School Leadership Matters

An empirical assessment of the attractiveness of principalship in the North of Ireland and the South of Ireland

Regional Training Unit and
Leadership Development for Schools

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PRICEWATERHOUSECOOPERS

Contents

Acknowledgements

Glossary

ACCS	Association of Community and Comprehensive Schools
ASTI	Association of Secondary Teachers
ATL	Association of Teachers and Lecturers
BME	Black and Minority Ethnic
CCEA	Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment
CCMS	Council for Catholic Maintained Schools
CIBE	Church of Ireland Board of Education
CnG	Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
DEL	Department for Employment and Learning
DE	Department of Education
ELB	Education and Library Board
ESA	Education and Skills Authority
GBA	Governing Bodies Association
GTCNI	General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland
INTO	Irish National Teachers' Organisation
IPPN	Irish Primary Principals' Network
IVEA	Irish Vocational Education Association
JMB	Joint Managerial Body
LDS	Leadership Development for Schools
NAHT	National Association of Head Teachers
NAPD	National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals
NASUWT	National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers
NCCA	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
NCSL	National College for School Leadership
NICIE	Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education
NPQH	National Professional Qualification for Headship
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PQH	Professional Qualification for Headship
PwC	PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP
RPA	Review of Public Administration
RTU	Regional Training Unit
UTU	Ulster Teachers' Union
VEC	Vocational Education Committee

Executive summary

There is growing international evidence of the importance of school leadership…

Since the late 1990s, there has been an increasing emphasis on school leadership in the international literature on educational effectiveness. Successive studies have demonstrated that the quality of school leadership is a key factor in raising educational attainment (Leithwood et al, 2006), and indeed, is second only to teacher quality in terms of impact on pupil achievement. There is also evidence that school leadership can impact on other student outcomes.

> *"School-level factors such as leadership, organisational learning and teachers' work have a significant impact on non-academic student outcomes such as participation in school, academic self-concept and engagement with the school."* (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006)[1]

Education ministers from Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) member countries have also emphasised the role of school leadership in assisting their education systems to respond to the changing needs of society at successive meetings from 2001. In response, the OECD instigated an international study into school leadership to inform policy development in this area, identify innovative practices and provide options for further action. The subsequent report, *Improving School Leadership*, published in 2008, presents the experience and practice of school leadership in 22 countries, highlighting the multifaceted yet central nature of the role of leadership in schools and beyond.

> *"As the key intermediary between the classroom, the individual school and the education system as a whole, effective school leadership is essential to improve the efficiency and equity of schooling. Within each individual school, leadership can contribute to improved student learning by shaping the conditions and climate in which teaching and learning occur. Beyond the school borders, school leaders can connect and adapt schools to changing external environments. And at the schools-systems interface, school leadership provides a bridge between internal school improvement processes and externally initiated reform."* (OECD, 2008)

Recognition of the crucial importance of school leadership has also been growing in both the North of Ireland and the South of Ireland. There has been substantial investment by the respective Governments in the development of current and future school leaders over the last number of years, most notably by the establishment of the Regional Training Unit and the introduction of the Professional Qualification for Headship (PQH) in the North of Ireland in 2000 and the Leadership Development for Schools Programme in the South of Ireland in 2002.

However, many OECD countries report challenges relating to the role of principalship…

Despite the growing focus on the importance of school leadership over the past decade, many countries which participated in the OECD study report similar challenges relating to the role of school principal or headteacher.[2] These concerns, which echo in many respects those identified in our *Independent Review of School Leadership* in England and Wales (PwC, 2007), are summarised in the Table overleaf.

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[1] Hargreaves, A., & Fink, D. (2006) *Sustainable Leadership*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

[2] Both the North of Ireland and the South of Ireland participated in the OECD study.

Table 1: International challenges to principalship (OECD, 2008)	
The age profile of current principals	In most OECD countries, the principal workforce is ageing and a large proportion will retire in the next five to ten years.
The number of applications per principal vacancy	Around three quarters of the participating countries reported declining numbers of applicants per post.
The expanding role of the school in society	At the same time, the role of the principal has expanded as schools gain greater autonomy and become increasingly the focus of initiatives to address issues such as social disadvantage.
A renewed focus on teaching and learning	There is a trend across all OECD countries to increase the focus on teaching and learning, not only in terms of raising attainment overall, but also to cater for more diverse pupil populations.

As noted above, school leadership is a key factor in raising educational attainment and the education authorities in the North of Ireland and the South of Ireland have committed to strengthening school leadership development in schools. Despite this, a number of educational challenges persist in each jurisdiction.

While educational attainment in the North of Ireland generally outperforms the rest of the United Kingdom at the higher end of the spectrum, there are concerns regarding performance at the lower end: 'the long tail of underachievement'. Furthermore, according to *Every School a Good School* (DE, 2008), only 37% of socially disadvantaged pupils achieve a Level 2 qualification and there is a 12% percentage point gap between the performance of girls and boys obtaining the standard of five GCSEs at A*-C. Again, the quality of education in the South of Ireland is highly regarded. However, despite having had a strong economy and buoyant labour market for a number of years, the South of Ireland education sector faces a number of challenges, including disparities in the educational attainment of pupils from different socio-economic backgrounds (OECD, 2007b).

In this context, PwC was commissioned by RTU and LDS to undertake research into school leadership in the North of Ireland and the South of Ireland…

In light of the 2007 OECD reports, PricewaterhouseCoopers (LLP) was commissioned by the Regional Training Unit (RTU) in the North of Ireland and Leadership Development for Schools (LDS) in the South of Ireland in June 2008 to undertake an all-island research study into school leadership.

The main purpose of the study is to investigate the reasons why some teachers apply for the post of principalship or headship and others do not, focusing on the perspectives of teachers who have recently been appointed to the post of principal or headteacher and experienced teachers who have not yet chosen to apply for principalship, and interpret the findings in light of the OECD report. The specific factors addressed by this study are as follows:
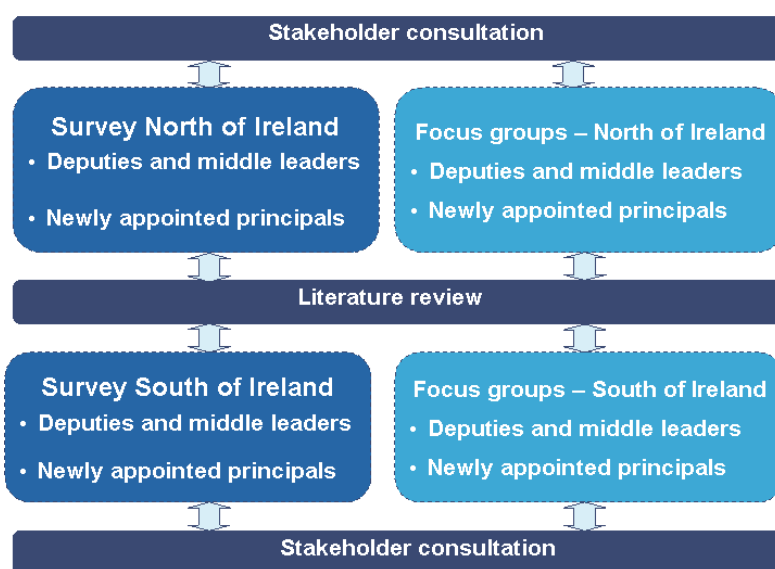
- Personal circumstances;
- Levels of reward;
- Levels of support attached to the post;
- Current career satisfaction;
- Alternative career path options;
- Prospect of selection;
- Perception of the role; and
- School or context specific issues.

The impact of other variables, such as gender, ethnicity, age, qualifications and experience was also considered as part of the research.

The research involved an extensive fieldwork exercise…

Our study comprised a mixed methodology of a literature review, stakeholder interviews, focus groups with school principals and experienced teachers, and a four part postal survey of principals and experienced teachers in the North of Ireland and the South of Ireland in Autumn 2008.

Figure 1: Our approach

Stakeholder consultation

Survey North of Ireland • Deputies and middle leaders • Newly appointed principals	**Focus groups – North of Ireland** • Deputies and middle leaders • Newly appointed principals

Literature review

Survey South of Ireland • Deputies and middle leaders • Newly appointed principals	**Focus groups – South of Ireland** • Deputies and middle leaders • Newly appointed principals

Stakeholder consultation

There was an overwhelming response to our survey, with, for example, a 40% response rate to our principal questionnaire. This is an extremely high response rate for a postal methodology and, in itself, provides significant evidence of the importance of these issues to professionals in the education sector.

This executive summary presents an overview of the emerging messages from this research as well as a comparison of our key findings in both jurisdictions. It discusses issues such as the demographic profile of principals which are common to other OECD countries and describes a number of factors which are more specific to Ireland, north and south. It also presents a number of recommendations to improve the future supply of school leaders and to increase the sustainability of the role in both jurisdictions.

The study found that many of the issues identified in the OECD report apply across Ireland…

The study found that many of the issues identified in the OECD report apply across Ireland, both north and south. In line with international experience, both jurisdictions face challenges relating to the demographic profile of principals and the perceived attractiveness of the position.

The age profile of principals is increasing and females are underrepresented in school leadership positions…

Of the newly appointed principals who responded to our survey, over 65% are aged over 40. There are, however, variations by sector. In relation to the gender profile of participants, female principals are represented to a greater extent

in the primary sector than in the post-primary sector in the North of Ireland and underrepresented as a proportion of the teaching workforce as a whole across both phases. While the picture is more balanced in the South of Ireland, it also emerged from the survey that females are still underrepresented in principalship in relation to the teaching population as a whole.

These statistics provide a unique insight into the characteristics of schools leaders across the North of Ireland and the South of Ireland. As our background research and the OECD comparative reports for both jurisdictions demonstrate, there is little centrally held information on the supply and demand for school leaders in either jurisdiction.

Table 2: Age and gender profile of respondents to the newly appointed principal surveys (%)										
	North of Ireland					South of Ireland				
Age by sector	21-30	31-40	41-50	51-60	60+	21-30	31-40	41-50	51-60	60+
Primary	7	40	35	19	-	16	20	37	24	-
Post-primary	3	10	26	59	2	-	17	38	39	6
	North of Ireland					South of Ireland				
Gender by sector	Male		Female			Male		Female		
Primary	39		61			26		71		
Post-primary	64		36			52		48		

In post-primary schools in particular, a large proportion of newly appointed principals are aged over 50, and the ageing profile of heads appears to be more acute in the North of Ireland. A substantial proportion of principals in both jurisdictions will therefore be retiring in the next five years or so. Furthermore, evidence from the stakeholders that participated in this research suggests that the number of principals taking early retirement is also increasing. Indeed, when we asked newly appointed principals where they saw themselves in the next 10 to 15 years, many did not envisage that they would remain in education.

Table 3: Where do you see your career path over the next 10-15 years? (Principal survey)	North of Ireland (%)	South of Ireland (%)
Remain in this school	52	70
Move to a bigger school	29	15
Move to another school	12	9
Retirement	37	35
Consultancy	28	27
Inspectorate	18	13
Leave teaching	7	5

In addition, one in ten newly appointed primary principals in the North of Ireland (7%) stated that they would leave teaching altogether over this time span. This may be due in part to the perception amongst some participants in this research that principalship is viewed by many as a 'life sentence', due to a lack of clear onward progression routes and alternative roles, and the 'relentlessness' of the job. Stakeholders in the South of Ireland view this as a particular issue and there is anecdotal evidence that principals are being appointed at an increasingly younger age.

As applications per post decrease, and where the terms and conditions attached to principalship do not facilitate 'stepping down', this trend is likely to continue.

> *"There aren't really any opportunities beyond the post. Once you've got a principalship the financial difference between one school and another is neither here nor there. A fresh challenge within the education sector is not something that's culturally embedded in Northern Ireland. People are often afraid of failure."* (Stakeholder, the North of Ireland)

There is also evidence from the current literature that after eight years in post, principals may begin to 'plateau' or become disenchanted with their role (Earley, 2004) and that new means of reinvigorating experienced principals are required.

There are many negative perceptions of the role…

Our qualitative and quantitative research also demonstrated that there are issues surrounding the perception of the role of principals. Only a fifth of teachers in the North of Ireland (who had completed the PQH) stated that they were likely to apply for principalship in the next 12 months and in the South of Ireland, only 4% of experienced teachers thought that they were likely to apply for principalship in the same timeframe. In addition, four in ten principals in the North of Ireland (40%) and almost six in ten (58%) principals in the South of Ireland described their work-life balance as poor or very poor.

Many of the factors which would discourage teachers from applying for principalship are similar to those that provide least job satisfaction for principals. These include workload, administrative tasks and bureaucracy, and financial management. Teachers also highlighted the potential sense of isolation and a lack of training or preparation for the role.

Figure 2: Factors which discourage applications for principalship

North of Ireland				South of Ireland			
Teacher survey Key factors discouraging applications to principalship		**Principal survey** Key factors providing least job satisfaction		**Teacher survey** Key factors discouraging applications to principalship		**Principal survey** Key factors providing least job satisfaction	
1	Workload	1	Bureaucracy	1	Workload	1	Bureaucracy
2	Administration	2	Administration	2	Administration	2	Dealing with complaints
3	Sense of isolation	3	Dealing with complaints	3	Combining leadership and teaching roles	3	Financial management
4	Accountability	4	Financial management	4	Lack of training	4	Administration
5	Combining leadership and teaching roles	5	Accountability	5	People management	5	Conflict resolution

Evidence from the literature and our qualitative research suggests that deputy principals and middle leaders are keen observers of principals and many participants cited the impact on work-life balance as a key disincentive to seeking principalship positions. Other important disincentives include the level of accountability experienced by principals and the differentials between the pay levels of principals and other senior members of staff.

And, until recently, there was little focus internationally on developing school leaders of the future…

Internationally, leadership development in education is a relatively new phenomenon. As the OECD Comparative Report states:

> *"While school leadership development has become a reality across OECD countries in the past 10 to 15 years, there is still a need for more coherent approaches to leadership development. Most principals come from a teaching background, which does not normally lead to the skills required to deal with the broadened roles of leadership for teaching and learning, for resource management, for setting goals and measuring progress and for leading and collaborating beyond school borders."*

This was acknowledged by the stakeholders and focus group participants in this research from both the North of Ireland and the South of Ireland, who warmly welcomed the investment in each jurisdiction in school leadership and who praised the work of the Regional Training Unit and Leadership Development for Schools in raising the profile and provision of leadership development. The development of the Tóraíocht programme for middle leaders by LDS was particularly welcomed in the South of Ireland.

> *"Before the RTU was set up there was very much a lack of training. We have been moving into a situation where there is recognition of the adequate training for professionals."* (Stakeholder, the North of Ireland)
>
> *"Initially I was turned off principalship because I saw the stress my father was under when he was principal of the school and I felt that I would never go through that. Thanks to things like the LDS course I feel quite differently now."* (Post-primary deputy principal focus group participant, South of Ireland)

Despite this, many principal respondents to our survey reported that they had not received formal leadership training prior to appointment (47% in the North of Ireland and 66% in the South of Ireland). Key reasons for not accessing training related to the availability and awareness of provision and a lack of time to undertake professional development. At the same time, many respondents described feelings of being 'parachuted' into the role and of lacking confidence in their abilities. Indeed, a lack of confidence was particularly important as a disincentive to applying for principalship for female experienced teachers. Some stakeholders also noted that, as a contributing factor in the North of Ireland in particular, advertisements for principal vacancies do not consistently state that PQH is required for the post.

There were also varying levels of uptake for informal leadership development activities. Networking and mentoring opportunities were popular amongst newly appointed principals, particularly as a means of counteracting the perception of isolation in their role.

> *"People were friends with you when you were a teacher with them. When you become a principal sometimes you can find that their attitude towards you changes – you can feel isolated."* (Newly appointed primary principal focus group participant, the North of Ireland)
>
> *"One of the tougher things is that you're no longer one of the staff. There's 'us and them' all the time."* (Post-primary deputy principal, focus group participant, South of Ireland)

In terms of in-school development, there was conflicting evidence regarding the extent to which leadership is distributed in practice, both as a means of succession planning and of making the role of principal more sustainable. Indeed, many teacher respondents in both jurisdictions and particularly from the primary sector suggested that opportunities to assume greater leadership responsibilities in their school are limited.

Despite these negative perceptions, most principals are positive about their role…

Our review of the current literature revealed that much of the focus is on the negative perceptions of principalship. However, responses to our survey demonstrate that newly appointed principals are largely happy in their role, with a high proportion stating that they are very satisfied. It should also be noted that these levels of job satisfaction are relatively high in comparison to other sectors. In, for example, the *2004 Workplace Employment Relations Survey* of employees from a range of sectors, including construction, financial services health and public administration, 72% of respondents stated that they were 'satisfied', or 'very satisfied' in relation to the work itself (Kersley et al, 2005).

Figure 3: Job satisfaction amongst newly appointed principals
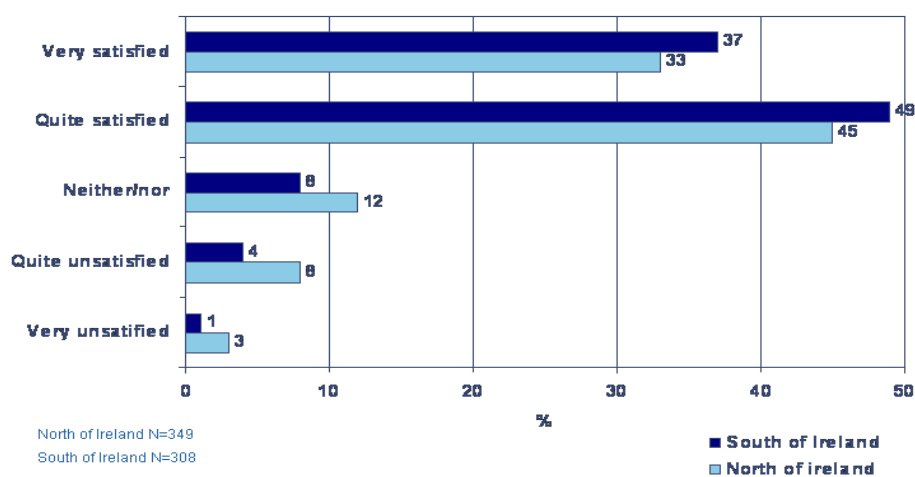
North of Ireland N=349
South of Ireland N=308

■ South of Ireland
□ North of ireland

Source: PwC survey of principals, North of Ireland, 2008 and PwC survey of principals, South of Ireland, 2008

Our findings from both the qualitative and quantitative phases of the research emphasise the intrinsic rewards that principalship can bring and the vocational nature of the role; the chance to 'make a difference'. This suggests that more work could be done to promote the positive aspects of the role of school leader – particularly by principals currently in position and their representative organisations.

Figure 4 below illustrates the intrinsic rewards, such as school ethos, the chance to make a difference, and pupil contact, which provide principals with most job satisfaction and which would encourage experienced teachers to apply for principalship.

Figure 4: Factors which encourage applications for principalship

North of Ireland		South of Ireland	
Teacher survey **Key factors encouraging applications for principalship**	**Principal survey** **Key factors providing most job satisfaction**	**Teacher survey** **Key factors encouraging applications for principalship**	**Principal survey** **Key factors providing most job satisfaction**
1 Chance to make a difference	1 Creating a school ethos	1 Personal challenge	1 Creating a school ethos
2 Personal challenge	2 Improving standards	2 Chance to make a difference	2 Improving standards
3 Create a vision	3 Pupil contact	3 Creating a vision	3 Pupil contact
4 Develop staff and leadership team	4 People management	4 Develop staff and leadership team	4 Involvement in new initiatives
5 Career advancement	5 Involvement in new initiatives	5 Career advancement	5 People management

We have noted that teachers are keen observers of the principals in their schools and indeed, many of the newly appointed principals in this research reported that they were inspired to apply by the example of their previous principal. In this context, the importance of excellent role models to inspire leaders of the future is clear.

> *"In my last school, there were a lot of good things going on. It got to the stage where I thought I could take that good practice elsewhere and lead it instead of being just a cog in the wheel."* (Post-primary deputy principal, the North of Ireland)
>
> *"Having the opportunity to lead and develop a school staff, creating a vision and making a real difference to the education of children in my school."* (Teacher survey, Ireland)

But there are some particular challenges in attracting principals in the North of Ireland and the South of Ireland…

Our research also identified some issues that are more specific to the North of Ireland and the South of Ireland, particularly in regard to the structural and cultural nature of the educational landscape and to specific terms and conditions for principals.

The relatively high number of small schools impacts on recruitment and retention…

In both the North of Ireland and the South of Ireland there are a relatively high number of small schools, mainly, but not exclusively primary schools. In these schools, and particularly in the South of Ireland, the majority of principals have teaching responsibilities. Many report that the challenge of balancing teaching and leadership responsibilities often results in feelings of guilt that insufficient time is spent on either role. Furthermore, a large number of these schools are located in rural areas which may further discourage applications for principalship. In our survey, over a fifth of teachers from both jurisdictions stated that a rural location would be an important factor in a decision not to apply for headship.

As the table below demonstrates, primary principals are more likely than post-primary principals to:

- Have little leadership experience prior to appointment;
- Spend more time in the classroom;
- Report a lack of distributed leadership in their school;
- Be less satisfied in their role, and, in the case of the North of Ireland, report a poor work-life balance; and
- Feel less prepared and receive less training for principalship.

Table 4: Challenges facing newly appointed primary school principals in Ireland	North of Ireland		South of Ireland	
	Primary	Post-primary	Primary	Post-primary
Non leadership position prior to appointment	23%	1%	36%	14%
Average number of hours spent teaching per week in timetabled classes	16	2	22	4
Leadership not at all or not very distributed	17%	1%	14%	11%
Quite or very satisfied in current role	74%	84%	86%	91%
Poor or very poor work-life balance	62%	51%	39%	57%
Limited or no support to apply for principalship	30%	16%	31%	16%
No formal leadership training prior to appointment	50%	34%	71%	45%
Very or quite prepared to fulfil the roles and responsibilities	47%	67%	54%	64%

There is a perception that the educational landscape is relatively conservative…

Several participants in the stakeholder interviews and the focus groups suggested that the predominance of small schools particularly in rural areas across the island of Ireland has led to a certain stagnation in the sector and to the persistence of a traditional view of the school leader. This was attributed to a number of factors, including:

- Structural impediments to mobility between schools;
- A policy of internal appointments in small schools (South of Ireland);
- The role of governors and Boards of Management in the principal selection process;
- A reluctance to appoint candidates from more non-traditional backgrounds; and
- In some cases, a fear of change.

"The old process of using governors to choose principals is very unfair. Someone who has taught in a school for 20 years is seen by governors as earning the right to become principal when they may not be the best person for the job." (Newly appointed primary principal, the North of Ireland)

"When the job came up, there was no other candidate. I would have felt somewhat disloyal to the staff, the pupils and the wider community not to go forward." (Newly appointed primary principal, the North of Ireland)

"I had no intentions of applying but when it came up there were no other applications, so I was basically coerced." (Newly appointed primary principal, South of Ireland)

"I was there so long it was expected of me to apply. The principal who was leaving said that if I didn't apply, someone else would come in and everything would be turned upside down." (Newly appointed primary principal, South of Ireland)

Evidence from the research suggests that this perception has discouraged applicants to principalship as candidates may feel obliged to 'wait their turn' or feel that their application is common knowledge in the wider community. Furthermore,

concerns were raised about the potential isolation of a principal with responsibility for performance management and conflict resolution issues in a close, local community. Many participants advocated a more professional, holistic approach to the appointment process, including for example, the use of more sophisticated techniques such as assessment centres rather than a one-off interview.

While there was some evidence suggested that women are increasingly being appointed to principalships, many stakeholders and focus group participants suggested a number of potential reasons for the perceived gender imbalance, particularly at post-primary level, including a perception that male principals are better for discipline.

> *"A lot of boards of governors feel it is better to have a male principal for discipline, especially in post-primary schools."* (Stakeholder, the North of Ireland)
>
> *"I would think in rural areas it's still in the minds of governors that you need a man."* (Newly appointed primary principal focus group participant, the North of Ireland)

Our research also revealed that personal attitudes and attributes impact on the likelihood of applying for principalship. In the main, experienced female teachers were more likely to state that a lack of experience and/or confidence in their abilities were factors that would discourage them from applying for principalship.

Table 5: How important would lack of leadership and confidence in your ability to perform the role be in influencing your decision <u>not</u> to apply for principalship?				
Quite or very important…	**North of Ireland**		**South of Ireland**	
	Male	**Female**	**Male**	**Female**
Lack of leadership experience	32%	37%	47%	59%
Lack of confidence in ability to perform the role	32%	42%	21%	49%

Principals' terms and conditions also seem to discourage applicants…

Reward levels and the terms and conditions of school leaders emerged as a key issue in both the North of Ireland and the South of Ireland. There was consensus among focus group participants that the current systems of reward in both jurisdictions do not act as an adequate incentive for teachers to apply for principal positions. In particular, differentials in reward between senior teacher and deputy principal positions and that of principals were thought to be insufficient in relation to the additional responsibility associated with the role.

> *"My actual difference in salary from taking vice-principal to principal was £52 a month. It is actually costing me money because of the extra hours."* (Newly appointed primary principal, the North of Ireland)
>
> *"I was a vice-principal in a large school in Belfast and I took a pay cut to become principal of a very small rural school."* (Newly appointed primary principal, the North of Ireland)
>
> *"Before I became a principal I was earning only ten thousand euro less, and when you take half that away for tax and divide by 52, it's a lot of extra responsibility for a ridiculous amount of money."* (Newly appointed primary principal, South of Ireland)
>
> *"I think the principal's role is very demanding mentally and physically and the salary increase would not compensate for it."* (Teacher survey, South of Ireland)

Other issues emerged in relation to seniority points (which discourage mobility between schools as the points relate to the school and not the individual), pension arrangements and notice periods in the South of Ireland. If principals step down after a certain period of time and return to the teaching staff, he or she loses the additional pension credits accumulated during their principalship, underscoring for many the concept of principalship as a 'life sentence'. The current system by

which principals are only required to give three months notice also received some criticism as this often results in insufficient time to appoint and handover to the incoming principal. There is also evidence that certain types of school may be less popular than others in terms of encouraging applications for principalship.

Table 6: How important would be the following school characteristics in influencing your decision <u>not</u> to apply for principalship?		
Quite or very important…	North of Ireland	South of Ireland
A small school (pupil numbers)	43%	32%
A school in a deprived area	34%	42%
An underachieving school	30%	39%
A school in a rural location	22%	22%

Indeed, several stakeholders, particularly in the North of Ireland, suggested that reward structures should reflect school circumstances and that additional payments should be made to principals assuming responsibility for certain types of school, such as underachieving schools for example.

There is also a certain level of instability in the system…

Many participants also highlighted the impact of ongoing reform in the education sector, particularly in the North of Ireland, (including uncertainty over future transfer arrangements and the establishment of ESA) and of demographic changes such as falling rolls, on teachers' aspirations to principalship. This was also linked to the desire for more streamlining of Government initiatives and improved communication with school leaders. The rate of change in education was also a major theme in our Independent Review of School Leadership undertaken in England and Wales (PwC, 2007) and to a certain extent, while the sector in NI is indeed experiencing an unprecedented rate of change, our conclusions in that report still hold good in the North of Ireland context.

"There is a sense in which many leaders in the sector seem to be wishing for a stability and consistency in their environment which cannot be delivered, and which is not enjoyed by any other organisation in the public or private sector. Change, diversity and complexity is an inevitable feature of the current and future environment of all sectors, and leaders need to accept and embrace this. A more legitimate concern is not with change itself but with the way in which change is managed and communicated by different agencies. It is therefore incumbent on the DfES, local authorities and other agencies to re-examine the efficacy of the arrangements that are currently in place to minimise the burden on the sector, and to ensure that they are acting in consort to deliver a coherent and 'joined up' message." (PwC, 2007)

There are also a number of other tensions relating to the role of the principal which became apparent during the course of this research and which require further attention in terms of the factors which motivate or discourage experienced teachers to apply for principalship. These include:

- **The balance of teaching and non-teaching responsibilities of principals:** participants held mixed views regarding the viability of the role of teaching principals. Many suggested that juggling teaching and leadership responsibilities made the job of principal almost 'undoable' yet at the same time others stated that they had entered the profession to teach and did not want to lose pupil contact time. Furthermore, teachers often suggest that principals should retain teaching responsibilities in order to better understand the daily experiences of, and demands on, teaching staff;

- **The definition of the role of the principal:** there is also a contradiction in the view that the role of the principal should be better defined and in that principals are motivated by having the freedom and autonomy to set the vision and ethos of the school. While 'national standards' for principalship will provide guidance in this regard, it is perhaps not feasible to have firm job descriptions for school principals. In other sectors, for example, senior leaders are unlikely to have 'hard and fast' definitions of their role;

- **The extent to which principals are isolated from the school workforce:** several participants noted that the role of principal can be isolated in the school, particularly given the visibility and accountability associated with the role. Not only did this discourage applicants to principalship but was also thought to impact on effective performance management of the school workforce, particularly in rural, close-knit communities. While this sense of isolation is an important disincentive, and is addressed in our recommendations below, it could, however, be argued that this is an intrinsic aspect of leadership, regardless of profession; and

- **People management and staff development:** overall, the opportunity to develop staff was viewed as a positive aspect of the role of principal. However, many participants reported that they did not, or would not, welcome the people management responsibilities associated with principalship. Indeed, many respondents suggested that additional training was required in this area, particularly in terms of performance management and conflict resolution. Again, leading and developing staff, and particularly leaders of the future, is a key function of leadership in, for example, the private sector.

These tensions, while important, are not, in our view, insurmountable, but rather demonstrate that there is a responsibility on all leaders in the sector to resolve the succession planning challenges that we have identified. In the section which follows, we present our recommendations for helping resolve these issues and the other disincentives for aspiring to principalship revealed by our research, taking account of both the school leadership challenges experienced in other OECD countries and of those which are particular to education in the North of Ireland and the South of Ireland.

In general terms, there are a number of actions which need to be taken to attract, develop and retain school leaders across the North of Ireland and the South of Ireland...

This research has demonstrated that there are a number of key issues that must be addressed in order to ensure the supply of principals in the North of Ireland and the South of Ireland and to make the role more sustainable. Our findings have led us to develop and elaborate a number of recommendations in relation to attracting, developing and sustaining school leaders (see Figure 5 below).

Figure 5: Attracting, developing and sustaining school leaders: our recommendations
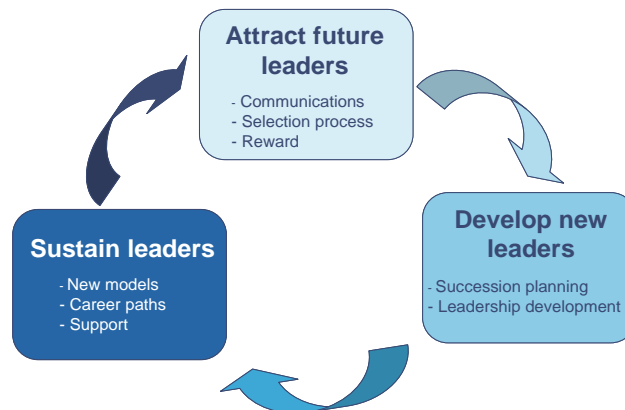
To attract future leaders, we need to…

Review and enhance communication across the sector…

Our findings have highlighted the challenges in attracting candidates to principalship positions in both the North of Ireland and the South of Ireland. It is evident that many deputy principals and middle leaders sometimes perceive school principalship as an unmanageable and undesirable prospect as a result of their observations of serving principals. However, the majority of principals surveyed expressed high levels of job satisfaction, suggesting that principals and other stakeholders could have a role to play in promoting the benefits of the role. Raising awareness of the benefits of distributed leadership, promoting different images of principalship and disseminating good practice in managing the demands of the job are also important.

Communication at a system-level was another concern for participants in the research; in both jurisdictions, participants called for clearer decision-making and guidance on policy. In the North of Ireland, participants questioned the pace of change in the sector and the definition of the role, while in the South of Ireland, many were unclear about the role of principal and its responsibilities. In order to attract talented candidates and encourage them to become school leaders of the future, it is evident that improved communication is required at both school and system levels.

	Table 7: Recommendations – Communication	
	North of Ireland	**South of Ireland**
1	• Encourage principals and governors to celebrate successes and emphasise the positive aspects of the job. The successes and benefits of the role should also be promoted by the Department of Education, the Regional Training Unit, the Education and Skills Authority and professional associations. RTU's use of serving heads in training programmes is an example of how the role can be positively presented;	• Encourage principals and Boards of Management to celebrate successes and emphasise the positive aspects of the job. The successes and benefits of the role should also be promoted by the Department of Education and Science, Leadership Development for Schools and professional associations; • LDS's use of serving heads in training programmes is an example of how the role can be positively presented;
2	• Consider redefining the role of school principal in light of new developments in the education sector;	• Consider creating a leadership profile to provide greater insight into what the role involves. Consider defining to a greater degree the roles and responsibilities of school principals;
3	• Promote different images of principalship to teachers, principals and governors, to ensure that the general perception is not 'grey and old'.	• Promote different images of principalship to teachers, principals and Boards of Management, to ensure that the general perception is not 'grey and old'.
4	• Streamline initiatives to ensure that the pace of change in the sector is manageable and that there is a strategic approach to the communication of new initiatives; • Government should communicate clearly and transparently to schools and principals regarding educational policy;	• Streamline initiatives to ensure that the pace of change in the sector is manageable and that there is a strategic approach to the communication of new initiatives; • Government should communicate clearly and transparently to schools and principals regarding educational policy;
5	• Government should communicate clearly and transparently to schools and principals regarding educational policy and provide clear and timely decision-making;	

Address current selection procedures…

The evidence highlights a number of issues with the current processes of selection for principals in both the North of Ireland and the South of Ireland, particularly around the role of governors and Boards of Management. Given the

wide-ranging implications of the choice of principal for children and young people, it is essential that the selection process is sufficiently rigorous and tests a range of skills appropriate for principalship.

Table 8: Recommendations – Selection process	
North of Ireland	**South of Ireland**
6	• Professionalise the system for the selection of candidates to principalship positions. This should comprise a range of activities to test the candidate's skills, and could include an assessment centre or similar method of 360° assessment. This could, for example, build on recent work undertaken by RTU using assessment centres as part of the recruitment process;	• Professionalise the system for the selection of candidates to principalship positions. This should comprise a range of activities to test the candidate's skills, and could include an assessment centre or similar method of 360° assessment;
7	• Consider providing training to governors on recruitment. Given that governors are voluntary, this could be provided through online modules to minimise the burden on them.	• Consider providing training to Boards of Management (BOM) on recruitment. Given that BOMs are voluntary, this could be provided through online modules to minimise the burden on them.
8	• Encourage greater consistency and the use of appropriate criteria in advertisements for principalship positions. For example, advertisements where a minimum number of years as vice-principal is a criterion for a principal position may exclude potential candidates. A possible approach could be to use RTU's National Standards for Headteachers (NI edition) as a framework for setting criteria.	• Review the practice whereby the majority of deputy principal appointments are internal.

Consider new approaches to reward…

It is evident from our research that current salary arrangements are an important disincentive for many teachers, with inadequate salary differentials between senior posts and principal positions, and anomalies in reward across different schools as key concerns. A review of current reward systems in both jurisdictions is therefore crucial.

Table 9: Recommendations – Reward	
North of Ireland	**South of Ireland**
9	• Review reward differentials between vice-principals and senior teachers and principals;	• Review reward differentials between deputy principals and senior teachers and principals;
10	• Review salary arrangements across different schools, for example, where the principal of a school is paid less than the vice-principal of a larger school;	• Review salary arrangements across different schools, for example, where the principal of a school is paid less than the deputy principal of a larger school;
11	• Review the emerging practice whereby serving principals moving to a different school are placed at a lower point on the salary scale;	• Review the practice whereby teachers moving to a different school lose their responsibility points;
12	• Consider incentivising principalships for schools in challenging circumstances through financial reward, sabbaticals or system opportunities.	• Consider incentivising principalships for schools in challenging circumstances through financial reward, sabbaticals or system opportunities.
13		• Review pension arrangements to allow principals to step down from their role without losing their pension entitlements.

To develop new leaders, we need to…

Implement system-wide succession planning…

Given the current challenges facing the recruitment of principals in both jurisdictions, planning for succession within schools is particularly important. The identification and encouragement of teachers with leadership potential early on in their careers can play a vital role in the development of a pool of school leaders for the future.

Table 10: Recommendations – Succession planning		
	North of Ireland	**South of Ireland**
14	• Provide training on succession planning for principals and governors to ensure that it becomes embedded in the system. This could, for example, expand upon the work of RTU's Building Leadership Capacity initiative which focuses on succession planning at the individual school level;	• Provide training on succession planning for principals and Boards of Management to ensure that it becomes embedded in the system.
15	• Ensure that those holding middle and senior management roles within their school are provided with opportunities to lead, rather than carrying out administrative tasks;	• Develop the middle-management structure in schools so that leadership becomes more distributed; • Ensure that those holding middle and senior management roles within their school are provided with opportunities to lead, rather than carrying out administrative tasks;
16	• Compile data annually and centrally on newly appointed principals and vacancies by phase, sector, age and gender. Data should also be collected on principals taking early retirement and approaching retirement age.	• Compile data annually and centrally on newly appointed principals and vacancies by phase, sector, age and gender. Data should also be collected on principals taking early retirement and approaching retirement age.

Enhance current approaches to leadership development…

Leadership development is closely linked by many participants in the research to their likelihood of applying for a principalship position. This was particularly pertinent for female teachers, who rated lack of management experience and confidence to fulfil the role as greater disincentives than their male counterparts. To this end, it is crucial that talented teachers are afforded sufficient and rewarding opportunities to take part in formal and informal development.

Table 11: Recommendations – Leadership development		
	North of Ireland	**South of Ireland**
17	• Define the role of governors in leadership development and provide guidance to governing bodies. For example, governors could have a role in monitoring whether staff are accessing adequate development opportunities. However, it should be remembered that governors are voluntary and any actions should avoid undue burden;	• Define the role of Boards of Management in leadership development and provide guidance to them. For example, Boards could have a role in monitoring whether staff are accessing adequate development opportunities. However, it should be remembered that Board members are voluntary and any actions should avoid undue burden;
18	• Create structures to allow newly appointed principals to shadow the outgoing principal of their new school prior to taking up the position, for example, by allowing the principal to shadow the outgoing principal where appropriate, or by establishing pre-induction training for principals on operational management. Indeed, we	• Create structures to allow newly appointed principals to shadow the outgoing principal of their new school prior to taking up the position for example, by allowing the principal to shadow the outgoing principal where appropriate, or by establishing pre-induction training for principals on operational management;

	Table 11: Recommendations – Leadership development	
	North of Ireland	**South of Ireland**
	understand from RTU that proposals are now in place to initiate an induction programme for newly appointed heads prior to taking up their post;	
19	• Promote opportunities for networking;	• Promote opportunities for networking;
20	• Consider establishing a formal mentoring programme for newly appointed principals. Criteria should be set to ensure that only successful principals become mentors. We understand from RTU that proposals are in place for Autumn 2009 to provide newly appointed principals with a mentor as part of their Consultant Principals proposal, and we suggest that the programme is monitored and evaluated to assess the impact on newly appointed principals;	• Consider establishing a formal mentoring programme for newly appointed principals. Criteria should be set to ensure that only successful principals become mentors;
21	• Continue to develop a precursor to the Professional Qualification for Headship (PQH) aimed at those in middle-management positions without firm aspirations for headship;[3]	• Provide greater formal leadership development training to teachers with leadership potential. For example, by opening the new Tóraíocht programme to a greater number of middle leaders in order to create a wider pool of potential leaders;
22	• The current review of PQH should give consideration to the development of modules on a range of leadership issues.	

To sustain existing leaders, we need to…
Explore new models of leadership…

It is evident that principals currently face significant challenges in sustaining their increasingly complex and demanding role. This was particularly the case for teaching principals who often struggle to combine their leadership role with full-time teaching duties; indeed, combining leadership and teaching roles is one of the key disincentives for participants in both the North of Ireland and the South of Ireland. While it may not be practical to introduce new ways of working into all schools, it may be useful to consider alternative models of principalship in order to increase sustainability in the sector.

In our 2007 *Independent Study into School Leadership*, we identified a number of potential models of leadership that could make the job of principal more 'doable' and help succession planning challenges. Indeed, many participants in our research noted the potential to federate or cluster schools in order to make the role more strategic. Our report also recommended new approaches to deploying administrative resources, for example, through creating 'travelling bursars' who could carry out financial responsibilities for a cluster of schools.

	Table 12: Recommendations – New models of leadership	
	North of Ireland	**South of Ireland**
23	• Consider alternative models of principalship for teaching principals and/ or in primary schools. For example, a strategic principal working across a federation or cluster of schools;	• Consider alternative models of principalship for teaching principals in primary schools. For example, a strategic principal working across a federation or cluster of schools;

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[3] We understand from RTU that this is underway as part of the review of Leadership and Management.

Table 12: Recommendations – New models of leadership		
	North of Ireland	**South of Ireland**
24	• Consider models such as co-headship to allow greater flexibility for principals, for example, to facilitate those with family or other personal commitments, or those wishing to reduce their working hours as they approach retirement.	• Consider models such as co-headship to allow greater flexibility for principals, for example, to facilitate those with family or other personal commitments, or those wishing to reduce their working hours as they approach retirement.
25	• Consider creating a financial bursar role in schools. In the primary sector particularly, one 'travelling bursar' could be employed across a cluster of schools	• Consider creating a senior financial post or bursar role in schools. In the primary sector particularly, one 'travelling bursar' could be employed across a cluster of schools

Create more diverse career paths…

Evidence from the literature and findings from the research suggest that principals work optimally when placed in a school for a maximum of seven to ten years, suggesting that fresh challenge is important in order to sustain and refresh school leaders.

Table 13: Recommendations – Career paths		
	North of Ireland	**South of Ireland**
26	• Publicise and encourage greater movement throughout the education sector through sabbaticals, secondments, inspectorate and other system-wide roles. For example, a day a week in a consultancy or mentoring role. This can also aid succession planning in schools.	• Publicise and encourage greater movement throughout the education sector through sabbaticals, secondments, inspectorate and other system-wide roles. For example, a day a week in a consultancy or mentoring role. This can also aid succession planning in schools.
27	• Create greater opportunities for life-long, personalised learning. For example, professional development opportunities tailored to the NCSL's five stages of leadership: emergent, entry, established, advanced and consultant.[4] RTU's framework for training could be expanded to facilitate this.	• Create greater opportunities for life-long, personalised learning. For example, professional development opportunities similar to the NCSL's five stages of leadership: emergent, entry, established, advanced and consultant.[3]

Provide additional support…

Providing principals with support such as administrative and caretaking resources, as well as support through governors and Boards of Management, can play an important role in sustaining serving principals, allowing them dedicated leadership time and helping to reduce their sense of isolation.

Table 14: Recommendations – Support		
	North of Ireland	**South of Ireland**
28	• Review levels of administrative and caretaking support provided to schools to ensure that principals have dedicated leadership time, perhaps through sharing resources between schools, especially small schools;	• Review levels of administrative and caretaking support provided to schools to ensure that principals have dedicated leadership time, perhaps through sharing resources between schools, especially small schools;

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[4] http://www.ncsl.org.uk/onlinecommunities-index/comms-extracted-index/comms-extracted-duquesnay.htm

Table 14: Recommendations – Support	
North of Ireland	**South of Ireland**
29 • Review the role of governors, considering new models of governorship and providing governors with training. For example, a centralised, specialised support role for sector bodies could be established;	• Examine the role of Boards of Management, considering new models of management and providing Boards of Management members with training in the identification, development and selection of school leaders. For example, a centralised, specialised support role for sector bodies could be established. While there has been investment in training for Boards of Management, further work is required to ensure more rigorous training for Board members.

Addressing these challenges in the current economic climate…

We recognise that, given the current economic climate, it may not be feasible to address all the concerns raised by participants in this research immediately. However, in our view, it is important to recognise both the depth and the validity of the issues identified. We have therefore provided an initial scoping of 'quick wins' or first steps that could be taken to mitigate against barriers to applying for principalship.[5] These include:

- Encouraging principals and governors and Boards of Management **to celebrate successes and emphasise the positive aspects of the role.** These successes and benefits should also be promoted by system-level organisations, such as the Department of Education in the North of Ireland, and the Department of Education and Science in the South of Ireland;

- **Promoting different images of headship** to teachers, principals and governors, to ensure that the general perception is not 'grey and old';

- Encouraging principals to ensure that **those holding middle and senior management roles within their school are provided with opportunities to lead,** rather than solely carrying out administrative tasks;

- **Examining the role of governors and Boards of Management in leadership development.** For example, Boards of Management and governors could have a role in monitoring whether staff are accessing adequate development opportunities;

- **Ensuring that Departmental communications with the sector are clear and transparent**;

- **Promoting greater opportunities for networking amongst school leaders;** and

- **Publicising and encouraging greater movement through the education sector** through sabbaticals, secondments, inspectorate and other system-wide roles.

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[5] A more detailed analysis is presented in Annex A: Recommendations for the North of Ireland and the South of Ireland.

1 Introduction

Introduction

1.1 Research evidence demonstrates that strong and effective school leadership is one of the key factors impacting on educational achievement (Waters et al, 2003; Leithwood et al, 2006). The continuing development and recruitment of effective leaders for the future is therefore a fundamental aspect of improving the educational attainment of children and young people.

1.2 The importance of school leadership has also been highlighted by education ministers from the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) member countries. As a result, OECD instigated an international study based on approaches to school leadership. Over 20 countries produced detailed background reports on school leadership and these, together with five case studies on school leadership, formed the basis of the comparative report, *Improving School Leadership* (OECD, 2008). This study emphasises the crucial importance of school leadership and identifies four policy levers which, if taken together, have the potential to improve school leadership practice. These four levers are: redefining school leadership responsibilities; distributing school leadership; making school leadership an attractive profession; and developing skills for effective school leadership.

"School leadership has become a priority in education agendas internationally. It plays a key role in improving school outcomes by influencing the motivations and capacities of teachers, as well as the school climate and environment. Effective school leadership is essential to improve the efficiency and equity of schooling." (OECD, 2008)

1.3 There is also an increasing acknowledgement of the importance of school leadership in improving standards and raising educational attainment in both the North of Ireland and the South of Ireland. The respective governments have invested significantly in the development of current and emerging school leaders, particularly with the establishment of the Regional Training Unit (RTU) and the introduction of the Professional Qualification for Headship in the North of Ireland in 2000 and the Leadership Development for Schools (LDS) in the South of Ireland in 2002.

1.4 In addition, schools are facing challenges as they experience higher levels of autonomy and accountability, and serve more diverse pupil populations with a wider range of social issues. The role of school principal is therefore also changing, becoming increasingly complex and demanding. It encompasses aspects such as financial and personnel management, and requires principals to keep abreast of frequent changes in policy as well as retaining a focus on improving standards and educational attainment.

1.5 The increasingly challenging role of the principal is thought to have led to a reduction in the attractiveness of headship for potential candidates. *Improving School Leadership* (OECD, 2008) notes that while the average age of school principals is rising across OECD countries, many jurisdictions are simultaneously faced with the challenge of declining numbers of applicants for principalship posts. Indeed, OECD Country Background reports for the North of Ireland and the South of Ireland highlight emerging concerns relating to the shrinking pools of talent for future principals and the calibre of candidates for principalship, together with questions about the attractiveness and sustainability of the role.

1.6 It is widely agreed that efforts must be made to address the succession planning challenge in order to ensure the future supply of high quality, effective school principals. An exploration and understanding of the factors that can motivate or discourage potential applicants when considering advancing to the role of leadership is vital in seeking to address the succession planning challenge.

Terms of reference

1.7   In light of the OECD reports, PricewaterhouseCoopers (LLP) was commissioned in June 2008 by the Regional Training Unit (RTU) in the North of Ireland and Leadership Development for Schools (LDS) in the South of Ireland to carry out an all-island research study into school leadership.

1.8   The main purpose of the study was to investigate the reasons why some teachers apply for the post of principalship or headship and others do not, focusing on the perspectives of those teachers who have recently been appointed to the post of principal or headteacher and experienced teachers who have not yet chosen to apply for principalship. The specific factors addressed by this research are outlined below:

- Personal circumstances;
- Levels of reward;
- Levels of support attached to the post;
- Current career satisfaction;
- Alternative career path options;
- Prospect of selection;
- Perception of the role; and
- School or context specific issues.

1.9   The impact of other variables, such as gender, ethnicity, age, qualifications and experience was also considered as part of the research.

Methodology

1.10 In order to address these issues we undertook an extensive research exercise, summarised in Figure 1.1. Each of the research activities is outlined in greater detail below.

Figure 1.1: Overview of methodology for the study
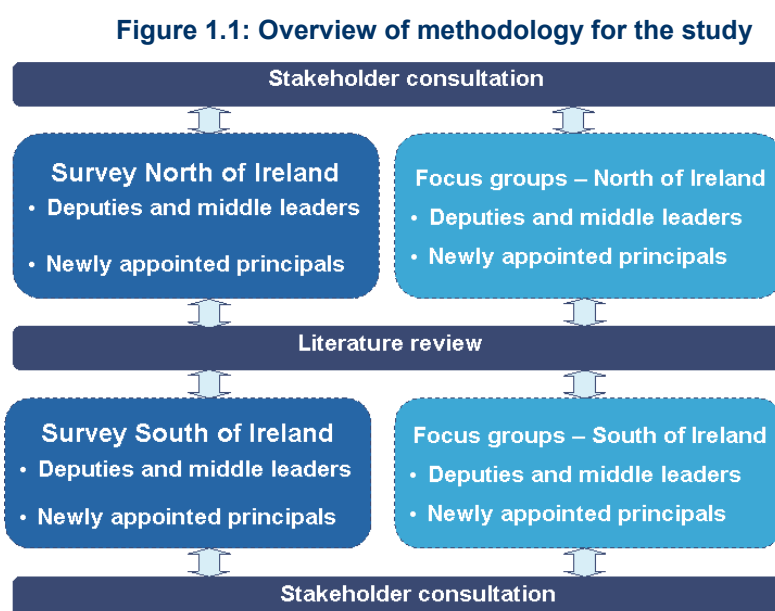
Literature review

1.11   The research team undertook a review of existing research into the attractiveness of the role of school principal and recruitment and retention issues in both the North of Ireland and the South of Ireland. The overall aim of the review was to provide a brief contextual background to the study and to inform the qualitative and quantitative phases of this research.

1.12   A range of literature was reviewed relating to school leadership in the South of Ireland, the North of Ireland and beyond, with approximately 45 documents considered in total. Issues examined in the review included perceptions of principalship, and the recruitment and retention of school principals.

Stakeholder consultation

1.13   The stakeholder consultation phase of the research comprised in-depth interviews and consultation with a range of key groups in both the North of Ireland and the South of Ireland. Table 1.1 outlines the organisations consulted during the research.

Table 1.1: Stakeholders consulted during the research

North of Ireland	South of Ireland
Northern Ireland Teachers' Council (NITC)[6]	Irish Primary Principals Network (IPPN)
Five Education and Library Boards	Joint Managerial Body (JMB)
Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS)	Irish Vocational Education Association (IVEA)
Education and Skills Authority (ESA)	National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals (NAPD)
Governing Bodies Association (GBA)	Association of Secondary Teachers (ASTI)
General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland (GTCNI)	Church of Ireland Board of Education (CIBE)
Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education (NICIE)	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA)
Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta (CnG)	Association of Community and Comprehensive Schools (ACCS)
Regional Training Unit (RTU)	Leadership Development for Schools (LDS)

Focus groups

1.14   We conducted a series of nine focus groups with newly appointed principals (those appointed within the last two years) and deputy principals and middle leaders in both the North of Ireland and the South of Ireland. Topic guides were constructed around the terms of reference and can be found in the technical report accompanying this publication.

1.15   In order to maximise participation, focus groups were set up in conjunction with existing training courses and a random sample of eight to ten participants was selected where total numbers on the training courses exceeded ten.

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[6] The NITC comprises: the Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL); Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO); National Association of Headteachers (NAHT); National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers (NASUWT); and the Ulster Teachers' Union (UTU).

Table 1.2: Focus group profiles

Group	Location	School phase	Participant type	Number of participants
1	Antrim	Post-primary	Newly appointed principals	9
2	Down	Primary	Newly appointed principals	9
3	Monaghan	Primary	Newly appointed principals	8
4	Enniskillen	Primary	Newly appointed principals	7
5	Portlaoise	Post-primary	Deputy principals	6
6	Wexford	Primary	Deputy principals	9
7	Cork	Post-primary	Middle leaders	8
8	Belfast	Post-primary	Deputy principals	7
9	Belfast	Primary and post-primary	PQH graduates	7
			Total	**70**

Surveys of newly appointed principals and experienced teachers

1.16 The aim of the quantitative fieldwork phase was to collect data on leadership issues from newly appointed principals and deputy and middle leaders. The specific objectives of the surveys were to:

- Provide more robust results for informing policy recommendations; and
- Provide opportunities to test out the most significant findings emerging from the stakeholder consultation and focus group phases of the research.

1.17 Questionnaires for the South of Ireland and the North of Ireland were tailored slightly to reflect the different educational contexts; however, both research instruments had a common set of questions to allow for comparative analysis. The four questionnaires were based around the topic guides used for the focus groups and informed by the stakeholder consultation and findings from the focus groups. Some questions were included from the previous research undertaken by PwC in our 2007 *Independent Review into School Leadership*, to facilitate comparison to results from the large scale survey conducted in England and Wales. The questionnaires were piloted during two focus group sessions with principals.

1.18 In the North of Ireland, the headteacher questionnaire was distributed to principals appointed to their first principalship since the introduction of the Professional Qualification for Headship (PQH) in 2000. The PQH is a tailored version of the National Professional Qualification for Headship, and was introduced by RTU in 1999 as a qualification to prepare teachers in the North of Ireland for principalship. The questionnaire for deputy principals and middle leaders was distributed to all PQH graduates who have not yet been appointed to principalship.

1.19 In the South of Ireland, the questionnaires were sent to principals appointed over the last three years. The principals also received in the pack three copies of the questionnaire for deputy principals and middle leaders to distribute to senior teachers in their school. The pack included four questionnaires in total, pre-paid business reply envelopes and a covering letter explaining the background to the study and asking the principal to select the senior teachers to respond to the survey at random.

1.20 There were four versions of the survey in total, and the response rates for each are presented in Table 1.3.

Table 1.3: Response rate of the principal and teacher surveys

Survey	Respondent type	Geographic location	Sample size	Number received	Response rate	Significance level*
1	Newly appointed principals	North of Ireland	750	349	47%	+/- 3.5
2	Newly appointed principals	South of Ireland	900	308	34%	+/- 4.1
3	Deputy principals and middle leaders (PQH graduates)	North of Ireland	800	230	29%	+/- 4.9
4	Deputy principals and middle leaders (Experienced teachers)	South of Ireland	1800 approx	393	22%[7]	+/- 3.9
Total				**1280**		

* At the 95% confidence level[8]

1.21 Overall, the response rates to the survey were high, indicating the level of interest in the subject matter. It should be noted that, due to the nature of a postal survey, there is less control over response rates than, for example, a telephone survey, and therefore the representativeness of the survey cannot be guaranteed. Generally, however, there was a good spread of survey respondents from across school phases and sectors in each jurisdiction. The following paragraphs compare the profile of respondents to the surveys by school phase and sector compared to the total number of schools across each jurisdiction.

Survey responses - North of Ireland

1.22 Table 1.4 provides a breakdown of respondents to the North of Ireland principal and deputy middle leader surveys according to the respondent's school phase, compared to the overall proportion of each school phase in the North of Ireland and the breakdown by phase of PQH graduates since 2000.

Table 1.4: Representativeness of survey responses by school phase

School phase	PwC survey of principals, 2008 - respondents	PwC survey of deputy principals and middle leaders, 2008 - respondents	PQH graduates since 2000 (sample used for deputy principal and middle leader survey) - schools	Overall breakdown for the North of Ireland - schools
Primary	59%	39%	50%	69%
Post-primary	26%	56%	40%	18%
Nursery	9%	2%	2%	8%
Special	4%	3%	5%	3%

Source: PwC survey of principals, the North of Ireland 2008, PwC survey of deputy principals and middle leaders, the North of Ireland 2008, www.deni.gov.uk and RTU

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[7] Newly appointed principals receiving the principal survey were asked to distribute four copies of the teacher survey to experienced teachers in their school. Given the number of small schools in Ireland, it is likely that in many instances there were insufficient numbers of experienced teachers for full distribution of the questionnaire in schools.

[8] The basic formula for calculating 95% confidence intervals is as follows: $p - 1.96\sqrt{\frac{p(1-p)}{n}} < \Pi < p + 1.96\sqrt{\frac{p(1-p)}{n}}$

Where p is the sample population, n is the sample size and Π is the population proportion.

1.23   As outlined in Table 1.4, responses to the principal survey are broadly in line with the overall ratios of school phases in the North of Ireland. The difference in response rates for deputy principals and middle leaders are likely to result from the lower numbers of middle and senior leadership team members at primary and nursery level.

1.24   Table 1.5 provides a breakdown of respondents to the North of Ireland principal and deputy principal/middle leader surveys by school sector, compared to the overall proportion of each school sector in the North of Ireland.

Table 1.5: Representativeness of survey responses by sector

School sector	PwC survey of principals, 2008 - respondents	PwC survey of deputy principals and middle leaders, 2008 - respondents	Overall breakdown for the North of Ireland - schools
Catholic Maintained	40%	41%	41%
Controlled	48%	28%	42%
Controlled Integrated	0%	1%	0.4%
Grant-maintained Integrated	2%	5%	3%
Gaelscoileanna (Irish-medium)	1%	1%	2%
Voluntary maintained	4%	9%	2%
Voluntary non-maintained	5%	13%	2%

Source: PwC survey of principals, the North of Ireland 2008, PwC survey of deputy principals and middle leaders, the North of Ireland 2008

1.25   Generally, the responses to the survey are broadly in line with the overall sectoral breakdown for the North of Ireland, with the exception of the lower percentage of deputy and middle leader respondents from the controlled sector.

Survey responses – South of Ireland

1.26   Table 1.6 provides a breakdown of respondents to the South of Ireland principal and deputy middle leader surveys according to the respondent's school phase, compared to the overall proportion of each school phase in the South of Ireland.

Table 1.6: Representativeness of survey responses by school phase

School phase	PwC survey of principals, 2008 - respondents	PwC survey of deputy principals and middle leaders, 2008 - respondents	Overall breakdown for the South of Ireland - schools
Primary	76%	74%	81%
Post-primary	21%	25%	19%

Source: PwC survey of principals, South of Ireland 2008, PwC survey of deputy principals and middle leaders, South of Ireland 2008 and www.education.ie

1.27   Generally, the spread of respondents across school phases is similar to the overall ratio in the South of Ireland. It should be noted that the deputy principal and middle leader survey in the South of Ireland was exploratory; newly appointed principals were sent three questionnaires to distribute to senior teachers in their schools in addition to their own principal questionnaire. It is likely that many schools may not have sufficient numbers of senior teachers to enable full distribution of the survey.

1.28   Table 1.7 provides a breakdown of respondents to the South of Ireland principal and deputy principal and middle leader surveys according to their school sector, compared to the overall numbers for the South of Ireland.

Table 1.7: Representativeness of survey responses by sector

School sector	PwC survey of principals, 2008 - respondents	PwC survey of deputy principals and middle leaders, 2008 - respondents	Overall breakdown for the South of Ireland - schools
Primary	46%	57%	81%
Community/Comprehensive school	3%	4%	2%
Gaelscoileanna	10%	9%	*[9]
Vocational/Community college	7%	7%	6%
Voluntary Secondary	11%	13%	10%

Source: PwC survey of principals, South of Ireland 2008, PwC survey of deputy principals and middle leaders, South of Ireland 2008, and www.education.ie

Analysis

1.29 In order to analyse the data set, responses to each of the open-ended questions were coded and a selection of quotations were used to represent the range of comments made.

1.30 The data was analysed according to respondents' gender, age, ethnicity, school phase and sector. The findings from the research were interpreted in light of the OECD comparative report.

Scope and structure of the report

1.31 The remainder of this report presents an overview of the current literature on school leadership, followed by findings from the fieldwork phases of the research. It should be noted that survey results have been rounded to the nearest percentage point throughout the report. The findings for the North of Ireland and the South of Ireland are presented separately. For each jurisdiction the report includes sections on perceptions of principalship and on the development, recruitment and retention of leaders. This report is structured as follows:

- Literature review;
- School Leadership in the North of Ireland – perceptions of principalship;
- Developing, recruiting and retaining effective leaders in the North of Ireland;
- School Leadership in the South of Ireland – perceptions of principalship;
- Developing, recruiting and retaining effective leaders in the South of Ireland; and
- Conclusions and recommendations.

1.32 A separate technical report accompanies this report, containing findings from the focus group phase of the research, a profile of respondents to the survey, full results from the survey and the topic guides and questionnaires used in the course of the research.

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[9] Statistics for school sectors in the South of Ireland on www.education.ie do not provide a breakdown for the Gaelscoileanna sector.
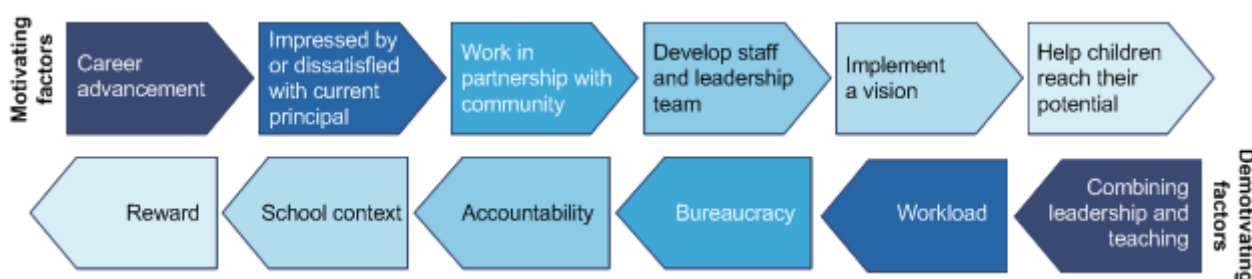
2 Literature review

Introduction

2.1   This section of the report presents the key findings from a review of the most relevant literature in order to provide a brief contextual background to the study. A range of documents relating to school leadership in the North of Ireland, the South of Ireland, the UK and beyond was reviewed. A slightly larger number of documents were found to relate to issues affecting the South of Ireland, perhaps due to the difference in scale between the two jurisdictions. This section is structured as follows:

- The international context;
- North of Ireland; the nature and scope of the issues affecting school leadership;
- South of Ireland; the nature and scope of the issues affecting school leadership;
- Attracting and recruiting principals;
- Developing skills for effective leadership;
- Succession planning and the selection process;
- Retaining effective school leaders; and
- Conclusions.

The international context

2.2   There is widespread recognition of the crucial role of effective school leadership in improving standards, and its impact on the quality of teaching and learning and the motivation of staff within schools (Hartle & Thomas, 2003). Indeed, Leithwood et al (2004), report that school leadership is second only to classroom teaching in its impact on educational achievement. As the role of the school expands to encompass a wider range of responsibilities for children and in the community, so the role of school principal becomes increasingly multifaceted and the recruitment and retention of effective leaders becomes more pertinent.

2.3   There are concerns internationally about declining interest from candidates for a position that is often viewed as stressful and challenging. In addition, some documents highlight emerging issues regarding the quality of candidates for principalship (Williams & Tom, 2003; Copland, 2001). These challenges are particularly concerning given that leadership roles are considered to have a significant and direct impact on the implementation of strategies and on the delivery of results (Waters et al, 2003; Alimo-Metcalfe & Lawler, 2001). There is also evidence that attracting applications from women and for schools in rural or deprived areas is particularly problematic (OECD, 2008).

2.4   Since the 1990s, there has been an increasing focus on the importance of school leadership and approaches to the recruitment and retention of school principals. Indeed, OECD (2008) notes that the succession planning challenge, together with the link between educational attainment and school leadership have made school leadership a priority in educational policy across OECD countries. There is also a great deal of research that considers the reasons behind the falling numbers of applicants for school principalship positions (Hobson, Andy et al, 2003, Mulford 2003).

2.5   It is reported that teachers are keen observers of the principals they work with, and are therefore aware of the challenges they face (IPPN, 2006b). Figure 2.1 presents a summary of the key factors that motivate or discourage teachers considering seeking headship identified in the literature. These aspects of the role are then considered in the remainder of this section of the report.

Figure 2.1: Factors that motivate and discourage teachers considering principalship

Motivating factors					
Career advancement	Impressed by or dissatisfied with current principal	Work in partnership with community	Develop staff and leadership team	Implement a vision	Help children reach their potential

Reward	School context	Accountability	Bureaucracy	Workload	Combining leadership and teaching

Demotivating factors

Motivating factors for principalship

2.6 While there is extensive discussion in the literature about the perceived barriers to the recruitment of school principals, the factors that motivate candidates to apply are considered in less detail. *Go for it: reasons to be a headteacher* (NCSL) outlines four key reasons why candidates choose to apply for the role of principalship, as outlined in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1: Motivating factors for candidates seeking principalship

Reason	Explanation
Help children and young people reach their potential	• Scope to improve the life prospects of children and young people. • Extended sphere of influence; able to influence the opportunities of a greater number of children.
Work in partnership with the community	• Policy initiatives put the principal at the heart of the community. • Principals have the capacity to help reinvigorate communities.
Develop your staff and leadership team	• Opportunities for identifying and developing future leaders, as well as helping staff at all levels to train and develop. • Policy development work is carried out by many principals at local and national levels.
See your vision for the school come to life	• Shaping teaching and learning and implementing a vision for the school can create a sense of satisfaction. • Sense of personal growth and achievement.

Source: NCSL

2.7 Other documents outline similar motivating factors to those identified by NCSL. IPPN (2005) identifies a number of 'enablers; these include: candidates' desire to become the leader of a school community and thus have the capacity to influence a school's ethos and culture; the opportunity to advance or change the direction of their career, and the perceived greater variety of the principal's role in comparison to that of a class teacher. In some cases, it was thought that teachers could be inspired by the leadership of their current principal to seek headship, or conversely, dissatisfied by their current experience of school leadership and seek to make a difference through principalship.

2.8 Sugrue & Morgan (2008) also highlight the intrinsic nature of the rewards and job satisfaction for principals. Findings from their survey of administrative principals indicated that receiving and giving support was the aspect of their role providing the greatest job satisfaction, followed by leadership rewards (such as giving direction and leadership) and the intrinsic rewards, such as variety of the work.

Demotivating factors for principalship

2.9   The literature highlights a number of demotivating factors for potential candidates considering principalship positions common to many countries (Mulford, 2003); these centre, in the main, on the nature of the role and its responsibilities. The subsequent sections on the North of Ireland and the South of Ireland consider other discouraging factors particularly affecting each jurisdiction.

Workload and perceptions of bureaucracy

2.10   There is a consensus in the literature that leading a school is a demanding and complex role, often presenting principals with large amounts of administration and bureaucracy. This is said to have implications for the principal's ability to focus on implementing their leadership vision and on teaching and learning within the school.

> *"Vast workload and ever-increasing responsibility with consequent negative impact on the health, welfare and personal life of the principal."* (IPPN, 2006b)

2.11   Some papers report that while the principal's workload could be reduced through the distribution of leadership responsibilities, in practice leadership is not truly distributed. Our Independent Review of Leadership (PwC, 2007) in England and Wales found that while the vast majority of school leaders surveyed considered leadership responsibilities to be distributed to at least some extent, many teaching and support staff did not feel engaged and involved in a way that was consistent with the school leader perspective. In addition, school fieldwork visits conducted as part of the study highlighted that many school leaders were over-stretched and carrying out a wide range of delivery-related responsibilities, suggesting that broader and deeper distributed leadership is required in schools. Indeed, *A life in the day of a headteacher* (NCSL, 2007a) found that principals spent almost a quarter of their time undertaking administrative tasks.

Accountability

2.12   Some authors describe the high levels of accountability associated with the role of principal as a factor that can dissuade candidates from applying for principalship positions (Mulford, 2003; NCSL, 2007a). The literature indicates that levels of accountability for principals are increasing, and that this aspect of the role can act as a key deterrent for teachers considering principalship.

> *"Few would dispute that the role of a headteacher is a demanding one. Heads today have responsibilities way beyond anything their predecessors experienced. They face a rigorous regime of accountability, being accountable to more bodies… and in more ways than ever before."* (NCSL, 2007c)

2.13   Others identify an imbalance between the principal's ultimate accountability and their level of authority and resources, suggesting that they do not always have the capacity to act freely despite being accountable for their school (IPPN, 2006b).

North of Ireland – the nature and scope of the issues affecting school leadership

2.14   Education is a key government priority in the North of Ireland, as outlined in the Programme for Government Document (the North of Ireland Executive, 2008). The sector is currently undergoing rapid reform with the introduction of a revised curriculum, the ending of academic selection and the introduction of the Curriculum Entitlement Framework, which aims to provide pupils with greater choice and flexibility by providing access to a wider range of learning opportunities, amongst other initiatives.

2.15   The North of Ireland currently has a complex school system, with 11 statutory bodies and a range of voluntary bodies. As part of the Review of Public Administration (RPA), the Education and Skills Authority (ESA) will be established by January 2010, and will carry out many of the functions of these bodies when operational. Schools in the North of Ireland fall into one of four broad school sectors; Controlled; Voluntary (Maintained), Voluntary (Non-Maintained) and Grant Maintained Integrated Schools.

2.16   While many children and young people in the North of Ireland achieve at the highest level, there remains a long tail of underachievement. For example, the North of Ireland had a wider spread of attainment than any other country participating in the OECD PISA 2006 study[10]. A significant number of young people leave school with low or inadequate qualifications; indeed one in five of the working population in the North of Ireland experience difficulties with numeracy and literacy (OECD, 2007a), while only 37% of socially disadvantaged pupils achieve Level 2 qualifications, according to the Department of Education's *Every School a Good School*, the recently published school improvement policy document.

Profile of principals in the North of Ireland

2.17   While the North of Ireland does not face the same pressing challenges as Great Britain in relation to appointing candidates to leadership posts, there are some concerns regarding the calibre of those applying for principalships and of the future supply pipeline of candidates (OECD, 2007a).

2.18   The age profile of serving principals suggests that over 400 primary and 125 current post-primary principals will retire in the next ten years. Table 2.2 presents the profile of teachers and principals in the North of Ireland.

Table 2.2: Profile of teachers and principals in the North of Ireland

Demographic profile	North of Ireland*
Number of teachers (primary)	8,353
Number of schools (primary)	894
Number of teachers (post-primary)	10,698
Number of schools (post-primary)	232
% of primary principals aged 50+	45%
% of post-primary principals aged 50+	54%
Gender of school teachers (primary)	72% (approximately) female
Gender of school teachers (post-primary)	72% (approximately) female
Gender of school leaders (primary)	Less than 50% female
Gender of school leaders (post-primary)	Less than 50% female

*Source: Country background report for the North of Ireland (OECD, 2007a). Data from 2004-5

2.19   With regard to succession planning, there are particular concerns about the following:

- The declining number of applicants for leadership posts, particularly for small rural primary schools;
- The under-representation of women in senior posts, especially in post-primary schools; and
- The attractiveness of principalship roles in primary schools and of teaching as a profession for men (OECD, 2007a).

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[10] *Student Achievement in Northern Ireland: Results in Science, Mathematics and Reading.*

> *"The need for change is widely recognised… Several key components are needed to successfully implement this transition… the quality of school leadership and management needs to be improved… standards must be raised and expectations increased."* (Confederation of British Industry, Business Agenda (the North of Ireland) 2005 quoted in OECD 2007a)

Key issues facing school leadership in the North of Ireland

2.20 School principals in the North of Ireland face many of the same challenges as their counterparts in the South of Ireland and the UK, such as the growing complexity of the role, increased administrative burdens and rising levels of accountability. They also face a number of policy changes specific to the North of Ireland, such as the ending of academic selection, increasing their provision in line with the Curriculum Entitlement Framework, and new responsibilities arising from the Special Educational Needs and Disability (Northern Ireland) Order 2005.

2.21 Inspection findings from 2004-2006 indicate that the leadership and management of just under 50% of primary schools was 'good' or 'very good'. At post-primary level, leadership and management were rated as 'good' or 'very good' in a third of schools, and in these schools, principals and senior management were found to be making better use of data to improve performance. However, the most recent inspection report stated that the quality of leadership and management was inadequate in 15% of primary schools and in almost a third of post-primary schools (ETI, 2007). Given the evidence of the impact of school leadership on attainment, there is evidently a need to address the quality of leadership in schools.

Factors discouraging applications for principalship

2.22 The literature suggests that school principals in the North of Ireland do not feel that the current salary differentials for taking on ultimate responsibility for the school act as an adequate incentive to progress to leadership positions. Anomalies in the system were another source of concern, for example, cases were cited where a principal of a small school earns little more than an assistant principal in a larger school (OECD, 2007a).

2.23 In the North of Ireland, around 40% of principals combine their leadership role with full-time teaching duties, predominantly in rural communities (Anderson & Evans, 2005). OECD (2007a) cites the 2002 Teachers' Health and Well-Being Survey, which found that teaching principals were more likely to have looked for alternative employment than other teaching grades.

2.24 Falling school enrolments can impact on applications for principal positions in some schools, particularly in light of recommendations made in the Bain Report (2006) in the North of Ireland on viable enrolment numbers for schools and potential school closures.

> *"The changing education landscape affecting all schools may deter some from applying for a leadership post in a school particularly where there are concerns around its future."* (OECD 2007b)

2.25 While 73% of serving teachers in the North of Ireland are female, men still hold the majority of leadership posts (OECD, 2007a). DENI (1999) highlights that where women were principals, it was more likely to be in nursery or primary schools, all-girls secondary schools or schools with fewer than 100 pupils. The report stated that while women who apply for senior posts were more likely to be successful than men, many women are reluctant to apply due to concerns about their own abilities, the possibility of a hostile reaction from others, not wanting to give up teaching and concerns about the validity of the selection process. Other factors cited by the report included work-life balance issues and a lack of encouragement from their principals; men were found to be encouraged to a greater extent than women.

Strategies to support school leadership

2.26   The North of Ireland's Regional Training Unit (RTU) develops policies and practice to develop effective school leaders, including a range of training programmes such as the Professional Qualification for Headship (PQH). It has established *National Standards for Headteachers,* which aims to provide a framework for professional development and action to inform, challenge and enthuse serving and aspiring headteachers. RTU also delivers a range of programmes to support vice-principals, principals and school management teams. These include:

- Building Leadership Capacity (Principals);
- Professional Qualification for Serving Headteachers (Principals);
- Leadership Team Development Programmes (Vice-principals); and
- MSc in Leadership and Learning (PQH graduates).

2.27   *Every School a Good School* (DE, 2008) emphasises the importance of principals engaging in rigorous self-evaluation in order to improve their performance. In addition, the School Support Programme (SSP) provides intensive support to schools for improvement measures. Where school leadership is found to be ineffective, support is provided through the Curriculum, Advisory and Support Services (CASS. Additional leadership support for the maintained sector is provided by the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS).

2.28   Distribution of leadership responsibility at all levels of the school is supported by policies and strategies developed by Education and Library Boards (ELBs) and delivered by CASS. This policy aims to build capacity in teachers across schools to share leadership responsibility, while acknowledging that the ultimate accountability for school development remains with the principal.

The South of Ireland – the nature and scope of the issues affecting school leadership

2.29   The quality of education in the South of Ireland is highly regarded. However, despite having had a strong economy and buoyant labour market for a number of years, the South of Ireland faces a number of challenges in the education sector. While the South of Ireland's results in the 2006 PISA study were above the OECD average (OECD, 2007c), the education sector nonetheless experiences challenges including disparities in access to higher education, and differences in the achievement of pupils from diverse socio-economic backgrounds (OECD, 2007b).

2.30   Former Taoiseach, Bertie Ahern, asserted the need for the South of Ireland to become a truly knowledge-based society in a foreword to *Strategy for Science, Technology and Innovation, 2006-2013*, highlighting a requirement for the development of skills and improving levels of scientific and mathematical literacy. Indeed, while literacy levels in the South of Ireland are above the OECD average, numeracy levels are at the OECD average and scientific levels are below the average (OECD, 2007b).

2.31   The South of Ireland's publicly funded school system consists of primary schooling for eight years, followed by five or six years of post-primary education. Primary schools are privately owned and controlled through patron bodies and funded through the Department for Education and Science (DES). The vast majority (95%) of the 4,016 schools are under the patronage and management of the Roman Catholic Church, with a further 4% under the Church of Ireland, and a small number run by other denominations. (OECD, 2007b). The main school types in the South of Ireland are Primary Schools, Voluntary Secondary Schools, Vocational Schools and Community Colleges and Community and Comprehensive Schools.

2.32   Irish language is compulsory for pupils in all primary and post-primary schools. There are 150 Gaelscoileanna primary schools with a further 140 in Gaeltacht areas. At post-primary level, there are 742 schools.

Profile of principals in the South of Ireland

2.33   The current age profile of serving principals suggests that almost half at primary level are likely to retire over the next ten years. Table 2.3 presents the profile of teachers and principals in the South of Ireland.

Table 2.3: Profile of teachers and principals in the South of Ireland

Demographic profile	South of Ireland*
Number of teachers (primary)	26,282
Number of schools (primary)	3157
Number of teachers (post-primary)	24,990
Number of schools (post-primary)	742
% of primary principals aged 50+	45%
% of post-primary principals aged 50+	Not known
Gender of school teachers (primary)	80% female
Gender of school teachers (post-primary)	60% female
Gender of school leaders (primary)	49% male
Gender of school leaders (post-primary)	Approximately 70% male

**Source: Country background report for Ireland (OECD, 2007b). Data from 2004-5

2.34   At the same time, there are many concerns about the difficulty of attracting potential school leaders to principal positions. OECD (2007b) reports that this is in contrast to other senior leadership positions in the school, such as deputy and assistant principal, which attract a lot of interest from candidates. A 2005 IPPN survey found that assistant and deputy principals were no more likely than other teachers to apply for principalship, in contrast with other OECD countries (IPPN, 2005).

2.35   Due to the largely rural population of the South of Ireland, constitutional entitlement and the historical legacy of a denominational school system, almost 75% of primary schools have fewer than eight teachers. Only those schools with eight or more teachers can appoint a school principal whose responsibilities do not include full teaching commitments. As a result, in many schools, the principal has to combine the role of full-time class teacher with their leadership responsibilities.

Key issues facing school leadership in the South of Ireland

2.36   School principals in the South of Ireland highlight many of the same challenges experienced by headteachers in other OECD countries, such as societal change, facilitating change and school improvement and the perception of increasing demands placed on principals due to changing legislation such as the Education Welfare Act (2000).

2.37   McDonald (2008) discussed 'turbulence' in the principal's operating environment, with particular regard to changing roles and regulations leading to diffusion in the role of school principals. Although the roles and responsibilities of school principals are set out in the *Report of the Public Service Benchmarking Body* (2002), there remains considerable confusion among practitioners:

> *"Because of a lack of a detailed statement of the day to day tasks which are or are not part of a Principal's role, there is no satisfactory mechanism to determine what is a legitimate duty to be undertaken by the Principal. In the absence of such a statement, Principals come under pressure to take on a variety of tasks which are not central to the key elements of the role set out above."* (HayGroup, 2003)

2.38 It is also apparent that there is no agreed or widely understood definition of distributed leadership, and that there are a range of views on the roles and responsibilities of different members of the senior leadership team. IPPN (2005) notes that there is not yet true distribution of leadership responsibilities across schools in the South of Ireland.

> *"The challenge for the system resides in the need to define distributed leadership, itself a contested term, and to situate the role of principal in developing a culture that supports distributed leadership."* (OECD, 2007b)

Factors discouraging applications for principalship

2.39 In the South of Ireland, school leaders are paid an allowance in addition to their teacher's salary. A survey of principals in 2005 found that 89% indicated that they did not think that the current system 'serves principals well' (IPPN, 2005). Other papers report a perception in the sector that the salaries, benefits and working conditions of principal do not compare favourably to those in similar grades in public service (OECD; 2007b, IPPN; 2006a), and therefore act as a disincentive for potential candidates.

2.40 IPPN (2006a) makes a number of recommendations relating to pay and reward, asserting that the current system in the South of Ireland is 'flawed'. These recommendations include:

- A **separate salary structure**;
- An **allowance for principals with regular teaching responsibilities**;
- A **significant differential** between the salaries of principal and deputy principal;
- A **realistic structure** of salary differentials to be created;
- **Separate salary structures** for in-school management roles; and
- **Common criteria** to be used in determining the salaries of principals.

2.41 The number of smaller, relatively isolated schools in the South of Ireland is also thought to be a disincentive for candidates considering applying for principalship. In addition, schools considered to be in challenging situations or with little or no perceived status are also thought to have difficulties in attracting applications (IPPN, 2006a, OECD, 2007b).

2.42 Given the number of smaller schools in the South of Ireland, the high percentage of positions in which the principal combines their leadership role with full-time teaching responsibilities was thought to act as a disincentive for potential candidates. OECD (2007b) states that with the role of principal becoming increasingly complex, teaching principals may find it more difficult to carry out classroom duties. Indeed, an INTO study (2006) found that 9.2% of principalships in the South of Ireland primary schools were not filled in the first competition, and that many of these were for teaching principal positions. In relation to reward, an IPPN survey in 2005 found that 81% of principals agreed that teaching principals should receive an additional allowance, and 88% said that teaching principals should be placed on a specific salary scale reflecting the complexity and workload of their dual role.

2.43 There are disparities between the number of female teachers in the South of Ireland and their representation at principal level. At primary level 80% of teachers are female compared to 51% of principals, and at post-primary, 60% of teachers are female with women representing only approximately 30% of principals (OECD, 2007b).Nonetheless, a survey of principals in the South of Ireland, women rated themselves more highly in terms of being able to deal with various challenges of the role than their male counterparts. The survey also found that

female principals derived relatively more satisfaction for some sources of job satisfaction, particularly in relation to the intrinsic features of the work and affirmation of colleagues (Sugrue & Morgan, 2008).

2.44 Conversely, the increasing feminisation of the teaching profession is thought to act as a disincentive for male candidates in the South of Ireland (OECD, 2007b). Ó Braonáin (2008) suggests that factors such as salary, prestige, cultural perceptions and a perceived lack of promotion opportunities act as disincentives for men considering entering the profession at primary level. This has implications for the pool of male candidates for principalship, and has raised concerns about the calibre of those going forward.

Strategies to support school leadership

2.45 The Leadership Development in Schools (LDS) initiative was established in 2002 by the Department of Education and Science (DES) to promote professional development for principals, deputy principals and others involved in school management and educational leadership in first and second level schools. In the past five years, in excess of 5,000 school leaders have participated in LDS programmes.

2.46 In addition, OECD (2007b) highlights a number of small-scale projects, supporting principals in identifying appropriate practices to improve teaching and learning and to strengthen the principal's leadership approach which have taken place over the last ten years. These projects are often university-led and include Teaching and Learning for the 21st Century led by National University of Ireland, Maynooth (NUIM)

Attracting and recruiting principals

2.47 In light of the range of factors thought to discourage applications for principalship both internationally and in the North of Ireland and the South of Ireland, many authors have examined strategies for encouraging candidates to consider applying for a principalship position.

2.48 Chapman (2005) argues that strategies aiming to increase the number of potential candidates for principalship should 'guard against' the effects of perceived demotivating factors and instead promote incentives that improve leaders' experiences of the role. She suggests that workplace conditions could usefully be reviewed and frameworks provided for support and mentoring, and asserted the importance of a clear and transparent selection process. Many other authors agree with Chapman's assertion that the role should be reviewed in order to make it more attractive to potential candidates (Fullan, 2006; McGuinness; DE, 1999).

2.49 Other authors suggest using different models of principalship, such as co-headship; having more widespread and focused succession planning (McGuinness); distributing leadership and management responsibilities; defining and articulating the role of the principal; and placing a greater focus on professional development, both formal and informal (Haygroup, 2002).

> *"There is increasing emphasis on the need for coherent, integrated, consequential and systematic approaches to leadership recruitment, retention and development."* (Chapman, 2005)

2.50 Our *Independent Review of School Leadership* (PwC, 2007) identified a number of existing and emerging models of leadership in England and Wales. The report suggests that there is no 'one size fits all' approach to developing models of school leadership, and that schools should not be compelled to adopt new models but they can be encouraged to review their current arrangements and be offered examples of alternative ways of organising themselves. New models could be considered in order to make the role of principal more doable, and at the same time, attractive. These models, which are broad and not mutually exclusive, are outlined below:

- **Traditional model -** typically includes a headteacher supported by deputy principal and/or assistant heads. This model was most common in the primary sector but was evident in some post-primary schools;

- **Managed model** - a flatter management-style structure in which specific roles are allocated on the senior leadership team for senior support staff, for example, directors of finance and/or HR. This model was found more often in the post-primary sector;

- **Multi-agency managed model** - a management-style structure which is outward-looking and inter-agency focused, generally involving teaching staff and professionals from other agencies working together as part of school leadership teams. This model is not currently widespread but may become more prevalent as initiatives such as extended schools become more embedded;

- **Federated model** - characterised by varying degrees of collaboration between schools and sometimes between schools and other providers, for example: shared strategic governing bodies, executive heads overseeing several schools; and

- **System leadership model** - embraces all the different roles that heads can assume that contribute to the wider educational system at a local, regional or national level. This would include, for example, providing advice to Government and 'virtual heads' responding to the needs of pupils facing specific challenging circumstances.

2.51 IPPN (2005) also makes a series of recommendations in relation to making the role of principal more attractive and sustainable. These include exit strategies enabling principals to 'step down' from their position; the creation of an 'administrative' deputy principal role in larger schools; ensuring that clerical and maintenance staff levels are adequate, and the establishment of guidelines to facilitate cohesive and efficient clustering of smaller schools.

2.52 The importance of making efforts to attract future leaders at school level is asserted by Hartle & Thomas (2003). They state that schools must play a role in planning for succession, and set out a six step approach to leadership talent development for schools, as outlined in Figure 2.2.

Figure 2.2: Six step approach to leadership talent development

1. Create a culture for growth
2. Benchmark current practice
3. Define the leadership qualities required
4. Identify the leadership talent pool
5. Assess individual talent
6. Grow leadership talent

Source: Adapted from Hartle &Thomas, 2003

2.53 *Improving School Leadership: Policy and Practice* (OECD, 2008) highlighted four key policy levers on which strategies for attracting and recruiting principals should be based. These are outlined in Figure 2.3.

Figure 2.3: Key areas for recommendations in
***Improving School Leadership: Policy and Practice* (OECD, 2008)**
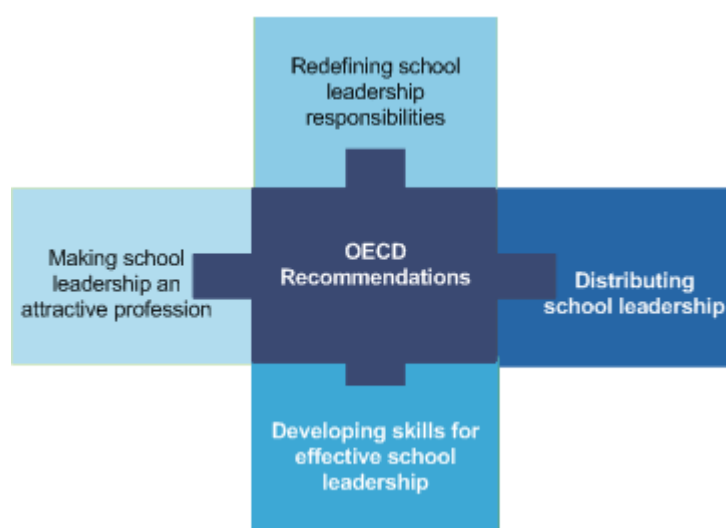
Source: adapted from *Improving School Leadership*, OECD (2008)

2.54 The first policy lever, *Redefining school leadership responsibilities*, discusses the importance of defining and delimiting the roles and responsibilities of school principals, ensuring that any definitions are guided by the aspects of leadership that best facilitate improved teaching and learning. It states that while autonomy for school leaders can have a positive impact on attainment, that this must be supported with capacity, motivation and support to maximise effects on school outcomes. In addition, the report advocates the use of frameworks to improve policy and practice in school leadership (OECD, 2008).

2.55 Regarding *Distributing school leadership,* the OECD report that the increasing responsibilities of school leadership necessitate the distribution of leadership responsibilities, yet true leadership distribution is rare in practice. The report suggests that this can be developed through formal and informal structures, and states that it must be supported by policy makers and through wider recognition of the role of leadership teams in schools. It also notes that school boards require support in carrying out their tasks.

2.56 The third policy lever: *Developing skills for effective school leadership*, discusses the importance of professional development in light of the changing role of school principal. It states that leadership development should be viewed as a continuum, to include initial training, induction programmes and in-service training, incorporating a range of learning methods to ensure variety. The report notes that there is no standard approach to the provision of leadership development, and that coherence between different institutions is important (OECD, 2008).

2.57 *Making school leadership an attractive profession* outlines a number of key strategies for encouraging candidates to seek leadership positions. Professionalising recruitment, focusing on the relative attractiveness of school leaders' salaries, acknowledging the role of professional organisations of school leaders and providing options and

support for career development were proposed as elements that can contribute to making the role more attractive to prospective candidates.

Developing skills for effective leadership

Continuing Professional Development

2.58 Principals in both the North of Ireland and the South of Ireland have a key role as 'lead learners' in the school, to ensure that leadership development is integrated with staff development, as determined by the National Standards for Headship (North of Ireland). The principal is responsible for leadership opportunities for other school leaders and teachers (OECD, 2007a).

2.59 Distributing leadership and management responsibilities to teachers throughout the school and providing informal leadership opportunities is thought to encourage potential candidates to consider applying for principalship.

> *"There is a need to expand, support, recognise, and reward leadership exercised by all members of staff at all levels of the schools' operation. In particular, it is time to look anew at the leadership team, especially the roles of assistant and deputy principals and the ways in which their roles could be redesigned to promote a sense of enthusiasm and satisfaction for career advancement in school leadership."* (Chapman 2005)

Leadership development

2.60 In the South of Ireland, the establishment of LDS in 2002 placed a greater focus on formal leadership development for teachers and emerging leaders in schools than had existed previously, and it is widely thought that provision has improved since its establishment. OECD (2007b) reports that a review of the Misneach programme for newly appointed principals found that over half of participants had had no training or preparation for their role until taking part in the programme, and that only 18% considered themselves to be well prepared to fulfil the role of principal.

> *"Inadequate training and development both for teachers who may aspire to school leadership and for principals in the role – timing, quality and breadth of professional development programmes all fall short."* (IPPN, 2006b)

2.61 In the North of Ireland there are a number of leadership development programmes available, in particular the Professional Qualification for Headship (PQH), which signals readiness for headship but does not replace the selection process. The qualification was adapted from the National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH) to reflect contextual differences between Great Britain and the North of Ireland.

2.62 The qualification is not currently mandatory for candidates applying for principal positions. However, OECD (2007a) suggests that PQH is becoming a key route for candidates aspiring to headship positions. We understand from RTU that there are 1,189 PQH graduates to date. Of these, 51% teach in primary schools, 25% in non-selective secondary schools and 15% at grammar schools. Table 2.4 outlines the number of schools with PQH graduates by sector from 2000 to June 2006.

Table 2.4: PQH graduates 2000-2006 by school type

School type	Number of schools with PQH graduates	Total number of schools in the North of Ireland	% of school type with PQH graduates
Nursery	4	99	4%
Primary	230	894	26%
Special	18	45	40%
Non-selective Secondary	92	162	56%
Grammar	54	70	77%

Source: OECD (2006)

2.63 Despite the number of teachers undertaking the PQH, OECD (2007a) states that the qualification does not appear to be used as a succession planning tool in schools.

> *"Although the candidate's application is accompanied by a 'supporting statement', usually from their principal, there is no clear evidence that the qualification is widely used in succession planning in schools."* (OECD, 2007a)

2.64 In both the North of Ireland and the South of Ireland, leadership development opportunities are also offered by some professional associations, as well as certain higher education establishments.

Characteristics of effective leadership development programmes

2.65 There is consensus in the literature that leadership development programmes should encompass the many and varied aspects of the role of school principal, including implementing a vision for teaching and learning, developing self and managing others and general managerial responsibilities.

Key Characteristics of effective leadership development

- A clear sense of mission and purpose;
- Curriculum coherence and alignment;
- Linkages between university programmes and professional development;
- Instructional strategies related to the nature of the material taught and the needs of learners – to include role-play, small group work and new information technologies;
- Varied structure of training in terms of length and time;
- A distinctive programme culture and symbols;
- Linkage to the mission, beliefs and values of relevant employing authorities; and
- Learning strategies that motivate through reflection and analysis, with a focus on coaching and feedback.

Source: Chapman (2005) citing research from Browne-Ferrigano (2003) and Peterson (2002)

Succession planning and the selection process

2.66 The importance of seeking to develop and encourage teachers with the potential to become school leaders is highlighted by a number of authors. Hargreaves & Fink (2006) carried out an investigation into sustainable leadership and planning for succession in schools in Canada and the USA. They identified four key factors in leadership succession, these were:

- **Succession planning:** the process of following one leader with another. Most successions were found to be reactive rather than proactive;

- **Succession management:** the creation of large pools of leadership from which future leaders emerge;

- **Succession frequency and duration:** addresses the optimum periods of leadership tenure and turnover; and

- **Succession and the self**: relates to the personal development issues of leaving and maintaining leadership legacy.

2.67 The role of governors in succession planning is highlighted by some authors. Our research on the NCSL Governor Engagement Campaign (2008) identified high levels of awareness among governors regarding the headteacher shortage in England and Wales, yet found that local succession planning activity was limited and that collaboration between schools on headteacher recruitment was low. In addition, just under half of Chairs of Boards of Governors surveyed stated that they would like additional information and advice on school leadership recruitment and on identifying leadership potential.

2.68 OECD (2008) reports that the selection process used to appoint principals can act as a deterrent for potential applicants. It notes that the preferred method used to select candidates is through interview, however, there is increasingly a focus on assessing a range of the candidate's skills and abilities. Visits, interviews, presentations and assessment centres are increasingly being used in selection. The report outlines key steps that could be taken to professionalise recruitment processes; these include broadening eligibility criteria, planning for leadership succession, providing a wider variety of activities to evaluate candidates and providing guidelines and training for those participating in recruitment panels.
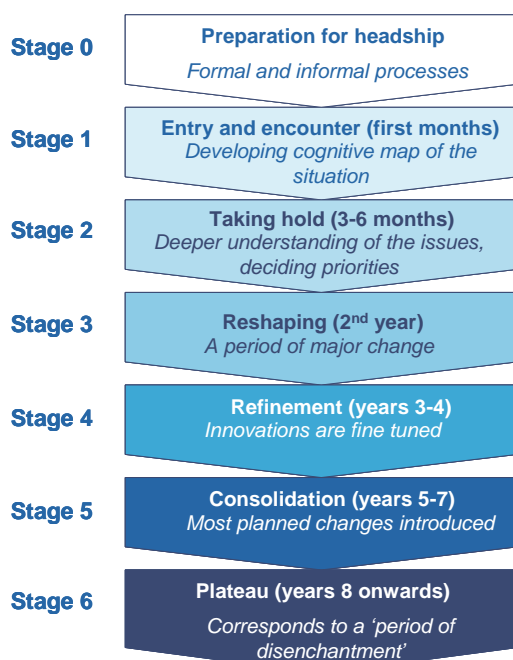
Retaining effective school leaders

2.69 Given the current challenges in the recruitment of school principals, retaining talented leaders is becoming increasingly important. Developing and recruiting the principals of tomorrow should be supported by retaining the effective leaders of today. Making efforts to retain leaders can also help to reduce costs and the time taken to replace a principal, as well as maintaining knowledge and experience (NCSL, 2007b).

2.70 In the South of Ireland, little data is held on the number of principals leaving the profession each year, or on principals retiring early (OECD, 2007b). In the North of Ireland, evidence suggests that few principals remain in post until the retirement age of 65 (OECD, 2007a), raising concerns regarding the loss of their experience and expertise.

2.71 NCSL (2007b) highlights a number of methods for keeping school principals engaged, including:

- Attractive flexible working options that offer refreshment;
- New professional challenges to re-energise; and
- New pension options and attractive flexible working options.

2.72 New models of headship, for example, can be used to increase flexibility in working options. The report asserts the need to ensure that 'hygiene factors' such as policy and administration work and supervisory relationships are effectively controlled so that principals are not encouraged to leave their job. It calls for focus to be placed on the motivating factors for principals to stay in post, namely achievement, recognition, the work itself, responsibility, advancement and growth.

2.73 While financial reward is thought to be important in the retention of school principals, having the right work environment, achievement and growth are considered to be more so. NCSL's survey of headteachers found that the key force in retention is the continued opportunity to have a significant impact on the school, followed by the freedom to act (NCSL, 2007b). This is supported to some extent by our research on the NCSL Governor Engagement Campaign (2008), which found that allowing the principal greater freedom to implement their vision for the school was the third most commonly used means of encouraging the retention of the principal by governors. Releasing headteachers to undertake profession development was the most commonly used method of supporting retention, followed by raising their salary.

2.74 Earley (2004) identifies seven key stages of the career of a principal. These are set out in Figure 2.4.

Figure 2.4: Key career stages of principals

Stage 0	**Preparation for headship** *Formal and informal processes*
Stage 1	**Entry and encounter (first months)** *Developing cognitive map of the situation*
Stage 2	**Taking hold (3-6 months)** *Deeper understanding of the issues, deciding priorities*
Stage 3	**Reshaping (2nd year)** *A period of major change*
Stage 4	**Refinement (years 3-4)** *Innovations are fine tuned*
Stage 5	**Consolidation (years 5-7)** *Most planned changes introduced*
Stage 6	**Plateau (years 8 onwards)** *Corresponds to a 'period of disenchantment'*

Source: Adapted from Earley, 2004

2.75 Some authors advocate methods of 'refreshing' principals who have reached the 'plateau' stage of their principalship (Earley, 2004). This could include through sabbaticals, moving to different schools and secondments in business. NCSL (2007c) notes that such strategies do not simply act to improve retention, but also serve to provide leadership development opportunities for other staff within the school.

"Working beyond the school in this way can be invigorating for headteachers and it therefore has implications for recruitment and retention. As well as presenting opportunities for heads, leading beyond the school has a knock-on effect in terms of leadership development elsewhere in the school… It gives deputies, assistant heads and others the chance to act up, take on more responsibilities and try out leadership roles for size, thereby preparing potential leaders and boosting their confidence and motivation." (NCSL, 2007c)

Conclusions

2.76 Schools across OECD countries are facing challenges in attracting sufficient numbers of high calibre candidates to principalship positions. The age profile of principals in both the North of Ireland and the South of Ireland indicates that a significant proportion is due to retire over the next ten years, and there are concerns about the falling numbers of applications for principalship vacancies.

2.77 Given the direct impact of school leadership on the educational attainment of children and young people, the long tail of underachievement in the North of Ireland and some evidence of falling attainment in the South of Ireland, there is consensus that strategies should be developed to address the succession planning challenge.

2.78 The factors encouraging and discouraging potential applicants from seeking principalship are discussed in the literature. Indeed, the majority of the literature focuses on negative perceptions of the role. However, aspects of the role believed to encourage teachers to apply were mainly intrinsic in nature, such as helping children and young people to reach their potential, the ability to influence school culture and developing staff and leadership team. Other motivating factors included the opportunity for teachers to progress their career, and being inspired or dissatisfied with their current experience of leadership.

2.79 Aspects of principalship considered to discourage potential applicants included the workload, bureaucracy and accountability associated with the role, insufficient salary differentials between principals and other grades and the context of the school, for example, those in disadvantaged areas were thought to be less attractive. It was also thought that the challenge of combining leadership responsibilities with full-time teaching duties was a disincentive for teachers. This was particularly pertinent in the South of Ireland, where 75% of principals also teach.

2.80 Many strategies for making principalship a more attractive proposition to potential candidates were outlined in the literature. These included redefining the principal's role and responsibilities, putting greater support networks in place, developing different models of principalship and placing a focus on developing future leaders. It was also suggested that the positive aspects of the role should be promoted to teachers, and that governors have a role to play in planning for succession in their schools.

2.81 The literature noted the important role of professional leadership development in attracting potential candidates to seek principalship positions. In the North of Ireland, RTU provides leadership development training to teachers and principals, while in the South of Ireland, the establishment of LDS in 2002 offers increased opportunities for professional development for teachers and principals.

2.82 Given the succession planning challenge, the retention of effective leaders is becoming increasingly important. Factors considered as helping to retain principals include maximising opportunities for achievement and growth. One author identified seven key stages of a principal's career, suggesting that after seven years, principals reach a plateau stage, and other authors propose methods of 'refreshing' serving principals.

3 School leadership in the North of Ireland – perceptions of principalship

Introduction

3.1 This section of the report considers the findings from a series of focus groups held with newly appointed principals and deputy principals in the North of Ireland, the results of the stakeholder consultation and the survey. It summarises participant views and perceptions on the role of school principal and is structured as follows:

- The supply of school leaders;
- Motivating factors for potential candidates;
- Demotivating factors for potential candidates; and
- Summary and conclusions.

The supply of school leaders

3.2 There was a consensus among stakeholders that the North of Ireland is facing a general challenge in the supply of school principals. This view was largely supported by results from our survey, which found that nearly two thirds (64%) of senior teachers were 'somewhat' or 'very' unlikely to apply for principalship in the next 12 months. The following Figure presents results from the teacher survey on the likelihood of teachers applying for headship. [11]

Figure 3.1: How likely are you to apply for a principal position in the next 12 months?

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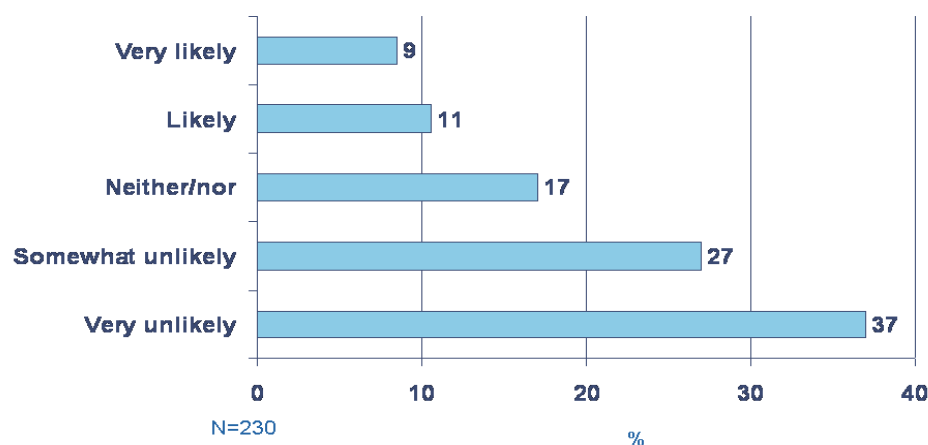
Source: PwC survey of senior teachers and middle leaders, North of Ireland, 2008

3.3 The evidence suggests that challenges in the supply of candidates for principalship differ depending on the school's phase, sector and context. According to our survey, primary school teachers are slightly more likely to seek a principalship position over the next year than their post-primary counterparts, with 21% of primary teachers stating that they are 'likely' or 'very likely' to apply, compared to 17% of post-primary respondents.

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[11] It should be noted that the teachers surveyed were graduates of the Professional Qualification for Headship (PQH), a leadership development programme for aspiring principals. Thus, their aspirations to principalship may not be representative of the teaching population as a whole.

"There is an issue in the supply of school leaders but that would vary from sector to sector and school to school. Posts are definitely difficult to fill from time to time; sometimes because of location, sometimes because of the public perception of the school." (Stakeholder, the North of Ireland)

3.4   Stakeholders highlighted a number of sectors and school types facing particular issues in relation to the supply of principals; namely; small schools where the principal combines the leadership role with full-time teaching commitments; Gaelscoileanna (Irish-medium schools); and schools in rural or deprived areas. Stakeholders also suggested that secondary schools are less attractive to potential candidates than voluntary grammars in part due to ongoing uncertainty in relation to future pupil numbers resulting from the open enrolment system.

3.5   Aspirations by management role varied. Survey findings suggest that seniority is more closely linked to aspirations for principalship at post-primary level. Of the main management roles in schools, post-primary respondents who were vice-principals were most likely to apply, followed by senior leadership team members. At primary level, subject co-ordinators were most likely to apply, followed by senior leadership team members, while vice-principals were least likely to apply. Table 3.1 presents findings from the survey on aspirations according to respondents' management role.

Table 3.1: How likely are you to apply for a principal position in the next 12 months?

Management role	Primary - likely or very likely (n=90)	Post-primary - likely or very likely (n=128)
Vice-principal	18%	24%
Senior leadership team member	25%	14%
Department head	-	5%
Subject co-ordinator	26%	8%

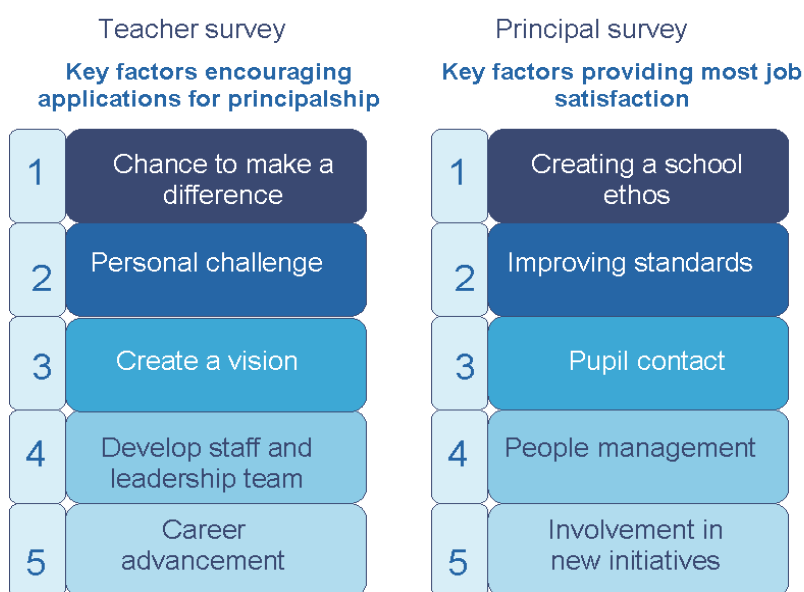Source: PwC survey of deputy principals and middle leaders, the North of Ireland, 2008

3.6   The perceived falling number of applications for principalship vacancies raised concerns among stakeholders regarding the quality and calibre of candidates applying for and being appointed to leadership positions. In particular, the management experience of candidates and their ability and potential to lead a school were questioned.

"The pool of applicants going forward is not as wide as expected, so there is less potential for a quality candidate for the job." (Stakeholder, the North of Ireland)

Motivating factors for potential candidates

3.7   Evidence from our research suggests that the reasons behind the challenge in the supply of school principals are complex and vary from individual to individual. In the majority of cases, there is no single motivating or demotivating factor in their decision to apply or not to apply for the role; rather, there are a range of factors at play. The motivating factors identified in the research are explored in the following diagram and in the following paragraphs. Additional issues, such as professional development and succession planning, are examined in the following section of this report.

Figure 3.2: What aspects of the principal role would encourage you to apply for headship, (Teacher survey) and which factors provide the most job satisfaction in your current role (Principal survey)?

Teacher survey	Principal survey
Key factors encouraging applications for principalship	**Key factors providing most job satisfaction**
1 Chance to make a difference	1 Creating a school ethos
2 Personal challenge	2 Improving standards
3 Create a vision	3 Pupil contact
4 Develop staff and leadership team	4 People management
5 Career advancement	5 Involvement in new initiatives

Source: PwC survey of deputies and middle leaders, North of Ireland, 2008 and PwC survey of principals, North of Ireland, 2008

Creating a vision and the chance to make a difference

3.8 The findings from our research emphasised the vocational nature of the role, with participants highlighting positive perceptions of principalship linked to its capacity to make a difference to others. Indeed, the key motivations for taking up a principalship and the areas providing most job satisfaction cited by deputy principals and middle leaders and principals in our research were largely intrinsic in nature, and included factors such as the opportunity to make a difference and influence pupils' lives.

3.9 Many focus group participants stated that they had a vision for how to develop the school, and that taking on the role of principal was the most effective way for them to implement that vision. This was a more important factor for post-primary teachers, with nearly two thirds (65%) noting it as one of the key incentives for applying to headship, compared to 58% of their primary level counterparts. The opportunity to create a school ethos also provided principals with a high level of job satisfaction, noted by 59% of principal respondents. Again, this was more pronounced at post-primary level; 62% of respondents compared to 56% of primary principals.

> *"For me the single most important thing is to make a difference for the children, and in terms of moving into a headship that would still be the single motivating factor. One of the major influences of children is the quality of their education and the people who have an influence on them. So it's making sure that their experience is wholesome, rigorous and pastoral so that they can take their place in society."* (Post-primary deputy principal focus group participant, the North of Ireland)

3.10 Focus group participants were asked to draw a picture representing their perception of principalship. For one newly appointed principal, principalship was a means of implementing a vision and creating a school ethos, as illustrated by Figure 3.3.

Figure 3.3: Perception of the role of principal

"That's me, the building and all the staff and pupils. All I'm looking for are the happy, smiling faces; for everybody to feel comfortable in school."

Source: Newly appointed post-primary principal focus group participant, North of Ireland, 2008

Developing staff and leadership team

3.11 Half the teachers surveyed also expressed a desire to work with and develop a team of staff in bringing forward their vision. For principals, this was one of the aspects of the role bringing them the greatest job satisfaction (noted by 18% of respondents), particularly where they felt that there was a good general ethos in the school. PQH graduates were significantly more likely to note that people management was one of the aspects of their role which provides them with the most job satisfaction (23% compared to 14% of non-PQH qualified principals).

3.12 Deputy principal focus group participants expressed a desire to have an influence over the recruitment and development of staff, and linked this with having the opportunity to create a positive ethos in the school.

"As a head you have an influence over the staff that you recruit and they are the front players in the school. The ethos of the school is reflected in the staff and the encouragement you give them permeates right down. I think that's really the importance of a head." (Post-primary deputy principal focus group participant, the North of Ireland)

Personal challenge and career advancement

3.13 Personal challenge and the opportunity to advance their career were also key motivations for teachers across both the primary and post-primary phases. Indeed, personal challenge was noted by over three quarters of all respondents as one of the factors that would encourage them to apply for headship.

"It was raw ambition that encouraged me to apply." (Newly-appointed post-primary principal focus group participant, the North of Ireland)

3.14 In some cases, lack of satisfaction with their previous role acted as an incentive for teachers to apply for principalship. For example, one respondent noted that they had previously worked under a "hero-head" who did not delegate sufficient responsibility to the senior leadership team. This lack of challenge and responsibility had prompted their application for principalship in another school.

3.15   A large number of newly appointed principals in the focus groups stated that the reason they applied for their position was due to 'natural progression,' where they felt that they had reached a stage in their working life where principalship was simply a logical career move. For other newly appointed principals, their reason for taking up a principalship was out of a sense of duty to the school, its pupils, staff and parents, and because they were often expected to do so.

> *"When the job came up, there was no other candidate. I would have felt somewhat disloyal to the staff, the pupils and the wider community not to go forward."* (Newly appointed primary principal focus group participant, the North of Ireland)

Demotivating factors for potential candidates

Perception of the role

3.16   Despite noting many positive perceptions of the role, teachers and principals also highlighted significant negative perceptions which can have an impact on the number of applications to principalship positions. Figure 3.4 outlines the key demotivating factors noted by survey respondents in relation to the perceptions of the role reported during the research. Each of these is subsequently considered in more detail, together with other factors thought to discourage applications for principalship highlighted in the research.

Figure 3.4: What aspects of the role would discourage you from applying for headship (deputy principal and middle leader survey) and which of the following factors provide least job satisfaction in your current role (principal survey)?

Teacher survey	Principal survey
Key factors discouraging applications to principalship	Key factors providing least job satisfaction
1 Workload	1 Bureaucracy
2 Administration	2 Administration
3 Sense of isolation	3 Dealing with complaints
4 Accountability	4 Financial management
5 Combining leadership and teaching roles	5 Accountability

Source: PwC survey of principals, North of Ireland, 2008 and PwC survey of deputies and middle leaders, North of Ireland, 2008

Workload

3.17   There was a consensus among focus group respondents that the workload associated with the role of principal acts as a significant disincentive for teachers considering progressing to principalship roles. In the survey of teachers, over half (54%) cited workload among the key factors discouraging them from applying for principalship. There was little difference in opinion regarding the importance of workload as a disincentive for primary and post-primary teachers.

3.18   Many focus group participants and survey respondents noted the demanding nature of the role and the wide variety of tasks carried out by principals on a daily basis. When asked to represent their perception of principalship in a picture, one newly appointed principal drew the following image depicting a principal trying to undertake several tasks at once.

Figure 3.5: Perception of principalship

"That's me in the middle, spinning plates."
(Newly appointed primary principal)

Source: Newly appointed primary principal focus group participant, North of Ireland, 2008

3.19   Principals and teachers were concerned about the impact of the workload associated with the role on their work-life balance, and the implications of this for their family life. The majority of principal survey respondents described their work-life balance as 'poor'. This was more pronounced at primary level, where 63% of primary principal survey respondents described their work-life balance as 'poor' or 'very poor', compared to just over half (51%) at post-primary. The following Figure presents overall findings from the principal survey on work-life balance, which support findings from the focus group phase of the research.

Figure 3.6: How would you describe your work-life balance?

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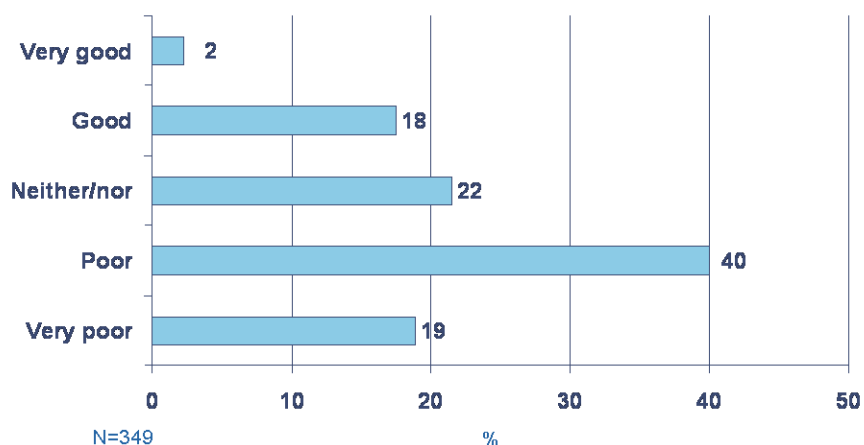
Source: PwC survey of principals, North of Ireland, 2008

3.20   These findings are broadly in line with evidence from our survey of headteachers in England and Wales in our *Independent Study into School Leadership* (PwC, 2006), in which 61% of headteachers surveyed described their work-life balance as 'poor' or 'very poor'. However, post-primary headteachers surveyed for the study were more likely than primary principals to view their work-life balance in this way (69% compared to 60%).

Administration

3.21 Closely linked to workload, the level of bureaucracy and administration associated with the role of principal was noted as a key factor discouraging applications to principalship by participants in our research. Indeed, 48% of teacher survey respondents cited administrative responsibilities as one of the main demotivating aspects of the role, while three quarters (75%) of serving principals noted bureaucracy as one of the factors providing them with the least job satisfaction.

3.22 The evidence suggests that administrative responsibilities are a greater factor at primary level, with 56% of primary teachers noting it as one of the key factors that would discourage them from applying to principalship, compared to 44% at post-primary level. For serving principals, administration was a factor causing the least job satisfaction for 46% of primary principals, compared to 36% of their post-primary counterparts.

3.23 Reduced time to focus on teaching and learning was cited as a key implication of the levels of workload and bureaucracy facing newly appointed principal focus group participants. They noted that the majority of teachers enter the profession in order to teach children and young people and to make a difference in their lives, suggesting that the perception that principals have little time to focus on this core business was detrimental to the supply of willing candidates for principalship.

> *"I don't get the time to do the things I took on this job to do. I find the bureaucracy, the constant form filling, the managing budgets and attending useless meetings gets in the way of what I was employed to do, which was to make a difference in these children's lives."* (Newly appointed primary principal focus group participant, the North of Ireland)

Sense of isolation

3.24 Evidence from the survey suggests that a perceived sense of isolation is associated with the role of principal. Indeed, 46% of teachers stated that this sense of isolation would be an important factor in discouraging them from applying for headship. This was supported by findings from the focus groups, where some participants noted that the role can at times feel isolated. One PQH focus group participant suggested that the accountability of principals can add to their sense of isolation, stating that even if they are supported by their senior leadership team, their ultimate accountability can isolate them from other staff.

> *"People were friends with you when you were a teacher with them. When you become a principal sometimes you can find that their attitude towards you changes – you can feel isolated."* (Newly appointed primary principal focus group participant, the North of Ireland)

3.25 Principals participating in the research thought that mentoring and networking with other principals would help to reduce the sense of isolation felt by many in the position. Some survey respondents suggested that the demographic changes in the North of Ireland contribute to the feelings of isolation associated with the role, noting that as many schools are in competition for pupils, they are less likely to share good practice and ideas with other schools. The rural location of many schools was also thought to compound the problem.

Accountability

3.26 The level of accountability inherent in the role of school principal as leader of a school was cited as a disincentive by the majority of focus group participants and stakeholders. Some newly appointed principals believed that the level of accountability was exacerbated by the public nature of principalship, noting that while other professions may have high levels of accountability, they are often afforded a degree of anonymity. Principals and stakeholders identified a perceived dichotomy in that heads are responsible for everything in their schools; yet do not always have the authority or resources to act in particular situations.

> *"The huge burden of responsibility and accountability for the curriculum, the budget, staffing, pastoral care, resources, the building, health and safety and so on is off-putting. Often principals don't have the legal power or the resources or time to act."* (Stakeholder, the North of Ireland)

3.27 Findings from the teachers' survey support this perception, with the principal's accountability said to be an 'important' or 'very important' factor likely to discourage applications for 45% of teachers. The findings are presented in Figure 3.7.

Figure 3.7: How important would a principal's accountability be in influencing your decision not to apply for the position of principal?

N=230
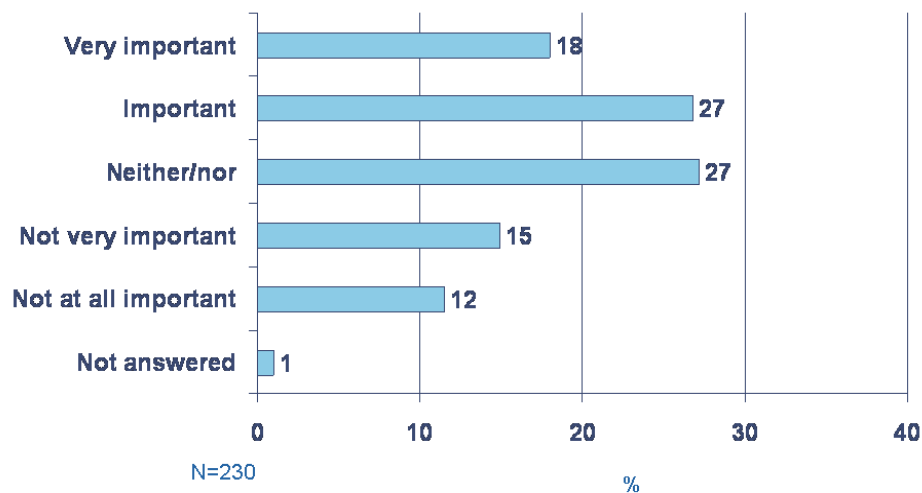
Source: PwC survey of deputies and middle leaders, North of Ireland, 2008

3.28 Linked to this, many principal and deputy principal focus group participants believed that the fear of litigation from pupils and their parents discouraged applicants for principalship positions. They suggested that parents were becoming increasingly litigious, and that any legal action taken against principals would be in the public arena and therefore damaging to their reputation and career.

> *"We have a case of child protection and we are experiencing a lot of solicitors. We are expected to know the legislation and we don't understand their legal jargon; we've been quoted and misquoted and that has frightened us a bit."* (Post-primary deputy principal focus group participant, the North of Ireland)
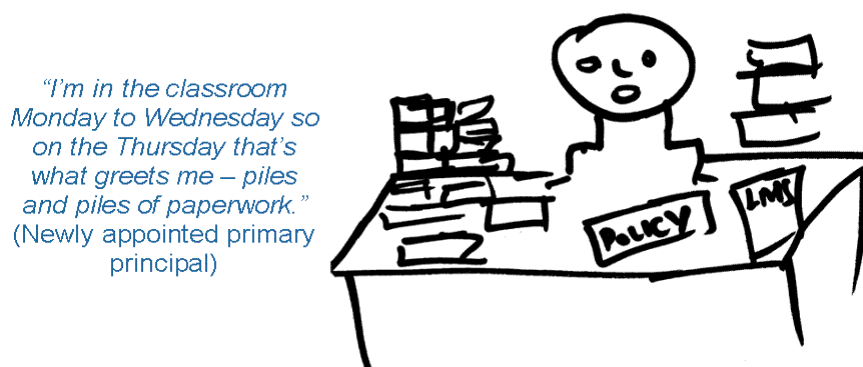
3.29 The extent to which accountability acted as a disincentive for potential candidates varied according to school phase and sector. At primary level, it was noted by just over half (51%) of primary level teachers as 'quite' or 'very important compared to 43% of their post-primary counterparts. At a sectoral level, a third (33%) of teachers in the Catholic Maintained sector noted accountability as a significant aspect of the role discouraging them from applying to principalship, compared to a quarter (25%) of teachers in the Controlled sector.

Combining leadership and teaching roles

3.30 There was agreement among focus group participants that combining the roles of full-time teacher and principal is challenging and has implications for both the principal and the school. Although teaching principals acknowledged that the additional release day for administrative duties has been useful, they maintained that 'both roles suffer' as

they are unable to fully devote their time to either. When asked to draw a picture of their perception of principalship, one newly appointed teaching principal depicted a teaching principal surrounded by paperwork, as presented in Figure 3.8.
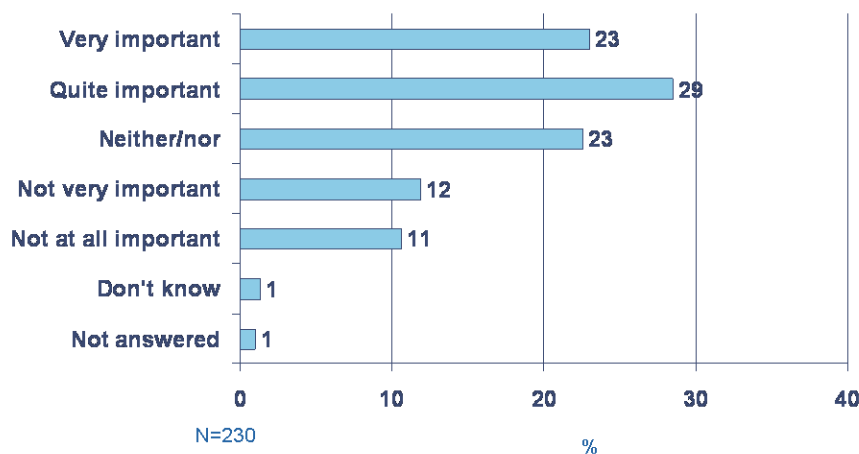
Figure 3.8: Perception of principalship

"I'm in the classroom Monday to Wednesday so on the Thursday that's what greets me – piles and piles of paperwork." (Newly appointed primary principal)

Source: Newly appointed primary principal focus group participant, North of Ireland, 2008

3.31   Our survey found that combining teaching and leadership roles serves as an 'important' or 'very important' disincentive for just over half (52%) of teachers in relation to applying for a principalship position. This was significantly more important for primary principals (78% compared to 32%), who are more likely to have to combine principalship with full-time teaching commitments.

3.32   In addition, female teacher survey respondents were more likely to view combining leadership and teaching roles as a disincentive than male teachers, with 56% of female teachers noting that it would be an 'important' or 'very important' factor compared to 45% of male respondents. As previously discussed, there was a perception among stakeholders that women are more likely to become principals of primary schools. As these roles often involve combining teaching with leadership duties, this is likely to be a factor in the difference in opinion. The following graph highlights teacher respondents' views on combining the roles of school principal and class teacher.

Figure 3.9: How important would combining teaching and leadership roles be in influencing your decision not to apply for the position of principal?

Category	Value
Very important	23
Quite important	29
Neither/nor	23
Not very important	12
Not at all important	11
Don't know	1
Not answered	1

N=230

%

Source: PwC survey of deputies and middle leaders, North of Ireland, 2008

3.33 In addition to the perception that teaching principals are unable to devote all their time to either role, many focus group participants and survey respondents noted that combing leadership and teaching roles would have a greater impact on their work-life balance than if they were to become an administrative principal.

> *"I don't think that I could cope with teaching principalship with three young children at home, however I think a non-teaching principal might still be an option."* (PQH focus group participant, the North of Ireland)

3.34 Some stakeholder and newly appointed principal focus group participants therefore called for a review of the role of the teaching principal. A suggested alternative was to federate a group of schools and place a strategic principal in charge of the federation. It was proposed that the strategic principal would have overall responsibility for the schools in the conglomerate, and a senior member of staff in each of the schools would be acting principal when the strategic principal was not present. The acting principal would have responsibility for the day-to-day running of the school, dealing with emergencies, visitors to the school, and parents, for example.

> *"Shared principalship was piloted in one area but withdrawn due to the expense. The principal absolutely loved it. I know that in Scotland there are acting principals and it's working really well."* (Newly appointed primary principal focus group participant, the North of Ireland)

3.35 One PQH focus group participant suggested that post-primary principals could remain as practising teachers while otherwise devoting themselves to leading the school by teaching one class per week. It was noted that this would help to maintain contact with pupils and allow the principal to maintain teaching expertise.

> *"At secondary level that we have subjects now that they could teach once a week or once a fortnight on employability or citizenship. It keeps them at the level that we are all at, working with the children; otherwise you end up with people who are principals who are not goal-orientated."* (PQH focus group participant, the North of Ireland)

Additional demotivating factors linked to perceptions of the role

3.36   In addition to the key factors discouraging applications for principalship considered above, participants in the research highlighted a range of other aspects of the role they felt could dissuade potential candidates from applying. These factors, which are explored in the remainder of this section of the report, are:

- The pace of change in the sector;
- School funding;
- Breadth of the role and people management;
- Levels of reward;
- Levels of support attached to the post;
- Current career satisfaction;
- Personal circumstances; and
- School and context specific issues.

The pace of change in the sector

3.37   Although involvement in new initiatives was noted by many principals as one of the aspects of the role providing them with the most job satisfaction, several focus group participants, stakeholders and survey respondents indicated that the number of new initiatives and policies to be implemented in schools served to increase the burden on principals and acted as a disincentive for potential candidates. Some suggested that the initiatives lacked coherence and direction and that there were too many being implemented at one time.

> *"There are far too many DE initiatives; there is a lack of coherence in the process of school improvement. It's overwhelming."* (Principal survey, the North of Ireland)

3.38   Many survey respondents also requested enhanced support from the Department when new initiatives are implemented, stating that embedding new programmes in the school could be demanding on their time and other resources in the school.

School funding

3.39   Earlier in this section of the report it was noted that the ability to create a vision and to make a difference were key incentives for applications to principalship. However, many focus group participants thought that where school funding is limited or restrictive, a new principal's capacity to implement a vision or make a difference to the lives of children and young people could be inhibited. Issues related to school funding were therefore thought to act as a disincentive to potential candidates for principalship.

> *"I think that a lot of your ideas and vision can be knocked because of basic things like finance and budgeting. A lot of things do get knocked because of financial constraints."* (Post-primary deputy principal focus group participant, the North of Ireland)

3.40   Many survey respondents called for increased funding, particularly in primary schools, to allow teachers to be given time out for leadership development training and for the allocation of responsibility points in order to allow greater distribution of leadership and to exploit the potential of talented teachers. Others believed that additional funding is required in order to provide increased administrative and care-taking support to allow principals to focus on teaching and learning.

Breadth of the role and people management

3.41 The role of principal was widely agreed to be diverse, and some focus group participants stated that there is a lack of clearly defined roles and responsibilities. The breadth of responsibility associated with principalship was thought to reduce the principal's capacity to focus on teaching and learning.

> *"The headteacher is responsible for the quality of teaching and learning in the school. What does the leaking roof in the Maths department have to do with teaching and learning? It is all of those things that encroach on your ability to come back to that core purpose."* (Newly appointed post-primary principal focus group participant, the North of Ireland)

3.42 However, survey respondents indicated that the role is reasonably well defined, with 42% of principals stating that they believed the role was defined 'to some extent', and a further third of respondents (33%) describing it as defined 'to a large extent'.

3.43 Managing people was cited by 15% of teacher survey respondents as one of the factors that would discourage them from seeking principalship. Furthermore, 12% of principals noted 'conflict resolution' as one of the factors providing them with the least job satisfaction. Indeed, when asked what additional support they would like or would have liked before taking up principalship, many focus group participants and survey respondents stated that they would like additional training on people management issues and on how to resolve conflict situations with staff, parents and pupils.

3.44 An important aspect of people management and conflict resolution is managing the performance of teaching staff. Some principals and teachers in the focus groups and survey noted that dealing with the underperformance of teachers is difficult and that there is little support or guidance available on how to deal with such situations.

> *"There is no support to deal with difficult members of staff unless things get really bad. You can have this fantastic vision and 99% of your staff behind you, but it only takes one person to bring the entire ethos of the school down."* (Newly appointed post-primary principal, focus group participant the North of Ireland)

3.45 Nonetheless, it should be remembered that for 51% of teachers surveyed, the opportunity to develop staff and leadership team was a key motivator for applying to principalship. This suggests that, while the opportunity to develop and create an ethos within the staff of the school is a benefit of principalship for many, managing people, particularly where there is conflict, can act as an important disincentive.

Levels of reward

3.46 There was a consensus among focus group participants and stakeholders that the current system of reward in the North of Ireland does not act as an adequate incentive for teachers to apply for principalship positions. In particular, differentials in reward between senior teacher and vice principal positions and the salary of principals were thought to be insufficient in relation to the additional responsibility associated with the role.

3.47 Participants in the research also noted anomalies in salary across different schools. For example, some participants cited cases where vice-principals in larger schools are paid more than principals of smaller schools, suggesting that current reward arrangements have particular implications for the recruitment of principals to smaller schools. When asked what would make the role of principalship more attractive, a tenth of teachers noted that a higher salary would act as an incentive for seeking headship. Only 1% of principal respondents to the survey cited reward as their main reason for taking up a principalship appointment, supporting the finding from the focus

groups and stakeholder consultation that current remuneration arrangements do not act as an incentive for potential candidates.

> *"Recently one school in the area was advertising for a principal's job and another for a vice-principal position and I looked into them. The vice-principal's salary was exactly the same as the principal – I thought, why would you take on the accountability of becoming a principal if you can be someone else's second-in-command for the same money?"* (PQH focus group participant, the North of Ireland)
>
> *"My actual difference a month from taking vice-principal to principal was £52. I looked at it at the end of the month and couldn't believe it. It is actually costing me money because of the extra hours."* (Newly appointed primary principal focus group participant, the North of Ireland)

3.48 A further suggestion made in relation to reward by a number of stakeholders and a minority of focus group participants was using financial incentives to encourage successful principals to move to struggling schools. It was thought that schools in challenging circumstances require the best leaders and that such principals could be attracted through increased salaries. Stakeholders also highlighted the increased role in the community principals of such schools often play and suggested that they should be rewarded accordingly.

> *"Successful principals should be rewarded to go into areas which are more socially challenged, and that should be built into the system."* (Newly appointed primary principal focus group participant, the North of Ireland)

3.49 In addition, one stakeholder and some survey respondents expressed concern regarding salary point scales for principals transferring to a different school. It was noted that, in some cases, a principal's pay decreases upon moving to a larger school, due to differing salary scales and being placed at the bottom of the salary scale for the new position. The stakeholder reported an instance where a principal at the top end of an 8-14 point salary scale had been reduced to point 12 on the new school's 12-18 salary scale, therefore taking a significant pay cut. It was asserted that this practice would act as a further disincentive for applicants to small schools, as well as discouraging principals' movement within the sector.

> *"When I became principal of this school I had to drop four points. Despite being a highly experienced principal (15 years) I had to start at the basic point (L9) and I had responsibility for a larger staff and three times the number of pupils."* (Principal survey respondent, the North of Ireland)

Levels of support attached to the post

3.50 As previously discussed, the role of school principal was perceived as an isolated one by many participants in the research. This sense of isolation was thought to be compounded by a perceived lack of support for school principals. In our survey of teachers in the North of Ireland, just over a fifth (21%) cited 'lack of support' as one of the aspects of the role that would discourage them from applying for principalship. This was more acute at primary level, where 23% of teachers cited lack of support as a significant disincentive compared to 17% at post-primary. Figure 3.10 highlights the key types of increased support requested by teachers and principals.

Figure 3.10: Types of support requested by principals, deputy principals and middle leaders in the research
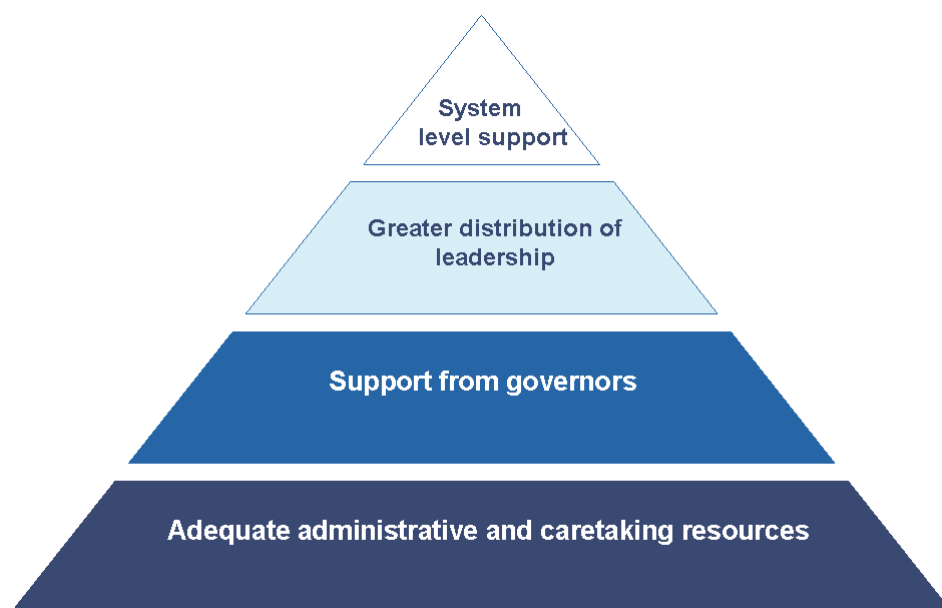
Source: PwC survey of deputies and middle leaders, North of Ireland, 2008, PwC survey of principals, North of Ireland, 2008 and PwC focus groups, 2008

3.51 Distribution of leadership responsibilities was thought to be a key method of supporting school principals. In addition, newly appointed principal focus group participants and some stakeholders highlighted the importance of having specialist staff to ensure that their time is not taken up with administrative or building maintenance tasks.

> *"Some of the tasks carried out by principals or senior management would be better filled by building management, finance or human resource professionals. Principals tend to become a jack of all trades."* (Stakeholder, the North of Ireland)

3.52 The evidence suggests that governors can also play an important role in providing support for principals. Where principal survey respondents felt supported by their board of governors, they were more likely to express satisfaction with their role. Some principals described dissatisfaction with their board of governors and called for greater support to be provided from them.

3.53 At a system level, many participants noted a lack of support, clear guidance and communication to schools from statutory bodies as a disincentive for teachers considering principalship positions. Participants in the research called for greater support and guidance on legislation and policies, asserting the difficulty of keeping up-to-date with these areas at the same time as leading a school. Indeed, increased support and guidance was noted by 8% of teacher survey respondents as the key factor that would make principalship more attractive to them.

3.54 In addition, the ongoing uncertainty in regard to policies such as the transfer test was a key concern and many participants in the research noted that it could act as a disincentive for prospective candidates. Both teacher and principal survey respondents called for clearer decision-making and guidance on policy from Government.

> *"Schools should not be used as political football - we need support and effective leadership."* (Principal survey, the North of Ireland)

Current career satisfaction

3.55 The survey results indicate that 82% of teacher survey respondents in the North of Ireland were broadly satisfied in their current role. Satisfaction levels were similar across school phases and sectors.

3.56 Pupil contact was noted by just under a third (31%) of respondents as the aspect of their job providing the most satisfaction, second only to the 'chance to make a difference.' For many teachers, reduced pupil contact was a disincentive in relation to applying for principalship roles, with 46% stating that this was an 'important' or 'very important' factor. As a discouraging factor, it was more important for female survey respondents (54% compared to 41%). One stakeholder also noted this as a disincentive for potential candidates.

"Losing contact with the classroom could have an impact, particularly in a large grammar school. Some manage to maintain one class a week, but generally speaking they would not be teaching." (Stakeholder, the North of Ireland)

3.57 Many deputy principal focus group participants also discussed enjoying their present role as a class teacher, emphasising that they had entered the profession in order to teach children and young people. Survey results suggest that this was more pronounced for teachers at primary level, with 57% of respondents citing reduced pupil contact as a significant disincentive compared to 41% of post-primary teachers.

Personal circumstances

3.58 Our evidence suggests that family commitments are an important factor in an individual's decision not to apply for principalship, with 80% of teachers describing such commitments as 'important' or 'very important'. Personal circumstances were very slightly more likely to act as a disincentive at primary level, where 82% of primary teachers stated that they would be an 'important' or 'very important' factor in their decision not to apply, compared to 78% of their post-primary counterparts.

3.59 In addition, stakeholders suggested that women are more likely than men to be deterred from applying due to family commitments. However, male survey respondents were significantly more likely to cite family commitments as an important factor in choosing not to apply for principalship than female teachers, as outlined in Table 3.2.

Table 3.2: How important would family or other commitments be in influencing your decision not to apply for a principal position?

| Level of Importance	Male respondents (n=91)	Female respondents (n=139)
Very important	64%	48%
Important	24%	26%
Neither/nor	4%	11%
Not very important	3%	8%
Not at all important	3%	7%

Source: PwC survey of deputy principals and middle leaders, the North of Ireland, 2008

3.60 All newly appointed principal participants in the focus groups agreed that their role had an impact on their work-life balance; indeed, 58% of principals surveyed described their work-life balance as 'poor' or 'very poor'. Evidence from the focus groups suggests that deputy principals and middle leaders are keen observers of principals, as many participants cited the impact on work-life balance as a key disincentive to seeking principalship positions.

3.61 In addition to personal commitments, survey results suggest that age is also a consideration for potential candidates. Those in the 41-50 age group were most likely to apply, followed by those in the 31-40 age group. All teacher survey respondents aged between 21 and 30 stated that they do not intend to apply for principalship in the next 12 months; an unsurprising figure, perhaps, given their likely level of experience. These findings suggest that experience is an important factor for teachers considering principalship. The likelihood of teachers applying reduces for the 51-60 age group, many of whom said that they would not be interested in headship as they were nearing retirement. Figure 3.11 presents the likelihood of teachers seeking a principalship post in the next year by age.

Figure 3.11: How likely are you to apply for a principal position in the next 12 months?
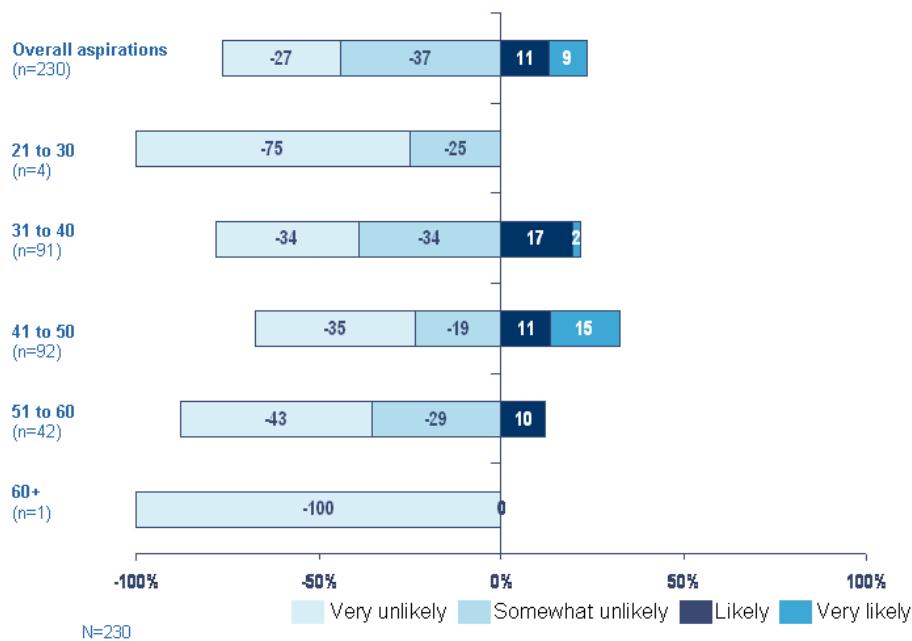
Source: PwC survey of deputies and middle leaders, North of Ireland, 2008

3.62 One stakeholder in the North of Ireland noted that potential candidates can sometimes be discouraged from applying due to the "parochial" nature of society, suggesting that often candidates' applications for principalships become common knowledge. As such, it was thought that many teachers will not apply through fear of failure.

School and context specific issues

3.63 In line with findings from the stakeholder consultation, results from the teacher survey suggest that teachers are less likely to apply to schools in some circumstances than others. Applying to a school of another denomination or to a small school were the most unlikely scenarios for teachers. While stakeholders thought that schools in a rural area were less likely to attract applications, only 22% of teachers considered this to be an 'important' or 'very important' factor in choosing not to apply for principalship.

Table 3.3: How important would school context be in influencing your decision not to apply for principalship?

| School context	% of participants describing it as important or very important
A school of another denomination	51%
A small school (pupil numbers)	43%
A school in a deprived area	34%
An underachieving school	30%
A school in a rural location	22%

Source: PwC survey of deputy principals and middle leaders, the North of Ireland, 2008 (n=230)

3.64   There were differences in how important various school contexts were viewed across the phases. Small schools and schools of another denomination were more likely to act as disincentives for primary teachers than those at post-primary, while underachieving schools were more likely to discourage applications from the post-primary sector. At a sectoral level, small schools, schools in a deprived area and rural schools were less likely to act as a disincentive for candidates from the Catholic Maintained sector than for those from the Controlled sector.

Job satisfaction of principals

3.65   Despite the numerous difficulties and issues associated with the role reported by newly appointed principals, most principals in the research asserted, nonetheless, that they enjoy and are fulfilled by their job. Overall, over three-quarters (78%) of principals described themselves as 'quite' or 'very satisfied in their current role. Post-primary principals described themselves as more satisfied than their primary school counterparts (84% to 74%), while principals of Catholic Maintained schools were more likely to note high levels of satisfaction than those in the Controlled sector (82% to 72%). These levels of job satisfaction are high; for example, in the *2004 Workplace Employment Relations Survey* of employees from a range of sectors, including construction, financial services health and public administration, 72% of respondents stated that they were 'satisfied', or 'very satisfied' in relation to the work itself (Kersley et al, 2005). Figure 3.12 illustrates the overall job satisfaction levels of principals in our survey.

Figure 3.12: Overall, how satisfied are you in your current role?

N=349

%
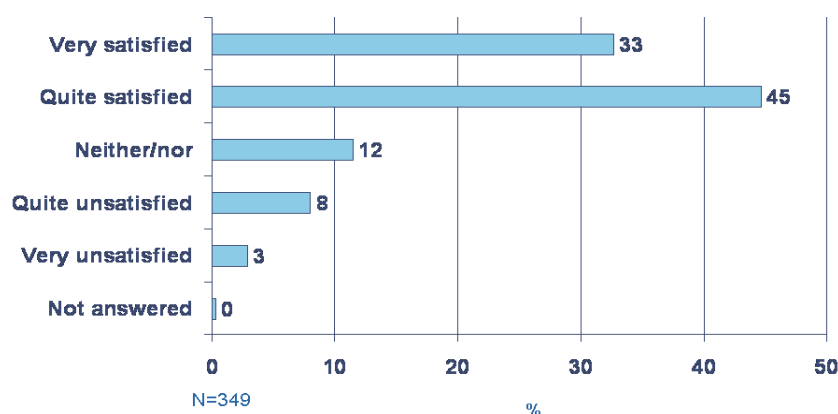
Source: PwC survey of principals, North of Ireland, 2008

3.66　These findings are in contrast to the somewhat negative image of principalship often portrayed by many newly appointed principals in the focus groups. This suggests that while the role has its difficulties, it is nonetheless a rewarding and enjoyable position for the majority of principals.

> *"Although you are extremely busy and can work late into most nights, it is a hugely rewarding experience. To lead a successful team through numerous ups and downs provides total job satisfaction."* (Principal survey, the North of Ireland)

3.67　Consistent with the literature, our research with deputy principals and middle leaders indicates that they are keen observers of their principals. This suggests that principals could play a role in making principalship a more attractive proposition to future leaders by highlighting the positive aspects of the job, and placing less emphasis on its challenges.

Summary and conclusions

- There was widespread agreement that the North of Ireland is facing a general challenge in the supply of school leaders, with small schools, Gaelscoileanna (Irish-medium schools), and those in deprived areas believed to be experiencing particular difficulties;

- Linked to this reduced pool of candidates, stakeholders highlighted concerns regarding the calibre of individuals applying for principalship;

- There are a number of factors that can serve to motivate teachers to seek principalship positions. These are largely vocational in nature, with key factors cited by deputy principals and middle leaders including the chance to make a difference, creating and implementing a vision for the school, and developing the staff and leadership team. Many of these aspects of the role also provide principals with high levels of job satisfaction;

- In other cases, principals noted that they had applied for principalship as it was simply a 'natural progression'; suggesting that they viewed principalship as the next logical step in their career;

- However, for many participants in the research, the perceived disadvantages of the role outweigh its benefits. The most commonly cited disincentives were the workload and level of administration associated with the role, with implications for the principal's capacity to focus on teaching and learning and their work-life balance. Other key factors discouraging applications for principalship included the degree of accountability inherent in the role, a perceived sense of isolation, the breadth of the role, inadequate reward differentials and the pace of change in the sector;

- In some cases, external factors such as family circumstances deterred potential candidates from applying, while for others, their high level of job satisfaction as a classroom teacher and reluctance to experience reduced pupil contact act as deterrents; and

- While there were many negative perceptions of principalship, the job satisfaction of principals surveyed is high. In line with findings from the literature, our research suggests that teachers are keen observers of their principals, which highlights an issue around the promotion of the benefits of the position by principals themselves.

4 Developing, recruiting and retaining effective leaders in the North of Ireland

Introduction

4.1 This section of the report explores the views of respondents and participants from the fieldwork phase of this assignment on the development, recruitment and retention of effective leaders. It is based on the findings from a series of focus groups, the survey of principals, deputy principals and middle leaders, and the stakeholder consultation, and is structured as follows:

- The role of professional development in the recruitment and retention of principals;
- Succession planning and the recruitment and selection process;
- Retaining effective leaders; and
- Summary and conclusions.

The role of professional development in the recruitment and retention of principals

4.2 Stakeholders and focus group participants agreed that the professional development of teachers plays an important role in encouraging applications to principalship, and ensuring that those who apply are of an appropriate calibre. The main elements of professional development identified in the research were formal leadership development training courses, in-school development through holding posts of responsibility, and more informal development, such as mentoring and networking. These forms of professional development are outlined in Figure 4.1 and explored in the following paragraphs.

Figure 4.1: Key aspects of professional leadership development

Informal development

Formal leadership development courses

In-school leadership experience

Source: PwC survey of deputies and middle leaders, North of Ireland, 2008, PwC survey of principals, North of Ireland, 2008 and PwC focus groups, 2008

In-school leadership experience

4.3 Providing leadership development opportunities to teachers within schools was widely agreed to be an important factor in encouraging them to progress into further leadership roles. It was suggested that taking on responsibility posts and various forms of managerial experience can imbue teachers with the confidence to continue taking on further leadership roles and eventually consider applying for a principalship position.

4.4 In our survey, a lack of management experience was an 'important' or 'very important' factor in their decision not to apply for principalship for just over a third (35%) of respondents. Evidence indicates that a lack of management experience and, linked to this, a lack of confidence in ability to perform the role, are more likely to act as a disincentive for female teachers. This suggests that male teachers would be more likely to 'throw their hat in the ring', while women require greater experience and confidence in their abilities prior to seeking principalship.

Table 4.1: How important would lack of leadership experience and confidence in ability to perform the role be in influencing your decision not to apply?

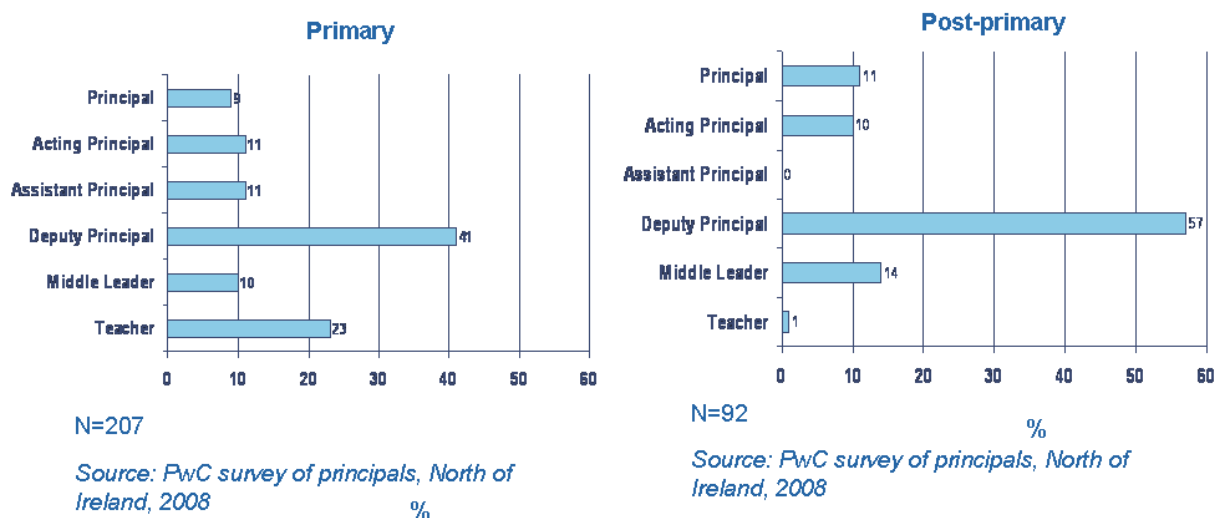| Gender	Male (n=91)	Female (n=139)
Lack of leadership experience – important or very important	32%	37%
Lack of confidence in ability to perform the role – important or very important	32%	42%

Source: PwC survey of deputy principals and middle leaders, the North of Ireland, 2008

4.5 There was agreement among stakeholders and focus group participants that management opportunities should be offered to teachers early in their careers, suggesting that this could both encourage them to consider principalship and help to identify those with leadership potential.

> *"There should be opportunities early on where teachers are exposed to the kinds of roles and responsibilities of a principal, so that they can get onto a career path that will align them to that position if they enjoy it."* (Newly appointed primary principal focus group participant, the North of Ireland)

4.6 The majority of principal focus group participants had had some managerial experience prior to their appointment, however some, particularly at primary level, had little or no leadership experience. This is in line with findings from our survey of principals, which found that just under a quarter (23%) of primary principals had been a teacher prior to their appointment, compared to 1% of their post-primary counterparts. Figure 4.2 presents the position held by principals prior to their appointment.

Figure 4.2: What was your position prior to your current appointment? Primary and Post-primary principals

Primary

Principal	9
Acting Principal	11
Assistant Principal	11
Deputy Principal	41
Middle Leader	10
Teacher	23

N=207

Source: PwC survey of principals, North of Ireland, 2008

%

Post-primary

Principal	11
Acting Principal	10
Assistant Principal	0
Deputy Principal	57
Middle Leader	14
Teacher	1

N=92

%

Source: PwC survey of principals, North of Ireland, 2008

4.7   Principal PQH graduates were more likely to have been a deputy principal prior to their appointment than those who had not undertaken the qualification (51% compared to 34%).

4.8   Principal and teacher respondents to the survey thought that leadership responsibilities in their schools were largely distributed, with 78% describing it as 'somewhat' or 'very' distributed and a further 9% stating that it was 'totally distributed'.

4.9   One stakeholder in the North of Ireland suggested that traditional forms of in-school management experience do not give an adequate reflection of the role of principalship, and asserted that potential leaders require wider leadership development opportunities. The stakeholder suggested a range of opportunities that could be provided to potential leaders to ensure that they are encouraged and fully equipped to carry out the role, including;

- Secondments to industry;
- Sabbaticals, including system-wide roles; and
- Working in a variety of schools.

4.10   This is in line with findings from focus groups with newly appointed principals, which found that the majority of principals initially felt ill-equipped to carry out the role. In the principal survey, only 6% of respondents felt 'very prepared' to fulfil the roles and responsibilities, and just under half (49%) of principals stated that they felt 'quite prepared'. Evidence from the survey suggests that those who had undertaken PQH were more likely to feel equipped to fulfil the role; 27% of principals who had not undertaken PQH described themselves as 'not very prepared' compared to 20% who had undertaken it.

> *"You may have developed the personal skills from co-ordinator to VP training, but there is nothing about management so it is a complete leap in the dark."* (Newly appointed primary principal focus group participant, the North of Ireland)

Formal leadership development courses

4.11   The majority of stakeholders in the North of Ireland agreed that there are sufficient formal leadership development courses and programmes available to teachers. Indeed, RTU was widely welcomed as a positive development as a centre dedicated to the development of educational professionals.

> *"I think we have a reasonable level of training and development both in terms of volume and in quality."* (Stakeholder, the North of Ireland)
>
> *"Before the RTU was set up there was very much a lack of training. We have been moving into a situation where there is recognition of training for professionals."* (Stakeholder, the North of Ireland)

4.12   Underpinned by the National Standards for Headteachers in the North of Ireland, the Professional Qualification for Headship (PQH) is a key part of the leadership development provision offered by RTU. Just over half (53%) of respondents to our survey of principals were PQH graduates. Of the principals who did not have PQH, over half were at primary level and a quarter were at post-primary, while 17% were principals of nursery school and a further 4% were principals of special schools.. At a sectoral level, 54% of principals who had not undertaken PQH were in the controlled sector, compared to 36% in the Catholic Maintained sector.

4.13   Surprisingly, just under half (48%) of respondents to the principal survey stated that they had not received any formal leadership training prior to their appointment. This lack of training was more acute in primary schools, with half of primary principals noting that they had not received formal leadership training, compared to just over a third

of post-primary principals. Stakeholders believed that there is sufficient provision available to teachers, pointing to a lack of uptake of training or to a lack of alternative provision aside from PQH. Principal respondents to the survey who stated that they had not accessed formal leadership training provided the following reasons:

- No time to undertake training – 35% of principals;
- Not aware of what was available – 24% of principals; and
- None available – 24% of principals.

4.14 Stakeholders agreed that the difficulty of affording teachers adequate time to undertake training was a key barrier to the uptake of leadership development opportunities. It was suggested that this was more pertinent at post-primary level, where the use of substitute teachers could be more problematic.

4.15 Evidence from our survey of teachers suggests that PQH is viewed positively, with 93% noting that it was 'effective' or 'very effective'. Some focus group participants and survey respondents thought that the role play and seminar aspects of PQH were particularly effective, stating that they enjoyed sharing good practice and reviewing different learning styles. However some principal and teacher participants in the research suggested that they would like the programme to place greater emphasis on financial management skills, personnel issues and conflict resolution.

> *"I feel that courses such as PQH are providing more opportunity for future leaders in terms of preparation for interviews and a clear understanding of the challenging role of principalship."* (Teacher survey, the North of Ireland)
>
> *"It makes you understand a bit about yourself, and it makes you see that you can fill the void between what you are now and being a principal or moving higher and how the PQH can help you. The verified activities; I would keep a number of them but I would like more seminar activities where you are learning about yourself and talking to others."* (PQH focus group participant, the North of Ireland)

4.16 Some stakeholders and deputy principal focus group participants indicated that many teachers apply for the PQH with a view to progressing to middle-management roles, rather than principalships or vice-principalships. This view was supported by the focus groups that were conducted with teachers currently undertaking PQH, in which the majority of participants stated that they had no aspirations for principalship. Instead, they reported using the course for their own professional development; to develop their managerial rather than leadership skills.

> *"In school, I'm supporting those who are doing the PQH and one of the often repeated statements I get is 'I'm just doing it for professional development. They don't really want to be headteachers."* (Stakeholder, the North of Ireland)
>
> *"I came on this for the journey, because I would be better equipped for the job I am currently doing."* (PQH focus group participant, the North of Ireland)

4.17 It was suggested that a precursor to PQH could be developed to cater for this group, in line with the NCSL Management Level Diploma in England. Indeed, some PQH focus group participants noted a lack of alternative formal leadership development training aside from the qualification, and indicated that they were undertaking PQH due to the lack of alternative provision.

> *"The main route is through PQH but I think that other programmes for middle management need to be developed."* (Stakeholder, the North of Ireland)
>
> *"There's nothing else really; I did my Dip PD and I don't want to do a Masters. There's no other real management or leadership qualification."* (PQH focus group participant)

4.18 Nonetheless, some PQH focus group participants noted that the qualification could be used as a 'springboard' for applying for principalship. Some also believed that teachers who did not have PQH may be less likely to apply for principalship, as they may have less confidence in their ability to fulfil the role, particularly if they had applied for PQH and not been accepted onto the course.

4.19 Formal leadership training had been undertaken by 89% of principals surveyed since taking up their position. Those at primary level were very slightly more likely to have received training since being appointed, with 90% of primary principals noting that they had received training since their appointment compared to 85% at post-primary. Many newly appointed principals noted in the focus groups that they would like ongoing training similar in nature to their induction training, suggesting that it had acted as a 'sounding board' for them.

Informal development

4.20 A range of informal leadership development activities had been undertaken by both teacher and principal survey results. Figure 4.2 highlights the informal professional leadership development activities undertaken by both teacher and principal respondents to the survey.

Table 4.2: Have you undertaken any of the following professional leadership development activities?

	Professional development activity	(%) Principals		Professional development activity	(%) Teachers
1	Networking	54%	1	Peer observation	64%
2	Accessing best practice via visits and showcasing at a conference	38%	2	Mentoring and coaching	47%
3	Work-based and in-house learning	28%	3	Accessing best practice via visits and showcasing at a conference	46%
4	In-school leadership development	28%	4	Work-based and in-house learning	45%
5	Mentoring and coaching	24%	5	Role play	40%
6	Work-based peer support	18%	6	E-learning	36%
7	E-learning	14%	7	In-school leadership development	36%
8	Peer observation	14%	8	Work-based peer support	30%
9	Role play	10%	9	Networking	28%

Source: PwC survey of principals, the North of Ireland, 2008 (n=349) and PwC survey of deputy principals and middle leaders, the North of Ireland, 2008 (n=230)

4.21 Evidence from the focus groups indicates that teachers and principals also value informal leadership development opportunities such as networking, mentoring and the dissemination of good practice. Indeed, networking with peers was viewed as one of the key benefits of undertaking formal professional development courses.

4.22 It is evident that teacher respondents to the survey had undertaken more professional development activities than principals. This is likely to be due to the fact that a database of PQH graduates was used to develop the sample for the teacher survey; PQH graduates are therefore more likely than non-PQH graduates to have undertaken a range of leadership development activities. Indeed, principal graduates of PQH were more likely to have undertaken networking (57% compared to 51% of non-PQH graduates), e-learning (18% compared to 10%) and role play (15% of PQH graduates compared to 3%).

4.23 The majority of principal focus group participants suggested that mentoring would be a valuable method of encouraging leadership potential and in providing support to newly appointed principals. Some PQH focus group

participants suggested that mentoring would help to allay candidate's anxieties about the accountability of the role. Other newly appointed principals in the focus groups believed that receiving encouragement and mentoring from their principal and colleagues had played an important role in their decision to apply for principalship.

> *"Early on in my career the principal was telling me to do this course and that course; that mentoring in an unstructured way encouraged me to do the courses required to take on responsibility in the school, to test whether I was capable of leading staff, parents and pupils."* (Newly appointed post-primary principal focus group participant, the North of Ireland)

4.24 Shadowing experienced principals was also widely cited by newly appointed principals in the focus groups as a leadership development opportunity. Some teachers and principals requested opportunities for aspiring heads to shadow successful principals on a placement, and many principals noted that the opportunity to shadow the outgoing principal of the school they had been appointed to would be a valuable induction.

> *"Shadowing opportunities for those thinking about embarking on the road to principalship would help aspiring heads see how different people approach the role, provide opportunities for reflection, and learn from the experience of others."* (Principal survey, the North of Ireland)

Succession planning and the recruitment selection process

4.25 Planning for succession in schools and perceptions of the recruitment and selection process can play an important role in attracting leaders of the future to consider applying for principalship positions.

Succession planning

4.26 It was agreed that, in general, succession planning at school level is not widespread. There were some cases of principals identifying and encouraging talented individuals to progress to leadership roles, and a minority of newly appointed principal focus group participants described how they tried to harness the leadership potential of particular teachers in their school through giving them a range of responsibilities and experiences. However, there was a consensus that planning for succession in schools is inconsistent and entirely dependent on the vice-principal and principal. It was also suggested that identifying and encouraging potential leaders is more challenging at post-primary level.

4.27 Some stakeholders suggested that governors and principals should be trained in how to identify and develop talent, suggesting that succession planning should become part of the ethos of every school. The importance of distributing leadership responsibilities was noted as a means of encouraging and fostering the leadership potential of talented teachers in this context.

> *"It's not just about the recruitment process; it's how you manage a person, what sort of target you set them, what sort of training you can provide for them, what sort of experiences you expose them to and what encouragement you give them. I think that's one of the least developed roles in Northern Ireland."* (Stakeholder, the North of Ireland)

4.28 Despite the perceived lack of succession planning at school level, there was acknowledgement that the PQH acts as a system-wide succession planning tool, and can provide a route to principalship for willing candidates. This view was supported by findings of the focus group with those undertaking the PQH.

> *"The only thing that I am aware of in relation to succession planning is PQH."* (Newly appointed post-primary principal focus group participant, the North of Ireland)

Selection process

4.29   Our research considered the process of recruiting and appointing candidates to leadership posts. The majority of teachers in the North of Ireland stated that they are aware of the process (87% of survey respondents). Awareness levels at primary and post-primary were similar. Views on the selection process were mixed, as illustrated in Figure 4.3.

Figure 4.3: What are your perceptions of the selection process for principalship?

N=230

%
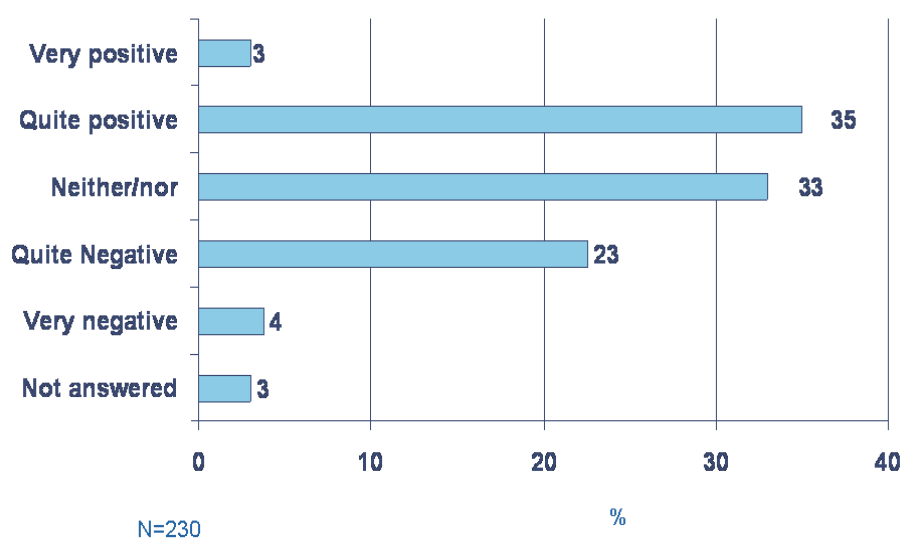
Source: PwC survey of deputies and middle leaders, North of Ireland, 2008

4.30   While approximately two fifths (38%) of respondents said that their perception of the process was positive, the perception of just over a quarter of teachers was negative. Evidence from the focus groups and stakeholder consultation highlights a number of concerns around the use of governors in the selection process. Some participants noted that governors are voluntary and often have little knowledge of the education sector, and therefore questioned their ability to select the right applicant. In some cases, stakeholders and focus group participants suggested that governors often have a predetermined view of the type of candidate they wish to appoint, usually in terms of their age, gender or length of time teaching. Teacher survey respondents frequently noted that candidates appointed to principalship were often already teaching within the school where the appointment was made.

"The old process of using governors to choose principals is very unfair. Someone who has taught in a school for 20 years is seen by governors as earning the right to become principal when they may not be the best person for the job." (Newly appointed primary principal, focus group participant the North of Ireland)

"People look at jobs here still in Northern Ireland and think that's probably going to be for a certain type of person and a certain age, or it must be for someone within the school. Maybe the job's already sewn up or it's the old boys' network; that type of old nepotism." (PQH focus group participant, the North of Ireland)

4.31   There was a relatively widespread view that governors prefer male candidates, particularly at post-primary level and in rural areas. It was also thought that women are more likely to be appointed as principals of primary schools

and as teaching principals. This is supported by the profile of principals who responded to our survey; the breakdown by gender is highlighted below.

Table 4.3: Profile of principal survey respondents by gender

Phase	Male	Female
Nursery	0%	16%
Primary	54%	63%
Post-primary	40%	16%
Special	3%	5%

Source: PwC survey of principals, the North of Ireland, 2008 (n=349)

4.32   While a minority of participants suggested that women are increasingly being appointed to principalships, many stakeholders and focus group participants proposed a number of potential reasons for the perceived gender imbalance, particularly at post-primary level;

- **A perception that a male principal is preferable for the enforcement of discipline:** *"A lot of boards of governors feel it is better to have a male principal for discipline, especially in post-primary schools."* (Stakeholder, the North of Ireland)*;*

- **A perception that women are more likely to be family-orientated:** "*It's a cultural issue; it would be thought that women are more family orientated."* (Stakeholder, the North of Ireland)*;* and

- **A traditional view that a school principal should be male:** *"I would think in rural areas it's still in the minds of governors that you need a man."* (Newly appointed primary principal focus group participant, the North of Ireland)*.*

4.33   In addition, some deputy focus group participants expressed frustrations with the selection process in the controlled sector. This process involves an interview panel putting forward three candidates, out of which a committee will select one for appointment. It was suggested that this was not an effective way of selecting a principal, as those on the deciding committee may not have a good understanding of the school.

"I am on the board of governors, and we have sane and sensible people who nominate three candidates. Then people who have no understanding for the school make that decision." (Newly appointed primary principal focus group participant, the North of Ireland)

4.34   The use of interviews for the selection of principals was questioned by many participants in the research. It was suggested that an interview does not adequately examine the wide range of skills and competencies required by school principals, and is therefore not sufficiently rigorous to ensure that principals who are appointed are suitable for the position.

"I find it difficult to see how a 30 minute interview could possibly be the best basis for the decision making for such a responsible position." (Teacher survey, the North of Ireland)

"It would be interesting to have an assessment in the same way for PQH skills. A final assessment should be done under pressure, because in the job you have to think on your feet. That would be very telling." (Newly appointed primary principal focus group participant, the North of Ireland)

Criteria for principal appointments

4.35 A number of teacher survey respondents and focus group participants indicated that advertisements for principalship positions are often inconsistent in their criteria for applications. Specifically, criteria were said to vary in terms of length of time teaching, length of time served as a vice-principal and the value of qualifications held. For example, some advertisements were said to require PQH, while in others, the qualification was not mentioned.

> *"There is a lack of consistency in criteria used in advertisements, particularly in recognising PQH."* (Teacher survey, the North of Ireland)
>
> *"Now if you don't have PQH, you're not going to get into the mix. There are so many other areas where total experience counts, but it doesn't include the teaching profession."* (Post-primary deputy principal focus group participant, the North of Ireland)

4.36 Indeed, some deputy and middle leader focus group participants noted that they were ineligible to apply for principalship or vice-principalship positions as they did not have the specified number of responsibility points or had not taught in the classroom for the required time. Some also noted that schools have a role to play in ensuring that responsibility points are allocated to the most appropriate staff.

> *"I'm not eligible for most vice-principal posts because I haven't done five years in primary. You have to have between five and seven years for that."* (PQH focus group participant, the North of Ireland)
>
> *"Sometimes those who are holding positions of high responsibility within the school are not necessarily ideal people to become principals, while those who hold responsibility points of lower status are maybe waiting for that opportunity but they haven't got the points they need to make that next step. So really, in schools, we are not fully facilitating the opportunity for people to become principals."* (Post-primary deputy principal focus group participant, the North of Ireland)

4.37 There was some debate during the qualitative phase of the research regarding whether boards of governors should place emphasis on length of experience and the age of candidates. Evidence from the survey suggests that principals perceive aptitude to be the most important factor in appointment to headship, followed by leadership experience and qualifications. It is self-evident that a certain degree of experience is required for principalship, and in the survey, length of service and age were considered important factors. Indeed, as noted in the previous chapter, those in the 41-50 age category were most likely to apply, while no respondents aged between 21 and 30 planned to seek principalship over the next 12 months. Figure 4.4 highlights findings from the principal survey on the importance principals place on age, leadership experience, length of service, qualification, aptitude and teaching subject for the role of principalship.

Figure 4.4: How important do you feel the following factors are in the appointment to principalship?

N=349
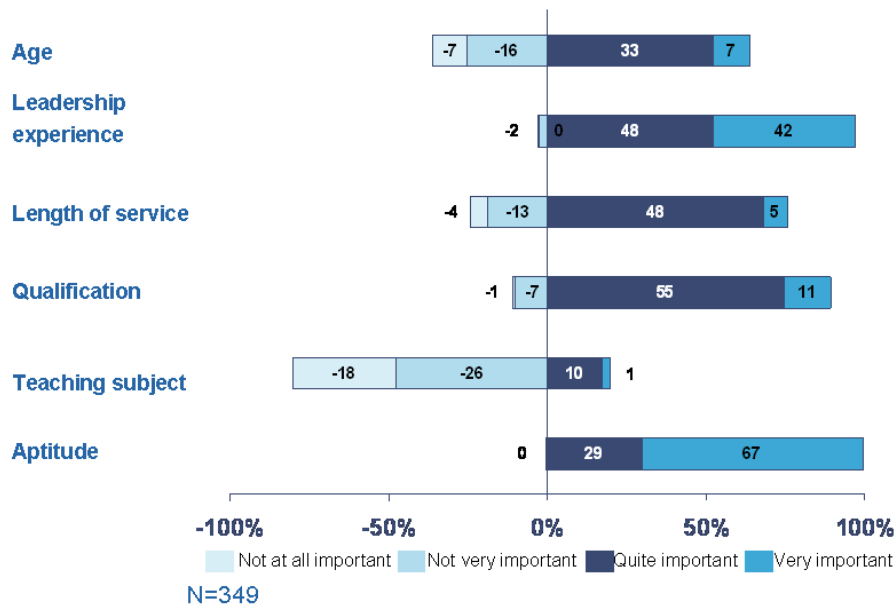
Source: PwC survey of principals, North of Ireland, 2008

4.38   With regard to the length of service and experience of candidates, focus group participants and stakeholders had mixed views on whether minimum criteria should be set around length of service. While all participants in the research agreed that candidates should have some experience, there were differing views on whether length of service was more important than the nature of management experience gained and leadership ability.

4.39   Some participants indicated that, where criteria is set around length of service, talented individuals with a range of quality management experiences may be discouraged from coming forward, in favour of someone who, for example, has taught in a single school for a long period of time. PQH graduate principals were less likely to perceive length of service as 'quite' or 'very' important than those who had not undertaken the qualification (48% of PQH graduates compared to 64% of non-PQH graduates).

> *"I'm not sure it's rational. Some candidates are excluded because they don't have seven years' experience. We need to consider whether conditions are meaningful or even practical."* (Stakeholder, the North of Ireland)
>
> *"We're not just looking for business leaders here. They've got to serve their time in the classroom; learn their trade and learn the skills."* (Newly appointed primary principal focus group participant, the North of Ireland)

4.40   In terms of age, it was suggested in the focus groups that some boards of governors, particularly at post-primary level, tend to select younger candidates as there is a perception that they will be more dynamic and innovative. However, some focus group participants questioned the rationale of this, proposing that younger principals may not be able to cope with the challenges of the role, or that the length of time facing principals until they retire could be discouraging. In line with our findings on length of service, 37% of PQH graduates noted age as 'quite' or 'very' important compared to 46% of those who had not achieved the qualification.

4.41 In our survey, principals were asked about other factors that they felt were important in the appointment to principalship. They highlighted a range of qualities that they felt leaders should possess, as illustrated in Figure 4.5.

Figure 4.5: Are there any other factors you feel are important in the appointment to principalship?

Source: PwC survey of principals, North of Ireland, 2008

4.42 Ethnicity was not considered to be a barrier to the selection of principals. This is likely to be due to the low numbers of Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) teachers within the profession. Indeed, almost all respondents to the principal and teacher surveys described their ethnic origin as "white".

Retaining effective leaders

4.43 Retention of school leaders was not considered to be a particularly pertinent issue in the North of Ireland at present among stakeholders and focus group participants. However, it was noted that there are cases of early retirement among principals, and that efforts should be made to retain and continue to develop effective principals.

4.44 Principal survey respondents were asked to highlight the factors that would encourage them to remain in post for the next ten to 15 years. In line with the key factors motivating teachers to take up principalship posts, the most commonly cited factor in the retention of principals was the opportunity to make a difference. Pupil contact, work-life balance and financial reward structures were also key considerations. The main findings from the survey in this regard are presented in Table 4.4.

Table 4.4: What factors do you think would encourage you to remain in post as a principal?

Factor encouraging principals to remain in post over the next ten to 15 years		% of principals
1	Opportunity to make a difference	75%
2	Professional challenge	65%
3	Pupil contact	61%
4	Work-life balance	51%
5	Combining leadership with a wider systems role, e.g. RTU or ETI associate	45%
6	Greater acknowledgement of the importance of school leadership	44%
7	Professional support networks	43%
8	Professional development opportunities	41%
9	Availability of secondment or sabbatical opportunities	38%
=10	Flexible working Type/ content of work	30%

Source: PwC survey of principals, the North of Ireland, 2008 (n=349)

4.45 A large number of stakeholders and newly appointed principal focus group participants suggested that principals should not remain in post for long periods of time, with many asserting that seven to ten years should be the maximum time spent by a principal in a single school. Opportunities for 'refreshment' proposed by participants included:

- **Sabbaticals to system-wide roles:** *"Principals could be offered sabbaticals and secondments to coach and mentor newly appointed principals."* (Stakeholder, the North of Ireland)*;*

- **Moving to a different school:** *"I think that principals should be compared to football managers who move on after a period of time and go into a fresh situation where they can motivate people more."* (Newly appointed post-primary principal focus group participant)*; and*

- **Becoming an inspector**: *"I think I would learn so much if I was an inspector in schools. We are working in silos and we don't get to see what goes on in other schools."* (Newly-appointed post-primary principal focus group participant, the North of Ireland)*.*

4.46 Some stakeholders and focus group participants indicated that a culture of fresh challenge was not established in the North of Ireland, with many principals either unable to access further opportunities, or, in some cases, be likely to resist change. Indeed, some newly appointed principals suggested that moving schools after a period of time could have its drawbacks, namely that it can take time to build trust and relationships within the school, which would be lost when the principal moved on. Another challenge to the implementation of secondments and sabbaticals identified by stakeholders is a fear among some principals that the acting principal in their school would be unable to cope.

> *"There aren't really any opportunities beyond the post. Once you've got a principalship, the financial difference between one school and another is neither here nor there. A fresh challenge within the education sector is not something that's culturally embedded in Northern Ireland. People are often afraid of failure."* (Stakeholder, the North of Ireland)

Summary and conclusions

- Professional development was widely believed to play a crucial role in attracting and recruiting school principals, and in ensuring that those who apply are of an appropriate calibre. In particular, the provision of wide-ranging in-school leadership development opportunities early in teachers' careers is thought to be important, and particularly so for female teachers, who rate lack of leadership experience and lack of confidence to fulfil the role as greater disincentives than male survey respondents;

- To this end, true distribution of leadership was noted as an important means of providing talented teachers with the opportunity to 'act up' and refine their leadership skills;

- At a formal level, while it is thought that there is adequate provision available, just under half of principal survey respondents had not received formal leadership development training prior to their appointment, providing reasons such as not having time to undertake training, being unaware of existing provision, or perceiving that there was none available;

- Many of the participants who had received formal leadership training had done so through PQH, which was generally identified as an effective succession planning tool. However, our findings indicate that many of those who undertake the qualification do not have aspirations of principalship; rather, they pursue the course for professional development and due to a lack of alternative provision. Informal professional development activities such as mentoring and shadowing serving principals were also believed to have a positive impact on the attractiveness of principalship;

- While our findings highlighted a high level of investment in leadership development training opportunities for teachers in the North of Ireland, the evidence suggests that the existing selection process may not be maximising this investment;

- In particular, many participants questioned the use of governors in the selection process, noting that they are voluntary, may have little knowledge of education, and often have a traditional view of the ideal candidate. The use of a single interview to appoint the leader of a school was a further issue for many, and a number of difficulties were noted regarding the criteria used for principalship advertisements;

- A further concern was the lack of widespread planning for succession at school level. Succession planning in schools was thought to be dependent on serving principals taking the initiative to identify and encourage potential leaders; and

- Linked to the succession planning challenge, some participants in the research commented that there is not a culture of 'fresh challenge' in schools in the North of Ireland, and that many teachers and principals are reluctant to move to a new school or role. Some suggested that principals should be in post for a maximum of seven to ten years, and should then move to a different school, or undertake a sabbatical or a system-wide role. The implementation of such strategies was thought to have a potentially positive impact on retention. This finding is supported by Earley (2004), who suggested that principals enter a 'plateau' stage in their career in their eighth year of principalship.

5 School leadership in the South of Ireland – perceptions of principalship

Introduction

5.1 This section of the report considers the findings from a stakeholder consultation, a series of focus groups held with newly appointed principals, deputy principals and middle leaders in the South of Ireland, as well as the results of our survey. This section summarises participants' views and perceptions of the role of school principal and is structured as follows:

- The supply of school leaders;
- Motivating factors for potential candidates;
- Demotivating factors for potential candidates; and
- Summary and conclusions.

The supply of school leaders

5.2 Stakeholders in the South of Ireland agreed that there is an issue in the supply of school leaders. Specific concerns were identified around recruitment to small schools, Gaelscoileanna (Irish-medium schools), schools situated in rural areas, particularly in the West of Ireland, schools in deprived areas and to teaching principal positions. Indeed, it was noted that many small schools have unfilled positions and that posts often have to be re-advertised. Several respondents indicated that the voluntary secondary sector was experiencing the most difficulties in relation to the rate of applications for principalships.

> *"Lots of small schools have unfilled posts for principal and many go to re-advertisement."* (Stakeholder, South of Ireland)

5.3 These findings were supported by the results of our teacher survey, which found that only 39% of experienced teachers had ever considered applying for principalship, while 85% said that it was 'very unlikely' that they would seek to progress to headship in the next 12 months. In the South of Ireland, few statistics are gathered on appointments to principalship, therefore, the true extent of the challenge in the supply of school principals is not known.

5.4 Our survey found that there are differing levels of interest in principalship across phases and sectors. Teachers in primary schools are slightly less likely to apply in the next 12 months than those in the post-primary sector (94% compared to 88% 'unlikely' or 'very unlikely' to apply), while with regard to sector, teachers in the Gaelscoileanna sector are least likely to apply in the next 12 months, followed by those in the primary and voluntary secondary sectors. The likelihood of teacher survey respondents by sector applying for leadership positions in the next 12 months is presented in Table 5.1. The findings should be treated with some caution, however, as the number of respondents in certain sectors was relatively low.

Table 5.1: How likely are you to apply for a principal position in the next 12 months?

Sector	Likelihood of applying (Likely or very likely to apply)	Number of respondents (n=)
Primary	11%	223
Vocational/ Community College	8%	26
Community/ Comprehensive School	7%	15
Voluntary Secondary	4%	52
Gaelscoileanna	0%	35

Source: PwC survey of deputy principals and middle leaders, South of Ireland, 2008

5.5 Overall, only 3% of teachers stated that they would be 'likely' or 'very likely' to apply for a principal position in the next year, with 86% reporting that they would be 'very unlikely' to seek a principalship. Deputy principal focus group participants had mixed views on whether they would aspire to headship; some had applied for positions in the past, while others were adamant that the role was of no interest to them.

5.6 Evidence from the survey suggests that middle leaders are more likely than senior leaders to have aspirations of applying to principalship. Indeed, at post-primary level, respondents who are heads of year were most likely to apply, followed by subject co-ordinators. At primary level, subject co-ordinators were most likely to apply. It should be noted that 'subject co-ordinator' is not an official post in the South of Ireland; rather, teachers carry out the role voluntarily. Deputy principal respondents at both primary and post-primary are least likely to apply. Table 5.2 presents findings from the survey on aspirations according to respondents' management role.

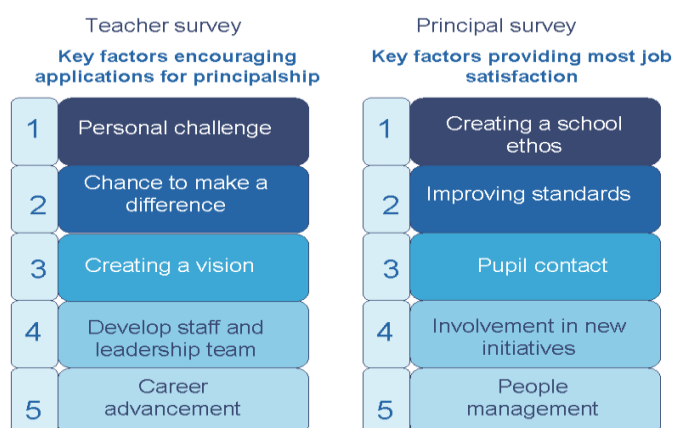**Table 5.2: How likely are you to apply for a principal position in the next 12 months?**

Management role	Primary – quite or very likely to apply (n=289)	Post-primary – quite or very likely to apply (n=97)
Deputy-principal	1%	4%
Senior leadership team member	3%	6%
Subject co-ordinator	7%	9%
Head of year	-	12%

Source: PwC survey of deputy principals and middle leaders, South of Ireland, 2008

Motivating factors for potential candidates

5.7 In line with the research in the North of Ireland cited earlier, the evidence does not pinpoint one particular factor either encouraging or discouraging applications to principalship. Rather, the findings suggest that there are a range of issues affecting each individual's decision whether or not to apply for principalship. These factors are outlined in the following diagram and explored in the remainder of this chapter.

Figure 5.1: What aspects of the principal role would encourage you to apply for headship, (deputy and middle leader survey) and which factors provide the most job satisfaction in your current role (principal survey)?

Teacher survey
Key factors encouraging applications for principalship

1 Personal challenge
2 Chance to make a difference
3 Creating a vision
4 Develop staff and leadership team
5 Career advancement

Principal survey
Key factors providing most job satisfaction

1 Creating a school ethos
2 Improving standards
3 Pupil contact
4 Involvement in new initiatives
5 People management

Source: PwC survey of deputies and middle leaders, South of Ireland, 2008 and PwC survey of principals, South of Ireland, 2008

Personal challenge and career advancement

5.8 Personal challenge was the most commonly cited incentive in encouraging applications to principalship from both principal and teacher survey respondents (noted by 61% of deputy and middle leader respondents and 45% of principals), while career advancement was noted by a third (33%) of teachers as a motivating factor. Deputy principal focus group participants and some survey respondents also described their drive and sense of ambition, and a desire to progress their career.

> *"I would like to be involved in steering things and how things are going. I would be very driven."* (Post-primary deputy principal, South of Ireland)

5.9 Some participants in the research found their current level of responsibility to be limited, and stated that they wanted to progress to a position where they could be more involved in leading the direction of the school and take a more active role in decision-making. Some newly appointed principals discussed their sense of achievement when they felt they had successfully dealt with a challenging day, noting that the role of principal was suited to their personality.

> *"I am anxious to take on a more senior management role; advancement career-wise so far has been limited to a 'B-Post' and that doesn't really carry much weight in decision-making."* (Teacher survey respondent, South of Ireland)
>
> *"I like the fact that you don't know what a day is going to throw at you – it's challenging and at the end of the day I'd rather feel good that I sorted that out, so it kind of suits my personality."* (Post-primary deputy principal, South of Ireland)
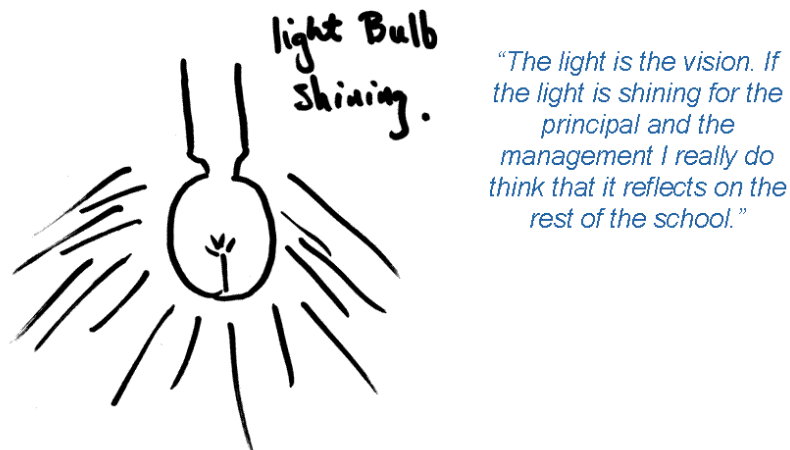
Creating a vision and the chance to make a difference

5.10 The opportunity afforded by the position of school principal to make a difference to children, young people and the wider community was the second most commonly noted source of motivation by teachers, cited by just over half (51%) of respondents. Survey results indicate that improving standards in their school provides satisfaction to serving principals; just over half (52%) of principal survey respondents noted this as one of the aspects providing them with the most job satisfaction.

> *"Having the opportunity to lead and develop a school staff, creating a vision and making a real difference to the education of children in my school."* (Teacher survey, South of Ireland)

5.11 The survey findings indicate clearly that the opportunity to create and implement a vision is one of the key incentives for teachers to progress to principal positions. This is supported by findings from focus groups with deputy principals who discussed a desire to implement their vision for the school. Similarly, the aspect of the role providing principals with the most job satisfaction was creating a school ethos, noted by just over half (53%) of respondents. Focus group participants were asked to draw a picture depicting their perceptions of principalship. One deputy principal viewed a principal as a visionary, as outlined in Figure 5.2.

Figure 5.2: Perception of school principalship

"The light is the vision. If the light is shining for the principal and the management I really do think that it reflects on the rest of the school."

Source: Newly appointed primary principal focus group, South of Ireland, 2008

Developing staff and leadership team

5.12 Working in collaboration with, and developing, other staff was a key motivation in seeking a principalship position for a third (33%) of deputy and middle leader survey respondents. For a quarter (25%) of newly appointed principals, people management was one of the aspects of their role providing most job satisfaction.

5.13 Many principal survey respondents noted the satisfaction they gained from managing their team of staff and resolving conflict. Indeed, where staff within a school were viewed as supportive, principals were more likely to express overall satisfaction with their role. This was supported by findings from the focus groups, for example, where some participants described a sense of satisfaction resulting from their interactions with other staff, with one deputy principal respondent noting that the opportunity to 'bring the best out of people' would encourage him to apply for principalship.

> *"Working relationships with our colleagues and the kids; that's where the real buzz comes from. There's a lot of collaboration amongst staff. That's what makes it worthwhile for me and the boys buy into things as students and they're happy, they're working and they're with you. That's where the incentive really is." (*Post-primary deputy principal focus group participant, South of Ireland)

Sense of duty

5.14 Moreover, several newly appointed principal focus group participants indicated that they were not encouraged to apply by the factors mentioned above, and indeed had not wanted to apply for principalship at all, but had done so out of a sense of duty to their school. Others suggested that they had felt pressurised into taking up the role, often where there had been no other applications. In some cases, principals had been encouraged to take up the position in order to avoid change in the school.

> *"I had no intentions of applying but when it came up there were no other applications, so I was basically coerced."* (Newly appointed primary principal focus group participant, South of Ireland)
>
> *"I was there so long it was expected of me to apply. The principal who was leaving said that if I didn't apply, someone else would come in and everything would be turned upside down."* (Newly appointed primary principal focus group participant, South of Ireland)

Demotivating factors for potential candidates

5.15   While the research identified many aspects of principalship that were thought to encourage teachers to apply for the position, participants in the research identified a number of factors that would discourage them from seeking principalship positions, and which could impact on their likelihood of applying for a headship in the future. Each of these factors is explored in the following diagram and subsequent paragraphs.

Figure 5.3: What aspects of the role would discourage you from applying for headship (Teacher survey) and which of the following factors provide least job satisfaction in your current role (Principal survey)?

Teacher survey	Principal survey
Key factors discouraging applications to principalship	Key factors providing least job satisfaction
1 Workload	1 Bureaucracy
2 Administration	2 Dealing with complaints
3 Combining leadership and teaching roles	3 Financial management
4 Lack of training	4 Administration
5 People management	5 Conflict resolution

Source: PwC survey of principals, South of Ireland, 2008 and PwC survey of deputies and middle leaders, South of Ireland, 2008

Workload

5.16   There was consensus that one of the key factors discouraging applications for principalship was the volume of work associated with the position. Indeed in the survey, workload was noted by approximately two thirds (67%) of teacher respondents as one of the main demotivating aspects of principalship. Survey results suggest that workload is slightly more likely to act as a disincentive at primary level (69% of primary teachers) than at post-primary level (63% of post-primary teachers); this is likely to arise from the number of posts combining teaching and principalship duties at primary level in the South of Ireland.
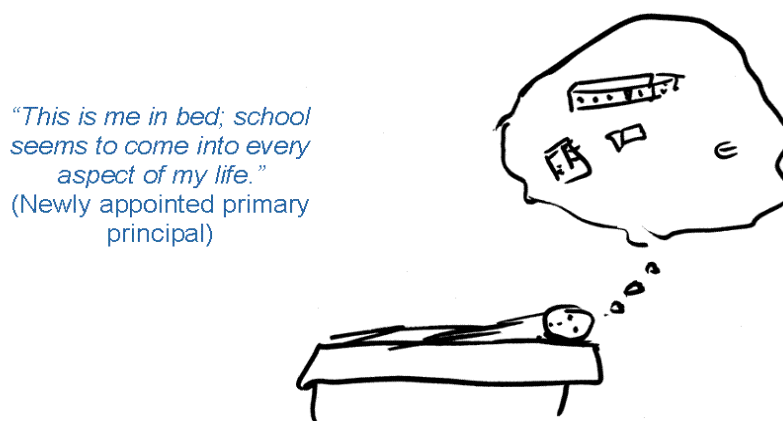
5.17   Key implications of the perceived workload and levels of administration associated with principalship included reduced time to focus on teaching and learning and on developing the school. This was an important disincentive for teachers, many of whom asserted that they had not gone into the profession to become an administrator; but, rather, because they wanted to focus on education.

"It has become the job of an administrator, not an educationalist. I have seen several excellent teachers deeply regret having become principals." (Teacher survey, South of Ireland)

"The paper trails are getting bigger and bigger. Principals are spending more time on paper than on real education." (Post-primary deputy principal focus group participant, South of Ireland)

5.18   The work-life balance of principals was also thought to be affected negatively by the volume of work associated with headship. Again, this was viewed as a disincentive by a substantial proportion of participants in the research. In the principal survey, a third (33%) of principals described their work-life balance as 'poor', a further 8% described it as 'very poor', while around 38% considered their work-life balance as good. However, these findings compare favourably to evidence from our *Independent Study into School Leadership*, where 61% of headteachers in England and Wales surveyed described their work-life balance as 'poor' or 'very poor'. When asked to depict their perception of the role of principal, one focus group participant portrayed the impact of the role on her life.

Figure 5.4: Perception of principalship

"This is me in bed; school seems to come into every aspect of my life."
(Newly appointed primary principal)

Source: Newly appointed primary principal focus group, South of Ireland, 2008

Administration

5.19   The number of administrative responsibilities associated with the role of principalship was closely linked to the workload cited as a disincentive by teachers and principals. Principal survey respondents most frequently noted bureaucracy as the aspect of the role providing least job satisfaction (according to 67% of respondents). Administrative responsibilities were the second most commonly noted aspect discouraging respondents from progressing to headship, selected by 60% of teachers.

5.20   In line with our findings on workload, a principal's administrative duties were found to be a greater factor in discouraging applications to headship at primary level. Indeed, just under half of primary school teachers (49%) cited a principal's administrative duties as 'very important' in influencing their decision not to apply for principalship, compared to just over a quarter (27%) of teachers at post-primary level. At a sectoral level, the survey findings indicate that administrative duties are considered to be a greater disincentive in the Gaelscoileanna sector, noted by 83% as an 'important' or 'very important' factor compared to 74% of primary respondents and 54% of Voluntary Secondary teachers. However, it should be noted that the total number of teachers responding to the survey in some sectors was small, and the findings should therefore be considered with caution.

Combining leadership and teaching roles

5.21   In the South of Ireland, three quarters (75%) of principals combine their role with full-time teaching commitments. Combining leadership and teaching roles was widely considered to be a significant disincentive for potential candidates considering progression to principalship. In the qualitative phase of the research, the majority of focus

group participants asserted that the role is not sustainable. Key concerns relating to the role included the lack of capacity to carry out either role to a high standard, leading to implications for the standard of teaching and learning in the school.

> *"You are juggling two jobs. Either you are doing one job or the other; to do both, you are not doing justice to either job. The children are suffering in your classroom because you are not there two days a week, and the jobs as a principal are piling up as you are teaching. Something has to give."* (Newly appointed primary principal focus group participant, South of Ireland)
>
> *"Principals shouldn't be teaching. I love teaching but I don't think it's sustainable to be teaching and running the school at the same time, no matter what the size of the school. A principal should have time in the office and a teacher should be in the classroom."* (Newly appointed primary principal focus group participant, South of Ireland)

5.22 The workload of the teaching principal was also thought to have an impact on work-life balance, with many participants in the research describing a sense of guilt associated with taking release time to deal with administrative responsibilities. In some cases, principals did not take their full release time, and instead carried out principalship responsibilities in evenings and at the weekend. Figure 5.5 presents findings from the survey of teachers' views of the role of teaching principal.

Figure 5.5: How important would combining teaching and leadership roles be in influencing your decision <u>not</u> to apply for the position of principal?

N=393
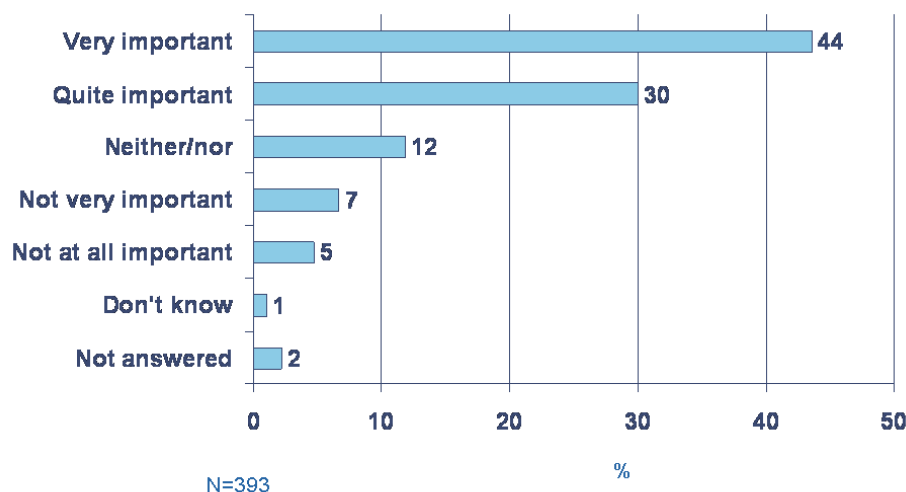
Source: PwC survey of senior teachers and middle leaders, South of Ireland, 2008

5.23 Although combining leadership and teaching roles acted as a disincentive for the majority of teacher survey respondents. This suggests that many enjoy the contact with their pupils, while experiencing difficulties in balancing the two roles.

Lack of training

5.24 Participants in the research linked a lack of professional leadership development training to teachers' aspirations for seeking principalship positions. This is explored in greater detail in the next section of this report; *Developing, recruiting and retaining effective leaders in the South of Ireland.*

People management

5.25   While developing staff and leadership team and people management were noted as incentives for teachers to seek principalship and as factors providing a high level of job satisfaction for serving principals, a third of teachers responding to the survey noted that people management responsibilities would act as a factor discouraging them from seeking a headship position. This finding was similar across both primary and post-primary teachers.

5.26   Conflict resolution was noted by almost a quarter of principals as one of the areas providing them with the least job satisfaction. When asked what further support they would like with regard to seeking principalship, many teachers noted that they would like greater guidance and advice on people management issues and conflict resolution.

> *"People management is a skill that needs to be taught, practised and honed."* (Teacher survey, South of Ireland)

Additional demotivating factors linked to perceptions of the role

3.68   In addition to the key factors discouraging applications for principalship considered above, participants in the research highlighted a range of other aspects of the role they believed could dissuade potential candidates from applying. These are explored in the remainder of this section of the report, as set out below:

- Accountability;
- Breadth of the role;
- Lack of onward progression routes;
- Levels of reward;
- Levels of support attached to the post;
- Current career satisfaction;
- Personal circumstances; and
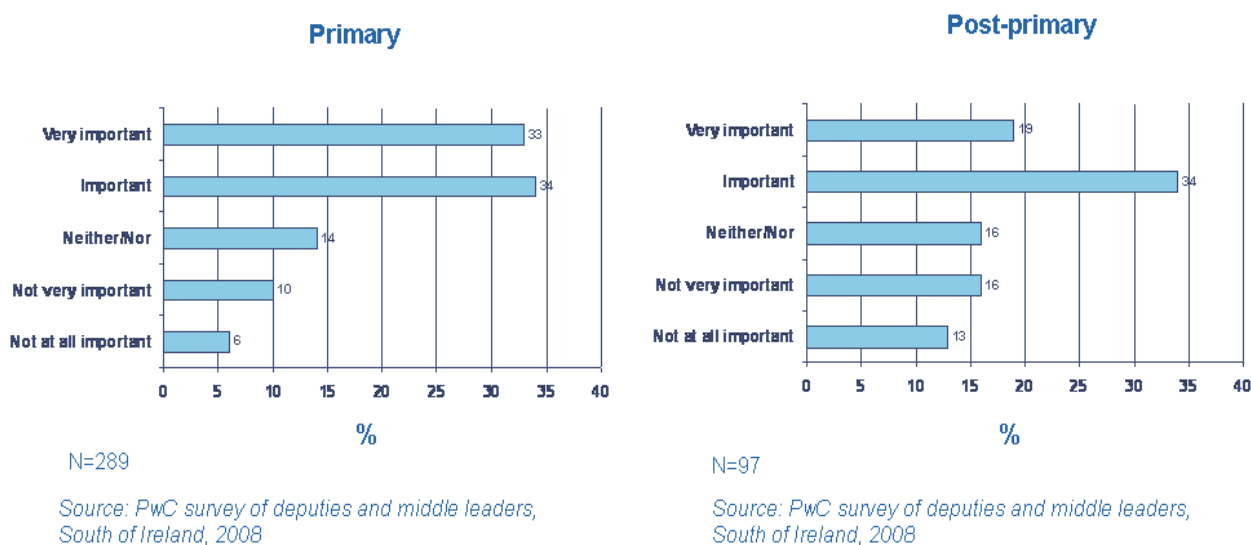- School and context specific issues.

Accountability

5.27   For some deputy principal focus group participants, the level of accountability associated with being a leader of the school was believed to be the main difference between the role of deputy and that of principal. As such, it was considered to be a significant factor in discouraging them from applying for headship. This is in line with findings from the teacher survey, which found that 63% of respondents considered accountability to be an 'important' or 'very important' factor in influencing their decision not to apply for principalship.

> *"The only difference is that the buck stops with him. Everything is signed off; you make a decision and you write your name down. Some of the decisions are common sense but they can be legally binding. You can only do the best you can."* (Post-primary deputy principal focus group participant, South of Ireland)

5.28   Accountability was found to be a greater disincentive at primary level, with approximately a third (34%) of teachers citing it as a 'very important' factor in deciding not to apply for headship, compared to just under a fifth (19%) at post-primary level. Survey results suggest that accountability remains a concern for serving principals, with 13% citing it as one of the factors providing them with least job satisfaction. In line with teachers' perceptions, this was more acute in the primary sector, with 15% of principals citing it as a factor causing the least satisfaction, compared to 6% of post-primary principals. Figure 5.6 presents findings from the teacher survey on the extent to which accountability acted as a disincentive for principalship for primary and post-primary teachers.

Figure 5.6: How important would a principal's accountability be in influencing your decision <u>not</u> to apply for the position of principal?

Primary

N=289

Source: PwC survey of deputies and middle leaders, South of Ireland, 2008

Post-primary

N=97

Source: PwC survey of deputies and middle leaders, South of Ireland, 2008

5.29 Survey results suggest that accountability plays a slightly more important role in the decision not to apply for principalship for women. Approximately two-thirds (65%) of female teacher survey respondents noted accountability as an 'important' or 'very important' factor in deciding against seeking a principalship position, compared to 56% of male respondents. The pattern is similar among newly appointed principals, with 15% of women citing accountability as one of the factors providing least job satisfaction, compared to 9% of male respondents.

Breadth of role

5.30 The diversity of tasks associated with the role was noted as a factor that can serve to discourage potential candidates from progressing to headship by both principals and teachers in the survey. It was suggested that time taken up by a diverse range of tasks results in principals becoming a 'jack of all trades', and inhibits their capacity to focus on developing teaching and learning in the school.

> *"I love the job but I feel torn in many directions all day everyday; there are not enough hours to handle all demands to a high level of satisfaction."* (Principal survey, South of Ireland)
>
> *"As a principal you are expected to be an expert on curriculum, a manager, a nurse, a mediator, a teacher and a choirmaster."* (Principal survey, South of Ireland)

5.31 The majority of principals responding to the survey indicated that their role and responsibilities were not fully defined, with just under a third noting that they were defined 'to a limited extent', and 41% noting that they were defined 'to some extent.' The evidence suggests that the boundaries of the role are better defined at post-primary level, with 81% stating that it was defined 'to some' or 'to a large extent' compared to 58% at primary level. These findings should be considered in conjunction with findings on the extent to which the capacity to create a school vision and ethos acts as a motivating factor for those considering principalship; it is self-evident that a degree of

autonomy and flexibility is required to enable principals to maximise the benefits of carrying out this aspect of their role. Where a principal is afforded autonomy to implement their vision, it is unlikely that their role will be completely pre-determined. Rather, principals with autonomy and flexibility within their role retain some responsibility for defining their own role and responsibilities.

Lack of onward progression routes

5.32   Several participants perceived that principals in the South of Ireland are being appointed at a younger age due to a decreasing supply of principals. It was suggested that, as a result, many view it as a 'life sentence', due to the length of service required to retirement and the lack of clear onward routes from principalship, and that there is little culture of change and fresh challenge for principals. This view is largely supported by findings from the survey of principals, which found that 70% intend to remain in their present school over the next ten to 15 years, as outlined in Figure 5.7.

Figure 5.7: Where do you see your career path over the next ten to 15 years?

N=308   %
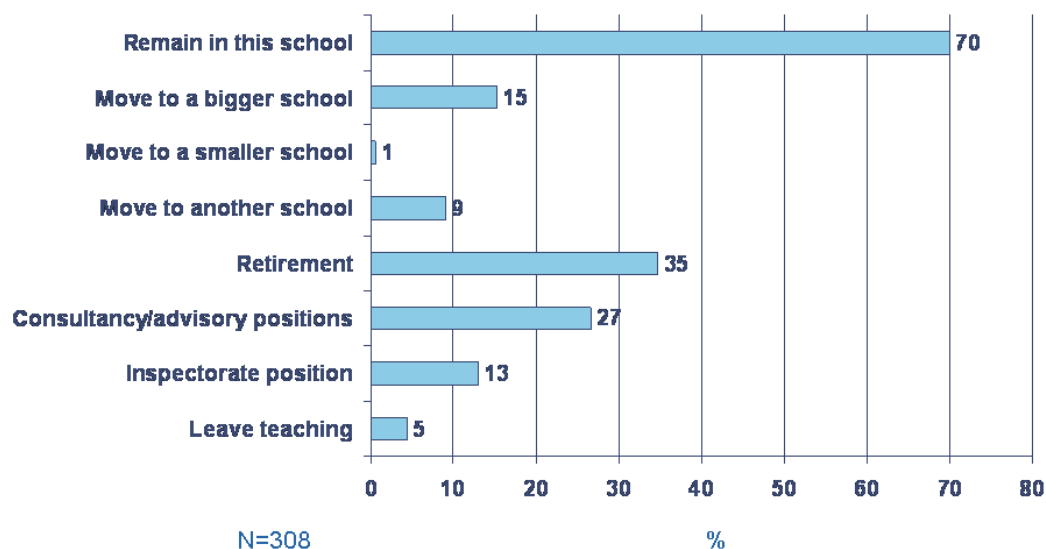
Source: PwC survey of principals, South of Ireland, 2008

5.33   Our survey results indicate that principals of primary schools are more likely to intend to remain in their present school (72% compared to 63% at post-primary), while post-primary principals were more likely to seek consultancy and advisory positions.

5.34   Several participants in the research commented that if principals step down from their position, they will lose their pension entitlements accrued during their time as principal, thus inhibiting opportunities for principals to return to teaching or take up other roles. It was thought that this would contribute to the perception of principalship, noted above, as a 'life sentence', and discourage potential candidates from applying.

Levels of reward

5.35   Stakeholders in the South of Ireland did not believe that salary was a factor in discouraging applications for principalship at primary level, due to salary increases resulting from the 2007 *Report of the Public Benchmarking*

Body. This exercise, which evaluated the pay and jobs of 109 grades in the public service sector, recommended that allowances paid to principals of primary schools be improved.

5.36 However, focus group participants and survey respondents did not agree with this perception, with many asserting that salary differentials between both senior teachers and principals, and deputy principals and principals, were insufficient and did not act as an incentive to take on the additional responsibility associated with the role. In the survey, only 1% of principals cited financial reward as the main factor in their decision to apply for a leadership role.

> *"Before I became a principal, I was earning only ten thousand euro less, and when you take half that away for tax and divide by 52, it's a lot of extra responsibility for a ridiculous amount of money."* (Newly appointed primary principal focus group participant, South of Ireland)
>
> *"I think the principal's role is very demanding mentally and physically and the salary increase would not compensate for it."* (Teacher survey, South of Ireland)

5.37 In addition, several participants noted that teachers moving to a different school are unable to transfer their responsibility points to the new school, as seniority weighting is attached to the school rather than the individual. The implication of this was that teachers may be reluctant to seek to advance their career through gaining experience in another environment due to the associated drop in salary.
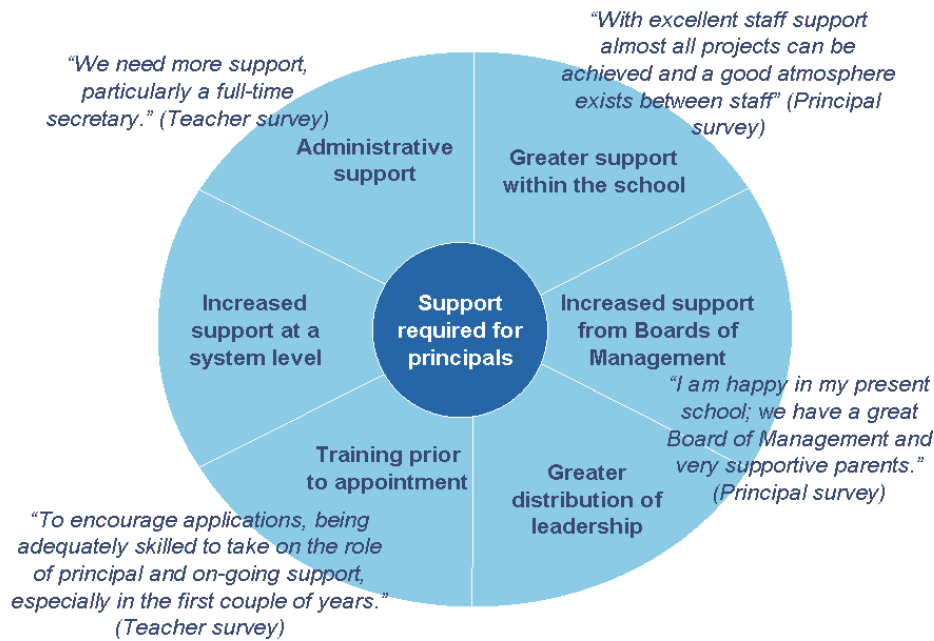
Levels of support attached to the post

5.38 Both teacher and principal participants in the research frequently related a perception that the role of school principal is isolated. Many survey respondents suggested that this sense of isolation can be more acute in small schools and in rural areas. For deputy principal focus group participants, isolation acted as a significant disincentive for seeking a headship.

> *"One of the tougher things is that you're no longer one of the staff. There's 'us and them' all the time."* (Post-primary deputy principal, focus group participant, South of Ireland)

5.39 When asked what factors would make the role of principal more attractive to them, many teacher survey respondents noted that providing greater support to principals would encourage them to consider applying. A range of support was called for by both teachers and serving principals. Where principals expressed high levels of satisfaction in their post, this was frequently attributed to a good general ethos in the school and support from within the school community. The key forms of additional support requested by teachers and principals are outlined in Figure 5.8.

Figure 5.8: Areas where principals and teachers called for increased support


"We need more support, particularly a full-time secretary." (Teacher survey)

"With excellent staff support almost all projects can be achieved and a good atmosphere exists between staff" (Principal survey)

Support required for principals

Administrative support

Greater support within the school

Increased support at a system level

Increased support from Boards of Management

Training prior to appointment

Greater distribution of leadership

"I am happy in my present school; we have a great Board of Management and very supportive parents." (Principal survey)

"To encourage applications, being adequately skilled to take on the role of principal and on-going support, especially in the first couple of years." (Teacher survey)

Source: PwC survey of deputies and middle leaders, South of Ireland, 2008, PwC survey of principals, South of Ireland, 2008 and PwC focus groups, 2008

5.40 At a system level, both principals and teachers called for greater support and guidance to be provided to school leaders on various aspects of the role, such as personnel issues, working with Boards of Management, financial responsibilities and policy. Some respondents also suggested that efforts should be made at a system level to reduce bureaucracy.

Current career satisfaction

5.41 Evidence from the survey indicates that the majority of teachers are broadly happy in their current role, with 92% describing themselves as 'quite' or 'very satisfied'. Figure 5.9 highlights the aspects of the role considered by teachers to provide the greatest job satisfaction.

Figure 5.9: Aspects of teachers' current job providing most satisfaction
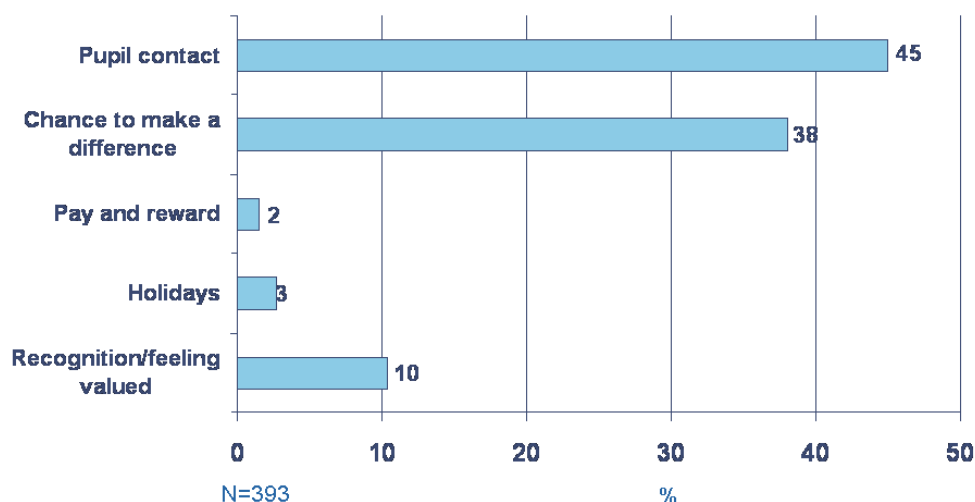
Source: PwC survey of deputies and middle leaders, South of Ireland, 2008

5.42   It is clear that the aspect of the teaching role noted most frequently by teachers as providing the greatest job satisfaction was contact with pupils; this was particularly evident in the primary sector. Many teacher participants in the research asserted that they entered teaching as a vocation and did not want to reduce their contact with children and young people. Indeed, reduced pupil contact and teaching time was thought to be an 'important' or 'very important' factor in the decision not to apply for principalship for 65% of teacher survey respondents.

> *"Teaching is my first love, and I hate the thought of not being in the classroom every day."* (Post-primary deputy principal focus group participant, South of Ireland)

Personal circumstances

5.43   Personal circumstances were believed to play an important role in the decision of teachers to apply or not to apply for principalship positions, particularly where teachers had young children. Overall, 80% of respondents to the teacher survey described family commitments as 'important' or 'very important' in their decision not to apply for principalship. In our survey of principals, the majority of respondents stated that they did not have children under the age of 16 (58%), and almost three quarters indicated that they did not have other carer responsibilities or commitments.

> *"I wouldn't look at principalship now because I have young children. If someone said to me now I could be a principal in the morning I would say no for that reason."* (Post-primary deputy principal focus group participant, South of Ireland)

5.44   Women were more likely than men to consider family commitments as important or very important in considering whether to progress to principalship (81% of female compared to 74% of male respondents). With regard to phase, 87% of teachers at post-primary viewed it is a significant factor, compared to 78% at primary level.

5.45   Evidence from the survey suggests that, as may be expected, age can also play a role in a teacher's decision whether or not to apply for principalship. Teachers in the 31-40 age group were very slightly more likely to apply for principalship than those in other categories (7% stated that they were 'likely' or 'very likely' to apply, compared to 4% of those aged 41-50 and 2% of those in the 51-60 category). No teachers aged 21-30 who responded to our

survey intended to apply over the next 12 months, however, it should be noted that the number of respondents in this age category was low.

5.46 Some deputy principal focus group participants indicated that fear of failure can act as a particularly strong disincentive in smaller communities, where it is likely that a failed application for principalship could become widely known. They noted that this could be 'damaging' for the individual concerned and may be problematic for their current role if parents and the community become aware that the candidate was not accepted by another school.

School and context specific issues

5.47 Evidence from the survey and focus groups suggests that the location and context of a school can have an impact on the decision of potential candidates not to apply for principalship. Our findings indicate that many teachers may be unwilling to move school at all, and would only apply for principalship if the position came up in their present school.

> *"I wouldn't go for principalship in any school other than my own; I consider myself a genuinely committed stakeholder. I wouldn't take on the problems of another school in a month of Sundays."* (Post-primary deputy principal focus group participant, South of Ireland)

5.48 For other teachers, schools in particular areas can act as a disincentive for seeking headship positions. Schools in deprived areas and underachieving schools were less likely to attract applications for principalship, according to stakeholders, survey respondents and focus group participants. It was also noted that often such schools are those more in need of an effective leader. Figure 5.10 presents findings from the teacher survey on the extent to which different school contexts can influence teachers' decisions not to seek headship.

Figure 5.10: The importance of school context in influencing teachers' decision not to apply for principalship
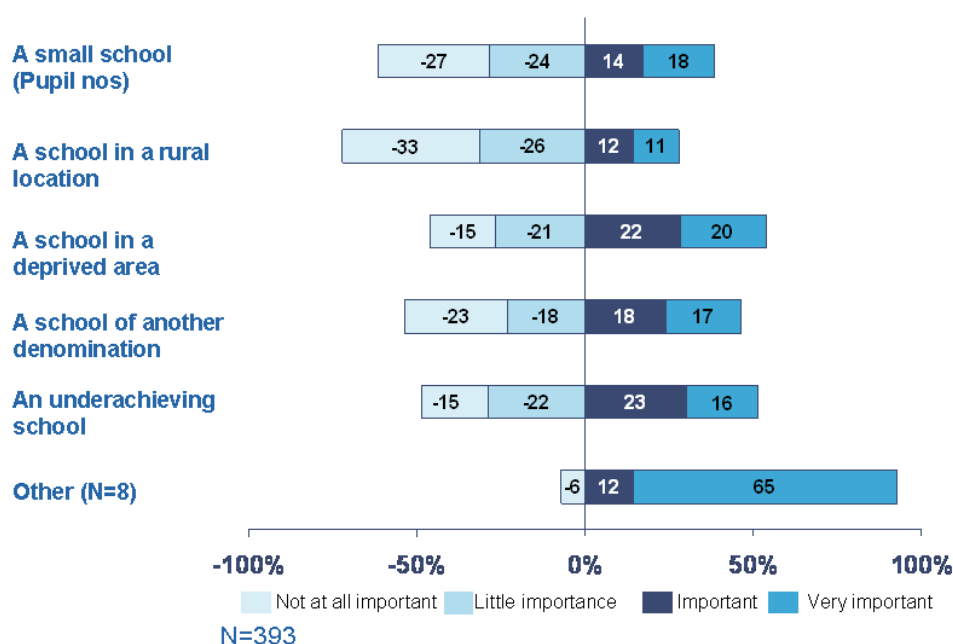
Source: PwC survey of deputies and middle leaders, South of Ireland, 2008

5.49   Our findings indicate that teachers at primary level are more likely to view small schools, rural schools, schools in deprived area and those of another denomination as less attractive than teachers in post-primary schools. However, respondents from the post-primary sector were less likely to apply for the post of principal in an underachieving school than primary principals, as outlined in table 5.3.

5.50   Small schools were viewed as less attractive to potential candidates partly due to uncertainty regarding staffing structures. Some deputy principal focus group participants, for example, discussed teacher job losses due to falling pupil numbers in their schools, resulting in insufficient teacher numbers to warrant an administrative principal. The lower salary associated with principalships in small schools was also considered to be a disincentive.

Table 5.3: Importance of school context in the decision not to apply for principalship by phase – teacher survey
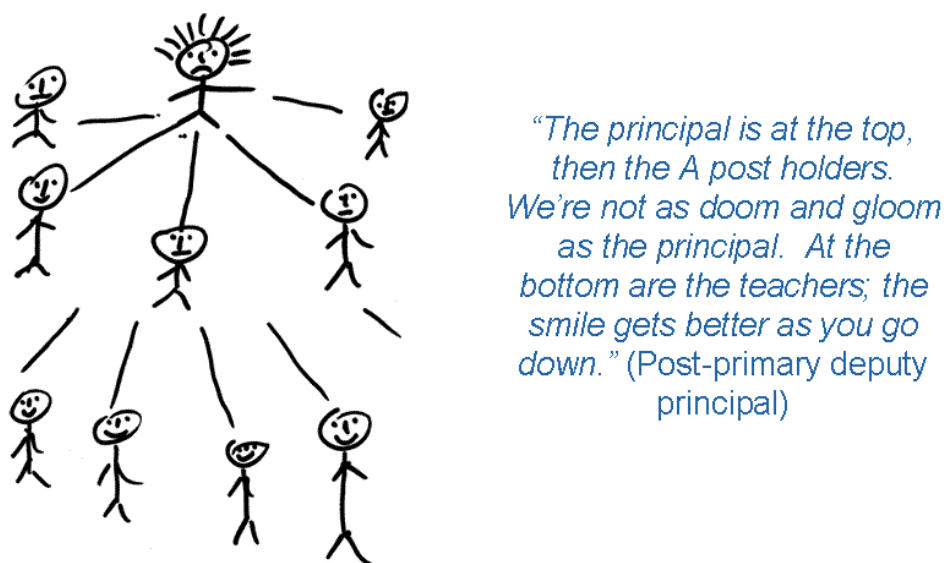
School type	% of teachers for whom school type would be an important or very important disincentive	
	Primary (n=289)	Post-primary (n=97)
Small school (pupil numbers)	39%	11%
School in a rural location	24%	19%
School in a deprived area	45%	34%
School of another denomination	38%	27%
Underachieving school	38%	45%

Source: PwC survey of deputy principals and middle leaders, South of Ireland, 2008

Job satisfaction of newly appointed principals

5.51 Despite the many negative perceptions and experiences of school leadership identified in the research, our research suggests that school principals are broadly happy in their role, with 86% of principals indicating that they were 'quite' or 'very satisfied' at present. Those at post-primary level were slightly more satisfied than their primary counterparts (91% compared to 86%).

5.52 This is a significant proportion; by way of example, in the *2004 Workplace Employment Relations Survey* of employees from a range of sectors (including health, public administration, construction and financial services), 72% of respondents stated that they were 'satisfied', or 'very satisfied' when asked about the work (Kersley et al, 2005). Our research with deputy principals and teachers suggests that they are keen observers of the principals of their schools, relating many of their often negative views of principalship to the experience of their current head. The following picture was drawn by a deputy principal representing their view of the role of school principal.

Figure 5.11: A deputy principal's perception of principalship

"The principal is at the top, then the A post holders. We're not as doom and gloom as the principal. At the bottom are the teachers; the smile gets better as you go down." (Post-primary deputy principal)

Source: Post-primary deputy principal focus group, South of Ireland, 2008

5.53 This indicates that principals play an important role in communicating the attractiveness of principalship to potential candidates, and could place more emphasis on promoting the positive aspects and benefits of their position, rather than creating an image of principalship as an unmanageable and undesirable proposition.

Summary and conclusions

- There were widespread concerns that the South of Ireland is facing a recruitment challenge in relation to the role of school principal. In particular, it was thought that small schools, Gaelscoileanna (Irish-medium schools) and schools where the principal combines leadership and teaching roles are experiencing lower rates of applications for vacancies;

- Nonetheless, participants identified a range of factors that could motivate teachers to apply for principalship, particularly relating to personal challenge and career advancement. The vocational nature of the role was also

emphasised, with other key motivating factors including the capacity to make a difference, having an opportunity to create and implement a vision and develop the staff and leadership team;

- Significantly, several principal participants noted that they had not wanted to apply for headship; rather they had felt under pressure to apply from other staff in the school. This resulted both from a lack of other applications for the position, and from the expectations of existing staff who wished to ensure continuity of leadership in their school;

- Indeed, our findings indicate that few teacher participants in the research had aspirations for principalship, and participants provided a variety of reasons for their decision not to apply. Workload and administration were the most frequently cited disincentives, with many teachers concerned that the role of school principal is now one of an administrator, rather than an educationalist. Linked to this, combining leadership and teaching roles acted as a significant disincentive for teacher respondents, and this is particularly pertinent given that 75% of principalships in the South of Ireland are teaching posts;

- Other demotivating factors identified included a lack of training, people management, and a lack of onward progression routes, with many teachers viewing principalship as a 'life-sentence'. Personal circumstances and current job satisfaction also played an important role in the decision of many teachers not to apply; with pupil contact the most commonly cited aspect of the role providing job satisfaction for teachers. Others cited inadequate salary differentials between senior teachers and principals as a reason for not wishing to apply for principalship; and

- Although the perceptions of principalship provided during the research were often negative, the majority of newly appointed principals surveyed expressed high levels of job satisfaction. In line with the literature, our research indicates that teachers tend to observe their principals closely, thus suggesting that they can play an important role in the attractiveness of principalship through promoting its positive aspects.

6 Developing, recruiting and retaining effective leaders in the South of Ireland

Introduction

6.1   This section of the report explores the views of those who participated in this research on the development, recruitment and retention of effective leaders in the South of Ireland. It is based on the findings from a stakeholder consultation, a series of focus groups and a survey of newly appointed principals, deputy principals and middle leaders. It is structured as follows:

- The role of professional development in the recruitment and retention of principals;
- Succession planning and the recruitment selection process;
- Retaining effective leaders; and
- Summary and conclusions.

The role of professional development in the recruitment and retention of principals

6.2   Participants in the research asserted that professional development can play an important role in attracting potential candidates to principalship positions, and, evidently, in ensuring that teachers who are appointed to headship have the appropriate skills and experience to fulfil the role. The key elements of professional development identified during the research were formal leadership development training courses, in-school development, for example carrying out a managerial role in the school, and informal leadership development, such as coaching and networking. These areas are outlined in Figure 6.1 and explored in the following paragraphs.

Figure 6.1: Aspects of professional leadership development
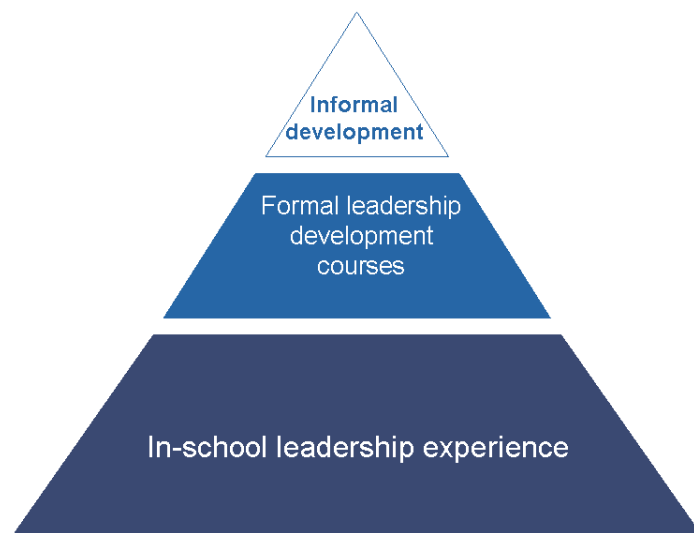
Source: PwC survey of deputies and middle leaders, South of Ireland, 2008, PwC survey of principals, South of Ireland, 2008 and PwC focus groups, 2008

In-school development

6.3   The provision of opportunities for potential leaders to undertake managerial roles and responsibilities was highlighted by stakeholders and focus group participants as an important factor in attracting teachers to apply for principalship. It was suggested that through obtaining leadership experience at various levels, teachers would gain the confidence and the will to seek greater and greater responsibility, with a view to eventually considering

principalship. Distribution of leadership responsibilities was considered to be an important method of facilitating in-school development opportunities.

6.4 However, stakeholders, focus group participants and some survey respondents in the South of Ireland identified a particular issue around a lack of true distribution of leadership and management responsibilities in schools. This was thought to have an impact on both the leadership development opportunities of potential school principals and on the work-life balance of serving principals.

"Responsibility in schools is top-heavy and is shared between the head and the deputy. There is a general acceptance that no one other than the principal can lead." (Stakeholder, South of Ireland)

"Principalship is a huge leap from one's role as a class teacher. The gap must be lessened by more involvement of staff - middle and lower management - in the running of the school." (Teacher survey, South of Ireland)

6.5 In our survey, 57% of teacher respondents stated that a lack of management and leadership experience would be an 'important' or 'very important' factor in their decision not to apply for principalship. This was particularly pertinent for female respondents to the survey, suggesting that female teachers are less likely to apply for a position unless fully confident in their abilities, and require greater experience and confidence in their abilities prior to seeking principalship.

Table 6.1: How important would lack of leadership experience and confidence in ability to perform the role be in influencing your decision not to apply?

Gender	Male (n=68)	Female (n=325)
Lack of leadership experience – important or very important	47%	59%
Lack of confidence in ability to perform the role – important or very important	21%	49%

Source: PwC survey of deputy principals and middle leaders, South of Ireland, 2008

6.6 Results of the survey do not fully support the perception that leadership responsibilities are not well distributed in schools, with 80% of principals and 85% of teachers stating that leadership in their school was 'somewhat' or 'very' distributed, as outlined in the Figure 6.4. This may relate to differing levels of understanding of what constitutes distributed leadership. There was little difference in the extent to which leadership was thought to be distributed at primary and post-primary level.

Figure 6.2: The extent to which teachers and principals perceive leadership to be distributed in their school
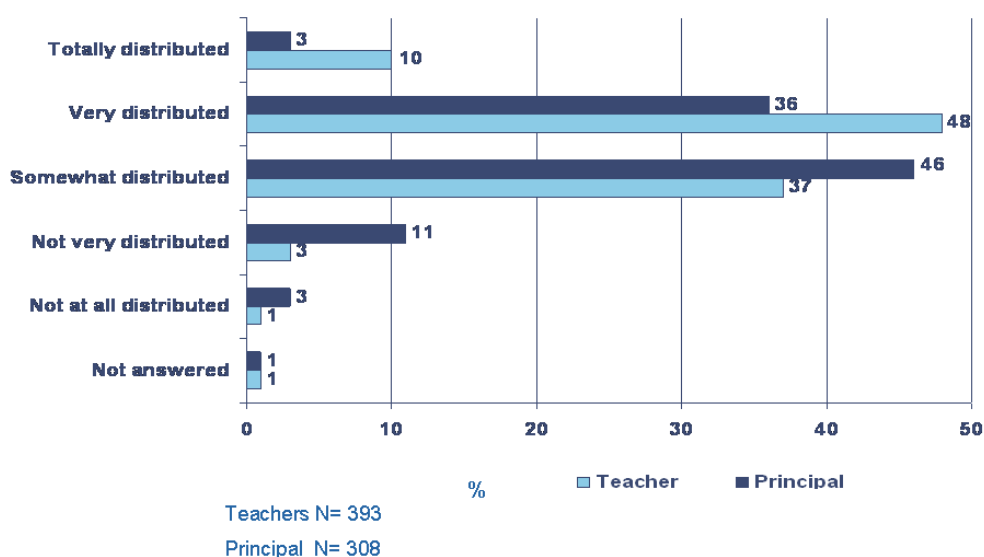
Teachers N= 393
Principal N= 308

Source: PwC survey of principals, South of Ireland, 2008 and PwC survey of deputies and middle leaders, South of Ireland, 2008

6.7   In the focus groups, the concept of distributed leadership was not immediately understood by participants. Once explained, most participants described the model of leadership in their school as 'inclusive', where everyone's opinions were taken on board, rather than describing a model where leadership responsibilities were shared among staff. This suggests that the practice of distributed leadership as a means of sharing leadership responsibilities and developing new leaders may not be embedded in schools in the South of Ireland.

> *"There are some deputy principals who have said that they have no duties as a deputy principal. Their only duty is to fill in for the principal if they are absent."* (Post-primary deputy principal focus group participant, South of Ireland)

Leadership experience

6.8   Evidence from our survey suggests that a significant proportion of principals are appointed to their position without prior leadership experience. This was particularly the case in the primary sector, where there are usually fewer posts of responsibility available to staff. Overall, approximately a third (31%) of principals stated that their position prior to appointment was class teacher. Table 6.2 outlines principals' positions prior to their appointment by phase.

Table 6.2: Position held by principal survey respondents prior to their appointment

Position held prior to appointment	% of principals	
	Primary (n=235)	Post-primary (n=64)
Teacher	36%	14%
Middle leader	19%	28%
Deputy principal	31%	44%
Acting principal	3%	5%

Source: PwC principal survey, South of Ireland, 2008 (n=308)

6.9 One stakeholder commented that traditional leadership positions in the South of Ireland, such as deputy principal, do not give a realistic view of principalship but, rather, involve a greater focus on administrative duties than actual leadership. This view was supported both by many newly appointed principal focus group participants who had previously held posts of responsibility, but had nonetheless felt unprepared to fulfil their new role, and, indeed, by our finding that the concept of distributed leadership is often misunderstood. It was suggested that senior post holders need to be given the opportunity to lead.

"I was a deputy principal and everyone said that was ideal preparation, but I have been completely steam-rolled by the other stuff I didn't know existed. The other principal was doing all of that and I was simply doing what he gave me." (Newly appointed primary principal focus group participant, South of Ireland)

Appointments to senior leadership positions

6.10 Stakeholders expressed concern that the majority of appointments to deputy principal positions in post-primary schools, and to all primary and post-primary schools with less than 300 pupils in the South of Ireland, are on an internal basis. They suggested that this approach can stifle the ambition of talented individuals, and likened the approach to teachers waiting to fill "dead men's shoes".

6.11 A further issue with internal appointments identified by several stakeholders and focus group participants was that those appointed to deputy principal positions were not necessarily the most suited to the position. In some cases, focus group participants described a system in their school whereby the longer serving members of staff were appointed to senior leadership positions. Where senior staff did not wish to progress to deputy principalship, participants reported that in some cases the position had been given to very inexperienced members of staff as a direct result of the internal appointment system.

"I didn't apply for the post of deputy principal, I just came up the ranks and that is the way that it happened. You didn't have to apply; it was just whoever was next in line got the post." (Primary deputy principal focus group participant, South of Ireland)

"There was a young teacher in a neighbouring school who had just started and nobody on the staff wanted the deputy principal job. He was appointed deputy principal six months into his teaching life; it nearly ruined him and he stepped down after six months." (Primary deputy principal focus group participant, South of Ireland)

6.12 The nature of the postholder system was identified by some focus group respondents as a disincentive for teachers wishing to move schools in order to progress their career. It was suggested that the implications of losing their responsibility points and seniority would discourage teachers from seeking career progression opportunities elsewhere. Nonetheless, many focus group participants were reluctant to have any other system in place, suggesting that if longer serving members of staff did not take precedence, it would have an impact on their morale and may be detrimental to the school.

"If you pass over a more senior person and give the post to someone else you are effectively saying that that person wasn't capable of carrying out those duties. What kind of signal does that give out to parents? It can be very damaging for the person who was passed over." (Primary deputy principal focus group participant, South of Ireland)

Formal leadership development courses

6.13 Evidence from the survey and focus groups suggests that formal leadership development training for teachers is not widely undertaken. The majority of teachers surveyed said that they had not received formal leadership development training, while the majority of principals stated that they had not undergone formal leadership development prior to their appointment, as outlined in Table 6.3.

Table 6.3: Proportion of teachers and principals who have not received formal leadership training

|	% of respondents
Teacher - % who have not (n=393)	77%
Principal - % who had not (n=308)	66%

Source: PwC survey of principals, South of Ireland, 2008, and PwC survey of deputy principals and middle leaders, South of Ireland, 2008

6.14   When asked what factors would make the role of principal more attractive to them, many teacher survey respondents stated that receiving more training would encourage them to consider principalship. In addition, some focus group participants noted that undertaking formal development activities, such as LDS programmes, had encouraged them to consider principalship.

"Initially I was turned off principalship because I saw the stress my father was under when he was principal of the school and I felt that I would never go through that. Thanks to things like the LDS course I feel quite differently now." (Post-primary deputy principal focus group participant, South of Ireland)

6.15   A lack of formal leadership development training was more pronounced at primary level, where 71% of principals had not received formal leadership training prior to taking up their appointment, in comparison to 45% of post-primary principals. In addition, male teacher survey respondents were more likely than female teachers to have undertaken formal leadership development training, with 29% of male respondents stating that they had undergone training compared to 21% of female respondents. Figure 6.3 outlines the reasons provided by principal survey respondents for their lack of formal development training prior to taking up their principalship.

Figure 6.3: Why did you not receive leadership training prior to your appointment?

N=308   %
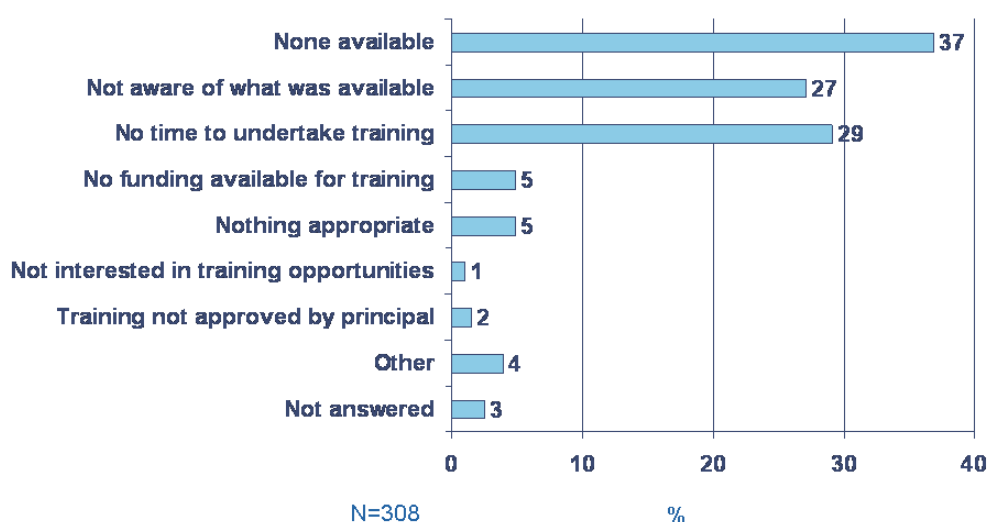
Source: PwC survey of principals, South of Ireland, 2008

6.16   The implications of the lack of formal leadership training undertaken by principals prior to their appointment included a reduced level of preparedness to fulfil their new role and its responsibilities. Our survey of principals found that while half (50%) felt 'quite prepared', just over a quarter (26%) stated that they were 'not very prepared' or 'not prepared at all'. This is supported by findings from the focus groups, which suggested that many newly appointed principals felt overwhelmed during the first few months of their principalship. This lack of preparedness

was thought to be compounded by the relatively short notice period for principals of three months, which meant that the majority of newly appointed principals did not have an opportunity to familiarise themselves with their new school, or to liaise with their predecessor. This was particularly the case where the principal's predecessor reigned prior to the summer months.

6.17 In line with the degree of leadership training undertaken prior to their appointment, principals at primary level felt less prepared than those at post-primary to undertake their role, with 53% of primary principals describing themselves as 'quite' or 'very' prepared compared to 64% at post-primary.

6.18 Of the teachers and principals who had undertaken formal training, the majority had accessed LDS courses such as Misneach, an induction programme for principals, and Tánaiste, an induction programme for newly appointed deputy principals and acting deputy principals which aim to help participants develop the skills necessary to fulfil their new role. Focus group participants and survey respondents who had taken part in Tánaiste found it to be valuable and effective, particularly due to the fact that it was delivered by facilitators who had previously served as deputy principals.

"Tánaiste training was delivered by people who had been deputies, so it was very effective because you had somebody who had walked that road before." (Post-primary deputy principal focus group participant, South of Ireland)

6.19 In addition, stakeholders welcomed the introduction of the Tóraíocht programme in September 2008, an LDS leadership development course aimed at teachers with four or more years' experience who may have aspirations of becoming a school principal. The programme aims to support preparation for future leadership positions and to develop the knowledge, understanding and skills relevant to educational leadership.

6.20 The other most common form of formal professional development undertaken by survey respondents was through professional associations. Such training was perceived as useful, particularly in providing networking opportunities.

6.21 Amongst teacher survey respondents, 61% suggested that they required more leadership training opportunities. Teachers and principals who indicated that they would like to receive more leadership development training requested both more training in general, and additional training with a particular focus on a number of specific areas in relation to the principal role. Figure 6.4 outlines the key areas where teacher and principal respondents would welcome additional training.

Figure 6.4: What type of training opportunities do you feel that you require?

Administrative duties

"There is a need for a practical course on form filling and record keeping." (Principal survey)

People management

"There's a big thing about how to handle people – pupils, staff and parents." (Post-primary deputy principal focus group)

Financial management

"The lack of training to deal with finances is frustrating." (Principal survey)

Types of support

Conflict resolution

"I find myself in need of training in how to deal with conflict; what to do when things go wrong." (Post-primary deputy principal focus group)

Dealing with inefficient teachers

"I would like to know what to do if a teacher is not performing; what is the formal structure?" (Post-primary deputy principal focus group)

Leadership team training

"We need more training for the whole team together, enabling best practice to our full potential." (Deputy and middle leader survey)

Source: PwC survey of deputies and middle leaders, South of Ireland, 2008, PwC survey of principals, South of Ireland, 2008 and PwC focus groups, 2008

6.22 While the majority of participants in the research felt that they would like to have accessed more formal leadership training as teachers, 91% of newly appointed principals stated that they had received formal training since taking up their position, and a similar proportion agreed that it had been useful. This was mainly through the Misneach programme, an induction course for first time principals which aims to support and prepare principals to lead their schools effectively. As highlighted in the figure above, many called for greater training on administration and finance, however it must be questioned whether it is an appropriate and efficient use of the principal's time to carry out such tasks.

6.23 Some principals also requested ongoing leadership development training, in a similar format to the Misneach programme. They stated that this would enable them to keep up-to-date with developments and help to improve their ability to run the school, as well as providing opportunities for networking.

Informal leadership development

6.24 In addition to formal leadership development training and in-school leadership experience, research participants also asserted the value of more informal leadership development, such as mentoring and networking. Table 6.4 outlines the professional leadership development activities undertaken by both teachers and principals in the South of Ireland.

Table 6.4: Have you undertaken any of the following professional leadership development activities?

	Professional development activity	(%) Principals		Professional development activity	(%) Teachers
1	Networking	58%	1	Work-based/ in-house learning	22%
2	Mentoring/ coaching	46%	2	Mentoring/ coaching	19%
3	In-school leadership development	42%	=3	E-learning	17%
4	Accessing best practice via visits/ showcasing at a conference	20%	=3	Work-based peer support	17%
5	E-learning	19%	=5	Accessing best practice via visits/ showcasing at a conference	14%
6	Work-based peer support	16%	=5	Networking	14%
7	Work-based/ in-house learning	15%	7	In-school leadership development	13%
8	Peer observation	8%	8	Peer observation	11%
9	Role play	3%	9	Role play	5%

Source: PwC survey of principals, South of Ireland, 2008 (n=308) and PwC survey of deputy principals and middle leaders, South of Ireland, 2008 (n=393)

6.25 On the whole, principals had availed of a wider range of professional development activities than teachers. Principals and teachers at post-primary level are more likely to have accessed professional development activities such as mentoring, work-based learning, peer observation, role play and accessing best practice via visits and conferences than those in primary schools.

6.26 Mentoring was frequently requested by both teachers and newly appointed principals as a professional leadership development activity. They believed that the guidance and support of an experienced or retired principal would be invaluable to newly appointed principals, as well as making the role appear less daunting to prospective candidates. Stakeholders cautioned, however, that only successful principals should be allowed to become mentors to maintain quality in the system.

6.27 In addition to mentoring, many research participants suggested that the opportunity to shadow an experienced principal would be useful in attracting potential candidates to principalship positions, as it would give them an insight into what the role involves and give them more confidence in their ability to fulfil its responsibilities.

> *"I think that in the first year the principal should be allowed to shadow good, fair and experienced principals and in this way gain their wisdom. Otherwise it will take the new principal many months and mistakes to learn these outlooks."* (Teacher survey, South of Ireland)

Succession planning and the recruitment selection process

6.28 The process used to select teachers for principalship appointments and how succession is planned for in schools are also viewed as important factors in the attractiveness of principalship to potential candidates. Each of these is discussed in the following paragraphs.

Succession planning

6.29 Participants in the research agreed that planning for succession in schools was not widespread, and this was linked to the perception that the most senior teachers in schools operating an internal appointment system are waiting to fill 'dead men's shoes'. Where succession planning was undertaken, this was thought to be dependent on individual principals taking the initiative to identify and encourage potential leaders. Some deputy principal focus group participants, for example, discussed teachers being given opportunities to 'act up' or to take on additional responsibilities within their school.

> *"I don't think there is formal succession planning but I do think there are a number of principals who are with it enough to recognise people with potential within their own staff."* (Newly appointed primary principal focus group participant, South of Ireland)

6.30 However, some focus group participants expressed concern around principals seeking to develop particular members of staff, suggesting that it could be considered favouritism by other staff and create difficulties and tension within the school.

6.31 Many stakeholders commented that succession planning needs to be carried out by principals with the support of Boards of Management, and that identifying and developing talented teachers should become embedded in the culture of the school. Stakeholders suggested that principals must allocate time and support to those holding posts of responsibility.

> *"Schools need to identify teachers who are predisposed to become leaders through relevant learning and experience. They then need to be given opportunities and supported by the Board of Management; it needs to become part of the ethos of the school."* (Stakeholder, South of Ireland)

6.32 The new Tóraíocht programme was, however, acknowledged by stakeholders as having the potential to become a succession planning tool across the South of Ireland by developing a pool of potential leaders.

Selection process

6.33 There was generally good awareness of the selection process for principalship appointments among teacher survey respondents. Views of the process were mixed, with half (50%) of teachers stating that their perception of the process was either 'quite' or 'very' positive, while only 8% described their impression as 'quite' or 'very' negative (a third were undecided). Many focus group participants and survey respondents described the process as fair, open and rigorous.

6.34 However, some focus group participants and survey respondents noted difficulties regarding the use of Boards of Management to appoint principals. Their experience of education and suitability to fulfil this role were questioned, and some participants noted that as these are voluntary posts, members may not expend sufficient time in selecting a candidate.

> *"You can have a chairman of a board of managers sitting on an interview board and they know absolutely nothing about teaching and yet they are one of the people deciding who is going to get the post. I think that some resentment does build up there."* (Primary deputy principal focus group participant, South of Ireland)

6.35 Other participants in the research suggested that the composition of panels interviewing and selecting principals is not always objective, and that in some cases, Board members are selected as they are likely to hold a particular

view on the type of candidate to appoint. Some also indicated that the chairperson of the Board would be likely to accept the candidate proposed by the principal on the panel.

> *"I am dubious about the qualifications of some interview Board members; there was a cosy cartel of principals operating in the area for a while. Some chairpersons of Boards are simply not suitable people to be interviewing."* (Teacher survey, South of Ireland)

6.36   Evidence from the focus groups and survey suggests that in some cases, male teachers may be favoured over female teachers in the appointment of principals. Participants in the research suggested a number of possible reasons for this perception;

- **A view that male principals are better placed to act as a disciplinarian in schools**: *"We have a lot of single parent families and the children are all with mum. I think that the physical presence of a man, especially where there are boys, is a steadying force."* (Newly appointed primary principal focus group participant, South of Ireland);

- **A traditional perception that principals should be male:** *"I was the only female who applied for the job. I had more experience in different types of schools than the man who got the job did. It was positive discrimination."* (Teacher survey, South of Ireland);

- **Women are more likely to be family-orientated:** 81% of female teacher survey respondents cited family commitments as 'important' or 'very important' in their decision not to apply for principalship, compared to 74% of men; and

- **Female teachers may be less likely to be encouraged by their senior leadership team to apply for headship:** *"My last principal told females that the job was just for men."* (Principal survey, South of Ireland)

6.37   Nonetheless, some stakeholders suggested that increasing numbers of women are now applying for principalships in the South of Ireland, partly due to encouragement from management bodies. One stakeholder noted that the percentage of principalship positions held by women had increased from 20% to 35% of all leadership positions in recent years.

Criteria for principal appointments

6.38   Participants in the research had mixed views on the importance of a candidate's length of service and age in regard to suitability for principalship. Evidence from the survey suggests that principals consider aptitude to be the most important factor in a candidate's appointment to principalship, followed by experience of leadership and qualifications held. Length of service was believed to be an 'important' or 'very important' factor by 56% of all respondents, while 37% of principals thought that age was a significant factor.

6.39   Figure 6.5 presents findings from the survey of principals on the importance of age, leadership experience, length of service, qualifications held, teaching subject and aptitude in considering candidates for headship.

Figure 6.5: Principals' perceptions of the importance of personal factors in relation to appointment to principalship
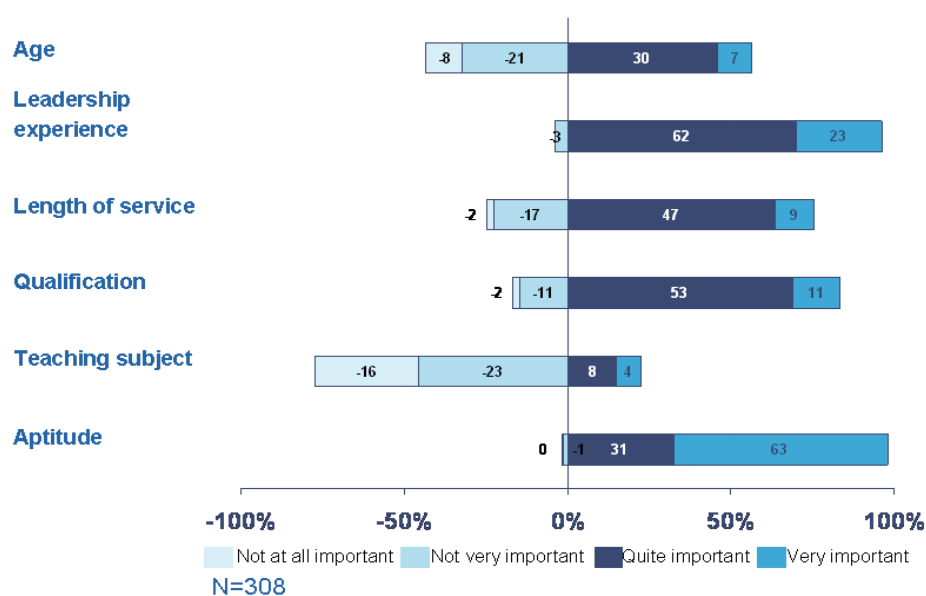
Source: PwC survey of principals, South of Ireland, 2008

6.40   Survey results highlight some differences of opinion regarding the importance of these factors at primary and post-primary level. At post-primary, age and leadership experience were viewed as 'quite' or 'very important' by more respondents than at primary level, for example, and leadership experience was thought to be 'quite' or 'very important' by almost all (97%) post-primary principals compared to 82% of their primary counterparts.

6.41   Primary principals were more slightly more likely to describe length of service and qualifications as significant factors than their counterparts in post-primary schools. Indeed, 57% of primary principals noted length of service as a significant factor compared to 50% at post-primary level, while 65% of primary respondents cited qualifications compared to 59% of their post-primary counterparts.

6.42   In the focus groups, some participants suggested that Boards of Management prefer young, dynamic principals to older candidates. Others asserted that it was important for those aspiring to principalship to 'serve their time' in the classroom and gain the trust and respect of the wider school community. While all participants agreed that candidates should have some experience and not be appointed early in their teaching career, there were differing views on the importance of leadership experience in relation to length of time spent teaching.

> *"People might have stayed in the school for all sorts of reasons and to be overlooked because somebody is fresh and might be slightly more qualified in terms of degrees. I would be wary of it. I think that somebody who is long standing, well known in the community and has given loyal service in the school should be heavily weighted."* (Primary deputy principal focus group participant, South of Ireland)
>
> *"If they have the time and energy in their thirties, and they have shown their abilities as a teacher and become involved in the different aspects of the school and are ready for it, I wouldn't go overboard on their length of service."* (Post-primary deputy principal focus group participant, South of Ireland)

6.43   Principal survey respondents were asked what other qualities they perceived as important for effective leaders. They believed that a combination of personal skills, experience and leadership ability were important, as illustrated by Figure 6.6.

Figure 6.6: Are there any other factors you feel are important in the appointment to principalship?

Source: PwC survey of principals, South of Ireland, 2008

6.44   Several stakeholders noted that, due to the numbers of principals retiring, many principals were being appointed at an earlier age, particularly in the Gaelscoileanna sector. Indeed, 73% of principal survey respondents in the 21-30 age group taught in the Gaelscoileanna sector; however, it should be noted that the overall number of principal respondents to our survey aged between 21 and 30 was relatively low (n=37). There was a concern that if appointed at a young age, principals would view the post as a 'life sentence', and that this could have an impact on the retention of principals in the system.

6.45   Ethnicity was generally not thought to be a barrier to candidates seeking principalship positions in the South of Ireland. Almost all (96%) of teacher survey respondents described themselves as 'white', while in the principal questionnaire, 90% of respondents described their ethnic origin as 'white' and 1% described it as 'Irish Traveller' (6% did not answer). This could be due to the demographic characteristics of the teaching population in the South of Ireland.

Retaining effective leaders

6.46   Several stakeholder respondents suggested that principals in the South of Ireland often retire before the age of 60, thus highlighting an issue with regard to the retention of effective school principals. One in twenty (5%) of all principal respondents stated that they would leave teaching within the next ten to 15 years.

6.47 The development of strategies for retaining effective school leaders was therefore considered to be important, and particularly pertinent where principals are appointed at a relatively young age. Table 6.5 outlines the factors that would encourage principals to remain in post as a principal over the next ten to 15 years.

Table 6.5: Over the next ten to 15 years, what factors would encourage you to remain in post as a principal?

Factor encouraging principals to remain in post over the next ten to 15 years	% of principals
1	Opportunity to make a difference	78%
2	Professional challenge	69%
3	Greater acknowledgement of the importance of school leadership	64%
4	Pupil contact	63%
5	Professional support networks	58%
6	Professional development opportunities	57%
7	Work-life balance	55%
8	Financial reward structures	45%
9	Type and content of work	37%
10	School location	31%

Source: PwC Principal Survey (n=308)

6.48 The findings suggest that many of the intrinsic aspects of the role that encourage teachers to seek principalship positions remain an important factor in their retention, for example, the opportunity to make a difference and contact with pupils. Continuing professional development and challenge were also key considerations. However, some primary principal focus group participants stated that they were unaware of how to access system-wide roles. Indeed, some principal focus group participants believed that there was little opportunity to pursue further career paths beyond principalship.

> *"There is a great deal of talk that the role of principalship should be seven to ten years, but there is very little option there."*
> (Post-primary deputy principal focus group participant, South of Ireland)

6.49 Overall, 70% of respondents to the principal survey plan to remain in their current school over the next ten to 15 years. Primary principals may be more likely to remain in post, with 72% stating that they would stay in their present school, compared to 63% at post-primary. Those at post-primary level reported that they are significantly more likely to seek consultancy and advisory positions (42% of post-primary principals compared to 21% of their counterparts at primary level).

6.50 Some stakeholders, focus group participants and survey respondents called for principals to be able to step down from headship and return to the classroom without losing their pension entitlements and all responsibility posts. They suggested that it could encourage more teachers to apply if they are not committing to a long-term role.

> *"If you choose to return to the staff you lose all your pension entitlements and all your responsibility posts."* (Post-primary deputy principal focus group participant, South of Ireland)

Summary and conclusions

- Professional leadership development was widely agreed to play an important role in attracting teachers to principalship, and indeed was linked by deputy and middle leader survey respondents to aspirations for headship. However, our findings suggest that formal leadership development training was not widely undertaken. However, the introduction of LDS is considered to be a positive development;

- The opportunity to gain leadership experience in-school was also considered to be an effective conduit for encouraging applications for principalship positions. However, the research highlighted a particular issue around a lack of true distribution of management responsibilities in schools, and, indeed, a lack of understanding of the concept of distributed leadership. This, therefore, has implications for leadership development opportunities available to potential candidates;

- Linked to this, the internal appointment system for deputy principal positions in many schools in the South of Ireland was thought to stifle talent and inhibit leadership ambition, with many participants describing teachers waiting to fill 'dead men's shoes';

- Views on the selection process for appointments to principalship were mixed. Although many described the process as fair, some participants expressed concerns with the use of Boards of Management in the recruitment of principals, questioning their suitability to fulfil the role and suggesting that they often have a predetermined view of the ideal candidate for the role;

- There were also concerns that succession planning for future principals in the South of Ireland is not widespread, and is largely dependent on individual principals encouraging and developing talented members of staff. However, at a system-wide level, the LDS Tóraíocht programme was acknowledged as having the potential to become a succession planning tool by creating a pool of future leaders; and

- The succession planning challenge is particularly pertinent with many principals said to be retiring early. Retaining effective leaders was therefore another key issue, and principals cited a range of factors that would encourage them to remain in post. These were frequently intrinsic in nature, including the opportunity to make a difference, while professional development opportunities and financial reward structures were also noted as incentives.

7 Conclusions and recommendations

Introduction

7.1 This report has considered the experiences and opinions of newly appointed principals, deputy principals and middle leaders in relation to school principalship in both the North of Ireland and the South of Ireland. It has also explored some of the existing literature on the challenges facing the future supply of school leaders, and the views of a range of stakeholders. The findings highlighted a number of themes common to both the North of Ireland and the South of Ireland, as well as several issues specific to each jurisdiction. The key similarities and differences between the two jurisdictions are highlighted in Table 7.1 and explored in greater detail in the following paragraphs.

Table 7.1: Key similarities and differences in school leadership in the North of Ireland and the South of Ireland

Issue	Key similarities	Key differences
The supply of school leaders	• Both jurisdictions face challenges in the supply of school principals; • Small schools, Gaelscoileanna (Irish-medium schools) and schools in rural and deprived areas experience particular difficulties; • Limited amount of statistics are available.	
Motivating factors for principalship	• Key motivations were the same for both the North of Ireland and the South of Ireland. • These include making a difference, creating a vision, personal challenge, developing staff and leadership team and career advancement.	• Several principal focus group participants in the South of Ireland noted that they had not wanted to become a principal, but had felt under pressure to do so from other staff.
Demotivating factors for principalship	• Workload, administration, combining leadership and teaching roles and current reward arrangements were the most commonly noted disincentives in both jurisdictions.	• In the North of Ireland, a sense of isolation and accountability were more frequently noted; • In the South of Ireland, lack of training and people management were among the key disincentives.
Job satisfaction of principals	• Principals in both the North of Ireland and the South of Ireland expressed high levels of job satisfaction.	• Principals in the South of Ireland expressed higher levels of job satisfaction than their counterparts in the North of Ireland (87% compared to 78%).
Professional development	• Agreement regarding the crucial role of professional development.	• Principals in the South of Ireland were less likely to have received formal leadership development training (66% compared to 48%) prior to their appointment. • Many focus group participants undertaking the Professional Qualification for Headship (PQH) in the North of Ireland do not have aspirations for principalship. • There were concerns regarding a perceived lack of true distribution of leadership responsibilities in the South of Ireland.
Succession planning	• Not widespread at school level in either the North of Ireland or the South of Ireland, but increasing due to the work of RTU and LDS.	• At a system level, PQH was acknowledged as a succession planning tool in the North of Ireland, while the new Tóraíocht programme was thought to have the potential to create a pool of future leaders for the South of Ireland.
Selection process	• Concerns about the use of governors and Boards of Management in the selection process.	• Inconsistencies in the criteria used for advertisements for principal positions were an issue for some participants in the North of

Issue	Key similarities	Key differences
	• Perceptions that those recruiting principals often have a preconceived view of the ideal candidate.	Ireland. • Concerns regarding the internal appointment system for many deputy principalships in the South of Ireland.
Retaining effective leaders	• Agreement that there is not a culture of 'fresh challenge' in both jurisdictions. • Aspects of the role thought to help maximise retention were largely intrinsic in nature, however sabbaticals and system-wide roles were also requested.	• This was thought to be a greater issue in the South of Ireland.

Motivating and demotivating factors for principalship

7.2   There was agreement that there is an issue with the supply of school leaders in both the North of Ireland and the South of Ireland. Linked to this reduced pool of candidates, several participants in the research highlighted concerns regarding the quality of those coming forward for principalship positions. Specific recruitment challenges were noted in small schools where the principal combines a leadership role with full-time teaching commitments, in schools situated in rural and deprived areas and in the Gaelscoileanna (Irish-medium schools) sector.

7.3   For the most part, motivating factors for seeking principalship identified in the research were intrinsic in nature, including making a difference to pupils, staff and the wider community, and creating and implementing a vision for the school. The five most frequently cited incentives for appointment to principalship were the same for both jurisdictions, also encompassing personal challenge, career advancement and the opportunity to develop staff and leadership team. Other reasons for seeking principalship included a sense of 'natural progression', and in some cases in the South of Ireland, a sense of duty or expectation from others to apply, rather than simply a desire to lead the school.

7.4   Participants in the research identified a range of factors that can act as a disincentive for teachers considering applying for a principalship. Common to both jurisdictions, workload, administration and combining leadership and teaching roles were key factors discouraging teachers from applying. In the North of Ireland, the accountability associated with the role together with a sense of isolation were significant factors, while in the South of Ireland a lack of training and the people management aspect of the role were among the factors most frequently cited. In addition, current differentials between the salary of principals and deputy principals were considered to be insufficient and this was also thought to discourage teachers from seeking to take on the additional responsibility.

7.5   Despite the many negative perceptions and views, principals surveyed expressed high levels of job satisfaction. Our research supports findings from the literature that teachers are keen observers of principals, frequently linking the challenges and difficulties facing their current principal to their own decision not to seek principalship. This suggests that principals themselves could have a role to play in promoting the positive aspects of principalship and thus encourage talented teachers to consider applying.

Developing, recruiting and retaining effective leaders

7.6   Professional leadership development for teachers was widely agreed to play a vital role in attracting candidates to principalship positions and in ensuring that those who apply are equipped to fulfil the role. Key forms of professional development identified by respondents were formal leadership development courses, in-school development opportunities, such as taking on distributed leadership responsibilities and informal development activities, such as mentoring, coaching and work-shadowing.

7.7   In the North of Ireland, a significant proportion of principals surveyed stated that they had not received formal leadership training prior to their appointment, pointing to a lack of alternative provision aside from the Professional Qualification for Headship (PQH). This qualification was generally believed to be an effective leadership development programme; however, our findings from the focus groups indicate that many of those who undertake PQH do not have aspirations of principalship; rather, they undertake the qualification in order to develop their skills and increase their experience. This is supported to some extent by findings from the survey, which found relatively low aspirations for principalship in the next 12 months among respondents undertaking PQH. It was suggested that a qualification aimed at middle management in schools could be valuable in targeting those who wish to extend their training yet have no aspirations of principalship.

7.8   The evidence indicates that formal leadership development training in the South of Ireland is not availed of systematically, particularly at primary level. In addition, our findings suggest that leadership is not fully distributed in many schools, thus impeding opportunities for teachers to gain in-school leadership development. Where leadership is not well distributed, principals are also more likely to undertake greater levels of administrative duties, which can be important demotivating factor for potential principals, as previously discussed. Participants also highlighted a further issue regarding the internal appointment system for deputy principal positions operated in many schools, suggesting that this system resulted in teachers waiting to fill 'dead men's shoes' and served to stifle ambition and talent. These issues are particularly pertinent due to the close association made by teachers of professional development in relation to their aspirations for leadership.

7.9   While our findings highlighted the investment made in the development of school leaders, particularly through the development of the Regional Training Unit in the North of Ireland and Leadership Development for Schools in the South of Ireland, there were many concerns regarding the processes used to select candidates for principalship positions, with implications for whether this investment is being maximised. These concerns centred on the use of governors and Boards of Management in recruiting candidates, with their suitability to fulfil this role called into question. In addition, succession planning at school level was not thought to be widespread. However, at a system-wide level, the PQH in the North of Ireland was acknowledged as a succession planning tool, and the new Tóraíocht programme in the South of Ireland was welcomed as having the potential to help plan for succession in the future.

7.10   As well as the importance of attracting and recruiting effective candidates for principalship, it is clear that there are issues regarding the retention of effective leaders, particularly in the South of Ireland. There were many concerns that as principals are increasingly appointed at younger ages, they may view the role as a 'life sentence'. Therefore, opportunities for refreshment and variety were thought to be crucial in their retention. Key factors cited by principals as acting as an incentive to remain in post were largely intrinsic in nature, for example the chance to make a difference. Other factors included professional development opportunities, financial reward structures and the opportunity to undertake system-wide roles.

7.11   It appears from the research that the relatively high number of small schools in both jurisdictions also has an impact on the recruitment and retention of principals. In these schools, and particularly in the South of Ireland, many principals have teaching responsibilities. Furthermore, a large number of these schools are located in rural areas which may further discourage applications for principalship. In our survey, over a fifth of teachers from both jurisdictions stated that a rural location would be an important factor in a decision not to apply for headship.

7.12   Linked to this, it was also clear from our research that some principals in the primary sector experience more specific issues. As Table 7.2 below demonstrates, primary principals are more likely than post-primary principals to:

- Have little leadership experience prior to appointment;
- Spend more time in the classroom;
- Report a lack of distributed leadership in their school;
- Be less satisfied in their role, and, in the case of the North of Ireland, report a poor work-life balance; and
- Feel less prepared and receive less training for principalship.

**Table 7.2: Challenges facing primary school principals in Ireland**

Challenges facing primary school principals in Ireland	North of Ireland		South of Ireland	
	Primary	**Post-primary**	**Primary**	**Post-primary**
Non leadership position prior to appointment	23%	1%	36%	14%
Average number of hours spent teaching per week in timetabled classes	16	2	22	4
Leadership not at all or not very distributed	17%	1%	14%	11%
Quite or very satisfied in current role	74%	84%	86%	91%
Poor or very poor work-life balance	62%	51%	39%	57%
Limited or no support to apply for principalship	30%	16%	31%	16%
No formal leadership training prior to appointment	50%	34%	71%	45%
Very or quite prepared to fulfil the roles and responsibilities	47%	67%	54%	64%

7.13   Both the North of Ireland and the South of Ireland are experiencing challenges in attracting candidates to school principalship positions. Our findings suggest that these challenges arise from a range of issues, including a wide variety of challenges associated with the role, difficulties around a lack of widespread succession planning, concerns relating to the selection process and insufficient professional development opportunities of all types. Given the fundamental importance of effective school leadership in improving educational standards, it is evident that action must be taken to address these issues in order to attract talented and effective leaders for the future.

Recommendations

7.14   We have formulated a series of evidence-based recommendations which aim to address the challenges facing the recruitment of school principals identified in this report. In the remainder of this section we set out these recommendations relating to both the North of Ireland and the South of Ireland, with specific recommendations for each jurisdiction highlighted where appropriate. Figure 7.1 illustrates the key areas of focus; these are discussed in more detail for each jurisdiction. It should be noted that, given the similar issues that face both the North of Ireland and the South of Ireland, some of these recommendations will apply equally to both jurisdictions. Annex A presents the recommendations and states whether they apply at a system- or school-level and some initial suggestions on whether they can be addressed in the short-term or long-term.

Figure 7.1: Key areas for recommendations

Attract future leaders
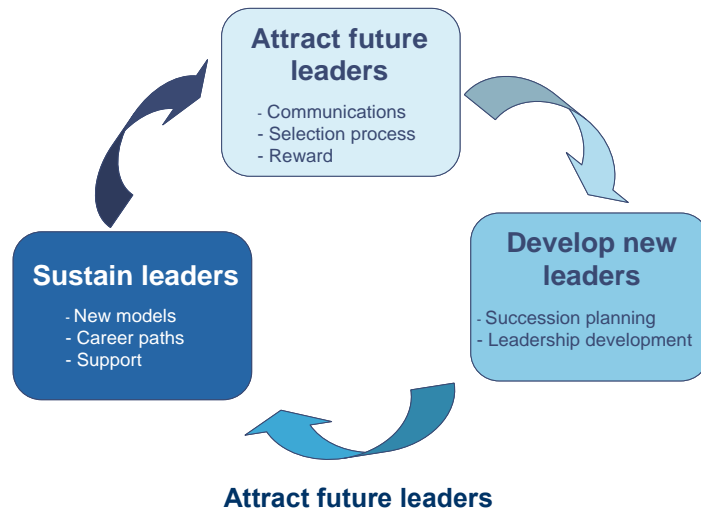
Attract future leaders

Communication strategies

7.15 Our findings have highlighted the challenges in attracting candidates to principalship positions in both the North of Ireland and the South of Ireland. It is evident that deputy principals and middle leaders often perceive school principalship as an unmanageable and undesirable proposition as a result of their observations of serving principals. However, the majority of principals surveyed expressed high levels of job satisfaction, suggesting that principals and other stakeholders could have a role to play in promoting the benefits of principalship. Raising awareness of the benefits of distributed leadership, promoting different images of principalship, and disseminating good practice in managing the demands of the job are also important.

7.16 Communication at a system-level was another concern for participants in the research; in both jurisdictions, participants called for clearer decision-making and guidance on policy. In the North of Ireland, participants questioned the pace of change in the sector and the definition of the role, while in the South of Ireland, many were unclear about the role of principal and its responsibilities. In order to attract talented candidates and encourage them to become school leaders of the future, it is evident that improved communication is required at both school and system levels.

Recommendations – Communication	
North of Ireland	**South of Ireland**
1 • Encourage principals and governors to celebrate successes and emphasise the positive aspects of the job. The successes and benefits of the role should also be promoted by the Department of Education, the Regional Training Unit, the Education and Skills Authority and professional associations. RTU's use of serving heads in training programmes is an example of how the role can be positively presented;	• Encourage principals and Boards of Management to celebrate successes and emphasise the positive aspects of the job. The successes and benefits of the role should also be promoted by the Department of Education and Science, Leadership Development for Schools and professional associations;
2 • Consider redefining the role of school principal in light of new developments in the education sector;	• Consider creating a leadership profile to provide greater insight into what the role involves. Consider defining to a greater degree the roles and responsibilities of school

	Recommendations – Communication	
	North of Ireland	**South of Ireland**
		principals;
3	• Promote different images of principalship to teachers, principals and governors, to ensure that the general perception is not 'grey and old'.	• Promote different images of principalship to teachers, principals and Boards of Management, to ensure that the general perception is not 'grey and old'.
4	• Streamline initiatives to ensure that the pace of change in the sector is manageable and that there is a strategic approach to the communication of new initiatives; • Government should communicate clearly and transparently to schools and principals regarding educational policy;	• Streamline initiatives to ensure that the pace of change in the sector is manageable and that there is a strategic approach to the communication of new initiatives; • Government should communicate clearly and transparently to schools and principals regarding educational policy;
5	• Government should communicate clearly and transparently to schools and principals regarding educational policy and provide clear and timely decision-making;	

Selection process

7.17   The evidence highlights a number of issues with the current processes of selection for principals in both the North of Ireland and the South of Ireland, particularly around the use of governors and Boards of Management. Given the wide-ranging implications of the choice of principal for children and young people, it is essential that the selection process is sufficiently rigorous and tests a range of skills appropriate for principalship.

	Recommendations – Selection process	
	North of Ireland	**South of Ireland**
6	• Professionalise the system for the selection of candidates to principalship positions. This should comprise a range of activities to test the candidate's skills, and could include an assessment centre or similar method of 360° assessment. This could, for example, build on recent work undertaken by RTU using assessment centres as part of the recruitment process;	• Professionalise the system for the selection of candidates to principalship positions. This should comprise a range of activities to test the candidate's skills, and could include an assessment centre or similar method of 360° assessment;
7	• Consider providing training to governors on recruitment. Given that governors are voluntary, this could be provided through online modules to minimise the burden on them as far as possible;	• Consider providing training to Boards of Management (BOM) on recruitment. Given that BOMs are voluntary, this could be provided through online modules to minimise the burden on them as far as possible;
8	• Encourage greater consistency and the use of appropriate criteria in advertisements for principalship positions. For example, advertisements where a minimum number of years as vice-principal is a criterion for a principal position may exclude potential candidates. A possible approach could be to use RTU's National Standards for Headteachers (North of Ireland edition) as a framework for setting criteria.	• Review the practice whereby the majority of deputy principal appointments are internal.

Reward

7.18   It is evident from our research that current salary arrangements are an important disincentive for many teachers, with inadequate salary differentials between senior posts and principal positions, and anomalies in reward across different schools as key concerns. A review of current reward systems in both jurisdictions is therefore crucial.

	Recommendations – Reward	
	North of Ireland	**South of Ireland**
9	• Review reward differentials between vice-principals and senior teachers and principals;	• Review reward differentials between deputy principals and senior teachers and principals;
10	• Review salary arrangements across different schools, for example, where the principal of a school is paid less than the vice-principal of a larger school;	• Review salary arrangements across different schools, for example, where the principal of a school is paid less than the deputy principal of a larger school;
11	• Review the emerging practice whereby serving principals moving to a different school are placed at a lower point on the salary scale;	• Review the practice whereby teachers moving to a different school lose their responsibility points;
12	• Consider incentivising principalships for schools in challenging circumstances through financial reward, sabbaticals or system opportunities.	• Consider incentivising principalships for schools in challenging circumstances through financial reward, sabbaticals or system opportunities.
13		• Review pension arrangements to allow principals to step down from their role without losing their pension entitlements.

Develop new leaders

Succession planning

7.19   Given the current challenges facing the recruitment of principals in both jurisdictions, planning for succession within schools is particularly important. The identification and encouragement of teachers with leadership potential early on in their careers can play a vital role in the development of a pool of school leaders for the future.

	Recommendations – Succession planning	
	North of Ireland	**South of Ireland**
14	• Provide training on succession planning for principals and governors to ensure that it becomes embedded in the system. This could, for example, expand upon the work of RTU's Building Leadership Capacity initiative which focuses on succession planning at individual school level;	• Provide training on succession planning for principals and Boards of Management to ensure that it becomes embedded in the system.
15	• Ensure that those holding middle and senior management roles within their school are provided with opportunities to lead, rather than only carrying out administrative tasks;	• Develop the middle-management structure in schools so that leadership becomes more distributed; • Ensure that those holding middle and senior management roles within their school are provided with opportunities to lead, rather than only carrying out administrative tasks;

	Recommendations – Succession planning	
16	• Compile data annually and centrally on newly appointed principals and vacancies by phase, sector, age and gender. Data should also be collected on principals taking early retirement and approaching retirement age.	• Compile data annually and centrally on newly appointed principals and vacancies by phase, sector, age and gender. Data should also be collected on principals taking early retirement and approaching retirement age.

Leadership development

7.20 Leadership development is closely linked by many participants in the research to their likelihood of applying for a principalship position. This was particularly pertinent for female teachers, who rated lack of management experience and confidence to fulfil the role as greater disincentives than their male counterparts. To this end, it is crucial that talented teachers are afforded sufficient and rewarding opportunities to take part in formal and informal development.

	Recommendations – Leadership development	
	North of Ireland	**South of Ireland**
17	• Define the role of governors in leadership development and provide guidance to governing bodies. For example, governors could have a role in monitoring whether staff are accessing adequate development opportunities. However, it should be remembered that governors are voluntary and any actions should avoid undue burden;	• Define the role of Boards of Management in leadership development and provide guidance to them. For example, Boards could have a role in monitoring whether staff are accessing adequate development opportunities. However, it should be remembered that Board members are voluntary and any actions should avoid undue burden;
18	• Create structures to allow newly appointed principals to shadow the outgoing principal of their new school prior to taking up the position, for example, by allowing the principal to shadow the outgoing principal where appropriate, or by establishing pre-induction training for principals on operational management. Indeed, we understand from RTU that proposals are now in place to initiate an induction programme for newly appointed heads prior to taking up their post;	• Create structures to allow newly appointed principals to shadow the outgoing principal of their new school prior to taking up the position for example, by allowing the principal to shadow the outgoing principal where appropriate, or by establishing pre-induction training for principals on operational management;
19	• Promote opportunities for networking;	• Promote opportunities for networking;
20	• Consider establishing a formal mentoring programme for newly appointed principals. Criteria should be set to ensure that only successful principals become mentors. We understand from RTU that proposals are in place for Autumn 2009 to provide newly appointed principals with a mentor as part of their Consultant Principals proposal, and we suggest that the programme is monitored and evaluated to assess the impact on newly appointed principals;	• Consider establishing a formal mentoring programme for newly appointed principals. Criteria should be set to ensure that only successful principals become mentors;
21	• Develop a precursor to the Professional Qualification for Headship (PQH) aimed at those in middle-management positions without firm aspirations for headship. We understand from RTU that this is underway as part of the review of Leadership and Management;	• Provide greater formal leadership development training to teachers with leadership potential. For example, by opening the new Tóraíocht programme to a greater number of middle leaders in order to create a wider pool of potential leaders;

22	•	The current review of PQH should give consideration to the development of modules on a range of leadership issues.

Sustain leaders
New models of leadership

7.21 It is evident that principals currently face significant challenges in sustaining their increasingly complex and demanding role. This was particularly the case for teaching principals who often struggle to combine their leadership role with full-time teaching duties; indeed, combining leadership and teaching roles is one of the key disincentives for participants in both the North of Ireland and the South of Ireland. While it may not be practical to introduce new ways of working into all schools, it may be useful to consider alternative models of principalship in order to increase sustainability in the sector.

7.22 In our 2007 *Independent Study into School Leadership,* we identified a number of potential models of leadership that could make the job of principal more 'doable' and help succession planning challenges. Indeed, many participants in our research noted the potential to federate or cluster schools in order to make the role more strategic, particularly at primary level. Our report also recommended new approaches to deploying administrative resources, for example, through creating 'travelling bursars' who could carry out financial responsibilities for a cluster of schools.

	Recommendations – New models of leadership	
	North of Ireland	**South of Ireland**
23	• Consider alternative models of principalship for teaching principals and/ or in primary schools. For example, a strategic principal working across a federation or cluster of schools;	• Consider alternative models of principalship for teaching principals in primary schools. For example, a strategic principal working across a federation or cluster of schools;
24	• Consider models such as co-headship to allow greater flexibility for principals, for example, to facilitate those with family or other personal commitments, or those wishing to reduce their working hours as they approach retirement.	• Consider models such as co-headship to allow greater flexibility for principals, for example, to facilitate those with family or other personal commitments, or those wishing to reduce their working hours as they approach retirement.
25	• Consider creating a financial bursar role in schools. In the primary sector particularly, one 'travelling bursar' could be employed across a cluster of schools.	• Consider creating a financial bursar role in schools. In the primary sector particularly, one 'travelling bursar' could be employed across a cluster of schools.

Career paths

7.23 Evidence from the literature and findings from the research suggest that principals work optimally when placed in a school for a maximum of seven to ten years, suggesting that fresh challenge is important in order to sustain and refresh school leaders.

Recommendations – Career paths	
North of Ireland	**South of Ireland**
26 • Publicise and encourage greater movement throughout the education sector through sabbaticals, secondments, inspectorate and other system-wide roles. For example, a day a week in a consultancy or mentoring role. This can also aid succession planning in schools.	• Publicise and encourage greater movement throughout the education sector through sabbaticals, secondments, inspectorate and other system-wide roles. For example, a day a week in a consultancy or mentoring role. This can also aid succession planning in schools.
27 • Create greater opportunities for life-long, personalised learning. For example, professional development opportunities tailored to the NCSL's five stages of leadership: emergent, entry, established, advanced and consultant.[12] RTU's framework for training could be expanded to facilitate this.	• Create greater opportunities for life-long, personalised learning. For example, professional development opportunities similar to the NCSL's five stages of leadership: emergent, entry, established, advanced and consultant.[13]

Support

7.24 Providing principals with support such as administrative and caretaking resources, as well as support through governors and Boards of Management, can play an important role in sustaining serving principals, allowing them dedicated leadership time and helping to reduce their sense of isolation.

Recommendations – Support	
North of Ireland	**South of Ireland**
28 • Review levels of administrative and caretaking support provided to schools to ensure that principals have dedicated leadership time, perhaps through sharing resources between schools, especially small schools;	• Review levels of administrative and caretaking support provided to schools to ensure that principals have dedicated leadership time, perhaps through sharing resources between schools, especially small schools;
29 • Review the role of governors, considering new models of governorship and providing governors with training. For example, a centralised, specialised support role for sector bodies could be established;	• Examine the role of Boards of Management, considering new models of management and providing Boards of Management members with training in the identification, development and selection of school leaders. For example, a centralised, specialised support role for sector bodies could be established. While there has been investment in training for Boards of Management, further work is required to ensure more rigorous training for Board members.

Addressing these challenges in the current economic climate

7.25 We recognise that, given the current economic climate, it may not be feasible to address all the concerns raised by participants in this research immediately. However, in our view, it is important to recognise both the depth and the validity of the issues identified. We have therefore provided an initial scoping of 'quick wins' or first steps that could be taken to mitigate against barriers to applying for principalship. A more detailed analysis is presented in Annex A: Recommendations for the North of Ireland and the South of Ireland. These include:

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[12] http://www.ncsl.org.uk/onlinecommunities-index/comms-extracted-index/comms-extracted-duquesnay.htm
[13] http://www.ncsl.org.uk/onlinecommunities-index/comms-extracted-index/comms-extracted-duquesnay.htm

- **Encouraging principals and governors and Boards of Management to celebrate successes and emphasise the positive aspects of the role**. These successes and benefits should also be promoted by system-level organisations, such as the Department of Education in the North of Ireland, and the Department of Education and Science in the South of Ireland;

- **Promoting different images of headship** to teachers, principals and governors, to ensure that the general perception is not 'grey and old';

- Principals should ensure that **those holding middle and senior management roles within their school are provided with opportunities to lead,** rather than solely carrying out administrative tasks;

- **Examining the role of governors and Boards of Management in leadership development.** For example, Boards of Management and governors could have a role in monitoring whether staff are accessing adequate development opportunities;

- **Government should ensure that its communications with the sector are clear and transparent**;

- **Promoting greater opportunities for networking amongst school leaders;** and

- **Publicising and encouraging greater movement through the education sector** through sabbaticals, secondments, inspectorate and other system-wide roles.

Annex A: Recommendations for the North of Ireland and the South of Ireland

Recommendations for the North of Ireland

Recommendation	Short-term		Long-term		Recommendation area(s)
	School level	System level	School level	System level	
Communication					
Encourage principals and governors to celebrate successes and emphasise the positive aspects of the job. The successes and benefits of the role should also be promoted by the Department of Education, the Regional Training Unit, the Education and Skills Authority and professional associations. RTU's use of serving heads in training programmes is an example of how the role can be positively presented.	√	√			Attract
Consider redefining the role of school principal in light of new developments in the education sector.		√		√	Attract and sustain
Promote different images of headship to teachers, principals and governors, to ensure that the general perception is not 'grey and old'.	√	√			Attract
Government should communicate clearly and transparently to schools and principals regarding educational policy and provide clear and timely decision-making.		√		√	Attract
Selection process					
Professionalise the system for the selection of candidates to principalship positions. This should comprise a range of activities to test the candidate's skills, and could include an assessment centre or similar method of 360° assessment This could, for example, build on recent work undertaken by RTU using assessment centres as part of the recruitment process.		√			Attract
Consider providing training to governors on recruitment. Given that governors are voluntary, this could be provided through online modules.		√			Attract
Encourage greater consistency and the use of appropriate criteria in advertisements for principalship positions. For example, advertisements where a minimum number of years as vice-principal is a criterion for a principal position may exclude potential candidates. A possible approach could be to use RTU's National Standards for Headteachers (North of Ireland edition) as a framework for setting criteria.		√			Attract
Reward					
Review reward differentials between vice-principals and senior teachers and principals.		√		√	Attract and sustain
Review salary arrangements across different schools, for example, where the principal of a school is paid less than the vice-principal of a larger school.				√	Attract

Recommendation	Short-term		Long-term		Recommendation area(s)
	School level	System level	School level	System level	
Review the emerging practice whereby serving principals moving to a different school are placed at a lower point on the salary scale.			√	√	Attract
Consider incentivising principalships for schools in challenging circumstances through financial reward, sabbaticals or system opportunities.				√	Attract
Succession planning					
Provide training on succession planning for principals and governors to ensure that it becomes embedded in the system. This could, for example, expand upon the work of RTU's Building Leadership Capacity initiative which focuses on succession planning at individual school level.		√			Develop
Ensure that those holding middle and senior management roles within their school are provided with opportunities to lead, rather than only carrying out administrative tasks.	√		√		Attract and develop
Compile data annually and centrally on newly appointed principals and vacancies by phase, sector, age and gender. Data should also be collected on principals taking early retirement and approaching retirement age.				√	Attract and develop
Leadership development					
Define the role of governors in leadership development and provide guidance to governing bodies. For example, governors could have a role in monitoring whether staff are accessing adequate development opportunities. However, it should be remembered that governors are voluntary and any actions should avoid undue burden.				√	Develop
Create structures to allow newly appointed principals to shadow the outgoing principal of their new school prior to taking up the position, for example, by allowing the principal to shadow the outgoing principal where appropriate, or by establishing pre-induction training for principals on operational management. Indeed, we understand from RTU that proposals are now in place to initiate an induction programme for newly appointed heads prior to taking up their post.		√			Develop
Promote opportunities for networking.		√			Develop and sustain
Consider establishing a formal mentoring programme for newly appointed principals. Criteria should be set to ensure that only successful principals become mentors. We understand from RTU that proposals are in place for Autumn 2009 to provide newly appointed principals with a mentor as part of their Consultant Principals proposal, and we suggest that the programme is monitored and evaluated to assess the impact on newly appointed principals;		√			Attract and develop

Recommendation	Short-term		Long-term		Recommendation area(s)
	School level	System level	School level	System level	
Develop a precursor to the Professional Qualification for Headship (PQH) aimed at those in middle-management positions without firm aspirations for headship. We understand from RTU that this is underway as part of the review of Leadership and Management.	√	√			Develop and sustain
• The current review of PQH should give consideration to the development of modules on a range of leadership issues.		√			Develop
New models of leadership					
Consider alternative models of principalship for teaching principals and/ or in primary schools. For example, a strategic principal working across a federation or cluster of schools.				√	Attract and sustain
Consider models such as co-headship to allow greater flexibility for principals, for example, to facilitate those with family or other personal commitments, or those wishing to reduce their working hours as they approach retirement.				√	Attract and sustain
Consider creating a financial bursar role in schools. In the primary sector particularly, one 'travelling bursar' could be employed across a cluster of schools.		√			Attract
Career paths					
Publicise and encourage greater movement throughout the education sector through sabbaticals, secondments, inspectorate and other system-wide roles. For example, a day a week in a consultancy or mentoring role. This can also aid succession planning in schools.	√	√		√	Attract, develop and sustain
Create greater opportunities for life-long, personalised learning. For example, professional development opportunities tailored to the NCSL's five stages of leadership: emergent, entry, established, advanced and consultant.[14] RTU's framework for training could be expanded to facilitate this.		√			Attract, develop and sustain
Support					
Review levels of administrative and caretaking support provided to schools to ensure that principals have dedicated leadership time, perhaps through sharing resources between schools, especially small schools				√	Attract and sustain

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[14] http://www.ncsl.org.uk/onlinecommunities-index/comms-extracted-index/comms-extracted-duquesnay.htm

Recommendation	Short-term		Long-term		Recommendation area(s)
	School level	System level	School level	System level	
Examine the role of Boards of Management, considering new models of management and providing Boards of Management members with training in the identification, development and selection of school leaders. For example, a centralised, specialised support role for sector bodies could be established. While there has been investment in training for Boards of Management, further work is required to ensure more rigorous training for Board members.		√		√	Attract and sustain

Recommendations for the South of Ireland

Recommendation	Short-term		Long-term		Recommendation area(s)
	School level	System level	School level	System level	
Communication					
Encourage principals and Boards of Management to celebrate successes and emphasise the positive aspects of the job. The successes and benefits of the role should also be promoted by the Department of Education and Science, Leadership Development for Schools and professional associations.	√	√			Attract
Consider creating a framework of the competencies required by school leaders to provide greater insight into what the role involves. Consider defining to a greater degree the roles and responsibilities of school principals.		√			Attract
Promote different images of principalship to teachers, principals and Boards of Management, to ensure that the general concept is not 'grey and old'.	√	√			Attract
Government should communicate clearly and transparently to schools and principals regarding educational policy.		√			Attract
Selection process					
Professionalise the system for the selection of candidates to principalship positions. This should comprise a range of activities to test the candidate's skills, and could include an assessment centre or similar method of 360° assessment.				√	Attract
Consider providing training to Boards of Management (BOMs) on recruitment. Given that BOMs are voluntary, this could be provided through online modules.		√		√	Attract
Review the practice whereby the majority of deputy principal appointments are internal.				√	Attract and develop
Reward					
Review reward differentials between deputy principals and senior teachers and principals.		√		√	Attract and sustain
Review salary arrangements across different schools, for example, where the principal of a school is paid less than the deputy principal of a larger school.				√	Attract
Review the practice whereby teachers moving to a different school lose their responsibility points.				√	Attract and develop
Consider incentivising principalships for schools in challenging circumstances through financial reward, sabbaticals or system opportunities.				√	Attract
Review pension arrangements to allow principals to step down from their role without losing their pension entitlements.				√	Attract

Recommendation	Short-term		Long-term		Recommendation area(s)
	School level	System level	School level	System level	
Succession planning					
Provide training on succession planning for principals and Boards of Management to ensure that it becomes embedded in the system.				√	Develop
Develop the middle-management structure in schools so that leadership becomes more distributed. Ensure that those holding middle and senior management roles within their school are provided with opportunities to lead, rather than only carrying out administrative tasks.	√	√			Attract and develop
Compile data annually and centrally on newly appointed principals and vacancies by phase, sector, age and gender. Data should also be collected on principals taking early retirement and approaching retirement age.				√	Attract and develop
Leadership development					
Review the role of Boards of Management in leadership development and provide guidance to them. For example, Boards could have a role in monitoring whether staff are accessing adequate development opportunities. However, it should be remembered that Board members are voluntary and any actions should avoid undue burden.				√	Develop and sustain
Consider creating structures to allow newly appointed principals to shadow the outgoing principal of their new school prior to taking up the position for example, by allowing the principal to shadow the outgoing principal where appropriate, or by establishing pre-induction training for principals on operational management.				√	Attract and develop
Promote opportunities for networking.				√	Attract and develop
Provide greater formal leadership development training to teachers with leadership potential. For example, by opening the new Tóraíocht programme to a greater number of candidates in order to create a wider pool of potential leaders.		√			Develop
New models of leadership					
Consider alternative models of principalship for teaching principals in primary schools. For example, a strategic principal working across a federation or cluster of schools.				√	Attract and sustain
Consider models such as co-headship to allow greater flexibility for principals, for example, to facilitate those with family or other personal commitments, or those wishing to reduce their working hours as they approach retirement.				√	Attract and sustain
Consider creating a financial bursar role in schools. In the primary sector particularly, one 'travelling bursar' could be employed across a cluster of schools.				√	Attract and sustain

Recommendation	Short-term		Long-term		Recommendation area(s)
	School level	System level	School level	System level	
Career paths					
Publicise and encourage greater movement throughout the education sector through sabbaticals, secondments, inspectorate and other system-wide roles.				√	Attract, develop and sustain
Support					
Review levels of administrative and caretaking support provided to schools to ensure that principals have dedicated leadership time.				√	Attract and sustain
Review the role of Boards of Management, considering new models of governorship and providing members with training.				√	Attract and sustain

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