



The Wiltshire Headteacher Mentoring Scheme: An evaluative report with recommendations

Commissioned by the Executive Group of the
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Children and Education, Wiltshire Council

Dr Fiona Maine, July 2010

Acknowledgements

I wish to thank all the headteachers of Wiltshire who so willingly took time to engage with this research. Knowing how busy the life of a headteacher is, it is testament to the commitment that the heads have to this scheme and to supporting each other.

Dr Fiona Maine July 2010

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Introduction

The Wiltshire Mentoring Scheme is a well established mentoring programme for headteachers new in post. It offers a free service whereby mentee heads engage in a mentoring relationship with another head over the course of a year. The rationale for the scheme is 'to enable a headteachers to feel comfortable and supported in the first year of their new post through a professional relationship with a colleague headteacher' (Wiltshire Council 2009). Newly appointed heads are sent a handbook outlining the programme and invited to choose a mentor that they think will be suitable based on profiles. There is guidance for process with the expectation that termly meetings will occur over the first year, with an optional two further meetings in the second year of the role. The local authority funds release time for partnerships to meet. The scheme has a built in evaluation structure but in order to gain a more systematic overview of its benefits and worth, Bath Spa University was approached to undertake a detailed, independent evaluation.

In a climate where there is much pressure on public services to not only be accountable for spending, but to make some quite drastic cuts, this review is timely. Furthermore, a national initiative by the National College, 'Head Start Professional Partners', (National College, 2010) has been piloted and arguably provides a similar service. The key difference is that the Wiltshire scheme accommodates all new headship appointments, not just first time headteachers, reflecting a particular philosophy about peer support, professional development and the benefits of learning together.

This review sets out to discover the impact on both mentee and mentor heads in Wiltshire, comparing findings with wider research and underpinning theory about mentoring.

Literature Review

This brief literature review does not set out to examine the nature of mentoring per se, but to draw on the experience of other research and theory to illuminate the findings in Wiltshire. There are several key areas of research interest which are relevant: the role the mentor takes, the relationship between mentor and mentee, factors affecting the success of mentoring partnerships and ultimately the benefits to both parties of being involved.

Mentoring is,

‘... off-line help by one person to another in making significant transitions in knowledge, work or thinking’ (Megginson et al, 2006)

A more reflective definition from Garvey and colleagues looks broadly at both coaching and mentoring as offering, ‘the potential, at least, to create new mindsets and therefore the opportunity for people to think new thoughts, create new organisational structure and develop different, more tolerant behaviours’ (Garvey et al 2009: 222)

Further to this, Connor and Pokora (2007) argue:

‘Both activities help people to take charge of their own development. The coaching or mentoring relationship facilitates insight, learning and change. Through this relationship, potential is identified, possibilities become reality and tangible results are delivered.’ (2007:11)

In the case of the Wiltshire scheme, the transition is the move into a new headship post and the style of mentoring involved is defined by Megginson *et al.* as ‘developmental’ with the emphasis on the mentee to move their own development forward. However, whereas the concept of the mentor might classically involve a ‘more experienced’ professional, the inclusion of all new headship posts in the scheme for Wiltshire identifies it as more of a ‘peer mentoring’ (Tomlinson, 2002) approach. The additional experience of the mentor might be knowledge about the local authority, or perhaps size or type of school. The importance in the scheme is that the mentee chooses the experience that they feel most appropriate, or receive additional guidance to do so (Wiltshire Council, 2009: 2).

Of course, it is not just the relevant experience of the mentor that is important. The relationship between mentor and mentee is a focus of much research and theory, and as a result features prominently in the design of the research. In 2005, Hobson and Sharp conducted a systematic review of studies which had focused on the mentoring of new headteachers. They did not clearly identify if their study included schemes like Wiltshire’s

which were broader than the induction of those new to headship, but their findings did show that the development of the relationship between mentor and mentee is crucial. In particular, they found that heads 'identified descriptors suggesting two way relationships, such as 'mutual learning' and collaboration', with over two-thirds of the mentors indicating that the term 'peer-support' was 'very appropriate' (Hobson and Sharp, 2005: 33). Hawkins and Smith (2006) also highlight the inter-subjective nature of the coaching or mentoring relationship. They suggest that the learning happens in parallel, in and through the relationship and this means that:

- the learning is always interpersonal;
- it requires both parties to be fully engaged and able to stand back and reflect;
- it is an inquiry in search of greater possibilities not a search for 'the truth';
- that new ways forward are co-created;
- any new understanding that emerges is always partial and requires further engagement to test the limits of its usefulness;
- it involves a transformation of the current relationship in the service of greater relational capability in work beyond the room.

(Hawkins and Smith, 2006: 6)

Thus it can be expected that the benefits of being involved in a mentoring relationship are not just for the mentee, but also for the mentor. The development of the relationship is important for both parties (Hobson and Sharp, 2005; Megginson *et al.*, 2006; Brockbank and McGill), in particular the 'redefinition' of the relationship at the end of the programme into a less formal friendship.

The role that the mentor takes is also a key feature of research around mentoring. The Hobson and Sharp study (most relevant because it looked specifically at new headteacher programmes) cites the work of Malderez and Bodoczky in identifying key roles, in particular those of model, *acculturator*, *sponsor*, *provider of support* and *educator* (which draws on a coaching approach). They acknowledge that the dynamic between head teachers may vary from this, as the traditional expert/novice relationship (Hobson and Sharp, 2005; 26) is not at the fore.

Finally, much as been written about factors for success in different mentoring approaches. For Megginson *et al.* (2006), the most important factor is that of voluntarism, not just being involved in the process, but in choosing a partner. For Wiltshire local authority, the use of the handbook allows this 'choice' and of course, not all newly appointed headteachers involve themselves in the scheme, expressing their choice by not opting in. In 2009/10 the

year from which the data was drawn, seven new heads declined to take part. Of these, five were in their second or subsequent headship and the other two were already receiving substantive support due to issues that were ongoing in their schools and felt that they did not need another person supporting them (Team Leader for the Leadership Support Team, 2010).

The second feature of success is training. Schemes where mentors are given training about the role are more successful, and the greatest success is shown where both mentors and mentees are engaged in training (in some cases together). The fact that support is ongoing also features as a success factor. Building in regular meetings over time is shown as a success criterion. The importance of matching is highlighted by Megginson *et al.* and Hobson and Sharp. The former suggest that a 'no fault divorce clause' is beneficial (2006, 33). Hobson and Sharp also stressed that the provision to change mentors was necessary. In addition, the establishment of ground rules (often called a 'contract') and the agenda being driven by the mentee are recorded as essential in successful programmes.

In addition, specifically related to research about headteacher mentoring schemes, Hobson and Sharp identify two additional main factors which were likely to impact on the success of the scheme: firstly, the availability of time and the importance of regular and structured meetings, and secondly, the qualities and attributes of the mentors themselves. They cite research by Grover (1994) who defined the most effective mentors as 'knowledgeable, experienced, supportive, flexible, accessible and trustworthy' (Hobson and Sharp, 2006: 37).

Lastly, programmes which were subject to continuing review, both between the mentor and mentee, but also the programme as a whole, were deemed more successful.

The resulting research design drew not only on the evidence and previous research then, but also used findings from previous studies to shape the areas for exploration. The findings section of the report links the experiences of the Wiltshire headteachers to others involved in mentoring situations as referred to in the background literature.

Research Design

The research was undertaken using a qualitative, interpretivist approach which emphasises the importance of meanings and the expression of values by research participants. Two questionnaires were developed (one for mentors and one for mentees). The questionnaires (Appendix A and B) contained both closed quantitative questions and more open ended qualitative text boxes. These were produced as electronic Word (Microsoft 2007) forms, and produced in a format which was multi-platform.

Both questionnaires were piloted. The questionnaire for mentees was sent to three headteachers who had received mentoring in the past, but not in the current year. The questionnaire for mentors was piloted by members of the County Executive Group.

The County Executive Group decided that the data set for the research would be mentors and mentees who had engaged in the programme in the academic year 2009-2010. Although not all of the partnerships would have been completed, it was felt that all heads would have had enough experience of the process to be able to comment upon it. This, of course would impact on questions relating to ongoing, or development of, relationships.

As a result twenty-three mentee and nineteen mentor heads were included in the study. Each headteacher was then contacted by telephone to explain the purpose of the study, and to pre-warn them that an electronic questionnaire would be arriving via email. As headteachers are extremely busy professionals, this was felt necessary to familiarise them with the process and to ensure that they did not dismiss the email without reading it. 55% of headteachers were spoken to directly, and in all other cases a conversation was conducted with the school administrator who assured that the email containing the questionnaire would be highlighted. This resulted in an 81% questionnaire response, which is exceptionally high.

The email also contained an introduction to the research (Appendix C) and clearly stated that not only would responses be entirely confidential, but that headteachers should not feel pressured to respond and should only participate if they felt it appropriate. The headteachers were given a three week response time, and a further prompt was sent out a week before the stated deadline for returns.

As the executive Group had expressed a wish that the Wiltshire Scheme should be compared to the newly piloted National College Head Start initiative involving Professional Partners, a 30 minute telephone interview was also conducted with one of the twelve headteachers who had been part of the pilot programme as a professional partner.

Findings

Expectations and motivations

Mentees

Out of twenty three mentees that were invited to participate, eighteen did so. Of these, twelve were in their first headship role, five were in their second, and one was more experienced. This is interesting as it shows that heads did not just see this as a service for new headteachers, but as an important part of taking up a new role. Of the five mentees who chose not to participate, two were in partnerships where their mentor also declined to respond.

Mentors

Out of nineteen mentors that were invited to participate in the evaluation, sixteen did so. Of these, eleven had engaged in the role between two and five times, and four more than five times. Only one mentor was a novice in the role.

Of the three mentors who did not respond, only one was the partner of a mentee who responded. The fact that in the main, both mentors and mentees from a partnership responded is useful as it means that comparisons (about relationships and the role) can be drawn. Did the mentors and mentees perceive the same issues as important? How did they differ in the way that they perceived the role?

Mentor motivations for being involved.

The mentors were asked what their motivations were for becoming involved in the scheme. The first point that became noticeable in the responses was that many of the mentor heads made references to the fact that they would be supporting new headteachers in the role (rather than experienced heads changing roles). The empathetic references were linked to the feelings of being new in headship. This links to the observation above which recognises that of the mentees 28% were heads in their second or more headship. Of the sixteen respondents, ten cited their own experiences of being mentored as a reason they joined the scheme. Not all of these experiences were good though, and two of the mentors cited bad experiences as a reason to be involved, an opportunity to ensure no one else suffered the same failures of the system. In addition, four of the mentors mentioned 'giving back' a suggestion of reciprocity to the system itself, showing a commitment and investment in the local authority. Many heads (44%) mentioned altruistic reasons for being involved, mentioning 'support' or 'help'. There only were three references to motivations that were

linked to expanding one's own learning or skills, recognising that the benefits to being involved in the scheme are two-way. A typical response was:

I had a very positive experience being mentored when I was a new head and felt strongly that having a supportive mentor can make a difference to the first few months of headship. I also felt that I would learn lots from visiting other schools and exploring a range of issues with mentees

Mentee expectations

The mentees were asked what they expected from being involved in the scheme and their responses to this question highlighted support and guidance. Only one person mentioned crisis support, whereas others talked more positively about challenges that they faced:

A friendly face to share the good and bad aspects of headship with and an opportunity to talk through some of the more challenging dilemmas we have to face and

To have some support from another Headteacher. To have some advice about issues which I may have had problems with.

Help, guidance, support and advice were mentioned in some degree by all participants bar one, who cited no expectations at all, and another who did not respond to this question. These responses show that the key themes of expectation were to draw on the more experienced mentor for reassurance, fitting the role into more classic definitions of mentoring. As one respondent put it:

A role of support and advice, for a sounding board to discuss issues that were causing concern, and another,

share problem solving discussions with an experienced HT

Two participants mentioned 'non-judgemental' as a descriptor for the mentor support:

I wanted someone that I could talk to about my role who was non-judgemental and supportive

There were also indications of the process being a joint endeavour, with problem-solving and reflection specifically mentioned:

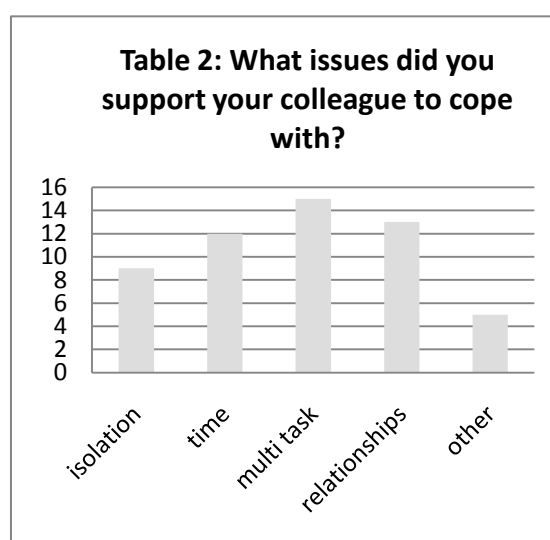
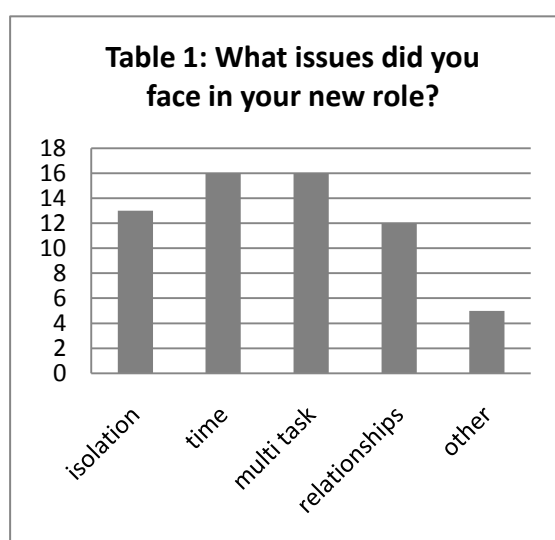
To share best practice

Someone with whom I could reflect and share concerns

The purposes of the scheme (Wiltshire Council, 2009) certainly fit with the expectations that the mentees had.

What were the issues?

These expectations were highlighted in the responses that the mentee head teachers made when asked about the issues that they had faced. They reflected that the issues identified by Hobson and Sharp were ones that they had faced, in particular 'dealing with multiple issues at once' and 'management of time', which would seem to be related. In both cases, 88% of the respondents said that these were issues that they faced. 72% of mentee respondents also cited the isolation of the role of headship as a key issue and this would serve to emphasise the importance of the role of mentor as someone to share and reflect with, not just issues and concerns, but also successes and good practice. The management of relationships (with colleagues/governors/parents) was also an issue which 66% of the mentees perceived that they have been supported on. Other issues which were cited were related to head's knowledge (advice sought about policy changes) and in two instances, 'one-off crisis' situations where the mentee head needed to draw on their mentor colleague for support. Table 1 below illustrates the needs that the mentees had:



The mentors were asked the same question and their responses were similar (Table 2).

Less of the mentors mentioned supporting feelings of isolation within the role of headship (56%), and it may be that this was not explicitly discussed by the mentees, but the act of sharing with a mentor implicitly supported the heads. All but one of the mentor heads felt that they had supported issues surrounding dealing with multiple issues at once. Other

issues that mentors had supported included, 'budgets' 'staffing' and 'legal issues', more factual support that a more experienced head would be able to provide guidance on.

How were issues dealt with?

The mentees were asked how the mentor helped to overcome these issues and they reported a number of different approaches. Four respondents mentioned 'listening' as a key strategy with four more explicitly mentioning 'availability' as a strategy. The fact that the mentor was at the end of a phone in addition to the set meetings was mentioned by two respondents. For example:

Just really useful to know that there is someone on the other end of the phone to talk things through with. The face to face sessions also give the opportunity to stop and take a bit of time out from the busy day to day running of the school

That talking with a mentor allowed perspective on a situation to be gained was mentioned by three mentees, and there were six references where either good advice or experience in the role of headship were mentioned as a way in which issues were resolved. Being able to talk and share, whether this led to advice or own problem-solving (perhaps more of a key success indicator coaching role) was highlighted by the mentees as the key strategy for moving forward.

All mentees were firm in their response that they had led the agenda, a key factor in the success of mentoring partnerships as defined by Megginson *et al.* (2006) and a purpose set out in the Wiltshire handbook. In one case the mentor took a lead in drawing the mentees attention to national/local matters as,

settling in as a new head meant that you did not always keep your eye on the ball - for developments

Others mentioned flexibility, and one respondent reported that whilst the agenda was hers, the first item to discuss was always well-being, and that issue was prioritised, even if all items were then put aside.

The mentors were asked if they felt that they had been able to support their colleague fully and to explain their answer. Twelve of them felt that they had done so, three of them specifically mentioning their use of extra time to enable this. For the three mentors who felt that they had 'mainly', 'to a large extent' or 'mostly' fully supported their colleague reasons such as 'particularly difficult'/'major' issues or 'time constraints' were cited. One

mentor had experienced issues in their own school and so had felt unable to fully support their colleague.

‘Experience sharing’ featured in several of the comments, either when mentors cited their own experience explicitly, or referred to themselves in terms of either a role model, or capacity builder. Being able to be flexible in the approach, either through allocating extra time (which matches the mentees perceptions of their mentor being ‘available’) or through discussions which meet the needs of the mentee, even if these became personal discussions, were used as indicators of success.

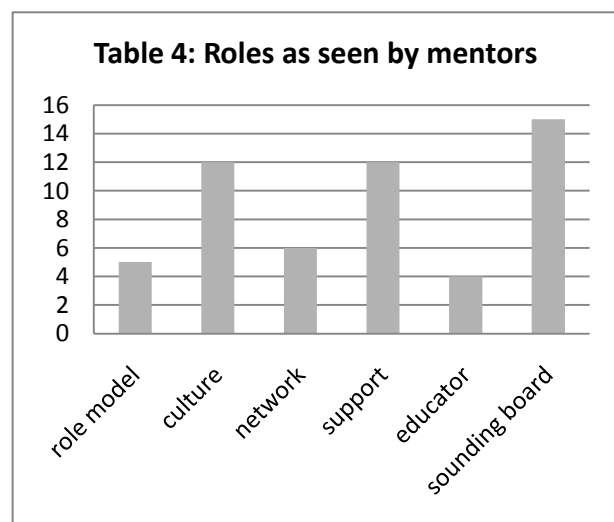
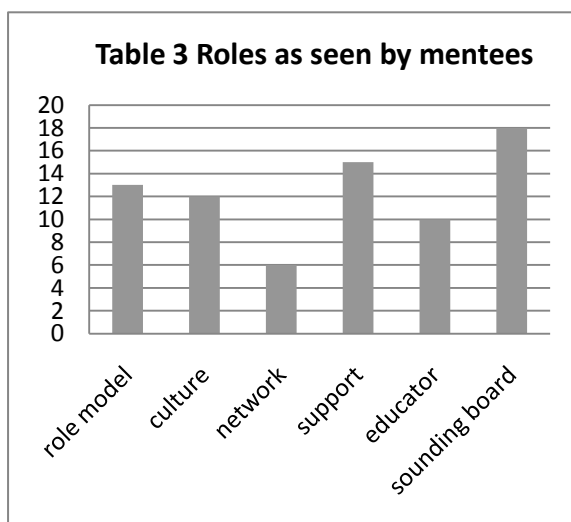
Sometimes H/T just want answers to questions, other times you try to help them come to their own decisions. Sometimes of course, we help on a personal level too.

This fits with the National College Professional Partner role of being a ‘guide’ (interview with Pilot Professional Partner, 2010). Whilst mentoring and coaching are enabling strategies, it was felt important that there were times when receiving specific advice and knowledge were important.

The role of the mentor

Both mentors and mentees were asked to analyse the different roles that the mentor had taken. The six different aspects to the role of mentor were drawn from Malderez and Bodoczky (cited in Hobson and Sharp 2005)

Both mentees and mentors were asked the same questions about the role that was taken and the results showed some parallels, and some interesting differences.



72% (13) of the mentees felt that their mentor had been a role model, whereas only 31% (5) of the mentors thought this the case. Similarly 56% (10) of mentees felt the mentor role included that of educator about the role of headship, yet only 25% (4) of the mentors felt this to be true. The mentors were more likely to term themselves as 'support' or someone who enabled the mentee to enter the culture of headship, a 75% (12) response, rather than to define themselves in a role which indicated expertise. A question that then emerges from this data is whether the impact of the mentors would change if they declared themselves to be role models of headship (for either better or worse). The roles that the mentors defined themselves as having, are in fact far more attuned to the 'guide by the side' nature of coaching, rather than mentoring. This distinction may be irrelevant, but it certainly shows that one of the key features of the Wiltshire Head Mentors is that they don't declare themselves to be 'experts'. All the mentees and all but one of the mentors did say that the role taken was one of a 'sounding board' and this word was also used in the qualitative responses to other questions that were given. A smaller percentage of mentees (33%) and mentors (37%) felt that the role involved supporting the mentee to network with other heads and local authority figures.

The relationship

Current research and theory about mentoring highlights the importance of the relationship between mentor and mentee (Megginson et al 2006; Hobson and Sharp 2005; Hawkins and Smith 2006; Brockbank and McGill 2006). They identify the stages that this relationship goes through, and how the dynamic of the relationship develops over time.

In fact this relationship is crucial, yet is left almost to chance. Whilst the mentees are able to select headteachers from a handbook outlining the mentor's profile, they are not able to measure the level of connection that they have with prospective mentors, unless they already know the headteachers involved.

One mentor offered a possible solution to this, in the form of a social gathering where informal discussions might indicate partnerships that might work. Almost a speed dating scenario, based on the premise that the 'adaptive unconscious' can quickly and accurately make judgements about people (Gladwell, 2005; 11):

...if newly appointed heads are invited to a social gathering, they might meet mentors and have a feel for the people they have met rather than picking at random / location from a booklet.

However, there are many factors which affect the success of the relationship, 'these include issues such as personal style and the chemistry between a mentor and mentee as well as issues around credibility' (Megginson *et al.* 2006: 11). One participant was very clear that they would not use a mentor that had less experience than they had. This raises an issue of expectation and role. Is it possible/desirable for a partnership to work if the mentee has more headship experience than the mentor? If the scheme continues to support all new headship roles, then this experience could happen. If it is to be encouraged, as 'peer-mentoring' (Tomlinson, 2002), then perhaps a clearer celebration of this as good practice could happen.

Selection and matching

The first part of this relationship involves the choosing of an appropriate mentor. Half of the mentees indicated that they had used the handbook, drawing on its factual information to help them make choices. Ten of them made comments that were positive about the attributes of their mentor, or specifically said that they were well matched. Five of the participants had based their selection on previous knowledge, with a further two seeking recommendations or basing their choice on reputation:

I chose someone I had heard a lot of good things about - someone who "got things done."

I selected my mentor as she was experienced but also on the recommendation of my previous Head.

No one mentioned the issue highlighted by Megginson *et al.* about mentoring that 'too-close' a match leads to a situation where there is no movement forward, though one person indicated in another question that they would have liked a little more direction.

The only negative comment about the relationship and matching came from a participant who had found that their first mentor had told them 'how to do my job his way', but they were positive about their second experience when they changed headship.

The mentors were more general in their responses to the question of how well matched they were. They were positive and drew on all their experiences and recognised that the relationships varied. There were three references to this being a question of skill or attribute,

Most of the H/T who offer support in this role are 'people' people and their interpersonal relationships are very strong. As new H/T select their own mentor, it is a rarity that they are not suited to work with each other.

One mentor described how they used coaching skills to establish a relationship, though didn't act as a coach to support the mentee:

Very well, use coaching skills to establish the relationship but not a coach!

These skills are core to the success of a mentoring partnership (Hobson 2003), and cannot be assumed. The careful negotiation through a mentoring conversation can be challenging especially when the boundaries between coaching, mentoring and guiding are blurred (Pilot Professional Partner, 2010).

How the relationship developed.

Where mentees mentioned that they had met with their mentor before taking up post this was seen as beneficial.

Our relationship was already established and I think that this really helped as we didn't need to spend time getting to know each other. We could hit the ground running.

Yes we did meet up and this helped the first session as we could move the meeting forward rather than going through this in the first session.

In both cases the idea of having a head start is evident, in particular to build up a relationship before entering into the formal role.

Several of the mentors had not yet reached the end of their first year of support, but of these all of them planned to stay in touch with their mentor. Four of the respondents explicitly mentioned the development of a friendship. Others mentioned staying in contact, with two seeming to maintain the mentor/mentee relationship through advice seeking and continuation of a 'friendly sounding board' role. In one case the relationship had developed into a more mutual sharing:

We are now friends who support each other.

These heads had successfully redefined their relationships (Brockbank and McGill, 2006: 111) and successfully drawn their formal mentoring partnership to a close. Only one mentee said that they had not kept in touch with their mentor, citing the building of other support networks as a reason for this.

Improvements to the relationship

When answering how the relationship could have been improved, ten of the mentees indicated that no improvements were needed (the assumption being that where a respondent wrote N/A this is because there were no applicable developments necessary). Of these, the comments that were about mentors were in high praise:

My mentor was an excellent example of true professionalism, always willing to share advice without judging. There was exemplary support and I would recommend her without any reservation

Due to the high calibre of my mentor I don't have anything to suggest here

With my mentor, not at all. She was brilliant in her role and I will forever be grateful for the support and friendship she continues to give me

Where there were less positive feelings, one of these suggested a 'little more leading' from the mentor, and the other described an abrupt finish:

I did feel that it came to an abrupt end and perhaps a follow up phone call the following term would have ensured that I was ok. (Although it may have been that this would have happened if it was felt that I needed it.)

Meggison *et al.* warn that mentoring partnerships are more effective when they wind up rather than wind down and the danger with the assumption that some type of contact might be maintained is that a 'wind down' approach is taken.

However, the most common response about the development of the relationship was about time constraints. There was a feeling that whilst it would have been beneficial to develop the relationship further, the pressure of time within the job made this difficult. Both responses that detailed this, mentioned the importance of scheduled meetings and there were two comments overall about the importance of 'leaving the school'.

Benefits of the scheme

Mentees

When asked about the benefits of the scheme the mentees mostly referenced the partnership with their mentor, that is, the benefit of sharing with another professional who can relate through their own experiences (55% response). The fact that this professional

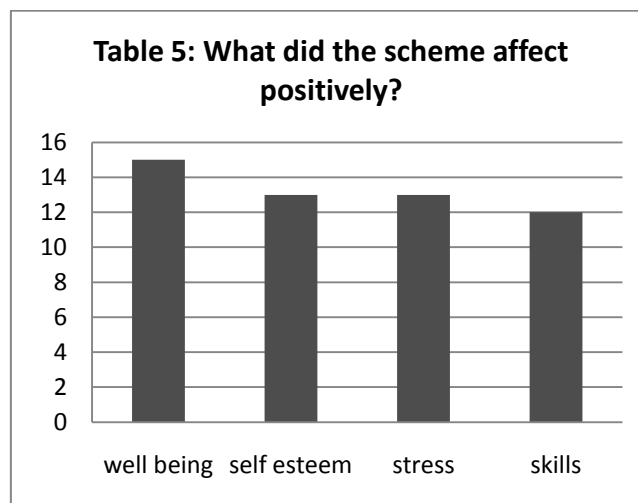
was not related, and also non-judgemental, was a benefit described by four mentees. A further two described the importance of local knowledge, being new to the Local Authority.

The importance of being able to share with a sounding board or reassurance emerged as a theme, which also reflects the role that both the mentees and mentors saw in an earlier question. Similarly, two mentees mentioned isolation, or the loneliness of headship. Furthermore two mentees indicated that the support was 'critical' or 'invaluable'.

One response in particular, picked up a range of benefits:

Having someone there to just check that you are ok. Talking through the decisions you could be making and whether there are other ways of tackling the situations. Knowing that every term you have time put aside to talk through the role of being a Head teacher and how to get a balanced work life.

Asked about what the scheme affected positively the mentors were very clear in their responses (Table 5). Fifteen mentees (83%) indicated that their well being had been improved, with thirteen (72%) indicating that self esteem had been positively affected and stress had been reduced. Well-being is undoubtedly a major benefit of this scheme and one that whilst less tangible, has dire consequences if not prioritised.



Mentors

Mentors were also asked about the benefits of being involved in the scheme. Two of the mentors responded from a position where they reflected on the benefits for the mentees. Of the rest over half of them mentioned either professional development or the learning of skills (sometimes just by seeing another school and the way it operated) but also the value of having a professional dialogue with another head, and being able to reflect on their own practice as a result. This is interesting as it did not emerge in the earlier question about

motivation to be a mentor, where the responses were more seemingly one way (focused on helping and support). Yet clearly the head mentors see a great benefit from their involvement. There were comments about 'confidence boost' and 'deepened understanding' as well as (in three cases) the 'privilege' of visiting other schools explicitly mentioned.

The professional development aspect was twofold. This was both from the perspective of direct training to undertake the role (and to keep up to date with current developments) but also more implicitly, the honing of listening skills, emotional literacy and mentoring skills. Interestingly coaching skills were also mentioned, suggesting a blurring of the boundaries between the two roles of mentoring and coaching as classically defined.

Typical responses included:

Personally, it has been fantastic professional development. With the training provided, I have been able to develop my coaching skills. It is also a confidence boost when I see that I have helped a colleague.

Overview of needs of heads across Wilts. Updated training which provides new viewpoints and refreshes old skills covered during LPSH etc Emotional literacy skills improved. Coaching in own school improved as a result

How could the scheme be improved?

Mentees

When asked how the scheme could be improved, mentees made nine comments with suggestions. Two of them related to the actual role and expectations of both the mentor and the meetings:

Ensuring that the HTs to choose from had a wide range of experience, some had less than me, so I wouldn't go to them.

This is an interesting comment as it takes a definite view of the mentor role as one of more experience. This can be seen to link with another comment which is also about the role:

a tighter schedule of what needs to be covered through the mentoring scheme, a guide for the structure of the meetings to be supplied to both parties in order for the expectations to be clear

In this comment, the role of the mentor is also under the spotlight. The heart of this comment is about expectations from the sessions (and therefore perhaps the role).

Two of the comments related to a development strategy beyond the mentored year, describing 'an exit plan' or 'support groups for headteachers beyond their first year'. In the literature around mentoring, the importance of a clear exit is also prevalent. In comments about continued relationships beyond the year (in the earlier section) heads suggested that they thought they might 'keep in touch' perhaps this would in fact lead to a gradual fading of the relationship, rather than a definite end, the 'winding down' scenario mentioned earlier. The Wiltshire Handbook shows that some move has already been made to accommodate need into a second year, but this is not the same as a structured ending point.

Two of the comments related to the relevance of the scheme only for new heads (or those new to the area) and this was cited as a reason for not engaging again. As the scheme is open to all new headship posts this is an interesting assumption, especially as five of the mentee heads were in at least their second headship, and so had felt it a useful service. The other comments related to the logistics of the scheme: more time needed to meet, an updated handbook (retiring heads were apparently included) and information about INSET to be given.

The comments which indicated no changes needed to be made varied from no comment at all to:

....is a fantastic experience that Wiltshire provide

Mentors

The mentors were asked how the local authority might support them better in the role and if they had any professional development needs that had not been met. 63% expressed no further professional development or training needs, and these responses varied from a simple 'no' to 'excellent training and support'. A couple of mentors mentioned taking the role further, one suggested looking at the 'new role of coaching and mentoring' and the other more generally 'a way of developing mentoring further'. The need for the mentor heads to be able to claim back the money was highlighted by one mentor as essential. The other comment for development came from the previously cited mentor who suggested a 'social event' so that prospective partnerships could meet and talk before choices were made.

Would you use the service again?

Finally, the mentee headteachers were asked if they would reuse the service. Fourteen of them said they would, two said not (one citing the reason of no longer being an initial head); and one suggested maybe – also suggesting that now that they had more experience they might not need the service any more.

Comparisons with other schemes in operation

The National College (NC) 'Head Start' Professional Partner scheme was piloted last year. As previously mentioned, in addition to the data gathered from the Wiltshire heads an interview was conducted for this evaluation with one of the twelve pilot mentors, to explore comparisons between the two schemes. The interviewee was open and reflective about her experiences and her comments offer interesting directions for consideration. The programme (as piloted) includes support of 20-30 hours across a two-year time span. The training to become a Professional Partner is intensive, with detailed exploration of the different roles that might be taken in supporting a new head. These were defined by the interviewee as mentor, coach and guide, with emphasis about the different aspect of each different role. However, sometimes she found the boundaries between these roles difficult to negotiate, particularly if it wasn't explicitly clear to the new head that the role had shifted. It was reported that much time was spent in formalising the establishment of the relationship and the importance of setting out a clear contract of engagement. This would seem to be different to the Wiltshire scheme which is less formal in approach. However, with both Professional Partner and new head very clear about expectations and commitment the way would appear paved for success based on the factors for success mentioned earlier.

One key difference between the Professional Partner scheme and the Wiltshire Headteacher scheme is the possibility of 'out of county' support. The national database will mean that heads from around the country can support each other. In theory this is quite liberating, but there are perceivably two flaws in this idea. Firstly, the logistics of travelling some distance, which is accentuated by the pressures of time as cited by respondents. Secondly, participants in this research specifically mentioned the use of a mentor in helping them to understand the way the local authority works. Building a network of support within the county can only strengthen a common vision and purpose.

The National College programme is only for new headteachers, and as mentioned at the very start of this report, it is the inclusion of *all* new headship posts which clearly demonstrates the commitment of the authority to all its headteachers:

‘This support is also available to heads in their second or subsequent headship as every headship is different’ (Wiltshire Council, 2009)

The issue of ‘matching’ still remains. There is nothing that suggests that a national database of heads will be any more effective in enabling heads to make good matches. It is not until the programme is underway that the true ‘match’ can be evaluated (by both parties).

Whilst the option of change is always possible, this does hinder the support process. An in-house scheme has an advantage here, as previous knowledge of heads (remembering that 28% of mentees chose someone they already knew) can be an advantage.

Purpose

The purposes of the scheme stated in the Wiltshire Handbook for Headteachers (Wiltshire Council, 2009), are:

- 1) To provide a confidential sounding board
- 2) To support the head in their new post
- 3) To help the headteacher manage pressure and achieve a healthy work life balance
- 4) To help meet needs identified by the head.

These are comparable with findings from Hobson and Sharp (2006) who cite a much earlier programme in England where the purposes were:

- to encourage and support effective headship;
- to support the process of finding, making and taking the role of head;
- to base mentoring on the new head’s experience of their school;
- to encourage ownership of decisions; and
- to benefit the school as a whole

(Hobson and Sharp, 2006: 33)

However, the key omissions in the earlier scheme are the prioritising of healthy work life balance and the provision of a sounding board. Interestingly the new Head Start programme from the National College states that it,

‘supports new headteachers in becoming highly effective in their roles through increasing their leadership skills and confidence, while encouraging learning, self-reflection and development’ (National College, 2010)

Similarly the emphasis is on the professional role rather than the person who is undertaking it. This purpose sits well with the Professional Standards for Headteachers (DES, 2004) in which the key areas are Shaping the Future; Leading Learning and Teaching; Developing Self and Working with Others; Managing the Organisation; Securing Accountability and Strengthening the Community. However underneath the professional who is able to meet these standards and lead their school forward is a person who in order to achieve these standards must have a healthy work-life balance and a sense of well-being.

There is minimal information on the National College website about the new Professional Partners programme other than basic information about the commitment to support headteachers, bridging the gap between NPQH and initial headship roles. It is stated that, ‘as part of Head Start, all new headteachers will be entitled to support from a professional partner during their first two years in post. Professional Partners are experienced, practising headteachers who provide personalised, needs-based support.’ (National College, 2010)

The role of the Professional Partner is to, ‘support, challenge and advise new headteachers through mentoring and action-based learning techniques, encouraging reflection on their professional practice’ (National College, 2010). In the pilot scheme all twelve Professional Partners were deemed outstanding by Ofsted. It is not clear if this was for piloting purposes, or whether the sheer scope of the roll out necessitated a broader ‘net’.

There is no mention of ‘challenge’ in any of the Wiltshire documentation, nor is it mentioned by the mentee or mentor participants. In their discussion of mentor relationships, however, Megginson *et al.* discuss the danger of lack of ‘stretch’ in a relationship where mentor and mentee are too similar (2006). The Wiltshire handbook does recommend that new heads approach a mentor that they are not already in a close relationship with, but the question of ‘challenge’ is interesting. It could be argued that the role of the School Improvement Partner is to challenge headteachers, and this is not the role of the mentor, however, a constructive critical friend, who is still concerned with well-being and being a sounding board, is in a position to challenge positively and supportively.

Another difference is that the National College is overt in its expression of the advantages of being a Professional Partner:

- an opportunity to support children and young people beyond your school by supporting new headteachers in their schools

- an opportunity to work with and support new headteachers experiencing challenges that you may have faced yourself as a new headteacher
- high-quality training including coaching techniques
- opportunities for staff in your school to develop their leadership skills in a controlled manner while you are supporting other new headteachers
- a potential first step into system leadership, with less time commitment than some other roles such as local leaders of education
- an opportunity for existing system leaders to build their system leadership experience

(National College, 2010)

Whereas the mentors in the Wiltshire scheme reflected similar benefits, the scheme documentation does not overtly state this.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The responses show that in the main, the day to day role of the head new in post can be well supported by the mentor process. When major issues occur (in the school of either the mentor or mentee) then external help needs to be found and mentors have no problem seeking this help or directing mentees towards it. Mentees were resoundingly positive in their responses, which is impressive given the high percentage of questionnaires received. Mentors also clearly enjoy the role, finding it rewarding and a good source of professional development. There are a few points that the Executive Group might wish to consider for the future in order to protect the scheme against funding cuts.

1. Training/Professional Development. Although mentors were in the main happy with their training this could be developed. The National College training for Head Start Professional Partners is intensive and leads to clear understandings about the different positions of mentor/coach/ guide. Where there were small criticisms of the Wiltshire scheme these tended around slight lack of clarity or structure, or no clear exit plan. Professional development for mentors could accommodate this and this could be developed in conjunction with the university, offering an accreditation route for mentors, for those who were keen to engage at a deeper level.
2. Training could also include mentees – to explore the role of mentoring, this could possibly even happen together. If this was held as an introduction event, it could serve two purposes, both to clarify the roles and expectations about the process, and possibly include a meeting opportunity for heads prior to choices being made about ‘matches’.

Clearly there are logistical issues here, though it should be noted that the respondents who identified that they had met with their mentor before taking up post were very positive about this.

3. **Structured Exits.** Whilst the successful partnerships had kept in touch and redefined their relationship into friendship, a more structured review phase to the programme could be considered. This would enable a sense of winding up rather than winding down.
4. **Funding.** Support for headteachers to leave their school in order to engage in this process is recommended to continue. The importance of time-tabled, committed meetings was referred to by respondents as a reason they kept the appointment.
5. **Benefits for mentors.** The time of funding crisis is not the time to be shy. The mentors were modest in their reflections of their role, not declaring themselves as role-models or educators. These are roles to be proud of and the benefits to the mentor's own school are clear. They were very definite in their description of the benefits of the role, and a strong reflective headship workforce is both desirable and commendable. It is recommended therefore, that the benefits to mentors are made more explicit in documentation.

Final Thoughts

The evaluation shows that the mentor scheme in Wiltshire is highly regarded and a valuable service. Whilst the National College database of Professional Partners may offer a broader scope in terms of an experience base from which to draw, this scheme allows a community and culture of Wiltshire headship to grow, with an emphasis on the *person* who is undertaking a new role, in order to enable them to grow as a professional. The inclusion of all new headship posts in the scheme is a unique feature and one which reinforces the message that head teachers are cared for by the local authority. The well-being of the headteacher workforce is crucial, and pressures are only going to grow in the next few years, making this a fundamental resource and commitment to schools. Mentoring as professional development is high on the national agenda, and continues to be a focus,

‘Mentoring others is often the best form of professional development.’ (Michael Gove, 17.6.10)

Dr Fiona Maine July 3rd 2010

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Appendix A

Wiltshire Headteachers Mentoring Scheme Evaluation: Mentees

Context: How many headship roles have you had?

One Two More

Have you used the Mentoring Scheme before taking this role? Yes No

Purpose: What were your expectations when you signed up to the Headteacher Mentoring Scheme?

Please explain.

Needs: What issues did you face in your new role? Tick all that apply.

- Feelings of isolation or loneliness in the role
- Management of time (ensuring a work/life balance)
- Dealing with multiple issues at once
- Relationships with colleagues/governors/parents
- Other (please use the box below to expand this)

How did your mentor help you overcome these issues, if at all?

Please explain.

Were you able to talk about issues that mattered to you? Did you lead the agenda?

Please explain.

Relationships: How did you select your mentor? How well matched were you as mentor and mentee?

Please explain.

How did your relationship develop over time? Did you meet before you took up your headship role? Have you continued to meet beyond the end of the scheme?

Please explain.

What role did your mentor take? Tick all that apply.

- A role model of headship
- Someone to help settle you into the culture of headship
- Someone who helped you to network
- The provider of support
- An educator about the role of headship
- A sounding board

Benefits: The Rationale for the Mentoring scheme is 'to enable a headteacher to feel comfortable and supported in the first year of their new post through a professional relationship with a colleague headteacher'. Was this achieved?

Fully **Partly** **Not at all**

What were the benefits of being involved in the Wiltshire Headteacher Mentoring Scheme?

Please explain.

What did the scheme affect positively? Tick all that apply

- Your psychological well being
- Your self esteem
- A reduction in stress/frustration
- Your increased professional skills

Development: How could the relationship with your mentor have been improved, if at all?

Please explain.

If you change headship would you draw on this service again? **Yes** **No**

How could the scheme itself be improved, if at all?

Please explain.

Appendix B

Wiltshire Headteachers Mentoring Scheme Evaluation: Mentors

Context: How many times (including this one) have you mentored a headteacher in a new role?

One Two-five More than five

Purpose: Why did you become a mentor? What were your expectations when you signed up to the Headteacher Mentoring Scheme?

Please explain.

Needs: What issues did you support your colleague to cope with? Tick all that apply.

- Feelings of isolation or loneliness in the role
- Management of time (ensuring a work/life balance)
- Dealing with multiple issues at once
- Relationships with colleagues/governors/parents
- Other (Please expand below)

Relationships: How well matched were you as mentor and mentee?

Please explain.

Do you feel you were able to support your colleague fully?

Please explain.

What role did you take as a mentor? Tick all that apply.

- A role model of headship
- Someone to help settling into the culture of headship
- Someone who helped networking
- The provider of support
- An educator about the role of headship
- A sounding board

Benefits: What were the benefits of being involved in the Wiltshire Headteacher Mentoring Scheme?

Please explain.

Development: How could the Local Authority support you further in this role? Do you have any professional development needs related to this role that have not been met?

Please explain.

Appendix C

Dear Headteacher (Mentor)

Wiltshire Headteacher Mentoring Scheme

My name is Fiona Maine and I work as the Programme Leader for CPD in the School of Education at Bath Spa University.

I have been commissioned by the Executive Committee to conduct an independent evaluation of the Wiltshire Headteachers Scheme, exploring the benefits and to make recommendations for the future.

In a time when public funding is continually under review, this evaluation will be a significant indicator of the scheme's worth and its future funding potential. As a mentor in the scheme, you'll appreciate that this is a free service to heads taking up a new role. I hope that I can draw on your support to fill in the attached questionnaire and return it to me by email.

In filling in the form, please be as candid as possible. This is an independent evaluation, and all responses will be completely confidential. Comments that you make will be used in the final report, but these comments will serve to reflect on the scheme, not on you, and they will be fully anonymised. You should also not feel obliged to engage in this process.

I fully recognise the incredible time pressure that you are under in your role as a head, and also appreciate that from time to time you may feel bombarded by questionnaires evaluating services. This research is designed to be a comprehensive evaluation, setting the Wiltshire Scheme in the context of national developments, and to inform how best it can be developed in the future. The bottom line is: Is this scheme one that future heads would benefit from in taking up new posts, or one that you would use again?

Please feel free to contact me with any questions that you may have, either via email, or by phoning me.

Please fill in and return the form to me by Friday May 28th 2010 at the latest.

Best wishes

Dr Fiona Maine
Programme Leader for CPD
f.maine@bathspa.ac.uk

Dear Headteacher (Mentee)

Wiltshire Headteacher Mentoring Scheme

My name is Fiona Maine and I work as the Programme Leader for CPD in the School of Education at Bath Spa University.

I have been commissioned by the Executive Committee to conduct an independent evaluation of the Wiltshire Headteachers Scheme, exploring the benefits and to make recommendations for the future.

In a time when public funding is continually under review, this evaluation will be a significant indicator of the scheme's worth and its future funding potential. You'll appreciate that this is a free service to heads taking up a new role. The keys to the evaluation are the users of the scheme and I hope that I can draw on your support to fill in the attached questionnaire and return it to me by email.

In filling in the form, please be as candid as possible. This is an independent evaluation, and all responses will be completely confidential. Comments that you make will be used in the final report, but these comments will serve to reflect on the scheme, not on you, and they will be fully anonymised. You should also not feel obliged to engage in this process.

I fully recognise the incredible time pressure that you are under in your role as a head, and also appreciate that from time to time you may feel bombarded by questionnaires evaluating services. This research is designed to be a comprehensive evaluation, setting the Wiltshire Scheme in the context of national developments, and to inform how best it can be developed in the future. The bottom line is: Is this scheme one that future heads would benefit from in taking up new posts, or one that you would use again?

Please feel free to contact me with any questions that you may have, either via email, or by phoning me.

Please fill in and return the form to me by Friday May 28th 2010 at the latest.

Best wishes

Dr Fiona Maine
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