



Northern Ireland
Assembly

**COMMITTEE
FOR EDUCATION**

OFFICIAL REPORT
(Hansard)

Regional Training Unit

22 September 2010

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

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Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Miss Michelle McIlveen (Acting Chairperson)

Mrs Mary Bradley

Mr Trevor Lunn

Mr John McCallister

Mr John O'Dowd

Mrs Michelle O'Neill

Witnesses:

Dr Tom Hesketh

}Regional Training Unit

The Acting Chairperson (Miss McIlveen):

I welcome Dr Tom Hesketh, director of the Regional Training Unit (RTU). I hope, Dr Hesketh, that after your presentation you will stay to answer members' questions.

Dr Tom Hesketh (Regional Training Unit):

I thank the Committee for the opportunity to engage on a theme that is at the heart of what we in RTU are privileged to take forward; it is at the heart of educational policy and has enormous implications for countless young folk, their communities and for wider society.

The professional staff of RTU welcome your interest and your intended inquiry, the results of which will make a significant contribution to the growing interest and evidence base globally that school matters. A key variable among the numerous contributory factors to school success is leadership.

As members know, education reform is a global enterprise; there is much that we can import from successes elsewhere. There is much, too, that we in Northern Ireland have to offer the outside world about what works, particularly in the area of school leadership. That is a fact that Professor Tim Brighouse remarked on in the work that he undertook with the Belfast Education and Library Board and RTU as part of the Achieving Belfast initiative.

As members know, RTU is a multi-stakeholder body that has considerable wisdom on the topic across its professional officer base and management board. Today, therefore, I will make my presentation to you as the lead professional officer in the organisation rather than providing an agreed management board perspective, although I have no doubt that you may be interested in the agreed management board perspective in the future.

The paper that I submitted to the Committee in advance was structured around four main themes: school leadership matters; the global consensus on the key characteristics of successful school leadership; the global consensus on the characteristics of successful leadership in the context of socio-economic deprivation, which members are particularly interested in; and the wider work that RTU is privileged to engage in.

For the purposes of this session, I thought that, rather than reading from the paper, I should provide the Committee with some brief comments on the first theme and some more detailed comments on themes two and three, which are closer to what I think is the at heart of the Committee's interest. The wider work of the RTU, which is dealt with in theme four, may come up in members' comments or questions. Therefore, if members are prepared to proceed on that basis, I will begin.

The first theme is: school leadership matters. The evidence base for leadership being linked to learning has grown enormously in volume and sophistication, as has the research methodology

that is applied to it. There is now global consensus on the link between leadership practices and pupil learning. As you would expect, it is a complex issue, and a complex chain of variables links leadership and leadership practices to student learning. However, the extent to which leadership affects learning is usually described in two main ways: directly and indirectly.

The direct impact suggests that leaders contribute between 5% and 7% of the cross-school variation in pupil learning, which, at first glance, might appear to be on the small side. However, 5% to 7% of the cross-school variation constitutes one quarter of the total school effects. In contrast, teachers account for one third of the variation across schools. That is the direct impact.

However, the indirect impact of leadership is perhaps more profound and significant. The indirect impact consists of the effect that the principal and other senior leaders in the school have on teacher or, more generally, staff efficacy. For example, principals can have a significant impact on the internal states of their teachers and, in turn, on teacher efficacy by working on motivation, abilities and work conditions, such as climate, culture and school organisation. Teacher efficacy is the key ingredient in a school's success.

The second theme is the characteristics of successful leadership, which is, essentially, what the Committee specifically requested us to comment on. Since leadership matters, leaders have a tremendous responsibility to get it right. The good news from research is that we now know a great deal about what getting it right means. Successful school leaders have recognisable characteristics that are cognitive and affective. However, there is now convincing evidence from research that the core practices of successful leaders have four major components: first, they set directions; secondly, they develop the capacity of all the people in the school; thirdly, they redesign the organisation so that it is aligned to the core business; fourthly, they manage the programme for learning and teaching.

All that is reflected in the various frameworks in Northern Ireland that describe and articulate affective leadership, from the national standards for head teachers, which underpin much of the work of the RTU and the professional qualification for headship (PQH), to the Education and Training Inspectorate's Together Towards Improvement framework. It is also enshrined in the Every School a Good School policy framework from the Department.

The Committee's interest in the theme of leadership in the face of social and economic deprivation is reflected in developments elsewhere, including the New Leaders for New Schools programme in the United States and the work of the National College for School Leadership in Nottingham on schools in challenging circumstances. There is also the celebrated work of London Challenge with inner-London schools. That is a success story: five or six years ago, student attainment in many London schools was below the national average; as a result of the work of London Challenge, those schools' attainment is now above the national average.

We have also worked with the Institute for Education in London on leadership on the front line, a copy of which I forwarded to members. Locally, at the behest of the Minister, "Combatting Underachievement" was the focus of a North/South Ministerial Council meeting. I had the privilege of chairing a symposium at that meeting, involving several local head teachers.

The socio-economic context is, of course, particularly difficult. Study after study suggests that socio-economic status (SES) typically explains more than half the variation in student achievement across schools. Family socio-economic status is a crude proxy for powerful conditions in the home that have a significant influence on pupils' success at school. Among those conditions are: family work patterns, academic guidance and support — or lack of it — stimulation to think about issues in the larger environment, academic and occupational aspirations, the provision of adequate health and nutritional conditions, and physical settings in the home conducive to academic work. All those come under the umbrella heading of socio-economic status.

A considerable proportion of the research carried out in schools suggests that those factors are unalterable. However, those features of pupils' backgrounds do not directly shape their ability to be successful at school; they influence but do not determine it. Underachievement is, therefore, a complex interplay of socio-economic status factors, the systemic factors that exist in many schooling systems, and school-based factors. We believe passionately in the work that we are privileged to do with head teachers. Where the correlation between low socio-economic status and low educational attainment is turned on its head or reversed — where the link between class and attainment is broken — leadership and the quality of teaching have been the twin pillars of success.

However, it is important to note that such success is always against the odds, since not just SES factors but systemic features of the system can contribute to underachievement. The factors that head teachers, other leaders in the schooling system and their staff have most control over are the school-based factors; they can make an enormous difference to the life opportunities of our young folk.

As we wrote in the introduction to our ‘Urban Pioneers: Leadership on the Front-line project’:
“many also experience relentless social and community pressures, frequently becoming the interface between disempowered communities and a range of public institutions.”

There is something distinctive about being an urban school leader or a school leader working in the context of socio-economic deprivation; it is about pace, complexity and the day-to-day challenges in a community context that are demanding and volatile. In order to make a long-term difference, school leaders in those contexts need to have an intimate knowledge of their community as well as an emotional attachment to it. They have to have aspirations to share power and a passion for their work; if half-hearted, they will not be able to sustain the pace or the pressures. From research and from our work in the field, we know the leadership practices that are effective in those contexts: assertive and positive leadership; direct frequent interaction with pupils; the shaping of practices around an ethic of care; sponsoring programmes aimed at helping parents to acquire additional parenting skills; assisting parents to gain access to the full range of social services; focusing on teaching and learning, including the fostering of an academic climate; the purposeful use of data, especially in school variation; leading professional development; and building productive relationships with families and communities. In short, as the authors of the compellingly powerful ‘10 strong claims about successful school leadership’ asserted, most successful head teachers draw on the same repertoire of basic leadership practices. The selection and combination of practices, however, depends on context, with the greater number of leadership practices required to effect change in more disadvantaged schools.

Substantial improvements in pupil behaviour, attendance, attitude and motivation are important precursors and facilitators for improvements in students’ academic achievement, especially in schools in highly disadvantaged contexts. We know that head teacher values are key components in their success. Invariably, they exhibit a strong sense of moral responsibility and a belief in equal opportunities; many will express, in a very explicit way, their zero tolerance of

underachievement. They respect and value all the people connected with the school; what typifies them more than anything is a passionate belief in the value of education and a passion for learning.

In conclusion, successful school leadership is fundamental to the health of our education system and of wider society. There is, perhaps, no better way of expressing just how fundamental it is than through the words of Michelle Obama, when writing about her husband:

“I’ve spent a huge chunk of our marriage trying to convince him to do something more sensible to change the world, like be a head teacher”.

The Acting Chairperson:

Thank you very much for your presentation, particularly for the incredibly useful paper that you sent us before the meeting. I am particularly interested in the PQH course. How would someone apply for that course and what criteria would be included in a formal application? I noticed that if a person wanted to go through that process and become a head teacher, he or she would have to get the backing of his or her school principal. Could you talk us through that process and the criteria that apply to the post?

Dr Hesketh:

The philosophy underpinning the PQH is a powerful one. In many ways, it emanates from what has been said thus far, which is that if leadership is important — and it is — we should not run the risk of people acquiring headships in our schools without the system having first invested in their preparation, training and development. PQH is best practice; in the private sector it would be referred to as succession planning or leadership supply. It is about creating a talent pool from which the future leadership needs of the sector can be met. Therefore, it has been constructed so that all those who have a teaching qualification can, in theory, apply for the programme.

Unlike some schooling systems that are open to the proposition that people can come from outside the education sector and lead schools, we in Northern Ireland have bought into the view that the best people to lead our schools are those who have experience of teaching and who are exemplary practitioners in the classroom. That means that our leadership needs for the schooling system can be met only by what we can do with the 23,000 or 24,000 teachers in the system. PQH is open to all teachers. We recently changed the model because, in some respects, PQH, 10

years on, has been more of a success than was ever envisaged. Almost by default, it has become the preparation ground not only for future head teachers but for vice principals, senior leaders and heads of departments who have benefited from the professional development that they acquired through PQH.

The downside is that PQH did not focus enough on its central objective, which was to prepare people exclusively for headship. The changes that we effected recently will mean that only those in the schooling system who have already accumulated significant experience of leadership and management will be able to go through the selection process for PQH to get onto the programme and warrant the investment that we put into it through the public sector.

The Acting Chairperson:

Are those positions self-funding or are they paid for directly by RTU?

Dr Hesketh:

They are paid for directly through the Department because RTU is funded directly by the Department of Education.

The Acting Chairperson:

How many positions are there for a headship course each year?

Dr Hesketh:

The model from which we are moving away essentially met preparation for headship and was open to the proposition that there were other leadership roles in the schooling system, for which, through PQH, we could also prepare people. Until recently, we had a recruitment of about 250 or 270 annually. The significance of the recent change, which brings PQH back to its original intention of focusing specifically on preparing those who are within touching distance of headship, means that the number who apply and get onto the new programme has dropped from 270 to about 110. Those who are interested in the programme now have to go through quite an intensive assessment process; it assesses the motivation, capability and readiness of the potential trainee head teachers. Only those who demonstrate that they meet the criteria of our new model gain a place on the programme.

The Acting Chairperson:

To get a position of headship, one has to go through the process of an appointment panel of boards of governors, and so on. What training is given to boards of governors to recognise the leadership qualities that are required for headship?

Dr Hesketh:

There is a wide-ranging governor training programme through the curriculum and advisory support services (CASS) of the education and library boards. Integral to that are aspects of the role of governors in relation to school effectiveness and the role of the head teacher. You put your finger on something significant about our schooling system: PQH is not mandatory. Therefore, it is possible that a board of governors or a teaching appointments committee, when considering an appointment to a headship, could go beyond the PQH talent pool. We need governors who have sufficient discernment about the kind of qualities that typify an effective head teacher to be certain that they make the best possible appointment.

The Acting Chairperson:

You listed 12 leadership practices that are effective in addressing underachieving schools in deprived areas. That is quite an extensive list; could you prioritise three of them?

Dr Hesketh:

In the past number of years, one of the experiences from which we gained enormously in our professional work, and from which the schooling system also gained, was our involvement in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) improving school leadership project, which included 22 other jurisdictions as well as Northern Ireland.

The project focused on what needs to be done to advance the capacity of leaders to affect schools. Four policy levers emerged from that work.

Listing those levers will help me to prioritise the points that I submitted to the Committee. The first policy lever referred to the need for headship to be redesigned and refocused on the core business of school. In other words, the need for head teachers to get much closer to learning, to be the lead learners and the lead professionals, and to lead their staff, particularly their teaching

staff, in the pedagogic and classroom practice improvement that is required to advance the quality of provision in schools.

Leader/learner heads focusing more on the core business of schools will inevitably take head teachers and other senior leaders into the purposeful use of data and will help them to look critically at data to see how pupils are doing and to ask important and courageous questions about why some of our kids do much better in some subjects with some teachers and not with others. Inevitably, the greater alignment of head teachers to the learning agenda in their schools and to the use of data and professional development is what head teachers should be concentrating on.

The other policy levers that emerged from the OECD work have resonance with what the Committee is interested in. The second lever talked about the need to move decisively toward distributed leadership in our schooling systems. In other words, schools are too complex and the issues that they confront are much too challenging to expect a head teacher to be able to move that awesome agenda forward on his or her own. Therefore the need to build leadership capacity in a school has become particularly telling.

The third policy lever referred a great deal to the need to continue to invest in leadership development by identifying, nurturing and preparing people in advance for the job and continuing to support and sustain them when they take up the post.

The fourth lever, which is certainly an issue for us, was the need to look critically at how we attract more people to the role of headship. Our demographics are perhaps the most acute of any of the OECD countries in that respect: 77% of our post-primary head teachers are aged 50 or over; over the next eight to 10 years, we are looking at a substantial turnaround in those who are leading in the secondary sector. Therefore, the dynamics that I referred to earlier about identifying and nurturing talent and creating a talent pool could not be more important.

The Acting Chairperson:

You also talk about redesigning the role and making head teachers the lead learners. Does that need to come from head teachers themselves or from the Department or the board?

Dr Hesketh:

That is a particularly good question. As I was talking, I could hear many excellent head teachers in our system proclaiming that they would love to get close to learning and undertake the lead professional role in their schools but that administration, bureaucracy and the accountability aspects of the job paradoxically take them further away from what they seek to get close to. We find that in its most acute form in a small primary school with its teaching principal. Across our schooling system, consideration needs to be given at an infrastructural level as well as at an individual school level to ways of enabling head teachers to better manage their wide portfolio of responsibilities, such as leading the learning, administration, bureaucracy, the interface with parents and the community and so forth. We must consider ways in which we can help heads to better manage that so that they can get close to what really matters.

Mr Lunn:

Thank you for your presentation. Can a head teacher or prospective head teacher who goes for that qualification fail it?

Dr Hesketh:

Yes. In fact, the pass rate for the old model PQH was about 83%; we are now moving to a new model. That percentage is of those who were successful in getting on to the programme. Of course, a significant number of folk applied who were not successful at the various entry stages because of, for example, what was on their application form. They also had to undertake an interview with their respective employing authority. From those entry processes there was a sizeable number of people who aspired to headship and sought PQH as a pathway to it but who did not get onto the programme.

Mr Lunn:

Roughly what percentage of head teachers holds that qualification?

Dr Hesketh:

There is good news. Sixty-three per cent of those who were appointed to headship in the secondary sector of our schooling system last year were PQH graduates; 57% of those who were appointed as vice principals for the first time in our schooling system last year were PQH

graduates.

Mr Lunn:

You do not have an overall figure across the board for how many actually hold the qualification?

Dr Hesketh:

Fifty-three per cent of principals in the secondary sector are PQH graduates, even though it is not yet mandatory.

Mr Lunn:

That is very impressive. Given the stress and strain of principals' and vice principals' workload, one could excuse them for not wanting to take on extra. It is excellent that more than half have done so. As the Chairperson said, there is no obligation for boards of governors to take account of the fact that the qualification exists, but it sounds as if they may be inclined to when appointing a new head teacher.

Dr Hesketh:

Increasingly, at board of governor level and teaching appointments committee level, there is an understanding of the currency of the qualification and that it is an investment from which a school can benefit enormously. The percentage of first-time headships acquired by PQH graduates has been growing over the past four or five years: in 2007, it was 54%; last year, it was 63%.

Mr Lunn:

I am always fascinated by how you judge the success of such things. Your briefing states that:

“leaders contribute up to somewhere between 5-7% of the cross school variation in pupil learning.”

How do you assess that? It might take you all afternoon to tell me.

Dr Hesketh:

It probably would, Mr Lunn. Fortunately, as I said at the start of the meeting, the research base on the impact of leadership has grown enormously because it has been a topic of interest across most schooling systems. It has also grown in sophistication. I think that you are asking how we could be so precise.

I am not suggesting that it has scientific status. However, it seeks to convey the extent to which modern-day headship appears to have become more remote from learning rather than closer to it and that the direct effect of a principal on the learning of every pupil is bound to be less than the direct effect of each pupil's own teacher. However, the significance of headship is the indirect effect that a principal will have on all the other things that happen in a school, including the effectiveness of teaching.

Mr Lunn:

I was coming to that. The most direct effective contribution that a head teacher could make would be his effect on his teachers.

Mrs M Bradley:

You are very welcome, Tom, and thank you for your presentation. Among your twelve effective leadership practices is "building productive relationships with families and communities". Can you elaborate on that? The Acting Chairperson asked you for three priorities; where would you place that practice?

Dr Hesketh:

The most powerful aspect is the voice of the practitioner, particularly in interaction with the community and with parents. May I read to the Committee what some of our head teachers said on the matter? On page 8 of our 'Urban Pioneers: Leading the way ahead', a head teacher from a school in west Belfast says:

"The parish is in... Estate which is an estate which in the last 30 years has seen a lot of civil unrest and the people here feel they have been dumped on... But in the last 5 or 6 years I have witnessed a change (I have been here for 10 years) in the sense that instead of looking inwardly, the community has started to suddenly look outwardly a bit.

You find in this area that a lot of them would be born here, marry here and die here. They do their shopping here even though things are much more expensive because John M up there would do 'tick' in terms of benefits, its not any money lending or anything... It's a very inward-looking community, but since Father x came here he's sort of got them geed up... and in partnership with all of us, the schools and the community organisations and the church, there has been a drive to say 'hold on a minute we matter here' and 'look we are all not dossers and lot of us want to work and a lot of us want peace so what can we do?'

The voice of practitioners is very powerful. Another example comes from east Belfast:

"Working-class parents would have sent their children here [in the past] in the knowledge, the hope that they would do well educationally and move on and move out... It used to be easy, you moved in to where your father worked, in the

Shipyards or Shorts or Mackies, and those places just aren't the big employers they used to be. There's no straight progression into employment anymore, and I'm not sure the Protestant community have grasped that education is the only way now for many of the children.

I think in the past it was easy to have the school community and the outside community distinct... I don't think we can afford that luxury anymore today, I think we need to be working in the community and with the community, and there are a lot of schemes, a lot of developments out there for the school to delve into and get involved in, in order to help the children, so I think the biggest challenge for the school really has been to get more involved in the community.

We have a cadre of head teachers who buy into the proposition that although schools can make an enormous difference, they cannot do it all on their own. They need to be involved much more intensively and regularly with agencies that are anchored in the community. The cumulative impact of working in that way is greater for young people's life chances than if schools try to do everything on their own.

Mrs M Bradley:

I asked because many teachers tell us that they have difficulty in getting some parents to attend even a parent-teacher meeting, which is very sad. I hope that it is improving; if it is, that is good. Thank you.

Mr O'Dowd:

I want to look at the figures from a different angle from Trevor Lunn, not to be provocative but to tease out more detail about the number of principals and vice principals who have the qualification. Among vice principals, 43% do not have the qualification, and the figure is roughly similar for principals. Is there a resistance to change; or does the process take time to move through the system?

Dr Hesketh:

It is more the latter than the former. The key point is that PQH is not mandatory. There is scope for boards of governors and teaching appointments committees to go beyond the PQH talent pool when filling vacancies. I do not claim for a moment that only those who are interested in and who have acquired a PQH can be successful leaders. Much good leadership development happens in other parts of the system. Of course, the best leadership development happens in good schools. Those figures are probably explained by the fact that PQH is not mandatory and that there are others beyond the PQH family who can contribute rather than by any reluctance or

resistance to accept the PQH badge.

Mr O’Dowd:

Has research compared schools that have the qualifications with those that do not? Is there a trajectory that suggests that the qualification is assisting schools?

Dr Hesketh:

In the early days of PQH, in 2002, the Education and Training Inspectorate picked a random sample of PQH graduates and followed them into their first year in headship. They asked whether the investment in such people, through PQH, had enabled them to make an effective transition into their new role of headship. The report was very favourable.

The Education and Training Inspectorate has a study under way that is close to what Mr O’Dowd described: it is an attempt to get closer to answering whether coming into headship with PQH better equips someone for the role. I look forward to that report.

Mr O’Dowd:

The overall mission is to raise standards in schools, especially failing schools — and I use the term advisedly; it may be fairer to describe them as less successful than other schools — that are often in socio-economically deprived areas. You said that the socio-economic status of a community contributes more than half of the factors that influence the level that someone will attain at school. What other areas should the Committee and the Assembly consider to tackle that issue and to promote education in the community rather than simply as a school project?

Dr Hesketh:

In England, a great deal of work is coming out of the extended schools project, which I can use as an example because it has been a feature of our own schooling system. Behind the extended schools approach is an acknowledgement that 80% of the factors that contribute to a young person’s attainment lie beyond schools; the school contributes to the other 20%.

Extended schools is about trying to create processes, engagements and connections between a school and those in the immediate community beyond it so that all concerned can engage more

meaningfully in moving young people's learning agenda forward. In other words, for the school to have an influence over that 80%; until now, many schools have adopted the attitude that they can do little about factors outside the school, so they concentrate on what they have control over inside it. There is a powerful argument for encouraging as much interaction as possible between a school and its community and the various social care, health and welfare agencies. That way, we will begin to touch more meaningfully on the behavioural, academic, social and emotional aspects. Learning for young folk is so complex and multi-dimensional that if one works only on academic learning at the expense of the behavioural, emotional and social sides, learning will not advance significantly or successfully. However, to make progress in those other areas, successful head teachers know that they must work with others.

Mr O'Dowd:

I have heard before that 80% of learning takes place outside school. In one sense, that is an impressive figure; in another, it is an alarming one. I wonder how many parents and communities are aware of the need for engagement in the home. I took my daughter to school this morning, and she will be picked up again at 12.30 pm. Fortunately, we realise that there is more to school. How do you get the message out, especially to communities and individuals that are under pressure, that learning should take place in the home?

Dr Hesketh:

That is what singles out the successful head teacher and other senior leaders who work in those contexts from those who are not so successful: they know the power of parental engagement and community involvement, and they develop creative, impactful strategies to ensure that those connections exist. Head teachers embrace the view that that is a core part of their responsibility and of what they should be about. Therefore, although other people can communicate the importance of the 80%, the schools are best placed to bring that message home to parents.

Mr O'Dowd:

You quoted from 'Urban Pioneers'. We live in largely rural community, and socio-economic deprivation applies in rural communities. Is the report applicable to the rural setting? Is there a separate study?

Dr Hesketh:

There has not been a separate study, but I think that it is applicable. ‘Urban Pioneers’ was more a reference to the fact that one is more likely to encounter schools that work in the context of socio-economic deprivation in towns and urban areas than elsewhere. However, we are not hooked exclusively or narrowly on the urban scenario. The concept of schools in challenging circumstances has a number of derivatives. I mentioned earlier the small primary school and the teaching principal. There are challenges and complexities in that context that warrant such a school being referred to as a school in challenging circumstances and, therefore, needing particular approaches. I have no doubt that outside the Belfast and Derry scenarios there are examples of schools that work in the context of social and economic deprivation. Most of what I have referred to applies equally to them.

Mr Lunn:

I heard that 80% of learning takes place outside school, which, as John said, could be terrifying or worthy of praise. Personally, I think it terrifying. Does that mean 80% of learning or 80% of preparation for life as a whole? Does it refer solely to academic learning?

Dr Hesketh:

We might each have a different take on that. My understanding is that 80% of the variables that affect how well a young person does are encountered outside rather than inside a school: our young folk spend between 15% and 17% of their time in school; a colossal amount of time is spent elsewhere. Everything that happens to us in our lives and experiences contributes to learning. If 15% to 17% of time is spent in school, that leaves open the possibility for all the other factors — the socio-economic status factors — to have an impact.

Mr Lunn:

Some 33% of pupils’ time is spent sleeping; for students it is more like 50%. I find that explanation bewildering. I cannot query the 17% figure; that is just time spent in school. You say that teachers’ contribution in school is about a third of the overall daily contribution and a head teacher’s is between 5% and 7%. Is that 33% of the 20% that is left? When deducted, it leaves 80%.

Dr Hesketh:

That has more to do with variation across schools. If, for example, the same pupils were in a different school, the respective contributions from the leadership and teaching staff would be lesser or greater.

I take the point about 80%; at first glance it appears to be alarming while the 5% to 7% that I mentioned earlier appears to be disappointing. However, successful head teachers do not buy into the proposition that the 80% is something that they need not worry about; they seek to find ways of minimising it; neither do they accept that the socio-economic status factors, which have a tremendous bearing on a young person's attainment, are unalterable. They seek to do as much as they can, through their staff, to reverse the correlation between the socio-economic context on the one hand and attainment on the other.

That is what makes them stand out from their peers. They adopt a zero-tolerance approach to underachievement and they seek to use the school, working closely with the community and other agencies, to minimise the impact of the factors beyond the school and to highlight the extent to which the school can make a difference.

Mr Lunn:

Does the qualification involve a residential period; is it part-time or home study? How do head teachers and prospective head teachers obtain the qualification?

Dr Hesketh:

The PQH journey is mainly part-time, twilight and probation; much of it is now online, given our digital world. A feature of the old model, from which we are moving away, was an intensive two-day residential element near the end of the journey, which focused on two aspects. One is preparing those going into headship to look critically at the school of the future and to align their thinking about learning in view of that; it focuses on the twenty-first century challenge rather than on what their career had, up to then, been immersed in. The other aspect of the residential element has been to prepare them for the assessment centre process, which is coming as the exit point.

Given the financial stringencies ahead, the residential element will be given serious consideration for the new model.

The Acting Chairperson:

Does the course take place in term time?

Dr Hesketh:

We have run with a mix of term-time and out-of-term elements. RTU looks after the education system's annual summer school, which we hold in the third week in August. We have put into the summer school significant aspects of the training and development that those undertaking PQH access.

We have gone for the twilight and online models rather than the full-day model, because we are conscious of the disruptive effect on the system of people being taken out of school during class time.

The Acting Chairperson:

What is the gender mix in applications and successful course attendees?

Dr Hesketh:

As members will know, 75% or 76% of the teaching profession is female. The challenge in our schooling system, as in many schooling systems, is that, over the years, there has been a preponderance of males over females in headship positions. Almost since it began, entry into PQH has always had a majority of females over males, which has helped to counteract the imbalance in the schooling system. The teaching profession is predominantly female, but the leadership cadre is predominately male. I do not have the figures to hand, but the proportion of males and females in headships has moved decisively in the direction of females over the past five or six years.

Mrs M Bradley:

Your paper states that:

“sponsoring programmes aimed at helping parents acquire additional parenting skills development” is known to be an effective leadership practice. Is that done in the school or does the leader buy it in?

Dr Hesketh:

There are some excellent examples in Belfast: Belfast Model School for Girls springs to mind as an example of a school that has seen such programmes as a vital aspect of its provision. Programmes are, in part, provided by the school, and some are commissioned. That is the kind of additionality that a school can bring to its young folk and their parents through, for example, extended schools money.

Mrs M Bradley:

There is nothing wrong with it.

Mrs O'Neill:

I have a comment rather than a question. You talked about the iron circle, and that will not be broken without a partnership approach. When a child goes to school, there is a partnership between the school, the pupils and the parents, so it is imperative that everyone comes together to work for the good of the child. I understand where the figure of 80% comes from. A child whose parents did not reach a high standard of education might not recognise the benefit of achieving in school. Anything that involves programmes in, for instance, confidence building in parents and basic literacy and numeracy skills in parents will feed into a child's success.

You have set out the core practices of successful leadership. First, the leaders set directions, through which, you say, they want the child to reach his or her full potential; secondly, they develop the capacity of the head teacher, the teachers and the staff in the schools and, in fact, the parents — that is also a factor. I accept that, and I think that it is the way forward.

Dr Hesketh:

Mrs O'Neill, I know that you are interested in the secondary sector. You could bring the 10 most successful head teachers who operate in the context of socio-economic deprivation, regardless of how the measurement is made, into the secondary sector, and I would be surprised if each one of them did not inform you of the extent to which they have connected what happens in the school effectively with parents and with the wider community. That contributes to their success more than anything else.

The Acting Chairperson:

The prospectus mentions mentoring and coaching. How do you drive that forward?

Dr Hesketh:

We are excited by that. Earlier, I mentioned how leadership development is best promoted and advanced. The best leadership development takes place in schools, particularly in good schools. One of the dynamics, which has always been part of PQH and which has contributed significantly to its success, is the extent to which we use practitioners. Serving heads and head teachers who have recently retired have, by and large, designed, delivered and assessed the programme.

The mentoring and coaching dimensions that we are building into the new model seek to create even greater connectedness between the leadership journey of those whom we are preparing for headship and the contribution that could be made to that journey by existing head teachers and other teachers. For example, in the new model we hope that every trainee head teacher will be matched with a serving head teacher — if serving head teachers can find the time to make such a contribution — or with a recently retired head teacher.

Engagement between serving and trainee head teachers through mentoring and coaching seems the best possible preparation for the job.

The Acting Chairperson:

Should that model not be rolled out across all schools, regardless of whether they are on the programme?

Dr Hesketh:

It is interesting that you say that, Madam Chairperson, because it is already present in the system in various other ways. We are privileged to take those who are newly appointed to headship through an induction programme. This year, we seek to match every newly appointed first-time head teacher with a mentor or coach, who will be either a serving or recently retired head teacher.

The other way in which we are using the powerful insight, wisdom and experience of the practitioner to advance the wider agenda of school leadership effectiveness is by working closely

with the employing authorities, education and library boards and with the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools so that schools that go into formal intervention as part of the Every School a Good School framework can benefit from the support and insight of experienced head teachers. We refer to that as a consultant head teacher model.

That acknowledges that the wisdom, insight, dynamism and passion for the job reside in the profession. Our job, in promoting leadership development, is to find ways by which that can be connected to our privilege of working with new and trainee head teachers.

The Acting Chairperson:

I thank you again for your presentation and for taking the time to answer our questions. I imagine that you will be no stranger to the Committee in future.

Dr Hesketh:

I appreciate the Committee's reception and its interest in the issue. Thank you.