



# What are we learning about... NPQH graduates?

Evidence Into Practice Guide



National College for  
School Leadership

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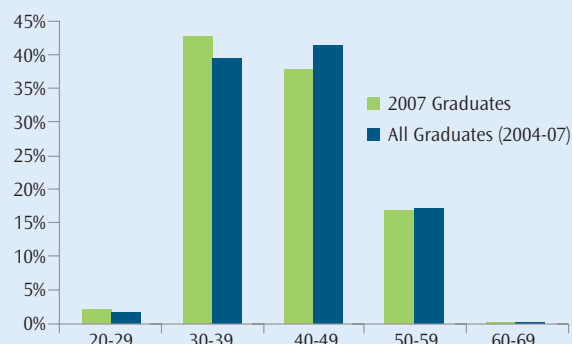


# Who are NPQH graduates?

Around 25,000 individuals have achieved NPQH under the current programme. A significant proportion of these have already moved into headship – around 40 per cent - 50 per cent of all NPQH graduates have become headteachers. The process leading to the award of NPQH is changing in 2008, with the expectation that a greater proportion of graduates will move through to headship more quickly.

Overall, most NPQH graduates are over 40 when they first acquire the qualification. However, 2007 was the first year in which most new graduates were aged under 40.

## Age profile of NPQH graduates on graduation: all graduates (2004–07) and those graduating in 2007<sup>1</sup>



Most NPQH graduates are working in the primary phase, accounting for just under 60 per cent of all graduates. However, this is in contrast with the distribution of actual headteacher posts, of which just under 80 per cent were in the primary phase in 2007.

Analysis of the National College for School Leadership's (NCSL) NPQH database also reveals that:

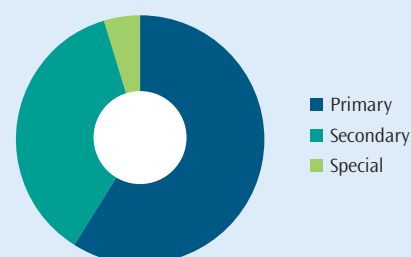
More women hold NPQH than men: about 65 per cent of graduates are female. However, women are still under-represented at senior levels in comparison to the proportion of women in the teaching workforce as a whole.

The data about individuals' job roles when they gain NPQH is complex – however, around 40 per cent of all graduates are deputy headteachers and 20 per cent are assistant headteachers.

The following table shows how regional distributions compare with regional weighting for school and pupil numbers. It shows that NPQH graduates are proportionally under-represented in London and the East of England.

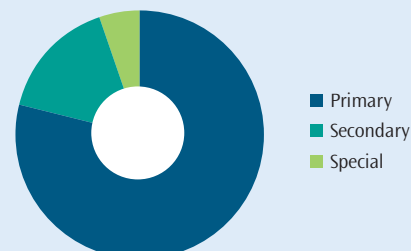
## NPQH Graduates – by phase<sup>1</sup>

(Base: all graduates 2004-07)



## Actual Headships – by phase<sup>2</sup>

(Base: full time headteachers in post 2007)



## Geographical distribution (England): NPQH graduates, schools and school pupils<sup>1,3</sup>

Region	North East	North West	Yorks & Humber	East Midlands	West Midlands	East of England	London	South East	South West
% NPQH graduates (2004–07)	6.9	16.1	10.0	9.1	10.7	9.0	11.5	17.4	9.3
% of school pupils	5.1	14.1	10.3	8.8	11.2	11.1	14.3	15.6	9.6
% of schools	5.7	15.3	10.9	9.9	11.3	12.3	11.9	16.2	11.3

Survey data suggest that for every 100 NPQH Graduates who have not achieved headship...<sup>4</sup>

52 have definite intentions to become a headteacher

38 aim to be a headteacher in the next three years

18 have already made an application and another 11 intend to apply within a year

## How many are applying for headship?

Among deputy headteachers, aspiration towards headship appears to be greatest for those relatively new in their post (that is, up to five years' experience as a deputy) and least for those who have served as a deputy for 10 years or more<sup>9</sup>.

Among NPQH graduates specifically, data suggest that only about 30 per cent of graduates are making applications (or planning to make applications within the year) for headship<sup>4</sup>.

It is clear that not all NPQH graduates are the same. Each graduate is at a different stage on the journey to headship, with some not planning to complete the journey at all.

This underlines the need for a differentiated approach to supporting NPQH graduates.

Wider survey work<sup>5</sup> has explored attitudes to headship among a base group of 1,000 teachers working at all levels, from classroom to leadership level. Teachers within the sample were asked simply 'Do you aspire to be a headteacher?'

- Overall, 32 per cent responded positively while 68 per cent said they had 'no plans at all' or that they 'never' aspired to be head.
- Among classroom teachers, 22 per cent responded 'yes', along with 33 per cent of middle leaders.
- Thirty-four per cent of primary teachers replied positively, compared with 27 per cent of teachers from secondary schools.

## WHAT IF... I focused on those closest to headship?

A targeted approach to support for NPQH graduates ensures that resources are deployed where they can have greatest impact, and also that development opportunities are appropriate to individuals' needs. This table shows how the NPQH graduate group might be broken into three broad target groups, with different packages of support for each.

Target group	Possible interventions
Active job seekers	These candidates are active in the job market. They welcome advice and support on application and interview processes so that they know what to expect. This group can also make good candidates for short-term acting headships if such opportunities become available locally, enabling them to add positive experience to their CV.
No immediate plans for headship	This group is key to boosting the number of candidates for headship in the short term, encouraging talented school leaders to consider taking the step to headship. Interventions for this group may focus on bolstering confidence, eg offering development opportunities which enable candidates to develop their skills in a safe environment. Mentoring, coaching and secondment programmes could all be useful interventions for this group.
Not intending to apply for headship	This group can provide useful intelligence about the perceived barriers to headship in order to inform future succession planning. This group has important professional development needs to be effective members of the school leadership team. Possibilities might include leadership refreshment and renewal programmes and/or finding opportunities for individuals to change role within the school and to take on new responsibilities.



### CASE STUDY – 'NPQH Plus': supporting aspirants heads in London

'NPQH Plus' is a programme developed for those closest to headship in London. It is based around a '24-hour conference' with an overnight stay, offering a range of inputs and group work. The facilitators and programme contributors are all experienced practising headteachers. The programme addresses head-on some of the main concerns of aspiring headteachers: from whole-school resource management, to how to manage an appropriate work-life balance and to how to approach the recruitment process itself. Each event is targeted on groups of around 20 individuals, enabling time for personalised interview sessions to identify individual needs for follow-up support. Following the residential, participants receive ongoing telephone support through the year, again by practising heads.

Participants have responded positively to the events – as shown through formal evaluation. In particular, they appear to value the practical advice and support made available and

the direct input from serving headteachers. Of the initial cohort to have undertaken the programme, one participant has achieved a headship (and attributes this to NPQH Plus), and two others are described as being 'on the way' to achieving their goal.

The fact that practising heads have designed and run the programme is seen as a strength. In particular, ongoing telephone support is a very time-efficient and helpful way to maintain momentum.

You can find sample programme schedules and details of the evaluation online at

[www.ncsl.org.uk/tomorrowsleaderstoday/resource](http://www.ncsl.org.uk/tomorrowsleaderstoday/resource)

### Contact details:

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# What attracts candidates to headship?

Research studies consistently suggest that potential candidates identify the intrinsic rewards of headship as the most appealing aspects of the role.

Extrinsic rewards – pay and benefits – are far less significant factors in potential candidates' assessment of the attractiveness (or otherwise) of headship.

## Top three responses: 'Which aspects of the headteacher role appeal to you?'

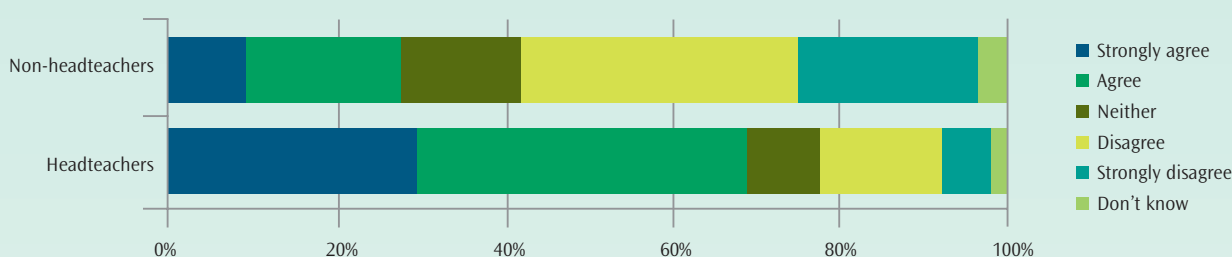
(Survey of 1,000 teachers working at all levels<sup>5</sup>)

Characteristic of headship	% of sample identifying with this characteristic
Opportunity to shape school	97
Opportunity to do something bigger	96
Opportunity to influence children's lives	95

## WHAT IF... I could make the attractive parts of the job more tangible?

There is clear evidence that individuals who experience headship change their attitude towards it. So initiatives that bring aspiring leaders closer to the reality of headship can have a positive impact, providing potential headship candidates with solid information to counter anticipation of headship. Such programmes – as in Gloucestershire, for example – have been evaluated to demonstrate a measurable impact on attitudes towards headship.

### Level of agreement with statement: 'Being a headteacher is the best job in the world'<sup>6</sup>



### CASE STUDY – The South Gloucestershire Leadership Academy Tomorrow's Leaders Today programme

South Gloucestershire is an authority with 16 secondary schools, three special schools, one pupil referral unit (PRU) and 94 primary schools. Over the past four years, the authority has developed its own Leadership Academy, a dynamic 'virtual' academy with a series of vibrant professional learning communities. The Academy involves enquiry groups (with publications), coaching and mentoring provision, international experiences, programmes, events, online resources and blogs.

The Academy's work is supported by a stewardship group of leaders from across the service and within schools.

It is underpinned by a set of beliefs:

- leaders should be inspired to extend their own leadership practices and then to distribute the learning at all levels;
- leaders at all levels are equal partners in developing excellence;
- all leaders will be able to collaborate, to network their learning and thinking;
- leadership should be informed by research, critical reflection and dialogue.

The Tomorrow's Leaders Today programme is one of the offerings in the Leadership Academy. Its purpose is:

- to identify and support talented middle leaders who are aspiring to a senior post;
- to ensure their effective transition into senior leadership, through a structured and supported programme;
- to pilot a model, which can offer a sustainable approach to successful planning in our South Gloucestershire schools.

The programme spans two years. The first year comprises a number of leadership development days and a two-week 'internship' in another school. The second year is based on a 12-month senior leadership team experience. South Gloucestershire has been able to develop this programme as part of its work on succession planning and leadership by harnessing the efforts of headteachers, adding some key external support.

Full details can be found at [www.leadersoflearning.net/leaders/TomorrowsLeadersToday.htm](http://www.leadersoflearning.net/leaders/TomorrowsLeadersToday.htm)

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[www.leadersoflearning.net/leaders/leaders\\_academy.htm](http://www.leadersoflearning.net/leaders/leaders_academy.htm)

## What deters NPQH graduates?

Survey data suggest that for every 100 NPQH graduates who have not yet reached headship, 14 say they have no plans to apply for headship at any stage. A further 23 say they may possibly consider applying at some future stage. If just eight of this latter group could be persuaded to overcome their reservations and enter the recruitment market, it would be equivalent to over 1,000 additional candidates for headship at national level.

A range of studies has consistently highlighted potential candidates' concerns about 'work-life balance' as the most significant perceived barrier to entry to the headship recruitment market<sup>7</sup>.

Data also suggest that current headteachers may be able to play a more significant role in creating a pipeline of aspirant headteachers for the future. While the majority of teachers in one survey said that they found their current headteacher "inspiring", far fewer say that their head inspired them to consider headship for themselves.

### Percentage of teachers agreeing with the following statements<sup>5</sup>

	Primary	Secondary	Overall
"I find my current head inspiring"	75%	67%	71%
"My current head inspires me to consider headship for myself"	40%	29%	35%

## WHAT IF... I could encourage more to become candidates?

NPQH graduates' most common concern focuses on work-life balance issues. Once appointed, however, new headteachers report extremely high levels of job satisfaction. This suggests a perception gap between NPQH graduates' anticipation of headship and the reality.

When asked what might help them develop their careers, NPQH graduates signal a preference for personalised practical help, selecting options such as 'someone in my area to talk about career progression'. In general, graduates are less interested in undifferentiated information, such as case studies of what it is like to be a headteacher. Such options rated as low priorities in one survey<sup>1</sup>.

It is no surprise, then, that interventions which appear to have the greatest impact are those which prospective candidates are able to drive personally. NPQH graduates appear to value most:

- opportunities to link with other prospective headteachers;
- opportunities to develop ideas with a current headteacher as a coach or mentor;
- personalised support to help develop a wider, strategic perspective.

All of these interventions are designed to help close the perception gap between candidates' concerns about headship and the reality of life as a headteacher.

## NPQH graduates<sup>4</sup> – Top five concerns, in rank order

### What concerns do you have about progressing your career?

- 1 I am concerned that the next rung on the career ladder will inhibit my work-life balance
- 2 I may need to move out of the area to find the right role
- 3 I like teaching and pupil contact and I'm concerned I will lose this
- 4 I haven't got enough experience to apply for the next job up
- 5 I don't want to take on more responsibility



### CASE STUDY – Hampshire Future Change Makers

Future Change Makers is one of a range of initiatives being developed by Hampshire County Council in partnership with NCSL to help ensure the availability of high quality school leaders. The programme, consisting of six core days between February and November, was piloted during 2007. It was led by someone with a national reputation in educational leadership, together with a number of Hampshire headteacher facilitators, and had 29 delegates from all sectors. These delegates represented a mixture of roles and experience: teachers, middle leaders, assistant and deputy heads. It was externally evaluated, which provided an opportunity to assess the success of the programme and highlight some points for further development. As part of the evaluation, delegates were asked, at the start and finish of the programme, about their future career intentions. As the table below suggests, there is potential for a programme of this kind to have a positive influence on building aspirations.

	Likely to seek headship		Undecided or not likely to seek headship	
	Before the programme	After the programme	Before the programme	After the programme
Primary	50%	95%	50%	5%
Secondary	60%	88%	40%	13%

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# Where do NPQH graduates feel least confident?

In 2007 NCSL invited NPQH graduates who were planning to apply for headship to self-evaluate their readiness for the role. These graduates felt least confident in securing budget and financial accountabilities – and ‘strengthening community’. They felt most confident around the competencies associated with ‘shaping the future’ and ‘leading learning and teaching’. These perceptions were confirmed by subsequent external assessment.

The most common anxieties cited by graduates in relation to the recruitment process were:

- uncertainty about the type of interview questions used at headship interview;
- a perception that a lack of budget and finance experience was holding them back;
- a lack of confidence that affected their overall performance.

External assessment suggested that most graduates found it difficult to provide well-constructed responses in answer to competency-based interview questions.

## WHAT IF... I provided support for candidates?

Aspirant headteachers (that is, those currently or about to apply for headship) appear to value practical help and support with the headship application and interview process itself.

The application and assessment process for headship can be radically different to the recruitment practices used at lower rungs of the school leadership career ladder, catching some candidates by surprise. As a result, some candidates may perform below their potential at initial interviews, having been uncertain what to expect. In these cases, first interviews are wasted as (in effect) practice runs, and may damage a candidate’s confidence and credibility in the process.

Among the resources offered to candidates by NCSL, those focused on application and interview technique are the most popular, suggesting scope to further develop such options locally.



### CASE STUDY Warwickshire County Council

After identifying a lack of awareness about the recruitment and selection process among their NPQH graduates, the team at Warwickshire County Council designed and ran a workshop focusing specifically on preparing individuals for application and interview for headship. The workshop takes a practical approach to: using background information effectively in preparing an application; writing letters of application; and tackling presentation tasks. The workshop includes mock interviews (with feedback) for candidates.

Rather than providing ‘set answers’, the workshop aims to develop awareness of the process of headteacher recruitment and improve skills. Those leading the workshop seek to build participants’ confidence in being themselves.

Although too early to assess impact, Warwickshire now has a list of potential ‘acting heads’ for the authority and is keeping in touch with participants.

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### CASE STUDY – Birmingham Catholic Archdiocese: building confidence for the selection process

A more intensive version of this programme is run by the Birmingham Catholic Archdiocese. Called ‘Take 4’, it takes only four participants on each workshop and, as one feature, enables participants to ‘eavesdrop’ the advisers’ discussion of candidates following a mock interview. Participants found enormous value in that part of the process in particular, as well as being able to observe others in order to benchmark their own performance.

The key learning points from both programmes include:

- Don’t under-estimate how little is known about the headteacher recruitment and selection process.
- Don’t aim to give people the answers.
- Aim to build on existing strengths and knowledge, to develop self-confidence.
- Local authorities need a mechanism for getting to people who might have gained NPQH outside the authority but are now working within it.
- Keep in contact with NPQH graduates who are taking a break (possibly a career break).

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Margaret Buck, Deputy Director of Schools Commission, Birmingham (buck@bdsc.org.uk)

# NCSL support for NPQH graduates

## NCSL resources

NCSL resources are available to all aspiring heads on NCSL's website, including a publication about how to prepare for an interview and selection centre ('Career Moves'), short video clips from governors on what they are looking for at headship and interactive resources to help candidates identify their development requirements which can be personalised to individual needs. These are available in the section for 'aspiring heads' at [www.ncsl.org.uk/tomorrowsleaderstoday](http://www.ncsl.org.uk/tomorrowsleaderstoday)

The Be a Head programme provides support to help candidates progress towards headship at the time they need it most. With regular newsletters, comprehensive information packs, a chance to put questions to a headteacher about the role and in-depth online support, this free programme provides a wealth of information to help build candidate confidence. To register for Be a Head, candidates should complete the survey at [www.ncsl.org.uk/beahead](http://www.ncsl.org.uk/beahead)



## CASE STUDY

### NCSL targeted support for local authorities

NCSL is working with 66 local authorities who face particular challenges in recruiting headteachers. Each of these local authorities have a combination of high re-advertisement rates, high proportions of faith schools, large numbers of pupils eligible for free school meals and high housing prices. This targeted support is intended to increase the number of suitable headship candidates locally, and to progress targeted NPQH graduates towards their first headship. More information about targeted support for NPQH graduates is available at [www.ncsl.org.uk/tomorrowsleaderstoday/partners/partners-support.cfm](http://www.ncsl.org.uk/tomorrowsleaderstoday/partners/partners-support.cfm)

## NPQH redesign

Headship has changed significantly since NPQH was last remodelled in 2000. As a result, NCSL is creating a more personalised and flexible structure for aspiring headteachers with a redesigned NPQH programme. As a key feature of NCSL's succession planning strategy, the proposed revisions to NPQH aim to make three main contributions:

- to improve the quality of applicants to headship
- to move graduates rapidly to headship
- to improve conversion rates to headship.

In particular, a more robust and rigorous entry assessment and development process will recruit only those genuinely seeking headship who demonstrate capability and readiness for the role.

The new programme is being rolled out in 2008. Full details are at [www.ncsl.org.uk/npqh](http://www.ncsl.org.uk/npqh)

## Sources

- 1 NCSL, NPQH Programme Database, Nottingham, NCSL
- 2 ONS (Office for National Statistics), 2007, School Workforce in England, April, London, ONS
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- 5 ICM, 2007, The Headship Index, September-October, ICM for NCSL
- 6 EdComms, 2006, NCSL Opinion Survey, EdComms for NCSL
- 7 PWC (PricewaterhouseCoopers) and DfES (Department for Education and Skills), 2007, Independent Study into School Leadership, London, PWC for DfES
- 8 Mori, 2005, Follow-Up Research into the State of School Leadership in England, London, Mori Social Research Institute

# What are we learning about... NPQH graduates?

### About this guide

This guide examines what we know about aspiring headteachers and NPQH (National Professional Qualification for Headship) graduates in particular. Although the information may be of interest to individual school leaders and governing bodies, it is designed for people who work across schools in local authorities, dioceses and other local partnerships to secure enough high calibre school leaders.

#### The guide asks four key questions:

- Who are NPQH graduates and what do we know about their motivations?
- How many NPQH graduates are applying for headship and how can we target effort on those most likely to become headteachers?
- What attracts candidates to headship?
- What deters NPQH graduates from applying for headship, and how can we help candidates overcome those barriers?

The guide explores some of the facts and figures to help succession planners develop their own answers to these questions and brings together key intelligence about NPQH graduates to inform local strategy.

A range of additional online resources, which includes more case studies and practical tools, are available at [www.ncsl.org.uk/tomorrowsleaderstoday/resource](http://www.ncsl.org.uk/tomorrowsleaderstoday/resource)

### Evidence into Practice Guides

This is one in a series of guides that share intelligence and insights into the leadership succession challenge facing schools. Guides will be published during 2008 and 2009 as local strategy develops and can be downloaded from

[www.ncsl.org.uk/tomorrowsleaderstoday/resource](http://www.ncsl.org.uk/tomorrowsleaderstoday/resource)

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