their child is off.”

“We need to tell parents much more than we used to how to do basic parenting such as bedtimes etc.” ■

HUMAN RESOURCES AND CHANGING STAFF EXPECTATIONS

Managing staff was seen as the second most time-consuming change. As with some parent matters, staff complaints and grievances are often huge drains on time.

When we wrote our report 10 years ago some schools were discussing whether they needed a Human Resources (HR) Manager. Indeed, our consultancy work put us in touch with several school HR Managers who, as the first at their school, needed to explain their role to colleagues. Nowadays, no-one questions the need for this role and, in addition to HR Managers, many schools have also allocated additional staff welfare responsibilities at Deputy Head level.

“A Staff Wellbeing Lead is now a common role in schools.”

A clear message from our research is “you can’t just manage people the way you were managed earlier in your career”. The changing environment requires Heads to adapt their approach in several ways.

→ **Flexibility:** Like other sectors, staff in education now expect more flexibility from their employer and are more concerned about work/life balance. Staff are more aware of their rights and job descriptions, may make more requests for time off, and may be less willing to work out of hours. This can create division between those who regularly work out of hours and those who cannot or will not. The requirement for flexibility is sometimes seen as a generational difference, perhaps exacerbated by remote working during Covid.

“Saturdays have fallen by the wayside, it seems, as we can’t remunerate well enough to make them palatable.”

“Ten years ago, if you were asked by the Head to take a trip with a group of children, you would do it without question. Now it is much more difficult to get staff to go ‘above and beyond’ and therefore potentially compromise family time.”



THE CHANGING NATURE OF HEADSHIP

- **Wellbeing:** Staff expect more support, nurturing and care for their wellbeing, sometimes including outside of work. Parents' demands add additional pressure which often cannot be met through extra staffing, given schools' financial constraints.

“There is an expectation that schools should respond to and take account of the wellbeing of their staff in all elements of their lives, not just at school.”

- **Contentious matters:** Many Heads report a higher incidence of formal claims or grievances. As with parental complaints, dealing with these can require enormous amounts of time and emotional energy. Additional and changing legal requirements add further complexity.

“Compared with a few years ago, I spend at least twice as much time on contentious staff matters.”

“In employment law we are now seeing some quite left-field judgments especially around discrimination which creates greater risk and less confidence in precedents.”

- **Process and transparency:** Good relationships with staff and upholding values are important, but Heads also need to have robust policies and processes to demonstrate they are making correct and fair decisions. They need to manage process as well as people, recording and formalising more decisions. As one person told us “You need to do the right thing and prove it”. Heads may also feel pressure to share more information about the school and its plans with staff, including financial information.

“I used to operate on the principle that as I am a person of integrity, have good relationships and treat people fairly, it's probably enough. Nowadays, it's much more about providing evidence and having robust processes which will be challenged.”



- **Pay and staff shortages:** Heads face many more demands for pay increases, with staff becoming increasingly aware of their market worth. TPS has also made staff more aware of contractual matters generally, with more staff joining unions which have sought recognition. Whilst the difficulty of recruiting high quality staff is nothing new, some schools are reporting greater challenges, especially in recruiting into support roles.

“I think in my whole career I only asked for a pay rise once – but nowadays, as Head, I get asked all the time.”

“Across teaching and support staff, employees are sector benchmarking and demanding premiums to stay.” ■



SUPPORTING STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH

Much has been written about the significant increase in mental health concerns in young people. There is also a much greater awareness of conditions and a willingness to ask for help or to raise mental health as an issue.

Reports describe students as experiencing higher levels of anxiety, depression, and stress. Factors such as academic pressure and social media can influence this and periods of isolation during Covid may have exacerbated these issues for many young people.

Heads reported that this aspect of the role has changed more than any other, reflecting the scale of the problem and the complexity of handling situations. This change was felt most keenly by Heads of senior schools and those with boarding.

“The biggest change, over the last five or six years I'd say, is the significant increase in the severity and frequency of teenage mental health concerns, particularly, suicidal ideation. It's fair to say that this is the single thing that most often keeps me awake at night and that was not really the case when I started out in headship about 10 years ago.”

“I know we all have rose tinted views of the past, but I honestly feel this issue is completely different to when I started.”



This has resulted in Heads needing to provide more leadership in many areas of student wellbeing.

Since other government-funded services such as the UK's National Health Service (NHS) or Child & Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) are overwhelmed, the burden often falls on schools to try to handle situations that they may feel unqualified to deal with.

“Society's view of schools has changed. We really are now the last support left standing, following the dismantling of so many other groups and institutions. It can feel like we are expected to have answers to everything in our pupils' lives.”

“The failure of services like CAMHS and the NHS means that the burden to look after complex issues falls on schools, which we are often not qualified to deal with.”

→ Many issues are complex, with elements of mental health, SEND and discipline needing to be considered together.

“As Head you often feel you have to make decisions that really should be decided on by a mental health professional.”

“Dealing with an increasing number of students with very complex needs, especially where there is an overlap between SEND and mental health issues is extremely tricky.”



THE CHANGING NATURE OF HEADSHIP

- Heads have needed to develop greater expertise and change their organisation to provide additional pastoral leadership through new structures and specialist support. The mental health lens is now used to review almost every aspect of the school. All staff are involved in training to provide support for children both inside and outside the classroom.

“The mental health of students is now a core element of the provision in all schools and it has had a significant impact on the way in which the curriculum and pastoral care is organised and delivered.”

- Schools have adopted an emphasis on proactive education to teach wellness, resilience and happiness, and to raise parent awareness.
- There is an increased focus by the Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) on student wellbeing and on ensuring leadership are meeting their responsibilities in this area.

Some Heads we researched were a little sceptical about the current focus on wellbeing and mental health.

“In our oldest year groups this is manifesting as young men and women who have a sense of entitlement - everything is diagnosable, has a name and is someone else's fault. Children don't seem to have resilience and I worry that in our desire to meet customer needs and to support our pupils, we might actually be exacerbating this phenomenon.”

“Mental health as a reason for behaviours is used now, and the resulting 'exceptionalism' needs careful managing.”

While many others saw their school's approach to mental health as a positive opportunity.

“I think it will be the teaching of wellness and happiness that will distinguish schools, how well you do this and how joined up it is.” ■

STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING

We discussed how the role of schools has changed and what steps schools are taking with the Deputy Head Pastoral of a large co-educational all-through day school.

How has the role of schools changed in recent years in respect of mental health?

It's easy to lose perspective and overlook just how extraordinary it is that schools are often now the front line for the provision of mental health services. At my school, and through my involvement with other organisations, I see schools at risk of becoming clinical settings for mental health and wellbeing as they try to pick up the slack of overwhelmed local public services.

What staffing and organisational changes have you made at your school?

We have adapted our Heads of Year and Heads of House roles. The Heads of House now focus entirely on building positive relationships with pupils and parents. Each child knows they can have a coach-like, supportive conversation with their Head of House and disciplinary matters will remain separate.

We have tried to be much clearer, generally, on who does what in the pastoral arena and are writing various “playbooks” which explain where everyone fits in. We will have four playbooks - for academic staff, parents, students and support staff who play a crucial part in the school community.

We have built a new “Well Centre” to house many of our services and, like most schools, we have introduced psychotherapists who work as counsellors to deal with more acute situations. We also have nurses and a chaplaincy team who fulfil a similar role to the counsellors but also pick up additional pastoral load.

In addition, we are increasing our number of staff qualified in mental health first aid in order to support children with pastoral needs or those at the acute end of the spectrum with challenges around attending school or needing time out from lessons.

What about proactive measures to build mental health?

Whilst we have had to put ourselves into the clinical space, our core is, of course, education and this is where we should add most value through proactive initiatives.

The main aspects are:

- 01** Ensuring an **environment** where kids feel genuinely safe, however they interpret this. You can get very highbrow about all this but what really impacts mental health for most students is whether they feel secure, cared for and whether people are nice to them.
- 02** Building a **community** that children want to feel part of, where they want to participate and where their achievements are noticed and valued. We have an extraordinary range of clubs and activities to give children opportunities to try and find a good fit.
- 03** We start our school year with three weeks focused on what our **values** mean in practice. The school sets the rules, but they set the culture. We want them to 'own' their actions and how they treat each other and for the school to be as inclusive and positive a place as we'd all like it to be.
- 04 Parents.** We know from research that children perform better when they are not anxious, so how can parents have conversations with their children in a way that doesn't drive anxiety? In our school, children already care very much about their academic outcomes so, if anything, our job as a school and as parents is often to play this down and let them know that whilst results matter, they are not what makes them who they are.
- 05 Positive education.** As well as PSICHE we run an education programme incorporating the PERMA model (Positive emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Accomplishment).

This includes building mental fitness, mental maintenance activities, and considering mental wealth. We teach children about ownership and agency around their mental fitness. It's something they should be proactive about building up and most of the time it's about shifting their lens so they see the importance and value in what they are doing anyway.

What really impacts mental health is whether they feel secure, cared for and whether people are nice to them

Can you talk too much about mental health?

Yes, if you frame it in the wrong way. Oxford University and University of New South Wales have embarked on research to look into this. We avoid overplaying the dangers of poor mental health and keep it down to earth, practical and about them.

What about your role versus parents' role?

I'm sure, like most independent schools, we can take on too much sometimes, and we do worry what happens when children leave us. Some schools are looking to invest in pastoral services for alumni, but maybe a better approach is working really closely with parents whilst they are with us, equipping them and their children with the skills they need for university. There is a risk that schools are becoming too much of "an anchor" instead of the home and the community. Crucially, we try and involve parents in everything we do, and no area more than in mental health and wellbeing. They will hopefully always have that important familial bond with their child which we can't and aren't trying to replicate.

What is your hope for the future?

We have loads of information about the prevalence of mental health issues among children, but ridiculously small amounts of proper research into what causes this and what helps, other than in clinical settings when it's already too late. We need better information to really ensure resources are being used where they have most effect and that the resources we are using are actually doing some good! ■

ACHIEVING EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION AND NAVIGATING RELATED SOCIETAL CHANGES

Schools are often at the forefront of societal changes and they have increasingly become places where developments in Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) are tested, often very publicly. This has involved, in particular, gender issues and also, very visibly, the movements known as “Everyone’s Invited” and “Black Lives Matter”.

After student mental health, this was seen as the second most changed aspect of headship, especially by Heads of schools with secondary age pupils and Heads of larger schools.

When we asked experienced Heads for an example of something they have dealt with this year that they would not have been involved with a few years ago, the most common examples related to EDI, in particular, gender transition.



Governments cannot control parents, but they can inspect schools



Increasingly a responsibility for schools and a challenge for leadership

Some Heads hypothesised that following the pandemic, the reputation of schools had been raised, meaning school leaders are now increasingly looked to for guidance on other complex areas. Another, less positive angle is that governments cannot control parents, but they can inspect schools, so more responsibility is placed on schools.

“Everyone’s Invited” may have contributed to schools’ increasing responsibility for students’ behaviour outside school rather than, for example, the focus being on parents.

“We are the go-to people on a whole range of societal issues. It has become a kind of moral burden – and we are expected to be experts on things we are probably not expert on.”

“The extent to which we are now responsible for students’ poor decisions on a Saturday night is completely different to 15 years ago when this would fall squarely on the parents.”

“The government can’t really look at what goes on in families behind closed doors but it can legislate for what schools do.”

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI), Black Lives Matter (BLM) & Everyone's Invited (EI)

The Heads we spoke to saw BLM and EI as positive, energising movements which had led to useful conversations and student-led change. They feel their schools are better places as a result.

"We've had a very good, constructive and positive time with our pupils, working on charters to reflect the school's attitude and commitment to EDI of every kind."

"We have had excellent, open and helpful pupil discussions and actions around EDI."

"EDI has been simultaneously challenging, refreshing and energising. It has enabled me to learn deeply about my own prejudices and at the same time modernise and redefine what we are doing as a school."

With race, however, one area that Heads often flagged as a challenge for schools, is increasing the diversity of their staff, especially senior academic staff, so they better reflect society or at least the school's pupil body.

"I would love to see the Independent Schools Council launch a major recruitment campaign to boost the diversity of the sector."

The BLM movement, which became much more prominent in the UK during the summer holidays of 2020, may have left Heads feeling rather exposed in having to deal with issues without as much support as they would have liked.

"One aspect of Black Lives Matter was how things escalated so quickly and the personal nature – 'you're white and privileged so what do you know?'"

Gender identity – navigating a path

Perhaps the leadership challenge most often raised by Heads relating to EDI was concerned with gender identity and gender transition. Some Heads feel that schools have become a battleground for polarised views on gender.

"You might get a family with two non-binary parents and an adopted child come to see you one day, and the next day a fundamentalist religious family. They are poles apart."

"Heads are caught at the front line of the argument as they lead their schools through what can be a maelstrom of opposing opinions and deep feeling."

"At a school you need to know where your centre is and accept that you won't please everyone."

Many Heads find this area difficult.

"What does all this mean for headship? – that it's trickier than ever. We may find it harder to be honest or blunt for risk of offense. I just avoid certain topics because I don't feel confident – e.g. transgender, sexuality, cancel culture."

"When I see a group of girls walking towards me, do I say 'morning ladies'? Is there a risk that one of them doesn't identify as a lady? Should I call these boys 'chaps'?"

The key challenging is navigating a sensible path and gauging the right amount of importance. Should schools develop a policy or should they deal with each specific case if and when it arises? Anecdotally, we sense that most Heads are doing the latter, and indeed are wary of speaking publicly or proactively on the subject.

"Our Lead Council's advice was don't try to have a policy but deal with the tiny number of cases on an individual basis."

"There is a risk that we spend too much time on these issues and a risk that we ignore them." ■

We discussed Equality Diversity and Inclusion with Gary Savage, Head Master at Westminster School. In the following conversation, he talks to Johan Jensen, Founder and CEO of All-in Education about his own leadership, how he's working to become a more inclusive leader and taking his senior team with him on this journey. All-in Education, part of the RSAcademics Group, has worked with Gary and his team on their EDI journey since the spring of 2022.

JJ: How do you define inclusive leadership?

GS: Inclusive leadership does two things; it seeks to bring everyone in the organisation together through the challenges that we face collectively, and it generates a culture in which each individual feels that they are, in a sense, a leader. Every member of staff at Westminster School should be seen as a leader in their own right. I believe that if you can instil that kind of inclusive culture across an organisation, of collective and individual empowerment, then you'll stand a chance to succeed as an organisation.

JJ: Why is it important to you to be an inclusive leader?

GS: If you can't include everyone and if you can't make everybody feel that what is happening in the school applies to them, involves them, hopefully inspires them and makes them feel valued and esteemed within the organisation, then it's not going to be a great place for them to live and work. It's not going to be somewhere where they feel inspired to give their best because they might feel that they're not really part of things. So, I think good inclusive leadership manages to instil a strong sense in everybody that they are part of the same team trying to achieve shared goals which they have themselves contributed to shaping. In this light, it would obviously be crazy to do anything other than leading inclusively. However, that's not to say I've succeeded; it's hard - but it must surely be the intention.

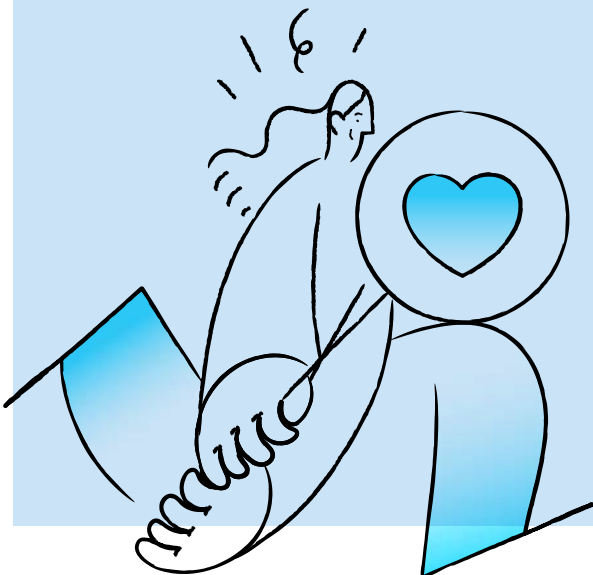


JJ: Why do you think inclusive leadership has become a skill or a quality that is sought after?

GS: Partly, it's because the past failings of our sector and wider society have been more exposed in recent years. Faced with this important challenge, all leaders need to step back and think critically about the way we run our organisations. In the past it is possible that "inclusivity", as a concept, has been taken for granted, and not been given the conscious attention it demands and deserves. We're understanding more and more - perhaps better now than ever before - that certain modes of language and biases, both conscious and unconscious, impact the way that we are seen, behave and act as leaders. The way in which we speak can unwittingly make others feel disengaged or disenfranchised. This could undermine them, their wellbeing and their sense of having a stake in the organisation. By extension, it undermines the organisation itself. If some of your team don't feel fully invested, because your leadership doesn't make them feel included, then the organisation is not going to soar in the way that we would wish it to.

JJ: How has your personal inclusive leadership style changed over recent years?

GS: I hope I've always tried to include everyone in the way I lead a school. This is the second school I've led and I've never focused on just a few individuals or cohorts of colleagues. I've always worked to make everyone in the organisation (those backstage like cleaners, caterers, security, IT as well as those front-of-house like teachers and managers) feel that I value what they do. I've encouraged my senior teams to do the same. However, in recent years I've become much more conscious about how I do that.



JJ: Do you have any specific examples of changes you've made to how you lead?

GS: It was perhaps easier in the past, I would try to practise 'inclusive leadership' with people I came across when I did my daily work. I think I've now become more active and thoughtful in the way that I try to do the same thing – I think about the language I'm using very consciously for example. There are some lazy, old-fashioned traps you can fall into, for example talking about teaching and non-teaching staff, which essentially defines a group by something they don't do.

JJ: Can you give an example of how this change manifests itself?

GS: At a recent service in the Abbey I made an absolute point to say to the whole school community "every single one of you has played a part in the success of the school this year as pupils, as teachers and as staff. Every one of you in your different ways has contributed to the success and the flourishing of the whole. I want to thank each and every one of you for all that you have done in your own sphere, individually and collectively". I'm not sure I would have been as conscious of the need constantly to lead in that way, through the prism of inclusivity, in the past – I would have simply tried to do it instinctively. But it can't be stressed often enough: whoever you are, wherever you come from, whatever you do in this organisation, you're valued, you contribute.



If you can't include everyone and if you can't make everybody feel that what is happening in the school applies to them then it's not going to be a great place for them to live and work

JJ: What are the key challenges for you to lead inclusively?

GS: Complacency is number one, telling yourself that 'of course I'm an inclusive leader, it goes without saying'. But it doesn't – you have to say it, you have to mean it, you have to show it and you have to demonstrably reach out to individuals and different groups of people in the organisation. Show everyone that you care. And I know I don't always manage to do it because of the challenge of time, busyness and tiredness. I need to make the time and I know I need to do that more often and better.

Then there's the challenge of our own biases, both conscious and unconscious biases. That was the great insight of the work that, as a senior team, we did with All-in Education, before we had you back in to talk to everyone – that moment when you made us close our eyes and think about our networks – I thought, yes, my network is somewhat lopsided. So, I need to be aware of that and conscious of how unwittingly and unintentionally the way I talk, the cultural cues I use and the mannerisms I adopt might be exclusive in a way that I don't want to be. To address these biases in my leadership practices is certainly the hard bit but it's about making the unconscious conscious.

JJ: What are the potential consequences of these biases?

GS: For example, in my network I have people who tend to have been educated at particular universities - does that then mean that when I recruit new staff that I am unwittingly inclined to lean towards people with a certain profile, a certain background or a certain kind of academic record that echoes my own experience? I'm probably more likely instinctively to understand, read and recognise the person and therefore feel more confident in saying to myself 'I know what this is, I know s/he will fit here'. However, in point of fact, you've got to have the confidence to not be so confident in order to challenge your assumptions and to make some decisions that may not be as straightforward as you are used to, but in the long term would be equal, if not better, value for the school. There are other routes to excellence than that of my own experience which I may not be able to read as quickly or as confidently. But I need to do that because in so doing I will further diversify our community and as long as that diversity is predicated on a proper commitment to inclusivity, as well as excellence, then our community will be stronger for it.

JJ: In what ways have you approached these challenges?

GS: It is quite hard because you have to unpack years and years of in-built, unwitting assumption. And that's one of the benefits of the work we've done together with All-in Education. It's important to show willingness to show vulnerability and for everyone to see that you too are vulnerable – as a headmaster, or as a senior team, we don't have all the answers. I try to be myself and to be authentic. Sometimes that means admitting I don't have the answer or that I don't always get it right. I'm sure that's a critical part of making an organisation feel inclusive, because you're lifting the bonnet and showing when the engine has malfunctioned. I think there's a tendency with leaders, perhaps especially in what can be hierarchical organisations like schools, to think and act as though we have to be infallible. However, everyone knows you're very far from infallible! And if you try to pretend that you are, people will cry foul. To show vulnerability and to accept that things aren't always any clearer in your own mind than anybody else's is an important part of making people feel that they're part of something equally.



JJ: What steps have you taken to create an inclusive work environment where all of your staff feel welcome and supported?

GS: We have good gender balance but a lack of ethnic minority representation on the senior team, and indeed in the teaching staff. This is something that we've talked about in common rooms up and down the country, not just at Westminster. I want to see a senior team that is a microcosm of the school that we want to build so that all our pupils can look and think 'I'm represented there' – but we are not there yet. In the meantime, I encourage the team to be inclusive in the way we all go about things. On a very basic level I try to give everyone a voice, the time and space in meetings to express themselves. We host small gatherings at regular intervals with the various teams in the school, teaching and support staff together. Also, when we organise major staff celebrations we now invite all our staff whereas previously celebrations were sometimes divided support staff/teaching staff. That creates a great opportunity for people who don't normally work together to meet each other properly and spend time together.



JJ: How do you draw on the diversity of your school to influence future strategy?

GS: Earlier this year I set up a number of working parties, one which looked at communications and how we can make these more regular and clearer to everyone who works at the school. Another working party looked at workload, and a third looked at teaching and support staff relations. This one put forward recommendations on the better use of shared spaces like the staff room and how staff briefings are presented and promoted more inclusively. The aim of all these working groups is to create a greater sense of inclusivity, validation and belonging. From these tiny acorns, hopefully a genuine, deeply rooted, flourishing tree will grow. You've got to get those small things right first.

JJ: How do you measure the success and impact of your inclusive leadership efforts?

GS: A fully inclusive environment would be one where you never had cause to be concerned about a particular group or individual feeling that they didn't belong or listened to. However, you should never assume that that's the case. You've got to have proper systems. For example, until this year, although there was a teacher appraisal process, there was no appraisal process for support staff. Thankfully we've got one now, which means that every support staff colleague every year can talk to their line manager. And hopefully within this inclusive culture that we're trying to build, we'll have the confidence to state whether staff are happy, content and feel able and empowered to raise issues. One of the measures is what happens via those appraisals but also what people say to me, what they say in our surveys and in the various working parties. These routes will tell us whether we're making progress.

JJ: And what about diversity?

GS: Another aspect of measuring success is looking at staff and governing board diversity data in the next three, five and ten years, particularly in the teaching staff and to answer the question 'does this group of professionals now better reflect ethnically and in other ways the very deep diversity of the pupils that we serve?'.

We've got a long way to go but I really think that the work we've done over the recent years with you has really helped put some of these things into focus and to help give us some real momentum, which I hope we'll be able to sustain. I believe we will because my team and I are determined that we do so. ■

LEADING IN THE AGE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

An obvious change to leadership in recent years is the growth of social media. Nearly all the ways in which headship has changed - including in response to parental expectations, student mental health, staff expectations, and, of course, societal changes - have been impacted by the greater public scrutiny and potential escalation of issues through social media. Many Heads see this increasing further.

“No matter how proactive you are, when something goes wrong, things go nuts. A completely untrue story goes everywhere. It's quite scary – do you say something, do you not say anything?”

“Navigating the threat from media when we are dealing with a challenging or upsetting issue is an added and very unwelcome stress and significant piece of work - e.g. trying to avoid negative and inaccurate press coverage or problems on social media.”

Shorter serving Heads and those in standalone schools, rather than members of a school group, were more likely to highlight social media and PR as a challenge in their survey responses.

In addition, the news media generally has become more interested in and critical of independent schools, with well-known, expensive schools making headlines.

“Who would have thought that Heads' salaries would be compared to bursary spending in the national press?”



Many Heads assume that anything they write to parents, or even staff, could become public and they communicate more carefully as a result.

“We need to assume that anything that goes to parents or staff could become public.”

“I must now assume that anything I write in an email or on a record about a pupil, parent or member of staff may be read by that person.”

Perhaps the main implication of this is Heads feeling less in control, especially when faced with public allegations. Governors may be particularly anxious, and some schools have enlisted specialist public relations support.

“After a few months of not really knowing what to do, we invested in some expert strategic PR and legal advice – it was expensive but necessary.”

In general, it seems that leaders everywhere, including in schools, are more likely to be in the firing line, with society becoming less deferential and quicker to criticise.

Student behaviour can also be more of a challenge in the age of social media with negative influencers, misinformation and conflict-escalation.

“Managing student behaviour is more challenging in the age of social media for a number of reasons. For example, students are susceptible to nefarious influences via TikTok, Instagram etc and they are often drawn into negative and unhelpful exchanges on SnapChat which are then shared with the school. Misinformation and gossip about the school's responses to poor behaviour is rapidly shared online, provoking outrage from students and parents.” ■

REGULATIONS AND COMPLIANCE

Whilst Heads recognise the positive aspects of regulations, they can also make decision-making more complex. Heads need to think through all the possible pitfalls of different regulations when making decisions, including Health and Safety regulations, GDPR, indirect discrimination etc.

“The weight of compliance and HR-related issues is ever more burdensome and brings ever more complexity to decision-making.”

“I find the increase in compliance to be, by and large, an expensive waste of time.”

An experienced Head explained how seemingly simple decisions can become much more complex when you consider possible pitfalls of various regulations.

For many years, colleagues who supervise rugby team matches on Saturday have enjoyed a drink afterwards with their opposite number from the visiting school. However, nowadays we need to think about questions such as:

- What are your responsibilities as a licenced premises?
- Where do you store the alcohol?
- Who is responsible, who holds the licence, who signs off how much can be drunk?
- What about the fact that staff involved are nearly always male, and what happens if I join those people and they are seen as the ones who get promotion? What about part-time female staff excluded from these networks?
- The bar is located in the Common Room. We know that people don't drink during the day, but how can we be sure? Do we have to keep it locked and who is the key holder?

As a boarding school, we like to see the school as an extension of home, moving between the two seamlessly, but increasingly we have to set more boundaries.

We heard mixed views on inspection, but most Heads saw additional burdens on schools arising from some of the recent changes in inspection.

“Schools are increasing the target to deal with things that parents are better placed to deal with. But the government and inspectors can't legislate against parents.”

“Mental health of students is a major societal issue but it is made worse in that the inspection regime seems to feel that we have to solve the issues of every child, however complex they are.”

Others talked to us about there being disproportionate penalties for trivial aspects of non-compliance, an issue which has of course been more in the public eye since the death of Ruth Perry.

“The odd error is not where the focus should be. Typos or order and sequence weigh far more than they should.”

A key concern from Heads is that what is auditable is not necessarily adding value, and the effort needed to check that every detail is right would be better spent on improving children's experiences.

“Of course, we do very well in our inspection, but we spend hours and hours preparing when we could be doing other things.”

“I sense more intervention from the DfE - never before have I felt more externally managed/directed as an independent school Head.”

Some aspects of inspection could encourage risk aversion or micromanagement, which could particularly be an issue for less experienced Heads of smaller schools. For example, might governors look to appoint a safe pair of hands rather than an innovative leader?

“It could mean that schools appoint heads who are a safe pair of hands and focus on compliance. There is a risk, especially in a less confident or new Head, that you micro-manage.” ■

Heads spend more time outside their school than ever before.



GREATER EXTERNAL FOCUS

One general theme from the research is that Heads spend more time outside their school than ever before. The strategic, sensitive or ambassadorial nature of many external-facing activities means they require senior leaders and the Head, specifically. Examples include setting up new partnerships with local schools, the development of international schools and fundraising. People expect the Head to lead on much of this activity and many Heads relish the chance to develop their role in this way.

It is clear that the nature of many school partnerships has changed. It is now not about independent schools simply sharing their facilities, rather work in this area is focused on the development of fully fledged, mutually beneficial partnerships, jointly run with local state schools. These partnerships require persistence and vision to set up but can provide both children and staff with great opportunities.

Fundraising has also become a much more important part of nearly every Head's job, and several schools have affiliated international schools which need the Head's attention.

"I spend at least 30% of my time explicitly on community or partnership work."

"The nature of many external aspects require the Head's full involvement."

"The focus on partnerships has, quite rightly, increased and it is an element of the Head's role that requires a great deal of personal time and commitment." ■

PARTNERSHIPS

The Head of a senior school describes a local schools partnership they set up.

Partnerships are different from outreach. With outreach, you are more like a benefactor sharing your resources, whereas partnerships involve all schools equally contributing resources in terms of staff time and funding and co-designing projects. It's therefore a group of educationalists benefiting from each other's expertise and resources and the ability to provide a wider range of opportunities for the children in their area, and on a scale that could not necessarily be achieved in their individual schools.

Local partnerships take a long time: it's a marathon not a sprint. But the payback is significant in benefitting the children, and offering engaging and inspiring CPD for staff.

We started with just one school which I became a governor of, and then over time got others onboard and we now have six local schools working together. We each contribute the same cost - less than £1000 per annum - to cover administration and events, and each invests equal time.

Activities and events include lectures, for example on minority interests such as Astronomy GCSE, masterclasses, and competitions.



Staff volunteer and schools agree whether they are able to give colleagues additional time rather than money. They learn from taking on broader responsibilities and through a wider network of peers. Whichever school we work in, we are all educationalists, so our approach is: "What can we do together that we can't do individually?"

The children gain through enrichment, knowledge and motivation, as well as broader mixing and breaking down of barriers.

After a while, the partnerships and activities gain their own momentum with lots of benefits that people might not have anticipated. With so much of our jobs being so challenging, this is a really joyful, sparkly thing.

In terms of the Head's role, you need to be particularly involved at the start, networking and getting buy-in from the other schools. You need to have a clear vision and a long-term plan and be able to articulate this in a persuasive way. You need to solve problems and deal with what might at first seem cynicism or opposition towards private schools. Above all, you need tenacity and determination, a strong sense of belief in what you are doing. ■

WHAT ABOUT ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE?

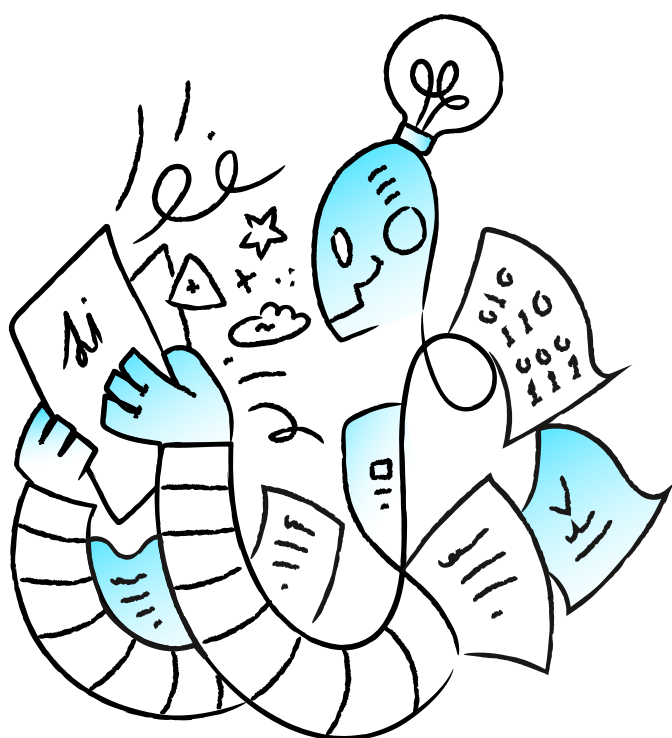
Our research was conducted between January and June, 2023. When asked about aspects of Headship that had changed, only about half of our sample of Heads selected “Understanding the impact of new technology such as AI (excluding social media) and developing a strategy” in their top seven areas that had changed the most.

Heads whose school was part of a group, especially senior or all-through schools, recognised this most frequently.

However, we had very few direct comments about AI from Heads during the research process and it did not feature in our earlier discussions and focus groups. This may be because few Heads understand the implications for their school and, in particular, the possible impact on their own role.

We suspect that over the coming months this will become an area of greater interest and focus, so we have included in **Appendix 1** some questions and answers with Heads who are further ahead than most in investigating AI, and who shared their different perspectives with us.

In the next section about implications, we discuss what AI might mean for Heads, the knowledge and skills required and early steps they might take to gain that knowledge. ■





The implications





In this section we will explore the implications of the changing nature of headship from a number of angles: the skills increasingly needed for success and the type of support and professional development which will help Heads to deal with the new challenges.

We will also look at the implications for the appointment of Heads in the future.

The skills which Heads increasingly need



As we have seen, most of the changes that have occurred in headship over the last 10 years amount to changes of emphasis required to address increasingly important challenges, rather than something completely new. So it is with the skills that Heads now need. Skills like strategic planning or resilience, for example, have always been part of headship, but they are being tested nowadays more than ever before.

Our research has focused on what has changed in headship. Therefore, we have not listed all the skills needed for headship, but rather we have focussed on those areas which have been identified by Heads as changing the most.

From our initial questionnaires, discussions and focus groups, 16 possible skill areas emerged as having become increasingly important. To gather more information about these areas, we asked our sample of over 100 Heads the following key questions (**see Appendix 2**):

- Which skills areas have changed the most?
- Which are most important for success?
- How would you rate your competence?

Skills like strategic planning or resilience, have always been part of headship, but they are being tested nowadays more than ever before.

From combining the answers to these questions, we identified the top 10 skills of most interest as follows:

- Greater business and financial acumen.
- More complex, bolder and more creative strategic thinking.
- Greater understanding of economic, political and societal change.
- Building greater resilience and wellbeing, being better at getting support and advice.
- Greater delegation and development of the SLT.
- Better management and protection of time.
- Greater understanding of changing technology, including AI.
- Additional appreciation of legal and regulatory matters
- Greater external facing skills including PR, parent relations, fundraising and partnering.
- Handling greater complexity.

We will now highlight some of the key points we picked up from speaking with Heads and other sector experts, including insights into good practice. ■



GREATER BUSINESS ACUMEN

Perhaps the term we heard more than any other when asking Heads to describe skill changes was “business brain” or business acumen. Whereas 10-15 years ago there may have been some dissension around whether a school is a business, there seems little such discussion nowadays.

■ **“It’s not a school if it’s not a business.”**

■ **“I am definitely running a business and I have had to embrace this reality.”**

The need for greater business and financial acumen was seen as the single biggest evolution in skills required of headship by our sample of Heads. This was a theme across all Heads’ responses but was highlighted even more often by shorter serving Heads.

Some key themes include:

- Heads need to embrace the fact that they are running a business. They are more “CEO” than “headteacher”.
- Heads need to be entrepreneurial and enterprising, developing ideas for diversifying income streams, increasing revenue and reducing cost.
- Heads cannot just rely on the Bursar; they need to understand much more about economics, finance, terminology, how to borrow money, banking etc.
- Whilst strategy has always been about finance, it is more of a driver for change than ever before.
- Whilst many governors may have business expertise, a Head needs to ensure this is applied in the school context – e.g. how parents will react to change.



Greater business and financial acumen was seen as the single biggest evolution in skills.

■ **“Headship requires social entrepreneurialism and also, increasingly, business entrepreneurship. There is a real opportunity for schools to see synergies between these two – an untapped power.”**

■ **“Nowadays, I think about finance and business in everything I do. The only exception is probably the teaching I do. Everything else, I am thinking about the business. For example, a teacher resigns, my first thought is do we need to replace, is it like for like, should we do things differently. Every area needs to be questioned and new ideas are welcome.”**

■ **“We are all thinking about VAT, business rates etc. You have to step back from the day-to-day running of the school and think “How would parents react if we structured fees like this?” It is partly behavioural economics. We have a lot of business people on the governing body, but if you are not careful, you are moved by people who run big business but don’t understand how our business is different.” ■**

MORE COMPLEX, BOLDER AND MORE CREATIVE STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP

“The modern Head has to be an excellent strategist, above the schoolmasterly skills that perhaps were valued a decade ago.”

Developing strategy has always been part of headship, but Heads are now reporting that current changes to the environment and the nature of future threats require a more fundamental review of the way schools operate. Heads are asking “How can we survive?” rather than, or as well as, “How can we improve?”

The strategic priorities being discussed at Senior Leadership Teams and Governing Boards are often quite different to those of a few years ago, for example:

Examples of previous strategic priorities

- Education and co-curricular development
- Pupil recruitment, marketing and admissions
- Fundraising and development
- Operational efficiency and effectiveness
- Organisation change – often including cultural development such as distributed leadership

Examples of additional current strategic priorities

- VAT, charitable status scenario planning
- Creative revenue generation and cost reduction options
- Organisational changes focused on potential major structural changes, e.g. shape of school, mergers, international expansion

A key feature of strategic planning in UK independent schools today is that it requires a more fundamental, far-reaching investigation, which contemplates potential major change.

Over 90% of the Heads we surveyed saw broader strategic thinking as a more important skill these days, including nearly 70% who saw it as much more important.

“In the old days, the Head looked after education, the Bursar looked after finances and the governing body looked after strategy. This is no longer a helpful way to think about roles. The Head as CEO needs to be across all aspects.” ■



The Head of a rural boarding school shares their perspective on the increasing need for fundamental strategic planning and the implications for school leadership.

My experience as a Teacher, Housemaster and Deputy Head helped me understand how to run school operations but did very little to prepare for the increasing strategic challenges we take on as Heads. I would estimate that about 40% of my headspace, i.e. what I worry about and what keeps me awake at night, is about strategic responses to external pressures.

It's not just about business acumen, as it requires creative thinking beyond the familiar education functions. We may have been around for several hundred years, but my school faces financial pressures and future threats that now require creative, courageous conversations about fundamental changes to our business model.

Governors of a charitable trust see their role as custodians of continuity and history. They see little incentive in taking risks and are very aware of huge reputational downside.



This includes questions such as:

- Should we merge with another school or group?
- Should we change from a charity to a business to enable more entrepreneurial decision making, or at least split away from our Foundation?
- Should we expand internationally?
- How can we use the summer holiday as a fourth term with significant extra revenue?
- Should we introduce a Nursery or Pre-School?

A key challenge with this type of strategic thinking is engaging governors in these uncomfortable questions.

I have a great GB who are emotionally very committed to the school but, I think, irrespective of skills and background, governors of a charitable trust see their role as custodians of continuity and history. They see little incentive in taking risks and are very aware of huge reputational downside. It's a bit like a fifth-generation farmer who doesn't want to be the one in charge when everything went wrong. However, we only have four more full Governing Board meetings until a likely Labour Government and VAT on fees.

This means that the Head and SLT have to drive strategy, carving out time for this, and we have also established a new governor subcommittee focused on strategy. We collaborate with other rural schools and must try to think unemotionally about what is best for the long-term future of the school.



What does this mean for the skills now needed for successful school leadership?

Firstly, let's talk about governors. I think schools will generally have to be able to move more swiftly than they have in the past. This could mean dropping charitable status and considering another structure where non-executives' and executives' incentives are more aligned.

For Heads, certainly resilience is key – in particular, an almost chameleon-like quality to switch personas between very different back-to-back meetings. I could be dealing with a member of staff's capability, then selling to prospective parents, then meeting my Bursar to discuss financial pressures.

As well as business acumen and creativity already mentioned you also need rigorous analysis. I personally feel quite comfortable with blue sky thinking, but I often wish we had more resource or expertise to add rigour – the sort of skills that management consultants bring. We sometimes develop proposals such as increasing our international intake by 10% but we haven't done the detailed planning for our recruitment campaign.

As a small school, we may, therefore, find ourselves having to make significant decisions but without the time and resource needed for the objective detailed analysis. This might mean delays and the risk of having to make difficult decisions only as a last resort. If you are negotiating a merger when you can't walk away, you'll no doubt get a worse deal.

In the future we may see many more mergers of smaller schools. As well as cost savings you would be able to pool resources for strategy development as well as many other benefits whilst, I think, still retaining much of your identity. ■

This illustrates several interesting points, including:

- In many schools, Heads may need to drive the process of developing strategy, given the natural conservatism of governors.
- The need for creativity and courageous thinking.
- Whether the traditional governance model is suited to a time which requires more nimble decision making.
- School leadership teams and boards may not be equipped to undertake the analysis necessary for this type of strategic decision making without expert advice.



THE IMPLICATIONS

GREATER UNDERSTANDING OF ECONOMIC, POLITICAL AND SOCIETAL CHANGES

100% of Heads surveyed saw understanding economic, political and societal change as being more important, with 65% rating it much more important.

The changing nature of headship is really all about how to operate successfully within a changing environment. Many factors such as financial pressures, regulations, future change of government, EDI, social media and AI point to the need for Heads to better understand what is happening and will happen in the world around schools.

It is interesting that, except in relation to AI, we heard very little mention of curriculum or pedagogical change. It would seem that Heads are used to leading in this area and do not see it as a major change or requiring a new skill.

“Expertise in the essentials of educational provision remains but the Head now needs to increasingly have a weather eye on political and economic factors beyond the school.”



Many point to the need for Heads to better understand what is happening in the world around schools



Economic, political and societal changes require Heads to be more tuned-in to, and better at interpreting, what is happening outside their school. This element of strategic thinking is sometimes called “horizon scanning” and serves to detect potential, important, upcoming changes.

“Shrewd understanding of a balance sheet and business finances seem far more important. Including a broad understanding of the UK economy and a good sense of banking/financing practices. The modern CEO can’t rely on a bursar in the same way.”

“Even as the Head of a UK school with no international borders or overseas campuses, I know that international awareness is crucial to understand the world in which my school operates.” ■

BUILDING GREATER RESILIENCE, MANAGING YOUR WELLBEING

98% of Heads saw building greater personal resilience and wellbeing as having become more important, with 60% saying it had become much more important. This reflects the key theme of increasing pressure that runs through many of the changes described in the first part of this report.

This is a broad area and one which is increasingly the focus for leadership development in other industries and sectors. Some of the key themes that emerged from our own research are as follows:

- In many ways, personal resilience is seen as a pre-requisite for everything else that Heads do. He or she may know all there is to know about strategy, finance and education but if the Head is not able to work in a sustainable way, they will not succeed.

“Resilience has to be the key issue for Heads these days.”

- Heads spend their lives thinking about others and need to learn the skill - and it is a skill - of looking after themselves.

“Some say you should take charge of your own wellbeing – but we need to realise that this is a skill in itself, and sometimes Heads don’t feel they have the permission to look after their own wellbeing. It’s a skill, and a duty to look after your own wellbeing – but you need to have the right culture for Heads to do this.”

- A key element is self-knowledge. For example, understanding how you react to pressure, and where you find energy and joy.

“Self knowledge is so empowering. You can go on a course to understand EBITDA – but this is not as important as understanding who you are. We use the Hogan instrument which looks at the dark side of personality. You work with a psychologist to help explore how you react under pressure. Of course, Heads have got to be open to it, but it can be a good first step to changing behaviour.”

- Heads need to be proactive in seeking support and advice, whether this is via coaching, peer networks, family or friends.
- Heads need to develop and be able to access a helpful and positive frame of mind which works for them when the pressure increases.

“You have to care and not care at the same time.”

“You need to be good at finding the joy – seeing life as a great adventure.”

“You mustn’t take things too personally or to heart. For this job, you need irrepressible reserves of optimism.”

- Governors may underplay the importance of their own role in providing reassurance and support and can help create psychological safety for Heads to be more open. Governance is not just about holding Heads to account.
- Many Heads benefit from routines which help promote holistic health and wellbeing, protecting their time, compartmentalising, and improving work/life balance.

“If I was negotiating my package again, I would ask for a coach and a gym package!”

- With the exception of coaching, which we discuss later, there is very little in the way of training or development to help current or aspiring Heads in this important area. We will also discuss this further under our section on professional development.

“Very little is ever done to support Heads with the pressures of the job. How do you as a human being cope with all this? We get training on how to deal with a crisis, but what does it mean when you go home.” ■

THE IMPLICATIONS

We explored this topic in more detail with one particular Head, who highlighted several of these themes:

BUILDING PERSONAL RESILIENCE AND WELLBEING THROUGH SUPPORT, ROUTINES AND RULES

The Head of a leading day and boarding school shares some thoughts and recommendations.

Support

My predecessor was in the role for 17 years and my Chair of Governors reassured me recently that they want me here for a long stint as well. We are all human, and I think most Heads, like me, have a bit of insecurity. Such a vote of confidence from the Chair of Governors is reassuring and empowers me to work effectively with the Governing Board, have an open dialogue, and talk about the best way to solve problems – and we have some challenges right now facing our school and the sector.

I joked recently that it would be remarkable that if during any headship there was a pandemic, a war in Europe, record inflation alongside a cost of living crisis, and a hostile political party keen to remove charitable status and tax us out of existence – and that's just the five year chapter that we're living through right now. If I am going to last another 15 years or so in such a demanding job, then I have to work in a sustainable way. I often talk to my senior team about finding a 'sustainable rhythm': I don't want them to reach the end of a week or term and be totally broken, even if the days sometimes seem long and challenging. I should add that I have young children, and given that I want them to benefit from independent education, I'm keen to stay in my role for the long haul.

The external threats we are all facing are real and for the most part out of our control, so we need to stay calm and control what we can. This was true during the pandemic and is true now as we face a recession and changes to TPS and VAT.



Having the right deputies in the right roles is so important, and a priority from the start of this headship was to build an effective senior team. My governors were supportive of several new appointments. Now that I've got such a strong team, I look after them. On a weekly basis I bring around croissants from the local bakery first thing in the morning, checking everyone is okay. Nearly every Friday we have a drink at 5pm in the Head's office for anyone who's available - it's an informal get together with no agenda, but a valuable time to debrief. They know that they can contact me anytime – in person or on WhatsApp if I'm out of school. Looking after them also means that I can delegate effectively and try to ensure that workload for all of us is manageable.

I've built a great relationship with my Chair of Governors and she often serves as a coach in challenging situations. Once she departs in a couple of years, then I might look into having an external coach. I also have a couple of mentors – one experienced current Head and one recently retired Head. We go for dinner every few months at the school's expense and they are a valuable sounding board.

In general, I am an outgoing, gregarious, optimistic person and I think this helps – I have many other Heads that I consider good friends and comrades in this profession. I have regular informal meetings with other Heads and often WhatsApp or text with questions or support. HMC is a great network and it's lovely to have peers with whom I can be open and honest.



Routines and rules

I learnt the importance of a healthy routine as a Deputy Head. In my first term on SLT 14 years ago, I was working all hours, running around trying to do everything to prove myself. My Head sat me down and told me I wasn't the person he appointed, and I needed to reset. He told me to start exercising again, to sleep, to take nights off during the week... he warned me that I could be a Head by 35 and then die of a heart attack at 55, and that sounded pretty depressing. In the end I became a Head at 37 and hope to live well past 55 with a sustainable rhythm.

“If I am going to last in such a demanding job, then I have to work in a sustainable way”

I now stick to the following routines:

- I try to do most of my work at my desk in school – occasionally I have to log on in the evening at home after I see my children to bed, but I try to make this an exception, rather than the norm.
- I never work past 10:00pm. I have a hard stop of 10pm and this means I'm always asleep by 11pm at the latest. This in turn means I can get at least 7 hours sleep every night before I get up at 6am every morning.
- I run around 5k every morning at roughly 6:30am. I often find that it's on my run where I do my best thinking and I arrive at school ready for the day ahead. My deputies laugh that when I say 'I need to sleep on it', what I really mean is that 'I need to run on it'. There is so much research about the benefits of exercise, spending time outdoors and appreciating nature. My daily run makes such a difference to my mental health wellbeing – it grounds me each morning.
- I say no to things – my PA and I have agreed that I will only be out two nights per week Monday to Thursday. I want to do bedtime with my children a couple nights a week. This means I can't do every concert or event, but I've become comfortable with this. My governors reassured me that they like that the Head is a family man, and this has made me feel less guilty about missing events on occasion.
- I put chunks in my diary – “meeting with KF” – KF is Keep Free! This means that I actually have slots to get work done during the day, rather than being in meetings constantly and then having to do emails all evening, every evening.

I'm far from the perfect Head, and every time I meet a new Head at HMC I am impressed in some way or another. But I do want to be a Head for a long time, beyond the next decade, so I've worked hard to set boundaries and establish routines that make it all seem manageable and sustainable. I've worked out that sleep and exercise are fundamental – if I compromise on these then I'm not the best version of myself, as Head or as a father and husband. I hope some of these reflections are helpful for others. ■

THE IMPLICATIONS

DEVELOPING THE SENIOR LEADERSHIP TEAM (SLT)

As the Head's role evolves, so does the role of SLT. Many Heads described how they have changed the structure of their senior team and adapted the way they work together.

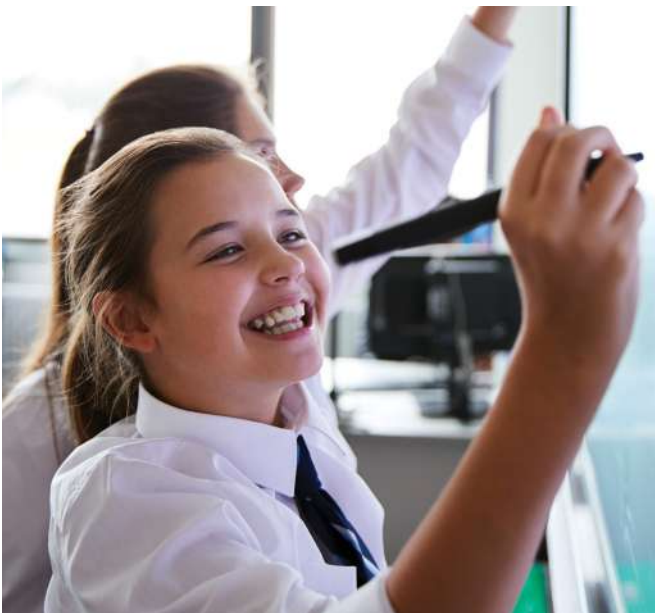
Changing SLT structures

Whilst we didn't undertake detailed research into changing school structures, we did hear a lot of examples of how Heads have reorganised their middle and senior teams. The key aims are to improve focus and capacity on many aspects highlighted in this report, facilitate delegation and develop colleagues.

Some key themes and examples include:

- More Deputy Head and Assistant Head positions with greater specificity of responsibilities. As well as the traditional pastoral and academic roles, these include co-curricular, staff / staff welfare, SEND, digital strategy, marketing, admissions, external relations, innovation etc.
- Senior Leadership Team v Senior Management Team. There are different terminologies, but we heard some examples where large schools have introduced a smaller, strategic senior team alongside a larger, more operational team.

“In an all-through school, we created a small executive team to oversee the strategic direction of both schools and ensure that the central functions are working effectively. The effect has been a much more joined-up approach and has created a stronger feeling of community.”



- Significant strengthening of support functions, with additional positions, e.g. HR, Marketing, Development Directors. Higher paid specialists and professionalised functions.
- Significantly revamped pastoral structures. As well as Deputy Heads and Assistant Heads with pastoral responsibilities, this could include counsellors / psychologists and redefined tutor and House roles. Support staff nowadays, as part of their safeguarding training, are all trained in what to look for and encouraged to feel responsible, in order to ensure more eyes on the children outside of classrooms.
- We encountered mixed views and only a few examples of CEO positions being created, except in school groups. However, we know from our other work that there is some movement towards this type of role. There are more independent schools in the UK today with Heads of school sections (such as Prep and Senior) reporting into an overall Head, who occasionally bears the joint title of “Head and CEO” or “Principal and CEO”. We believe this trend will increase, particularly in larger schools.

“I am not convinced the school is ready for the Principal model but it needs to transition towards a fresher understanding of what only the Head can do so that he or she can focus on that.”



Many Heads described how they have changed the structure of their senior team and adapted the way they work together.

“As Principal, I am now effectively the CEO and all operational educational leadership is exercised by the Heads of School. This was not an easy thing for the school community to initially understand or accept but the impact after several years is that we have superb educational leadership and highly effective business and strategic leadership from people who have time to focus on both the detail and strategy of those areas. We are also better governed because governors are able to require more of the senior team”

- More collaboration between schools and more mergers, for example, between prep and senior schools which, in turn, may result in SLT members having broader roles across schools.
- Splitting of the Bursar's role into finance and operations – e.g. CFO, COO.

“With the retirement of the Bursar, we changed to have a Director of Finance and a Director of Operations and then introduced an executive committee which works across Prep and Senior which is the two Heads, Director of Finance and Director of Operations”

- New senior roles which focus on international development e.g. International Development Director.

THE IMPLICATIONS

We discussed SLT development with the Head of a large 4-18 co-educational day school.

What was your main reason for making changes at SLT Level?

We wanted to build more capacity. We found, like a lot of schools, that things did not return to normal after Covid. We seemed to be constantly dealing with the effects of additional anxiety and pastoral challenges for pupils, their families and our staff. Add to that the - important and well overdue - work that had resulted from #BlackLivesMatter and #EveryonesInvited, and we were experiencing unsustainable workloads, meaning we could not support our community as well as we wanted to. With additional senior level resource, we can manage this better, as well as supporting all of these constituents.

These changes have signalled to us all that strategic progress remains important, even through difficult periods, but more important still is the wellbeing of those in our community. It also signals that we are willing to invest in additional capacity for the sake of that wellbeing.

What structural changes did you make?

We added some additional roles. I established a Senior Deputy Head without portfolio. The Senior Deputy Head deputises for the Head and has capacity to help our other senior leaders as needed. I split the Academic Deputy Head into two roles - a new post of Director of Learning and Teaching, and a role which kept the title of Deputy Head (Academic) but had a much more strategic oversight function. I also separated the pastoral leadership into two roles - a Deputy Head (Safeguarding) focused on both operational and strategic oversight of all matters safeguarding (she is also our Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL)), and a Deputy Head (Pupil Development) role, focused on strategy and rollout of our work on character development, physical and mental health and wider wellbeing. This strategic work was previously being side-lined by the increase in volume of reactive safeguarding work. We have also strengthened support services with a Director of Development and a Director of Marketing and Communications who are now part of our core leadership team.

Another important change is that we have located each of the teams together - e.g. the academic senior team sit together, as do the pastoral team. This helps ensure things don't slip through the cracks.



What about meetings and decision-making structures?

We used to have one large SLT meeting for two hours every week. We changed this to a smaller Core LT (CLT) and a larger SLT, each meeting every fortnight, for one hour maximum. We brought in a much more disciplined approach to preparation, papers, actions and being clear on each agenda item's purpose - either "decision required", "for consultation", or "for information". There is no AoB unless pre-notified to the (rotating) Chair. The Senior Deputy Head runs the fortnightly SLT, typically without the Head attending, as well as three early morning Core LT mini-meetings each week; in the past, I attended all SLT and Core LT mini meetings.

How are the agendas different between the smaller Core LT and larger SLT?

The Core LT (CLT) focuses more on exploratory development when you need to discuss things in more detail. We try not to have the same discussion twice, so the outcome from CLT would then be presented to the SLT, with the heavy lifting having already been done. An example would be our mobile phone policy - everyone has an opinion on this, and it could, therefore, take up a large amount of SLT time. Instead, we aired views at CLT, put a clear presentation together on the various viewpoints, considerations and initial conclusions for SLT, and then had a focussed and short discussion, before sharing our policy more widely for consultation.

At SLT we aim for more focused discussions, for example, with a paper presenting background research, other schools' practice and say, three specific questions for discussion. We never have "exploratory" items in isolation on our agenda. Any item must have a clear context, a purpose (discussion, consultation, decision), and a paper with any pre-thinking and research presented, which all are expected to have read and thought about before the meeting. If this has not happened in time for the pre-meeting deadline, it is removed from the agenda. It felt draconian at first, but has got us into much better habits, and made our meetings much more productive - they are no longer ineffectual talking shops!

In a large school you need to try to shift the parental mentality from “the Head needs to know my child”, to “the Head needs to make sure my child is known”.

How has this supported the evolution of your role as Head?

I am much more focused these days externally, for example, fundraising and developing our bursary programme, establishing local partnerships or working with our Heads' association. This term, I have often been working outside the school one or two days per week. I am able to delegate confidently to my Senior Deputy Head and wider team, knowing there is the capacity and ability to take this on.

As well increasing capacity, how have you helped your senior colleagues to take on more?

I have developed a much less directive, more coaching and supporting style of leading. This has taken some time to embed, with some of my senior leaders needing more support than others, but I want each of them to own their particular area, and I use more of a coaching style to encourage initiative.

I have also been strongly influenced by the Hersey-Blanchard model of situational leadership – adapting my approach to the individual and task, depending on colleagues' experience, confidence and willingness. In other words, directing, supporting, coaching and delegating differently depending on where individuals are on their leadership development path.

I also believe (I read it somewhere once) that good people development involves watching others do a worse job than you and being ok with it. This involves relinquishing some control and being more willing to see people make mistakes for the right reasons. But there is no better way of developing talent – and the corollary benefit is a longer-term reduction in workload for the leader!

As you delegate more, how do you manage parents' expectations who may still want you involved?

In a large school you need to try to shift the parental mentality from “the Head needs to know my child”, to “the Head needs to make sure my child is known”.

I encourage parents who contact me directly to deal with colleagues who are better placed to answer their specific concerns, and who are more available. In a typical situation, for example, when a parent asks to speak to the Head, my PA will respond, letting them know that I am aware of their request, but due to my diary commitments, it might be some days before they can see me; in the meantime, a senior colleague is available, and I have asked them to be in contact about the matter. We make it clear that I am taking an interest and am available for a follow-up meeting further down the line if appropriate. In practice, however, this follow-up meeting is hardly ever needed, as my senior team are very capable. They listen and acknowledge issues first before finding collaborative solutions. It's important that as Head, I don't undermine the Deputy's ability to solve things at the right level.

THE IMPLICATIONS

Developing SLT members

Once you have the right leadership structure in place how can the team work together to encourage delegation and support the Head in their evolving role?

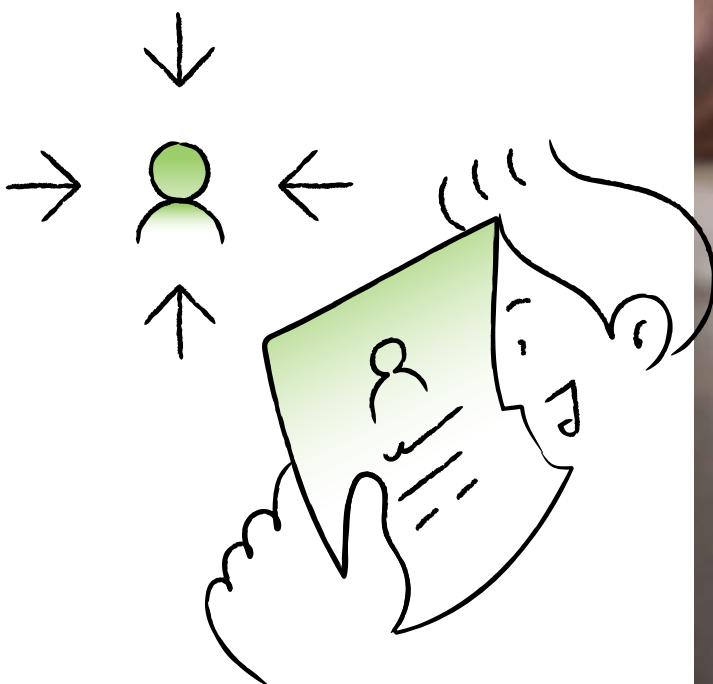
A key element is, of course, having the right people in place with the skill and will to take on more.

“My advice is put great time, energy and effort into appointing the right senior people around you as this allows a Head the chance to lead properly.”

In addition, many Heads, like the case study on the previous page, discussed how they have adapted their style to more of a coaching approach to encourage people to take more initiative and ownership.

“When leading, the task based stuff is easy if tedious, what’s more challenging is helping others develop skills. I’ve coached and mentored five senior colleagues and the difference is unbelievable – they feel like different people. Leaders build capacity in others.”

The Independent Association of Prep Schools (IAPS) in particular, has invested in the development of its member Heads as explained by Charlie Warshawski who runs a coaching organisation.



DEVELOPING THE SLT THROUGH COACHING

Charlie Warshawski describes how his organisation, Love Your Coaching, has trained Heads in coaching to support the development of their senior teams.

Love Your Coaching is a partner of RSAcademics, supporting our mission to help schools benefit from the best leadership possible.

Since 2015 our organisation, Love Your Coaching, has trained has trained well over 100 Heads in both the independent and state sectors to earn an advanced coaching qualification (ILM Level 7 certificate in coaching for executives). The majority have been funded by their school, but occasionally Heads have self-funded.



One notable example of this is IAPS, who for the last three years have funded the training of 24 serving heads a year to earn this coaching qualification. Mark Brotherton, IAPS Director of Education Services explains: "We train our Heads to be coaches for two reasons. Firstly, to build a community of Heads who can coach fellow Heads and school leaders, and secondly, and perhaps more importantly, so that the Heads are able to develop a coaching approach in their own schools."

The coaching skills that the Heads learn

During the intensive coach training programme, the Heads learn a range of strong coaching skills. They often already have an element of these skills in place, having had many one-to-one conversations during their careers. The focus of the training is to take these skills to an advanced level. They learn how to ask focused and insightful questions, to listen very carefully in order to understand rather than to reply. They create an expansive space for the coachee to talk and reflect, and in their structured conversations, probably their biggest win is to learn how to avoid giving advice, so as to help colleagues find their own solutions.

The benefits of this approach

It is joyful to see Heads engaging in an advanced coaching approach, which fits so well with a modern approach to leadership. Heads we have trained often report that their own leadership style is transformed. Typical comments we hear include:

- I have stopped giving everyone solutions and started asking more questions.
- I have been able to help my colleagues think things through and come up with their own answers.
- Having a "listen first" approach is incredibly useful, and my colleagues really appreciate it.

Heads choose to coach a range of people within their own schools. Most commonly, the coaching is provided to SLT. Advice and problem-solving sessions transform into coaching sessions. What used to be a "Head talking" session has been transformed into a "Head listening" session.

"When I started my training, I didn't really believe that a questioning-only approach would have a very good impact. Now that I am qualified and am coaching regularly, I can really see how beneficial it is for everyone."

Patrick Wenham, formerly Head of Bickley Park School

The impact on how SLT members operate is also significant. The overarching reflection is these leaders stop coming to the Head with just a problem to fix but come prepared to engage in dialogue. Rather than expecting to be provided a solution, they expect to talk things through, and to come up with their own answers. The Head is always there with an answer at the end of the conversation in case they are stuck, but in most cases, this is not required.

"This is the second coaching qualification I have taken, and as I continue to improve as a coach, the impact it is having is becoming clearer. Those meetings that used to be so focussed on my ideas are no longer like that. I help people talk things through, to reach their own answers. What is so striking is that my leadership team, when I coach them, are always so pleased to have worked it out for themselves." **Rebecca Smith, Head, KES Stroud.**

Not all Heads are able to find the time to invest in their professional development in this way, but these initiatives by IAPS and other organisations show that there is an appetite for Heads learning to become coaches. We celebrate and encourage this and are confident that this can help change the leadership landscape in education.



THE IMPLICATIONS

Complementary skills mix

One important way to think about leadership development is less about fixing deficits and more about playing to one's strengths and getting complementary support in other areas. This is especially the case for experienced, senior leaders. They need to be good enough at everything, but they should focus on where they add most value and make sure they get advice and support in other areas.

This approach elevates the importance of the correct mix of skills at the top of the school – within the governing board and, in particular, across the SLT.

As one Chair of Governors described it:

“All areas are getting more difficult and it’s now very unlikely that one individual could be strong in all of these. So maybe we have to think more about leadership teams, how we build them – including the role of governors.”



Leadership development is less about fixing deficits and more about playing to one's strengths and getting complementary support



This approach underlines the importance of several other headship skills mentioned within this report, such as:

- Self-awareness to understand gaps and areas of support needed.
- Having the confidence to ask for advice and not feeling you need to know everything.
- Being good at getting the best out of others, recognising and making the most of their expertise.
- Skilful delegation .
- “Situational leadership” – i.e. adapting your approach to the individual and situation, different people need different things to step up and perform their best. ■

TIME MANAGEMENT (AND WHY IT IS SO DIFFICULT)

Of all the skills that Heads identified as changing, time management was seen as their least competent area. In our anonymous survey, fewer than 10% reported that they were very good at managing and protecting their time, and nearly 25% admitted to being poor in this area.

There is, however, an obviously strong link between resilience and wellbeing, and time management and delegation. As one Head explained:

“What differentiates a Head doing the job from a Head loving the job is that they have managed their time so that they have time to think and rest.”



Why is this so challenging? Some possible explanations that we heard include:

- Heads need to manage expectations. Children, staff, and perhaps particularly parents may be used to the Head being involved with everything. As one Head succinctly put it – “the customer wants more of you than you can give”.

“People want direct access to the Head, even in large schools with distributed leadership.”

“The days of a Head knowing every pupil and being a genial host to all school events are over.”

“A transformative change was when I gave up going to all school events and fixtures and created a rota amongst my senior management team to share this work.”

“What differentiates a Head doing the job from a Head loving the job is that they have managed their time.”

- Although the concept of a “Hero Head” – someone who can be all things to all people – may not be an ideal to which the Heads themselves subscribe, the rest of the school community, including some governors, still expect this.

“Some parties, perhaps especially governing bodies, expect the Hero Head – someone who stamps around the school, and everyone feels their presence.”

“The view remains that the Head should be the Head ‘master’ or Head ‘mistress’ or ‘lead teacher’ or the expert ‘Head of the family’ who is engaged deeply as the operational decision maker; the go-to person for staff, parents, pupils who should know each person.”

“Intellectually everyone gets how the job of Head has changed but do people across the school community really want this?”

THE IMPLICATIONS

- You may, by default, just work harder as you are influenced by events. It is more challenging to take a strategic approach to prioritising, involving the consideration of trade-offs and planning accordingly.

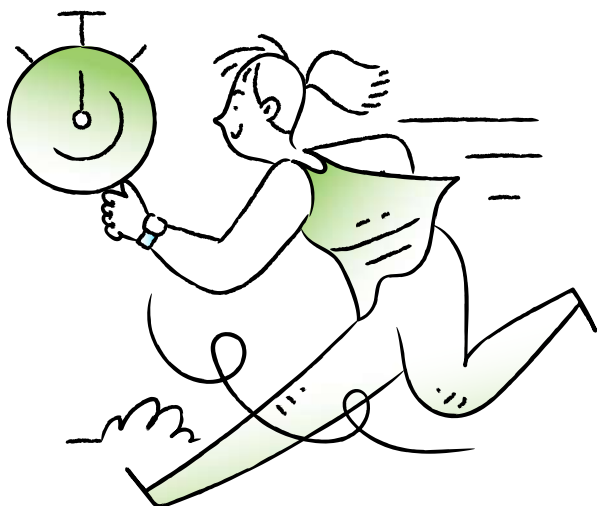
“I can see that I need to spend more time focused on strategic matters. I need to spend more time supporting my senior team and ensuring they are delivering, and more on ambassadorial roles. Yet my staff and parents still want the omnipresent Head.”

- Being involved in the day-to-day might be the comfort zone where a Head feels competent and happy and the role that other people want the Head to play. This can be a hard habit to break.

“In a small prep school, the status quo can be to go to the Head for EVERYTHING. My personal favourite was when I was the person informed about a child's verruca!”

- Are some schools yet to understand the value of a good PA – and unwilling to pay them accordingly?

“Schools need to understand the importance of a good PA and the salary needed. This is someone who can change the way in which your life runs.”



- Are we still recovering from the greater centralisation and directive nature of decision-making during Covid?
- In several aspects of headship, such as dealing with parents, compliance or student mental health for example, we have described higher risks, quicker escalation, and greater anxiety among sections of the community. It is easy to see how this makes delegation harder as these matters become more important more quickly.

“It's really hard to lose the operational chains and get above it all. Perhaps because things now escalate so much quicker, and the level of complexity and level of anxiety in the outside world requires more senior intervention.”

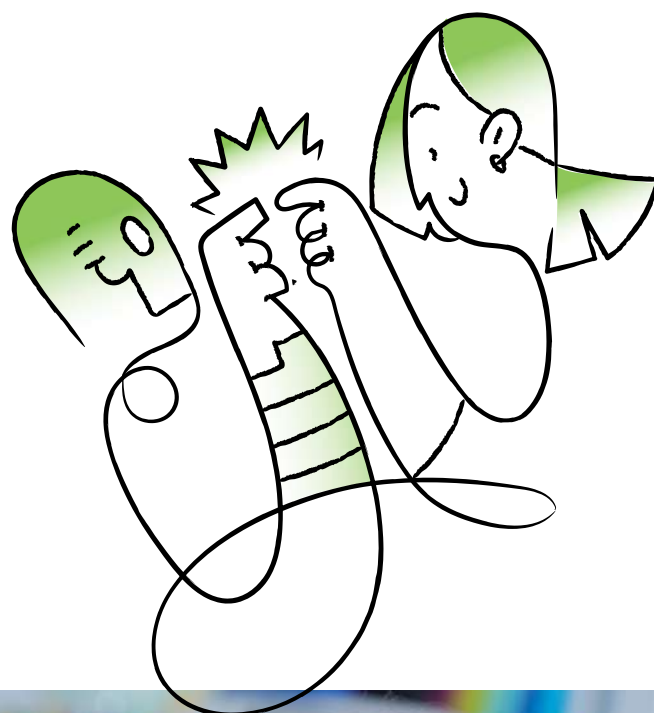
In summary, time management and delegation are easy to talk about but much harder to do. Key enablers include a stronger, more empowered senior team, more reasonable expectations of the accessibility and involvement of the Head, and a thoughtful and disciplined approach to managing time. ■

GREATER UNDERSTANDING OF CHANGING TECHNOLOGY, INCLUDING AI

We suspect that if we were writing this report a few months in the future, technology, and in particular AI, would be higher up Heads' agendas and would come out more strongly in our survey. Anticipating this, we asked three Heads, who have already started investigating AI to contribute their perspectives to our report (see Appendix 1).

Whilst our contributors each emphasised different themes, and this is, of course, a fast-changing area, we would suggest the following key points in terms of the implications for Heads' skills and knowledge:

- AI is not going away, so whilst Heads don't need to be experts, or feel rushed, they need to become interested and aware.
- A collective approach is needed with collaboration and sector influence to ensure that AI is not something "done to you" but delivers improved student outcomes and school efficiencies. Heads therefore have the opportunity to be part of that sector-wide collaboration and to shape the debate.
- The opportunities greatly outweigh the risks, in the view of the people we spoke with. AI has the opportunity to change education hugely.
- Heads should develop a vision for how they would like to see AI impact education and should know how it could serve the interests of students and staff in their own school. ■



THE IMPLICATIONS

GREATER APPRECIATION OF LEGAL AND REGULATORY FRAMEWORKS

The need for greater appreciation of legal and regulatory frameworks was seen as more important by nearly 95% of Heads surveyed and it was picked as the second most significant change. It is seen as a key contributor to the additional complexity of the Head's role and the cause of some of the additional challenge in dealing with staff and parents. ■



We spoke with Naseem Nabi, Partner at VWV law firm, about the changing role of Heads and the increasing appreciation of legal and regulatory matters that is required nowadays.

How have you seen the role of Heads change over recent years in relation to legal and regulatory compliance?

In the past, legal and regulatory issues have predominantly been dealt with by Bursars, whereas now, Heads need to be far more informed. A lot of this relates to better understanding of what could become contentious – for example, in dealings with parents, pupils or staff – and the much higher incidence of formal complaints and litigation.

How much more is there for Heads to understand these days?

Over the years we have run a training course for new Heads on legal, regulatory and compliance matters. That course has become far more extensive as we see the statutory framework governing schools increase. I would estimate the increase to be in the region of 25-30% compared with say, 10 years ago.

What are some examples which illustrate these legal changes?

Legal compliance underpins a school's operation and always has; what has changed is the scope and specificity. Areas which have been discussed as good practice in the past are more likely to now be specifically covered by statutory regulations.

For example:

- **Safeguarding** is well established in schools; since KCSIE become statutory guidance, it has developed significantly – for example, more expansive recruitment and on-line checks, reporting requirements and referrals to statutory bodies and on-line safety.
- The changing interpretation of **protected characteristics** and the growing extent to which they are relied upon by parents, pupils and staff. Most recently, for example, aspects relating to neurodiversity and transgender.

- Heads and senior teams have had to understand the changing skills and compliance training required for **governing bodies**.

There are also changes relating to the employment relationship. Independent schools are, for example, increasingly being pressed to recognise Trade Unions and have needed to understand the law around this as well as industrial action. This was a rare consideration for Heads of independent schools 10 years ago.

What about future changes that Heads will need to get up to speed on?

There are several areas we are watching closely, such as:

- Awaiting legislation on transgender rights to understand how this affects schools.
- Regulation and guidance relating to AI and changing technology.
- Implications of a potential change in government, impact on charitable status and VAT.
- The government consultation on creating a statutory duty to report child sexual abuse - a mandatory reporting duty.
- The government has published draft legislation relating to the Protect Duty which will impose duties to improve protective security against terrorist attacks and register with a regulator.

Some of what you have talked about is included within inspection, but are there any other particular changes?

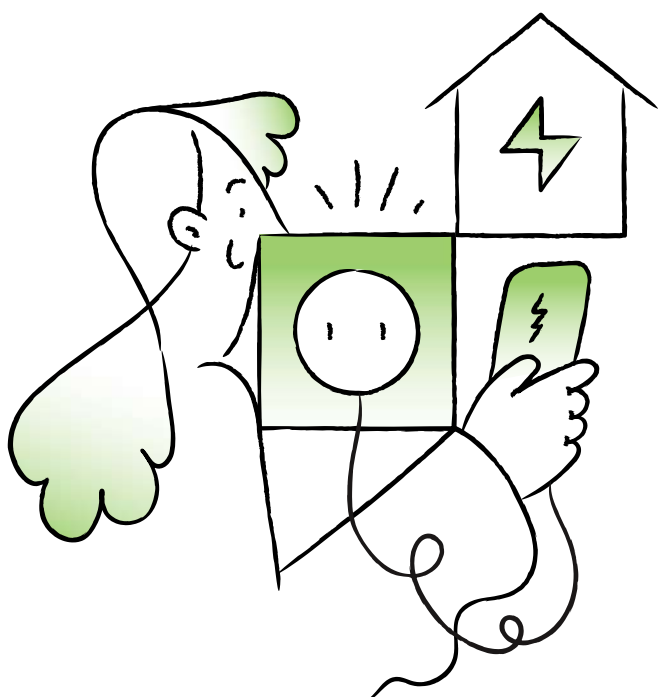
- The ISI's new inspection framework will come into force in September. From that point schools will receive one type of routine inspection every three years. No overall judgement will be received and inspection reports will be more nuanced.
- The government indicated its intention to consult on changes to the National Minimum Standards for boarding in 2024.

GREATER EXTERNAL-FACING SKILLS

In recent years, Heads have been devoting more time to external matters, often resulting in them spending more time away from the school. Some Heads we spoke with discussed the need to increase their visibility at school as a result.

“There are tricks to being seen! I go to assembly every morning – even if I have to leave school for the rest of the day. I am always seen at break – it’s very tempting to arrange to see people over break but I avoid this to ensure that I am seen. I always go to the dining hall for lunch, never have it in my office.”

In addition, during the research we discussed the greater emphasis on the requirement for external-facing skills. Some of these focused on developing skills in handling contentious matters, especially in the age of social media, whereas others were more strategic, for example, in relation to establishing partnerships or fundraising.



PR and social media

The change most often mentioned when discussing social media was greater public scrutiny, with contentious matters or complaints often being accelerated or amplified. When we asked Heads about the single most challenging issue they have faced, several mentioned handling a public relations situation, including examples of entirely false allegations.

THE IMPLICATIONS

We asked Kate Keating, a senior consultant at RSAcademics who specialises in communications, about the changing PR environment and implications for the skills needed by Heads and their teams nowadays.

How has the PR environment changed?

All organisations, including schools, are communicating in a more challenging environment. There are perhaps two main considerations:

- Shifting audience expectations. The pandemic and cost of living crisis have created a climate of dissatisfaction and, at the same time, a sense of 'entitlement' to better service and responsiveness.
- The propensity of social media to escalate and amplify issues. Pupil/parent comms can quickly make their way into the public sphere, but it is important to remember that social media can exaggerate issues and is something of an echo chamber. Schools therefore need to maintain balance and perspective over how they communicate.



Are there some approaches which are more likely to be successful when dealing with contentious public issues?

There are some general guiding principles which seem to make a difference when Heads chart these tricky waters:

- Leaders are expected to be more human and less corporate or lawyerly in how they communicate – for example in response to a complaint that has become public. This is even more important in a school context where people are generally less tolerant of something that comes across as cold. Of course, Heads will want to appear in control, but being empathetic and personable can be more important than being polished. It can be hard to recover if the initial tone is wrong.
- The school community, especially parents and students, expect Heads to be in listening mode more these days. Schools may have got used to setting the rules and being in control of how and when they communicate, whereas now there is an expectation of more engagement. This includes being proactive and opening channels for inclusive two-way communication.
- With everything accelerated by social media, it's important not to wait too long before responding. Sometimes schools wait because they don't yet have an answer, but it's important to go to where the conversation is happening online, be open and respond at the very least with a holding statement. The general aim is to always take the matter away from social media, offline – e.g. a face to face conversation.





Do you have any other advice for schools which find themselves in challenging PR situations?

They should consider short term specialist advice and support. A typical Marketing and Communications Department or Head is unlikely to have crisis communications experience or established relationships with journalists. Because of this they may be overly influenced by lawyers and the legal aspects, whereas the focus also needs to be on presentation and how to navigate the situation in terms of shaping people's reactions, emotions and impressions.



THE IMPLICATIONS

Proactively influencing parents

Dealing with changing parental expectations and contentious matters was identified as the single most time-consuming element in how the role of Head has changed. The key issue seems to be dealing with the small number of complaints which take up a disproportionate amount of time and which have become much more of an issue for Heads in recent years.

We were very interested to explore examples of good practice which might proactively reduce and manage escalation of issues when things go wrong.



The Head of a Girls' Boarding School shares some steps they have taken to proactively build positive parent relations.

Pre-empting difficult moments

We used to have dozens of complaints, including sometimes quite extreme reactions, every year from parents whose daughters were not among the 18% made prefects. We now write to parents before the annual application process to put things into perspective and try to influence how they can support their daughter if disappointed by the outcome. It has made a huge difference to what had become a somewhat dreaded annual event.

Whilst you can't eliminate contentious parent matters, we have taken steps to try to build a stronger foundation with parents and reduce potential escalation of conflict when issues arise.

Parents' Association

We have developed closer relations with the Parents' Association, enhancing their role beyond the usual organising of events and raising concerns. This includes sharing confidential plans and using them as a sounding board to gauge reactions to proposed changes. Whilst there is some risk, it has worked well with the group welcoming more responsibility and maintaining confidentiality. We have parent committees on food, uniform, co-curricular and academic, and are now adding parent representatives to working parties looking at a range of changes in the school.

Parent talks

During lockdown we started holding online talks for parents and have continued these, both in person and live-streamed. They are led by our house staff who use their expertise to explore difficult issues and help parents avoid pitfalls when things go wrong.

Subjects include mental health and wellbeing, eating disorders, online safety, living together in the boarding environment, navigating the teenage years.

The style is a relaxed, open discussion with a key theme around how we can work together when issues arise – as they will in any teenager's life. We talk about the dangers of catastrophising or taking things at face value, and what we can learn from experience of dealing with numerous difficult situations.

The reaction from parents has been universally positive. They often appreciate that they're not an outlier and gain confidence, for example, around setting rules and boundaries for their daughters. Staff also build additional expertise and feel better equipped to handle difficult situations.

In addition, before every Parents' Evening we include an update on a particular pastoral topic led by a senior leader. The Parents' Association also organise external speakers on topics of interest.

Governing Board

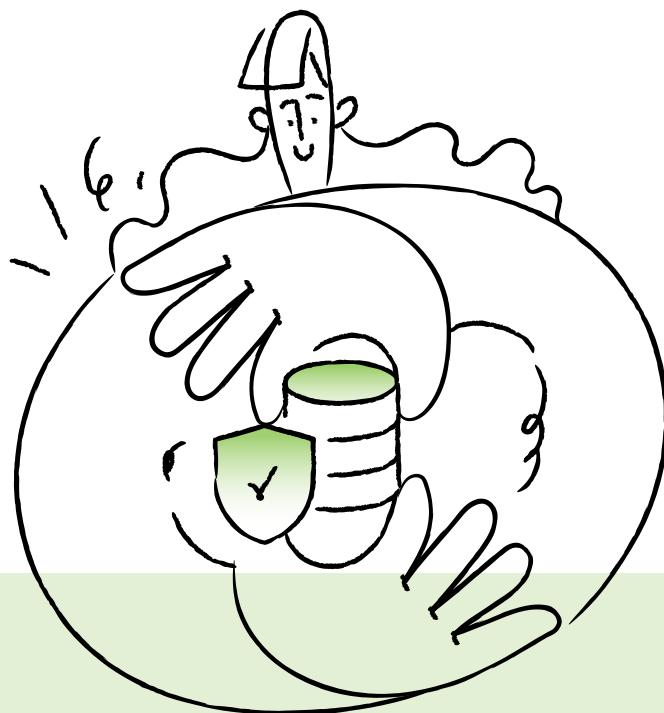
Whilst we have had very few escalated cases, we have worked very well together with our Governing Board in handling these. The governors have promptly formed a panel to hear appeals and have been very measured and objective in listening to both sides. They are willing to be robust with parents when they disagree, and we feel we can admit mistakes by the school if justified. We always try to seek some element of compromise.

Ultimately, I know that our governors would support parting company with parents if the time, money and impact on other members of the school community outweighs any chance of repairing the situation.

Fundraising

Fundraising is seen by some Heads as a new skill area and something for which their career to date may not have prepared them. However, the key element to learn would seem to be an understanding of good development practice. Heads would then be able to utilise other, more familiar skills such as relationship building and communication.

“I very much doubt any vocational teacher went into the profession thinking they would need to front major fundraising campaigns.”



We spoke to Rachael Petrie, Head of Philanthropy and Fundraising Consultancy at RSAcademics, on the changing role of Heads in leading fundraising and the skills required.

Is fundraising part of every Head's role?

Fundraising is becoming increasingly important as an additional income stream given the financial challenges facing schools. Some schools, including preps, have been doing this successfully for many years, but others have been wary of getting involved – perhaps due to resourcing or concerns about sensitivities such as asking for money alongside fee rises and amid financial downturns.

Over half of independent schools, for example, are not members of IDPE (Institute of Development Professionals in Education) – which is an approximate guide to who is involved in fundraising.

What are the key challenges for Heads not yet involved in fundraising?

There are probably three issues:

- 01** Some Heads don't really understand fundraising. When schools, for example, are appointing new Development Directors, they often don't know which questions to ask at interview to understand candidates' skills. There is, therefore, a need to support and educate some Heads about what good development looks like.
- 02** It's not a quick fix! It's a long-term investment and process with a potentially significant payback over time, if the correct resources and methodologies are employed.
- 03** There are also increasing regulatory requirements which Heads and, in particular, governors as Trustees, need to be aware of (reference Charity Commission Report - CC20).

What are the skills and knowledge required of Heads?

The main thing is understanding how successful fundraising works. It's not an intuitive process or something you would have normally picked up through experience or training on your path to headship. At the same time, when undertaken correctly it's not difficult or uncomfortable, so the emphasis should initially be on understanding how good fundraising works. For a Head, areas of focus might include:

- Research into the parent and alumni communities to understand their views.
- Putting together a compelling story for how fundraising will be used to support the school's long-term aims.
- Policy development - if you are raising funds for bursaries, for example, you need to have a policy explaining all the steps for pupils, from identifying, inducting, supporting to graduating from the programme.
- A focus on individual conversations with potential major donors.
- Making sure compliance is in place.



Whilst the Development Director will plan, organise and advise, the Head's role is critical in selling the vision and personally interacting with donors.

What about actually asking for money – isn't that a skill?

It's more about relationship building, which a good Development Director will choreograph for the Head. As mentioned, it's a long-term process which includes getting to know potential donors, getting them engaged with the school, explaining the vision and, in particular, understanding donors' views and areas of interest so that slowly, over time, you can see where they might be interested in helping. The school, for example, may be focusing on increasing access through bursaries, but a major donor may be more interested in the library or sports.

If this is done well, it should feel like a natural progression to put together a proposal for a donation. It will feel like it has been co-designed between the school and the donor.

What is your advice for Heads?

The key point for Heads, if not already up to speed, is to educate themselves on good practice in fundraising and how a Development Director should support you. They can do this by attending conferences, talking to other Development Directors and successful fundraising Heads or they can contact RSAAcademics, of course!

“Leading local partnerships, you need the same skills as leading your own school community as an ambassador, with political savvy.”



Partnerships

The 2020 ISC census found that 85% of independent schools have mutually beneficial partnerships with state schools, with ISC's [schoolstogether.org](https://www.schoolstogether.org) website giving extensive information on these partnerships.

The Heads we spoke with described how getting partnerships off the ground requires vision and persistence, and especially where these are a new initiative in the locality, they require strong ambassadorial skills and political savvy to enlist support. Our case study on **page 41** provides details on the process of setting up a partnership and the skills required.

“We have to move from “crumbs from the table” to fully integrated partnerships.”

“Partnerships take a long time – it’s a marathon not a sprint.”

“Leading local partnerships, you need the same skills as leading your own school community as an ambassador, with political savvy.”

“What skills do you need? Good networking and the ability to get proper buy-in from other heads, clarity of vision and the ability to articulate and explain what you are trying to do, long-term planning, problem-solving and dogged determination.” ■

THE IMPLICATIONS

HANDLING GREATER COMPLEXITY

Headship has always been seen as complex, in particular given the wide range of relationships you need to manage and how different these constituencies are. However, there would seem to be a general consensus that it has become more complex in recent years. Some examples of the greater complexity include:

- Increasing breadth of responsibility with, for example, additional external focus.
- Higher stakes decision making, with a greater cost of getting it wrong.
- Additional legal pitfalls, including examples of contradictory regulations such as privacy (GDPR), versus employment (discrimination), versus safeguarding.
- Highly complex individual pupil cases involving SEND, discipline and mental health concerns.

These are just examples, and almost every section of this report could be used to illustrate this additional complexity.

So, what sort of leaders are more likely to succeed in an increasingly complex role? What are some likely skills, personality traits and qualities that might help? Here are some suggestions:

- Good at getting support and advice – you can't know everything, so you need to build support networks and be good at asking questions and using new information.
- Good at getting the best out of the team, including recognising that team members may know more than the Head about their subject. In other words, working well with experts.
- Able to handle ambiguity and accept less control.
- Able to influence rather than trying to control change. This could mean less emphasis on perfect planning and more emphasis on adjusting and adapting by being tuned-in and connected with the organisation. ■





How to support and develop Heads today

As the environment and skills needed for success evolve, what support do Heads need to help them adapt and succeed?

Here we look at a number of ways in which this can be achieved.





COACHING

One significant change over the last 10 years is the increasing use of coaches for senior leaders in education, especially Heads.

What is coaching?

Mentor or coach?

Whilst these terms are used interchangeably in many circles, at RSAcademics we usually see them as follows:

Mentor

Someone who knows a lot about schools and headship. A mentor often supports a Head who is new in role and may provide advice and make suggestions as well as the usual coaching relationship.

Coach

May not know about schools, but may be an experienced leader, and has expertise in coaching, for example asking questions to help Heads reflect and solve problems, using a balance of challenge and support.



Some leaders are coached by former Heads, including people they may have reported to earlier in their career. These people, therefore, know a lot about schools and have often trained as coaches since retirement. Sometimes referred to as a “mentor” they know a lot about the job of a Head and are likely to also give advice.

Many of our discussions, however, referenced qualified coaches from a non-schools background. These executive coaches may coach leaders in different sectors and bring a broad perspective on leadership.

THE IMPLICATIONS

Coaching for Heads is now widespread

We were quite surprised that nearly everyone we spoke to during the more detailed early part of our research had benefitted from a coach. For several, coaching had been quite a revelation – perhaps being something they had either resisted or not been offered earlier in their headship.

“After 14 years I finally asked for a coach after not handling an issue very well. I wish I had asked earlier – it’s really, really helpful. There can be a bit of a macho angle where you don’t want to ask for help.”

“Every Head should have a coach. I didn’t have one in the first year of my job and I can’t tell you how much difference it has made. It should be part of every job offer.”

We heard universal praise for the benefits of coaching with no dissenters. Coaching is becoming increasingly popular and is much less likely to be seen as a remedial intervention, but rather something that successful leaders make use of.

Whilst coaching, and especially mentoring, may be most often talked about with new headships, it is clearly valued at all stages and levels of experience.

“I honestly can’t now imagine doing this job without a coach and I think every single Head should have one!”

“The coaching that I have benefitted from at various points in my role as a leader has been transformative for me and has helped me develop as a leader.”

“I have now had three different coaches over a decade, each one brilliant and completely helpful. I would never have admitted to that 20 years ago, and now I openly say I seek advice and help from outside the organisation.”



Coaching is becoming increasingly popular as something that successful leaders make use of.

How coaching works

Coaching is a process - a balance of challenge and support aimed at helping leaders help themselves. Whilst it is flexible and can operate in a way that suits the “coachee” and their coach, a typical approach would include:

- A diagnostic phase to agree some key areas of focus. If there is a “sponsor”, such as the Chair of Governors, these objectives might be discussed and agreed at the start between the three parties.
- A planned duration, such as two or three terms, during which the coach and Head will meet face-to-face or online two or three times per term. These discussions are confidential to the Head and coach.
- A check-in at the end, including with the sponsor if applicable, to review progress.

Whilst Heads make good use of informal peer or mentor relationships, here we are talking specifically about a paid-for service.

Coaching – One Head's story

I have been a Head for over 15 years in two different schools. I first came to coaching after about eight years into my first headship of a medium sized prep school which was part of an all through school.

Although I felt successful and was receiving good feedback and appraisal reports, there were a few niggles in my head. I had great aspirations for the school, but also was worrying that I wasn't as fresh as I had been when first appointed.

A fellow Head recommended a coach. We had an initial chat just to see if this would be right for me, and then I booked in for a full coaching package, meeting every month or so for an hour, mostly online but sometimes face to face.

I remember the first couple of sessions being quite challenging. It was quite straightforward to pin down my overall goal from coaching, as it related to the development I was looking at for the school. But as I started to talk through some of the themes, it became obvious that I needed to work on myself as well. This did come as a bit of a surprise to me. Of course, I knew that I was not the finished article, but I thought that I didn't need significant professional development.

The major theme to get out of the way was this sense of feeling a bit out of touch because I had been at the same school for eight years. Funnily enough, I was able to put that to bed quite quickly and started to see my length of service as a strength rather than as a barrier.

"As I started to talk through some of the themes, it became obvious that I needed to work on myself."

After this, each session progressed with an increasing sense of momentum. There was always a new topic to talk about. Sometimes it was more about strategic planning and long-term aspirations I had for the school, other meetings we focused on a thorny relationship or problem that I had to tackle, and sometimes it was just a good environment to help me talk out what was on my mind.

In each session the time went pretty quickly. I found that the types of questions I was being asked allowed me to really think quite deeply about each issue. I found that by the end of each session, ideas that I didn't have at the beginning started popping up, and often these ideas and thoughts continued later into that day or when I was at home.

We finished the coaching at the end of the year, as I had been encouraged to see that coaching worked well as a time-bound exercise. I liked that, as I wouldn't have wanted to have been locked into a coaching arrangement for ever and ever!

Having said that, I did choose to reengage my coach about six years later when I moved to another school and found year two as the Head to be quite challenging. That second round of coaching was equally valuable, and I was able to use it differently than the first round because I felt like a more confident and focused leader.

There is no doubt in my mind that coaching is an excellent support for me as a Head, and I tell many of my peers to consider it for themselves. It is often hard for us to know who the right person is to talk to. Knowing that my coach is knowledgeable about schools but not part of our organisation was incredibly useful.



Coaching is a rare opportunity to be open and show vulnerability.

Coaching topics and benefits

As mentioned in our section about resilience and wellbeing, Heads typically must provide the necessary reassurance and positive leadership that others require. They therefore have to appear confident and positive. Coaching is a rare opportunity to be completely open and show more vulnerability than would be appropriate at school.

“This job is all-consuming, but you need to be able to offload. You may be very aware of your weaknesses but you can’t show them to the school community, but you can to a coach. My coaches have all been from the corporate world. Sometimes explaining things to someone who doesn’t understand schools helps you see the flaws in your argument.”

“Most new Heads have imposter syndrome. If they are faced with an SLT or staff who don’t want change, it’s very difficult. They need support from coaching on how to deal with these issues.”

“Coaching encourages you to make decisions and gives you the courage to stop prevaricating.”

“You can and should show some vulnerability at school – for example with your SLT, but you also need to inspire confidence. With a coach, independent from the school, you can be completely honest and show vulnerability and not have all the answers. My coach is from outside schools, from a different sector. We have holistic discussions which consider impact on home life as well.” ■



Julie Keyes, founder of The Educational Coach, summarises some common themes for coaching conversations with Heads:

- **Trust** – especially within the organisation, discussing elements such as credibility, reliability, intimacy and how these impact trust and their leadership.
- Managing **staff** – particularly around the difference between Gen Z and later career teachers.
- High-stakes **decision-making**.
- **Building teams**, working with and building new or inexperienced teams. Complementary skills to fill gaps.
- Developing a sense of their own **leadership style** versus the leadership style that might be needed right now – particularly with new Heads or when dealing with complex situations.
- **Delegation** – a huge theme, and time management as part of this.
- Helping Heads consider the **different domains** within which they operate – for example, executors, strategic thinkers, relationship builders, influencers – constant conversation around where they need to be at any time.
- The conflict between needing to be **adaptable** in what might be unpredictable situations, but at the same time wanting to be the leader who demonstrates structure and vision.

IMPLICATIONS FOR GOVERNORS

One benefit of this report should be to help Governors reflect on the changing nature of headship and how they might adjust their approach accordingly. We discussed this topic at a recent Governors' conference. The views of those present can be summarised as follows:

- Governors need to embrace the fact that so much is changing in the world and work to understand the implications this has for schools. They need to appreciate the extensive ways in which the educational environment of today is different from even a few years ago.
- Governors should undergo training to understand the demands of headship.
- Governors should give more space and time to relationship building with the Head and SLT.
- Governing Boards need a wider range of skills now and Boards should update their skills audit.
- Heads need a better induction and transition to the role and to the school when they take up post and the Chair of Governors should make sure this happens.
- Ongoing coaching for Heads is very important and should be encouraged by governors.
- Heads need more support in dealing with millennial parents.
- The range of skills a Head needs nowadays adds up to more than what one human can offer. This is unrealistic and governors need to prioritise the key skills they seek when looking to appoint a new Head and support efforts to find complementary skills to support current incumbents.

“Good governance is close to my heart. Better understanding by governors of the nature of headship should be an important outcome of this report.”

“Looking at the spate of HMC heads who have left this year, often the issue is governance. For example, one Head had a torrid time with Everyone's Invited. The Governing Board saw their role as interrogating the Head – it was his fault – rather than joint responsibility.”

This overlaps with some of the themes emerging from our conversations with Heads:

- In their quest to hold Heads to account, Governing Boards may underplay their important **role in providing reassurance and bolstering the confidence** of increasingly pressurised Heads. Heads may be unlikely to ask for help, so governors, especially the Chair of Governors, may need to take the initiative to create an environment in which Heads can be open about the challenges they are facing.
- The importance of a **joint problem-solving** approach, where Head and governors strategise together. While the division between governance and management is still important, governors may need to provide more support and advice and share responsibility. This may especially be the case when dealing with public relations matters, where governors feel under pressure.
- Considering the financial pressures schools are facing and the need for fundamental strategic reviews, governors need to **adapt to a different pace and complexity of decision-making**.
- There is a need to **invest in the development and support of Heads**, for example, through coaching and training. This might include the development of the SLT to enable greater delegation to the right team.

“Governors need to protect and preserve their Heads very carefully. They have had years of messaging about 'holding the executive to account'. They need to make sure that they are keeping hold of their Heads, full stop! That means looking after them - which my Board does brilliantly, I must add!”

“You cannot be a good Head without good governors.”

“In a fast-changing world, with schools needing to be adaptable businesses, governance has a greater involvement with management with more input into more rapid strategic decision making.” ■

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF HEADS

Clearly, there is a need for Heads to be trained in ways and on matters which are relevant to their changing roles. Here we look at how CPD for Heads might need to change in the light of our research findings.

Three domains of leadership – a changing agenda for CPD

One helpful way to describe leadership skills and development areas is under three categories:

- 01 Leading self** – including personal abilities and qualities related to emotional intelligence and personal effectiveness.
- 02 Leading and influencing others** – including leading people and teams, interacting and influencing inside and outside the organisation.
- 03 Leading the organisation** – including the knowledge and skills needed to plan and organise what needs to be done.

A greater focus on personal, interpersonal and emotion-related aspects of leadership

Applying these categories to the skills that emerged in our research, we could illustrate this as follows:

Leading self

- Developing greater **self-awareness**
- Managing your own **wellbeing**
- Building greater **resilience**
- Being better at getting and using **advice and support**
- Better organisation and **time management**.

Leading and influencing others

- **Developing the SLT**
- Increasing **delegation**
- Working under pressure with **governors**
- Managing more and faster **change**
- Increased **conflict** management
- Handling greater **breadth** and **complexity**
- Greater need for **fundraising**
- Managing **PR** in an age of social media and changed attitudes
- Developing fully-fledged **partnerships**.

Leading the organisation

- More fundamental **strategic planning**
- More of a '**business** brain'
- Greater **financial** acumen
- Greater understanding **economic, political** and **social** change
- Greater appreciation of **legal** and **regulatory** changes
- Developing understanding of new technologies such as **AI**.

These three domains of leadership are used in leadership development, for example, when designing training programmes. Whilst there is some overlap, they are often seen as building on each other – for example, leading self being a foundation for other aspects.

The knowledge and skills identified in domain three are, of course, important. However, many people we spoke to wanted to emphasise the “leading others” and in particular “leading self” areas, seeing these as the foundation for success and commenting that their own training and development has lacked this focus.

This prioritisation on more personal leadership areas is also supported by the insights from coaches and coachees detailed above.

The key implication for the development of Heads is a greater focus on more personal, interpersonal and emotion-related aspects of leadership. Our main reasoning is:

- There is more support, advice and information available on leading the organisation, including current training offers for Heads that can be easily adapted to reflect changes in the environment.
- These technical elements are potentially easier to learn because they are more concrete and factual. They fit more with an “educational model” where you learn content and knowledge through training or self-study.
- The more personal development areas of leading self and leading others are a foundation for other aspects of the job. Many Heads, however, see these as lacking in leadership development in the educational world, especially when compared with development of leaders in industry.
- There may be an assumption that you must be good at domains one and two already to have obtained a headship position.
- It is easier to talk about domain three meaning the other domains are less discussed and provided for. Improving financial knowledge or understanding of employment law, is easier to discuss than say, resilience and wellbeing.



“I see a lot of younger Heads who are swamped by the demands of the task, I mentor a couple of them and they are just not prepared for all that the role demands.”

“Very little is ever done to help Heads deal with the pressures of the job. How do you as a human being cope with all this?”

“I did an MBA in School Leadership: I learnt a lot of stuff - strategy, marketing, change management, but there was very little on being a leader. That remains a gap in preparation for the future.”

“We need to change our paradigm of training so we begin to focus far more on self-leadership and management of people skills rather than content. Most of the training we get is stuck in the education paradigm – go and learn stuff and get a certificate. HMC or NPQH is a lot about learning strategy, management of change, marketing, finance etc. – but most of our job is leading ourselves and leading others.”

“We need a greater focus on managing and understanding yourself. We all have triggers and a dark side to our personality – but understanding this is really important.”

Training would be more interactive and facilitative, helping people reach their own insights.

Changing leadership development methods

A greater emphasis on domains one and two would suggest a different approach to the usual content-led, expert-input, training approach to development. It would, for example, be very different to some association conferences we have attended in UK and abroad where the main structure was guest speakers giving presentations, with a few minutes for Q&A at the end.

Training in general is likely to play less of a role and where it does, would be much more interactive, exploratory and flexible, with trainers being more facilitative, helping people reach their own insights.

Development methods are likely to include more emphasis on:

- Learning through reflection – describing, exploring and making sense of experience.
- Coaching and mentoring.
- Peer support – e.g. groups of Heads or other leaders discussing issues of common interest with minimum structure.
- “Open space” – where participants set their own agenda on the day (see box).
- Collection and analysis of feedback – e.g. qualitative 360-degree feedback.
- Use of psychometric tests – e.g. personality tests and other preference inventories to help Heads reflect, often discussed with a specialist.
- Observed simulations with detailed feedback.
- Advanced interpersonal skills, for example working in small groups using trained actors.
- Advanced presentation skills, for example working individually with a coach to connect emotionally with your material and audience. ■

OPEN SPACE – a valuable approach to professional development

What is open space?

One origin of open space is the feedback from conferences that the most useful time was during the coffee breaks when you could talk to people about the topics you really wanted to discuss. An open space meeting tries to achieve this for the whole event.

What happens at an open space meeting?

The participants arrive with minimal or no agenda set, except perhaps that the meeting is about their development, and spend the first 30 minutes or so discussing what is on their mind and areas which they are interested in exploring.

This results in a few key topics emerging, written up on flip charts, owned by one participant who sells the topic to the group – e.g. “in the breakout room next door I’d like to discuss how we can proactively reduce the number of contentious parent matters we deal with.”

How do discussions take place?

There are different approaches, but typically there is minimal structure. People choose to join the breakout discussion, but don’t have to stay if they change their mind. In particular, it is often agreed there will be no plenary report back so that people can really focus on the discussion and not have to think about making notes or presenting.

After a set period of time, the groups would get back together and run the process again, picking new topics or perhaps continuing with the same one.

What sort of topics work best?

What often happens is that initial topics are business-like / group problem solving, but after a while, people often want to discuss more personal matters – for example about how to handle a difficult relationship or cope with pressure etc.

The short answer is, however, “whatever the participants feel is most relevant”. This is the whole aim of the open space approach.



Assessing and appointing the Heads of tomorrow





Governors often find it hard to nail down exactly what they are looking for, when it comes to the skills, qualities, values and experience that the next Head of their school should bring. And, from our many years' experience of supporting Head appointment processes, it can be hard to convince boards to use new and creative methods for assessing these strengths. Here we look at how the criteria for appointment and the assessment methods might usefully change in the future.

EVOLVING CRITERIA

Clearly, one aim of this report is to describe how the criteria for successful headship are evolving. Whilst we are not attempting to provide a blueprint, we can suggest that most schools will want to consider putting greater emphasis on business-related skills, on those abilities associated with handling pressure and working with others.

The graph below shows what our sample of 104 Heads thought were the skill requirements for headship that have changed the most.

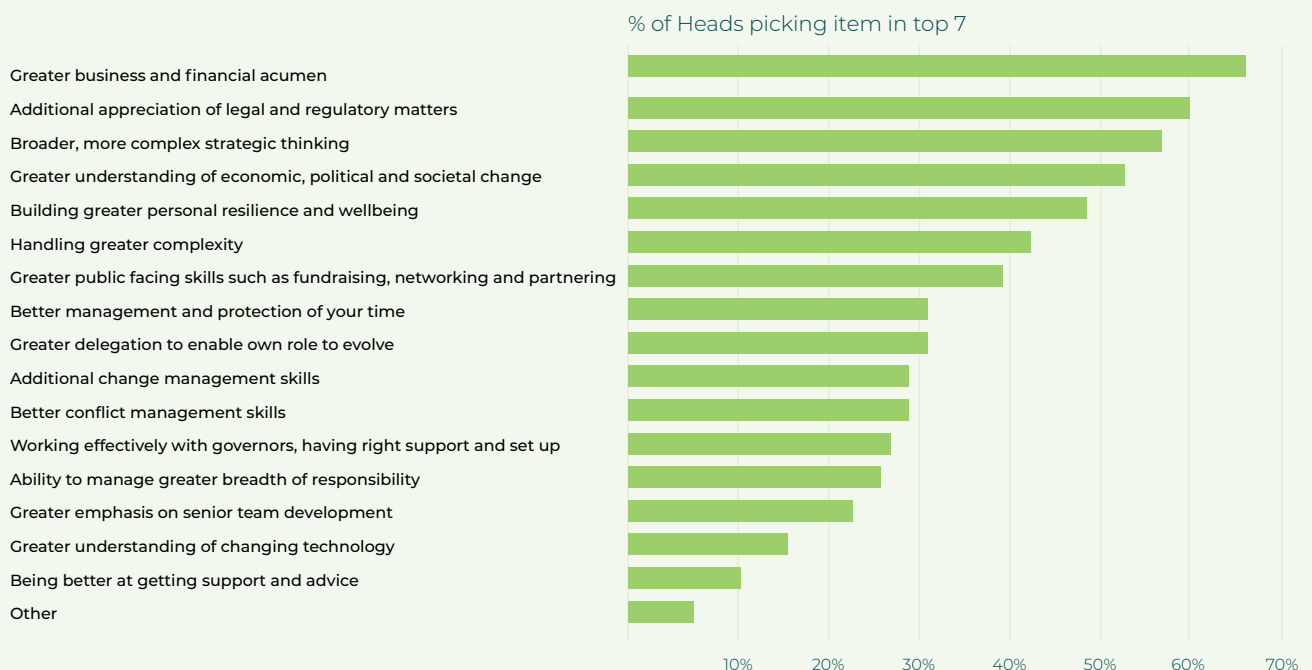
"I'd be looking for someone who could run a successful, dynamic and ambitious business, as well as a school!"

"Demeanour is so important - being agile, resilient and responsive in a challenging environment is essential."

"I would give candidates some school business scenarios and ask them to suggest possible strategies: this might lead to supplementary questions on how they would lead different stakeholder groups through any change."

"Comparing the job description when I was recruited 10 years ago to that of my successor, a key element is even more focus on running a business." ■

What skill requirements have changed the most?



THE IMPLICATIONS

THE PROBLEM WITH INTERVIEWS

The problem with interviews, and indeed many other selection techniques, is that they are good at assessing interview skills but less effective at assessing other job skills.

Or to put it another way, when one looks at the criteria school Governors apply when appointing a Head, some aspects are much easier to assess than others, with the risk that panels over-weight what is easier to assess or infer other qualities which might be unrelated.

Looking at some of the themes identified in our research, we could illustrate this as follows:



HARDER TO ASSESS AT INTERVIEW

- Resilience and wellbeing
- Getting and using advice & support
- Working under pressure with governors
- Leading change
- Conflict management
- Handling breadth and complexity
- Organisation & time management
- Delegation and developing SLT

EASIER TO ASSESS AT INTERVIEW

- Fundamental strategic planning
- Business and financial acumen
- Understanding economic, political and social change
- Appreciation of legal/regulations
- Understanding technologies/AI
- Fundraising
- PR
- Developing partnerships



REVIEWING SELECTION METHODS

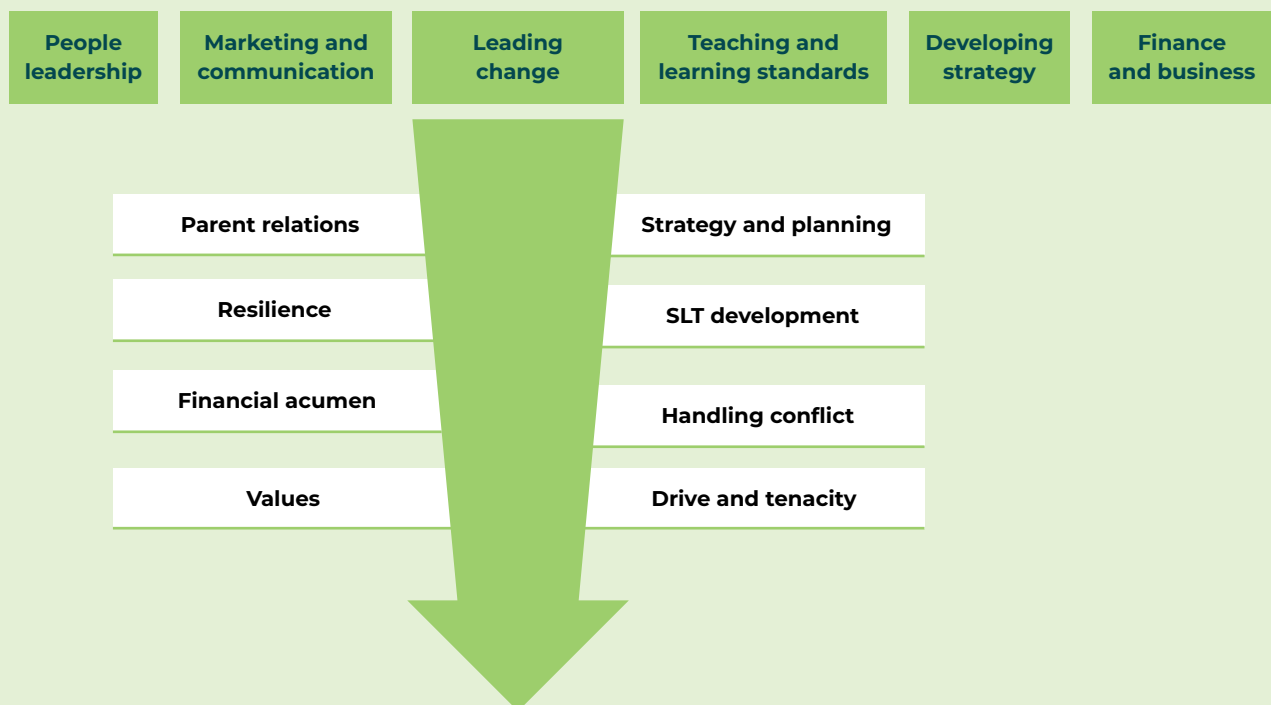
Our advice, especially when considering these harder-to-assess areas, includes the following:

01 When interviewing, **look for depth rather than breadth**

Instead of asking a series of short questions, for example, about people, finance, marketing etc., ask candidates to talk through how they managed a significant project, for example, managing a change, and use follow-up questions to get into depth.

A detailed explanation by a candidate may reveal skills and experience across many areas of the person specification. ■

EXPLORE ONE WORK EXAMPLE IN DEPTH

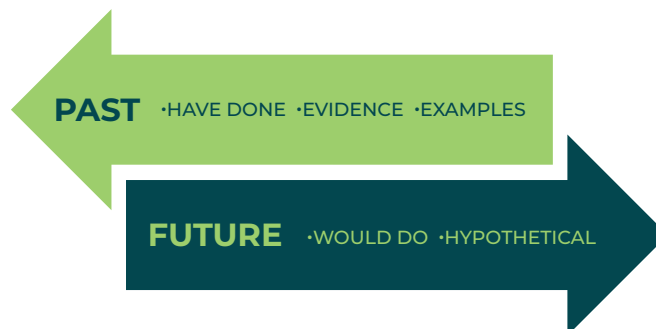


THE IMPLICATIONS

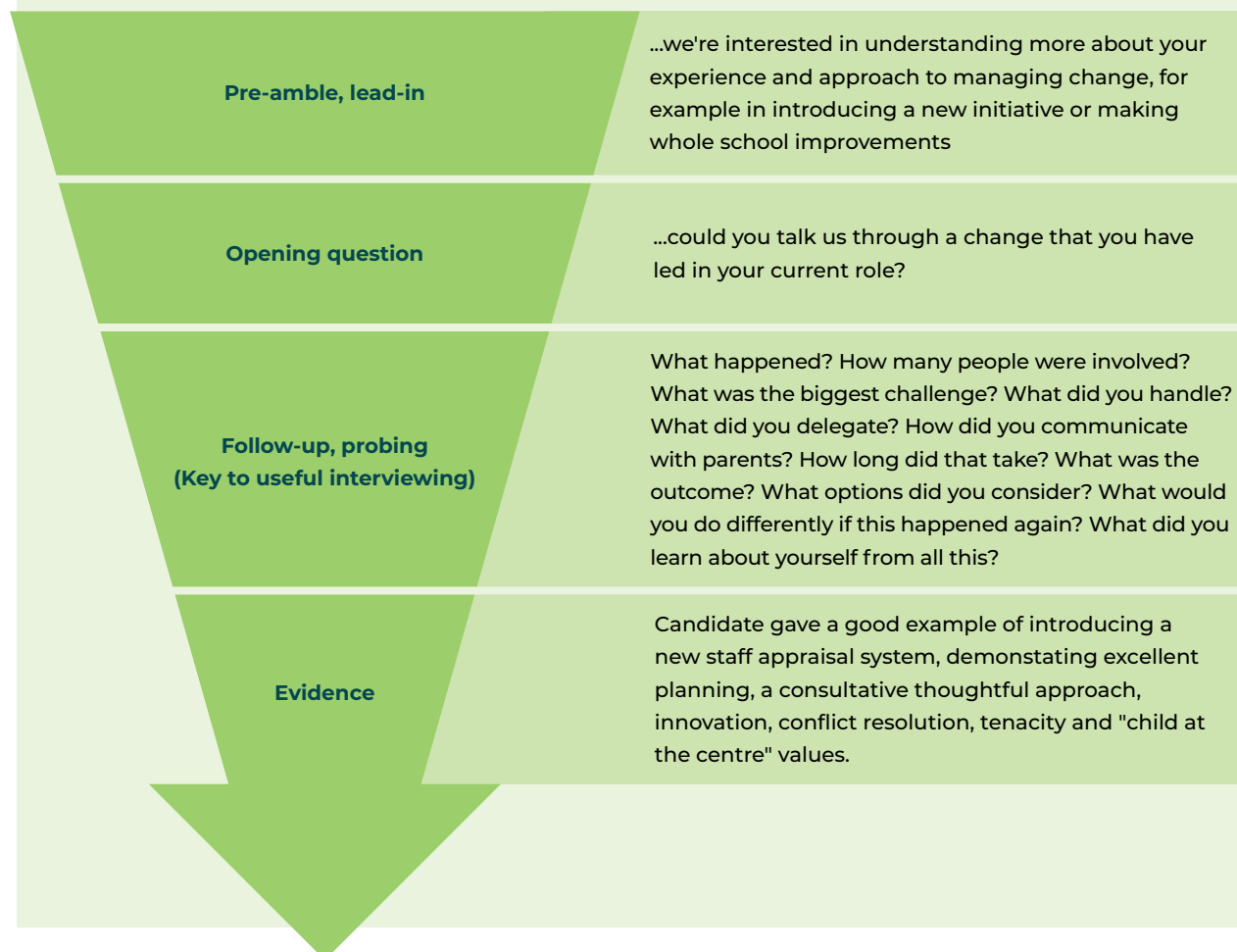
02 Focus on **past more than future** or hypothetical performance

Whilst questions about what the candidate would do if appointed are often easier for a panel to relate to, they are less likely to unearth the harder-to-assess aspects. Questions about what the candidate has done are more likely to generate better evidence, especially with lots of follow-up questions. For example, ask about how they have developed and delegated to their SLT, how have they dealt with contentious staff matters, rather than asking how they “would” do these things.

So that the interview does not become a test to see which candidate can give the best example without prior notice, we also recommend telling all candidates, in advance, the sorts of broad areas that the interviewers may wish to probe and for which they should therefore be prepared, with examples. ■



Gathering evidence from past examples



03 To assess skills such as business and financial acumen, ask candidates to lead **discussions on real issues** at the recruiting school

This is the type of strategic or problem-solving discussion one would have at a governor sub-committee. It is not a case study, but a real, current issue the recruiting school's senior staff and governors are looking at. The Board does not need to prepare a detailed briefing since the candidate is expected to ask questions to understand the background. ■

Discuss a real current issue at your school

TWO WAY - NOT Q&A

NOT A CASE STUDY

ANSWER IS UNKNOWN



Example of discussion on real issue to assess business and financial acumen

One aspect we are looking at is how we can significantly raise our school revenue. (Explain background briefly – share key information)

We don't yet have a plan, and if you were appointed this would be a topic you would want to discuss with the team and Governing Board.

Could we spend a few minutes having that discussion now – not looking for answers but exploring the subject together. You can ask us questions and we can discuss different approaches.

THE IMPLICATIONS

04 Use personality tests

Personality tests are a way into a more personal and detailed discussion than is normally possible at a selection interview and can, therefore, be especially insightful about candidates' more personal attributes and ways of working.

Particular areas of focus can include, for example:

- Resilience - for example, dealing with emotionally charged people situations, coping with ambiguity, handling disagreement, managing pressure.
- Delegation and development of team, involvement and valuing of others.
- Ambassadorial and public facing skills, comfort in the spotlight and representing the school externally to new people.

The candidate completes a questionnaire which produces a computer-generated report – comparing their answers with typical leaders. This is therefore the candidate's self-report and it feels easy and comfortable to explore this with the candidate. Having the report legitimises and provides a shared language for exploring what might well otherwise remain hidden aspects of the candidate's working style.

At RSAcademics, our qualified expert interviews the candidates about their report and then discusses this with the Chair, also sharing notes and providing guidelines for the governing body to follow up with the candidates themselves. ■





Appendices





Perspectives on AI – Q&A with three Heads and a robot



AI AND SCHOOL LEADERSHIP INTERVIEW ONE

We discussed the emerging possibilities of AI with **Dr Andy Kemp, Principal at The National Mathematics and Science College, Coventry.**

As of June 2023, how would you describe UK independent school Heads' attitude to AI?

I think some leaders have their heads in the sand, perhaps hoping to avoid the issue and thinking it will go away. Then there are a number who are interested but as yet know little about it. And perhaps the smallest group are well informed and starting to plan where it might take us.

What is your advice to Heads?

As with most other things, if change isn't led from the top, it's unlikely to succeed. You don't need to be an expert and you shouldn't feel rushed, but you should be engaged, listening and asking questions. It's not something we can opt into if we are interested, and the Heads associations have a role to play in creating opportunities for leaders to learn, discuss and understand more.

More generally, if we as a sector don't get involved and plan, then it will be done to us. Smart boards, for example, were designed by technologists to fulfil a need they, rather than schools, saw. The predictable result: they were never as useful as promised. If we are not careful, AI could easily go the same way.

A school's track record with technology, therefore, plays its part. There is still a degree of cynicism in the sector – you even get schools that sell themselves on the basis that they don't use tech! A significant minority of schools may take this approach with AI – it's just not the world they want to be part of.

What do you think school leaders are most interested to learn more about?

The impact of AI on assessment. AI gives the ability, if we are brave enough, to completely reinvent the way we do assessment in schools.

The traditional exam was designed as a uniform, scalable model to meet the needs of hundreds of thousands of students. To a large extent though, we have ended up assessing people's ability to do exams and educating them towards this.

How could AI improve assessment?

One analogy with AI is the introduction of the calculator in the 1970s when we had concerns that it would trivialise parts of the Maths curriculum, but our response was to ask better questions. AI is a bit like a massive calculator for the Humanities. If you are setting a student an essay to write, which can be better answered by ChatGPT, then you need to ask yourself whether you really want an essay, or are you just thinking that an essay is the easiest way to assess learning.

If you agree that the best form of assessment, and indeed the reason we still include a viva for PhDs, is a conversation with a student to test their knowledge and understanding, then we should explore how AI can facilitate this at scale.

AI gives an opportunity to start to build a more interactive, responsive and tailored approach to assessment and learning. If a student can't answer a question, you introduce clues. Ironically, the technology has the potential to allow for a more human and personal approach. In our current A Level Maths papers, for example, sometimes if you can't answer the first part of the question you are stuck and can't attempt the rest – that's 10 marks lost. With an AI assessment, if stuck, you would get some prompts and then be able to move on to tackle parts b & c.

What do you see as the main barriers to changing towards a more tailored or interactive approach to assessment?

Exam boards make a lot of money from the current set-up and are likely to prefer the status quo.

In the UK we suffer from a highly politicised education system which means a short-term focus. This sort of change needs a 10-year horizon.

I suspect organisations such as the IBO who are more removed from politics will have advantages here, and indeed are already permitting students to use ChatGPT, for example. I suspect international schools and international examinations may end up leading the way where they have more agility.

Where are the greatest opportunities in improving teaching and learning?

Building on changes to assessment, we have opportunities to rethink the whole way we teach and learn, with a greater focus on conversing rather than writing.

I have often thought, perhaps because I am a scientist, if I have developed a good essay plan, what is the real added value of asking me to write the essay – is it just assessing writing skills rather than understanding and knowledge?

There are already examples around the world of teachers using AI to change Teaching and Learning, for example:

- Asking students to critique essays produced by ChatGPT
- Using AI to mark English Literature essays and give student feedback. Research has shown this to be as good, if not better than a panel of experts.

This aspect of giving feedback could be particularly transformative. If, for example, students write an essay or do a test in class on Monday, instead of waiting for it to be marked and handed back on Thursday, it's immediately assessed by AI with the student getting detailed feedback, and the teacher getting an instant collated picture of overall strengths and weaknesses and areas to focus on at the next lesson.

Taking this further, it's easy to see how you can shorten the feedback loop and learn more quickly with a student submitting a piece of work, getting feedback, revising and resubmitting, getting feedback etc. It will take time for people to learn to trust the technology, but teachers will be able to think much more about teaching and less about marking.

What about ethical issues such as bias or inequality?

I think one of the most exciting aspects of AI in education could be reducing bias and increasing equality.

Teachers may have subconscious biases linked to their knowledge of students and mark accordingly, whereas AI could eliminate this (if trained properly).

There are also students who struggle to do themselves justice in an exam situation but are in fact very able. Changing assessment to be more interactive and conversational will make it more relevant to real life and avoid the pressure of the exam room.

Whilst the independent sector may have more resources, AI could be a levelling up tool, providing access for a wider group of people to provisions which are currently only for the wealthy. We know, for example, that expensive individual tutoring can make a big difference to student outcomes. What if this was available for free – as is already being piloted by Quizlet? What about mock interviews for Oxbridge? Maybe these will be available to all through AI.

With the democratisation of education, the independent sector may lose some educational advantages, and it may be more on the co-curricular side that they continue to distinguish themselves.

There are, of course, concerns around GDPR, so most of the applications will need to be closed systems where you retain control over the data. If an application is free it's often because you are the product and your information may be sold or used for commercial purposes.

What about barriers to using AI in Teaching and Learning?

There is definite fear of the unknown, and indeed most teachers are quite conservative. There is also a feeling of losing control – if something else does the marking for me, will I miss something?

Is there a risk around de-skilling? If teachers stop marking essays, for example, will they lose the skill to do this, and does this matter?

What school activities might be early adopters of AI?

A prime area for teachers could be around saving time on tasks outside the core of their role in the classroom.

I don't select teachers for their report writing ability. If they can generate the main bullet points then AI could draft a report – a bit like a PA drafting a letter which you review and finalise. Reports could be more detailed, more accurate and higher quality, whilst also being less of a burden for teachers.

On balance, do you think we should be optimistic or concerned about the impact of AI?

There are definitely reasons to be concerned about the impact of AI, particularly in the short term where it provides easy routes for students to cheat. But cheating isn't new, and we shouldn't allow the potential of these short-term concerns to cloud the potential for a true revolution in education. AI has the potential to fix what I see as two of the great challenges of education by creating a more personal and individual assessment system, and closing the feedback cycle so that all students can have near-instant feedback on all their work, whilst simultaneously removing the current burden of marking from teachers.

I'm excited for the future of our schools, working with AI, but that future will only exist if we engage now, own the narrative, and set the direction, as the future is coming whether we like it or not! ■

AI AND SCHOOL LEADERSHIP INTERVIEW TWO

In June 2023 we discussed the emerging possibilities of AI with **Helen Pike, Master of Magdalen College School, Oxford.**

What's your advice for other Heads starting to investigate AI?

If you had told me a few years ago that I would be contributing to a piece on new technology I would never have believed you! I knew comparatively little about AI, but rather than leaving it on the “too difficult pile”, I was able to use my contacts to get advice and support. So, my main suggestion for other Heads is activate your networks such as parents, colleagues and peers to seek advice.

I can also assure Heads, having just visited schools in Palo Alto, that we are not lagging behind – nearly everyone is at the start of thinking what this will mean for education. Perhaps what has actually happened is that AI has advanced more quickly than anyone expected.

What are the main opportunities you see?

My main aim is workload reduction so that teachers can concentrate on the core elements of their role where they add most value. I can't see anything replacing high quality teachers engaging with children in classrooms. This is the heart of what we do, and we should use AI to free teachers so they can do as much of this as possible.

What do you see as likely early applications of AI?

Although we might not call it AI, we already use it in schools, for example:

- Maths departments use Dr Frost and other auto-marking programmes.
- We use software to create complex multiple-choice quizzes – they are challenging for teachers to create from scratch but easy for AI.
- We developed an application to work out our school bus service routes etc by inputting pupils' post codes (this was a closed system to ensure GDPR compliance).
- Microsoft's Copilot will be able to populate PowerPoint slides, reducing lesson preparation time for teachers who are always looking for new, creative ways to transfer knowledge.

How do you see this evolving?

“Copilot” is an apt term because the focus should be working with new systems rather than expecting them to do the work for you – or even fearing that. It's like having an assistant which can produce ideas and draft suggestions which you then review. You retain control and responsibility.

Looking ahead, I think we can expand flipped learning – where you swap homework and class activities. Pupils can, for example, use AI to study and learn in the evening and then write an essay in the classroom.

We talk about making our Science Department more like that of a University. AI should help us model and even conduct scientific research with access to big data which would be a significant benefit.

What about risks and concerns?

There has been so much talk about cheating, but this is more an issue for Universities who have been moving to open-book take-home assessment, or who do not know their students and their work as well as our teachers do. Our public exam system could change in the way that some aptitude testing has, to an adaptive approach which allows the very able to move through to the more challenging questions more swiftly.

There are, however, issues with confidentiality and I think schools will also have to develop closed systems where they retain control of data.

We have started discussing ideas and plans via parent forums. We are working things through with our Heads of Departments and then we plan to write to parents explaining our philosophy and how we see the pros and cons.

Is AI an opportunity for the independent sector?

It's possible that independent schools with resources, networks, technology, time and space could pull even further ahead. For example, we have someone joining our staff who has just completed a DPhil in AI and Computational Applied Science. We have a disproportionate number of PhDs in our sector, although Computer Science is actually more popular in state schools.

However, we are working together with partner state schools, looking across the curriculum together, sharing ideas, reviewing PSHE and developing shared policies – e.g. around ethics. It's very much an opportunity to learn together.

We should also make sure that the education sector as a whole has its voice heard in strategic, ethical and practical terms.

Finally, what about your role as Head – how might this be affected?

A key aspect will continue to be helping staff with change management and dealing with uncertainty. Tired teachers may be thinking, "oh not another revolution", but if they can see timesaving opportunities with bespoke closed systems which are very low risk, then they may welcome change.

Since the pandemic, we have become more open to technology with interactive screens in the classroom and blended learning, and we now have an opportunity to extend this. There are also timesaving opportunities with our support departments. Closed systems will be particularly important in many of these support functions to ensure confidentiality.

I haven't started thinking yet about saving my own time, but some Heads are experimenting using AI as an additional assistant to draft communications or summarise notes from meetings. Perhaps there are documents you need to refresh every year which would benefit from new ideas. I expect we will see more and more opportunities, but you need to retain control and communicate in your own distinctive style. ■



AI AND SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

INTERVIEW THREE

Our last interview about AI and its impact on school leaders was with **William Goldsmith, Head of St George's School, Windsor Castle.**

As at June 2023, what's your attitude to AI?

It's already here and it's going to be front and centre of every Head's agenda. You could see it a bit like where safeguarding was say, 15 years ago, and how it quickly became part of everything we do. AI has the potential to be the biggest revolution in education, presenting huge opportunities for children's learning and schools' efficiency. Children joining us now will grow up with augmented reality being as common as the TV remote control was for their parents.

What are some early opportunities for AI?

I know of schools which are trialling AI for the Head's end of year reports – a task that normally takes the best part of a week. They taught the application their Head's writing style using previous reports, collected and entered key feedback, set approximate number of words and other parameters, and produced an equally good end product saving days of work.

Children are, of course, already using it. It can spread across a school in a matter of days. Regional AI collaborative networks are already being set up by schools to share ideas and models. I know of at least four that are in operation and gaining momentum. I also know that AI has reached the agendas of Governing Bodies of schools this term.

What do you see as key opportunities at your school?

I am most interested in exploring tailored, individual learning for primary years, especially EYFS and Key Stage One, when teaching children the basics of phonics, reading, writing and arithmetic. Take the Oxford Reading Tree for example, with its levels and bands. How can we use AI to monitor a child's reading so that the child is automatically stretched to the next level in real time as they are reading aloud? In this way the difficulty of the book changes, so instead of reading all of one series before you graduate to the next, AI will adjust the content to suit the precise performance level. AI will know, for example, which words the child is struggling with and introduce similar words to practise. This all happens in real time with feedback to the teacher, including spotting potential learning difficulties for earlier referrals to specialists.

There are, of course, many other opportunities relating to assessment and tracking which can ensure we enable a culture of individualised high performance learning for all students. Perhaps the days of the 'Gifted and Talented' register are over as, essentially, every child is being stretched in real time to achieve more than they, or indeed we as teachers, think their potential is.

What might this mean for teachers and organisation structures?

As a sector we are facing unprecedented financial pressures and future threats. We have, therefore, got to investigate how AI can save costs. For example, do we need as many teaching assistants if we can provide as good or better learning experience partnering with AI? How can teachers' time be redistributed to ensure they spend more time in the classroom and less on administrative tasks such as marking and report-writing. Just as AI enables efficiency in other industries, including healthcare, surely the education sector can follow suit? But this does mean we have to break out of the 19th century 'factory style model of learning and teaching' that we seem obsessed with!

**What about risks and ethical considerations?**

I see many more opportunities than threats, but just like we teach children values such as kindness, collaboration, democracy, respect etc, we must actively teach AI to project these qualities. AI advances every single day and our children will grow up with it, just as the children now graduating from school and university did with the smart phone. We need to teach children to use it responsibly and with a strong moral purpose. This way it will be a tremendous force for good in global society. This requires schools to use their collective influence to drive the agenda rather than its application being driven by tech companies' profits, as we sadly saw through the rise of social media – and look at the long-lasting damage this has caused to the authenticity of humanity.

What is your advice to fellow Heads?

Whatever you feel about the positives or negatives, AI is not going away. Every few days its strength is enhanced and it will become as important to know about as basic pedagogy or assessment. There is a danger that, as a sector, we end up sleepwalking into AI or competing with each other counterproductively. We need to take a collective approach and remain focused on our moral imperative to use AI ethically, to improve children's learning and for children to understand how to live with it in a good way. Organisations such as the Heads' associations or curriculum organisations can take the initiative to help schools become effective users of AI, focused entirely on student outcomes. ■

AI AND SCHOOL LEADERSHIP INTERVIEW FOUR

We also asked **ChatGPT!**

Please describe in about 500 words how AI will impact the role of Heads of UK independent schools

The role of Heads of UK independent schools is poised to undergo significant transformation with the advent of artificial intelligence (AI). As AI technologies continue to advance and integrate into various sectors, education is no exception. AI has the potential to revolutionize how schools are run, teaching and learning strategies are implemented, and administrative tasks are handled. This transformative impact will undoubtedly extend to the role of Heads of UK independent schools, requiring them to adapt and evolve in several key areas.

One of the primary ways AI will impact Heads of UK independent schools is through data analytics and decision-making. AI can process vast amounts of data, providing valuable insights and trends that can inform strategic planning, resource allocation, and curriculum development. Heads will have access to real-time data on student performance, engagement levels, and learning preferences, enabling them to make data-driven decisions for improving educational outcomes. With AI-powered analytics, Heads can identify areas of improvement, personalize learning experiences, and track the effectiveness of interventions, ultimately enhancing the overall educational experience.

Furthermore, AI can streamline administrative tasks, freeing up valuable time for Heads to focus on pedagogical and leadership responsibilities. Routine administrative processes like scheduling, record-keeping, and paperwork can be automated using AI tools. For instance, AI-powered virtual assistants can handle inquiries from parents, students, and staff, reducing the burden on the Head's office. This automation allows Heads to allocate more time towards instructional leadership, fostering teacher development, and engaging with students and their families on a deeper level.

AI can also contribute to personalized and adaptive learning experiences. With the ability to analyze vast amounts of data, AI can identify individual student strengths, weaknesses, and learning styles. Heads can work alongside AI systems to develop personalized learning plans for students, ensuring that their educational journey is tailored to their specific needs. AI-powered adaptive learning platforms can provide students with interactive and engaging content, adjust difficulty levels based on individual progress, and offer

targeted interventions when necessary. Heads will play a crucial role in overseeing the implementation of these technologies, collaborating with teachers to create a holistic learning environment that blends AI-driven tools with traditional teaching methodologies.

The role of Heads of UK independent schools will also evolve in terms of preparing students for the future job market. AI is reshaping industries and creating new career paths, demanding a set of skills different from those required in the past. As educational leaders, Heads will need to ensure that their institutions are equipping students with the necessary skills to thrive in an AI-driven world. This may involve integrating AI education into the curriculum, teaching students about AI ethics, data literacy, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills. Heads will be responsible for forging partnerships with industry leaders, universities, and research institutions to offer cutting-edge AI-related programs and opportunities for students.

However, it is important to note that the implementation of AI in education also raises ethical and social considerations. Heads of UK independent schools will need to navigate these complex issues, ensuring that AI is deployed responsibly, ethically, and with an understanding of its limitations. They will need to address concerns related to data privacy, algorithmic biases, and the potential impact of AI on employment within the education sector. Heads will be instrumental in creating policies and frameworks that uphold ethical standards, safeguard student data, and foster a culture of transparency and accountability in AI adoption.

In conclusion, AI is set to have a profound impact on the role of Heads of UK independent schools. From data analytics and administrative automation to personalized learning and preparing students for the future, AI will reshape the way schools are managed and education is delivered. Heads will need to embrace AI technologies, develop a deep understanding of their potential, and lead their institutions towards a future where AI augments the educational experience while maintaining a human-centered approach. By leveraging AI effectively, Heads can propel their schools forward, driving innovation, and ensuring students are well-prepared. ■

Quantitative Survey (anonymous) – The Questionnaire



THE NEW ART OF HEADSHIP 2023

Including your current school and all previous headships, how many years have you been a Head?

- ☐ Less than 1 year
- ☐ 1 to 2 years
- ☐ 3 to 10 years
- ☐ 11 to 20 years
- ☐ More than 20 years
- ☐ Prefer not to say

How would you describe your gender?

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female
- ☐ Non-binary/other term
- ☐ Prefer not to say

How many years have you been a Head at your current school?

- ☐ Less than 1 year
- ☐ 1 to 2 years
- ☐ 3 to 10 years
- ☐ 11 to 20 years
- ☐ More than 20 years
- ☐ Prefer not to say

Has the school undergone any significant or structural changes over recent years? (E.g. changed the intake age and/or gender mix of pupils, changed location, merged with another school etc.)

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

CHANGING NATURE OF HEADSHIP

To what extent have the following aspects of Headship changed in recent years.

Please select **up to seven items** which you feel have changed most significantly, in recent years.

- ☐ Responding to unprecedented **financial pressures**
- ☐ Managing change related to TPS
- ☐ Dealing with contentious **HR issues**, and dealing with changing staff expectations (excluding TPS)
- ☐ Recruiting and retaining **staff**
- ☐ Developing and managing **partnerships**
- ☐ Managing external and public **relations**
- ☐ Supporting student **mental health** and dealing with complex cases
- ☐ Navigating **societal changes** such as gender issues, Everyone's Invited, Black Lives Matter
- ☐ Responding to changing **parent** expectations and attitudes, dealing with contentious issues
- ☐ Managing **compliance and inspection**
- ☐ Leading and communicating in the age of **social media**
- ☐ Understanding the impact of new **technology** such as AI (excluding social media) and developing a strategy
- ☐ Developing the **curriculum** as the needs and expectations of students, employers, parents change
- ☐ Other aspect(s) not mentioned above, please write in:

Looking at the items you have selected which single item has changed the most in recent years?

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Responding to unprecedented financial pressures | <input type="checkbox"/> Responding to changing parent expectations and attitudes, dealing with contentious issues |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Managing change related to TPS | <input type="checkbox"/> Managing compliance and inspection |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Dealing with contentious HR issues , and dealing with changing staff expectations (excluding TPS) | <input type="checkbox"/> Leading and communicating in the age of social media |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Recruiting and retaining staff | <input type="checkbox"/> Understanding the impact of new technology such as AI (excluding social media) and developing a strategy |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Developing and managing partnerships | <input type="checkbox"/> Developing the curriculum as the needs and expectations of students, employers, parents change |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Managing external and public relations | <input type="checkbox"/> Other aspect(s) not mentioned above, please write in: |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Supporting student mental health and dealing with complex cases | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Navigating societal changes such as gender issues, Everyone's Invited, Black Lives Matter | |

Looking at the items you selected, please tell us how challenging each of these aspects now is.

- ☐ Extremely challenging
 ☐ Very challenging
 ☐ A little challenging
 ☐ Not challenging

Looking at the items you have indicated are very time consuming, please indicate which of these is the single most time-consuming item?

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Responding to unprecedented financial pressures | <input type="checkbox"/> Responding to changing parent expectations and attitudes, dealing with contentious issues |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Managing change related to TPS | <input type="checkbox"/> Managing compliance and inspection |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Dealing with contentious HR issues , and dealing with changing staff expectations (excluding TPS) | <input type="checkbox"/> Leading and communicating in the age of social media |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Recruiting and retaining staff | <input type="checkbox"/> Understanding the impact of new technology such as AI (excluding social media) and developing a strategy |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Developing and managing partnerships | <input type="checkbox"/> Developing the curriculum as the needs and expectations of students, employers, parents change |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Managing external and public relations | <input type="checkbox"/> Other aspect(s) not mentioned above, please write in: |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Supporting student mental health and dealing with complex cases | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Navigating societal changes such as gender issues, Everyone's Invited, Black Lives Matter | |

SKILLS & QUALITIES OF HEADSHIP

To what extent have the skill requirements for successful Headship changed in recent years?

Please select **up to seven items** which you feel have changed most in terms of their importance in recent years.

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Greater business and financial acumen | <input type="checkbox"/> Better conflict management |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Broader, more complex strategic thinking | <input type="checkbox"/> Being better at getting support and advice |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Greater understanding of economic, political and societal change | <input type="checkbox"/> Additional appreciation of legal and regulatory matters |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Better management and protection of your time | <input type="checkbox"/> Greater public facing skills such as fundraising, networking and partnering |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Greater delegation to enable own role to evolve | <input type="checkbox"/> Ability to manage greater breadth of responsibility, including specialists |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Greater emphasis on senior team development | <input type="checkbox"/> Greater understanding of changing technology |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Additional change management skills | <input type="checkbox"/> Other aspect(s) not mentioned above, please write in |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Building greater personal resilience and wellbeing | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Handling greater complexity | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Working effectively with governors with the right type of support and set up | |

Looking at the items you have selected which single item has changed the most in recent years?

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Greater business and financial acumen | <input type="checkbox"/> Better conflict management |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Broader, more complex strategic thinking | <input type="checkbox"/> Being better at getting support and advice |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Greater understanding of economic, political and societal change | <input type="checkbox"/> Additional appreciation of legal and regulatory matters |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Better management and protection of your time | <input type="checkbox"/> Greater public facing skills such as fundraising, networking and partnering |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Greater delegation to enable own role to evolve | <input type="checkbox"/> Ability to manage greater breadth of responsibility, including specialists |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Greater emphasis on senior team development | <input type="checkbox"/> Greater understanding of changing technology |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Additional change management skills | <input type="checkbox"/> Other aspect(s) not mentioned above, please write in |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Building greater personal resilience and wellbeing | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Handling greater complexity | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Working effectively with governors with the right type of support and set up | |

Looking at the skills and qualities you selected, please tell us how much more important these items now are.

- ☐ A little more important
 ☐ More important
 ☐ Much more important

Again, looking at the items you selected, please rate your own competence in these skills/qualities.

- ☐ Poor or lacking
 ☐ Satisfactory
 ☐ Quite good
 ☐ Very good

Looking at the items you have selected which single item has changed the most in recent years?

If you have any other comments in response to the aspects covered in this survey, please write your thoughts in the space below.

YOUR SCHOOL

What type of school do you lead?

- ☐ Nursery/Pre-prep/Prep/Junior school
- ☐ Senior school
- ☐ All-through school

Does your school belong to a group of schools?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

In which UK region is your school located?

- ☐ North East
- ☐ North West
- ☐ Yorkshire and Humber
- ☐ West Midlands
- ☐ East Midlands
- ☐ South West
- ☐ South Central
- ☐ South East
- ☐ East
- ☐ London
- ☐ Scotland
- ☐ Northern Ireland
- ☐ Wales
- ☐ Other parts of the UK
- ☐ Outside the UK

Which description is closest to your school?

- ☐ Mainly or only day pupils
- ☐ Fairly even mix of boarding and day pupils
- ☐ Mainly or only boarders

Is your school a charity, non-profit or owned by a proprietor? *Please select any that apply.*

- ☐ Charity/non-profit
- ☐ Profit making/commercially owned

In the current year, approximately how many pupils attend the school?

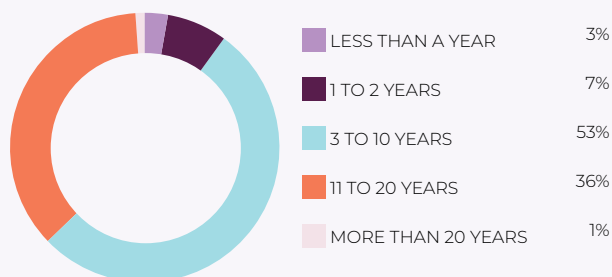
- ☐ Up to 150
- ☐ 151-300
- ☐ 301-450
- ☐ 451-700
- ☐ 701-1000

Data from the quantitative survey

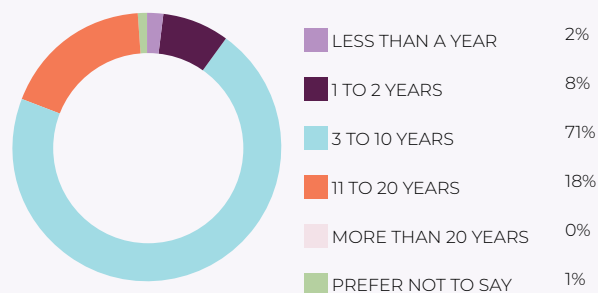


RESPONSE SAMPLE

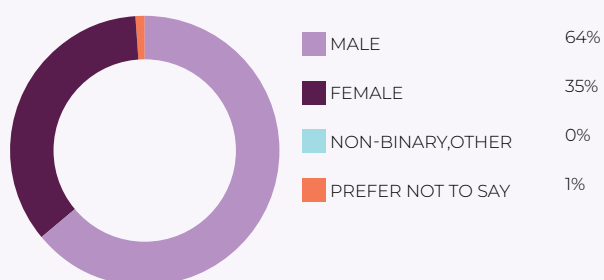
INCLUDING YOUR CURRENT SCHOOL AND ALL PREVIOUS HEADSHIPS, HOW MANY YEARS HAVE YOU BEEN A HEAD?



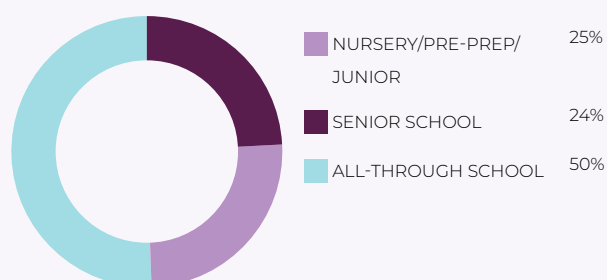
HOW MANY YEARS HAVE YOU BEEN A HEAD AT YOUR CURRENT SCHOOL?



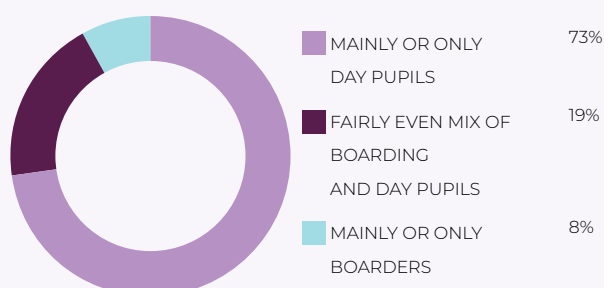
HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR GENDER?



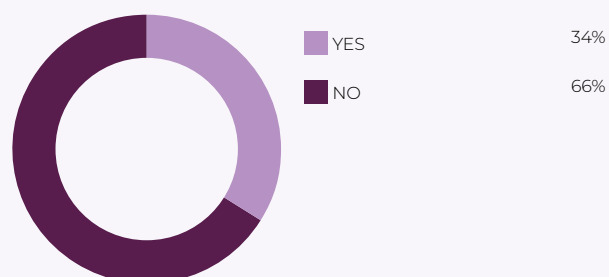
WHAT TYPE OF SCHOOL DO YOU LEAD?



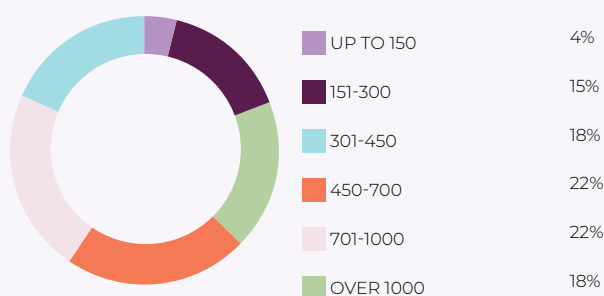
WHICH DESCRIPTION IS CLOSEST TO YOUR SCHOOL?



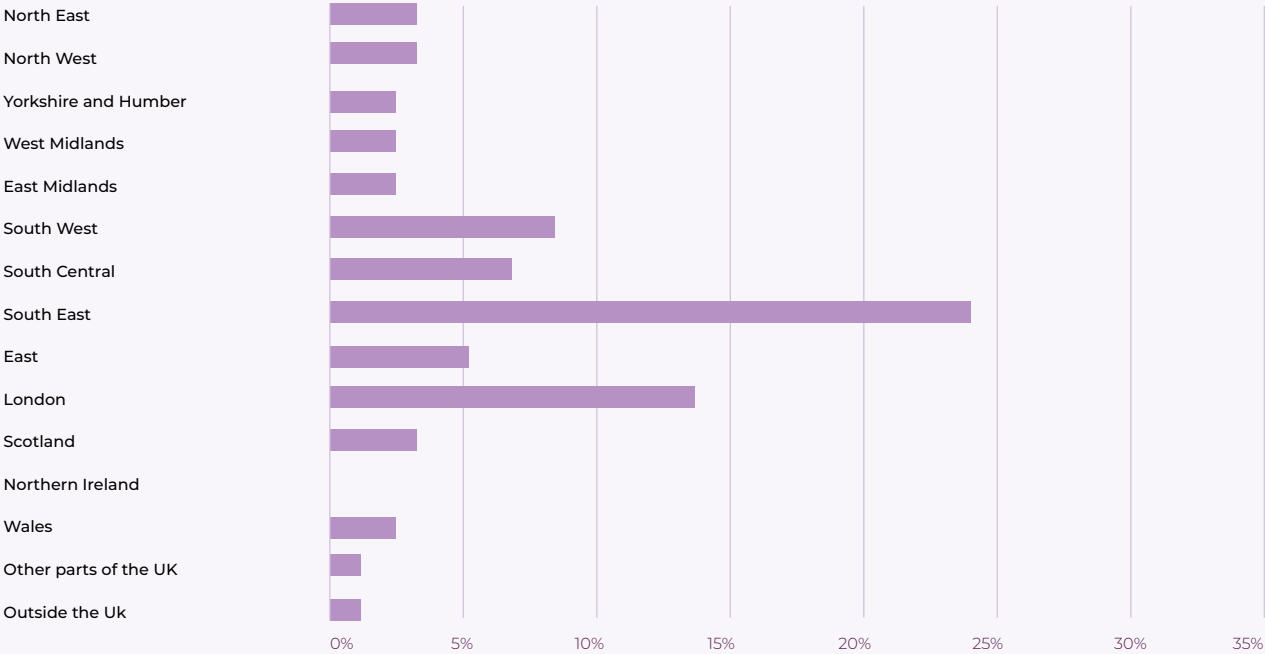
DOES YOUR SCHOOL BELONG TO A GROUP OF SCHOOLS?



IN THE CURRENT YEAR, APPROXIMATELY HOW MANY PUPILS ATTEND THE SCHOOL?

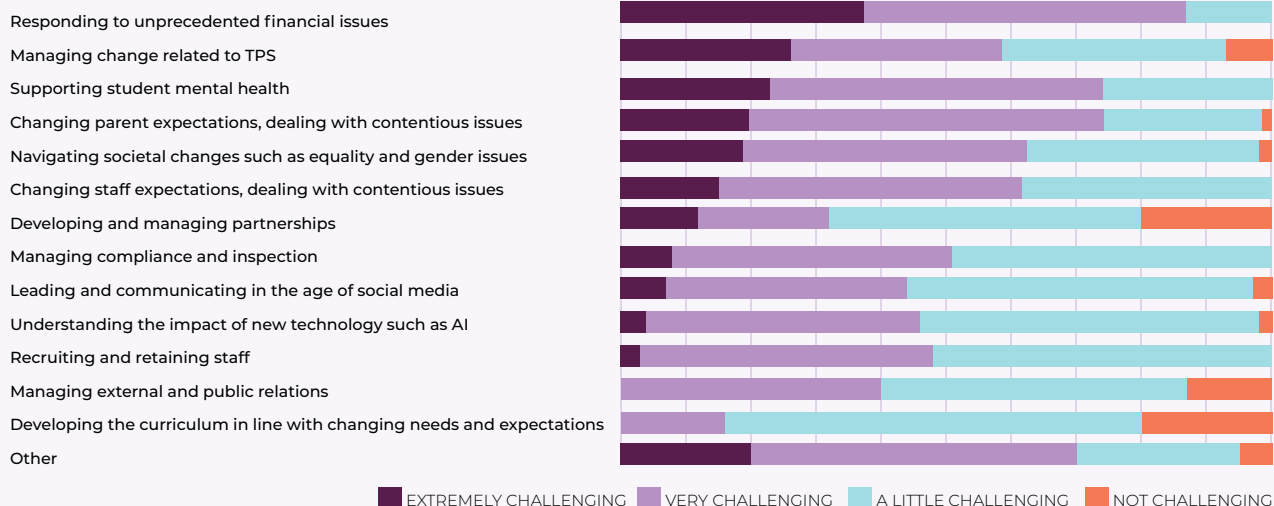


IN WHICH UK REGION IS YOUR SCHOOL LOCATED?

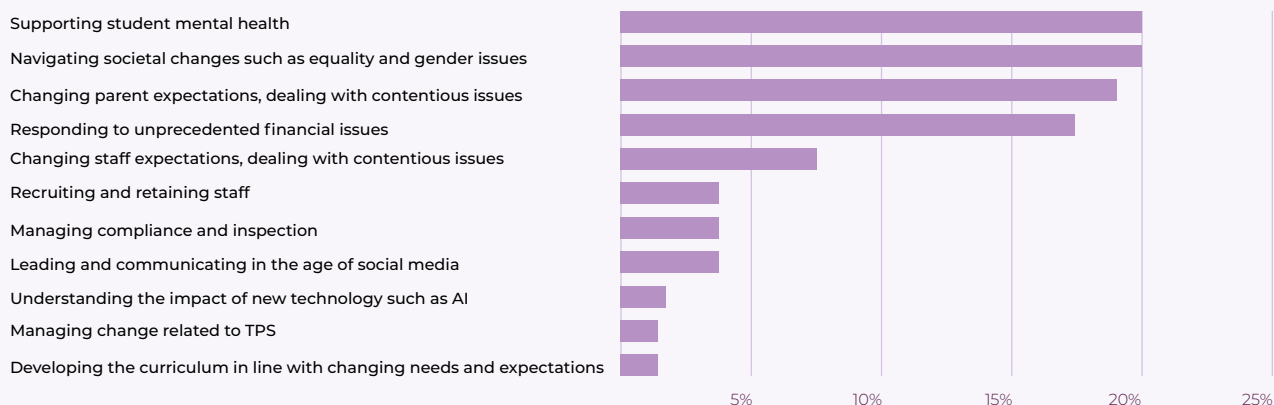


KEY FINDINGS

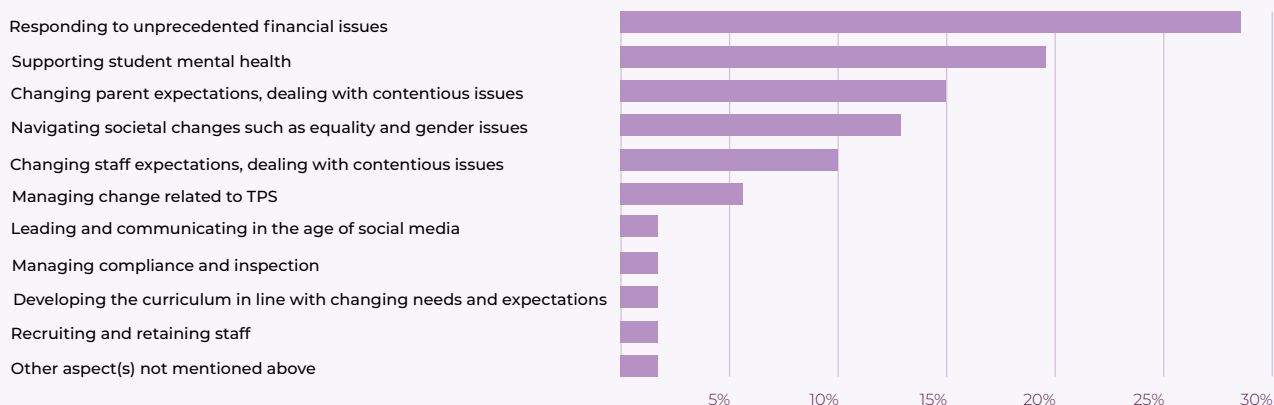
HOW CHALLENGING ARE EACH OF THESE ASPECTS NOW?

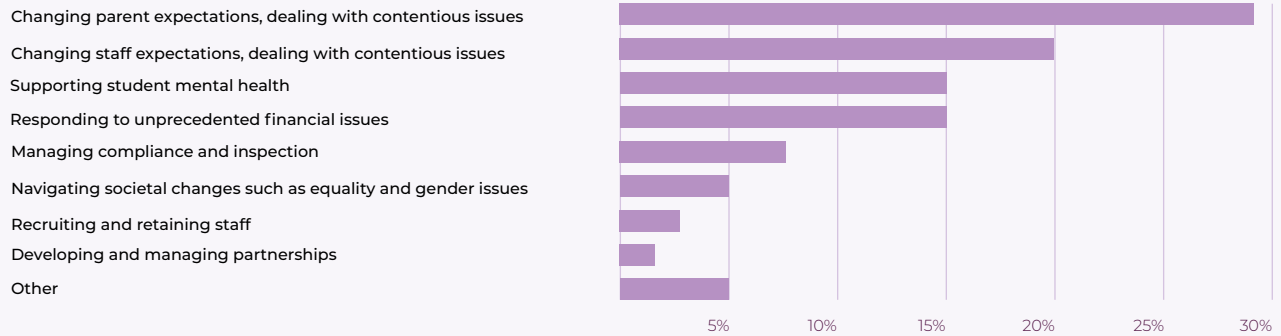


WHICH SINGLE ITEM HAS CHANGED THE MOST IN RECENT YEARS?

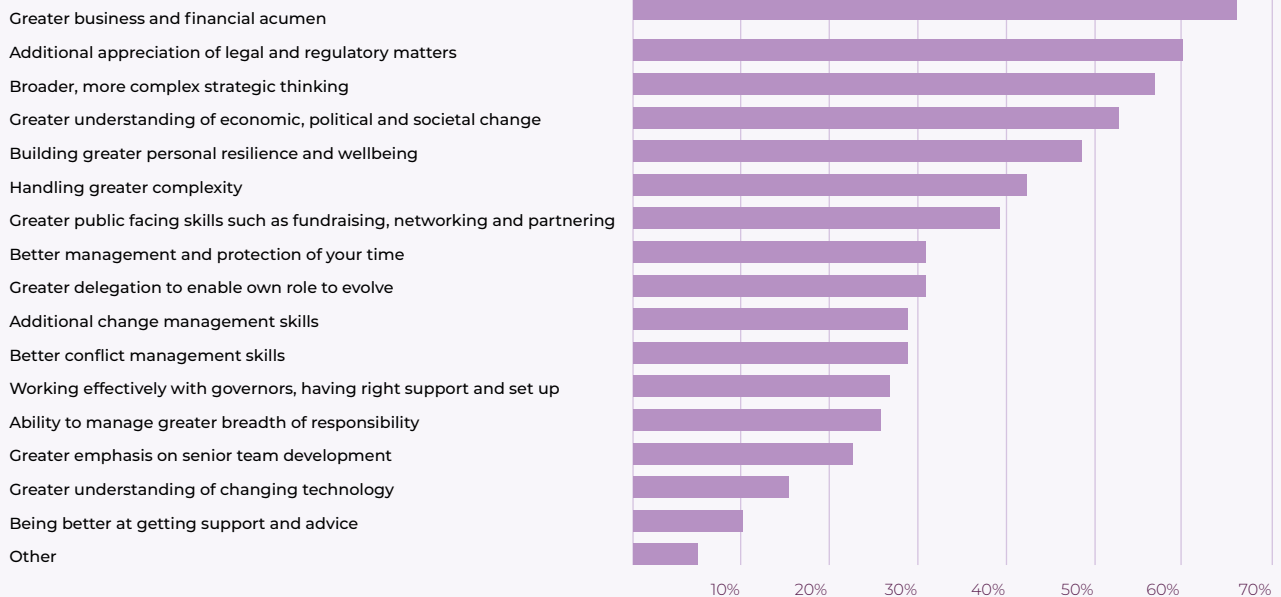


WHICH SINGLE ITEM IS THE MOST CHALLENGING?

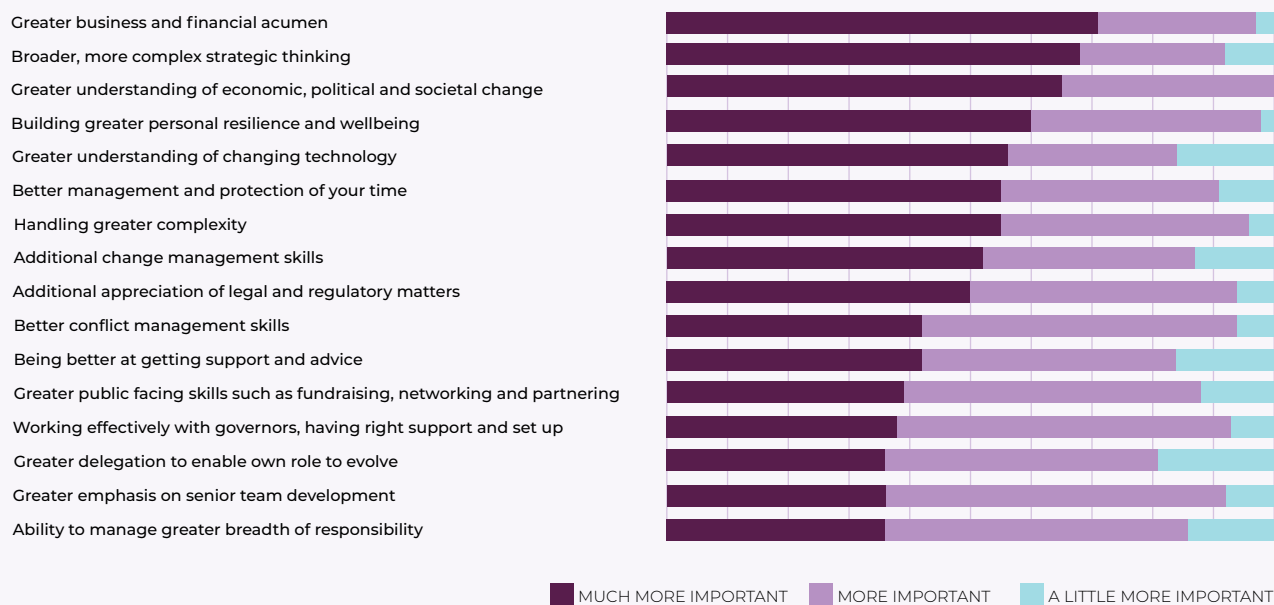


WHICH OF THESE IS THE SINGLE MOST TIME-CONSUMING ITEM?**WHAT SKILL REQUIREMENTS HAVE CHANGED THE MOST?**

% of Heads picking item in top 7



HOW MUCH MORE IMPORTANT THESE ITEMS NOW ARE?



Qualitative Survey



THE NEW ART OF HEADSHIP 2023

SECTION ONE

This first section is about you.

1) Which sector do you primarily work in?

- ☐ Independant Sector
- ☐ State Sector

2) Including previous headships, how long have you been a Head?

- ☐ Less than 3 years
- ☐ 3 to 10 years
- ☐ 11 to 20 years
- ☐ More than 20 years

3) Including previous headships, how long have you been a Head?

- ☐ Less than 3 years
- ☐ 3 to 10 years
- ☐ 11 to 20 years
- ☐ More than 20 years

SECTION TWO

This section is about the challenges of headship and how these might have changed in recent years.

4) Before we ask about specific challenges, please tell us overall how much you feel headship has changed in recent years and what are the key aspects you have in mind.

If you have any other comments in response to the aspects covered in this survey, please write your thoughts in the space below.

5) We would now like to ask about some specific aspects where the challenges of headship might have changed. These are listed below.

Please click on those headings which you feel are most relevant or of most interest to you and write your insights, experience, observations or personal anecdotes in the space provided. The more you write the better, but please write as much or as little as you wish under as many or as few headings as you wish.

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Financial pressures | <input type="checkbox"/> Post pandemic recovery - e.g. student catch-up, changed ways of working, changed expectations |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Mental health of students | <input type="checkbox"/> Increasing poverty |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Equity, Diversity and Inclusion – e.g. responses to movements such as Black Lives Matter, Everyone's Invited and issues relating to the LGBTQ communities | <input type="checkbox"/> Changes to regulations, inspection or compliance |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Staff wellbeing | <input type="checkbox"/> External partnerships and relationships |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other staffing issues – e.g. recruitment and retention, or leading people | <input type="checkbox"/> Other additional or changing challenges |

6) What changes in the school leadership structure have you introduced, for example SLT structure or Head becoming CEO? What has been the effect of these?

7) What has been the single most challenging issue you have faced as Head in the last few years? Why has this been particularly challenging?

8) Can you think of an example of something you have dealt with so far this school year that you would not have had to deal with a few years ago as Head?

9) What is generally the most challenging aspect of your job? Would you have answered the same a few years ago? What has changed?

10) Do you have any other thoughts about how the nature of headship has changed?

SECTION THREE

This section is about the knowledge, skills and experience for successful headship and how these might have changed.

As before, please write your suggestions, ideas, observations or personal anecdotes or experiences under the following headings and questions. Although the findings from the survey are to be reported anonymously, it will bring the research to life if you can give some real examples.

The more you write the better, but please write as much or as little as you wish in response to as many or as few questions as you wish.

11) Whilst, no doubt, many aspects remain constant, do you detect any changes of emphasis in the knowledge, skills and experience needed for successful headship nowadays? Are some things more important or less important than they were a few years ago?

12) If you were choosing a successor, how should the selection criteria differ to when you were appointed?

13) Thinking about how best to spend your time, are there any particular ways this has changed?

14) Reflecting on your own development as a leader, have there been any particular formative experiences or perhaps moments when something “clicked” for you?

15) Imagine a successful Head is returning in 2023 after a three year sabbatical away from the world of education. What advice would you give this person to help them quickly get up to speed?

16) Do you have any other insights about success factors of headship and how these might be evolving?

SECTION FOUR

This section is about any insights you have about the future evolving role of headship.

17) In what ways might the nature of headship change in the future?

18) What is your number one prediction for something different that Heads will have to tackle and deal with in the coming years?

19) Do you have any other thoughts about the future of headship?

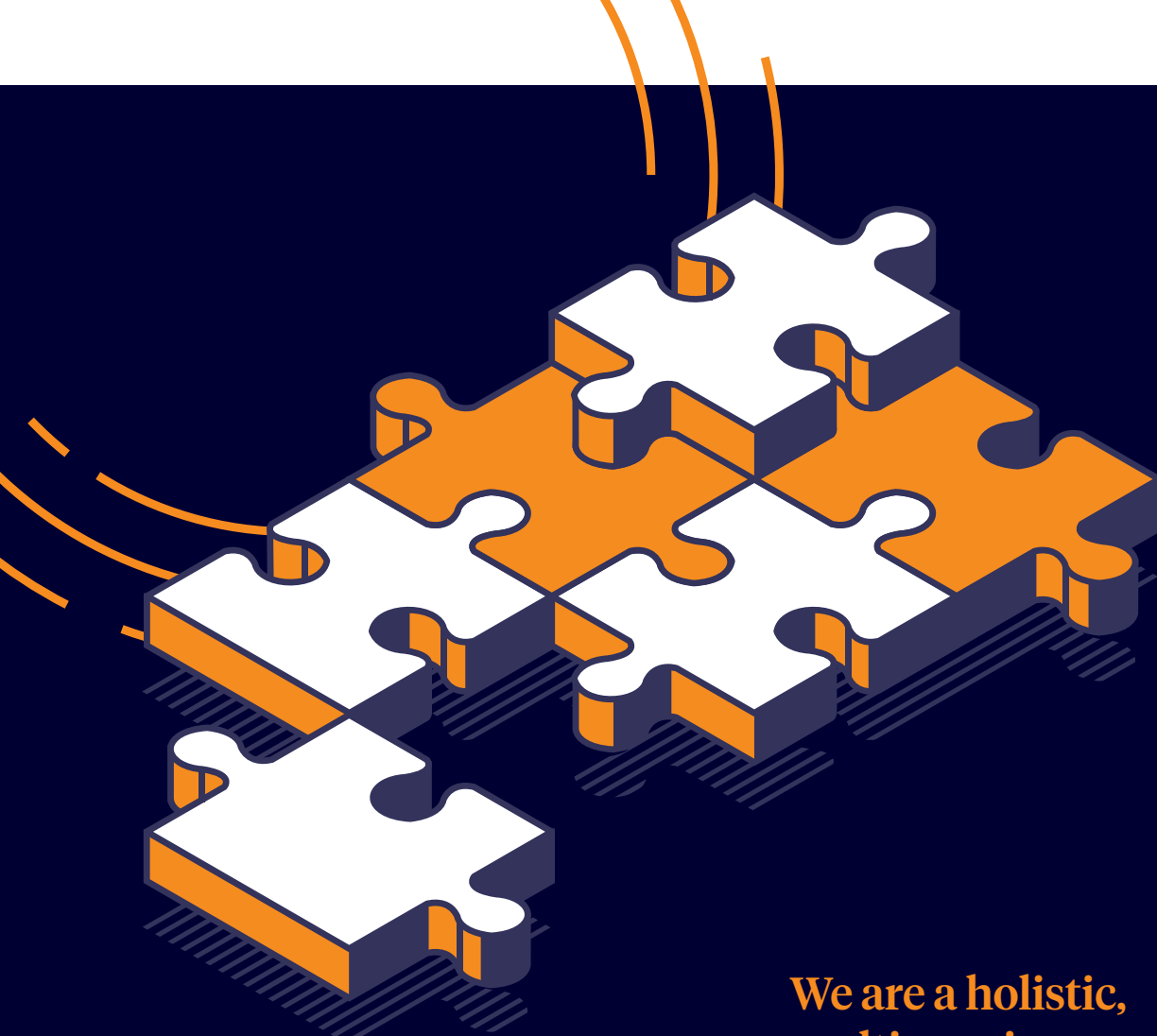
20) If you would like to make any additional comments about any of the topics covered in this survey please do so below.



Contributors to qualitative survey, discussions and case studies



Name	Position	Organisation
Andrea Berkeley	Senior Advisor	RSAcademics
Andy Kemp	Principal	The National Mathematics and Science College
Carl Rycroft	Headmaster	Davenies School
Charlie Minogue	Headmaster	Fettes College Preparatory School
Charlie Warshawski	Owner and Programme Lead	Love Your Coaching
Chris Jones	Chair of Governors	St Edward's School, Oxford
Chris Ramsey	Headmaster	Whitgift School
Clive Rickart	Chief Executive Officer	The Society of Heads
David James	Deputy Head	Lady Eleanor Holles School
Emma-Kate Henry	Head	St Christopher School, Letchworth
Eve Jardine-Young	Principal	Cheltenham Ladies' College
Gareth Pearson	Head	Christ College Brecon
Gary Savage	Head Master	Westminster School
Gavin English	Deputy Head Pastoral	Alleyn's School
Helen Pike	Master	Magdalen College School, Oxford
Irfan Latif	Principal	DLD College, London
Jaideep Barot	Headmaster	Bristol Grammar School
James Hodgson	Head Master	Bedford School
Jane Lunnon	Head	Alleyn's School
Jesse Elzinga	Headmaster	Sevenoaks School
Jo Duncan	Headmistress	Wycombe Abbey
Johan Jensen	Director	All-in Education
John Partridge	Deputy Head	Leicester High School for Girls
Julia Harrington	Executive Chair	Neuroscience for Teachers
Julie Keyes	Founder	The Educational Coach
Julie Lodrick	Headmistress	Tudor Hall School
Kate Keating	Senior Consultant	RSAcademics
Kate Martin	Head	Mowden Hall School
Kathy Crewe-Read	Head	Bishop's Stortford College
Kevin Fear	Headmaster	Nottingham High School
Leo Winkley	Headmaster	Shrewsbury School
Libby Nicholas	Managing Director	Dukes Education
Louise Davidson	Headmaster	Dulwich Prep, London
Lucy Elphinstone	Headmistress	Francis Holland School, Sloane Square
Marina Gardiner-Legge	Headmistress	Oxford High School (GDST)
Martin Reader	Head	Cranleigh
Maxine Shaw	Head	Danes Hill School, Surrey
Melvyn Roffe	Principal	George Watson's College
Michael Windsor	Headmaster	Abingdon School
Naseem Nabi	Partner	VWV
Nick Robinson	Head	Prestfelde School
Rachael Petrie	Head of Philanthropy	RSAcademics
Richard Maloney	Headmaster	Uppingham School
Rudolph Elliott Lockhart	Chief Executive Officer	Independent Schools Association (ISA)
Sam Price	Headmistress	Benenden School
Sarah Cunningham	Director of Human Resources	King Edward's Foundation, Birmingham
Simon Camby	Group Chief Education Officer	Cognita
Simon Hyde	General Secretary	HMC - The Heads' Conference
Siobhan McGrath	Executive Principal	Southbank International School
Sue Hincks	Membership Director	Girls' Schools Association
Suzanne Cave	Director and Coach	Coaching Creatives
Tim Hands	Headmaster	Winchester College
Vicky Tuck	Chair of Governors	Charterhouse
Will Austen	Headmaster	Witham Hall School
Will Brooks	Headmaster	Brambletye School
William Goldsmith	Head	St George's School, Windsor Castle



We are a holistic,
multi-service consultancy,
completely dedicated to
helping schools thrive.

HOW CAN RSACADEMICS HELP?

For us, this means helping our clients:

- Benefit from the most outstanding leadership possible
- Become or remain strong and sustainable businesses, whatever the context in which they operate
- Be happy and safe learning communities.

All our services today are designed to these ends, although it was not always that way. When we started in 2002 our work was primarily to help schools with marketing, market research and strategic planning. Before setting up the company, our Founder, Russell Speirs, had worked at Unilever in similar roles and been the Marketing Director at Uppingham School.

Then, in 2009, we began to support Boards with the appointment of Heads. By 2015 we were handling almost half the agency-led headship appointments at UK independent schools, but we felt something was missing. We could see that school communities were not always able to benefit fully from having great leaders because the Heads needed extra support and the governors needed to be more effective. So we developed our review, coaching and training services for governors and Heads, which are now taken up by schools all over the world.

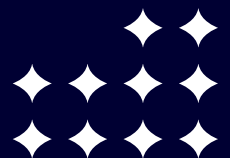


Around the same time, we set up our fundraising consultancy business to support “not-for-profit” schools with their development. We also added to our strategic consultancy team the sort of financial and business analytics that more and more clients were calling for, as they looked to strengthen their business model in challenging times.

More recently still, we have developed some pioneering research tools to measure student wellbeing and inclusion, and have developed strong consultancy partnerships with other specialist providers, including All-in Education.

We believe that now, in our 22nd year of operation and with a team of over 80 consultants and administrators, we are more able than ever before to offer the range of services schools need to thrive. Or put another way, we believe we now have the range and depth of expertise and insight to help with the increasingly complex art of headship.

Please do get in touch, in complete confidence, if you would like to know more. In the first instance, write to info@rsacademics.com so we can make sure you reach the best qualified person.



APPOINTING HEADS

By the end of 2023, we expect to have managed the appointment of just over 500 Heads and Deputies of UK independent schools. We have a unique approach and structure which benefits our clients and reassures candidates, and we have been awarded exclusive use of the Kampus 24 microsite technology to promote vacancies and target the best people.

We are already beginning to apply the insights from this research study and to combine them with personality testing to help Boards of Governors identify and assess the most outstanding leaders, capable of rising to the new challenges of the job.

SUPPORTING THE WELLBEING AND DEVELOPMENT OF HEADS

This study shows just how demanding and difficult the role of a Head has become. We continue to offer supportive and developmental appraisals of Heads and now we also partner with Charlie Warshawski and his team of coaches at Love Your Coaching. Everyone we interviewed for this study had experienced or could appreciate the benefits of coaching. It is normal and it works. Please get in touch to learn more.

ENSURING EFFECTIVE AND COLLABORATIVE GOVERNANCE

Governance is changing. There is a need for better informed, more diverse, better organised and, as this study shows, more collaborative governance. More than ever, Heads need to work closely and communicate openly with their Board. We can help. Read our 2023 report entitled "Upwards and Onwards" about how school leaders can work better with their Board. Or contact us for a governance review or training, which is always tailored to the culture and stage of development of your school Board.



ADDRESSING THE STRATEGIC CHALLENGES, STRENGTHENING THE BUSINESS MODEL AND PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

For over 20 years, RSAcademics has been supporting schools to prepare for the future, organising collaborative and energising workshops, conducting research or advising on school improvement and student enrolment. Schools ask us to conduct one or a combination of the following:

- Market studies, competitor analysis, brand positioning studies, demographic mapping
- Perception and attitude research among stakeholders using various methodologies, including our flagship tailored online surveys
- Advising on strategy, developing plans or assessing specific business initiatives and opportunities, working with Boards and Senior Teams as facilitator and guide, to stretch possibilities and encourage courage
- To improve student recruitment and retention, we conduct transformational Marketing & Admissions Audits and put together effective marketing plans
- To help schools improve their educational provision and overall school administration, we conduct wide-ranging reviews of a school's operation, from financial management to governance and leadership structures, almost always with a major focus on the educational provision itself.

If a major change programme is planned, after or without our advice, we also help an increasing number of schools with its implementation. For example:

- Our communication specialists work to identify key messages and plan the finer details of a communication and PR programme. They have a deep understanding of the nuances of communicating change in an educational setting.
- We also provide project management support, either by temporary membership of strategy groups, the secondment of an associate to the school or the recruitment of a dedicated project manager.



STRENGTHENING SENIOR LEADERSHIP TEAMS

One consequence of the increasing demands and complexities of their role is that UK independent school Heads have looked to strengthen their leadership team. By “strengthen”, we mean grow and/or up-skill and/or delegate to more. We help with the recruitment of senior leaders and Deputies as well as carry out studies - objectively, sensitively and rigorously – to help with the re-engineering of the top team. We help Heads make sure they have the “right people on the bus” and in the right roles, too. And through our partnership with Love Your Coaching we train Heads in coaching skills.

SUPPORTING STUDENT WELLBEING

We are delighted to have recently announced a partnership with Teen Tips, who provide those looking after children and young people with access to up-to-date professional advice and practical tools so they are equipped to deal with the pressures of growing up. Training and resources are delivered via webinars and talks and through the The Wellbeing Hub, a live and interactive web app that provides expert support for the whole school community to access.

In addition, we have recently launched a new pupil voice survey service, which makes it easier than ever to gain feedback from your pupils via a user-friendly, flexible and confidential survey service. At just £3* per pupil per year, “Pupil Voice” provides scheduled, regular pupil feedback. The content is aligned with the new ISI Inspection framework and will help you develop a considered and co-ordinated programme of surveys that will provide you with the feedback you need to support student wellbeing.

DEVELOPING AND MAINTAINING HAPPY PARENT RELATIONS

Managing changing parent expectations and responding to an increasing number of parents raising formal complaints is the most time-consuming of the changes to a Head’s role. We believe that regularly taking the pulse of parental satisfaction with an established feedback programme is central to supporting more effective parent engagement.

Each year, through our surveys, more than 20,000 parents in the UK share their views about their children’s schools. This provides the most robust benchmarking dataset in the sector. We present personally the results of every tailored survey and we add value through recommendations and sharing our sector-wide insight.

FUNDRAISING AND DEVELOPMENT

Fundraising is a relatively new and important responsibility for Heads and, as this study has shown, one for which not all of them are prepared. We can provide personalised and discreet coaching and advice, recruit fundraising professionals or advise on specific elements of the fundraising strategy. All schools can achieve success and since 2015 we have helped over 100 schools generate fundraising income and build a long-term culture of philanthropic giving.

EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

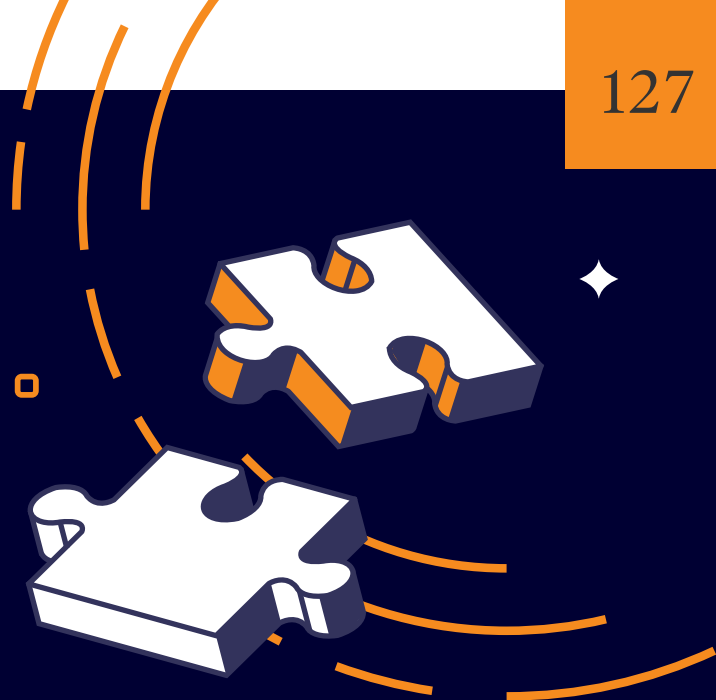
Under this heading come a wide range of new opportunities, and also challenges, for the leaders of independent schools. These are considered in our report. It is an area which many Heads find difficult.

To help us become a leading provider of EDI solutions, RSAcademics has developed a strong, formal partnership with All-in Education, a key provider of EDI services to schools. Together, we support schools in their efforts to create more inclusive and equitable learning environments.

The specialist Research Team at RSAcademics has worked for a few years already with All-in Education to provide “Sense of Belonging” surveys for school communities. In addition, All-in Education offers:

- A flagship leadership development programme, which combines training and facilitated discussions to support senior leaders in developing EDI strategies
- Comprehensive training for classroom practitioners to help them create inclusive learning environments
- Audits to support curriculum development, governance, and inclusive staff recruitment.

* This price is valid for 2023 only and may change thereafter.



40 OF THE 400 PLUS UK INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS WE HAVE WORKED WITH IN THE LAST 3 YEARS

Abingdon School
Albyn School
Berkhamsted Schools
Bloxham School
Channing School
Dauntsey's School
Dragon School
Emanuel School
Fettes College
Finton House
Giggleswick School
Luckley House School
Maidwell Hall
Manchester High School for Girls
Merchant Taylors' Schools Crosby
Moulsford Preparatory School
Mount Kelly College
Newcastle High School for Girls (GDST)
Norwich School
Oakham School
Oldham Hulme Grammar School
Royal Grammar School, Guildford
Shiplake College
St Edward's School, Oxford
St Paul's Girls' School, London
St Swithun's School
Surbiton High School
The Blue Coat School, Birmingham
The Downs, Malvern
The Godolphin and Latymer School
The Grange School, Cheshire
The King's School, Gloucester
The Maynard School
The Perse School, Cambridge
Tonbridge School
Warwick School
Westminster School
Winchester College
Woldingham School
Wycliffe College

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