

English summary
of Fafo-rapport 2019:37

From figurehead to overworked handyman?

Recruitment to school leader
positions in Norwegian
schools

From figurehead to overworked handyman?

Recruitment to school leader positions in Norwegian schools

A good school relies on good school leaders. Therefore, recruiting and retaining highly competent school leaders is an important social responsibility. In this report, we examined recruitment to school leader positions. We did this in two ways: we considered firstly how many applicants there are for new positions, and secondly, how many leave their jobs, or want to leave their jobs, as school leaders. Since we know that workforce mobility is affected by job satisfaction, we also investigated school leaders' workday and whether they enjoy their workday. The analyses in the report are based on two questionnaire surveys – one submitted to school owners in the Association of School Leaders and one submitted to school leaders in the Association of School Leaders – as well as qualitative interviews with school owners and school leaders in three selected local authorities.

We found that most school owners find that there are few applicants for advertised positions as school leaders. This is particularly problematic in small local authorities where our findings show that altogether 89 per cent of school owners have experienced that there are less than five applicants for a single school leader position. At the same time, between 50 and 70 per cent of the school leaders who responded to the questionnaire envisaged staying in this position for the duration of their career. These figures indicate that while it can be difficult to get candidates to apply for positions as head teachers, the desire to change jobs is not particularly high compared with workforce mobility in other fields. Meanwhile, our findings show that it is young people with a short length of service who are either uncertain about remaining in their jobs as school leaders for the duration of their professional career or do not want to do so. It appears, therefore, that a major challenge in the recruitment of school leaders is helping young, newly appointed school leaders to enjoy their work.

This may appear to be a fairly difficult task since our analyses also show that many respondents perceive school leader positions as challenging. The main reason is that a number of people find that these positions are characterised by a high workload and cross-pressure between short-term administrative tasks and long-term educational development. Twenty-nine per cent of school leaders who are uncertain about continuing as school leaders throughout their professional career or do not want to do so, attributed this to pay levels, whereas 65 per cent attributed it to the workload. This means that pay is not the prime reason for people wishing to change jobs over time. However, this does not mean that pay

English summary of Fafo-report 2019:37
From figurehead to overworked handyman?

Mathilde Bjørnset and Marianne Takvam Kindt

© Fafo 2019

is unimportant. A total of 82 per cent completely or partly agreed that school leaders' pay is too low.

Job satisfaction and the desire to stay on in the job as a school leader do not, however, appear to depend on the size of the local authority. This may indicate that the extra challenge experienced by small local authorities in finding enough candidates to apply for school leader positions is not just about the difference in job content. Our interviews revealed that this might be a matter of recruitment routines – for example, where vacant positions are advertised. Our questionnaire surveys do not include data on school size. However, in the qualitative interviews, the size of the school was frequently mentioned. Several interviewees believed that the job varied considerably according to the size of the school. In a number of cases, a single head teacher was in sole charge of school administration, a situation which can be very challenging. Future research on the recruitment of school leaders should examine this in more detail.

In order to reduce recruitment challenges, it appears to be particularly important to ensure that young, newly appointed school leaders enjoy their work. In the report, we discuss whether mentor schemes, administrative support and the use of school leader training programmes might have a positive effect on the situation.

English summary of Fafo-report 2019:37
From figurehead to overworked handyman?

Mathilde Bjørnset and Marianne Takvam Kindt

© Fafo 2019