

PhD Studentship

Primary school head teachers and collaborative networks

Closing date: Monday 1st June 2020

Interview date: Wednesday 24th June 2020

Supervisory team:

Dr Carla Solvason, School of Education, University of Worcester

Professor Geoffrey Elliott, School of Education, University of Worcester

Dr Marie Stephenson, School of Education, University of Worcester

Applications are invited for a fully funded full-time PhD studentship exploring the role that head teacher collaborations play in providing support for primary school head teachers.

Context:

It has long been noted that strong school leadership is key to a school's success, but the form that this leadership should take has changed immeasurably over recent times. At the turn of the century the emotional capability and complexity of the individual leader came under scrutiny and the much sought after leader attribute became 'emotional intelligence' (Goleman et al 2002). Over a decade later a focus upon the effective characteristics and qualities of successful leaders has become embedded within head teacher expectations. The values and traits of the individual leader are now squarely under the microscope, with a focus upon self-knowledge and how this is demonstrated through behaviour (Berkovich, 2014).

In 2012 the National College for Leadership of Schools and Children's Services identified a dearth in those applying for headship roles. Two years earlier Apple (2010) had put a reluctance to apply down to the increased accountability, inspection and competition that had emerged through policy change. And whilst "schools are rife with emotionality, as they deal with people's most important hopes, fears and dreams on a daily basis" (Maxwell and Riley, 2017: 496) it is important to remember that most of the challenges that leaders face are dealt with in seclusion from any form of emotional support for themselves (Tahir et al, 2016: 422).

That they offer unwavering support, care and enthusiasm, with no obvious source of replenishment for themselves, must take its toll.

In 2017 Berkovich and Eyal carried out a comprehensive review of 49 articles exploring the concept of *emotion* in the head teacher role. Leadership has become emotional labour. Brennan and Ruairc (2019: 142) discuss the demands of the role and how many head teachers, particularly in disadvantaged areas “invested their heart and soul to make a difference in the lives of the children.” In 2017 Maxwell and Riley explored the emotional investment of school principals and the concept of ‘burnout’ in particular.

Their empirical research found that “school leaders face significantly increased emotional demands compared to the general population, and this is associated with poorer psychosocial health” (493). Within this barren landscape nurturing relationships with peers can provide vital sustenance for head teachers (Solvason and Kington, 2019).

The Project:

In 2016 the Education Development Trust emphasised that “the best unit for school improvement is no longer single institutions. It is the cluster.” The intention of this studentship is to investigate this claim, not only in terms of the continued improvement of school processes and product, but also in relation to the emotional wellbeing of its leaders.

This PhD studentship represents a unique and exciting opportunity to contribute to a clearer understanding of the workings and benefits of school-based collaborations and partnerships between head teachers in primary schools in England. The successful candidate will be responsible for developing the detail of this proposal further and will work closely with the supervisory team to select appropriate methods of enquiry. It is anticipated that the successful candidate will have knowledge and understanding of the primary school phase, its wider educational and policy environment, and the critical role of the head teacher.

Aim:

To better understand the contribution of leadership collaborations in providing support to primary head teachers.

Objectives:

- To undertake original research with head teachers (in England) drawing upon qualitative and quantitative approaches;
- To gain a better understanding of the range, structure and workings of collaborative support groups;
- To understand the role that support groups can play in the continuing professional development of the head teacher;

- To investigate the role of support groups in providing head teachers pastoral/emotional support;
- To understand, from the perspective of the head teacher, the potential that collaborations have to impact upon whole school improvement;
- To interrogate documents and statistics which evidence the impact of collaborative leadership clusters;
- To contribute to educational policy, practice and the theoretical literature.

Research approaches:

Interpretivist approaches to teacher narrative stories/ life histories

School and Local Authority level longitudinal data interrogation

Documentary evidence (Ofsted/ collaborative interventions/ policy)

References:

- Apple, M W (2010) *Global Crises, Social Justice, and Education*. New York: Routledge.
- Berkovich I. (2014) Between person and person: Dialogical pedagogy in authentic leadership development. *Academy of Management Learning and Education* 13(2): 245-264.
- Berkovich I and Eyal O (2017) Methodological review of studies on educational leaders and emotions (1992-2012): Insights into the meaning of an emerging research field in educational administration. *Journal of Educational Administration* 55(5): 469-49.
- Berkovich I and Eyal O (2015) Educational Leaders and Emotions Review of Educational Research March 85(1): 129–167.
- Brennan J and Ruairc G M (2019) Different worlds: The cadences of context, exploring the emotional terrain of school principals' practice in schools in challenging circumstances. *Educational Management Administration and Leadership* 47(1): 129–146.
- Education Development Trust (2016) *Effective Clusters Diagnostic* (electronic reference no longer available).
- Goleman D, Boyatzis R and McKee A (2002) *Primal Leadership: Realising the Power of Emotional Intelligence*. Boston: Harvard Business School Press.
- Maxwell A, and Riley P (2017). Emotional demands, emotional labour and occupational outcomes in school principals: Modelling the relationships. *Educational Management Administration and Leadership*, 45(3), 484–502.
- Solvason and Kington (2019) Collaborations: Providing Emotional Support to Senior Leaders. *Journal of Professional Capital and Community*, <https://www.emerald.com/insight/search?q=solvason&showAll=true>
- Tahir L, Haruzuan Mohd M N, Daud, K, Vazhathodi H and Khan A (2016) The benefits of headship mentoring: An analysis of Malaysian novice head teachers' perceptions. *Educational Management Administration and Leadership*, 44(3): 420–450.

Whitehead, J. (2008) Using a living theory methodology in improving practice and generating educational knowledge in living theories. *EJOLTS*, 1(1); 103-126

Further reading:

Elliott, G., Kadi-Hanifi, K. and Solvason, C. (2018) *Your Guide to Successful Postgraduate Study*. London: Sage.

Qualifications needed:

Essential:

Applicants should have or be able to evidence:

- Education to Masters Degree level in a relevant area of Education or a related discipline.
- A sound understanding of, and interest in the UK primary education phase;
- Experience of relevant qualitative research methods and skills;
- Ability to contribute to research study design;
- Computer literacy;
- Proficiency in oral and written English;
- Ability to organise and meet deadlines;
- Good interpersonal skills;
- Ability to work independently and contribute to a team;
- Ability to travel independently (for data collection, conference attendance and so on)
- Commitment and an enthusiastic approach to completing a higher research degree;

Desirable:

- Experience of senior management in the primary education sector.

Details of the studentship:

During the period of the studentship, the successful candidate will receive the following:

- a tax free bursary of £15,009 per annum for a period of 3 years
- a fee-waiver for 4 years
- a laptop
- use of the Research Student Study Space in Research School
- access to the Research Student Support Scheme to cover costs and expenses related to your research

Application Process:

To begin the application process for this studentship please go to our webpage www.worcester.ac.uk/studentships and click apply now next to the project you wish to apply for.

The Interview

The interview will provisionally be held on Wednesday 24th June 2020. All successful, shortlisted applicants will be interviewed. The interview process normally lasts around one and a half hours in total and includes a meeting with the project supervisors, and an opportunity to view the campus and the Research School.

In advance of interview, shortlisted candidates will be asked to submit:

- A sample of written academic work which demonstrates an understanding of research approaches.

Shortlisted applicants invited for interview will be asked to give a 10-minute presentation based on: *Approaches to creating positive research relationships with schools.*

Research at the University of Worcester:

Research at the University of Worcester has grown significantly over the last 10 years. This growth is reflected in the outcomes of the Research Excellence Framework (REF 2014). Worcester was the most improved University in the UK based on Research Fortnight's "Research Power" measure, reflecting a more than four-fold increase in the number of staff submitted compared to RAE 2008 and a commensurate increase in the quality of the research. The University will submit 50% more staff to REF 2021 than in 2014 and is expecting significant further improvements in its outcomes. It is also reflected in the increase in Research & Knowledge Exchange funding over this period. The University has been successful in winning funding from a wide range of major funders: Research Councils such as AHRC, BBSRC, ESRC and NERC; major charities such as the Leverhulme Trust, the Alzheimer's Society and the British Academy; health-research funders such as the NIHR, the Department of Health and local NHS Trusts; European funding through Horizon 2020 and Erasmus+; and funding from local, national and global businesses.

The University is focused on research which addresses real world challenges and provides solutions to these challenges:

- **Human Health and Wellbeing** with research groups looking, for example, at mood disorders, dementia care, biomedical research, and violence prevention
- **Sustainable Futures** with research groups looking, for example, at crop protection, eco-system services, aerobiology and sustainability education
- **Professional Education** with research groups looking, for example, at the social psychology of education and the philosophy and ethics of professional practice)

- **Identity and Inclusion** with research groups looking, for example, at social justice, inclusive approaches to sport, religion & society, and Early Modern culture & society

The University continues to provide a robust infrastructure for research. It has a well-established Research School which houses its growing research student body and which provides a comprehensive programme of researcher development for staff and students. It established a Research Office in 2013, responsible for research funding, governance and strategy. The University is committed to further developing its research profile, through a strategic approach to its support for and investment in research. Its fully-funded studentships are part of this investment.

School of Education:

We are one of the country's major providers of education, training and research for the children's workforce.

Founded in 1946 as a teacher training college, the University of Worcester has been training inspirational teachers for over 70 years. The Institute of Education has built on this legacy to develop a reputation for the highest quality provision, partnership working and delivery.

We place a great value on the individual, and creating a friendly and supportive environment in which to work and learn. This approach has allowed us to develop a programme of high quality courses, school support services and research.

We value research that has an impact. We believe it is important to work in ways that influence changes in peoples' lives and work, theory and society.

Our research is rooted in local, regional, national and international contexts. We encourage collaborative involvement with professional groups, community projects and more.

Students benefit from cross-departmental seminar programmes and a dedicated research office. We regularly welcome research visitors from other Departments, especially where research links with our current activities can be developed.

Our staff, along with our postgraduate research student community, are involved in a wide variety of educational research areas. Research interests include assessment, evaluation and school effectiveness, science and mathematics education, arts, and music education, curriculum practice, international educational development, and critical and philosophical approaches to education.

Research School:

The Research School is a focal point for all our research students. It provides:

- day-to-day support for our students, both administrative and practical, through our dedicated team
- a Research Student Study Space with both PCs and laptop docking station
- a comprehensive Researcher Development Programme for students and their supervisors

- a programme of student-led conferences and seminars

You will be expected to play an active role in the life of both the Research School and of the School of Education. You will be given opportunities to gain experience in learning and teaching within the School of Education under the guidance of your Director of Studies.

Widening Participation:

As part of its mission statement the University is committed to widening participation for its higher degrees. Although most candidates will have an undergraduate and/or a Masters degree, the University is happy to accept applications from candidates with relevant professional qualifications and work related experience.

For further information or an informal discussion on this project, please contact Dr Carla Solvason (Director of Studies) via email at c.solvason@worc.ac.uk.

Applications can be online made at: www.worcester.ac.uk/studentships