

## Aberystwyth University

### *Framing headship*

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# **Framing headship: a demand-side analysis of how the headteacher role is articulated in job descriptions.**

Running header: Headship role articulations

The majority of studies into recruitment to the headship role have focused on supply-side dynamics and teachers' own accounts of the factors that (dis)incentivise them from aspiring or progressing to headship. Significantly less work has been done in analysing demand-side factors (Kwan & Walker, 2009). This paper addresses the gap by presenting findings from a mixed-methods analysis of headteacher job descriptions (n=67) published in a complete school year within Wales - one of the UK's devolved education systems. A discourse analysis was conducted, based on organisational and occupational conceptions of professional work (Evetts, 2009), which informed a subsequent content analysis of the job descriptions. Our findings identified a dominance of articulations that privileged organisationally-orientated understandings of headship and evidence of a lack of contextualisation and agency by stakeholders responsible for recruitment. Such 'demand-side' analysis offers scope for examining and understanding the way in which headship is framed and aligns with policy within a variety of international educational contexts and jurisdictions.

Keywords: headship; organisational and occupational professionalism; agency; job descriptions.

## **Introduction**

Effective leadership as a driver of school improvement - especially within educational systems that have moved towards higher levels of accountability and state direction - has long been acknowledged within educational policy and research (Crow, Day & Møller, 2017; Leithwood & Louis, 2012; Robinson, Lloyd & Rowe, 2008). These

international debates on the role and identity of headteachers (Crow, Day & Møller, 2017; Daniels, Hondeghem & Dochy, 2019; Grice, 2019; Kurland, 2019) illuminate the tensions in professional practice which exist in balancing internal and external accountability in a way that is authentic and appropriate to specific and local context. What has been termed as the Global Education Reform Movement (GERM) (Sahlberg, 2011, 2012), has dominated and shaped discourse and practices in many international education systems, requiring high levels of alignment to meet external accountability demands (Sahlberg, 2011). As a consequence, the role of headship has been reconceptualised and judged along technocratic principles, as opposed to values, beliefs and dispositions (Lumby & English, 2009). Against this international backdrop, educational policy in the UK has been devolved to parliaments in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales (policy for England still rests with the UK parliament in Westminster). Wales' divergence in terms of educational policy from England (as a politically influential neighbour) has resulted in continual shifting between higher and lower levels of accountability. In Wales within the higher-level accountability phase, policies focused on external accountability, which prioritised technocratic assumptions and an organisationally-orientated headship role (Connolly et al., 2018; Davies et al., 2018); within the lower accountability phases there have been attempts to encourage professional agency (Biesta et al., 2015) rooted in more occupationally-orientated understandings of headteachers' professional practice (Connolly et al., 2018; Davies et al., 2018).

Within this context, the recruitment and retention of headteachers in Wales has been the subject of much debate and has even been characterised as a crisis within media discourse (BBC, 2016). While the validity of this crisis narrative has been scrutinised and critiqued (Connolly et al., 2018; Davies et al., 2018), there remain significant issues in relation to

the recruitment of headteachers to vacancies in Wales (NAHT Cymru, 2016). Connolly et al., (2018) and Davies et al., (2018) have drawn on data from headteachers, deputy and assistant headteachers to explore the factors which inhibit recruitment, and which render headship challenging to existing post-holders. Such ‘supply-side’ issues (Kwan & Walker, 2009; Walker et al., 2003) in recruitment have been explored by a number of studies which have focussed on teachers’ perspectives on the factors that (dis)incentivise them from aspiring or progressing to headship (Macbeath, 2009; Macbeath et al., 2009; Tunnadine, 2011). Significantly, ‘demand-side’ factors (Kwan & Walker, 2009; Walker et al., 2003) have received less attention: namely the attributes, skills and competencies that are sought in candidates for headship. This paper addresses the gap through discourse and content analysis of all the fully publicly-accessible headteacher job descriptions (n=67) published in Wales during the 2016-2017 school year. It presents a mixed methods approach to the analysis of job descriptions - which could also be applicable in a range of contexts, used here to develop a more robust understanding of ‘supply-side’ issues in order to inform policy related to recruitment.

## **Literature Review**

### ***Conceptualising headship – occupational and organizational professionalism***

This paper’s approach to categorizing job descriptions draws on the theorisation of professional practice generally (Evetts, 2010; Freidson, 2001) and more specifically teachers and educational systems (Biesta, 2015; Priestley et al. 2015; Whitty, 2008). What is clear is that professional work, especially that of the public-sector professional, has undergone profound change (Evetts, 2010). Freidson (2001) indicates that this is the result of the gradual intrusion of bureaucracy and the marketisation of professional work. This

is exemplified by increased bureaucracy, imposed standardization, techno-rational approaches to knowledge and technicist approaches to practice – resulting in professional work structures that have become increasingly hierarchical and more aligned with managerialist approaches. This is defined by Evetts (2009, 2010) as ‘organizational professionalism’ and resonates with Hoyle and Wallace’s (2005) account of the ‘restricted professional’. From a critical perspective this had been represented as the antithesis of, and incompatible with, idealized (Whitty, 2008) or occupational accounts of professional work (Evetts, 2010). These accounts include autonomy, discretion and the contextual solutions to complicated problems, which require horizontal work organisations and collegial practice (Freidson, 2001; Priestley et al., 2015). Drawing on the work of Sackney and Mitchell (2008), Cranston (2013) illustrated how external accountability has had the effect of constraining headteacher agency, noting that many headteachers’ work has become “more concerned with accounting than with learning, with control than with teaching, with compliance than with risk-taking and with public relations than with student experiences” (p. 135).

Fullan et al. (2015) usefully differentiates external from internal accountability. They argue the former is an exercise in systems-level monitoring and selective intervention which is often be designed to reassure external stakeholders that accepted standards are being upheld. They contend that there is scant evidence that external accountability, in and of itself, is a successful driver of sustained school improvement or system effectiveness. By contrast, they argue that internal accountability is characterised by a professional and collective responsibility for learners and for continuous improvement, and call for “an accountability in the profession and of the profession” (Fullan et al., 2015, p. 4).

Whilst professional work has undoubtedly been recontextualised through external policy and accountability, there has been a tendency to represent headteachers as passive policy receivers (Biesta, 2014; Connolly et al., 2018; Davies et al., 2018), ignoring their capacity to resist, subvert or indeed endorse these changes (Connolly et al., 2018; Davies et al., 2018). The introduction and intrusion in schools of both the market and increased bureaucracy, has resulted in the headteacher role evolving into one more aligned with externally- imposed organisational objectives. Some have resisted these moves, arguing that headship now resembles a business manager role at the apex of an increasingly vertical organisational structure (Collet-Sabe, 2017). Yet, other newly-appointed heads have endorsed these organisationally-aligned conceptions of the headship role (Connolly et al., 2018; Davies et al., 2018), leading to what has been categorised as the “lone ranger” or “empire builder” idea of headship (Kulz, 2017, p. 94).

Many accounts of professional practice have attempted to resist and reposition the role back towards an occupational orientation (Biesta et al., 2015; Cranston, 2013; Priestley et al., 2015). These accounts aim to offer an alternative approach to the intensification of leadership work associated with the “hero” or “solo” leader models of headship (Torrance, 2015, p. 487). They position teachers as leaders and advocate models where leadership is shared, distributed and not necessarily linked to official roles held within the school hierarchy (Bush & Glover, 2014). Enabling teachers to work in this way places the empowerment of teachers - through talking, listening, acknowledging expertise and sharing decision-making - as central to headship and requires that teachers are supported and equipped with the skills to lead (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Bredeson (2000, p. 394) identified how headteachers who adopted this approach saw themselves as “creators of tension” orchestrating and contributing to “stretching” conversations focused on pupil learning and classroom practice. This positions headship as being principally

educative: central to which are practices, behaviours and values which support learning based on sense-making, challenging assumptions and creating shared meanings.

Bezzina (2012, p. 248) terms this as “educative leadership”. Grounded in supporting others to provide authentic and transformative learning experiences, it utilises the inter-relationship between collaborative professional learning and teacher leadership (Poekert, 2012). Through this it enables leaders to fully realise the unique position they hold in influencing and cultivating a culture to enable change (Bredeson, 2000; Frost, 2012). Fundamentally, educative leadership (Bezzina, 2012) is predicated on key aspects of occupational accounts of professional practice: an uncompromising emphasis on teaching and learning, collegiality, using evidence to make contextual judgements, shared professional learning, leadership capacity building, and the development of culture and community based on shared moral purpose - all of which need to be sustained over time (Evetts, 2010). Bredeson (2000) also suggests the headteacher’s role is to “help ... unfreeze current values, expectations, structures and processes so new ways of thinking about teaching, learning and schooling can be considered” (p. 389) and argues this can be achieved through “posing questions, challenging assumptions and collaborative problem solving” (p. 394). This educative leadership approach compels headteachers to adopt features of educative mentoring which include:

- supporting an inquiry-orientated stance to developing practice (Guskey, 2002; Norman & Feiman-Nemser, 2005),
- privileging collaborative, critical reflection (Langdon & Ward, 2015; Norman & Feiman-Nemser, 2005),
- challenging orthodoxies and established norms (Langdon & Ward, 2015),

- resisting expert-novice, hierarchical conceptualisations of staff relationships (Daly & Milton, 2017; Langdon & Ward, 2015) and
- promoting reciprocal learning (Langdon, 2014).

These, if embedded, support the emergence of educative, authentic and transformative cultures in schools that nurture the professional growth of all staff. In this way enactment of leadership, rooted in an educative mentoring stance, can also mitigate the imposition of techno-rational approaches to knowledge and technicist solutions to complex challenges such as the uncritical adoption of rolled-out uncontextualized solutions (Fairclough, 1992; Hargreaves, 1999). On this basis we suggest this way of working could support the collective agency of the profession to improve practice (Daly & Milton, 2017; Priestley et al. 2015).

#### ***Demand-side factors relating to headteacher recruitment***

Kwan and Walker (2009) draw a key distinction between studies which have examined the ‘supply’ and ‘demand’ sides of the issue of headteacher recruitment vitality. Supply-side issues are understood to refer to those which affect prospective candidates’ decisions to seek headship, or the factors that may serve to (dis)incentivise them from putting themselves forward for the role. Studies have pointed towards external accountability, workload and work-life balance, increasing managerialism, financial responsibility, risk, isolation, and a perceived distance from teaching and learning, as salient factors in dissuading candidates from progressing to headship (Connolly et al., 2018; Davies et al., 2018; Macbeath, 2009; Macbeath et al., 2009; Rhodes & Brundrett, 2009; Tunnadine, 2011). By contrast, demand-side issues relate to how stakeholders involved in the recruitment of headteachers “define the criteria for selecting suitable candidates” (Kwan



& Walker, 2009, p. 35). Although they have received less attention (Kwan & Walker, 2009), demand-side factors and recruitment practices can be considered as key sites for the reproduction of prevailing, and preferred, understandings of educational leadership and management. Whilst we acknowledge job descriptions are only one element of the recruitment process, which influences the recruitment of a particular type of head, it is likely they play an important role in framing the wider dominating public discourse around what it means to be a headteacher. Blackmore and Barty (2004, p. 12) suggest the selection of school leaders can perpetuate a “normalised principal identity” constructed by the recruiting body, with candidates strategically presenting themselves in ways that align with a desired normal identity.

A small number of studies have considered demand side dynamics: an analysis of headteacher recruitment practices in Hong Kong, found that generic managerial skills were prized by recruiters over other skillsets, and suggested that “reform pressures are pulling principals away from a role as educational leader to one of administrative manager” (Kwan, 2010, p. 1858). Thomson (2009) also examined 185 UK headteacher job descriptions and focussed on descriptors of “what the head was actually to do” (Thomson, 2009, p. 48). The majority used OFSTED vocabulary (English Inspectorate) to articulate the nature of tasks that prospective headteachers would be required to deliver - just 16% of schools, outlined measures other than test results or “mandated outcomes” as their key criteria for school improvement in the descriptions.

### ***Welsh context***

Following referenda in 1997 and 2011, responsibility for education was devolved from the UK’s Parliament (Westminster) to a newly formed legislature in Wales, a country of three million people. Since the establishment of the National Assembly for Wales in

1999 (now called the Welsh Parliament), it has been suggested that Wales has witnessed three distinct phases of policymaking (Egan, 2017, Titley et al., 2020) in respect of its bilingual education system. The early phase witnessed an experimental approach by the Labour Assembly Government (Moon, 2012) characterised by the development of what has been called a Welsh alternative to the competition, choice and market-driven rhetoric which characterised educational policy in England (Reynolds, 2008). Central to this Welsh alternative were attempts by the government, to build trust and collaboration between education policymakers and practitioners (Jones, 2011; Power, 2016), and to rescind public-facing accountability mechanisms, most notably with the abolition of state-run statutory testing and school league tables.

From 2010 onwards, the second phase of policy arose from the realisation that Wales had performed poorly in relation to the other UK nations in the 2009 PISA assessments (Andrews, 2011, 2014). A range of reforms initiated and re-introduced significant accountability and challenge into the Welsh system. During this time, a School Standards and Delivery Unit was set up by Welsh Government (WG), regional consortia<sup>1</sup> were established to oversee school improvement, a system of national testing was introduced for 7-11 year old pupils, and performance-based school ‘banding’ (followed by a ‘categorisation’ system) was put in place between 2011 to 2015. Connolly et al. (2018) have argued that the accountability leveraged into the system during this time had the effect of realigning the lived role and identity of headteachers towards a

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<sup>1</sup> Since 2012, local authorities in Wales have formed four regional consortia with responsibility for school improvement and effectiveness. These are the Central South Consortium Joint Education Service (CSC) for Central South Wales, Education Through Regional Working (ERW) for South West and Mid-Wales, Gwasanaeth Effeithiolrwydd (GwE) for North Wales and the Education Achievement Service for South East Wales (EAS).

predominantly managerial, organisationally-orientated conception of professional practice.

It has been suggested that Wales has recently entered a third phase of educational policymaking (Egan, 2017; Tittley et al., 2020) with the launch of a new National Mission (WG, 2017a): this is a suite of reforms, based on working in partnership with the profession, with a focus on the co-construction of policy with the educational workforce and other stakeholders. There is also an apparent commitment within the policy documentation and rhetoric to more collaborative and collegiate approaches with a move towards the ‘Schools as Learning Organisations’ model (OECD, 2018; WG, 2017a). This is accompanied by a commitment to reducing some measures of external accountability (NAfW, 2018), and therefore an increased emphasis on democratic and internal accountability (Biesta et al., 2015; Cochran-Smith et al., 2018; Fullan et al., 2015).

The lack of any coherent, overarching strategy focused on leadership development has been a source of recurring criticism within Wales (Hill, 2013; OECD, 2014, 2017). This has resulted most recently in the creation of the National Academy for Educational Leadership (NAEL) as a response to what has previously been seen as an ad hoc and piecemeal approach (OECD, 2014, 2017). Along with the NAEL, WG has underlined the significance of leadership in its National Mission reform (WG, 2017a), and created a new set of Professional Standards for Teaching and Leadership (WG, 2017b) with the intention of providing a continuum for development from early career through to senior leadership.

### ***Headteacher recruitment in Wales***

Based on key indicators of recruitment vitality, there has been legitimate cause for concern with regard to headteacher recruitment (Connolly et al., 2018; Davies et al., 2018; NAHT Cymru, 2016). In assessing the data on headteacher recruitment, studies have tended to look to three key measures: the percentage of vacant posts as a proportion of all posts, the number of applications received per vacancy advertised, and the proportion of posts re-advertised following a failure to appoint (Howson & Sprigade, 2010; Macbeath, 2009; Macbeath et al., 2009). In 2016, NAHT Cymru gathered data on each of these indicators from Welsh Local Education Authorities (LEAs) for the 2014-15 school year: 18 of Wales' 22 LEAs were able to provide such data. The report found that 18% of posts in Wales were vacant at the time, and identified some areas of Wales which were experiencing particularly acute difficulties - 13 LEAs had been forced to re-advertise headteacher posts and, 12 noted that the majority of headteacher posts had failed to attract more than five applicants (NAHT Cymru, 2016). The Education Workforce Council (EWC) also note that applications per post have fallen markedly since 2012, when vacant headteacher or deputy positions (without a teaching commitment) on average attracted 29.5 applications. By 2015 this had fallen to 9.6 per advertised vacant post (EWC, 2017).

In order to better understand these issues this study sought to illuminate the extent to which discourses of occupational and organisational accounts of professionalism were proportionally represented across the sample of job descriptions collected.

### **Methodology**

All headteacher job descriptions in Wales were collected from the beginning of September 2016 until the end of August 2017 – a full school year. Whilst 171 were

collected in total during the school year only 67 contained sufficient publicly available information (a full job description and person specification) to merit inclusion in the final sample. These included descriptions written in both English and Welsh as schools in Wales are categorised as being English-medium, Welsh-medium or Bilingual<sup>2</sup>.

The research team adopted a pragmatic, mixed methods approach which was sequential, iterative and exploratory in design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). This involved a process of critical discourse analysis informed by key theoretical discourses of teacher professionalism prior to a detailed quantitative content analysis which utilised the software NVivo11. Whilst we acknowledge that traditionally, critical discourse analysis and content analysis sit on different sides of an epistemological divide, adopting a pragmatic approach allowed us to explore, both the way meaning arises from the job descriptions and to analyse the countable aspects of the text (Hardy, 2004).

### *Phase One – developing shared understanding of categories*

The research team worked in pairs or triads to read through each of the 67 job descriptions. Based on their shared understandings from this process and the underpinning key theoretical ideas (Connolly et al., 2018; Davies et al., 2018; Evetts, 2009, 2010) they started to develop an analytical framework. The aim of this framework was to provide an overarching structure that allowed for the categorisation of the job description statements by best fit (see Table 1 below). Within this process each job description was first subjected to a critical discourse analysis (Rogers, 2011), during which the in-depth reading and re-reading of the individual statements within the job

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<sup>2</sup> Bilingual and Welsh medium schools are categorised as such on the basis of their most recent ESTYN inspection report.

descriptions developed and helped to fully determine the categories. The individual statements which shared similar discourses in relation to existing articulations of organisational and occupational professional practice were grouped together to inform and exemplify these common categories. In this way the construction of the categories within the framework was arrived at abductively (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003) and drew upon intertextual understandings of different approaches to the enactment of the headteacher role (Connolly et al., 2018; Davies et al., 2018).

Fairclough (2015, pp. 129-31) suggests discourse analysis which involves asking critical questions about the forms of language used in the text, such as the experiential, expressive and relational values that are features of it. In the context of these job descriptions, this meant posing questions such as:

- Does the vocabulary and grammar used reflect occupational or organizational accounts of professional work? Or a mixture of both?
- How are ideologically contested words and concepts deployed? (e.g. accountability, challenge, responsibility, manage(ment)).
- What professional processes and participants dominate the individual statements? For example, considering the extent to which proposed tasks and activities are collaborative, collective and/or collegiate, distributing the locus of control to others; or are they characterised by individual, managerial and/or directed actions?
- To what extent they promote an ethos of professional judgement *in situ* or are performative in relation to external drivers?

This research has therefore focussed on the discourses informing and influencing the production of the texts and meanings embedded in them, but has not (yet) explored the

wider process of how these texts are employed and interpreted by those who use and consume them in society (e.g. governing bodies, others involved in recruitment and prospective candidates for Headship etc.).

In beginning to define, develop and finally solidify the categories, the approach was one of iterative constant comparison (Glaser, 1965) between the individual statements, theoretical understandings from the literature and the emergent categories, conducted by two or more researchers, undertaken in and across both languages (English and Welsh). Shared understandings and interpretations were thus co-constructed by a constant process of identifying and challenging categorizations in a way that developed and documented the conceptual understanding of these. These categories were then established and agreed by the research team. The theoretical understandings that informed the categorisations are explored in the literature review and broadly summarised in the Table 1 below.

INSERT Table 1 here

Category 1 statements can be clearly understood as those statements which were grounded in organisationally orientated accounts of the headship role; whilst Category 5 statements were aligned with notions of an occupationally orientated approach to professional practice. Categories 2 and 4 are descriptive accounts of the negotiation of the conceptual polarities exemplified in categories 1 and 5. Category 3 contains statements which were more conflicted in nature and communicated mixed messages that were polyphonic (Bakhtin, 1981) or were impossible to allocate to the other categories based on the information they contained.

### ***Phase Two – iterative defining and refining of categories***

All statements were coded on a range 1 to 5 by at least three members of the research team. Discussions helped to identify clearly boundaries between categories and the defining features of each. Individual biases and interpretations of categories were identified and calibrated to align with the teams agreed interpretations to ensure consistency within the coding. Again, the categorisation occurred in both languages, and a process of continual cross-moderation of categorised statements from the job descriptions was undertaken, which ensured consistency between English and Welsh.

Following this, the job description statements were analysed using NVivo 11, which enabled a further level of checking for consistency of allocation to categories for each of the statements. At this point anomalies were identified and discussed by the team, who then made further decisions to ensure the agreed coding approach was being consistently and rigorously applied - this further improved the reliability of the coding process.

### ***Phase Three – final allocation of job description statements to categories (data cleanse)***

Another iteration of coding was undertaken once the categories were agreed across the team. A systematic and iterative approach to checking and re-checking the application of the categories was implemented to ensure the highest possible reliability by at least three researchers to eliminate any further anomalies. This was then subjected to a final check through the examination of all job descriptions that appeared similar or which had been derived from the same regional consortia or local authority template to ensure identical coding allocation. In total, 2970 statements were coded from the 67 job descriptions. Once the team had agreed the reliable allocation of the statements to the five categories, the



percentage coverage of each job description as allocated to each of the five categorisations was calculated.

#### ***Phase Four – considering the data against a range of characteristics***

In order to identify any apparent differences or patterns, the data was analysed according to: location by consortia region, school sector, school language medium and school denomination.

### **Results**

Having analysed all the statements in the 67 job descriptions, as outlined in Table 2 below, 50.5% were categorised 1, 23.2% were categorised 2, 16.3 % were categorised 3, 5.9% were categorised 4 and 4.0% were categorised 5.

INSERT Table 2 here

Across the continuum of categories, as outlined in the methodology, the percentage coverage of each job description showed a striking pattern of decrease from 1 to 5. This was consistently seen across all schools and regional consortia regardless of sector, language medium and denomination.

Figure 1 below shows the percentage coverage of all the categories 1-5 against the four regional consortia. This shows a consistent pattern for all respective categories in each consortia. It should be noted that a significant number of job descriptions (n=27) did not have any statements coded as category 5 but *all* job descriptions had statements coded as category 1.

INSERT Fig 1 here

Figure 2 below shows the percentage coverage of combined category 1 and 2 and category 4 and 5 statements by regional consortia. These categories were combined on the basis of the closeness of the concepts which underpinned them. When the data set is amalgamated in this way the extent of the dominance of categories 1 and 2 becomes clearly apparent. It should be noted that a number of job descriptions (n=10) had no statements coded as categories 4 and 5 combined but *all* job descriptions had statements coded as categories 1 and 2 combined.

INSERT Fig 2 here

INSERT Fig 3 here

Figure 3 above shows the percentage coverage of all the categories 1-5, presented against the attribute of school language. In the data set 52 job descriptions were for English-medium schools, 11 for Welsh-medium schools and 4 for schools categorised as being Bilingual. The pattern of coding the statements to categories showed little variation across types of school by language medium.

Figure 4 below shows the percentage coverage of the categories 1-5, presented against the attribute of school sector. In the data set 49 were primary schools, 13 were secondary schools, 4 were categorised as 3-16 schools and 1 was a special school. The pattern across the categories is broadly consistent for primary, secondary and 3-16 schools. However, there were no coded category 5 statements for the single special school in the data set.

INSERT Fig 4 here

The data was also interrogated against the attribute of school denomination (faith and non-faith schools) and was consistent with findings of all other attributes reported.

## **Discussion**

### ***Dominance of statements that articulate an organisationally orientated account of professional practice.***

The key finding was the dominance of Categories 1 and 2 across the sample, and whilst the inclusion of some statements of this nature in job descriptions are clearly essential, the disproportionate balance is cause for concern given the policy aspirations in Wales. This analysis provides evidence that the headteacher role in Wales, as articulated in the job descriptions at this time, was clearly situated within an organisationally-orientated account of professional practice. While previous work has considered the lived reality of headteachers' professional practice (Connolly et al., 2018; Davies et al., 2018) this demand-side analysis provides clear evidence that the role was being articulated in a way that aligns with a centrally-prescribed, organisationally-inflected understanding of headteachers' professional work. This would indicate there is a disconnect between the account of professional work as articulated in these job descriptions and more recent policy aspirations for the role within what has been deemed the 'third phase' of Welsh policymaking in education (Connolly et al., 2018; Davies et al., 2018; Egan 2017). Of course, this may be due to time lag between data and context, but the framing of the responsibilities of a headteacher as a series of managerialist professional practices aligned to a more organisational account of the professional, poses risks to the creation and maintenance of a collaborative culture which resists externally-imposed

bureaucratic and managerialist intrusions on professional work (Freidson, 2001). It may be the case that, if this study is replicated in five years, that the role will be more closely aligned to categories 4 and 5 which would reinforce the ways of working that the National Mission (WG, 2017a) promotes; alternatively, the stated commitment to collaborative working as a key element within headteachers' practice may transpire to be merely rhetorical or variably enacted (Ball et al. 2012). The scarcity of category 5 statements - completely absent in some of the job descriptions - suggests that there is a need for a careful and considered policy review of the way the headteacher role is conceptualised. There is a need to recalibrate the professional role of headship towards a more appropriately balanced articulation of occupational and organisational approaches, reflecting the direction of travel as outlined in the National Mission (WG, 2017a).

In these job descriptions in categories 1 and 2 the demands of external accountability exert a disproportionately powerful influence on the skills and attributes deemed desirable in prospective headteachers. As previous work has illustrated (Connolly et al., 2018; Davies et al., 2018), Welsh headteachers support accountability, but within an occupational framework, where they are accountable to their learners, parents, colleagues and communities. What they rejected were the crude models of external accountability and the subsequent obsession with data that they perceived reduced their role to a restricted managerialism - a key feature in organisational professionalism (Evetts, 2009; Fullan et al., 2015).

### ***Replication***

There was a high degree of consistency in the job descriptions throughout the data set across geographical boundaries, socio-demographic, linguistic and religious contexts.

Only 11 job descriptions were identifiable as being distinct, appearing to have been written in a bespoke way for their specific school context. It was apparent that a small number of job descriptions were being utilized across regional consortia and local authority boundaries with little or no modification, suggesting a lack of recognition of the importance of school context. Indeed, Smith (2010) suggests that some governors - with responsibility for headteacher recruitment and to whom headteachers are answerable - believe theirs to be a superficial role with LEAs exerting a paternalistic influence on how governance is conducted, and viewing the LEA (or regional consortia) role as serving to “focus governors’ minds” (Smith, 2010, p. 269). We speculate that governing bodies may not wish to deviate from a standard local headteacher job description template, because they may not feel they have the agency, expertise, confidence, or time to modify or construct an articulation of the role for their specific school.

Given this we contend that support will be needed for governors, headteachers, local authorities and regional consortia in order to create meaningful job descriptions that articulate a nuanced, shared and commonly-agreed understanding of the role, which can take account the uniqueness of local context and aligns with the national policy direction.

### *Nature and fit of the Headship role*

On the basis of the data analysed above, we question whether the desired skillset of a headteacher, recruited under the terms of these job descriptions, is appropriately configured to enable them to assume their key role in the changing Welsh educational reform journey. We suggest that a recalibration of the articulation of the role is required and that there may need to be (and may already be) a movement within headteacher job descriptions which recognises occupational approaches to professional work and the contextual needs of schools within the system. This requires all stakeholders involved in

the conceptualisation and articulation of the headteacher role in job descriptions - governing bodies, local authorities, regional consortia, diocesan directors and other stakeholders - to be active in framing the headteacher role. This demands that they consider carefully the extent to which the job descriptions they construct reflect the way in which they anticipate and expect the role will be enacted. While this research relates directly to Wales, the analytical approach taken is likely to be useful in a range of contexts to explore alignment in role descriptions and the associated discourses articulated and espoused in national policy. Conspicuously under-represented in these job descriptions was a consistent articulation of the attributes, skills and competencies that coalesce around learning and teaching and are predicated on a set of approaches, values and principles which engage participants in working together to socially responsible goals (Sachs, 2003). This collective agency might be developed through professional learning practices that work to promote shared understandings (Priestley et al., 2015); the adoption of an inquiry orientated stance (through being curious and inquisitive about practice and embracing disruptive thinking) (Guskey, 2002); enabling professional judgement and autonomy and working to create cultures of shared trust and mutual endeavour that resist expert novice hierarchical conceptualisations (Biesta, 2015 et al.; Langdon & Ward, 2015). Adopting these ways of working involves a shift towards an understanding of the headteacher role as an educative agent, employing approaches from educative leadership and mentorship (Daly & Milton, 2017; Bezzina, 2012; Norman & Feinman-Nemser, 2005) to support teaching as an educative process for all (Dewey, 1933; Skourdombis, 2019). The findings therefore raise questions in relation to how at times of policy change, headteachers will need high-quality professional learning opportunities to support them in realising new aspirations, which require a different balance between occupational and organisationally-orientated professionalism.

## **Conclusion**

We acknowledge that a limitation of this study is that the articulation of leadership within these job descriptions may not inevitably lead to a closely aligned lived reality once headteachers are in post, which warrants further research. The data illustrated how in Wales, these job descriptions were highly replicated, a-contextual and dominated by organisational conceptions of practice, with limited reference to more occupational understandings. This may suggest a lack of agency of school governors and the dominance of standardised approaches advocated by meso-level bodies. There is disconnect between the articulations of headship found within these job descriptions and the more occupationally-orientated conceptions of professional practice articulated in the third phase of policymaking in Wales, particularly the National Mission (WG, 2017a).

Further research will aim to:

- Use this data as a baseline from which to undertake a similar study with more recent headteacher job descriptions from Wales, when the current reforms described in this paper have matured.
- Explore the lived reality of the cohort of headteachers recruited to these job descriptions.
- Use this methodology to conduct similar studies in other policy contexts so as to offer comparison of the nature of the headship role in different educational jurisdictions.

Consequently, there are serious implications for the changing nature of the role of headship being promoted in Wales at the current time. If, as the data suggests, the articulation of headship when the job descriptions were collected were dominated by organizational, managerialist, techno-rationalist ideas, consideration is needed in relation to the impact this will have on the realisation of the Wales' National Mission (WG, 2017a)

and its ambitious change agenda. Can Wales enable, through a new articulation of headship, headteachers to be *educative agents* primarily focused on learners and facilitating professional learning to support a learner-centred orientation? What are the necessary steps needed to shift towards this re-imagined articulation of the role and how can it be supported?

This paper's methodologically innovative approach illustrates that undertaking a 'demand-side' analysis in this way can help illuminate the intentional and unintentional framing of the headteacher role. It usefully highlights the implicit messaging that exists within documents (in this instance job descriptions) and the extent to which the framing aligns with the intended policy direction. This study highlights how this type of analysis can provide a deeper insight into 'supply-side' issues and could potentially be useful in understanding an informing similar policy models adopted in other international systems.

Embedding educational change, improvement and transformation is difficult and should not be underestimated (Maguire et al., 2015). This study exemplifies the value of knowing where you are starting from. Focusing on the 'demand-side' is useful in supporting policy makers to clearly understand the messages conveyed by the articulations of the job descriptions. This approach raises questions about the extent to which those responsible for recruitment need or do not need to modify the job descriptions to contextualise them and align them with policy direction. Without this level of scrutiny and attention to implicit messages articulated in job descriptions there are likely to be missed opportunities and unintended consequences.



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