

## **Recruitment and Retention of Headteachers in Scotland**

John MacBeath, Peter Gronn, Darleen Opfer, Kevin Lowden, Christine Forde, Mike Cowie,  
Jim O'Brien

### **Abstract**

This paper reports on a study funded by the Scottish Government between December 2007 and July 2009. Its purpose was to explore the issues of recruitment and retention of headteachers in Scotland and to make recommendations to the Scottish Government.

The context for the study was a growing international concern about recruitment and retention of high quality school leaders internationally. The background to this initiative was evidence from a number of countries that the high profile, high stakes and intensity of leadership had led to problems of identifying aspirants to that role. Research tools were shared with parallel programmes in the U.S., Denmark, Norway and Sweden.

The four research questions:

1. What prompts teachers to seek to become head teachers and what barriers do they face?
2. What do head teachers think about their role? What keeps them in post and what might make them leave or change direction?
3. What arrangements, approaches and policies have been adopted by local authorities and central government for succession planning, identifying early leadership potential and training and development?
4. Why do some teachers not aspire to headships and is there anything that could change their views?

1218 teachers and 1137 headteachers responded to two surveys. Follow up interviews were conducted with a representative sample of 47 headteachers, 9 local authorities, 28 non-aspirant deputes and potential heads, and 18 aspirant teachers/deputes.

Only eight per cent of teachers surveyed saw their eventual career destination as headteacher, with 72 per cent saying their aspirations to headship were unlikely to change in the future. A key explanatory factor was the emotionally demanding nature of headship - a concern for nearly 70 per cent of the headteacher sample, with 72 per cent concerned about the job's impact on their lives outside of work. A further 72 per cent of heads said "public grading of

school performance” was a concern, with potential exposure to litigation appearing to be an emerging issue.

The report, published in November 2009, makes 28 recommendations with regard to a more collegial relationship among schools, local authorities and government bodies, including the Inspectorate.