

SCEL Fellowship Programme  
Area of Enquiry

# Leadership Succession in a semi-rural Local Authority

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**SCEL**

Scottish College for  
Educational Leadership

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### Introduction

This enquiry has been completed as part of Scottish College for Educational Leadership (SCEL) Fellowship Programme Cohort 2 to provide recommendations on leadership succession for Aberdeenshire Council.

My engagement in the SCEL Fellowship Programme has encompassed the model of professional learning (GTCS, online a). Leadership succession tends to generate short-term solutions involving training and recruitment and, initially, I shared this view. The main barrier that I have encountered is a belief that 'leadership development' is the panacea to all the ills of public services without an understanding of the concepts of 'leadership' or 'development'. Engagement with research during the SCEL Fellowship programme has enabled me to identify this as a wicked problem. "The leader's role with a Wicked Problem is to ask the *right* questions rather than to provide the *right* answers" (Grint, 2005:1473). By increasing my understanding of systems leadership I recognised that any solution would encompass schools, local authorities and national bodies. Interaction with policy makers and opinion formers developed my knowledge of change at national level both in terms of possibilities and constraints. Collaboration with fellowship participants, SCEL staff and senior leaders facilitated by coaching and academic support has provided a space to explore ideas and test developing knowledge. I believe that this has enabled me to think deeply about leadership as *the* keystone in improving outcomes for young people. Overall, my involvement in the programme has increased my commitment to making a difference through system leadership.

### Background

Over the past 20 years school leadership as a route to educational improvement has become a key area for education professionals, academics and governments. Developments include the Standard for Headship, Scottish Qualification for Headship, continuing professional development (CPD) for educational leaders including a focus on leadership at the Scottish Learning Festival, the Flexible Route to Headship, Into Headship and national leadership summer schools.

The Scottish Government invited Graham Donaldson to review teacher development and the outcome was a report 'Teaching Scotland's Future' (Scottish Government, 2011). This confirmed the view that the two most important ways in which school education can be improved are "firstly, the quality of teaching, and secondly, the quality of leadership" (Scottish Government, 2011: 2). Teaching Scotland's Future affirmed the need to revise the

Professional Standards. The GTC Scotland Framework of Professional Standards (GTCS, online b) has been revised in the light of changing contexts within education and society. The Standards for Leadership and Management were extended from the previous Standard for Headship to include a standards Career-Long Professional Learning and Middle Leadership, as well as the Standard for Headship. The intention was to meet the needs of all teachers in, or aspiring to, formal leadership roles in our schools.

Teaching Scotland's Future recommended the establishment of a college that would support leadership development at all levels for education practitioners across Scotland. Working with partners, the Scottish College for Educational Leadership aspires to bring a coherent approach to leadership development across Scotland. SCEL has coordinated the development of the Into Headship programme that will be mandatory for all new head teachers appointed in and after session 2018-19. The Framework for Leadership, launched in October 2015, re-emphasised the importance of developing leadership at all levels and provided support to teachers.

### Local Context

Aberdeenshire Council is categorised as a semi-rural/rural local authority. There are 38,500 pupils in 151 primary schools and 17 secondary schools. The authority employs approximately 3,500 teachers in 2,850 full time equivalent posts. Aberdeenshire Council Education and Children's Services has a budget of £260M.

Aberdeenshire Council figures for 2015 indicate that there are currently:

- 13 head teachers who are eligible to retire.
- 47 who can retire in the next 4 years.
- 58 who can retire in the next 5 years.
- An average of 1.4 adverts or campaigns per post were needed. Every other head teacher post required second advert to attract a suitable candidate.
- Leadership qualification.
  - Three secondary and one primary teacher undertaking Into Headship. 21 teachers are undertaking a headship programme (FRH,SQH)
  - 43 teachers have attained the Standard for Headship. The majority are currently in head teacher posts.

- Local authority opinion is that formal qualifications restrict head teacher recruitment. (Scottish Parliament, 2015)

This is not an isolated or local phenomena. In Scotland over 30% (716/2546) of all head teachers are over 55. Highland Council announced, in October 2015, that it would create 50 multiple school head teacher posts due to the shortage of suitable applicants for posts. OECD (2008) reported that 15 out of 22 countries reported a lack of suitable applicants for leadership positions. The following are adverse to recruitment.

Housing costs.

- An additional 50% increase above the Scottish average increase in house prices.
- Supply of new houses, in particular affordable housing, has fallen short of requirement year-on-year.
- Rental prices had shown a 40% increase from 2010 to 2014 (4 times the Scottish average).
- This limits affordability to those in the upper quartile of household incomes.

(Aberdeen City and Regional Deal, 2015)

Remoteness

- Despite good rail and road links to central Scotland and an international airport in Aberdeen, Teachers living and working in the central belt consider that Aberdeenshire is remote.

In response to these issues Aberdeenshire Council has adopted a recruitment tactic of extensive use of social media publicising the high quality of life in the area, offered an £8,000 recruitment and relocation package to all teachers and support in finding suitable affordable housing.

Bottoms (2010) stated that a feature of highly effective US school districts was a strategy to develop their own school leaders. These districts had integrated succession planning into their ways of working. Studies in business have also found that companies that promote from within have outperformed the market, whether the company had high performance or poor prior performance. (Bower, 2007).

Consequently, rural and semi-rural authorities should rely more on growing their own leaders.

## Literature Review

The requirement for high quality leaders (HQL) will increase due to worldwide trends impacting on education. OECD (2008) reported that moves to increase autonomy and decentralisation had been accompanied by an increase in accountability for attainment and performance. In *Leadership 2030* (Hay Group, online) noted that the demands on senior leaders at an emotional, cognitive and behavioural level will be higher than ever.

Leaders will need to be:

- competent conceptual and strategic thinkers;
- able to engender loyalty by showing integrity, an openness to both people and ideas;
- able manage through influence;
- able to coach, mentor and mediate and by doing so be able to support increasingly diverse teams of staff, students, parents and communities;
- willing to engage in system leadership and relinquish power as they collaborate with partners;
- able to supporting individualism while maintaining a focus on core purposes.

Fink (2011) recognised the need for the concept of a leadership *pipeline*; nurturing groups of teachers with the necessary leadership qualifications to progress through middle to senior levels. He also argued for a larger *pool* of teachers with formal leadership experiences some of whom will enter the pipeline. An even larger *reservoir* of teachers who are willing and able to undertake informal leadership positions and given suitable opportunities and support will take on formal roles. In this context formal leadership roles are those associated with a responsibility to line manage other teachers. This is usually a position in a promoted post structure, such as principal teacher or depute head teacher.

Murphy (2007) identified issues relating to both organisational structures and professional cultures that were barriers to leadership development in schools. The hierarchical structure of schools resists changing the norms, defends itself and tends to be self-perpetuating. In addition this hierarchy can be comforting for un-promoted teachers as there is someone else to find the funds, raise concerns and take responsibility. Teachers identified a clear divide between teaching and administration and further that a leadership role will comprise the teachers' capacity to have an impact in the classroom. Finally, there is a strong egalitarian

belief amongst teachers that they hold equal positions and those who take on leadership roles are setting themselves up as the experts.

Anderson *et al* (2011) reported that formally qualified teachers were unwilling to be head teachers and identified key factors including lack of training and unachievable demands of the role. In a study of middle-career teachers Stone-Johnson (2014) examined the generational aspect of senior leadership rather than the job factors. The reasons cited for not being attracted to a leadership post included moving away from the students where they had greater autonomy and capacity to influence. The post was seen as administrative, bureaucratic, hierarchical, having long hours and being stressful. Stone-Johnson (2104) argues that unlike an older generation that valued job security as remaining in one organisation and climbing the career ladder the current generation of teachers valued balance, freedom and flexibility. “Even with changed job descriptions many teachers do not wish to become principals. They will assume leadership roles but not the general leadership of a school” (Stone-Johnson, 2014, p. 620). In addition job redesign may not be the answer:

We must also understand that the next generation of teachers will also likely have different aspects on which they place greatest weight. The implications of this understanding is that moving to a model such as job redesign might work for the current crop of educators, but will likely not endure the next generation. (Stone-Johnson, 2014, p. 620).

When considering selection of aspiring leaders both Newton *et al* (2013) and Fink and Brayman (2006) referenced Wenger’s (1999) work on career trajectories to analyse career progression towards headship. Newton *et al* (2013) warns that succession plans that rely largely on those who have aspirations to headship, termed ‘inbound trajectory’, can exclude those who have appropriate qualities but at this stage do not aspire to the role. These teachers, who Wenger terms ‘insider trajectories’ will grow and develop over time. Generational trends, discussed elsewhere, suggest that the number of teachers with self-identified inbound trajectories is declining while the number with insider trajectories is increasing.

If we are to develop the large number of leaders who may populate a *pool* of potential leaders then we must develop a *reservoir* of teacher leaders. Newton (2012) examined the impact of a leadership development programme containing elements of coaching, servant leadership (Spears 2000) and adult education. This was embedded in a program designed to increase use of ICT in classrooms. Participants developed their leadership skills and increased their willingness to take on leadership roles. Practical experience of leadership led participants to see themselves as leaders, increased their sense of self efficacy and resulted in them forming the view that formal leadership roles were an extension of learning and teaching. In return the raised visibility created by their involvement raised their profiles and made them viable

candidates for formal leadership positions. “Teacher leadership is not primarily viewed as a mechanism to increase the formal leadership pool, but this is a significant side benefit of meaningful teacher leadership programs” (Newton 2012: 43). Teacher leadership is one component of Stoll’s (2015) triad of partnership, professional development and leadership. “They cannot be separated - they are mutually influential and independent. Pedagogy is at the core and the leadership and development are there to ensure that the pedagogy is great” (Stoll, 2015: 8).

Dimensions of effective succession-planning programmes and recommendations

The previous literature review and analysis of studies and reports in the in the US, Australia, UK and Canada contain a number of common themes and these are reflected in this section of the report. OECD (2012, 2014), Russell and Sabina (2014), Australian Institute of Teaching and School Leadership (2015), Australian National Catholic University (2010), Schimdt-Davis and Bottoms ( 2010, 2011), Ontario Institute for Educational Leadership (2008), Council of Ontario Directors of Education (2012) and National College for School Leadership (2006, online) yields the following dimensions and recommendations regarding leader development.

**1. Support effective Professional Review and Development (PRD)**

Self-reflection and self-evaluation against professional standards and commitment to PRD is at the heart of leadership development resulting in learning being matched to individual need, professional development and context.

**All head teachers to be competent in non-directive coaching techniques.**



GTCS Self Evaluation Process (GTCS, online c)

## 2. Cultural Change

Effective programmes to promote and develop teacher leadership are essential for both school improvement and leadership succession. Senior leaders must aim for long term cultural change that is supported and sustained over time.

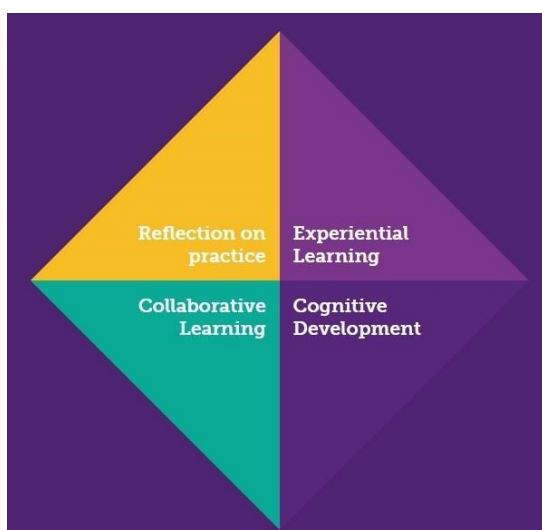
This should:

- emphasise the centrality of professional learning to school improvement;
- ensure that the intended impact of improvement is shared;
- develop a culture of trust;
- distribute leadership;
- develop a common language of learning and leadership;
- enable teachers undertake systems leadership by working across and between schools and authorities.

**Ensure that a culture is established that promotes teacher leadership**

## 3. Develop leadership development programmes

Develop a range of programmes at teacher leadership and middle leadership that reflect the appropriate professional standard using the Model of Professional Development (GTCS, online a) and articulate with the Framework for Educational Leadership (SCEL, 2015).



Model of professional learning. (GTCS, online a)



Programmes should include not only technical skills and knowledge but also behaviours and attitudes to develop individual confidence, competence and resilience. Leadership development should be seen as a continuum with a shifting balance between traditional higher education course work and work-based development. There should always be a balance in favour of authentic work-based practice giving participants opportunities for extended and challenging learning. Programmes should exploit opportunities provided by leadership programmes offered to other employees at a similar level within the local authority and, if possible between authorities as this will develop system leadership.

Programme features should include elements that develop:

- instructional leadership that improves the quality of learning and teaching based upon effective evaluation;
- complex leadership skills intended to shared vision and values, building capacity and interpersonal skills;
- management and technical skills;
- system leadership creating opportunities for participants to lead across and between schools and authorities;
- an understanding of the principles of adult learning (Jensen et al., 2015);
- peer learning, coaching and feedback.

In addition

- accreditation by higher education institutions should be offered but such accreditation must not create an additional barrier to participation;
- successful involvement in such activities should also form part of the selection processes for further development or head teacher posts;
- programmes should be developed between authorities.

**Develop programmes of learning as suggested above.**

#### **4. Talent identification**

There has been a reluctance to identify teachers with potential to lead because of concerns about 'cronyism and favouritism' and 'cloning' that can lead to exclusion of minorities and on gender. Therefore an open transparent succession process that is based on clear understood selection criteria is essential. Potential leaders would be nominated or self-referred. Appropriate selection tools should be developed to assess candidates against the relevant professional standards and provide evidence of leadership roles and identify potential to develop. Such a selection process would allow allocation of resources to be targeted. Clear selection criteria means that teachers know where they are in terms of a leadership journey. This will enable individuals to identify those areas of leadership, management and technical skills that require further development. This should be linked to the Framework for Educational Leadership (SCEL 2015).

**Develop an open and transparent selection process using appropriate tools for entry to and progression through development programmes.**

#### **5. Roles in the Succession Planning Process**

Everyone in a formal leadership position has a responsibility for developing leadership. A universal expectation is of a development-orientated culture at all levels. Those aspiring or with the potential to undertake formal leadership roles will be directed to suitable professional learning opportunities.

Head Teachers and senior leaders in the authority must take ownership of the leadership succession programmes. These groups must show a personal commitment to the leadership programme by allocating finance, time and energy into the selection process, programme delivery, evaluation and programme improvement. Fullan (2008:17) states:

Great leaders develop those around them at a fast rate and in high numbers, so much so that the organisation cannot absorb them soon enough. Stated differently, leaders who develop leaders provide a farm system for other organisations. It may be frustrating to groom internal leaders only to have them leave early for other leadership position, but in public schools, especially, helping to develop leadership for the system as a whole is an immediate form of legacy leaving.

**Clarify roles and expectations in the succession planning process**

## **Conclusion**

An effective leadership succession pathway will result in:

- clearly understood leadership pathways and programmes that support personal and professional growth and development;
- school and local authority leaders actively involved in developing a culture of leadership and committing to support leadership programmes;
- school leadership change being effectively managed;
- positions being filled by high performing leaders.

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