

Empowering school heads

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School heads play a key role in the quality of education. Their role has changed over time, with the emphasis increasingly coming to lie on educational development and improvement and providing a good working and learning environment for teaching staff. Collaboration with parties outside the school has also become increasingly important. In their day-to-day practice, school heads are having to devote more attention to leadership and less time to managerial tasks. To be able to do this, school heads must be empowered to think and act strategically.

There is room for improvement in the capacity of some school heads to think and act strategically. At present, school organisations offer heads insufficient opportunity for further development of that capacity. School heads could also be given a greater role in policy formulation and decision-making at management level. Further professionalisation and better positioning of school heads will be needed if they are to take on a more strategic role. School heads, school boards and government can work together to facilitate this. In this report, the Council makes a number of recommendations for progressing along this path.

Recommendation 1: Strengthen school leadership by creating a common professional profile

A number of good initiatives have been taken in primary and secondary schools and in senior secondary vocational education aimed at putting school heads on the map as a professional group. There are many correspondences between these sectors in terms of what constitutes a good school head: the competence profiles are virtually identical. However, the Council believes that successful professionalisation requires a sector-overarching approach. Such a common approach will bolster the recognition of school heads as a professional group and strengthen their positioning within the education system. It will also put them in a better position to take control of their own development and professional practice. The Council recommends working towards the development of a single, sector-overarching professional standard with one mandatory register. It is important that this professional standard draws a clear distinction between different levels of experience and that professional standards and requirements are described in specific terms. If they are to have a direct influence on national policy-making and decision-making, cooperation between school heads' organisations is essential.

Recommendation 2: Create an integrated leadership development system

Promoting good school leadership requires that all school heads work from a solid knowledge base. Currently, there are too many differences across the educational sectors in the way school heads are trained, and too much diversity in individual training programmes. The Council recommends that the government take measures to improve the quality of school heads, in the same way as for teachers. Pooling of research, education and training needs to be stimulated and facilitated. Scholarships should also be made available for school heads. This should be accompanied by higher demands in terms of the professionalisation of school heads in primary and secondary education and in senior secondary vocational education. The Council believes it is important that school heads should be trained to Master's level. Professionalisation agreements focusing on providing leadership are also needed. School boards need to develop a strategic HRM policy, offer an induction programme for school heads and organise informal learning.

Recommendation 3: Give school heads the opportunity to develop the strategic aspects of their role

School organisations must create scope for school heads to play a strategic role. School boards need to offer them opportunities to influence strategic policy, for example by organising consultation between the board and school head aimed at learning from each other and working to build a culture of trust. The Council believes it is right to incorporate the strategic role of school heads in management structures and good governance codes. School boards need to relieve heads of time-consuming tasks that do not fit in with their strategic role, by providing a basic level of operational support within the school. Finally, the Council recommends that school heads be systematically involved as discussion partners in school inspections.