

LA /ESSEX PRIMARY HEADS' ASSOCIATION NORTH EAST AREA
WEDNESDAY 10 NOVEMBER 2021

MEETING SUMMARY: ISSUES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Agendas and minutes for these meetings available at www.essexprimaryheads.co.uk

Attendance List		
	<p>DISTRICT AND EPHA AGENDA (a.m.) (Notes below) Nick Hutchings, Chair</p> <p>EPHA meeting, including outcomes of the Headteacher wellbeing survey Venn Essex Maths Hub Lads Need Dads Using the Apprenticeship Levy Juniper Payroll</p>	<p>Welcome to the following Headteachers: Debbie Conroy Joseph Fielder Karen Jones Hannah McCann John Poulson Pieter Labuschange Valerie Rose Hannah Watson</p> <p>Farewell to the following headteachers: Donna Parker</p> <p>Nick Hutchings and Pam Langmead</p> <p>Jamie Whiteside Joel Shaljean Charlee Kilbey, National College of Education Gavin Freed</p>
p 2 -14	<p>AREA AGENDA LA updates on current priorities including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic Aims 2021/22 • Work of the Taskforce • SEND Strategy • ECC resettlement of refugees • Safeguarding • Early Years Strategy • School Partnership refresh and relaunch • Assessment and Moderation 	<p>Clare Kershaw Jo Barclay Carolyn Terry</p>
p 15	<p>Tendring Project and North East specific update</p>	<p>Philippa Holliday Janine Hanson</p>
p 16	<p>Key dates</p>	<p>NORTH EAST headteacher meetings 2021/22 Wednesday 2 March 2022 Wednesday 15 June 2022</p> <p>Headteachers' Annual Conference 2022 Friday 25 March 2022 Chelmsford City Race Course</p> <p>Deputy Headteachers' Annual Conference 2021 Friday 7 October 2022 Colchester Football Stadium</p>
<p>*Page numbers refer to the full minutes (posted on the EPHA website) of the Autumn term Area meetings with LA Officers and Headteachers.</p>		

LA /ESSEX PRIMARY HEADS' ASSOCIATION NORTH EAST AREA
DISTRICT AND AREA MEETING
WEDNESDAY 10 NOVEMBER 2021
ATTENDANCE

Present

Rachel Anderson	Harwich Primary and Nursery
Liz Bartholomew	The Mayflower Primary
Aaron Battersby	All Saints, Great Oakley
Natasha Bennett	Two Village CE Primary
Simon Billings	St John's Green Primary
Suzie Bliss	Walton-on-the-Naze Primary
Gavin Bradley	White Hall Academy
Sue Bridgeman	Montgomery Infants and Nursery
Toby Bull	The Bishop William Ward CE Primary
Tracey Caffull	Great Bentley Primary/Frinton
Alex Candler	Lexden Primary
Debbie Conroy	Sir Martin Frobisher Academy
Alice Constantine	Kingswode Hoe School
Sarah Crookes	Cann Hall Primary
Paula Derwin	Hazelmere Juniors
Sarah Dukelow	Alresford Primary
Abbie Fairbairn	Lawford CE Primary
Diane Fawcett	St Andrew's CE Primary, Weeley
Belynda Fellows	St James CE Primary
Clare French	Kendall CE Primary
Lisa Frith Sly	Caulos Academy
Donna Gaffney	Layer-de-la-Haye Primary
Alan Garnett	North Primary & Nursery
Alison Grigg	Broomgrove Infants
Jackie Halliday	Messing School
Claire Holmes	Monkwick Infants & Nursery
Nick Hutchings	N East Chair/ Hamilton Primary
Julie Ingram	Chappel CE Primary/Fordham All Saints
Ellie Jaggs	Boxted St Peter's CE Primary
Karen Jones	Great Clacton CE Juniors/Rolph Pri
Becky Keitch	St George's CE Primary, Gt Bromley

LA Officers

Clare Kershaw	Director of Education
Philippa Holliday	Assistant Director, North East
Jo Barclay	Head of Education Safeguarding
Stephen Chynoweth	EY and Education Manager, N East
Kerry McGrory	SE Partner (North East)
Carole Farrer	SE Partner (North East)
Nicky Everett	SE Partner (North East)
Janine Hanson	Inclusion Manager N East

Susan Locke	Milldene Primary
Andrew MacDonald	Langham Primary
Ian MacDonald	Elmstead Primary
Becky Maguire	St Joseph's Catholic Primary
Kathy Maguire-Egan	Oakwood Infants
Nerys Maidment	Baynards Primary
Joanna Marshall	Tendring Primary
Hannah McCann	Gosbecks Primary
Rebecca McCutcheon	Monkwick Juniors
Janet Meacock	Millfields Primary
Carl Messer	St George's Primary
Mark Millbourne	Prettygate Infant and Juniors
Amanda Mitchelson	Old Heath Primary
Donna Parker	Ardleigh St Mary's Primary
Richard Potter	Home Farm Primary
Claire Russell	Braiswick Primary
Clare Sampson	Roach Vale Primary
Nikki Sirett	Alton Park Juniors
Adam Squirrell	Stanway Fiveways Primary
Steven Turnbull	Hazelmere Infants and Nursery
Craig Twin	St John's CE Primary
Tania Wright	Mersea Island School
Michelle Wright	Montgomery Juniors

In Attendance

Pam Langmead	EPHA Professional Officer
Jamie Whiteside	Venn Essex
Joel Shaljean	Lads Need Dads
Stephanie Newland	St Margaret's, Toppesfield
Matt O'Grady	West Horndon Priamry
Bridgette Gough	St Andrew's Primary, Halstead
Michelle Bernard	Cann Hall Primary
Jacinta Tarr	Oakwood Infants

Apologies

Sue Bardetti	Holland Haven Primary
Gail Burns	St Michael's Primary & Nursery
Samantha Moseley	All Saints CE Primary, Dovercourt
Kate Moore	Birch CE Primary
Nicky Patrick	Spring Meadow Primary
Susan Shipp	Friars Grove Primary
Darren Smith	Brinkley Grove Primary

Note: If your attendance or apologies have not been noted please contact the EPHA Professional Officer at pam@langmead.me.uk for amendment.

1. WELCOME

Nick Hutchings, the North East Area Chair welcomed headteachers to the meeting, noting that this was the first in-person meeting for nearly two years because of the continuing Covid pandemic. He expressed his admiration for the extraordinary job that headteachers are doing, holding their schools together even though life has definitely NOT gone back to normal.

Welcome to the following Headteachers:

Debbie Conroy	Sir Martin Frobisher Academy
Joseph Fielder	Heathlands CE Primary
Karen Jones	Rolph CE Primary (Executive Head)
Hannah McCann	Gosbecks Primary
John Poulson	Iceni Academy
Pieter Labuschagne	Unity Academy
Valerie Rose	Ravens Academy (Principal)
Hannah Watson	Stanway Primary (Acting Headteacher)

Farewell to the following headteachers:

Donna Parker	Ardleigh St Mary's CE Primary
--------------	-------------------------------

Nick noted that Donna Parker is retiring early after many years in headship and she will be a huge loss to Essex schools, children and their families, as well as a valued member of the EPHA Executive. She has particular knowledge and influence in relation to the small school agenda, and will be missed by her colleagues.

If you are leaving please make use of the EPHA new heads' checklist, and complete it for your successor. This is available on the EPHA website at <https://essexprimaryheads.co.uk/info-and-documents/good-practice/>

2. NORTH EAST EPHA MEETING

Nick Hutchings shared the following information:

- a) **The Autumn term EPHA newsletter**, including dates for the 2021/22 school year, was circulated to headteachers in advance of the meeting -these can also be found on the EPHA website www.essexprimaryheads.co.uk.

b) **EPHA Annual General Meeting**

The EPHA Annual General Meeting took place on 30 September 2021 and the following headteachers were elected as officers for the coming year:

- Harriet Phelps-Knights (Janet Duke Primary) Chair
- Nick Hutchings (Hamilton Primary) Vice-Chair
- Nicky Barrand (Cherry Tree Primary) Executive Treasurer

They are supported by 36 headteachers across the county, representing their colleagues in different districts. The full Executive membership list, minutes of the AGM, and the Constitution and Financial Regulations are available on the EPHA website.

c) **EPHA Priorities for 2021/22**

At the AGM the headteachers who attended discussed the priorities for the Association for the coming year. It was agreed these should include:

- i. The Task Force priorities, particularly the "year of reading"
- ii. Continuation of the EPHA briefings delivered by the Professional Officer

iii. Headteacher support and wellbeing

d) Covid-19 Webcast with Director of Education and Director for Public Health

The next webcast with Clare Kershaw and Mike Gogarty will be held on Wednesday 1st December, 9.30 am. This will be recorded as usual. The Professional Officer has forwarded a link to headteachers.

Another webcast will be held on Wednesday 12 January 2022, 1.30 pm – 2.45 pm, online – the Zoom invitation will be sent out later in the term.

e) Conferences

The annual Headteachers' conference will be held on Friday 25 March 2022 at Chelmsford City Race Course. Please note the change of date and venue, to enable us to accommodate everyone who wants to attend. The programme and booking form for the conference will be emailed to schools at the beginning of the spring term.

Next year's Deputy Headteachers' conference will be held on Friday 7 October 2022, at the Colchester Football Stadium.

f) EPHA resources on the EPHA website

A couple of updated checklists are available on the EPHA website:

Ofsted checklist following the notification phone call) <https://essexprimaryheads.co.uk/info-and-documents/ofsted/>

Safeguarding audit based on current Ofsted requirements <https://essexprimaryheads.co.uk/info-and-documents/safeguarding/>

g) Alan Garnett book promotion

Alan Garnett, head at North Primary and Nursery School, reminded his colleagues that he has written a book about his experience as a headteacher during the pandemic. *A head teacher's diary: leading a school through the pandemic (making it up as we go along)*, is available from Red Lion Books <https://www.redlionbooks.co.uk/product/a-headteachers-diary/>

h) Gold Education – supply agency recommended by a number of schools.

[Gold Education Recruitment](https://www.goldeducationrecruitment.co.uk/)

01245 699095

07830 427130

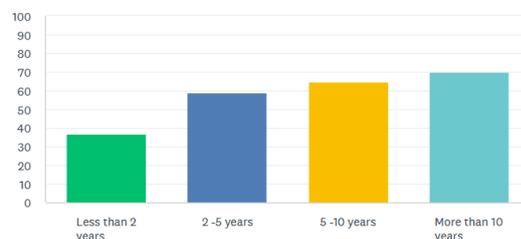
Paul.Yates@goldeducationrecruitment.co.uk

3. EPHA HEADTEACHER WELLBEING SURVEY OUTCOMES

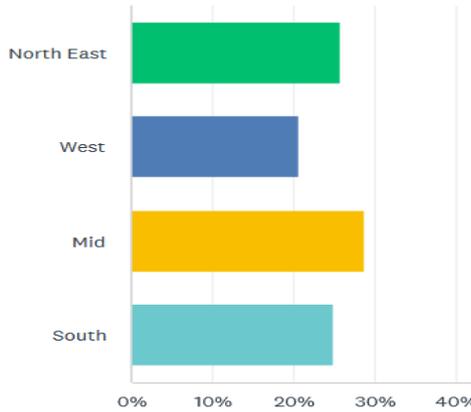
The EPHA Professional Officer gave a presentation on the outcomes of the recent EPHA headteacher wellbeing survey, which ran for 3 weeks in October /November. She shared the following outcomes, including a number of key quotes from the headteacher comments that were received.

235 Essex primary-phase headteachers took part in the survey (over 50%)

Respondents- length of time as a headteacher.



Based in which quadrant?



“As a new headteacher I find the job incredibly lonely. I work exceptionally long hours. I had always been a determined individual who wanted to become a headteacher, I am now regretting my decision.”

“Although I've been a HT for 12 years I've never felt so overwhelmed as I do at the moment.”

Worklife balance rating

4.2 
average rating



How happy have you been in your professional role in the last 12 months?

4.6 
average rating



If you had your time again, would you pursue your current headship?

- 63.14% said Yes
- 36.86% said No

“The management of Covid over the past 18 months has considerably affected workload for me as a Head, when I already have an extremely poor work life balance.”

“This has been the toughest time in my 15 years of headship. I am working in excess of 16 hours a day and most of the weekend just to stay on top of my workload.”

“Anecdotally, my son is 26. A few months ago, getting in from work I said 'I hate my job' and he said, 'In all my years, I have never, ever heard you say anything remotely like that about your work.’”

Have you considered resigning in the last 12 months?

- 60.59% said Yes
- 39.41% said No

“I absolutely love my job and feel very privileged to hold this position. However, the ridiculous pressure I feel from Ofsted following the stress of Covid, which is still with us, have made the job feel

unmanageable. My stress levels are so high it makes me feel that I want to walk away from it all.”

“I consider myself to be a very positive, resilient person and I despair of people who like to dwell on the negatives of the job, however, it is extremely difficult to maintain this positivity and not get drawn into poor wellbeing. Only yesterday, I thought 'what else is there?' and if I wasn't the main earner at home, would change careers. I don't have that as a realistic option.”

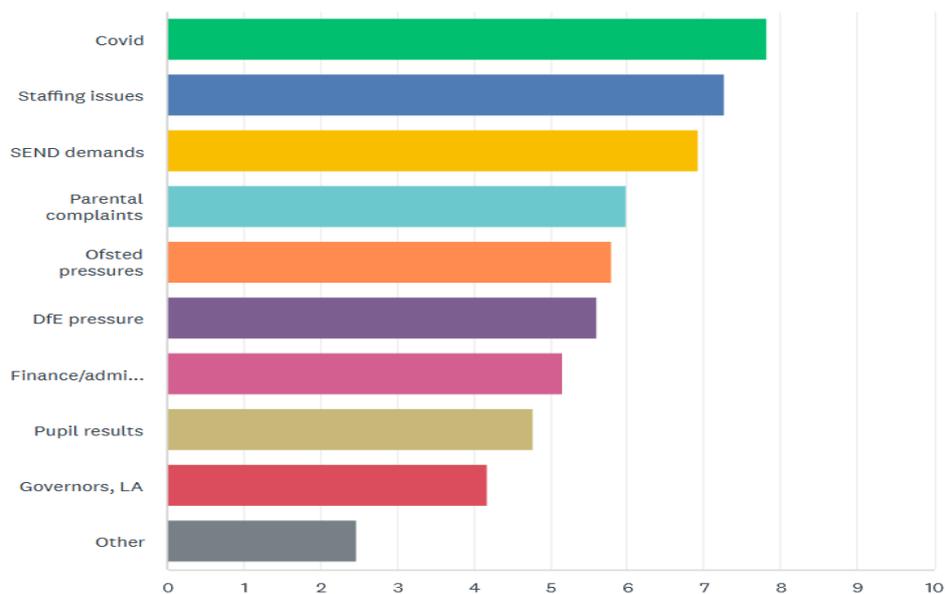
“The approach taken appears a binary one. Move into lockdown and all priorities are altered and the expectation that Heads are considered and supported, for their own wellbeing, is raised. **Exit lockdown and there is a climate of normality** in the expectations that **Heads can deliver, be held to public scrutiny, and provide recovery**, at a time when we have more Covid cases than ever before, more staff absence than ever before, a greater workload than ever before, and are still very much dealing with the reality of the day to day impact in the school.

I am concerned for my team, and every day have to accept my own vulnerability, and put it to one side. The old adage states that you have to look after yourself first, take dedicated time, make space ... but under such challenging circumstances this is exceptionally difficult, and my presence needed more than ever to be **the glue that holds the organisation together**.

Exhaustion levels are significant, and I think the gap between what is expected of me, and what we are able to deliver, is widening and adds to the stress. I know I will not be alone, or that this is a nationwide issue.

Now is the toughest it has been.”

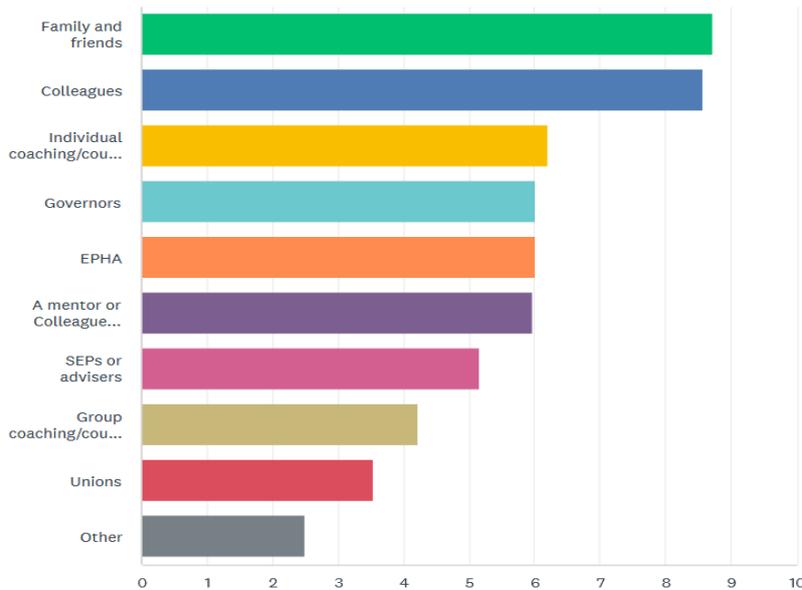
What factors have caused you the most stress/anxiety at work in the last 12 months?



“It was incredibly hard to rank the stressors as it depends on the day, if I am being honest. I have never known a term as difficult as the first half of this term. It is the first time I have ever considered resigning from education completely.”

“I think the job is now so work heavy that it is impossible to do a good job without working 18 hours a day. No amount of coaching etc would change that unfortunately. I am a fairly positive individual who accesses and maintains my own mental health well but you cannot change the continuous pressures of Ofsted, changes, parents and paperwork; the pressures of managing Covid has also completely changed the job for me. It is like Ofsted and the LA have completely forgotten the pandemic has taken place and it is business as usual, except anyone actually working in school knows that this is not true with staff absence/wellbeing at its highest and **being one person trying to manage this is unachievable.**”

What support helps?



What support could EPHA offer?

EPHA plans to facilitate a range of support in addition to the current EPHA offer, which will include signposting or brokering practical help for heads in crisis, such as:

- Coaching or counselling – individually or in a group
- Colleague Support for any headteacher in need (not just new heads)
- Capacity help in a school – headteachers or deputies seconded to help add leadership capacity for a limited time
- Governance advice and support, including recommending clerks who can manage “statutory” meetings
- Legal support for complaints
- Bespoke training, including joint training on complaints for headteachers and governors

EPHA will also continue to work and lobby on behalf of all Essex Primary-phase headteachers, including sharing the results of this survey at a local and national level. Headteachers were encouraged to share the survey and the additional comments with their governors.

The Professional Officer noted that headteacher/senior leader wellbeing is a focus for the Education Taskforce, as well as being the number one priority for the NAHT this year. She is investigating what funding might be available to support headteachers in Essex.

What additional support would help?

A number of additional suggestions were put forward by headteachers, many of which were focused on improved support for pupils with special educational needs. Suggestions included:

Encourage good practice in school: ensure that all staff are not responding to parent emails out of hours/weekends.

SEND

- National PR and information around what parents should expect from mainstream schools, especially around 1:1 support, applying for EHCPs, exclusion.
- Hold other partners/advocates to account when they advise parents to “tell the school to apply for an EHCP”.
- Easier and wider access to parenting skills support (at all ages, not just the pre-school child) to reduce the number of parents who think that all poor behaviour equals SEN.
- More Special School places.

- Equal funding for children with SEND in mainstream and specialist provisions.
- Equal spread of high level EHCPs across all schools.
- Flow charts on where to ask for help on issues regarding alternative education routes.

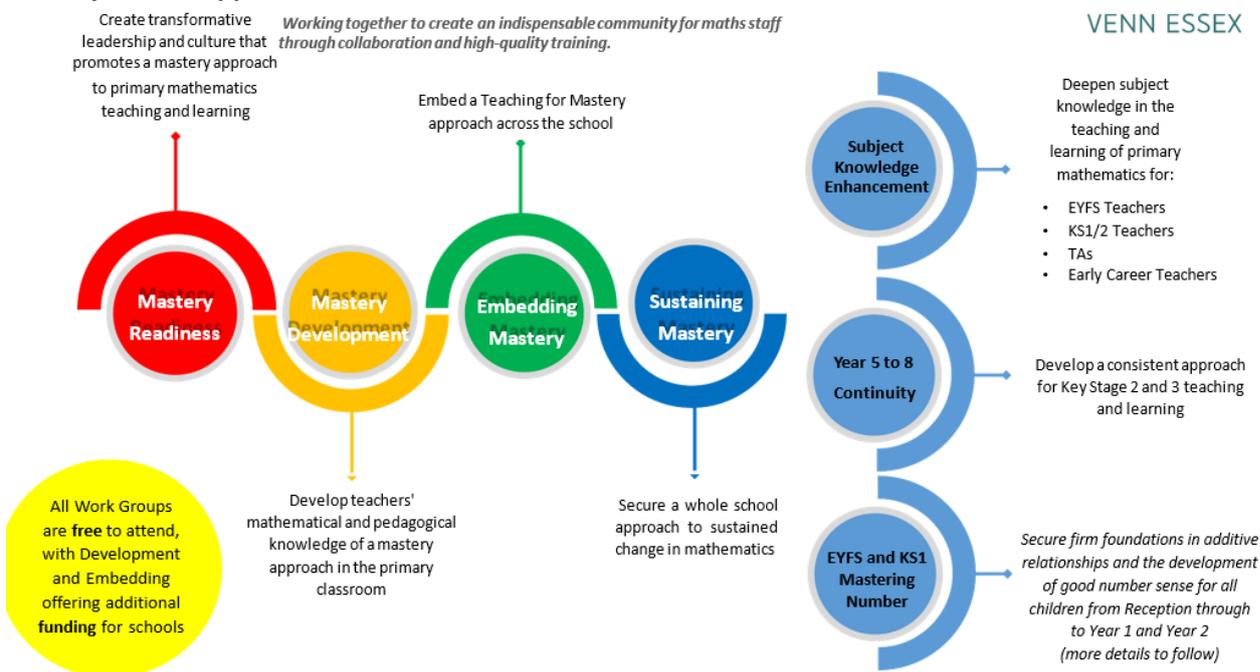
Continued support and focus to reduce the power of Ofsted

4. MATHS HUBS – VENN IN ESSEX

Jamie Whiteside was welcomed to the meeting. He explained that he works for the Venn Essex Maths Hub, run by St Thomas More Catholic Primary, in Colchester.

Venn Essex Maths Hub offers a range of different professional development opportunities. The fully funded projects cover mathematical subject knowledge and pedagogy in all educational phases.

Primary School Opportunities 2021/22



W: vennessexmathshub.co.uk | E: info@vennessexmathshub.co.uk | T: 01206 489933 | Express your interest [click here](#)

More information at <https://vennessexmathshub.co.uk/professional-development/projects/>

5. LADS NEED DADS

Joel Shaljean attended the meeting to inform heads about Lads Need Dads, a charity established to support boys and young men whose fathers are absent from their lives. Joel is well known to Essex schools having led Essex Steps for the last 7 years, and working in mainstream and special schools for over 25 years.

The mission of the Lads Need Dads is:

To empower and enable boys aged 11-15 with absent fathers, or limited access to a male role model, to be motivated, responsible, capable, resilient and emotionally competent, to prevent them from becoming at risk of under-achieving, offending, exclusion or dropping out of school.

The Fatherlessness Crisis

1.1 million children in the UK are growing up without a father in their lives (CSJ 2018)

2.9 million children live in lone parent families

(ONS 2019)

Males are a high risk gender:

- Exclusions – boys have more than three times the number of permanent school exclusions, with 6,000 PEX compared to 1,900 for girls in 2018/19.
- 86% of boys in custody aged 12-18 were excluded from school before being detained.
- 76% of male prisoners under 18 in England and Wales grew up with an absent father.
- Boys have achieved lower exam results than girls for the past 3 decades.
- In the 2018 cycle, 35% fewer males went to university than females.
- Figures from the DfE in 2020 reported that “male white British free school meal pupils are the least likely of all main ethnic groups to progress to higher education.”
- Across all pupils eligible for free meals, 26% went on to university by the age of 19, but for white pupils on free meals the figure was 16% - and only 13% for boys.

Why boys with absent fathers are at an even greater disadvantage

Countless statistics show that young boys, where a father is absent and who have no appropriate male role, will struggle as teenagers and are at a higher risk of low self-esteem and/or dropping out of education, antisocial behaviour, substance abuse and crime.

The referrals that Lads Need Dads receive:

- Mum and Dad separated, Dad not in the home
- Never met or known Dad
- Dad lives out of the area, contact lost
- Dad has died
- Dad is in prison
- See Dad sporadically
- Looked after children
- Dad may have walked away
- Dad left due to domestic abuse

The impact of the absent father on boys

- Current research has found:
Sense of rejection leading to unworthiness, self-doubt and self-hatred
- Adrift/rudderless/lost
- Crisis of identity
- Anger, bouts of rage
- A lack of motivation
- A need to belong
- Loss of value – underachieve
- Poor judge of character
- Unfilled void – leading to addictions
- Lack of confidence

What does Lads Need Dads do?

Long term intervention programmes – using male volunteer mentors they provide long-term early intervention for boys aged 11-15 via a structure programme including:

- Group work development sessions and outdoor activities – Equip
- Practical life-skill training and community volunteering – Engage
- Peer mentor training, inspirational speakers, trips – Inspire
- Open ended support after completion - Ambassadors

Support for mums and carers

Reading mentors

Research and training

Joel wants to encourage and ask schools to help identify the boys who have absent fathers, and would

benefit from the support offered by Lads Need Dads. The benefits are numerous including: early identification= early intervention; reduced escalation of behaviour, risk of exclusion, mental health issues; improved educational outcomes; the ability to plan ahead and put protective factors in place; regular emotional wellbeing check-ins with a designated male; pastoral teams prepped so that support can be put in place early; teachers to receive training on impact of the absent father on boys.

The biggest barrier for Lads Need Dads is not funding or the recruitment of volunteers, but the identification of boys in secondary schools that need support.

Step 1 Staff perception surveys across secondary and primary schools in Essex. This explores teacher perceptions of the correlation between boys with absent fathers or limited access to a male role model.

Step 2 Training to front line staff and parents.

Policy review

For further information and to express an interest in taking part in the survey:

Email info@ladsneeddads.org or joel@ladsneeddads.org

Office number 07834 402017

www.ladsneeddads.org

6. USING THE APPRENTICESHIP LEVY FOR SENIOR LEADER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Charlee Kilbey, Partnership Manager from the National College of Education, was welcomed to the meeting. She explained that she was standing in for her colleague, Sharon Hockley, who manages Essex and the Eastern Region.

Millions of pounds of schools' Apprenticeship Levy is being recouped by the Treasury – literally millions! A recent FOI request revealed that over £3m from just 3 Local Authorities' schools' Apprenticeship Levy funding had been returned to the Treasury. The Apprenticeship Levy should be seen as part of the strategic planning for professional development of the school's workforce. Even those schools that are not required to pay into the levy may be able to access funding to pay for apprenticeships.

Millions of pounds of Levy funds – which belong to LA schools and MAT academies – could pay for an amazing array of training for your staff, support your appraisal progress or strengthen your Talent Management strategy. The NCE is offering senior leaders the chance to access a L7 Masters programme through their January 2022 cohort. It can be fully paid for by the Levy.

A reminder of the timeline and history of the apprenticeship levy and the NCE involvement:

2015 – Manifesto Commitment

2017 – Levy announced

2018 – NCE began programmes

2019 – Ofsted and ESFA inspections

2019 – [A guide to apprenticeships for the school workforce](#), DfE, Nov 2019 paper

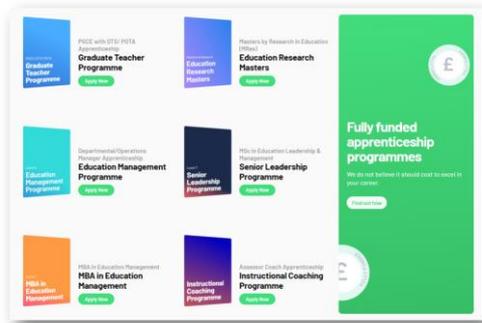
2020 – *circa*. 1500 learners on apprenticeship programmes

2021 – NCE portfolio development and building regional collaborations

2021 – Budget commitment to increase apprenticeships impact

2022 – NCE Regional Partnerships roll out

The NCE portfolio of fully funded apprenticeship programmes:



Lever 7 Senior Leadership Programme

For whom	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Current Senior Leaders in schools, Trusts or Local Authorities • Serving Headteachers, Trust Central Team members* • Aspiring Senior Leaders
Qualifications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MSc in Education Leadership and Management • L7 Senior Leader Apprenticeship
Eligibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bachelors Degree (2:2 or above) • GCSE (C or above) in English and Maths • Currently in a leadership role in school
Price	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £14,000 (funded by the apprenticeship levy)

This is a dual-accredited apprenticeship programme, lasting 2 years and leading to an MSc in Education. NCE works with Essex Local Authority to draw down funding for the programme.

Module content:

- Foundation Module
- Strategy
- People Management and Development in Education
- Innovation and Change
- Finance, Governance and Risk in Education
- Research Methods and Project

Format

- 24-month programme
- First day of learning and five 2-day Professional Learning Days
- Assessment through 4 Essays, 2 Reports, 2 online Assessments, Dissertation and Strategic Business Proposal, Professional Discussion and a portfolio of evidence
- Support from dedicated Professional Learning Mentor
- Monthly engagement and 12-weekly Reviews (with Line Manager)

20% Off-the-job training (OTJT)

The largest misconception surrounding apprenticeship programme relates to off-the-job training, and the assumption that staff need to be out of school one day a week. This is not the case.

Although the requirement cannot technically be fulfilled in day to day duties, if your employee is actively implementing, demonstrating, learning new skills learned on the course, then can log it as 20%.

Level 5 Education Management Programme suitable for

- Current middle leaders or aspirant senior leaders (2-5 years)
- School Business Managers
- For teaching and non-teaching leaders

Module content

- Leading People
- Personal Effectiveness and Decision Making
- Operational Management
- Finance and Project Management
- Managing People and Building Relationships

Format

- 22-month programme
- First day of learning and 13 seminars (½ days)
- Delivery from Andy Buck and ex-headteachers
- Assessment through a School Leadership Project, a portfolio of evidence and assignments
- Monthly engagement and 12-weekly Reviews (with Line Manager)

Other programmes include

Level 4 Instructional Coaching Programme, suitable for

- Early Career Framework Mentors & NQT Mentors
- HLTA, Cover Supervisors, in-school coaches or Pastoral support staff
- Subject Specialist or School Improvement Lead/Officer

The full presentation (NCE Strategic Partnership slides) can be found on the EPHA website at

<https://essexprimaryheads.co.uk/meetings/termly-area/composite/>

Contact

Sharon Hockley Sharon.Hockley@nationaleducation.college

Gareth Alcott, Director of Strategic Partnerships

M: 07932 872226

T: 0208 221 9089

W: www.nationaleducation.college

7. JUNIPER PAYROLL

Gavin Freed, CEO of Juniper Education was welcomed to the meeting. Gavin is the Executive Chairman of Juniper Education, who took over payroll from Essex County Council in April. *(NB Gavin attended three of the four headteacher meetings and these notes amalgamate the concerns and feedback expressed by headteachers and School Business Managers across the county.)*

Gavin stressed that relationships with Essex schools are incredibly important for Juniper Education, but acknowledged that they are currently under strain due to the ongoing problems with the payroll system. He assured headteachers that Juniper manages payroll effectively in other parts of the country and agreed that payroll should be a “sideshow, not a main event” in the life of an organisation. He stressed that no one wants to run a service that they are not proud of, and he apologised for the disruption, upset and increase in workload that the problems have caused for schools.

Juniper participated in a bidding process last November, and he suggested that ECC was keen to come to a swift conclusion when deciding a new provider. Juniper is keen to support Essex schools and many have bought into both HR and finance for years, which should provide continuity for schools. He noted that, as a provider, ECC was quite unique: historically there were numerous systems in place to support schools, including a central bank account system, pension management and payroll. In the last year there has been a separation of the three (including closing the central bank account system entirely) and this has caused huge change. However, there continues to be three partners in the system: schools, Juniper and ECC (who continue to manage pensions).

There was a slow contractual conclusion and ECC decided not run a parallel system with the new payroll

system as would normally happen, instead choosing to transfer 280+ schools in one “big bang”, which required a huge data migration of 18,000 employees. This transfer was patently unsuccessful. Juniper had to create a uniquely new operating model for Essex schools, which has caused multiple problems.

Gavin reminded headteachers that the transition took place at the same time as lockdowns and the pandemic, causing unique staffing problems in their own team. Staff were required to work from home which had a negative impact on training, team working and communication, as well as the recruitment of staff. He noted that the relentless month-on-month pressure of managing a payroll system creates very few, if any, opportunities to create change and repair systems.

Gavin accepted that communication has been appalling, and Juniper has now introduced a new system of named contacts and regular weekly slots for schools, so that queries and problems can be addressed in a timely and guaranteed way. For some schools this system has brought about improvements; however, some do not like such a regimented approach, and there are a number of schools that still do not have a named contact (or are unable to get through to them)>

In order to address the problems that have arisen since April, Juniper has engaged outside support and expertise, and the collaboration with ECC has improved. CR Payroll Solutions has been engaged for four months to address the current problems and to ensure that the payroll service is fit for purpose. CR Payroll has a reliable, long-term record of leading the successful delivery of payroll services and emergency cover to clients in the UK and Ireland. All of their payroll specialists are CIPP (UK) / IPASS (ROI) qualified, and they only recruit staff with 5+ years of payroll experience. Their aim is to take a payroll from failure to delivery, participating as a payroll expert on the project. Initially they learn the client’s system and hear both sides of the project from the client (Juniper) and their customers (Essex schools). They agreed that communication and consistent contact is key.

Over the three meetings, headteachers shared examples of problems they have experienced and, in many schools continue to face. These include unmanageable and inconsistent deadlines, failures of the portal, poor or non-existent communication and numerous payroll mistakes. Many staff have been paid incorrectly, some tax codes have been wrong, some schools have received no pension reports since the transition. This has placed a huge stress on business managers in schools. Headteachers recognise the stress and challenges for the Juniper workforce, noting that at times they have spoken to team members on the verge of tears. However, the online training for schools has been poor, as the sessions have been delivered by a trainer who does not know the systems and therefore cannot answer any but the most basic queries.

Juniper Education is determined to fix the problems being experienced by schools, but Gavin explained that he has come to the conclusion that the workload resulting from the current number of contracts means that it is not possible to fix the problems as fast as everyone would like. A letter from Gavin sent to schools on 17 November set out an interim solution , and he shared this proposal at the meetings:

We have engaged plenty of external help but inevitably there comes a point where more people create co-ordination challenges that create diminishing returns. More detail on the period to March is shared below. It is obvious that everyone would like this to be quicker and there will be some schools that simply cannot wait, we completely understand this and wish to do what we can to act in the greater good.

Therefore, I suggested in the meetings that I have attended so far that if some schools choose to move to an alternative provider now that we would support them in this by waiving any notice period and supporting migration through a separate team. The corollary of this is that working with a smaller number of schools will enable us to get to smooth running more quickly. Effectively this would happen by sharing some of our current workload with other payroll providers that it’s clear should have happened in the first instance.

Several people asked about the challenges of migrating now but the answer to the risk lies in the scale,

just as it does to our challenge. New providers taking on a manageable number of schools will have the bandwidth to thoroughly check all details at take on. There are open discussions that we are having with some of these providers.

In answer to a number of questions, Gavin confirmed that Juniper Payroll could, realistically, hold onto about half of their existing schools, and effectively manage the system going forward. He confirmed that the transition of data for each school that decides to move to another provider would be overseen by a member of staff from Juniper Payroll, the school itself and a member of staff contracted to support the migration. The current workforce for Juniper Payroll will continue to manage the remaining schools (i.e. they won't reduce staff numbers), and the company will not take on any new schools at the present time.

Juniper is currently communicating with a number of new providers but will not and cannot dictate which payroll provider a school moves to, if they choose to go. It is, however, imperative that schools choose to move to a number of providers so that any one provider is not overwhelmed; it is becoming clear that a number of other payroll companies are capping the number of schools that they are taking on at any one time. Gavin stressed that Juniper is not cherry picking which schools they retain; the decision to stay or go is entirely up to each school. He acknowledged that the decision to change providers cannot be made instantly; if a school decides to move they need to find a new provider and go through a governance process, which may take time.

Gavin was asked if Juniper would reimburse schools for costs incurred during the last few months, such as overtime for finance and business managers. He explained that the original fee paid to ECC for the contract was substantial and Juniper has invested a huge amount into the business, including buying in specialist support in the last few months; the company is not in a financial position to be able to compensate schools.

A considerable number of headteachers said that, rather than moving providers, their preferred solution would be for Juniper to fix the problems and run an effective service. Gavin noted that the company did not want to lose customers, but this was the most expedient route in the short to medium term. Recently, four schools have offered to set up a working group to help Juniper iron out the issues that are being experienced since the transition to Juniper. This support has been welcomed.

One key issue is the introduction of automatic reconciliation, which will reduce the amount of time the finance manager/SBM spends on payroll each month. Gavin explained that they are working with Capita and FIMS and will get the information out to schools as soon as possible.

Gavin was thanked for attending the meetings and for being frank about the problems being experienced by Juniper and their customers. It was agreed that EPHA would work with them to try to resolve the issues for affected schools as soon as possible.

Contact details

Gavin Freed gavin.freed@junipereducation.org

8. FUTURE DATES

NORTH EAST headteacher meetings 2021/22 - Colchester Football Stadium

Wednesday 2 March 2022

Wednesday 15 June 2022

Webcasts with Clare Kershaw and Mike Gogarty

Wednesday 1 December 2021, 9.30 am – 10.45 am, online

Wednesday 12 January 2022, 1.30 pm – 2.45 pm, online

“Managing Complaints” – training for Heads and Chairs

Thursday 10 February 2022, The Lion Inn, Boreham (afternoon, time to be confirmed)

Monday 28th February 2022, online, Zoom link to follow, 1.00 pm – 3.00 pm

(The sessions will repeat the same content)

Headteachers’ Annual Conference 2022

Friday 25 March 2022 Chelmsford City Race Course

Deputy Headteachers’ Annual Conference 2022

Friday 7 October 2022 Colchester Football Stadium