Changing Expectations and Experiences of Headship in Scotland

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Abstract: *In Scottish education, school leadership is regarded as central in realising the policy ambitions to raise attainment. This article examines critically the policy expectations and demands made on headteachers. These expectations are set out in successive sets of a professional standard – the Standard for Headship – particularly the codification of the key purpose of headship. These expectations are interrogated first through a textual analysis to identify codes of meaning, and second through interview data relating to the lived experiences of headteachers. These data were collected as part of a larger study and the issues explored included the range of tasks the headteachers undertake routinely, their motivations and experiences of the role and the means of coping with demands. The discussion highlights some of the tensions experienced by headteachers as they work to meet expectations. From this investigation, it is clear that the codified expectations placed on headteachers relating to learning and to leading people chimes with the headteachers' aspirations for their role. However, operational matters and administrative demands dominate the day-to-day work of headteachers. The article concludes by identifying some critical issues for the preparation of headteachers.*

Key words: headship, principalship, professional standards, leadership standards, headteacher role, school principal role.

Introduction

The role of the headteacher has become increasingly pivotal as education systems take forward improvement strategies. However, like many other educational systems, Scottish education is facing issues related to the recruitment of headteachers (Hancock & Muller 2010; MacBeath 2006). These issues relate to headships in small primary schools as well as to difficulties in recruiting headteachers for schools experiencing difficulties (Association of Directors of Education Scotland 2013). The increasing shortage of headteacher applicants has been exacerbated by both a demographic trend, with large numbers of headteachers retiring, and the phenomenon of the 'career deputy' (Cranston 2007), where experienced deputy headteachers do not want the responsibilities of headship (Forde and Lowden forthcoming). A strong suggestion is that the difficulties of recruitment are due at least in part to the perceptions by teachers of the expectations and pressures of the role of headteacher (MacBeath, Gronn, Opher, Lowden, Forde, Cowie & O'Brien 2009). Scottish education is poised to take forward a National Improvement Framework (Scottish Government 2016) and the role of the headteacher is pivotal in this reform: 'Leadership is key to ensuring the highest possible standards

and expectations are shared across a school to achieve excellence for all' (p. 10). This article explores critically the way expectations of the role of headteacher have evolved over a period of 20 years and how these expectations relate to the lived experiences of serving headteachers.

The article draws on an ongoing project exploring educational policy, social justice and leadership, and leadership development in Scottish education, where one of the key strands is the relationship between policy and the lived experiences of headteachers. The main focus of this article is to interrogate the expectations and demands made of headteachers by examining successive sets of professional standards which codify expectations of headteachers. We first examine these expectations through a textual analysis. We then draw on data gathered on the lived experiences of headship to interrogate these expectations. We begin the article with some of the issues related to the experience of headship. We then outline the policy and governance context of Scottish education, which is influential in shaping the headship role. We present data from a textual analysis of policy which tracks the evolution in the official articulation of the role of headteacher in successive sets of a professional standard, *The Standard for Headship* (General Teaching Council Scotland 2012; Scottish Executive 2005a; Scottish Office Education and Industry Department 1998). We then use data on the lived experiences of headteachers to interrogate these expectations further. Here, we draw on a larger study on the recruitment and retention of headteachers funded by the Scottish Government (MacBeath et al. 2009) and pay particular attention to the demands on headteachers and their reflections on their experiences of the role.

The Role of Headteacher

Thompson's (2009) sobering study of headteachers in England indicates that multiple demands are made of headteachers, sometimes with tragic consequences for incumbents. Across numerous educational systems, it is widely recognised that there are increased demands on headteachers and limits on their ability to shape expectations (Gronn & Rawlins-Sanaei 2003). MacBeath (2006) identified a number of issues related to the recruitment of headteachers, including the pace of change associated with the job, intensification of work and the range of accountabilities and bureaucratic demands of the role. Bauer and Brazer (2013) also make the point that there is not one factor alone that will affect job satisfaction, but that the isolation of the role mediates a range of other factors:

> Isolation has to do with the principal's sense of feeling alone at work. It is less a structural reality than an emotional response to one's experiences as a school leader. Professional isolation is embedded in the legacy of how principalship developed (p. 157).

Though Bauer and Brazer focus on new principals, this sense of isolation has long been identified as a feature of the role of the headteacher (Mercer 1996). The complexity of the role of headteacher is equally evident in larger urban schools as it is in small rural schools, but headteachers in different settings may adopt different strategies to cope with this complexity. Hayes (1998) and Southworth (2003), for example, found that when faced with the competing tasks of teaching and leading in a small school, headteachers tended to sacrifice their leadership activities. Nevertheless, Southworth (2008) noted that while the external environment and its administrative demands, inspections, financial responsibilities and rapid changes in policy were demotivating, there were many motivating aspects of the headteachers' role, especially related to teaching and pupil progress. There seems to be a paradox at the heart of headship, with a tension between the range of demands on headteachers and their concern for teaching, learning and the pupils.

Policy, Governance and Accountabilities

The wider policy and governance context of Scottish education is a critical factor in determining the expectations placed on headteachers and their day-to-day experiences. With the establishment of the Scottish Parliament in 1997, education became a devolved function. This has led to considerable divergence in policy, governance and provision between Scottish and English education (Arnott & Menter 2007). One of the most notable differences is the maintenance of a strong public education system in Scotland, where more than 95% of provision is in the public sector (Scottish Government 2014). Further, Scottish education policy is developed through the interplay of central government (the Scottish Government) and local government (the local authorities). There is considerable variation in size and location across Scotland's 32 local authorities (LAs), ranging from large to small and from urban to rural or remote. There is also considerable diversity in terms of the socioeconomic profiles of LAs. For instance, Glasgow City Council is the largest LA and has some of the poorest areas as well as the most ethnically diverse population within its boundaries, whereas two neighbouring LAs – East Renfrewshire and East Dunbartonshire – have a suburban profile with high home ownership and professional populations. While in urban areas there will be a mix of school sizes, in other areas small primary schools make up a considerable proportion of the overall school provision.

The LAs are responsible for the provision of compulsory education (ages five to 16, though secondary education continues to age 18) within their local area and overseeing pre-5 education. Furthermore, LAs are accountable to the central government for the performance of schools, especially in meeting the improvement agenda for pupil attainment. Under the Standards in Scotland's Schools etc. Act (Scottish Parliament 2000), LAs are legally obliged to ensure all schools have an annual school improvement plan through which they take forward the national priorities set by the minister responsible for education. Currently, this demand is encapsulated in a national improvement framework (Scottish Government 2016) where year-by-year information on literacy and numeracy, child health and well-being and school leaver destinations will be collected 'to provide a level of robust, consistent and transparent data across Scotland' (Scottish Government 2016: 5). This performance-driven agenda is critical in shaping the relationship between headteachers and their LA. At the same time, financial constraints on public spending have led to changes in the administration of education within LAs. Education remains the largest budget for local councils in Scotland, but as Forde (2014) highlights, the local administration of education services is being merged with the administration of other public services. There is now a strong emphasis on headteachers following local policy and procedures in matters such as strategic planning, financial and human resource management, alongside the national improvement strategy.

While the interplay between central and local government is one dimension of the governance of education, there are other bodies at the national level that are important in shaping the expectations on headteachers in Scotland, in particular Education Scotland and the General Teaching Council Scotland (GTCS). Education Scotland has a dual responsibility for curriculum development and for the inspection of educational provision. In the quality assurance framework, 'How good is our school? The Journey to Excellence' (Education Scotland 2015), leadership is one of the key quality indicators and so the inspection process places particular demands upon headteachers. The GTCS, as the professional body for teaching, is charged with the task of setting professional standards for teaching which includes the Standard for Headship (GTCS 2012). All teachers appointed to the post of headteacher must demonstrate their achievement of this standard (Scottish Executive 2005a).

Further, as part of a programme of recertification – Professional Update (GTCS 2014) – headteachers are expected to evaluate themselves against the Standard for Headship to demonstrate their ongoing development and retain their registration.

Specifying Headship

Professional standards are a major element of both professional development strategies and accountability systems. However, professional standards have been the focus of much debate, with some arguing that they may constrain practice and development (Gronn 2000; Kennedy 2005) and others claiming a developmental contribution of professional standards (Forde, McMahon, Hamilton & Murray 2015; Murphy 2005). The term 'professional standards' covers a wide range of constructions, with early standards having a functional orientation (Esp 1993). The Scottish standards have moved away from a purely functional orientation and, in addition to setting out the required professional actions, the standards articulate the professional values, knowledge and understanding as well as the professional qualities and attributes headteachers are expected to develop (O'Brien & Torrance 2005). Standards do exert considerable influence on shaping expectations. Ceulemans, Simons and Struyf (2014) illustrate the ways in which a set of professional standards for teaching shape different processes, 'standardarising' teacher education in the Netherlands. Similarly, in Scotland professional standards have multiple uses. Specifically, the Standard for Headship is used to:

- structure the assessment process of award bearing programmes including the professional qualification for headship
- provide criteria for recruitment and selection processes for headteacher posts
- provide a tool for self-evaluation
- structure headteacher professional review and development activities
- design, plan and review professional development opportunities.

The first Standard for Headship was published in 1998 (SOEID 1998) following a consultation programme with different stakeholders within and beyond the teaching profession, and was revised in 2005 (Scottish Executive 2005a). The Standards for Leadership and Management (GTCS 2012) includes the third iteration of the Standard for Headship.

Analysis of Changing Constructions of the Key Purpose of Headship

Successive sets of the Standard for Headship (GTCS, 2012; Scottish Executive 2005a; SOEID 1998) have mapped out the actions, skills and qualities expected of headteachers, framed by a statement of the 'key purpose of headship'. This key purpose is important in providing a coherent and succinct articulation of the expectations of the role of headteacher.

To explore the changing expectations of headteachers in Scotland, each edition of the Standard for Headship was subject to a content analysis. A content analysis can be used as a quantitative method of analysis to examine what Graneheim and Lundman (2004) refer to as the manifest content of texts, where the frequency of specific terms is tracked. Graneheim and Lundman also indicate that content analysis can be used as a qualitative tool to identify the latent content of texts, where the focus is on identifying codes of meaning (Cohen, Mannion & Morrison 2007). In this study, a qualitative content analysis was undertaken to examine the evolution of expectations on headteachers. Through a process of reading and re-reading these texts, codes of meaning were

identified. These codes were then clustered around four themes: (1) leadership and management, (2) leadership and learning, (3) culture and community, and (4) the wider context. Each key purpose was further scrutinised to identify similarities and differences in relation to each of these themes.

Table 1: The key purpose of headship

Date	The key purpose of headship
SOEID (1998)	To provide leadership and management which enables a school to give every pupil high quality education and which promotes the highest possible standards of achievement (p. 3).
Scottish Executive (2005a)	The headteacher acts as the leading professional in a school and, as an officer of the local authority, provides vision, leadership and direction to ensure high standards of education for all the children and young people in their care. To achieve this, the headteacher works with and is accountable to others to ensure that the school is organised and managed to meet its aims and targets, and is a creative, disciplined learning environment. In so doing, the headteacher works with a range of others – staff, children and young people, parents, local community members, local authority officers and other agencies involved in services for children and their families (p. 2).
GTCS (2012)	The headteacher acts as the leading professional in a school and as an officer in the local authority. Headteachers lead the whole school community in order to establish, sustain and enhance a positive ethos and culture of learning through which every learner is able to learn effectively and achieve their potential (p. 10).

Leadership and Management

The interdependency of leadership and management is clearly stated in the key purpose of the first Standard for Headship: 'To provide leadership and management'. Perhaps the most noticeable aspect of the second Standard for Headship is the absence of the word 'management'; this document reflects the privileging of leadership over management and coincided with the publication of the government's Leadership Agenda (Scottish Executive 2005b). Gronn (2003) picks up this point, noting that leadership is enjoying a periodic ascendancy over 'management' in education, and demonstrates the significant problems posed by this privileging of leadership. Despite the eschewing of management, there is a strong managerial element in the 2005 version of the Standard for Headship: the headteacher 'works with and is accountable to others' and 'ensures that the school is organised and managed to meet its aims and targets'. In the most recent Standard for Headship (GTCS 2012: 10), the relationship between and importance of both leadership and management is reified in the title, Standards for Leadership and Management.

Leadership and Learning

One idea consistently repeated through the three sets of standards is the emphasis on the progress of every student learner, but equally noteworthy is the change from 'all children and young people' (SOEID 1998: 3) to 'every pupil' (Scottish Executive 2005a: 2) and then to 'every learner' (GTCS 2012: 10); this latter term encompasses other members of the community, including staff. In the first Standard for Headship, the relationship between leadership and learning is shaped by the dominant discourse of quality and standards: 'high quality' and 'highest possible standards of

achievement' (SOEID 1998: 3). The development of this Standard for Headship coincided with the launch of a national quality assurance framework, How good is our school? The Journey to Excellence. The drive for attainment continues in the second Standard for Headship: 'to ensure high standards of education for all the children and young people in their care' (Scottish Executive 2005a: 2). What is noticeable in these first two versions of the Standard for Headship is that the word 'learning' is not used except in the term 'disciplined learning environment' in the second iteration (Scottish Executive 2005a: 2). The latest standard has repositioned 'learning' as the central driver and reflects the growing focus on forms of leadership centred on learning, such as pedagogical leadership (Robinson, Lloyd & Rowe 2008). Thus we see a widening of the scope of the role of the headteacher, with a stronger focus on pupil learning and learning across the community: 'a positive ethos and culture of learning' (GTCS 2012: 10).

Culture and Community

Ideas about leadership and culture have evolved through these statements. The focus of the first key purpose is the school and the pupils. However, in the second Standard for Headship, there is a stronger sense of the importance of the role of the headteacher in shaping the culture of the school: 'a creative, disciplined learning environment' (Scottish Executive 2005a: 2). And alongside this is a much more developed idea of participative approaches. The school is part of a wider community to which the headteacher has a responsibility, and very much reflects the growing inclusive education agenda. Thus, in the second Standard for Headship, 'the headteacher works with a range of others: staff, children and young people, parents, local community members, local authority officers and other agencies involved in services for children and their families' (Scottish Executive 2005a: 2). Inclusion remains a central tenet of school leadership, but in the most recent Standard, the core educative purpose has been reified. The 'children and young people' of the second Standard (Scottish Executive 2005a: 2) have become 'learners' (GTCS 2012: 10), and there is a subtle but significant development from a headteacher being expected to 'work with' different stakeholders to build a 'learning community' that includes pupils, parents, community partners and professional agencies. 'Head Teachers lead the whole school community in order to establish, sustain and enhance a positive ethos and culture of learning through which every learner is able to learn effectively and achieve their potential' (GTCS 2012: 10).

Wider Contexts

The first Standard for Headship makes no reference to any external context. In later versions of the Standard, the interface between the schools and the external context becomes marked. In the second Standard, we can see a tension between autonomy and accountability: headteachers are the 'leading professional in a school' and 'an officer of the local authority' (Scottish Executive 2005a: 2). Whereas underpinning the idea of 'professional' is an assumption of autonomy (Hoyle 2001) in determining the educational processes, wrapped up in the idea of being an officer is the sense of being directed from elsewhere. In the most recent Standard, this tension of headship around being a professional versus a public-sector manager remains.

Table 2: Evolving expectations

Theme	Changing expectation
Leadership and management	Moving from leadership and management to a privileging of leadership to the positioning leadership and management as interdependent.
Leadership and learning	A consistent focus on inclusion ('all'), but the scope of this changes from all pupils to all learners across the school community.
Community and culture	The scope of headship changes from 'the school' to working with a range of partners, the headteacher is creating and sustaining the school as learning community which involves a wide range of stakeholders.
Wider contexts	A move from the role of head teacher of a school to leading a community with the tension between being the leading professional and an officer of the LA.

The successive Standards for Headship set out in detail the expectations of the role of headteacher and, from the analysis of the statements of the key purpose, the scope of the responsibilities and influence headteachers are expected to exercise has widened to cover the school's wider community. There has also been a sharpening of the focus on learning across this community. The textual analysis above has highlighted tensions between expectations related to leadership in headteachers' roles and their extensive range of management responsibilities. We now further interrogate this official codification of headship by using data gathered from serving headteachers regarding their role and experiences of headship.

The Experiences of Headteachers in Scotland

Overview of Study

In this second part of this article, we draw on a larger study on the recruitment and retention of headteachers in Scotland (MacBeath et al. 2009). We focus on using the data gathered through a survey (n=1,137) and through individual interviews (n=47) to explore the lived experiences of serving headteachers in Scotland. This sample of headteachers ranged from newly appointed with less than a year in the post (n=158) to highly experienced with more than 16 years in the post (n=157). The majority of the sample had between three and ten years in the post (3-5 years n=263; 6-10 years n=217). The samples for both the survey and the individual interviews included headteachers from primary, secondary, special schools and combined schools (with primary and secondary provision). The qualitative interview data were analysed to identify key themes, and the quantitative data were subject to a factor analysis to identify clusters of activities undertaken by headteachers. The questionnaires and interviews covered a range of questions related to the respondents' journey to headship, their motivations for becoming headteachers and aspirations for the future, as well as their lived experiences of headship. In this discussion, we explore key themes related specifically to the respondents' experiences of headship: the hours headteachers routinely work, the tasks they routinely undertake, the emotional demands of the role, and their experiences of working to address the demands of educational policy. Quotations from interviews are used to illustrate the key findings.

The Length of the Working Week

In 2001, following a national agreement – the Teachers' Agreement (Scottish Executive 2001) – the teacher contract (including that of headteachers) was based on a 35-hour working week, with an additional 35 hours per year for continuing professional development (Scottish Executive 2001: 5). A study of the implementation of this agreement (Menter, McMahon, Forde, Hall, McPhee, Patrick & Devlin 2006) revealed that working beyond the 35 hours specified in the contract was common across the teaching profession, including headteachers: 'The average number of hours worked for all respondents (including classroom teachers, principal teachers, deputy headteachers and headteachers in all sectors) in the time-use diary was 45 hours per week' (Menter et al. 2006: 23). The issue of length of the working week remains a concern in Scottish education, with the Educational Institute of Scotland (EIS), the largest teaching union, continuing to highlight the pressures created by the increased pace of change:

> [T]he additional pressures on managers and teachers will increase at a time when research shows that the levels of stress and workload among teachers continue to intensify due to a combination of curriculum change, new qualifications, increasing numbers of children with additional support needs in mainstream schools, and the accumulation of 5 years of cuts with more to come according to budget forecasts (EIS 2014).

The survey of headteachers conducted as part of the study on recruitment and retention (MacBeath et al. 2009) indicated that less than 1 per cent of headteachers reported working a 35-hour week. As we can see from Table 3, the vast majority of headteachers worked well above this 35-hour threshold, often over 45 hours per week, with a significant proportion working over 60 hours per week.

Table 3: Average hours worked per week

Hours	Number	Percentage
35 hours	1	<1
36-40 hours	19	2
41-45 hours	117	11
46-50 hours	232	21
51-55 hours	277	25
56-60 hours	223	20
61-65 hours	131	12
66-70- hours	65	6
70+ hours	51	5

Source: MacBeath et al. (2009: 22).

The interviews reported by MacBeath et al. (2009) also highlighted the long hours worked by headteachers as well as their sense of responsibility; many study participants spoke of being the first to arrive at work in the morning and the last to leave at night, and of a need to fulfil commitments in the evening such as parents' meetings and school and local community events. Within these data there was no discernible pattern in terms of the type of school or hours worked; the all-consuming nature of the role is evident across different school contexts. One secondary headteacher reflected, '[i]t's to do with what's in your head and this feeling that something's niggling away at you – a job yet to be done', while another stated, 'all I do is go home to sleep' (MacBeath et al. 2009: 22).

Regardless of context, a strong theme across the interviews was the notion that the headteachers' commitment to their role had consequences, as only 9 per cent of respondents reported feeling that health and well-being was not an issue in relation to their role as headteacher.

Tasks and Activities of the Headteacher

The activities that headteachers undertake can vary to some degree in relation to the particular type of school they are in. For example, teaching headteachers in small primary schools have a regular teaching commitment (Wilson 2008), whereas larger primary and secondary schools have senior and middle management structures. Nevertheless, the study highlights the extensive range of activities in which all headteachers engage. This wide range of demands made on headteachers is highlighted in Table 4. Although these are broad estimates of the type of activities and the time spent on these by the headteachers, they provide a sense of the range of demands.

Table 4: Time committed to activities in a typical week (per cent of respondents)

Activity	None	<3 hours	3-5 hours	6-10 hours	>10 hours
Curriculum management	1	24	41	26	8
Development of teaching & learning	<1	20	38	30	11
Strategic planning	1	33	39	21	6
Budgeting & finance	1	58	33	8	1
The school building & fabric	4	67	23	5	1
Absence cover	23	49	22	6	1
Providing cover for teacher release	39	40	16	4	1
Classroom teaching	24	41	16	5	14
Staffing matters	1	35	38	21	6
Matters for parent council/Board of Governors	4	73	18	4	1
Relations with external agencies	1	42	37	16	5
Dealing with challenging pupils	3	37	28	21	11
Other	3	10	20	28	38

Source: MacBeath et al. (2009: 24).

These demands cover matters associated with the leadership of teaching and learning, the strategic development of the school, management activities and working with the wider community. Also noteworthy is the teaching commitment on the part of a substantial proportion of headteachers. While 24 per cent of study participants indicated that they did not teach, others reported having routine teaching commitments, covering teacher absence, or providing cover to enable teachers to have their weekly non-class contact time under the terms of the Teachers' Agreement. (Under this agreement, all teachers are contracted for a 35-hour working week, but the maximum class contact time is 22.5 hours out of the 25-hour pupil week). In addition, dealing with challenging students was an area of activity reported by the majority of headteachers, with some indicating substantial periods of time spent on this: 28 per cent of respondents reported spending between three and five hours per week dealing with challenging students, and 21 per cent between six and ten hours. A much smaller number of headteachers (11 per cent) reported spending more than ten hours in the

week on this issue. The external community was another duty routinely covered by headteachers, with the majority of headteachers reporting up to three hours spent on this task. Staffing matters was a major area for the vast majority of headteachers, with only 1 per cent reporting they had not engaged in dealing with staffing matters in a given week. The focus of the current key purpose of headship revolves around the idea of building and sustaining a learning community, but Table 3 highlights some variation in this area. A substantial proportion of headteachers spend more than three hours on dimensions of leading a learning community, but a minority of headteachers is not involved in curriculum management or the development of teaching and learning.

A factor analysis of the responses to the question of the types of activities in which headteachers are engaged in a working week was undertaken, and this highlighted three broad clusters, two of which relate to the key purpose of headship: 'the leadership of people' and 'strategic leadership'. The third cluster of 'other' contained a range of often unplanned operational activities. As we can see from Table 5 included in 'leadership of people' were personnel management processes, and included in 'strategic leadership' were the improvement and organisation of the school.

Table 5: Roles of the headteacher

Cluster	Strategic leadership	Leadership of people
Elements	School improvement planning	Developing & providing continuous professional development
	Establishing school priorities	Supporting new staff
	Establishing & planning the school budget	Evaluating teachers
	Reviewing and/or developing teaching practices and curriculum	
	Developing the school timetable	

These clusters in Table 5 reflect the key purpose of headship in the third Standard for Headship document. However, it is the 'other' category that is particularly revealing of the extensive and often unpredictable range of demands made on headteachers. The data highlight the headteachers' responsibility for the whole school and everything that happens there. This could entail headteachers having to find pupils who had left the premises, patrolling at lunchtime and supervising arrivals and departures on school buses, or dealing with floods, leakages and hazardous waste in the school. This multiplicity of tasks in any one week was both a source of satisfaction and frustration, and this tension is evident if we look at the emotional demands on headteachers.

Emotional Demands

Crawford (2009: 88) argues that the core of a school 'lies in relationships teacher/student, parent/teacher, teacher/teacher, child/child', and so the emotional dimensions of leadership are critical to successful leadership. Part of the emotional dimensions of leadership is the emotional labour headteachers undertake in managing the emotions of others, whether staff, pupils or parents (Purdie 2014), as well as managing their own emotions. A strong theme in the interviews was this emotional dimension where, on the one hand, headteachers reported being tired and worn out, while on the other hand highlighting their commitment to and satisfaction from their role as a headteacher: 'I was trying to get the best job done – a commitment …a calling almost – I felt I wanted to do well…the work/life balance is still an issue…' (primary headteacher). Table 6 sets out the nine different aspects of the emotional dimensions of leadership reported by the headteachers.

Immediately noteworthy are the range of aspects and the high ratings of the majority of these aspects as concerns. With the exception of the item, 'The loneliness of the job', where the scores were spread across the four categories, well over 60 per cent of headteachers were 'concerned' or 'very concerned' about all the other aspects.

Table 6: Aspects of the role that concern headteachers in percentages

Aspect	Not concerned	Somewhat concerned	Concerned	Very concerned
The demanding nature of the job	4	18	33	45
Overall accountability for learning quality	13	26	36	25
Public grading of school performance	9	20	27	45
The impact of the job on my personal health and wellbeing	9	24	29	38
Possibility that I might be exposed to litigation	9	31	32	28
The emotionally demanding nature of the job	6	23	30	40
The impact of the job on my life outside work	7	22	27	45
May ability to manage my working time	11	30	36	24
The loneliness of the job	25	29	26	20

Source: MacBeath et al. (2009: 27).

Again, we go back to the expectations set out in the third Standard for Headship document around learning, and while headteachers are either concerned (36 per cent) or very concerned (25 per cent) about being held to account for the overall quality of learning, perhaps more revealing are the pressures that come with the public nature of the role. These pressures include the 'exposure' from the 'public grading of school performance' (the grade of the school awarded in an inspection is published in a public report). Headteachers were also concerned about being held personally legally responsible for incidents in the school ('possibility that I might be exposed to litigation'). Many of these incidents are unpredictable and often beyond the control of headteachers. The headteachers' concerns about the impact of the job on their own well-being is another dimension of the intersection of leadership and emotions. The 'demanding nature of the job' overall was very highly rated as a concern, but associated with this were the emotional aspects of the role and headteachers' ability to manage their time as well as the impact on life outside of work. While isolation was a concern for a substantial number of headteachers (40 per cent across 'concerned' and 'very concerned'), the data highlight ways in which headteachers looked for support, whether through building and working with a senior leadership team in school, or by having a supportive network, working with other headteachers, or having confidence in their role.

Working with a Policy Context

The policy context in Scottish education is complex, and it is clear from the data that this wider context has an impact on the experiences of headteachers. The data depicted a continual playing out of the tension between professional autonomy and the accountability of the headteacher as an employee of the local authority. A working group recently assembled for the purpose of tackling bureaucracy (Scottish Government 2013) highlighted concerns about the amount of paperwork associated with the planning undertaken by teachers. However, while there have been attempts to streamline planning processes for teachers, there has been no focus to date on the administrative demands faced by headteachers. In the survey of headteachers (MacBeath et al. 2009), the study participants reported that administrative demands were a significant part of their workload. Repeated requests by different agencies for information and the lack of scope in making decisions about the budget and about staffing were recurring themes. As one primary headteacher noted:

> [P]aper work driven from the centre has no sense or clear purpose and hugely frustrating and takes time away – for example the number of returns and questionnaires that come from the local authority when new initiatives or posts have been created.

However, Table 7 illustrates that again there were mixed results. Accountability demands of the local authority were a source of dissatisfaction for some headteachers, but 44 per cent reported being satisfied in this regard. There were also variations in the respondents' experiences of support from their local authority. Some headteachers reported that they felt unable to seek help from their local authority, but many reported positively on the support they received, particularly through Quality Improvement Officers. In times of difficulty, even in a supportive context, the loneliness of the role could be particularly acute. One primary headteacher reported being able to access LA support, but highlighted one episode over a staffing issue where it was 'the depths of loneliness ... if you don't get the support that you desperately need in that dark moment ... you don't sleep … things are really black'.

Table 7: Satisfaction with elements of the headteacher role: policy context (percentage of respondents)

Elements	Very dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Satisfied	Very satisfied
Accountability demands of local authority	15	39	44	2
The amount of support provided to me by my employer	16	32	46	6
Current government policies	11	46	41	2
Accountability demands of national inspection	25	35	37	2

Source: MacBeath et al. (2009: 29).

Part of the tension comes from the three layers of decision making, with central government and local government seeking to exert influence at the school level in order that policy ambitions are taken forward. Therefore, headteachers are accountable on two levels, both within their local authority and nationally, particularly through Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Education (HMIe) inspections and attainment rates. The national policy context had mixed results, with slightly more responses of dissatisfaction with the current government policy. While 37 per cent of headteachers reported they were satisfied with national inspections, there was greater dissatisfaction with this process. Headteachers were able to report on an extensive range of audit and review activities conducted by HMIe and other bodies such as the Care Commission (which oversees pre-5 education). Reviews are also conducted by the local authority in preparation for and as a follow up to this regular cycle of HMIe inspections. Other audits were reported covering areas such as hygiene, health and safety, and fire, indicating the range of activities that headteachers were responsible for. When asked why teachers do not aspire to headship, one primary headteacher's response sums up this sense of being held to account: '[The] buck always stops here …one reason why people don't go that step further into headship because of accountability, at the end of the day you are accountable for everything'.

Discussion

Headteachers are placed as central to the improvement agenda in Scottish education. The professional standard, the Standard for Headship, sets out the expectations framed by a statement of the key purpose of headship, which has evolved through successive standards. Through these sets of standards, this key purpose has been concerned with 'learning', though the scope of what comprises learning has widened, with the focus moving from 'high quality learning', to 'effective learning', and then to 'leading a learning community'. For headteachers, this emphasis on learning lies at the heart of their role and is an important source of satisfaction. However, the data on the lived experiences of the headteachers highlight the way the multiple demands on headteachers limit their engagement in teaching and learning.

From this interrogation of successive professional standards, we can see a strong alignment between the principles underpinning the Standard for Headship and the aspirations of headteachers. There are, however, a number of issues emerging from this comparison of official expectations and lived experiences. The data highlight the demanding public role of headteachers and the significant pressures they experience in their day-to-day work. The range of accountabilities requires constant negotiation and reporting at national and local levels, and the public nature of these accountabilities is a clear source of pressure. Further, headteachers are charged in the professional standards with providing strategic leadership, and indeed this is an important dimension of their motivation to become a headteacher. However, a considerable amount of their working week was spent on dealing with operational matters, particularly management tasks associated with following policies and reporting to a local authority or with extreme or crisis issues, especially pupil behaviour and well-being. The wider policy context was another source of pressure that detracts from the role of the headteacher in teaching and learning. These sometimes conflicting expectations are captured in the tension between being 'leading professional' and 'an officer of the local authority'. On the one hand, the data highlight that at times, headteachers experience the overwhelming nature of their role where they feel they will be held to account for everything that happens in the school. On the other hand, there is the strong sense of purpose and the notion that, ultimately, satisfaction comes from the headteachers' leadership of learning across a learning community. One primary headteacher sums up: 'Working with children: seeing them develop… groups of children grow more confident, progress in their learning and seeing individuals develop … yes, pupils and staff'.

This exploration has raised issues for the preparation of headteachers. An important element of headship preparation in Scotland has been the deepening of the professional values through the interrogation of practice using the Standard for Headship as well as building professional practice (Forde 2011). From the reports of aspirant headteachers, this is highly significant in their development (Forde 2014). However, this exploration reveals the 'back of the tapestry' where there will be points at which demands – sometimes contradictory and always relentless – create barriers that limit opportunities for headteachers to realise fully the key purpose of headship and to achieve sustained improvement. The examination of the lived experiences of headteachers highlights the emotional dimensions of leadership and the importance of resilience and determination. The Standard for Headship sets out four clusters of personal and interpersonal attributes which aspirant headteachers should demonstrate, and included in this is a cluster around 'Self-awareness, inspire and motivate others' (GTCS 2012: 10). This cluster largely concerns actions headteachers take to engage others, but there are some aspects related to the emotional demands of headship and the attributes needed: 'manage self'; 'build personal credibility'; 'display confidence and courage in the way they deal with criticism and conflict' (GTCS 2012: 9). These dimensions could be attributed to personality, and limited attention might therefore be paid to these as areas of development. This study has highlighted the importance of the emotional dimensions of leadership forming a central area in headship development. Consideration needs to be given to the building in of learning approaches – particularly mentoring, coaching and peer learning processes – that support and enhance the development of, and reflection on, the emotional dimensions of school leadership, whereby aspirant headteachers can explore and reflect on their day-to-day experiences, as well as more critical incidents, and forge responses.

Conclusion

The key purpose of headship in the Scottish professional standards is firmly focussed on teaching and learning, which aligns with headteachers' own aspirations. Nevertheless, headteachers are still heavily involved in the operational matters to keep the school going day-to-day. These are not trivial matters, and include issues related to pupil behaviour and care that are often urgent and critical. Where professional standards are used primarily as regulatory documents, as a means of determining the competence of individual headteachers, then the context of that headship is critical. This article points to the structural barriers preventing headteachers from focusing predominantly on the stated key purpose of headship. However, leadership standards are also a powerful developmental tool for self-evaluation and professional learning. Here, standards can assist headteachers to keep a focus on the central issues of learning and teaching and to move between an operational and a strategic role.

This article suggests several areas for further study. The data from two research studies were drawn on to compare official expectations and lived experiences. An extension would be to investigate headteachers' views of professional standards and how they use them. The study highlights the importance of the voice of headteachers and their experience, and there are questions to be asked about the role of the profession, and in particular serving headteachers, in the design of leadership standards.

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