Sustaining a Vital Profession

A research report into the impact of Leadership Coaching in schools

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national education union

Integrity Coaching & Leadership Development

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“Headteachers give so much of themselves to support teachers and to make a positive impact on children and young people, and yet they experience some of the highest levels of stress in the system.

At a time when the challenges in the education system are becoming acute, this research demonstrates that specialist coaching can make a real difference in the professional and personal lives of headteachers.”

Professsor Rachel Lofthouse

Executive Summary

- **This research, undertaken by CollectivED, a research and practice centre at Leeds Beckett University**, is an evaluation of a year-long headteacher coaching programme.

- **The coaching was provided by Integrity Coaching and funded in 2018-19 by the National Education Union** (the NEU having taken this on from the NUT when it was formed by amalgamation). 39 headteachers requested to join the coaching programme. Coaching was undertaken by 10 professional coaches with two-hour sessions once per half term forming the main core of coaching activity. Coaching was confidential and bound by a contract.

- **The evaluation draws on three questionnaires across the year responded to by the headteachers being coached** (with 79.5% completing the first questionnaire), telephone interviews with headteachers (at the mid-point and at end of the programme) and two focus groups with headteachers at the end with 41% of the headteachers participating in either interviews or focus groups or both. The final data came from interviews with coaches and the programme leader (also a coach), with six of the ten coaches being interviewed.

- **The coaching conversations were productive.** They provided space and time and allowed focused, supportive and supported reflection. This was dependent on the skill of the coach and also the acknowledgement of the importance of 'identity work' which explored personal values as well as professional challenges.

- **This programme was successful because of the quality and independence of the coaching provision.** Coaches brought depth of experience and strong understanding of how to enable headteachers to engage in productive thinking which then enabled them to develop new approaches in their professional and personal lives. The coaches also supported them to explore their values and seek opportunities to align these with their leadership roles.

- **Headteachers requesting the coaching came from every education sector and phase,** although in 2018-19 the majority were primary headteachers. Some were in their first year of headship whereas others had been a head for over 15 years and several in more than one school.

- **The evaluation demonstrates that this coaching programme has delivered the outcomes described as desirable success criteria by the coaches**. It has proved beneficial to the headteachers in a number of respects and there is evidence of an impact beyond the individual level.

- **The headteachers dealt with specific challenges and complexities associated with the role which between them had a significant impact on their resilience, wellbeing and work/life balance.** This coaching programme provided a means to support headteachers both personally and professionally.

Executive Summary

- **There was a positive impact on headteachers' self-belief and confidence,** and coaching helped them to place greater priority on their physical health. Coaching also helped to address the feelings of isolation commonly felt by headteachers. These gains had a reciprocal benefit in managing the demands of the job and reducing the 'erosion of resilience'.

- **Coaching supported headteachers to develop and maintain effective management approaches**, giving them time to prioritise the issues that need resolving, developing their competence in decision-making and working positively with and empowering colleagues. It also supported their strategic leadership, giving them a chance to develop a 'clear road map' and 'clarity in direction'.

- **Coaching of headteachers has the potential to help maintain sustainability in the school workforce.** This can be seen as building medium to long term capacity in the profession at individual and collective levels. Some of this comes from the direct impact of coaching on the headteacher (as indicated above) as well as an impact on how they work with colleagues and the wider school community. There is evidence that this coaching programme had a positive impact on retention for headteachers at risk of leaving.

Key Recommendations

Based on this evaluative research we make the following key recommendations.

Headteachers are recommended to:

- **Recognise that for some of their peers exploring the relationships between their personal wellbeing and professional capacity,** and between their values and their leadership identity through coaching has been a positive experience;

- **Be aware that headteacher coaching can be an investment in individual leadership development** and resilience and may benefit the wider school community;

- **Be open to the idea of being coached for a period of time at any point in their headship,** and especially if the challenges of headship start to feel as if they undermine capacity in role and wellbeing;

- **Find out about coaching offers that may be available** and research the types of coaching on offer to identify possible opportunities for engagement;

- **Talk to their governing body or board of trustees** about the potential value of funding headteacher coaching;

- **If they have had a positive experience of the impact of coaching share this with other headteachers** to help break down any stigma attached to it and to ensure others know that this might be a good option for them;

- **Give honest feedback to coaching providers** to ensure that over time the offer of coaching to headteachers becomes as refined as possible.

The DfE is recommended to:

- **Better understand the nature of the challenges faced by headteachers** (beyond workload) and identify ways that the DfE can reduce these;

- **Draw on this research into headteacher coaching and other evidence to develop policy** to support retention and efficacy of headteachers which includes an offer of professional, external coaching;

- **Match the policy with an appropriate method of funding** that can be made available to individual headteachers, working with their governors, trustees and employers to make autonomous decisions about accessing coaching;

- **Gather appropriate evidence to better understand the differences between mentoring, coaching, supervision, and peer-support** in enabling headteachers to meet the challenges of their roles and at all stages of their leadership careers;

- **Support the sector to develop a specific professional organisational code of ethics for coaching in education** to ensure that coaching in education has rigour and has independent profession-led quality assurance.

Coaching providers are recommended to:

- **Develop models of coaching which are attuned to the specific demands of the education sector** and the personal and professional needs of those working in leadership roles within it;

Key Recommendations

- **Monitor and evaluate the impact of any union-funded coaching programmes without breaking confidentiality around the coaching process.**

School governors, MAT trustees and employers are recommended to:

- **Be alert to the challenges specific to headship and ensure that headteachers have opportunities to discuss with you what approaches might support them to meet these challenges;**
- **Be willing to consider the potential value of coaching in relation to the headteacher's wellbeing and capacity and retention in role, and how this may impact positively on the wider school community;**
- **Respond with a commitment to consider funding headteacher coaching if it is requested and if an appropriate coaching provider can be identified and be prepared to offer it if it is felt that it may be beneficial;**
- **Recognise that coaching, in order to be effective, must be a confidential process and do not expect the headteacher to disclose details of the discussions either formally or informally;**
- **Use exit interviews with departing headteachers to establish whether they have experienced any of the challenges that might have been addressed through coaching.**
- **Be aware of the significance of creating a safe space for coaching in which there are no conflicts of interest between the parties**
- **Employ coaches with appropriate and relevant professional experience and qualifications to ensure the quality of coaching**
- **Develop a model of supervision for coaches to ensure that the quality of coaching is maintained and to offer coaches suitable means to access support and opportunity for their own professional development;**
- **Make use of relevant coach training and education opportunities to ensure that coaching practices are taking account of current research and evidence;**
- **As a combined sector seek opportunities to develop a specific professional organisational code of ethics for coaching in education to ensure that coaching in education has rigour and has independent profession-led quality assurance.**

Teacher and headteacher unions are recommended to:

- **Have coaching offers available to members with some funds allocated to this;**
- **Promote the value that some members find in engaging with coaching to help to raise awareness of it and reduce any stigma that might be attached to it;**

Research Overview

The NEU funded coaching programme was designed to support headteachers to meet the challenges of their role. The coaching was provided by Integrity Coaching, (an Independent coaching organisation) and was led by its director and former headteacher, Viv Grant. 2018-19 was the third year that the union had funded this programme, with the initial funding decision made by the NUT prior to its amalgamation with the ATL to form the NEU.

Headteachers were invited to take up fully funded places on the coaching programme and all participants were volunteers and self-referred. The cohort of headteachers in the programme for 2018-19 was 39. The coaching model adopted by Integrity Coaching was described by its director Viv Grant, as follows:

"Our coaching model as an ontological root, in that it has been designed to enable headteachers to lead with integrity out of who they are."

The intention of the coaching programme approach is that

1. The headteacher remains at the centre of the coaching conversation.
2. The headteacher always sets the agenda.
3. Their coach helps them to make meaning and find depth of purpose in their own leadership journey, by taking account of key themes as and when they arise.

Prior to one-to-one coaching the headteacher coachees engaged in introductory training to develop their understanding of coaching and were then coached by coaches with whom they were matched.

The NEU funding allowed Integrity Coaching to provide six two-hour coaching sessions to each headteacher on the programme across the school year. There were check-in phone calls or skype calls available in between these sessions. Integrity Coaching coaches recognise central themes that often need to be attended to in the coaching process. These key themes are detailed below.

1. What matters most to you?
2. Your lived experience of leadership
3. Your values, your school
4. Growing through the challenges
5. Your identity as a leader
6. The authentic self

The personalised nature of the support on offer, meant that these themes could be addressed in the manner that was most appropriate for each individual, as and when they arose within the coaching conversations.

Research Overview

The purpose of this research was to establish the efficacy of the NEU funded headteacher coaching programme.

The research investigated the impact of coaching as perceived by the headteachers. These perceptions were considered in relation to the expectations of the impact of coaching held by the coaching provider and coaches. The main research questions set up at the start of the evaluative research project were:

- **How does participation in the coaching programme affect headteachers' perceptions of their leadership role?**

- **How does participation in coaching affect headteachers' self-efficacy?**

- **In what wys does participation in coaching influence headteachers' decision making and capacity to meet the challenges of leadership?**

Additional questions that were intended to be explored through the lens of the participants' perceptions are:

- **What (if any) are the contemporary challenges of school leadership that coaching helps to address?**

- **Is there a need for coaching in schools?**

- **What impact can/does coaching have on wider school improvement and pupil outcomes?**

- **What is the impact of coaching on the individual, their personal life and well-being?**

- **What are the barriers that can prevent school leaders from pursuing coaching?**

Research methods

In the busy life of a headteacher it may be difficult to separate out the impact of coaching from other influences on their capacities in their role, but the research design offered opportunities for the participants to focus on their experiences of coaching at several key points across the year. Data was collected through:

- **Questionnaires completed by headteachers being coached,**
- **Telephone interviews with a sample of headteachers being coached,**
- **Telephone interviews with a sample of coaches,**
- **Focus groups with headteachers.**

Details of the methods are given in appendix 1.

The Research Team

CollectivEd

The Centre for Coaching, Mentoring and Professional Learning, at Leeds Beckett University, was commissioned by the National Education Union (NEU) to evaluate the Headteacher Coaching Programme. Both researchers behind this report took an infomed perspective to the research and design approach.

Professor Rachel Lofthouse

The principal researcher was Professor Rachel Lofthouse, the director of CollectivED. Professor Lofthouse has a background in coaching research and is Professor of Teacher Education in the Carnegie School of Education at Leeds Beckett University.

Ruth Whiteside

Te research associate was Ruth Whiteside. Ruth is a former teacher and senior leader and currently works freelance. Her Masters dissertation focused on coaching within a primary school setting.

Recognising the challenges of Headship

The complexity of headship

The coaching offer was made to headteachers in acknowledgment of the challenges that they face. During the evaluation the nature and impact of these challenges were explored.

Through focusing on the experience of coaching, and considering the impact of coaching, details were revealed about the life of headteachers. Work-life balance, wellbeing, and the challenges of the role were discussed.

Both the headteachers and the coaches described Headship as made up of many challenges, and they also acknowledged that headteachers have limited control over some of the dimensions of the role.

One headteacher (in a questionnaire response) wrote that "the demands of headship can be overwhelming".

During an interview one headteacher compared school improvement to an oil tanker:

"As turning things around takes a long time and so it's important to have a sense of what is achievable and manageable".

The coaches' understanding of this was heightened by the fact that they had a sequence of coaching conversations with more than one headteacher and they naturally synthesised the patterns of the challenges that the headteachers faced.

One coach was clear that "headteachers' work is always about children and young people in their care and how they can best serve them", but that this created challenges. Headteachers face the challenge of building and maintaining relationships with colleagues, including senior leadership teams, parents and governors or trustees.

One coach suggested that headteachers face "mission creep" and that they "need time and space to chew over tussles".

Headteachers have to deal with complexity in terms of their pupils, their staff and the wider community, with a decline in other public services being noted as negatively impacting on some families.

They also face significant pressures from the system, with the most common being referred to as pressures of Ofsted and of financial decisions at a time of diminishing school budgets.

Recognising the challenges of Headship

When asked whether challenges were most keenly felt by new headteachers the coaches all expressed a view that headteachers face new challenges each year regardless of how experienced they become in role. This was summarised by one coach who said that:

"The more you understand something the more there is to worry about and headteachers need to understand all the things that they cannot control and what the greater risks are that they can take. People don't pace themselves. I don't think burnout suddenly happens."

The emotional toil of headship

Two headteachers used the words "difficult" and "turbulent" to describe their school year. Another headteacher said that he felt it was not always easy to think far enough ahead about the implications of any decision he had to make.

Another key theme emerging from headteacher interview responses was that they tend to experience being a head teacher as a lonely job that leaves them feeling isolated. This was reinforced by a coach who had previously been a headteacher who said that:

"In my own experience of headship I felt extreme isolation and loneliness and I always had a sense that I was going to be judged."

This loneliness is an interesting phenomenon because during the focus group one participant made the point that it is "rarely recognised that during any day headteachers have hundreds of interactions and that most often people want something or to tell you about a problem in their lives".

He went on to describe how this has an impact on the headteachers, saying that when he had left one school he felt a relief because he realised "how much of peoples' lives you carry, and every time you see a child in the playground you know something about that family".

He also expressed this as an "emotional weight, which unless you manage it, erodes your resilience over time".

Coach Response

"In many of the conversations we talk about relationships with others, especially their leadership colleagues, and also aggressive families who don't accept being told. It is essentially focused on how to manage relationships. The headteachers tend to introduce the theme of dependency on the headteacher. And we consider how they are building other people up to share the load."

The Immediate impact of Coaching

Coaching had early benefits

While coaching is not offered as a 'quick-fix' this research indicates that it can start to have positive impact from the outset. The impact that coaching had was illustrated through the responses to the interim questionnaire which was sent to headteachers after one term of coaching.

70% of the headteachers responded to this questionnaire and the key findings from this showed a clear relationship between the personal and the professional benefits:

"The goals are centred around work-life balance and this impact on professional performance and resilience."

"Coaching will continue to enable me to tackle challenging circumstances and scenarios in a calm way that will mean I retain a sense of optimism in the solutions I am constantly working on."

"I am learning that my priority is the children in my school and helping staff to be the best they can be, so that our children are happy and learning."

"The coaching sessions are giving me more confidence in my leadership skills and I expect this confidence to grow throughout the year."

A thematic analysis of the responses to the questionnaire showed early evidence that, even at this early stage, a significant majority of headteachers regarded their experiences of coaching as supporting their progress in meeting their goals (as identified through the coaching) both personally and professionally. The key themes emerging were:

- **Coaching helping them to gain a greater sense of work-life balance;**
- **Coaches providing them with emotional support;**
- **Gaining confidence in their leadership role through coaching;**
- **Coaching helping them to get better at developing other staff within school and improving working relationships, e.g. with governors;**
- **Developing their ability to reflect and drill down to specifics of challenges during and following the coaching conversations;**
- **Coaching as a process which supported problem-solving and the need to cope with continuing demands of the job, including emergency management;**
- **Managing difficult issues and people by gaining new perspectives through coaching and being able to think more strategically;**
- **Coaching helping them recognise of the importance of developing teachers and systems to better support children's learning and wellbeing.**

Coaching supports wellbeing and growth

Coaching supported wellbeing

When asked about how they would define the success criteria of coaching headteachers the coaches all expressed similar objectives, which included allowing headteachers to talk about and act on their wellbeing. One coach explained this as:

"Headteachers would be talking about their own well-being quite strongly and will have taken steps as a result to put their own needs higher up the agenda and will be able to give examples".

The evidence above indicates that this started early on in the coaching. The focus of coaching the headteacher as a whole person (beyond their professional remit) is critical because, as already indicated, the headteachers felt that their role can take its toll on them personally and had an impact on their resilience, health and wellbeing.

One of the ways that the coaching programme worked was by acknowledging and addressing personal aspects as well as the professional challenges.

Coaching was described as "supportive" and helped one headteacher to "build resilience to face the range of challenges while maintaining wellbeing". As such it was a reciprocal relationship; feeling more resilient supported headteachers to deal with the pressures of the job, but also to gain more capacity to deal with the pressures reduced stress and supported a sense of wellbeing and boosted the headteachers' self-confidence.

As one headteacher stated in the focus group "I am more emotionally resilient and can cope with the major decisions and issues that daily come my way".

Headteachers also seemed to be more willing to make their own wellbeing a priority. One stated during a focus group that she had the "confidence to speak up about the impact [of work] on my wellbeing" and another saw coaching as essential in "making time for me".

Another interesting response from all of the headteachers who attended the focus groups was that because they had recognised the importance of coaching on their wellbeing their schedule of coaching meetings had not been cancelled or changed.

They reflected on this with some surprise given how much of their other workload became moveable or was interrupted. While prioritising time for the coaching could be seen as a self-indulgent act there was evidence that the impact on the headteachers meant that their emotions were more balanced at work.

Coaching supports wellbeing and growth

Coaching aligns values with practice

Another success criterion offered by a coach was that coaching would help the headteachers "to be good solid leaders able to lead schools with confidence", and to "feel like they are a good head".

In a focus group one headteacher stated that they had gained "confidence to implement some very quick wins".

In one questionnaire a headteacher wrote that having greater confidence since the coaching meant a greater sense of direction and purpose, both professionally and personally.

Meanwhile, in an interview one headteacher indicated that coaching had enabled them to "recalibrate self and goals".

In another interview one headteacher suggested he felt he was "a more human and humane leader" through coaching as he had become better able to work with his staff to focus on the values of the school.

Another headteacher referred to the fact that coaching allowed him to stay more balanced and less reactive with his staff. In the final questionnaire one headteacher stated that coaching

"Helped me come to terms with changes I had no choice in and therefore I am in a better mental place to begin to make the plans we need to".

Coach Response

"At some point I might ask about personal trajectory. That leads the perspective above and beyond the job they are doing now. I am there to support and uphold the individual in the role. I am interested in who and how they are."

Coaching enhances professional practice

Coaching builds leadership capacity

Unlike other forms of support or training that can be made available to headteachers the coaches did not enter into the contract to give specific advice, information or guidance for the leadership role.

The headteachers' evaluation of their experience of coaching was that it had supported them in building their capacity for managing the complexities of school and had had an influence on the work of their colleagues. In the focus group several key outcomes were shared on with the discussion leading to a consensus that the following impact were common:

"Having time to prioritise the issues that need resolving."

"Competence; developed decision making, strategic ability, soft skills to influence others"

"Allowed me to work through key challenges"

"Contribution to empowerment of staff"

As already demonstrated, the emotional impact of headship can be huge. In interviews two headteachers said that the coaching had helped with the emotions they experienced in what had been a tough year for them, both professionally and personally.

The coaching allowed one respondent to "remind myself that this is my school, I can take control" (as previously, this respondent had begun to feel the school was lurching out of her control), and the other said "coaching focused my attention on what I can take responsibility for, and what I can't control".

70% of the headteachers interviewed agreed that coaching had helped their decision-making, with the other two suggesting it was less about the decision itself and more about the processes underpinning the decision.

One coach stated that success criterion for coaching was that the headteacher would have "a clear vision and purpose" which they recognised was difficult to achieve "when the school or the head is in a bad place".

The evidence that coaching can help resolve this was reinforced by the questionnaire responses in which headteachers recognised that their goals changed frequently depending on day-to-day issues, and that coaching allowed them time to think more strategically about their long-term goals, and thus they had maintained their vision for their school more effectively.

Coaching enhances professional practice

During the focus group discussions, it became clear that the impact of coaching on developing greater confidence was not just good for self-esteem but was also critical in leadership. One headteacher explained to her peers, that "this confidence gives me enhanced clarity about my own vision for leadership, and I have developed an authentic leadership persona and identity."

Coaching supports distributed leadership

These impact reflected the desired success criteria that the coaches articulated about their work. One coach explained this as follows:

"Some headteachers see being a head as doing more rather than doing differently. Being able to think about how to make the best use of staff is important. They need to be not overprotective, not infantilising, and they need to realise that sometimes they don't demand enough of their staff."

Coaching creates a sense of purpose

Thus, as well as helping headteachers to manage their schools and staff, coaching seemed to contribute to their leadership of their schools, particularly as they developed self-awareness of their professional identity and capacity, took time to think more strategically and took greater account of their own values. The statements shared in the focus groups revealed these qualities:

"A clear road map, professionally, socially and emotionally."

"Re-focus on the bigger picture, not get caught up in the day to day."

"Self-confidence to believe in our core values and key decision making".

In the second round of interviews, all respondents agreed that coaching had helped their decision-making. One headteacher described the big strategic decisions as "a fork in the road" and that it had been beneficial to talk these decisions through with the coach as it allowed him to see more obviously the pros and cons of the possible ways forward.

Another described working with the coach as having given him a sense of perspective and an opportunity to take a step back and reflect properly. Coaching had a pronounced effect on all the respondents in terms of their ability to make more strategic, thoughtful decisions.

Coach Response

"It is important to avoid a destructive tension between who they are and how they lead. Coaching is tacitly supporting them to be true to themselves and finding ways of explaining that and how they can help other people see that."

Coaching enables professional development

Coaching offers time and space for change

During interviews two headteachers admitted that despite applying for the coaching programme they had been sceptical at first. One said that after a previous experience of coaching, they felt that this was going to be an unnecessary use of resources. However, that same headteacher said it was "an invaluable use of my time".

The sections above give some indication of how this model of coaching made the difference in the working and personal lives of the headteachers. The mechanism for this process was further revealed through the data. Recurring themes were the 'space and time' that coaching allowed for 'reflection' and to become 'focused', as well as the 'support' that the coaches offered.

In interviews all the headteachers talked about the value of the coaching session as being given permission to take time and reflect on decisions, rather than 'fire-fighting' all the time.

Self-doubt and lack of confidence meant that some of the headteachers did not always feel they were able to make strategic decisions, and they said that coaching had developed them as more reflective practitioners. Gaining 'perspective' was how one headteacher described it, because it had meant they could slow down and think things through properly.

Coaching as a quality process

The changes described above are critical in professional development of the headteachers, but their success is dependent on the skill of the coach and the quality of the coaching conversation that the headteacher and the coach engaged in. In the questionnaires some headteachers commented on the skill of their coaches in supporting them to find their own solutions to thorny problems.

To illustrate this, the table on the following page lists some of the coaches' comments about how they define successful coaching. These criteria were coded (during analysis) as 'headteachers engaging with identity work; becoming more reflective'. These expectations of success are compared in the table with comments from the headteachers. This helps to demonstrate the extent to which successful coaching was achieved.

Coach Response

"The coaching journey helps people explore their strengths and weaknesses. It is for both personal and professional development. They are trying things on during the coaching conversation. I think coaching is different for every person - not one size fits all. Every person I have worked with has developed a different way. It is about supporting them with their individual needs. In training everyone gets the same thing. Coaching is a better model for heads because they are getting what they need."

Coaching enables professional development

Headteachers engaging with identity work; becoming more reflective	
Coaches' definitions of successful coaching process (all quotes)	**Headteachers' reflections on the process of coaching (all quotes)**
"I would be looking for some sort of shift in them, greater self-awareness, ability to step away, better able to self- coach to ask themselves questions that really matter, getting away from the busy treadmill."	Being guided in self-reflection and made to 'dig deeper'. (Focus group) The coach doesn't supply answers but helps to uncover answers that have been there all the time. (Interview) Ability to unpack complex issues, gain perspective and find ways forward. (Focus group)
"I want them to have conversation about their strengths."	Time to reflect on positives rather than only hearing the negatives. (Focus group) Coaching allows and helps you to realise you are being rational about situations. (Focus group) The space to stop and actually consider what I do well as a leader. (Questionnaire)
"There is an element of offloading that people find helpful. It can be emotional. It is helpful to share this with someone who knows and understands the job and listens with an informed ear."	Coaching was nurturing…indulging myself in proper strategic work. (Interview) Coaching was supportive emotionally. (Interview)
"Coaching usually raises questions about professional identity. It goes beneath the school's performance. It includes consideration of who they are and is integrated with professional identity."	It gives me the space to look at things from a different perspective and to think about how I will change my management style. (Questionnaire) Coaching makes me feel like I own the solutions and that I can move forward with them with confidence. (Interview)

Coaching sustains the education system

Coaching supports headteacher retention

There is evidence that coaching of headteachers supported their health, wellbeing and retention in their posts. One headteacher wrote a comment in the focus group "I am managing my health and balancing my work/life much more healthily now".

Another stated "I'm still in the job of headteacher – at the start of coaching I didn't think I would be" and a third focus group participant stated that coaching was "Keeping me in the job – time to reflect on positives rather than only hearing the negatives".

Further evidence of this emerged from the final interviews with one headteacher describing the job as "a millstone round my neck" but continued that they had found the energy and drive to carry on because of the coaching.

In the same way another headteacher said they had been sceptical about coaching because they were very close to quitting the role, due to "the pressures of the job". That headteacher is now still in role and very much more positive, having found the coaching to be "supportive emotionally".

The impact that coaching has on retention should not be overlooked. One headteacher in the focus group wrote "sustainability" on his card. During the resulting discussion he talked more about this. He had been a headteacher for more than ten years in several schools and he was proud of his new found "ability to deal with the job".

He contrasted this with what he perceived as the current common "systemic problem of single-use heads", in other words of headteachers who were not in post more than a few years and did not progress to subsequent leadership posts.

Coaching creates self-efficacy and collective efficacy

The evidence from this evaluative research suggests that coaching of headteachers has the potential to help maintain sustainability in the school workforce. This can be seen as building medium to long term capacity in the profession at individual and collective levels. Some of this comes from the direct impact of coaching on the headteacher.

The emotional support felt by coached headteachers helped them to maintain their sense of self-efficacy and ability to manage 'the quagmire of everyday stuff'. It was recognised by one respondent that the coaching focuses very much on the coachee finding their own answers and ways forward, thereby fuelling their self-confidence and trust in self.

Coaching sustains the education system

Given the complexity of the role, the responses suggest that there is a need for a level of support and/or supervision for headteachers to enable them to manage their roles effectively and safely.

All headteachers referred to the way in which the coaching had given them greater clarity and purpose, or vision, for their school. This is the sort of impact that extends beyond coping better with the job week by week and can help to explain how coaching might sustain headteachers in the profession and help them to develop more sustainable working practices and cultures which also impacts on others.

Questionnaire responses illustrated this. One headteacher wrote about "problems being seen as opportunities" as a result of the coaching programme. Another wrote that they were now less likely to dwell on the "negativity" when events at school threaten to "engulf" them.

There was a sense that the coaching allowed the coachee to take stock of where they were, whether professionally or personally, and thus see the bigger picture. Another headteacher wrote "I am learning to have more perspective about things I have absolutely no control over" so that they could re-focus their attention on what they could control.

Coaching provided the headteachers with time to think more clearly about those demands. This illustrated that coaching met another success criterion offered by a coach during interview;

"I want heads to feel more resilient. To have an agency with a narrative that is within their control, and to recognise that the person you have the most control over is yourself and that you can reconnect with yourself".

Coaching has a school-wide impact

Having opportunities to reflect on and develop longer term plans and strategies is a critical component of school leadership, but there then has to be a way for these to be shared with and continued to be worked on with colleagues and governors.

This is where the collective impact of the headteacher being coached started to take shape. In interviews the headteachers talked about how coaching had impacted on how effectively they communicated strategy. One called it having a "common language".

In questionnaires, several of the headteachers wrote that they were already using, or were planning to use, coaching as a strategic tool for the senior leadership teams, and later, their teaching staff.

Coaching sustains the education system

One headteacher has used the DISC personality profile test to assess their staff team and how well it works, with a view to improving communication and self-awareness. This had come about as a result of working with their coach on understanding self, others and teams.

This type of secondary impact was further illustrated in the focus groups where one headteacher stated that they now had more "tools, strategies, and ideas which were previously unknown, and that can be implemented in school".

In interviews four headteachers explained they now had more coaching conversations in their schools, particularly with the senior leader teams. This allowed the teams to come up with their own solutions and meant the headteachers felt more able to let others make decisions, rather than feeling like they always had to 'tell' others, or to assume complete responsibility.

Coaching for the heads seemed to also empower other senior leaders. The evidence suggests then that the coaching programme had a beneficial impact on the school community, particularly on those who worked most closely with the head. This is therefore potentially a cost-effective way to ensure school development and staff well-being.

In interviews some headteachers indicated that being coached was also impacting on pupils. It appeared to have contributed to some headteachers developing a more relational behaviour strategy, including re-writing their behaviour policies and implementing programmes like restorative justice into their schools. In such cases therefore coaching the headteacher led to a change in school culture.

Coaching can be transformative

The discussion about school culture was extended in the focus group by another headteacher who had written that coaching had "enabled [her] leadership skills to transform in an alternative head role", one which she said allowed her to align her values more closely with her practice.

This outcome related to an extended description given by one coach who believed that through coaching "headteachers experience an integration of their professional role and their soul, the link between the professional sensibility and the values of the core self".

He went on to suggest that "contemporary headship culture encourages a disconnect." He elaborated further by stating that in his experience of working with headteachers over many years and in several roles, he had found that "relatively new headteachers have a tendency to over-adapt and tolerate that separation, which for some headteachers becomes intolerable over time."

He concluded that "some headteachers come to coaching to reconnect with their sense of vocation as a leader" which allows them to "shift towards values-based leadership". The evidence seems to indicate that for some at least this was true.

Coaching relies of specalist expertise

The unique and bespoke qualities of coaching

To conclude this research report it is important to reiterate that the evaluation was of a very specific programme of headteacher coaching. This matters for two reasons: firstly, to clarify that the evidence of the impact of this coaching should not be assumed of other models, and secondly, to draw attention to the characteristics of this specific programme which the headteachers had stated had assured its quality.

Their recognition of the quality and value of coaching was illustrated during one focus group discussion where the headteachers all confirmed with each other that they had prioritised the coaching, ensuring that they had not missed sessions. It was further reinforced by the statement that "There should be a protected grant for new heads to be coached."

There are several key characteristics of this coaching programme that are worthy of elaboration because the evidence from the headteachers was that they had created the quality of the practice and the degree of impact. A genuine success of this coaching programme was that it created unique opportunities for headteachers to talk about their work and themselves as professionals as well as on a personal level.

Some of this was made possible because of the time allocated to it (each coaching session lasted two hours), the one-to-one face-to-face interaction of the coaching conversation, and the maintenance of the relationship between half-termly coaching conversations through occasional phone calls.

The location and venue of the coaching conversations was also relevant. While a couple of coaches met their headteachers at their school to be shown around, the coaching conversations all took place off-site in a place where the headteacher felt comfortable.

These venues included coffee shops, hotel lounges, dedicated coaching spaces at the coaches' own setting, including garden studios, a converted windmill, and even walking, both in countryside and urban areas.

All the headteachers travelled some distance for their coaching sessions (they were never in the local area) as this contributed to the confidentiality of the conversations. This travelling time, either by train or car, was seen by the headteachers as part of their thinking time both prior to and following on from the coaching conversation itself.

Coaching relies of specalist expertise

The importance of coaches' independence

Headteachers particularly valued the fact that coaches were not connected to their school in any way and had no vested interests. Four headteachers in the first interviews mentioned the importance to them of this independent space so that they could get to the bottom of difficult issues. They talked about the significance of this being that confidentiality and 'head space' was maintained.

Coaching had been a supportive process that had allowed them to talk openly and honestly. They stated that this does not happen with anyone else, e.g. with union rep, governors, other head teachers in the area, because of the vested interests involved.

The importance of the coach independence was reinforced in the final interviews. The convergence of these ideas from headteachers in interviews was significant as they could only realistically be drawing on their own experiences.

The focus group gave a chance for a wider group of headteachers to share their evaluation of the coaching and these statements written at the start of the focus groups at the end of the programme confirmed these qualities:

"Skill of the coach at identifying the issue"

"Coach has no vested interest – important"

"Blue-sky thinking without judgement"

"A place to explore issues without judgement"

"A safe space"

"Confidential space to have honest and open conversations that lead to clarity in direction"

The importance of coaches' expertise

To better understand how these qualities were generated and sustained in the coaching it is important to know more about the coaches, their skills and backgrounds, and how Integrity Coaching maintained these standards.

Coaching relies of specalist expertise

There were three key dimensions:

- **the coaches had a depth of knowledge and experience that they brought to bear in coaching practice;**
- **they were skilled coaches and had a refined understanding of what coaching is;**
- **they recognised the importance of coaching being individualised.**

The interviews with the coaches and the programme leader offered evidence for how these qualities were achieved. The coaches were not simply recruited from other fields and then trained as coaches for this programme, but instead have all been practicing as coaches for some time (between four and twenty years) and they all also practice as coaches beyond this specific funded programme.

The coaches recruited to this programme did not all have the same professional background or coaching qualifications and many of them also had portfolio careers, with their other roles being quite diverse (see table on the following page).

The professional diversity and maturity (illustrated in table on the following page) contributed to the collective depth of knowledge that the individual coaches brought to coaching and working as associates with Integrity Coaching. As one coach said:

"I enjoy coaching - especially school leaders. I do quite a lot around behaviour and this leads to exploring their own behaviour. I use applied psychology and transactional analysis. These are useful frameworks."

Their breadth of skills ensured that the nature of coaching offered through this programme was not formulaic. When reflecting on working with the different headteachers, one coach noted that:

"their individual preference for this kind of work makes a difference to the nature of the coaching I practice, for example, with one it is very practical and with another it is deeply psychological, almost spiritual".

It is also interesting to note that while many of the coaches had direct experience of school leadership, this tended to be over ten years ago.

This perhaps allowed them to hold the coach stance (rather than a more advisory stance) but did not seem to diminish their credibility as coaches for current headteachers.

Coaching relies of specalist expertise

Characteristic	Example from Coaches
Professional background	• I taught in primary schools for 10 years in the 70s and 80s. I was acting headteacher in one school. Then I had roles in the local authority. • I've been in educational leadership and I work as a consultant. I have experience of working with headteachers especially around behaviour management. • I have been a teacher and a headteacher in secondary comprehensive. I have experience of being a school leader but that finished in 2001. I have been an education consultant since then. I have expertise in learning power research. • I have experience of senior local authority work around provision for children out of school and those with SEND. I was a tutor for the NUT.
Other current roles (in addition to headteacher coaching)	• Part of the CFBT team focused on behaviour support and excluded children and work on school improvement • I coach staff in local authorities. I also am a volunteer coach in a Cancer support centre and do some voluntary mentoring in not-for-profit organisations. • I also practice as a counsellor and therapist.
Coaching accreditation or other relevant qualifications	• Certificated through the Academy of Executive Coaching • Member of International Coaching Federation (ICF) • Trained as transactional analysis psychotherapist

Coaching relies of specalist expertise

The importance of coaches' ongoing professional development

The coaches were aware of their own development of practice, and how their skills had developed over time.

Some sought formal acknowledgement of this, for example through certification with the International Coaching Federation which one coach said had kept her "on track and makes sure I am performing at a high level" and noted that as a result she was "much more aware of coaching skills".

In particular they have developed skills at asking deep questions - not to generate a battery of responses or quick solutions but to develop deeper, more critical thinking to support headteachers in their leadership role, as testified to by the headteachers.

They were particularly aware of how their work as coaches differed from their work in other fields and where the boundaries lie with other forms of support. One coach said:

"It is a different skill set to being a consultant. As a consultant I am telling people. As a coach I ask powerful questions and I am getting the client to have the solutions. Sometimes I ask would you be interested in me putting my consulting hat on."

This clarity of purpose was essential, as another coach said:

"A few headteachers understand what coaching is but more often they are not sure what they have volunteered for. In the first session we spend time understanding what coaching is on the spectrum. It is not counselling. I point out where it gets close to mentoring and sometimes people do ask for advice. And I help people work out what can inform their options."

The programme rested on a model of coaching which started with 'contracting' and this helped to develop a shared understanding of what was to come, including when a coach might signpost to a headteacher when and how their other needs may be addressed beyond the coaching.

As an organisation Integrity Coaching also ensured that the coaches in this programme had opportunities for professional development and personal reflection and one way that this was managed was through supervision.

Their team of associates (coaches) met three times during the year to discuss a mixture of business matters and also undertake group supervision, which was provided by a supervisor external to the organisation.

Coaching relies of specalist expertise

Viv Grant, Director, Integrity Coaching

"It is good practice for the coaches to have separate supervision. Professional qualification is important but does not guarantee credibility. It is about sharing our values. My coaches have to have a good understanding of life in the education sector and what life is like for school leaders. They have to show depth in coaching as a reflective process. They have to be able to conduct long conversations and ask key questions."

Coaching as an investment

The evidence suggests that the headteachers recognised the positive impact coaching had had on their capacity to meet the challenges of headship and would have liked to continue with it if possible. All the headteachers interviewed talked about the cost of coaching.

One head had met with a more local coach and had agreed a coaching programme for the next year, with two thirds of the cost paid for by the school and a third paid by herself. The other head teachers were looking for ways to buy in a coach more locally, but all said that their school budgets were dire.

Given the nature of school budgets, itself a challenge of headship, the headteachers recognised that their coaching might have been seen colleagues of governors as a luxury. However, they all felt that funding high quality coaching provision for headteachers should be seen as be a justifiable investment in the system.

Conclusion

Given the complexity of the role of headteachers, there is a need for a level of support and/or supervision for headteachers to enable them to manage their roles effectively and safely. The main research questions framing this evaluation considered the extent to which coaching might be a suitable model for achieving this by asking;

• How does participation in the coaching programme affect headteachers' perceptions of their leadership role?

• How does participation in coaching affect headteachers' self-efficacy?

• In what ways does participation in coaching influence headteachers' decision making and capacity to meet the challenges of leadership?

The evidence and discussion presented in this report answers these questions in detail and it is reasonable to draw the conclusion that the coaching proved to be a mechanism for making a difference in both the personal and professional lives of headteachers.

As such it can be claimed that coaching made a contribution to the sustainability of leadership, the teaching profession and the education sector more widely. The coaching was characterised by being individualised and responsive to needs and preferred styles of engagement of coachees whilst being offered within a common programme framework that was quality assured and delivered at the agreed cost.

The coaching provided essential emotional support to the headteachers enabling a sense of self-efficacy and developing their ability to manage 'the quagmire of everyday stuff'. The coaching focused very much on the coachee finding their own answers and ways forward, thereby fuelling their self-confidence and trust in self.

The key recommendations are outlined at the start of this report.

Appendix 1: The Evaluative Approach

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was given through Leeds Beckett University. All participation in this research was voluntary and confidentiality will be maintained throughout this report and any subsequent forms of dissemination.

Viv Grant acted as the 'gatekeeper' in terms of providing the participants with project information and the invitation to participate in the research. All the headteachers and coaches (including Viv Grant) engaging in the coaching programme were invited to participate. All participants gave informed consent prior to engaging with the research.

Integrity Coaching undertook mid-point evaluations and a final evaluation. The purpose of this CollectivED research project was to add further depth to the internal programme evaluations. This report deals only with the CollectivED research findings.

Data collection tools and methods of analysis

The research used four methods to gather data: questionnaires completed by headteacher participants, telephone interviews with a sample of the headteachers, focus groups of the headteachers and telephone interviews with a sample of coaches.

The findings were analysed as the data was collected and used to inform the next phase of research (e.g. to identify valuable questions for subsequent interviews).

Questionnaires

Questionnaires were sent to all to headteachers being coached, using an online survey tool three times across the year in January, April and July (see appendix 1).

The first questionnaire was designed to consider what expectations the participants had of the coaching thus far, and in future sessions; the second was designed to look at where the participants were at that point in the programme and evaluate the impact of the coaching so far; the third was designed to evaluate the whole programme over the course of that year and what the participants would now do with the experience.

Appendix 1: The Evaluative Approach

First Questionnaire

In the first questionnaire, participants were asked to answer the following questions:

- **In response to your hopes and goals that you set out at the beginning of the coaching programme, how are you doing/what progress has been made?**
- **How do these relate to your own personal and/or professional development?**
- **How do these relate to your school context?**
- **How do you expect the coaching process will continue to facilitate these outcomes through the year?**

Second Questionnaire

In the second questionnaire, participants were given a series of statements to respond to using a Likert scale, with each statement inviting the participant to explain their choice.

- **Coaching is positively impacting on my leadership skills.**
- **Coaching is giving me more confidence in my capacity as a school leader.**
- **Coaching has supported positive outcomes in the wider school community.**
- **Coaching is having a positive impact on my well-being.**

Third Questionnaire

In the third questionnaire, Participants were given a series of questions and asked to make a scaled choice: (Options: significantly less/less/not changed/more/significantly more)

- **How optimistic are you?**
- **How resilient do you feel?**
- **How satisfied do you feel in your job?**
- **How happy are you with your work-life balance?**
- **How confident are you in your leadership role?**
- **How effective are your communication skills?**
- **How effective is your leadership team?**
- **How strong are your relationships with others, (e.g. governors, parents, outside agencies?)**
- **Has your coaching this year supported you to make strategic plans for your school for the forthcoming year?**

Appendix 1: The Evaluative Approach

Demographics

Each questionnaire also asked for the following demographic information and participant code:

- **Gender**
- **Age**
- **Age phase of school/setting**
- **Type of school/setting**
- **Years as a senior leader**
- **Number of schools as a senior leader**
- **Years as a head teacher**
- **Number of schools as a head teacher**

The percentage of headteachers completing the first questionnaire was 79.5% of the cohort. Only (10% headteachers completed each of the second and third questionnaires. The demographic and professional breakdown is shown in table below.

Questionnaire	Percentage of respondents	No of yrs as SLT	No of schools as SLT	No of years as HT	No of schools as HT
Q1 (January)	79.5%	0-5 yrs - 29% 6-11 yrs - 29% 12-17 yrs - 23% Over 18 yrs - 9%	0-4 sch - 90% 5-8 sch - 10%	0-5 yrs - 65% 6-11 yrs - 23% 12-17 yrs - 13% 18 yrs + - 0%	1 sch - 71% 2 sch - 16% 3 sch - 10% 4 sch - 3%
Q2 (March)	10%	0-5 yrs - 25% 6- 11yrs – 0% 12-17 yrs - 50% Over 18 yrs - 25%	2 sch - 25% 3 sch - 25% 4 sch – 50%	0-5 yrs - 50% 6–11 yrs - 25% 12–17 yrs - 5%	1 sch - 50% 2 sch - 25% 3 sch - 25%
Q3 (July)	10%	0-5 yrs - 25% 6-11 yrs - 25% 12-17 yrs – 0% 18 yrs - 50%	3 sch - 25% 4 sch - 50% 7 sch - 25%	0- 5 yrs - 50% 6-11 yrs - 25% 12–17 yrs - 25%	1 sch - 25% 2 sch - 50% 3 sch - 25%

Appendix 1: The Evaluative Approach

Interviews with headteachers and coaches

All headteachers in the coaching programme and their coaches were invited to be interviewed and the sample selected represented the diversity of the participants, in terms of gender, the school phase that the headteachers worked in, their level of experience as headteachers and as coaches for this programme.

The sample was not selected to deliberately involve specific coach and headteacher coaching partnerships. One member of the research team interviewed all of the coaches and the other interviewed all of the headteachers.

Headteacher Interviews

There were two phases of telephone interviews with headteachers in March and July. There were 7 headteachers interviewed in March and 4 in July, with 2 of the interviewees being interviewed on both occasions. In total there were 4 male and 5 female headteachers interviewed which represented 23% of the cohort.

The headteachers interviewed led primary schools, a secondary pupil referral unit (PRU), a sixth form college and an independent special school. Some of the headteachers were new in post, others more experienced with some having been a head in more than one setting. The interviews were semi-structured around the following questions:

1. **Are you enjoying being coached? Why?**
2. **Has being coached supported your decision-making and if so, what difference is it making?**
3. **To what extent is this impacting on your school community?**
4. **Looking ahead, what would you hope the remaining coaching would do? (1st phase of interviews only)**
5. **Looking ahead, do you hope to be able to continue with coaching? (2nd phase of interviews only)**
6. **Is there anything you would change about the programme?**

Each headteacher interview lasted between 22 and 45 minutes and they were audio-recorded and transcribed.

Appendix 1: The Evaluative Approach

Coach interviews

There were six interviews with coaches which accounted for 60% of the coaches (3 male and 3 female), including with the programme leader who was also a coach.

Between them the coaches were coaching 24 of the headteachers in the programme (19 primary, 3 secondary, 1 pupil referral unit, 1 special school, 2 nursery and 1 prep school).

The interviews were semi-structured around the following questions:

1. What led to you to become a coach for this programme (have you been a headteacher yourself, have you coached previously etc.?)

2. How many headteachers are you coaching on this programme this year, what phase or sector do they work in and do you think this makes a difference?

3. What do you think are the key success criteria for your work on this programme?

4. Do you think there is a typical coaching 'journey' (engagement, openness, self-awareness, self-determination, confidence), what causes any differences in the journey?

5. How has your coaching developed over time (skills, repertoire, understanding etc.)?

The interviews with coaches lasted between 30 and 45 minutes and they were audio-recorded. Detailed notes were also taken at the time of interview and listening to the recordings and using the notes allowed a focused review of the interview data prior to analysis.

Analysis of interview data

Once the interviews with coaches and the first round of interviews with the headteachers were completed the research team met to review the data for an initial process of sense-making and started to recognise key themes emerging.

The researchers then took their own data set and independently clarified the key themes which emerged. These were based on recurring themes across the interviews and or those which were deduced by strong emphasis by individuals in their interviews. This holistic analysis of the data informed the design of the second round of interviews, the second and third questionnaires and the focus group.

Appendix 1: The Evaluative Approach

Focus Groups

Headteachers attending the July Integrity Coaching evaluation day were invited to take part in two focus groups. These involved 13 headteachers, which made up 33% of the cohort with 6 female and 7 male participants.

Seven of the headteachers participating in the focus group had not taken part in interviews. The headteachers had varied years of experience in the role of headteacher with some having been a head in more than one setting.

The participants were first asked to note down three key impact of their coaching this year on individual cards. These were then shared with the whole group who worked with the facilitator to suggest how they could be grouped together thematically.

This led to a more detailed discussion to unpack the answers given. Finally, the participants were shown key findings from the interviews with the coaches which outlined what they believed coaching could achieve, and a comparison was made.

Addressing limitations in the evaluation

This is not a comparative study and as such the research does not compare the experiences of headteachers engaged in other coaching models or other methods of headteacher support or training. The conclusions that we can reach relate to the evaluation of this coaching approach as a specific activity during the 2018-19 school year.

This report can also only account for the experiences of those headteachers and coaches who chose to engage with the research through completing questionnaires, volunteering to be interviewed and attending the focus groups.

Although 79.5% of the head teachers involved in the coaching programme responded to the first of the questionnaires, only 10% responded to each of the second and third questionnaires. There was some overlap between the three questionnaires, with three headteachers completing both the first and the last questionnaire for instance.

This means that the data from the second and third questionnaires cannot be considered to be a representative sample of the whole cohort, although it is nonetheless interesting to gain the perspective of these headteachers whose individual responses do add to the available evidence and therefore this data is still included in the report.

Appendix 1: The Evaluative Approach

The sample of the headteachers who engaged with at least one interview and / or the focus groups was 41%, and these methods offered the richest opportunity for data collection.

By including interviews with the coaches this research is able to draw upon their experiences of working closely with 24 of the 39 headteachers (62%). Due to the guarantee of confidentiality researchers did not ask for the names of the headteachers who they were coaching but it is possible that some of these 24 had not personally engaged with the data collection.

The researchers have a close interest in coaching, both professionally and through previous research. They were aware that this positionality could have altered the lens through which they viewed the evidence emerging.

As such they were particularly careful to do so with appropriate criticality, being careful not to highlight narratives just because they aligned with any preconceptions or prior experiences.

This was aided by the fact that despite this background neither researcher had previously researched or engaged in headteacher coaching specifically.

Prior to writing this final report the interim research summaries had been shared with both the participants of coaching and the NEU, and in addition Viv Grant (of Integrity Coaching) and Rachel Lofthouse had led a workshop at the 2019 BELMAS conference which allowed for an informed discussion with participants about the research and its significance.

About the Research

This report is based on the evaluation of the 2018-19 headteacher coaching programme provided by Integrity Coaching and funded by the National Education Union.

Researchers and report authors:
Professor Rachel Lofthouse & Ruth Whiteside from CollectivED at Leeds Beckett University

About CollectivED

CollectivED is a network of teachers and other professionals, academics and students as local, national and international friends, partners and practitioners. Their areas of research include mentoring and coaching as well as other professional development activities, such as lesson study, supervision and supported action enquiry.

Website: www.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/carnegie-school-of-education/research/collectived

Press Enquiries: Rachel Lofthouse (r.m.lofthouse@leedsbeckett.ac.uk)

About the NEU

The National Education Union is the largest education union in Europe, supporting and representing more than 450,000 members, including the majority of teachers.

Website: www.neu.org.uk

Press Enquiries: NEU press office (press@neu.org.uk)

About Integrity Coaching

Integrity Coaching is the UK's leading provider of coaching services for Head teachers and senior school leaders. The company supports sustainable approaches to school improvement, through the provision of personalised services that protect and nurture the emotional and psychological wellbeing of our nation's school leaders.

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