Executive headship

A summary of the executive headteacher (EHT) role, with practical questions and exemplar role descriptors to consider when creating the position

1 What is an executive headteacher?

Unlike the term 'headteacher', which is defined under section 35 and 36 of the Education Act 2002, there is currently no legal definition of what an 'executive headteacher' (EHT) is or what they should do. The School Workforce Census (DfE, 2015) considers that the 'post of executive headteacher should be used for a headteacher who directly leads two or more schools in a federation or other partnership arrangement'. The research largely supports this definition though found that it does not wholly reflect the picture on the ground. In practice, EHTs can:

- lead formal groups of schools (MATs or federations)

- be the substantive leader of one school and have a contractual arrangement with one or more other schools (perhaps on an interim basis)

- lead a school with more than one phase or site (that is, not necessarily two separate schools)

- have management responsibilities which go beyond that of a single phase school (such as managing a teaching school alliance).

It is therefore helpful to think of an EHT as the strategic leader of more than one school or equivalent responsibility. It is a complex role that is deployed in a range of contexts and structures to address different priorities. There is no one-size-fits-all when it comes to the role of EHT. The role should reflect the context and needs of the school(s), the time available to the EHT, and the experience and strengths of the individual. It should also take account of the other roles in the leadership structure of the school or group of schools, such as Head of School(s) (HoS) and Chief Executive Officer (CEO). Relevant parties need to be involved in helping to define the EHT role. Indeed, the research found that one of the major challenges associated with an EHT structure was clearly defining the role and the division of leadership responsibilities (for instance, between the EHT and HoS). Figure 1 below depicts how the remit of the EHT may vary depending on the scale and size of the organisation. It also shows the position of the EHT role in relation to other strategic and operational layers of management, such as a CEO and HoS.

Figure 1. Leadership arrangements associated with EHTs
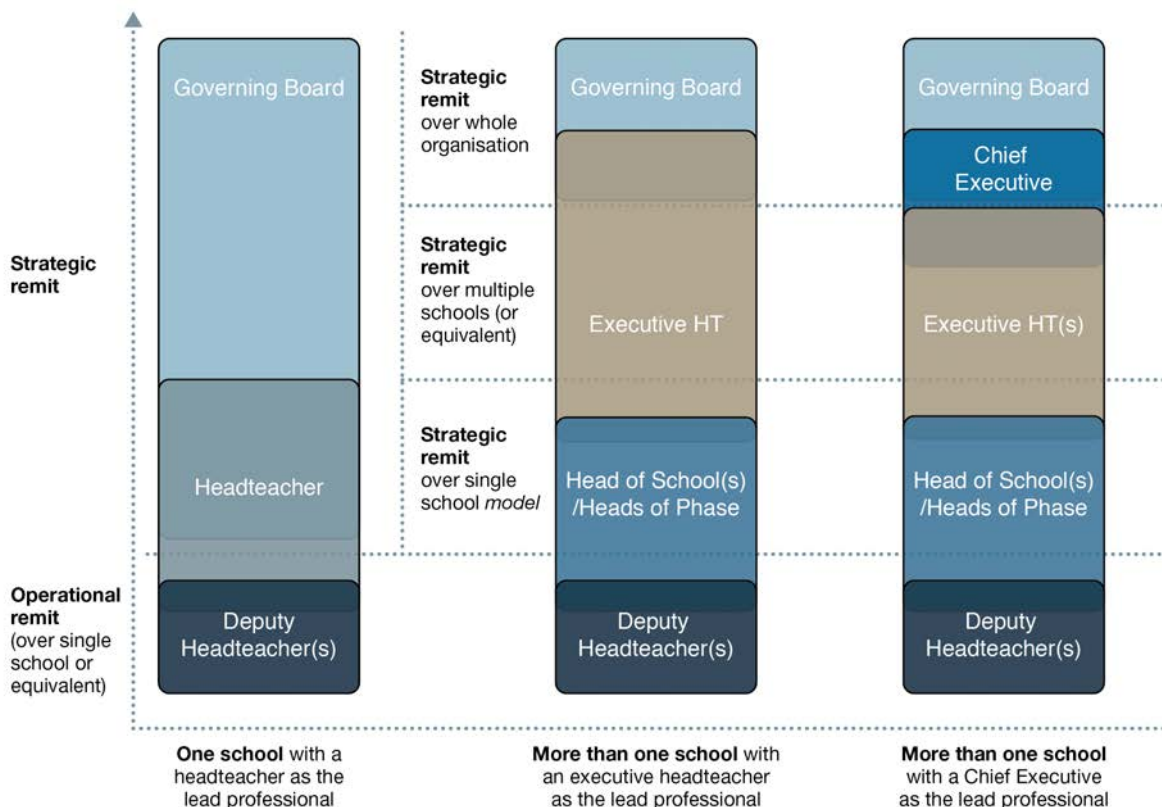
About this document and how to use it

This document is based on research conducted by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER), Ambition School Leadership (formerly The Future Leaders Trust) and the National Governors' Association (NGA). The findings have been re-purposed by education expert Andy Buck to help leadership teams when they are considering EHT roles and associated structures.

1

Part 1 provides an overview of the EHT role and is suitable for anybody working in the sector.

2

Part 2 provides practical questions to be discussed by all parties involved in establishing an EHT role.

3

Part 3 sets out exemplar job descriptors for an EHT role.

The distinctive role and skills of EHTs

The research suggests that the EHT role may vary depending on the size and scale of the position, as well as the specific purpose of the position. The research found that EHTs have three main strategic priorities:

- improvement (e.g. addressing school underperformance)
- expansion (e.g. increasing management capacity and efficiency)
- partnerships (e.g. forming and growing a school grouping).

To fulfil these priorities, the EHT role often emphasises and focuses on: strategic thinking; school-to-school consistency and collaboration; coaching and staff development (particularly, building leadership capacity); and an outward focus. Figure 2 depicts the distinctive role of the EHT (compared to a traditional headteacher of a single phase school) and the particular skills needed, as emphasised in the research.

Figure 2. Skills needed in relation to the distinct roles of EHTs
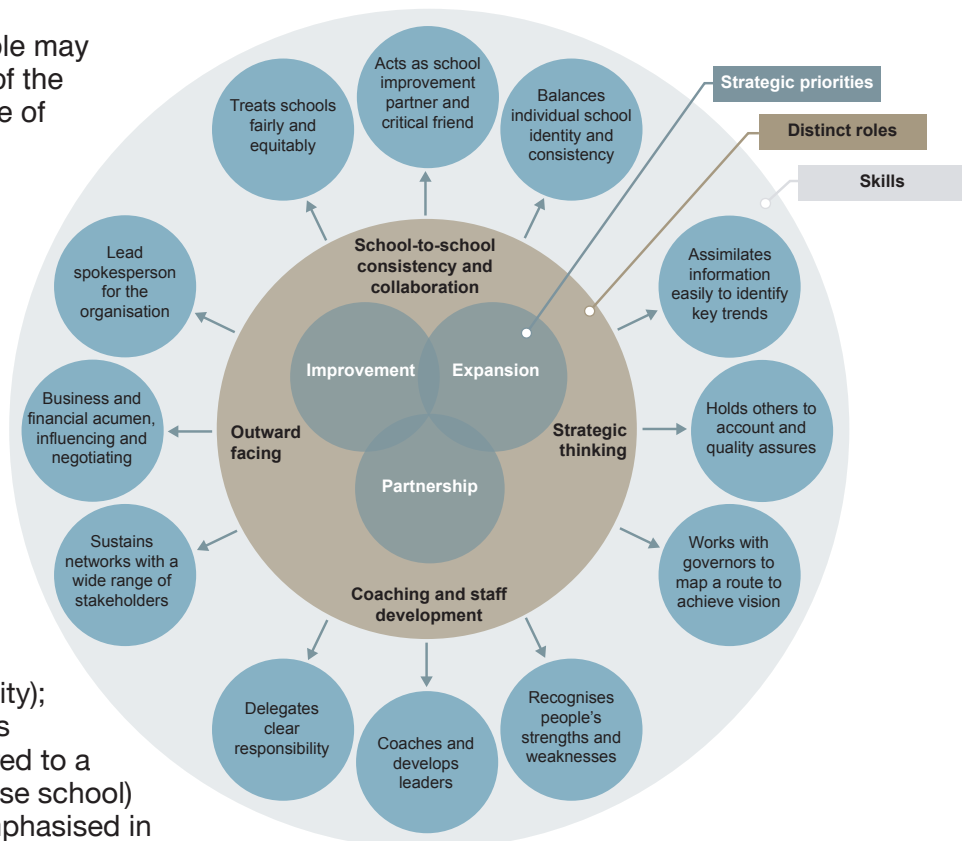
Further information

The research report on which this guide is based, and accompanying outputs can be viewed here: www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/exec01

School Teachers Pay and Conditions 2016: www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-teachers-pay-and-conditions-2016

National Standards of Excellence for Headteachers (2015): www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-standards-of-excellence-for-headteachers

2 Key questions to consider when creating an EHT position

Existing leadership teams and the next 'layer up' (e.g. education director or CEO) should be involved in these discussions so they can make sure that arrangements for accountability and support are properly tailored to fit the structure required, and that they align with head of school (or equivalent) job descriptions. Consultation with governing boards (GBs)[1] also needs to be factored in, again according to context. Some questions may seem very prosaic, but they are designed to elicit people's pre-conceptions about what is involved. Some of the questions are based on the assumption that there is more than one school or site (such as in a Federation, Multi-Academy Trust (MAT), or other collaborative, group or multi-site arrangement), which may not be relevant in other contexts.

Role of executive head – overview

1. Can you describe what the core purpose of the role of the EHT is in a couple of sentences? (What are the basic principles that you are applying when working out the detail?)

2. What aspects of leadership will the EHT be responsible for and how might this be divided with other leadership roles, such as HoS? (e.g. strategic leadership; day-to-day operational management (including financial management and management of the school site/s); recruitment, training and management of staff; teaching, learning and curriculum; use of data to monitor, evaluate and improve performance; community engagement and partnership working)

3. How much do you need to vary the job descriptors in part 3?

4. What is the leadership structure for the group and within each school (see part 3 of this publication)?

5. How does the EHT relate to, and work with, the school business manager?

6. Does the EHT have a role in line managing, or coaching and mentoring the HoS(s) and (if appropriate) other senior staff across the schools involved?

7. How might the EHT role need to be different in each school (if more than one)?

8. What are the job titles for any roles created (the HoS role does not have to have the same name in each school)?

9. What are the developmental/training priorities for the EHT and HoS(s)?

10. What processes, structures and data will be required to enable the EHT to oversee and Quality Assure (QA) the work of the HoS(s)?

Logistical issues

11. How many days is the EHT in each school? Will this change over time?

12. Where is the EHT predominantly based?

13. What admin provision will be made for the EHT in each school? Where will their PA support be co-ordinated from?

14. How will the EHT salary and other associated expenses, including admin support, be allocated to school budgets?

School management issues

15. How will the backfill of staff in each school be organised?

16. How will the staffing structure in each school be agreed?

17. How will the budget in each school be agreed?

18. What will be the approach to staff appointments?

19. Are there particular areas where joint staff appointments may be appropriate or group-wide roles?

20. How will the development plan for the organisation and (if appropriate) each school be created and actioned?

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[1]Note: throughout this document, the term governing board refers to governors/trustees in schools in the maintained and academy sectors.

Attendance at meetings and events

21. Who will attend Senior Leadership Team (SLT) meetings and who will run them?

22. Who will be responsible for liaison with parents? (e.g. parents' evenings, open evenings)

23. Who will attend local heads' meetings?

24. Who will meet with union representatives?

25. Who will attend other meetings and school events? (e.g. assemblies)

26. Who will be responsible for other strategic meetings and networks? (e.g. school-to-school networks; businesses; national policy forums)

Working with Governing Board(s)[1]

27. How will the GB(s) work with the EHT?

28. How will the GB(s) work with each HoS?

29. Who is the EHT accountable to and how will the GB(s) feed into the performance management of the EHT?

30. Who is the HoS accountable to and how will the GB(s) feed into the performance management of each HoS?

31. What training needs may exist for the GB(s)?

32. Who will attend meetings with the Chair of Governors/Trustees and Governing Board(s)? (including Governing Board/Trustee meetings and governing committees and Local Governing Board(s))

33. If there are multiple GBs, which will the EHT attend and which will they be a member of?

34. What reports to the GB(s) will the EHT and HoS make?

Managing a group of schools

35. How will the effectiveness of the group of schools/partnership be reviewed?

36. As a result of these reviews, how may they affect changes to the arrangements within the group?

37. How long is the group of schools/partnership planned to last for?

38. Is there a view at this stage as to the ultimate size and composition of the group?

39. How might arrangements within the group change should other schools join in the future?

40. Are there any changes to the allocation of education advisers?

41. How will the EHT and each HoS ensure there is an appropriate collective skill set both within each school and across the schools?

42. Who will be named on the Ofsted report for each of the schools?

43. Will the EHT have a single contract or separate contracts with each school?

44. If there is a CEO, how does the EHT role relate and what is the division of responsibilities and remit?

Some questions may seem very prosaic, but they are designed to elicit people's pre-conceptions about what is involved

3 Exemplar role descriptors for executive heads (or similar role)

The following exemplar role descriptors should be seen as a starting point in defining and clarifying an EHT or similar role. The descriptors are indicative at this stage as the EHT role is emerging and evolving. That said, the role should be clearly articulated, and the exact remit should be appropriate to the context of the organization and may need to change over time. The research found that the EHT role is consistently more strategic and less operational than that of a 'traditional' headteacher position. Again, it is intended that these exemplar descriptors will help to ensure focus on the practicalities of the EHT role; to make sure everyone is clear about how things will actually work.

Strategic leadership

- Leading the school group and line managing, coaching and mentoring the HoS(s) and (if appropriate) other members of senior leadership.
- Defining and delivering the vision and objectives of the school group, its leadership structure and its development plans, in partnership with the HoS(s) and GB(s), (including, ensuring coherence between the group and individual school development plans).
- Creating a culture across the school group of continuous improvement and a drive to raise achievement, progress and quality of teaching and learning.
- Building strong leadership capacity across the school group that is capable of transforming practice.
- Developing capacity across the school group for school improvement through flexibility of staffing, collaboration and effective organisational and administrative systems.
- Ensuring and monitoring the consistent and ongoing implementation across the school group of key policies and strategies (e.g. in relation to finance, HR, IT and behaviour).
- Setting and monitoring appropriate targets for the management of teaching quality and student performance.
- Working with the HoS(s) to ensure that GB members within the group are provided with high quality information and training to enable them to fulfil their role.
- Providing support and challenge as a 'critical friend', drawing on robust analysis of data, monitoring and evaluation, to ensure school improvement, where required.
- Reporting to the GB(s)/Trust Board (and other relevant audiences) on the performance of the school/s.

Financial and business management

- Providing financial leadership of the group of schools (including cohering financial management and organisation across the schools/ sites within the group), in consultation with GB(s) and HoS(s).
- Ensuring that budgets are set and monitored for each school.
- Providing support and guidance on implementing policies within guidelines agreed with the GB(s) and to adhere to legal and statutory requirements.
- Ensuring the management of efficient administrative systems.
- Ensuring the site is effectively managed.
- Ensuring the health and safety of all staff.

Educational leadership and management

- Ensuring a clear vision for the school group and providing support and guidance in translating this into a vision for each school.
- Setting high educational standards in the school(s).
- Ensuring an appropriate curriculum is designed and implemented in the school(s).
- Creating a climate for learning in the school(s) that enables all students to thrive.
- Ensuring students are set challenging targets for their achievement in the school(s), based on regular, frequent and robust assessment and tracking arrangements and ensuring appropriate interventions are in place, as required.
- Leading outstanding teaching and innovative practice to enhance learning.
- Ensuring excellent student achievement and welfare in the school.
- Ensuring preparation for inspection within the school(s), including maintaining accurate school self-evaluation.
- Overseeing and facilitating opportunities for cross-working, shared pupil experience and interchange, and coherent teaching and learning approaches within the school group.

People leadership and management

- Taking a lead on building the leadership capacity across the school group and within each school, including recruitment, professional development and deployment of the HoS(s) and, if appropriate, senior leaders.
- Overseeing strong staff appointments within the school(s).
- Ensuring an effective approach to managing staff performance and staffing issues, in accordance with GB policy.
- Ensuring high quality professional development and training for all staff within the school(s).
- Ensuring the safeguarding of students in accordance with GB policy.
- Promoting equality of opportunity for all staff.
- Ensuring that staff are retained, motivated and valued.
- Overseeing the management of staff deployment and accountability in order to distribute leadership and expertise across the school(s).

Links with community and business

- Taking a lead on sharing learning across schools within the group and beyond the group, with other schools and organisations, to champion best practice.
- Being the figurehead of the group in securing strong links with partners to expand the scope and resource, and, support the progress and sustainability of the school group.
- Ensuring strong and effective partnerships with parents.
- Creating effective links with the community, with business, with local churches and other faith communities to enhance learning opportunities.

About the authors

Andy Buck is the Managing Director of Leadership Matters and #honk. Leadership Matters is a web-based membership organisation that offers school leaders access to high quality online development tools and other leadership content. #honk is the organisation through which Andy works directly with educational leaders on executive coaching, team development, training and conference keynotes.

Karen Wespieser is Head of Impact at NFER. She is an experienced manager of research, skilled in qualitative and quantitative research with a passion for increasing the use of evidence. She was the project director and one of the lead authors on 'Executive Headteachers: What's in a Name'.

Jennie Harland is a Research Manager at NFER. She has worked on numerous studies exploring issues of school workforce development, in particular teachers' Continuing Professional Development (CPD). She was the main researcher and one of the lead authors on 'Executive Headteachers: What's in a Name'.

Other outputs based on this research

A Full Report of the Findings

Lord, P., Wespieser, K., Harland, J., Fellows, T. and Theobald, K. (2016). *Executive Headteachers: What's in a Name? A Full Report of the Findings*. Slough, Birmingham and London: NFER, NGA and TFLT.

The full report of findings, including key messages and recommendations for policy and practice, why executive headteachers (EHTs) matter, the distinctive characteristics and distribution of EHTs, the circumstances under which schools appoint an EHT, and the facilitating factors, challenges, and development of the EHT role.

Executive Summary

Theobald, K. and Lord, P. (2016). *Executive Headteachers: What's in a Name? Executive Summary*. Slough, Birmingham and London: NFER, NGA and TFLT.

A two-page concise summary of the full report.

Technical Appendix

Harland, J. and Bernardinelli, D. (2016). *Executive Headteachers: What's in a Name? Technical Appendix*. Slough: NFER.

The technical appendix provides a detailed account of the methodology used to obtain the data on which the full report is based.

Literature Review

Fellows, T. and Odell, E. (2016). *Executive Headteachers: What's in a Name? A Review of the Literature*. Birmingham and London: NGA and TFLT.

The literature review encapsulates existing research on the EHT position in England. It covers three main areas: the history of EHTs in England; the skills, qualities and motivations identified in EHTs; and the governance and school structures associated with EHTs.

Case Study Compendium

Wespieser, K. (Ed) (2016). *Executive Headteachers: What's in a Name? Case Study Compendium*. Slough: NFER.

The compendium provides an overview of each of the 12 case studies that were conducted as part of the research. Each case study includes a description of the setting, the purpose of appointing an EHT, the focus of the EHT role, qualifications of the EHT and replicable features.

Infographic Poster

The infographic poster – included in the full report – displays quantitative data about the distinctive characteristics and distribution of EHTs.

All outputs are available from: www.nfer.ac.uk