

# The Key Role Of Mentorship in Principals' Professional Development Trajectories: Emerging Impact Of A University And District Research/Practice Learning Partnership



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## Presentation Abstract

# The Key Role Of Mentorship in Principals' Professional Development Trajectories: Emerging Impact Of A University And District Research/Practice Learning Partnership

A significant concern in many education systems internationally, is the recruitment to and retention of sufficient numbers of suitably qualified and experienced teachers in principal roles. This is a longstanding global issue and Scotland's system is no exception. This paper reports firstly on findings from the authors' research with experienced principals in Scotland through a Life History Narrative (LHN) approach, that illustrates key issues around support for new and long serving principals, with strong advocacy in the co-produced LHNs for mentoring to support principalship. Crucially, there is a need for mentoring support to be structured as an opportunity and an entitlement, with value placed on mentoring through allocation of time and resources, and facilitation of a safe space for critical conversations around the role and the challenges of headship.

Secondly, the paper reports on a district and university partnership in Scotland: 'The Headteacher (Principal) Mentoring Programme' from the perspectives of the university researchers, a district lead and a school principal. Development of the programme was supported by learning from the experience of colleagues in the Republic of Ireland, and lessons from the district's previous mentoring model where lack of a formal structure or training meant that the mentor/mentee partnerships were not deemed to be impactful or sustained. The rationale and content of the programme was underpinned by this learning and also data from the authors' LHN research. The programme involves:

- Full training for mentors: an ongoing professional learning experience for experienced principals in the district
- Mentoring for all principals new to principalship, as an offer and an entitlement in the district
- System leadership opportunity for the mentoring design team (comprising representatives from the university, district and schools).

Finally, the paper will present research methods and findings to date on the impact of the partnership programme, through a formative evaluation of year one. This research amplifies the voices of long-serving principals (mentors), new principals (mentees) and the mentoring design team (experienced principals representing all sectors in education) in six impact criteria around experience of the partnership, professional growth and practice, development of new skills and knowledge, confidence and wellbeing, motivation and job-satisfaction, and impact on student learning in schools and in the wider education system. The findings have implications for principalship support and continued professional learning, in particular relation to the design of mentoring or similar programmes at a local or national level. There are also propositions for the ICSEI community around how such a partnership may change the perception and representation of the principal role, in a time when the recruitment and retention are deemed by the World Bank to be at crisis level.

# School Principalship Recruitment: A Global Crisis?

RECRUITMENT & RETENTION

## Is This the Beginning of the Principal Exodus?



By Denisa R. Superville — February 16, 2023 ⌚ 8 min read

Education Week (2023)

VIDEO

## Schools crisis as hundreds of heads quit

The Times (2023)

Published on Education for Global Development

## Will a crisis force us to rethink school leadership?

World Bank (2023)

## Crisis in recruitment and retention of school principals will only worsen

Irish Times (2022)

## Headteacher recruitment crisis: 5 tips for action

At a time when school leaders are needed more than ever, new research sheds light on the issues that stop people from applying for head roles and how to overcome these hurdles

9th June 2023, 5:30am

TES (2023)

## A day in the life of a headteacher facing Ofsted pressure, funding crises and recruitment challenges

ANGLIA | EDUCATION | TEACHERS | SUFFOLK | ⌚ Friday 31 March 2023 at 5:04pm ITV (2023)

Published on Education for Global Development

## Leading the charge: Why investing in school principals matters

JUAN D. BARÓN, AIJA RINKINEN & MELISSA ADELMAN | JUNE 08, 2023

World Bank (2023)



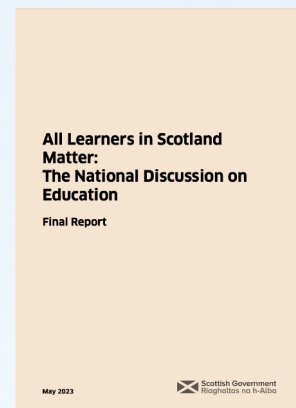
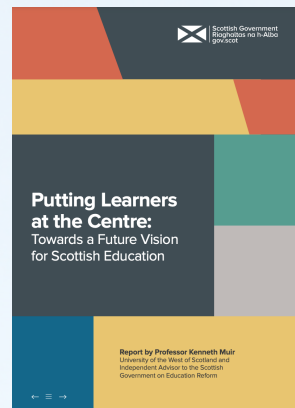
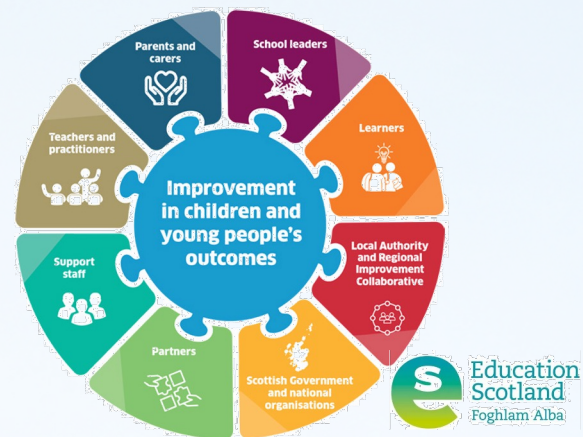
## Inquest to examine Ofsted's role in lead-up to death of headteacher Ruth Perry

The Guardian (2023)





# Being a Headteacher in Scotland




## Headteacher Recruitment and Retention Working Group

- Attractiveness and appeal of the role (workload)
- Career Journeys
- Data sharing
- System Resilience
- Wellbeing
- Diversity in the profession

### Achieving Excellence and Equity

#### 2023 National Improvement Framework and Improvement Plan







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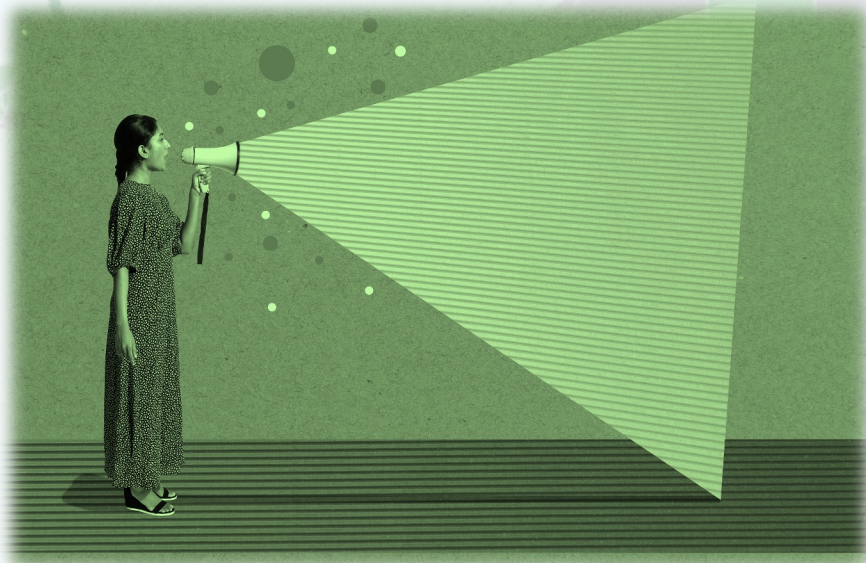
School of  
Education



UofG

Future of Headship

# Amplification of Principals' Voices in Troubling Times: *A Life History Narrative Approach*



How can we understand the lived experiences of school principals?

How are school leaders' voices sought and amplified within and across our education system(s)?

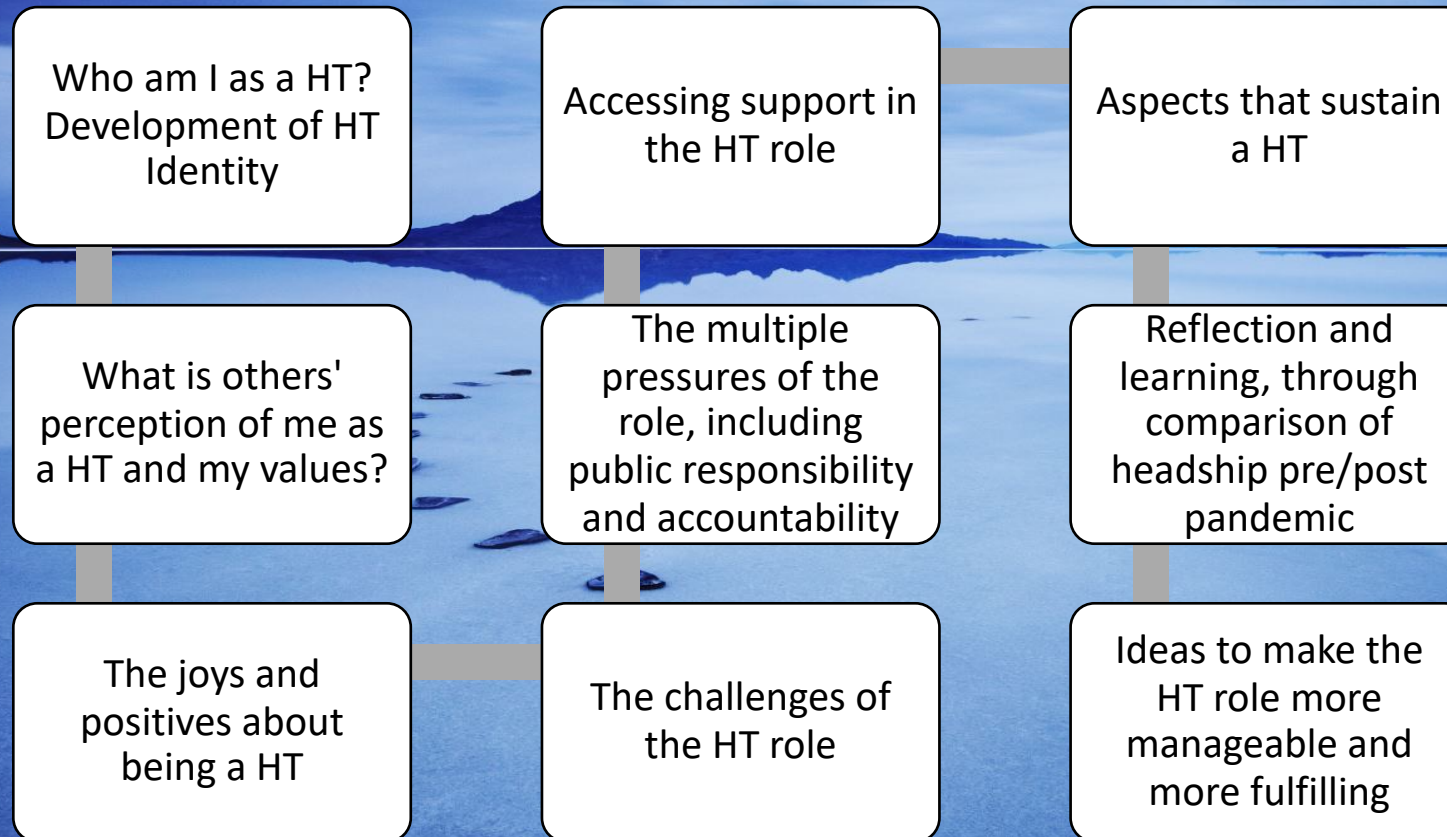
Source: Microsoft 365 stock image (*University of Glasgow subscription*)

(Danaher et al. 2013)



# Thematic Analysis of LHN Data

## Key Milestones in Experiences of Headship



Torrance, D., Forde, C., Harvie, J., Mitchell, A., and McMahon, M. (forthcoming). *"Telling my story": Charting the journey to and in school leadership through life history narratives*. Charlotte, NC: IAP.

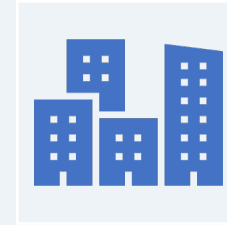


Findings from our research, through a Life History Narrative (LHN) approach, highlighted key issues around support for new and long serving headteachers, with strong advocacy in the co-produced LHNs for mentoring. Crucially, there was a need for mentoring support to be structured for new and longer serving headteachers, with value placed on mentoring through allocation of time and resources. Further, this would allow a safe space for critical conversations around the role and the challenges of headship. (Forde et al., 2023).

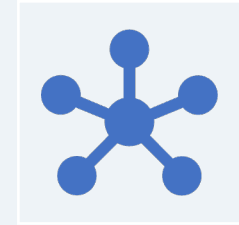
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# District (Local Authority) Perspective



Research Informed  
City



Networked  
Learning



GLASGOW: Nurturing City





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UNIVERSITY RESEARCH



DISTRICT NEEDS



UNIVERSITY TOOL :  
MOODLE

# Design Group



DESIGN GROUP  
COLLABORATION



NEW PRINCIPAL  
MENTORING PROGRAMME







# Structure and Process

- Recruitment of Mentors
- Professional Development of Mentors



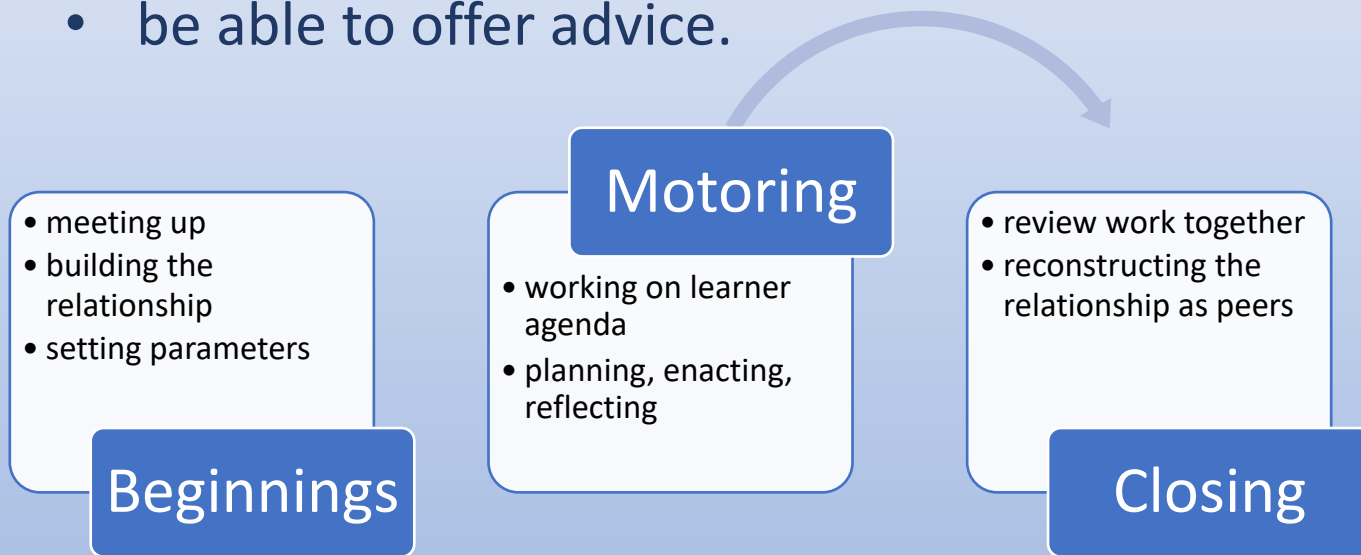
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# How does the mentoring work?

**A mentor should** (GTCS, online)

- have relevant and similar experience to the person being mentored;
- be able to act as a model; and
- be able to offer advice.



*“I hope lots of people sign up [to be future mentors], I found this [being mentored] such an amazing support this year”* Mentee, session 2023/24

# Mentor Questionnaires

After residential training

After follow up training







# Impact

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“Shifting leadership from early headship fire-fighting to strategic shared responsibility”



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# Experience of Partnership

- Networking
- Strengthening links with Glasgow University
- Access to resource:
  - people e.g. Professor Alma Harris, Dr Santiago Rincon Gallardo, Dr Khadija Mohammed, Professor Christine Forde
  - research and articles.



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# Professional growth and practice

93% developed skills or learned from the training.

- Listening
- Solving Own Problems
- Race Cognisant Leadership.
- Leadership

*“I’ve become a better listener and more aware of not always stepping in with a solution”.*



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# Confidence and wellbeing

Increased confidence and readiness

Belief in own abilities and knowledge

Wellbeing impacts: confidence in self and skills.

Valued as a practitioner and leader

*“This was a transformational session ... Glasgow should create more opportunities like this for all heads to have a safe space to meet”*



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# Motivation and job satisfaction

- Valued
- Empowered
- Motivated

*“This was the best CLPL I have experienced as a school leader in Glasgow. It was enlightening to hear how important my role is and how I contribute to creating other leaders. I feel invigorated and motivated for my job again and can’t wait to get started”*

*“I have something to give back”*



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# Impact on student learning

Improved professional dialogue and support

Networks to support across the city

Building capacity in staff

Equalities policy and anti-racist education

Confident school leaders

Reflective practice



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Changing the perception and representation of the principal role at a time when recruitment and retention are at crisis level

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# Questions?





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Thank you to the ICSEI Community  
and to our hosts in Dublin